

Freedom First

The Liberal Position

- ❖ **NDA's Management of the Economy**
- ❖ **The Year That Was ...**
- ❖ **Rahul Resurgent**
- ❖ **ISIS - A New Threat**
- ❖ **Modi Goes to China**

Freedom First believes in an open society based on minimum government and maximum freedom tempered by a sense of individual responsibility, in which the people's genius has a fair opportunity to develop and grow; and rejects any ideology, movement or policy that sets one group of citizens against another, be it based on class, caste, religion or envy.

Remembering Raju

It was with deep sadness and shock that I learnt that S. V. Raju tragically (to paraphrase Robert Frost) went to sleep when he still had miles to go. I am certain he is celebrating with the angels right now. Raju was much more than the editor of a journal that provided intellectual stimulation for over two generations of discerning readers – he was an institution. It could not have been easy stepping into the shoes of the legendary Minoo Masani, but Raju accomplished this task with flair and determination. During his stint with the Swatantra Party – a party whose rectitude and integrity has never been replicated before or since in Indian politics – he stuck to his principles even as politicians all around him were succumbing to the lure of patronage and easy money.



S. V. Raju
(24.09.1933 – 19.05.2015)

S. V. RAJU became synonymous with the *Freedom First* when he adopted Minoo Masani's child as his own. He was a man dedicated to any task he took up. The Swatantra Party was his ideological flag pole but after its dissolution, he gave himself to the *Freedom First*. Notwithstanding his ideological convictions, he remained a truly 'liberal' man. He respected the opinions of others and tried to understand their views. His liberalism led him to respect diagonally opposite points of view. He turned the *Freedom First* from a voice in the wilderness to a well-respected opinion-maker. He

was ever keen to cover all important developments quickly and objectively. As an Editor, he did not reject any article just because he did not agree with its view-point. All that mattered was that it was logically presented and was free of malice.

It is to Raju's credit that *Freedom First*, despite its modest circulation, gave an unbiased voice to opinions from all sections of society. Although the magazine was perennially short of funds, he never gave in to the temptation of crass commercialization, which would have impacted the journal's integrity. Even against seemingly impossible odds, he kept the magazine going for half a century: an achievement almost without parallel in Indian journalism. All the while, *Freedom First* enhanced its reputation; gathering an ever more distinguished legion of faithful subscribers. He rarely judged, even when he disagreed with some of the opinions expressed by contributors. I myself had a somewhat acrimonious interaction with him on the subject of our current Prime Minister, but to his credit, he did not allow his annoyance to come in the way of publishing my articles. He will be sorely missed.

He prided himself as a 'Liberal' and was the Chairman of the Indian Liberal Group for a number of years. He did not fear criticism but was sensitive to attacks on his motives. He was not cynical and hoped that the country would see better days; he believed that the Modi Government deserved to be given a chance to change the country's direction. He was willing to put aside the Godhra episode (not forget) and see if Modi could lead the country differently. It hurt him deeply when he was accused of being partial to communalists. He refused to hit back or offer any defence. If his critics misunderstood his motives, he suffered in silence and carried on undeterred but the hurt showed.

More importantly, Raju was a 'Good' man. There are geniuses, scholars, leaders but there are few good men in public life. We have lost a 'Good' man and that is so sad!

Firoze Hirjikaka

Ashok Karnik

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In this issue ...

It is with a deep sense of loss that we inform our readers of the sudden demise of our editor, S. V. Raju. This very issue was the last one to be touched by his caring and watchful eye for detail, in spite of his failing health. And so, even though he could not write this editorial, its pages still breathe with his spirit, that is why it will be the July issue that will be dedicated to him.

In this issue, by way of a cover story, there are articles on some salient aspects of the Modi-led NDA government which completed its nascent debut on May 26 this year. While Babu Satyanarayana goes over “The year that was”, Ranga Kota looks critically at “NDA’s management of the economy”. And a resurgent Rahul is, indeed, a prominent part of this scene, as is the sharp contrast between rural distress and farmer suicides at home and the soaring scale of economic development spurred by visits abroad.

Among the global issues that affect us all is the brutality of the ISIS and its ominous threat is captured in Ashok Karnik’s article with a power that makes it an eye-opener by itself.

RS

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NDA's Management of the Economy

– More of The Same

Ranga Kota

A large number of NDA's claimed success stories are made out of tweaking several initiatives or ideas of previous governments, of complying with judicial intervention and directives, and of unexpected largesse in terms lower international oil prices and reduced gold imports.

As the Modi-led NDA celebrates its first anniversary in power, there is not much euphoria in the country. Nothing much significantly changed on the economic landscape. Continuation and conclusion of initiatives of the previous government are broadly the dimensions of management. No quantum jumps and no breakaway ideas.

The government was lucky as the international commodity prices, chiefly the crude oil, took a south ward journey soon after it took charge, providing it with better fiscal space in terms of fuel subsidies and falling inflation.

The corporate and middle class wager on NDA is still on. How long will it remain is any body's guess.

The Government Likes CSO

Arun Jaitley must be eminently pleased with the CSO for giving a boost to the GDP growth. All the numbers, we hear of late, are all based on the revised methodology of calculating GDP. These numbers can differ significantly from old set of calculations. If Jaitley is pleased with 7.4% GDP growth number for the FY 2015, he should compare this with 6.9% GDP growth under Chidambaram in FY 2014. If all the excellent economic management, claimed by NDA government, could only add half a percentage point to the GDP growth in FY 2015, the government needs to be concerned. If FY 2016 posts a GDP growth around 7% due to rural distress, in two years of NDA's rule, the Indian economy will have remained stationary. The 6.9% GDP growth during UPA's last year is never mentioned as often as 7.4% of NDA's first year for obvious reasons. You compare only when it helps you. Otherwise you ignore.

It would be interesting to know from experts what the revised GDP growth numbers of UPA'S would be like if they were calculated on the basis of revised methodology. Obviously, the NDA Government will not be pleased with such an exercise. But, the nation would like to have this information to scrutinize the GDP growth numbers of NDA government.

Stock Markets Take a Breather

Not too distance ago, some stock market players were predicting sky was the limit for Sensex. Sold on Modi's magic, the BSE Index went from 22000 to 29000, gaining over 7000 points between April 2014 and Feb 2015. The February, 2015 budget was hailed as brilliant by a large section of India INC. Now, the pundits are at as loss to explain the loss of momentum on Indian Stock Exchanges since the budget.

Everyone knows that the Indian stock markets are over dependent on FIIs and the latter can change their investment options in emerging markets depending on their perception of returns. The FIIs are finding in recent times a few other emerging markets more attractive. This reflects their assessment of Indian economy in the near term.

The below par corporate results in the first quarter of 2015 only suggest corporate earnings are stretched on a weak consumer demand and on a higher leverage. Corporate performance in the last one year has not shown any significant improvement. What propelled Sensex to move up by 7000 points in a year when nothing much seems to have changed in the corporate sector makes one wonder whether markets sometimes become over exuberant. The recent downward correction on the stock market reflects a changed assessment of Indian economy going forward.

"Make in India" – a Long Shot

Manufacturing makes sense only if the manufacturers make money. Manufacturers have to have a growing demand both internally and externally. Demand is a function of economic conditions and incomes of people. We have seen, over the last couple of years, a weaker growth in the domestic demand for a variety of products. Besides, China with its low price proposition is cutting into the domestic manufacturers' share in a variety of products. Indian steel industry, which depended on growing Chinese market in boom days, finds itself at the

receiving end over the last year.

Adding to manufacturing sector woes, the export market is not providing any opportunity for growth. Export performance over the last three years has remained stuck around USD 300 bn.

Corporate sector blames high domestic interest rates as the reason for the subdued domestic demand. The Rupee appreciation against few international currencies other than USD is held as a reason for the sluggish export performance.

While one can debate reasons for its listless performance, the fact remains that we are unlikely to see a dramatic turnaround soon in the manufacturing sector. A significant reduction in domestic interest rates could kick-start much needed growth in domestic demand. The corporate sector would first use the surplus capacity and cash on higher price realizations. The international economic situation outside the US, and plummeting revenues of oil rich nations do not augur well for a steep rise in the export performance in near term. Hence, there is no compelling reason for the corporate sector to step up investments in Indian manufacturing any time soon.

One more year of average performance of manufacturing sector would make the promise of jobs for millions lose more sheen for aspiring middle class.

Banking on Infra Growth

If manufacturing is unlikely to add to growth, government has to invest huge sums in infra projects. Except in national high ways, Railways and Ports (air/sea), the central government has very little role in deciding on a large number of infrastructure projects and their pace of development in civilian sector.

States have a significant role in pushing infra projects in areas like urban transport, power, water, irrigation, mining, smart cities and housing. The Indian private sector is not willing to involve in infra funding in a big way, learning from its past mistakes, where unsustainable debt, land acquisition, regulatory clearances and tariff regulation delayed projects and made them unviable. The state governments are strapped for cash. Borrowing is an option. But some states like Punjab and West Bengal are carrying huge debts and might find it difficult to raise resources for huge infra. Therefore, a big push from states to infra in short term is unlikely to materialize.

This leaves the centre to do the heavy lifting. The

central government is keen to provide more spending thrust from the budget. Also, it does not mind raising resources through debt. If the investments are in technological up-gradation, rolling stock or modernization of exiting railway infrastructure, government can target accelerated finishing lines. But, for green field projects, where land acquisitions and environment clearances become necessary the government could run into a wall.

Development Land Locked

Even if we assume that the environment ministry will tweak its rules to facilitate clearances for mega infra projects, it is the land acquisition battle that is fought on the ground that will test the NDA government's ability to push infra on a mission mode.

The fate of USD 12bn Korean steel project (POSCO) in Odisha and of Tata Motors' Nano project in West Bengal would suggest that sustained opposition to land acquisitions could kill projects over time. These projects were conceived before the much criticized UPA's Land bill was passed in the parliament. A few amendments to the land bill might win some brownie points for NDA government, but will not give it a blank cheque. It will be more like UPA's attempt to pass the bill of 51% FDI in front end retail. They won the battle in parliament at a great cost. The courageous deed of UPA carried no punch with world big retailers as the bill had a few conditions that were difficult to comply with.

The NDA government is already on the back foot with the amendments to land bill of UPA. It knows that pushing it too hard will only reinforce the emerging image of this government as anti-farmer and pro-corporate. Dumping it completely will affect the image of the PM adversely. It will get passed, in due course, in some form. But, it would do no wonders to the land acquisition. It will end up as a mere Pyrrhic victory for the government.

Not Much Infra Dividend to India Inc.

There is no doubt that a stepped up investment in infra-structure will offer great opportunity for manufactured products like steel, cement, construction machinery and rolling stock. Considering the present state of the Indian manufacturing capability and its competitiveness, a large part of the dividend will go to companies abroad. The solar industry is a case in point. The Indian solar panel manufactures are crying hoarse about Chinese dumping panels at prices the Indian makers cannot match. The solar power producers want to import cheap panels to ensure their projects meet competitive tariffs for solar power. The NDA government has a difficult choice to make, if it opts for make in India.

In some cases, there is no choice to be made. India does not make them. Nuclear reactors will be from foreigners. Most of metro rail coaches will be from abroad. Even steel might get imported for these projects.

The size of gains to Indian corporate sector from government's infra push is difficult to assess and a lot depend on the Government policy on import policy and tariffs.

Struggling Services Sector

There is an increasing concern about the future growth of the Indian IT and financial services which led a robust Indian service sector growth over the past several years and contributed to a major part of Indian GDP growth story. Some people are predicting that the best for the Indian IT is already behind and we see a slower growth in this sector. The below par performance of Indian IT majors in the first quarter of 2015 is seen as a pointer. Though the prospect of huge domestic market for IT emerging is a positive, the earnings from the domestic market will take a long time to match the current international revenues. A slow growing IT sector is a problem for job creation for lakhs of engineering students that pass out from colleges every year. Besides, the sector over the next few years might shed considerable jobs which will have lost relevance in changing the IT market.

The financial services ride on the real economy. If the real economy does not fire on all cylinders, the financial sector growth gets affected. We have seen over the last few years, banking sector suffering from a high level of non-performing assets and a low credit growth. The banking sector loaded heavily with the public sector banks will have to get their balance sheets in order to raise more capital from the public as the government is not keen on providing any succour to the struggling banks. This again will have an implication for creation of large number of jobs for people.

Do the Same but Claim More

A large number of NDA's claimed success stories are made out of tweaking several initiatives or ideas of previous government, of complying with judicial intervention and directives, and of unexpected largesse in terms lower international oil prices and reduced gold imports.

The diesel price deregulation was not a bold initiative as claimed. The previous government by April 2014 brought the diesel price very close to its market price, through a very intelligent process of increasing its price, beginning in January/February 2013, in instalments of 50

paise per litre per month. The NDA government, preferred to continue this gradual increase. As luck would have it, the international oil prices have started declining in the second half of 2014, making government's job easier in decontrolling diesel prices.

The Insurance Bill is nothing new and in works for several years. Jan Dan Yojana is rebranding of financial inclusion concept of the previous government. Vidya Balan was on the air for quite some time promoting toilets, before Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign made a much bigger noise. Make in India is another name for UPA's National Manufacturing Policy first announced in October 2011. Direct Benefit Transfer scheme is just an expansion of UPA's trial run with it. The GST bill is the culmination of efforts and concessions made by Pranab, Chidambaram and Jaitley stretching over several years. The Coal auctions were mandated by the court. Any government of the day would have followed the process. Spectrum auctions are a mere continuation from the past. Increases in FDI limits in railways and defence projects drew on the previous Government's ideas/initiative. Aadhar, sans legal sanction, is a continuation of a legacy from the previous government.

But, this government is active on optics and sound bytes. It projected the conclusion of each one of above is their success story. Besides, there is an obliging press to buy the government's economic success story for better part of the year. It is only, of late, the press is becoming critical of the government, aided by the respected people like Deepak Parikh and Arun Shourie.

Head Winds Stare Government

The recent upturn in international oil prices forced the government to make upward corrections recently in petrol and diesel prices which are now market determined. If the international oil prices move further up – a likely prospect – the government will find the domestic oil prices going up in tandem. The government claimed all the success for lower oil prices. It will have to take the flak for the rising fuel prices. The rising oil prices will add to inflation.

The other head wind will be the below normal monsoon predicted by the Met. If monsoon is inadequate this year the rural distress might prove a daunting challenge to the government. Lower grain output in the second year in a row could raise prices of agricultural products with the attendant jump in food inflation.

These head winds have a potential to affect any significant recovery in the economy this fiscal. The NDA may celebrate its first year in government on an imagined

sense of high. But it enters the second year confronting the challenges of depressed agricultural sector, yet to recover manufacturing, struggling services sector and an infra push that could trip on lack of resources and delays in land acquisitions. Besides, there are not many legacy ideas or initiatives remaining, which this government could convert into its success story.

The miraculous powers of this government are suspect. We have not seen any economic miracle so far; whether we see a few in the future, only time will tell. Meanwhile, the promise of Achhe Din is on hold.

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The Year That Was ...

H. R. Bapu Satyanarayana

Modi appears to have touch of a genius for he comes up with some unique ideas and it is well known that ideas rule the world. While all the previous Prime Ministers were content to tread the pedestrian ways of governance, Modi has demonstrated the vision of a statesman.

Prologue

After the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power with a massive mandate in the Lok Sabha Elections which catapulted 'Chaiwala' Narendra Modi to the position of the Prime Minister of India. The political events have moved at such a frenetic pace that it has not only surprised the people of India but also taken the world by storm. The single significant political event is decimation of the Congress Party presaging the end of the Dynastic Rule that held power for more than five decades. True, the Party was democratically elected but the real catch was that since a vast majority of the voters were unlettered and poor they were an easy target for allurements of money, drinks etc. The other factor that helped was the mystique of the Gandhi name which the Party cleverly appropriated. And there was this canard being sedulously spread by the media that the voters are clever and discriminating which is just not true. It is only in recent years when communication and education has spread that voters could see through the game and the result has been emergence of BJP in strength and birth of the Aam Aadmi Party as a counter to the Congress.

Modi, like a conquering hero, single-handedly led his Party to electoral victory from one assembly election to the other while the Congress Party saw its electoral fortunes reaching its nadir. Now much depends upon Modi who has suddenly emerged as a supreme leader of the country. He is uniquely cast to play a decisive role to shape the political destiny of the country. As of now, there are so many political developments and initiatives happening in such quick succession, it requires to be analysed in depth for their impact on governance. There was a general feeling mainly articulated by the Congress

about the dooms day scenario if Modi becomes the Prime Minister. But the events have belied the image of Modi as a dictator and have shown his softer side of personality to go out of the way to be accommodative. All his policy initiative speaks eloquently of his oft repeated mantra of inclusive development of 'sub ka saath, sub ka vikaas'. Also, he gives an impression of keeping his own counsel and not driven by his link to the RSS however strong it is about promoting Hindutva ideology. Though he has distracters in his own party, he remains stoic. His following is intact and even growing and he has won the admiration of his opponents too, for whatever may be the reservation about his style and approach on political issues, he comes out as a person dedicated to serve the country's interest as his top priority.

In the following an attempt has been made to touch briefly on certain main political events that throw light on the dynamism of the NDA government in contrast to the regime of the UPA government which seemed to be taking a Kumbhakarna nap while the affairs of the state drifted without direction.

Formation of Government with PDP

The prolonged delay in formation of the government in Jammu & Kashmir lent itself to all sorts of speculations. After a one to one talk between Modi and Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the 'marriage' was consummated with a hug and a government formed with Mufti as chief minister. However, the first act of Mufti was to issue a statement praising Pakistan and the separatists for the peaceful conduct of elections. This shocked the nation for terrorists attacked the police station in which jawans paid with their lives. As if that was not enough, Mufti called for transferring

the remains of Afzal Guru who was hanged and buried in Tihar jail in connection with attack on our Parliament. Yet, there was pregnant silence by the Prime Minister. Though a minimum programme was agreed to, Article 370 on which the BJP was strident earlier is not a part of it. There is a perception that BJP's priority was dictated by coming to power in J&K. Whether Modi's intention of focus on development will succeed or not depends very much upon the interplay of forces pulling in different directions by the chief minister with his known sympathy towards Pakistan, separatist elements, with Pakistan encouraging terrorist attack and encouraging militants inside.

General V. K. Singh Attends Pakistan's Day

There was lot of hue and cry in the media when the Union Minister of State for External Affairs Ministry, General V. K. Singh attended Pakistan's Day held in Pakistan High Commission. All the separatist leaders from J&K also attended. This was widely criticized in the media for the fact that earlier the Indo-Pak dialogue was cancelled due the Pakistan High Commissioner meeting the separatists in violation of the government's instruction not to do so. General Singh did not help matters when he tweeted 'Duty' and 'Disgust'. His press conference later to clear the misunderstanding that attending was as per protocol that has been followed earlier did not carry conviction. The irony is that the dialogue at the Foreign Secretary level was underway in the shadow of terrorist attack in Samba and Kathua sectors in J&K. Singh appears to tie himself in knots by tweets that upset the media. For example, though he received universal praise in rescuing our stranded Indians from Yemen, his unfortunate tweet of 'presstitute' attracted severe strictures in the discussions from the participants on the Times Now channel.

Floods in J&K

The state was traumatized for the second time by unprecedented floods that caused immense suffering and death and destruction of property. It is another matter that the main cause of destruction was man-made due to its ecological negligence and encroachment of the lake areas by unchecked growth. The rescue operation mounted by our army has been praiseworthy. During earlier occasion the previous government failed miserably to rise up to the occasion. Hopefully the chief minister who has been all praise for Pakistan will realise his folly and realise that the salvation of the state lies in his close cooperation with the Centre.

AAP Flattered to Deceive

The Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi came up like a breath

of fresh air with its leader Arvind Kejriwal whose programme of clearing the Aegean stables of corruption and giving relief on electricity and water charges struck a responsive chord with the people. Also, its election symbol of a broom had a powerful impact symbolizing the aam aadmi. In the assembly elections in 2013, BJP missed to get a majority by a whisker, AAP which scored just a bit more was able to form the government with the help of the Congress. It is public knowledge how it collapsed after 49 days. However, in the next assembly elections it scored a stunning victory winning 67 of 70 seats while BJP got 3 seats and the Congress drew a blank. In fact, Kejriwal admitted that resigning after 49 days was a mistake and also confessed that the Party had become arrogant. However, ousting of the founding members from the National Executive and showing intolerance to opposing views only strengthens the fact that the arrogance has returned. The general perception amongst the section of the followers is that the Party has become Kejriwal-centric. Some important people who were the bulwark for the Party are abandoning the Party in disgust and yet surveys indicate that his popularity as chief minister is high. Though there are signs that it may implode under its own contradictions, speculation that AAP may become a footnote in history is premature.

The Death of Young IAS Officer D. K. Ravi

Tsunami like protests by all sections of people in Karnataka caught the attention of India at large with unrelenting media glare at the untimely and mysterious death of the young IAS officer D. K. Ravi who was found hanging in his government flat. He ran a one man crusade against the sand and real estate mafia forcing the hand of the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to bow to the popular pressure to hand over the investigation to CBI. This came days after it was entrusted to the State CID under the Home Minister. Immediately after the news of Ravi's death, the police commissioner, the home minister and the chief minister said that the death appears prima facie to be a suicide. This casts serious doubt in the minds of the people because this observation came even before the autopsy report came. Also, it is significant that according to media reports the CM, the Home Minister and the Police Commissioner entered the autopsy room and the police failed to cordon off the room where Ravi was found hanging with lot of people crowding the place. The general perception is that the government and its agencies had sufficient time to manipulate and derail investigation so that truth may not come to light. The blatant manner in which a lady colleague's name has been made public is itself a serious misdemeanour. Even if investigations reveal that Ravi committed suicide, the government cannot escape responsibility for being guilty

of abetment to suicide. However, it raises a larger question for statistics reveal that all over the country 40 whistle blowers were eliminated. Even now honest officers are hounded and traumatized with frequent transfers and otherwise harassed. The Whistle Blower's Act has not been effective. It is time that NDA government come up with policy initiatives to tighten measures and assure honest officers that they are not going to be targeted. The transfer of IAS officer Ashok Khemka who exposed the land deal of Robert Vadra by the BJP ruled Haryana sends wrong signals and needs clarification.

Attack on Churches

In an interview on NDTV, the Economist Jagadish Bhagawati who is a professor at Columbia University dismisses the attack on churches as alarmist and calls them a routine crime. To establish his credentials he informs that his wife converted into Christianity and that both his nephews married Christians. He says if there is anything for Christians to fear today, he should be the first to join the protest. But the truth is that these fears are totally groundless and are at best a product of a fevered imagination. The investigative report from the First Post by Rupa Subramanya makes it clear that there is simply no evidence for six alleged attacks on Christian churches and one on Christian school. It may be remembered that the church has an agenda of evangelism and it has gone on for centuries. When the Home Minister proposes banning conversion why there are no takers from the opposition? The plain fact is the Congress and other opposition parties are not able stomach the rise of Narendra Modi and the ever obliging media is ready to blow up the issue to give a communal colour for it appears they too have an agenda. It is tempting to think that if, as established, there is no evidence of any ulterior motive in the attacks could it be that there is an unseen hand cleverly orchestrating this to discredit Hindutva elements and Modi in particular as a reprisal to Ghar Wapsi movement?

Auction of Coal Blocks and Black Money

The former prime minister Manmohan Singh, whose role figured in the Coalgate scam, was in an unenviable position when summons were issued by the special court for him to appear on April 8 along with five others. However, the Supreme Court, on appeal, stayed the summons. In the petition it was contended by former PM that the allocation was 'governmental decision' taken in public interest. Questioning the logic of summons, Dr Singh said that it was time the SC issued an 'authoritative pronouncement' on the interplay between governmental decision and criminal prosecution under the Prevention

of Corruption Act. What is involved here is not only accountability but causing a huge loss to the public exchequer by the decision. Hence, if the logic of petitioner is accepted by the SC, it amounts to saying that however bad the decision nobody can be held accountable for the issues of propriety and loss however huge it may be. Anyway, the ball is now in the SC's court and its views on the important issues raised will be keenly awaited. It may be recalled that it was vehemently argued by Kapil Sibal, the minister in the UPA government that there was no loss while CAG estimated the loss at Rs 1.86 lakh crore. Following the cancellation of the coal blocks as per SC's verdict and now auctioning it has already yielded Rs 3 lakh crore. A few blocks are still to be auctioned. Similarly, in the case of bringing back black money stashed in foreign banks for which Modi was being taunted is now yielding results as a result of series of actions taken by NDA govt.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

What Modi has started as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan movement is slowly catching up across the country. The cleaning of Ganga and his latest vision of cleaning tonnes of garbage from Mount Everest which is called the world's largest junk yard also falls in this genre

Modi's Astounding Vision

Modi appears to have touch of a genius for he comes up with some unique ideas and it is well known that ideas rule the world. While all the previous Prime Ministers were content to tread the pedestrian ways of governance, Modi has demonstrated the vision of a statesman. Take for example of the 'Teachers Day' which used to be observed as an annual charade but what Modi has done is to invest it with greater significance with mutual interaction with all the students and teachers across India that has been mutually inspiring and learning experience. Similarly his monthly 'Mann-Ki-Baath' is a unique medium of direct communication with the people which will help to fine tune his government's approach to governance after getting a feedback.

National Executive Meeting in Bengaluru

The meeting was a sort of Interim Report Card of what the NDA government has achieved during the past one year. During the meeting all the decisions of the Modi government were endorsed. Also, Modi's foreign policy hinged on what is called 'Panhamrit' comprising Samman, Samvad, Samridhi, Suraksha and Sanskriti evam Sabhyata which are self-explanatory were praised. Manual

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Rahul Resurgent

Firoze Hirjikaka

Whether by intention or sublimely during his sabbatical, realisation seems to have dawned on Rahul that whatever he had been doing hitherto was not working.

Unlike the previous generation of Nehru-Gandhis, he does not seem to have politics in-built in his genes. Nevertheless, the role of Congress leader has been thrust upon him and he cannot afford to shirk it.

The BJP may keep denying it till it is blue in the face, but there is no denying that it is rattled by a rejuvenated Rahul Gandhi after his return from his secret sojourn to parts unknown. They don't know what to make of him. For years, they had used him as their god-sent whipping boy, who effortlessly lent himself to ridicule and derision; and who lacked the political skills to fight back. They mocked his near-invisibility; and on the rare occasion when he made an appearance in public, he sounded either befuddled or petulant. That master orator and communicator Narendra Modi made mincemeat out of him, much to the hilarity and approbation of a captive audience waiting to be entertained. When he vanished from sight early this year, not only the BJP, but members of the Congress too started composing his political obituary.

Before I proceed, permit me a brief aside about the inevitable link to “dynasty” whenever the Gandhis are discussed in any forum. The dynastic politics of the Congress has been a favourite target of political commentators and columnists; and even more so since the Lok Sabha debacle. I am not doubting the veracity of this, but I would like to point out that dynasty is ingrained in Indian politics irrespective of which party they belong to. For example, the recent Bandra by-election seat was won by the wife of a prominent Shiv Sena leader; and the late R. R. Patil's wife is tipped to win despite the fact that she has absolutely no qualification for the job, except for the family name. And who can forget the infamous Lalu Prasad-Rabri Devi duo; or the Karunannidhis or the Chautalas...I could go on and on. Rahul Gandhi and the Congress have certainly been found wanting in matters of governance, but to keep harping on the dynasty issue is a bit hypocritical considering that family inheritance has been prevalent in Indian politics ever since Independence.

Back to Rahul. Just as mysteriously as he had disappeared, he came back. He offered no explanation as to where he had been – it could have been a voyage of self-discovery, or simply a vacation – but it was soon

evident that a transformation had taken place. Far from living up to his reputation as the elusive crown prince, suddenly he was everywhere – in the field, in Parliament, on pilgrimage treks and even in Delhi's urban jungle. Even more amazingly, he knocked the omnipresent and omnipotent Narendra Modi off the news headlines on television and in newspapers. The BJP's scoffing response that he is all show and no substance comes across as rather hypocritical, considering that their own glorious leader is the epitome of showmanship. Indeed, Rahul's growing relevance is reflected in the level of the response of the BJP. When Rahul was considered an inconsequential lightweight, his pronouncements were countered by low level BJP spokespersons (who often helped his cause by launching obnoxious personal attacks on “Rahul-baba”). After the “new” Rahul emerged, the party felt compelled to bring out the big guns. No less a personage than Arun Jaitley - identified by Arun Shourie as a member of the BJP's ruling trimurti – mocked his unexplained leave of absence; and that too in the august halls of parliament.

Whether by intention or sublimely during his sabbatical, realisation seems to have dawned on Rahul that whatever he had been doing hitherto was not working. His direct personal attacks on the new messiah, far from hurting Modi, only made the latter more popular and the former appear churlish and immature. Whoever is now advising him are on the right track. He now focuses on specific issues - farmer suicides, urban housing woes, etc. For sure, he occasionally slips in a catch phrase, like “suit-boot-ki-sarkar”, but then, in this age of television news, that is de rigueur for all politicians. More importantly, he is reaching out to his constituents through direct contact; something the autocratic and self-important Modi cannot bring himself to do; and delegates the task to his underlings. Incidentally, have you observed the PM's recent appearances in Parliament? Not only does the great orator remain inexplicably silent, the bored expression on his face conveys the impression that he considers the proceedings a waste of time (his style is to rule by diktat); and the attacks on himself and his party not worthy of a

personal response. This is in stark contrast to his pre-election avatar as a humble chaiwalla and man of the people. Rahul's barbs about Modi's frequent foreign visits may have elicited a sarcastic response from Jaitley, but an impression is forming in public opinion that the PM attaches greater importance to being feted by foreign governments and being lionised by the Indian diaspora abroad, than to domestic issues. They are beginning to wonder if Modi's stated concern for the poor and for minorities extends beyond mere rhetoric. This was reflected in the BJP's decimation in the Delhi assembly elections and the recent West Bengal civic polls, where the once invincible BJP was virtually routed.

So what is next for Rahul? It is important that he maintains the momentum he has generated and not allow

it to fizzle out. This will not be easy for him. Unlike the previous generation of Nehru-Gandhis, he does not seem to have politics in-built in his genes. Nevertheless, the role of Congress leader has been thrust upon him and he cannot afford to shirk it. If he wants to set himself and his party as a credible alternative to Modi and the BJP, he must go beyond words and be seen to take concrete action; and he must exhort his party members to do so. He has a huge perception deficit to overcome; and the temptation to chuck it all and follow his natural inclinations will be very strong. It is to be seen if he has the fortitude to persevere.

MR. FIROZE HIRJIKAKA is a retired civil engineer, freelance writer and member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*. Email: leonardo8_99@yahoo.com.

Swastika: Whose Symbol Is It Any Way?

Nitin G. Raut

... simply because Nazis have demonized the Swastika, even the Hindu and Buddhist Swastika can be victimized without caring to examine its religious and cultural significance from the Hindu and Buddhist point of view or its history.

An Indian newspaper carried a headline "US varsity mulls ban on Hindu symbol". The symbol in question is "Swastika". It so happened that an American Jewish student of George Washington University returned from a trip to India with a Swastika image and placed it on the bulletin board in the University's residential premises predominantly inhabited by Jewish students and predictably it stirred a hornet's nest but only to be realized that it was not a hate message. However, it was reported that the student who placed the image would face permanent expulsion. The report further quoted a professor that the University officials have "seemingly taken the position that posting anything which could be mistaken for Nazi Swastika" is prohibited "even by students who are Hindus and Buddhists".

It is here that ignorance triumphs to create an impression that simply because Nazis have demonized the Swastika, even the Hindu and Buddhist Swastika can be victimized without caring to examine its religious and cultural significance from the Hindu and Buddhist point of view or its history.

The Nazis adopted Swastika as a symbol of Hitler's National Socialist Party. Hitler's monstrosity in butchering

hapless Jews in Europe during the Second World War resulted in genocide of six million Jews. Thus the Nazi Swastika has become a hated symbol and its representation is outlawed in Israel and the West. The Odium of anti-Semitism attached to Swastika because of its association with the Nazis has understandably drawn reactions ranging from hate to consternation.

Its infamous publicity on Nazi Flag, propaganda material and military dress has seemingly made it sort of a monopoly of the Nazis and consequently has come to be associated with hate crime, genocide and inhumanity. The Swastika symbol was adopted by the Nazis only in the 1920s and its association has left it with a legacy of hate and untold brutality. The Nazi Swastika is a political symbol. The Hindu and Buddhist Swastika is a symbol of religious and cultural significance.

It is necessary to clear the misconception of the Hindu and the Buddhist symbol of "Swastika" without in any way hurting the susceptibilities or even belittling Jewish people's abhorrence which cannot be disputed and is even shared by this writer who is a Hindu.

The Hindu and Buddhist symbol of "Swastika" is

more oriental in its art form and representation unlike the Nazi which is geometrical in shape with sharp right angles. In the Hindu and Buddhist symbol the right angle are rounded and often have dots near the rounded angle with two parallel lines on either side. The ends of each arm is also slightly curled.

The antiquity of Hindu Swastika predates the Nazi claim to Swastika by several centuries and is often drawn in form of “rangolis” during Hindu Pujas and religious function. The word “Swastika” is derived from the Sanskrit word “Suastika” meaning luck and divinity. The word “Su” means “goodwill” and “asti” means “being”. It can have no nexus to the obnoxious Nazi ideology and its misuse by the Nazis cannot undermine its religious and cultural significance in Hindu and Buddhist religions. The Hindu “Swastika” represent God (Brahma), Energy (Shakti), Artha (Wealth), Kama (Desire) and Moksha (Liberation). It is also widely used in Buddhist and Jain religious ceremonies. Even in the East Asian traditions – Japan, Vietnam, China – “Swastika” is found in varied forms having religious and cultural significance.

Among the Hindus and the Buddhists it symbolizes prosperity and good fortune and business account books in India and Nepal bear the symbol. It is also a common symbol used by trade organizations in India and Nepal -

both the only Hindu majority states in the world. Many Hindu temples display this symbol.

In fact the symbol of “Swastika” was even found in ancient Europe on coins and structures and is discovered in archeological excavations in Europe and Egypt. It is also found as a decorative symbol in Celtic and Greek architecture. The Theosophical Society has anti-clockwise symbol of “Swastika” alongwith the Hindu symbol of Om, Christian cross and even the Star of David and it continues without any controversy. The Red Indians of North America also commonly used it but it is anti-clock wise.

The contemplated ban on the use of Swastika by Hindu and Buddhist students by the George Washington University if implemented will tend to interfere with the Hindu and Buddhist religious freedom and needs to be distinguished from the Nazi Swastika. If implemented, it will also be violative of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America which prohibits the making of any Law that impedes the free exercise of religion or abridging freedom of speech or that which infringes freedom of the Press. The action will be devoid of its historical perspective.

MR. NITIN G. RAUT is an advocate by profession and member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*.



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Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

Every issue has at least two sides. A wise person examines all sides before coming to a conclusion. This is an attempt to present various sides of an issue so that a considered opinion can be formed.

Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi

Point

1a) The trial of Lakhvi has assumed farcical tones over the last few years. His trial for the Mumbai attack is in the limbo and he is on bail. Meanwhile he has been detained from time to time. His detention has assumed more importance than the main case. We are upset when he is released from detention and forget that the main case is suffering from benign neglect. Now the Pak High court has warned the prosecution to expedite the terror case but the prosecution is unlikely to do much. They blame India for not providing evidence quickly as if it is India's obligation to provide proof of a conspiracy hatched in Pakistan. India has been giving dossiers after dossiers and the Pak Foreign Minister has described it as deserving a place in the waste-paper basket. India's mistake is that it earnestly believed that Pakistan would gratefully accept the evidence provided by India and use it for prosecuting the conspirators of 26/11. The reality is that Pakistan knew who the conspirators were all along and in fact its ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) was at the root of the attack. We appear to be naïve enough to believe that Pakistan would punish its own for an attack carried out as a part of Pakistan's long-term strategy. The same logic applies to Hafiz Saeed, J-u-D leader, who moves all over Pakistan spouting venom against India and threatens to attack us. We expect Pakistan to take action against Hafiz Saeed as the fountainhead of fanaticism and terrorism in Pakistan! What dream-world we are living in?

Counter Point

1b) In international matters, we appear a little child-like in believing that the world would come to our aid as it recognizes that India is the injured party. The mistake made in J&K in 1948 is repeated in one form or another as we innately believe in our motto, 'Satyamev Jayte' (Truth Prevails). Truth does not prevail in international affairs; only national interests prevail. Do we believe that the US does not have adequate proof of Pakistan's perfidy in the terror attacks in India? The US perhaps knows more than we do. What it does with that knowledge is the problem. The US will act against Pakistan only when it suits US interests. No country helps another country because it is right; it helps it if the action furthers its own interests. The US joins India in the fight against terrorism not because it has compassion for India but because terrorism threatens the US as much as it does India. We must calculate why the world would help us. Not for our sake! Not because Lakhvi, an international terrorist has been released from jail or Hafiz Saeed threatens clandestine war. It will do so only when it is threatened by Lakhvi/Saeed's actions. We will have to fight our own battles and not depend on the US, UK, Israel, France, etc. Now we have complained to the UN about the release of Lakhvi on bail but it may end up in unending paper pushing. Wailing and whining because the world does nothing is not the solution; if we have a problem, we should solve it ourselves. Running to the big brother is not the answer.

Being Salman Khan

2a) Salman Khan's conviction (May 6) for rash and negligent driving under the influence of alcohol, leading to the death of one person and injuries to many more caused a storm in Bollywood; some were affected due to their financial investments, others due to industry friendship and some due to personal sympathy. Their reactions ranged from understandable to bizarre. Nothing wrong in sympathizing with a fellow human being, even if he is in the wrong but the bizarre part was when an eminent singer like Abhijeet blamed those sleeping on the foot-paths for inviting their own death. He has not grasped the Indian reality that people in most cities have to use the foot-paths as their bed-rooms! Yes, it is their crime that they

2b) Salman's charity and good behavior cannot become mitigating factors. We have underworld dons who, after lifetime of making illegal loot, donate heavily for religious festivals and emerge as philanthropic social dignitaries. Do they need special treatment for their humanitarian work, forgetting the havoc they played on the society? We had Varadabhai (Mudaliar), Arun Gavli, Haji Mastan who were a social menace but also donors to various temples and dargahs. More to the point, did Salman ever express regret for killing somebody even if it was unintentional? He was busy fabricating his defence and disowning all responsibility. His appeal will determine the weaknesses in the prosecution case. He has the money to engage the

Point

are poor, Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya. The next lot would be those who walk on roads as there are no foot-paths. They can be hit by cars and should not complain as they are the guilty party according to Abhijeet's law! The sympathy for Salman is understandable but we have reached a stage where drunken driving has become an acceptable misdemeanour, not a crime. The Supreme Court has had to come down heavily on this trend and asked the courts that death due to reckless driving should not be viewed leniently.

Counter Point

best lawyers in the country. It is getting too complicated and we need not go into the legal aspects of the case here. The issue is that his financial clout helped him use all the legal remedies available to an accused; a common man cannot use the provisions of law that can help him stay out of jail. The contrast between the two is glaring and disturbing. The judicial system cannot be faulted for allowing Salman to remain on bail. What hurts is that the same system cannot be accessed by all.

Farmers' Suicides

3a) The suicides of farmers have awakened the country to the plight of our countrymen who have been taken for granted for centuries. The dependence of farmers on the monsoon and their desperation when the monsoon fails or wavers was common knowledge. India is no stranger to famines although famines are no longer the killers they used to be due to improved transportation and better communication in the last 60 years. That is at least one thing we can be thankful for after Independence. Still the farmer's plight has not changed greatly. He has been fighting a losing battle against poor irrigation, increased cost of cultivation, unremunerative prices for his produce, etc. At the best of times a farmer has work on his farm, roughly 120 days in a year, as most farmers can take only one crop a year. He needs other sources of income. Various well-meaning suggestions for rural income generation have been made. Several solutions are available but all will take time and nobody has time. We have the great ability to split hairs and not allow any project to go through smoothly. This ensures that no solution is quickly adopted.

3b) It has become a political necessity to promise radical changes in the rural income patterns. Every party promises a lot and does not or cannot do much. It is not as if the parties are insincere; they may be genuinely concerned but their priorities shift. Agriculture is a vast problem that has no immediate remedy. Centuries-old problems cannot be resolved in 5 years or even in a decade but a beginning has to be made. No Government has the courage to admit that it cannot solve the problem in its tenure. It therefore makes false promises; no long-term measures are initiated and the problem festers. Sometimes, it bursts out in the form of desperate farmers killing themselves. Media gets into a frenzy blaming the existing dispensation and pointing out the omissions of the past. Very little thought is given to what can be started now which may bear fruit after may be 15 years. Let the country know that the problem will persist for a long time, instead of promising quick fixes. That party may lose the next election but the problem would move towards some solution.

Readers are invited to email their points of view on serious issues of the day to ashokkarnik2001@yahoo.co.in. Readers who do not have the facility of a computer can also post (mail) their points of view on serious issues of the day to "Point Counter Point", c/o Freedom First, 3rd floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai 400001.

Corrigendum

In the article on "Was Jawaharlal Nehru responsible for snooping on Bose?", *Freedom First*, issue no. 575, May 2015, the sentence "One year later there was a chill in the Indo-UK relations when Nehru condemned the Anglo-American invasion on the Suez", should read as ".....Nehru condemned the Anglo-French invasion.....". In fact, the USA had criticized the Anglo-French invasion just as Nehru had done. The error is regretted.

Guntur Remembers Raju

Members of the Guntur chapter of the Liberal Group along with Avagahana, a local voluntary organization held a meeting on May 20 to pay their respects to their sincere and committed friend S. V. Raju. Dr. L. S. N. Prasad, Secretary of the Liberal Group, Andhra Pradesh reports.

Dr. Y. Sivaji, recalling his long-time friendship and association with Raju says, in his opening remarks, that Raju was a personality of journalistic ethics par excellence. Raju maintained a cordial relationship with the old guards of the freedom movement and the leaders of the Swatantra Party such as Rajaji, Minoo Masani, N.G. Ranga and others. However, he never took advantage of his closeness to them. He is the last man who saw the ups and downs of the Swatantra Party. He was a link between the old Swatantrites and the modern liberals. He was the “other Minoo Masani” who trained late N.T. Rama Rao on management of the government, public as well as political relations.

Dr. Sivaji found Raju very amenable with students. They would gather around him and listen to his stories of the past with great admiration. Raju encouraged the youth to be fair and frank in meeting their goals. He was

instrumental in the formation of the Youth Wing in the Liberal Group.

Mr. V. V. S. Rama Rao, Member, Cotton Advisory Board remembers Raju assisting him in organizing programmes on agriculture and rural indebtedness, not only in Guntur but also in other parts of Andhra Pradesh along with the agriculture colleges and groups. He too spoke of the ease with which Raju took the youth under his wing and helped in organizing various programmes to inculcate the liberal ideology among them. Mr. Rama Rao offered his assistance in publishing any material that may have remained unpublished so that the liberal thought is not lost, but is circulated to a wider section of people.

Mr. Sivaramireddy lauded Raju’s contribution in propagating economic reforms and liberalization in India. He said that Raju’s contribution as editor of Freedom First is commendable. He called him a liberal philosopher and sincerely hoped that his work and ideals are carried forward by his friends in the Liberal Group.

Mr. Ch Seshayya, former president of the Telugu Desam Party, Prakasam District admired Raju’s active personality and his tireless effort in the development and propagation of liberal ideology upto his last breath.

The other speakers included Mr. Ranga Rao, farmers’ leader, Dr. L.S.N. Prasad, Secretary, ILG-AP and Mr. P. S. Murthy, Secretary, Andhra Intellectual Forum. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Bhasyam Narasayya, leader of the Telugu Desam Party, Guntur. The meeting ended with a two-minute silence in memory of Mr. S. V. Raju.



L to R - Mr. V. V. S. Rama Rao, Mr. Bhasyam Narasayya, Dr. Y. Sivaji, Dr. L. S. N. Prasad

Fond Reminiscences of our dear Editor ...

We were flooded with messages from Mr. S. V. Raju's friends within hours of his passing away and overwhelmed with the way in which they brought out his innate qualities, the quiet side of his nature which got lost in his anxiety to do things in a hurry. In the last few years, Raju was a Man in a Hurry! He somehow knew that there were so many things to do and so little time. Alas, a few assignments have remained incomplete. We reproduce below snippets received from our readers. – Editorial Team

I am deeply grieved and shocked to learn of the sudden passing away of my dear friend, Raju. He was a dignified person, always holding high values and totally devoted to the cause of promoting freedom and protecting the rights of the citizen. Publishing *Freedom First*, a rare publication of outstanding quality was a testimony of his total dedication to the cause. He was indeed a true friend, always helpful in all situations. I associate myself with all of you in this hour of grief and pray that his soul may rest in peace.

D. N. Patodia, Gurgaon

*

I have just read the very sad news about Raju. I knew that he had been ill but never expected this. My heartfelt condolences to the entire *Freedom First* family.

Kunwar Sinha, Mumbai

*

It is with deep regret to know of Mr. S. V. Raju's sudden demise. On behalf of the liberal group in Guntur, I express my condolences. He was a good friend and advisor to me for the last twenty years since I knew him. I learnt from him a lot about Indian politics and the Swatantra Party. His death is a great loss to the propagation of liberal ideology.

Dr. L.S.N. Prasad, Guntur

*

The passing away of Shri Raju is indeed very sad. I thought he was out of the woods. The news of his demise comes as a bolt from the blue! His whole life was devoted to the cause of liberalism in India. I came to know him in the late 1960s, thanks to my illustrious colleague and friend at the University, the late Dr. S. P. Aiyar. The struggle against the Emergency brought me close to the two liberals of repute. The void at *Freedom First* is simply difficult to imagine.

Dr. B. Ramesh Babu, Hyderabad

*

There are those who walk in the shadows of great leaders, and it is only with their passing that one realizes

how great was their own contribution. Mr. Raju was one such. He was in many ways the true successor to Rajaji and Masani. He devoted his life to keeping the flame of the liberal institutions alive that these great leaders had set up. For me, Mr. Raju was a mentor and guide. He initiated me into the ideals of the liberal movement. Every time I met him, I returned with admiration and respect for the untiring energy, clarity of thought and dedication. He shared generously his time and knowledge. Despite his age and increasingly frail health, he kept up a gruelling work schedule that would put many of us to shame. Systematic, methodical and humble, he worked every single day to archive the learnings of the past and make these available to future generations. Though he never hesitated to take a position and was clear and unambiguous in his views, he was the archetypal Liberal, always accepting of another's viewpoint and defending to his death the freedom of the individual. I shall feel his loss very deeply.

Meera Sanyal, Mumbai

*

Raju was a giant among men, though he never gave anyone the impression that he was among the best minds in this country. He had a self-effacing quality about him, but when he began narrating incidents and his interactions with people, you were suddenly confronted with the expanse of Raju's contacts and knowledge. He used to talk about a case he had filed before Mumbai High Court where he had posed the question "Can any citizen swear by a Constitution which says that the country is secular and socialistic?" The courts have not dared consider the merits of the question, he used to tell me with a twinkle in his eye. If they do, it will compel a rethink on the belated insertion of these words into the Indian Constitution. The question remains relevant even today. He was an amazing man. I shall miss his presence, his warmth and his guidance.

R. N. Bhaskar, Mumbai

*

Like several others of my generation, I feel unfortunate that I could "discover" Raju only in India's post-reforms era, albeit I had heard about him, but never got acquainted with him till then. Thereafter, I have been

singularly blessed that he involved me in the preparation of four Liberal Budgets and some other programmes and studies of the Indian Liberal Group. That was the time I came to know more about this great human being, his complete dedication to the cause of the Swatantra Party and his two great idols – Rajaji and Minoo Masani. He sustained his dream of reviving the Swatantra Party in India's evolving political milieu, but that has proved to be in vain. He was always so passionate about projecting and propagating "appropriate" political economic liberalism for this country. For many of us, he was a friend, philosopher and mentor in the true sense of the term. It will be an immense loss to the already fragmented liberal movement in this country – it is going to be orphaned!

Sunil S. Bhandare, Mumbai

*

Very sorry to get the sad news of the demise of Mr. Raju. He was a great friend of the family and a delightful person also. We all will miss him.

Gita R. Pai, Mumbai

*

Deeply saddened to hear of the passing away of Mr. Raju. I still remember the meeting I had with him for discussing about Papa's biography. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Shyamsunder Pai, Mumbai

*

It's very sad news. Our last link with the epoch of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari is lost. I still remember Raju scanning through very small prints of *Freedom First* through eyes that were taking no more strain.

Sharad Joshi, Pune

*

I am very sad and shocked to know that Mr. Raju is no more with us. It is a huge loss for us. I have always admired his intellectual ability, administrative competence and human values. May his work and principles give strength to his colleagues to bear this cruel blow of destiny.

Dr. Usha Thakkar, Mumbai

*

Mr. Raju was a stalwart of *Freedom First* and a familiar face in the corridors of Army and Navy Building. We have been neighbours in our respective offices for years and I have watched how tirelessly he worked. His qualities will live on.

Radhika Sabavala, The Marg Foundation, Mumbai

*

This is a sad day of losing a friend who motivated me to join the faculty of SIES, who encouraged me to write comments on the legendary Minoo Masani, a friend whom I looked upon as a Beacon in this community work, always a hope to the ships in troubled waters – so many pleasant memories of a fine Gentleman. He shall always be near to my heart.

Bhal Patankar, Mumbai

*

The world has lost a dedicated person who was very clear about his values and prepared to fight against all odds.

Minocheher Damania, Mumbai

*

I knew Mr. S. V. Raju for over two decades. I have seen him as one of the few who held unflinching loyalty to liberal social mores and a free economy that drives the spirit of people to better their economic lot. He lived in a country that is ruled by politicians that hardly subscribed to his beliefs. I am not sure whether he went out of this world disappointed with the state of affairs in the country.

People like him are a few and would hold a candle for a small minority that still believes in a liberal social and economic world.

Ranga Kota, Hyderabad

*

Eighty-one years old and frail, S. V. Raju was Rajaji's conscience keeper and conscience of the Swatantra Party. He saw and served the party with distinction from its inception in 1958 till his last day on 19th May 2015. In Mr. Raju's death, the Swatantra Party has lost its most faithful and able "JAWAN". The Swatantra philosophy lives on. Men may come and go, parties may live or not, the spirit lives on and on. Successive governments during the last two decades have implemented the economic and political philosophy of the Swatantra Party. Our country's progress is the result of this adoption. The Jawan is no more and yet the "Amar Jyoti" lives on and on.

**Dharmendra Nagda, Mahendra Oza,
S. Ramachandran,
The Matunga Unit of Swatantra Party**

*

ISIS - A New Threat

Ashok Karnik

We do not comprehend the mindset that allows the crudest form of violence like beheadings, rapes, mutilations, burnings, slavery, mass executions and genocide that the ISIS commits. We are lost without knowledge of ISIS philosophy, ideology and methodology.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has emerged as a new international phenomenon. It is the Caliphate that the Islamic world was supposedly waiting for. The Caliphate demands obedience by all Muslims and has declared war on more and more areas. It has won large tracts of land in Iraq and Syria and secured the allegiance of followers in Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Chechnya, Pakistan, etc. ISIS or Daesh in Arabic, believes it to be Allah's Army specially anointed to take on and defeat the Army of Rome. The Army of Rome is a generic term to include every Western influence from the 11th century to the 21st century. It alludes to the crusades launched to liberate the holy lands in the Middle East. More pertinently, the military conquests by the Western industrialized nations led to imposition of Western notions of culture in large parts of the world, including the Middle East. The dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and rearrangement of national boundaries of many Middle East countries to suit colonial compulsions left bitterness. It was interpreted as defeat of the Islamic way of life. This resentment against this cultural and political onslaught had to erupt sometime; it is happening now. It is no longer a Rome-oriented religious campaign by the West but for the jihadis it continues to be the Army of Rome vs Islam. The war is against Western culture, Western education and Western military might. The Ottomans had won their final battle in 1516 against the Ghouris at a place called Battle in Syria. The ISIS/Daesh believes that it will fight its final battle against the Army or Rome at Dabiq. Its offensive against the infidels and apostates is thus based on its absolute faith in the Quran and prophesies of the middle ages! It should not be mistaken for a band of bandits. It has its own theology and philosophy, howsoever repugnant its barbaric conduct.

Puritan Daesh v/s Al Qaeda

For Daesh it is not a simple 'we' (Islam) and 'they' (West) fight. ISIS/Daesh simultaneously fights the battle for theological purity; it is also a fight amongst Islamic fanatics themselves, all of whom swear by the Quran and Hadith but become bitter enemies over interpretations of topics outside the Quran. Daesh is a progeny of Al Qaeda but challenges the latter because of differences over

defining who are the true Muslims and who are the 'infidels' or 'apostates'. Who needs to be destroyed first and who can be won over as friends? Al Qaeda treats the West as the immediate enemy and tolerates (not accepts) the Middle East countries under Western influence. Daesh treats them as evil and wants to destroy them too. Al Qaeda controlled the jihadi movement all over the world because of its global network and more importantly its money power. Osama bin Laden had legendary abilities to raise funds and could dole out money to deserving jihadi organizations. Al Qaeda could decide whom to attack and whom to ignore; who could be treated as potential supporters and who were to be declared 'infidels'. The debate started with the Arab Spring when Middle Eastern countries started a revolt against their despotic rulers and won. The victors adopted various means to secure power; although all of them were Muslim majority countries, some accepted democracy (elections) and some did not mind a pact with secular forces to strengthen their hold. None adhered to Quranic edicts and imposed Sharia. Al Qaeda decided to tolerate the religious deviation and supported the emerging regimes as potential allies. The more puritan Daesh could not accept the 'infidels'. Daesh rejected the Al Qaeda line and broke away. To add to the discomfiture of the Al Qaeda, Daesh did not require Al Qaeda's financial support. In fact, Daesh was/is so much flush with funds that it can support other jihadi groups.

The theatre of war has shifted from AF-Pak to Iraq-Syria. Those opposing the 'infidel' and the 'apostate' are engaged in war and not giving sermons from the caves of Af-Pak. The dictates of ISIS are more appealing than those of Al Qaeda. Trouble is brewing between the two. Daesh swears by ideological purity and treats shias, Kurds, the Muslim Brotherhood and all accepting any form of democracy as enemies. While Western powers are distant enemies, the deviants are the near enemies to be fought here and now. It does not care if it has to fight on multiple fronts but it is determined not to tolerate infidelity and meets out the harshest (barbaric) punishment to those it considers guilty. The horrendous atrocities the ISIS commits are beyond understanding. The attack on Ismailis in a bus in Karachi on May 13, 2015, killing 43 people is a case in point. Daesh is proud of the killings of the 'infidels' while

the world weeps in shock. We do not comprehend the mindset that allows the crudest form of violence like beheadings, rapes, mutilations, burnings, slavery, mass executions and genocide that the ISIS commits. We are lost without knowledge of ISIS philosophy, ideology and methodology. Initially we thought that the new Caliphate was an outburst of tribal passions, ethnic animosities and regional ambitions. It goes much beyond that and has a perverted but effective ideological-cum-philosophical base which can influence millions of Muslims all over the world. Daesh believes that it is its divine duty to cleanse the earth of the scum that misrepresents the teachings of the Quran.

Jihad – The Only Answer?

The ISIS does not hide its objectives. What it lacks in military sophistication, it compensates with religious zeal and passion against centuries of pollution of what was the domain of the Quran. In the process, all rational ideas and sensitivities get drowned even among those who are otherwise modern. Jihad is the answer for every problem; life without this cause is meaningless for its adherents. Once the fear of death disappears, an individual becomes all powerful and no argument can stop him from dying for his goal.

ISIS has its weakness in its lack of military sophistication; it does not have an air force, missiles, satellite support or a navy and depends totally on brutal land warfare. It has made a tactical error in appearing on the horizon, leaving its strong suit of anonymity. Terrorism flourishes because terrorists are not easily identifiable;

they merge with the population and are difficult to detect. ISIS has given up its anonymity and declared itself a State with loose but identifiable land presence. It had to take this step as a Caliphate is a necessity for spreading Allah's message and imposing Sharia. It is now vulnerable to better equipped attacking forces. It is fortunate that with the disillusionment in Afghanistan and Iraq, the West and particularly the US, is wary of deploying its armies to fight a land war as it is afraid of getting sucked into an interminable conflict which would be basically unwinnable. It can push the ISIS through air attacks but it cannot eliminate it; the jihadis' local support would get stronger as they emerge as martyrs to another assault by the West. It is a dilemma that the world faces.

The Endless Madness

The disturbing aspect is that the extreme fanaticism of Daesh is becoming acceptable to the West's pampered children; every malcontent thinks that he can jump on the bandwagon of protest against Western culture. It is not surprising that thousands of Europeans and Americans are joining the ISIS fight. Those who cannot join ISIS choose to become "Lone Wolf" terrorists. We do not know when the madness will end and what damage it can cause till its defeat. The rumoured death or incapacitation of Caliph Baghdadi could make a huge difference as such autocracies generally split due to fights over succession. However, one should not depend on wishful thinking. The world should understand what lies in the future. It would add urgency to the need to evolve measures to resolve the threat before it engulfs the world in further strife.

Dawood's Return?

Ashok Karnik

Dawood's extradition case is also much misunderstood. How can a country that denies his presence in its jurisdiction be asked to extradite him to India.

A lot of hot air was generated over a senior former CBI officer's claim that he was approached in 1994 to discuss the possibility of Dawood's return from Pakistan to face trial for the 1993 Mumbai blasts. It was speculated that this possibility was sabotaged by interested politicians and policemen who were afraid that Dawood would expose his connections with them if he returned to India. The then CBI Director denied this claim but a few other officers sprang up to back the story. As usual the media went to town and speculated who the top politicians could be. Some usual suspects were mentioned

too, without much thought. There is no doubt Dawood had connections with politicians and police officers but the current speculations are based on half-knowledge. It is not as if the former CBI officer and others are lying. Every fugitive tries to utilize every contact at different levels to explore how he can escape severe punishment. Dawood must have approached several officials and lawyers, including Ram Jethmalani, who are now coming out with their versions. They may be correct but do not know that several such contacts are used only to see if a workable plan can be evolved. Several channels are used

because if one gets blocked, another is available. Therefore politicians or police officers, howsoever powerful, cannot block the offer completely. Such approaches are exploratory till real deal-makers are reached. The deal makers are not identifiable and they keep the Government out of such 'unauthorized' negotiations. In fact, a veil of 'deniability' is built around such activities. The argument that the State Government (Sharad Pawar) or the Central Government (Narasimha Rao) should have acted on Dawood's offer is ludicrous as no Government can be caught dealing with a terrorist/murderer. It can deal only with the Government concerned and not bargain with criminals. Hostage situations are different.

Secret deals are indeed made but these are struck by shadowy unidentifiable agencies through middlemen who are equally untraceable. CBI officers who are well known are never likely to be used to strike a deal. CBI is not only accountable to the Government but also to Courts. Its officers cannot participate in any deal with a criminal without the Court's approval. No wonder that the CBI officer got a cold shoulder from above. The media speculation that Dawood's surrender was sabotaged by certain politicians is a speculation only and just that. Given a little more thought, one should wonder what Dawood can reveal in India that he cannot do from Pakistan? If he or the ISI were bent on causing damage to some politicians' careers, they could leak the same information more securely from Pakistan than from an Indian jail. One thing is clear that whatever conditions Dawood might have

presented, the only concession he would have got was the choice of the method of hanging! Even the shadowy agencies might not have touched Dawood's offer.

Another rather juvenile argument presented was that if Dawood had been brought back in 1994, the 26/11 attack on Mumbai could have been averted. This is childish as the attack was planned by the Lashkar-e-Toiba (L-e-T) with the support of the ISI. In case Dawood was not available, L-e-T/ISI would have found an alternative.

Dawood's extradition case is also much misunderstood. How can a country that denies his presence in its jurisdiction be asked to extradite him to India. The faux pas of a junior Minister in Parliament saying that "we do not know where Dawood is" had to be undone by the Home Minister claiming that Dawood is very much in Pakistan. The extradition move is only a pipe dream! It would have been great to get our hands on Dawood but let us not assume that he was ready to fall and somebody in India prevented his fall due to ulterior motives. Even the CIA with its worldwide network and immense resources took ten years to detect and eliminate Osama-bin-Laden. We need to have greater patience, not in the hope that Pakistan would change its colours but in the capacity of our agencies to deliver.

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The Swatantra Party in Gujarat:

A Shooting Star (Part II)

Usha Thakkar

Politics of castes remained important. The feeling of newcomers taking away power from old workers revived the historical Kshatriya-Patidar antagonism. Although the top leadership fought hard to counter this, there is no doubt that the Swatantra Party was divided into two factions based on caste.

This is the second part of the three-part article on the history of the Swatantra Party in Gujarat.

The Elections in 1967

The 1967 election was a turning point in the politics of India and Gujarat. The prestige and influence of the Congress had declined due to factors like the 1962 Indo-China war, Nehru's death in 1964, economic issues like devaluation of the rupee and the growing desire for change among the people.

The Swatantra Party now wanted not to be just the opposition, but wanted to be an alternative. There was an increase of two seats in the Lok Sabha and 14 seats in the Assembly for Gujarat due to an increase in the number of seats for these bodies from 1962 to 1967. In the 1967 elections the Party fielded 148 candidates from all the 17 districts for the assembly of 168 members. 66 members were elected from 15 districts; however the Party drew a blank in the districts of Amreli and Bulsar; it was second in 69 places and lost deposits in 5 places. The Party polled 37.5% of votes. Out of 66 seats won by the Swatantra, 62 belonged to the rural areas. This was in accordance with the scene at the all-India level. There was clear bipolarisation between the Congress and the Swatantra. More than 83% of the votes were divided between the two Parties. There was straight contest between the Congress and the Swatantra in 35 constituencies.

The Swatantra remained strong in Surendranagar and Sabarkantha areas. It could make a good entry in Saurashtra also and improved its position in North Gujarat. It maintained its position in Central Gujarat and was weakest in South Gujarat. It won 5 seats in Surendranagar, 8 in Sabarkantha, 7 in Kaira, 6 each in Ahmedabad and Mehsana and Panchmahal, 5 in Baroda, and 4 each in Rajkot and Jamnagar and Junagadh, 3 each in Banaskantha and Bhavnagar, 2 in Kutch and 1 each in Ahmedabad city, Broach and Surat. The Party's performance was weaker in Kutch and Kaira compared to the 1962 elections. There was tension caused by resignations of a few stalwarts and sitting MLAs like Gulab Shankar Dholakia and Jadavji Raghavji from Bhuj and Rapar (Sharma, 1976:333). Some

members also complained that the Swatantra Party in Kutch was completely under the control of the Rajputs, who were anti-Patidars. The Party's unexpected defeat in Kutch and Kaira districts and poor show in South Gujarat crushed the Party's hopes to rule. It tried to forge an alliance with the opposition parties, but could not succeed. Its efforts for alliance with the leftist parties like PSP were also unsuccessful. It had made electoral adjustments with Jan Sangh for 15 seats.

The number of the Patidar MLAs of the Swatantra was 8 in 1962 and 13 in 1967. The number of the Kshatriya MLAs was 8 in 1962 and 23 in 1967. (Sharma, 1976:395-6) Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha had supported the Swatantra in 1962 and 1963 elections. But in 1967 there were dissensions in the Sabha on the issue of the support to the Swatantra. Mahida had resigned from the Party because of his grievances: he did not get the desired position in the Party; he did not get enough financial help to fight his case in the Supreme Court in 1965, and his Anand seat was taken from him to offer to H. M. Patel to fight the Lok Sabha election. Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha was divided between the Swatantra and the Congress in 1967 elections. Mahida and Solanki, two architects of the Sabha, were on opposite sides. Mahida's resignation from the Swatantra in 1965 and re-joining the Congress, and the 'accommodative strategy' adopted by the Congress created a political fury.

The economic policies of the Swatantra Party attracted some industrialists like Pashabhai Patel, Manubhai Amresey and Viren Shah. The Party was strengthened by the joining of retired and experienced bureaucrats like H. M. Patel and C. C. Desai. Support of many ex-rulers like those of Jasdan, Chuda, Dhrol, Idar, Jamnagar, Devgadhi-Baria, Santrampur, and Dhangadhra was helpful.

The results of the Lok Sabha elections were encouraging for the Swatantra. It contested 21 seats and won 12 seats. It was second in 8 constituencies and got 39.92% votes. Like the Congress, the Swatantra tried to take in its fold all the sections of the society.

Minoo Masani retained the Rajkot seat but with a reduced margin. Pravinsinh Solanki was victorious from Kaira once again. Other notable winners were Dandekar from Jamnagar, Viren Shah from Junagadh, Piloo Mody from Godhra, Ramchandra Amin from Mehsana, Manubhai Amersey from Banaskantha, Pashabhai Patel from Baroda and C. C. Desai from Sabarkantha. R. K. Amin defeated Prabhudas Patwari in Dhandhuka. Meghrajaji, ex-ruler of Dhangadhra, won both the Lok Sabha and the Assembly seats. He retained the Lok Sabha seat. The Congress became a victim of internal conflicts. The approach of veterans like Ratubhai Adani and Rasiklal Parikh indirectly helped the opposition. The Swatantra lost the Kutch and Anand seats to the Congress. In Anand, Narendrasinh Mahida, as a Swatantra candidate had defeated Maniben Patel, the Congress candidate, in 1962. However, in 1965, he left Swatantra and joined the Congress and in 1967 as a Congress candidate he defeated H. M. Patel, the Swatantra candidate. This once again showed the importance of the Kshatriya factor. The seat in Dohad also was lost. Lalit Patel was selected to contest in place of the sitting member Purshotamdas Bhil. South Gujarat continued to be under the Congress, and North Gujarat under the Swatantra. Both parties showed almost equal strength in West and Central Gujarat.

Some surprises of the election results were - a narrow victory for Bhaikaka, defeat of H. M. Patel for Lok Sabha by Mahida and for the Assembly by Shankarbhai Vaghela, defeat of ex-ruler of Kutch Himmatsinhji in Mandvi assembly seat and Kutch Lok Sabha constituencies, and defeat of the Congress leaders and ministers like Manubhai Shah, and Bhanuprasad Pandya.

In the 1967 elections, the Congress realised that it could not take the Kshatriya support for granted, so it tried to woo them. The 1962 experience had brought a change in the approach of the Congress to the Kshatriyas. According to Shah, as a result of the interaction with the Sabha, the Congress Party's attitude towards the Kshatriya Sabha shifted from one of indifference and antagonism to consideration, and from consideration to accommodation. (Shah, 1975: 136)ⁱ

Politics of castes remained important. As observed by Kothari and Maru, "The feeling of newcomers taking away power from old workers revived the historical Kshatriya-Patidar antagonism. Although the top leadership fought hard to counter this, there is no doubt that the Swatantra Party was divided into two factions based on caste. It was a case of politics bringing together traditionally rival castes into an alliance based on a new identity of interest, and then once the alliance took form of a single organisation, the traditional groups reasserted themselves. These factions substantially influenced the outcomes of

the elections." (Kothari and Maru, 1970: 83-4)ⁱⁱ

The Swatantra tried and largely succeeded in uniting the Patidars and Kshatriyas of Saurashtra with those of Gujarat and of Saurashtra. Saurashtra Khedut Samaj joined the Swatantra. In November 1963 at the 15th Convention of Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha at Ahmedabad, the Kshatriyas of Saurashtra and Kutch came together. Bhaikaka tried his best to woo the Girasdar Association and erstwhile princes to be with the Kshatriyas. He followed the principle of allocating 33% seats each to the Patidars and the Kshatriyas and the rest to other communities. But this had its problems. Dayabhai Patel, Pashabhai Patel and Dadubhai Amin were against giving too much importance to the Kshatriyas. There were also some like Vadilal Lallubhai Mehta and Suketu Shah who did not approve of this principle.

Swatantra wooed the princely elements even at the cost of alienating its trusted lieutenants in Banaskantha, Surendranagar, Jamnagar and Panchmahal districts. It also gave tickets to some Congress dissidents. The Kshatriya leaders like Natvarsinhji and Jaydeepsinhji asked the Kshatriyas to remain faithful to the Swatantra. Natvarsinhji asked the community to defeat traitors like Mahida and consider the elections as 'Dharmayudhha'.

The traditional enmity between the Kshatriyas and the Patidars continued. Patidars made open allegations against Bhaikaka for appeasing the Kshatriyas. It was more evident in the districts of Mehsana, Ahmedabad and Baroda. (Sharma, 1976:162)ⁱⁱⁱ. Ramchandra Amin in Mehsana refused to consider any Kshatriya candidate and insisted on Patidar candidates. In Ahmedabad the Patidars put up candidates against the Kshatriya nominee of the Party. The Patidar faction encouraged setting up an unofficial candidate against Maharaja Fatehsinhrao in Baroda district and flaunted the understanding between the Swatantra and Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha.

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To be continued

Agrarian Crisis – Rural Distress – and All That

Sunil S. Bhandare

The best way is to move towards more strategic buffer stock operations and not judge national food security policy of the government on the basis of how much quantity of foodgrains is being procured and at what price.

In the course of last couple of months, the narrative of political economy's discourse has shifted swiftly towards gruelling challenges of agrarian crisis or rural distress. This is not surprising given [a] the growing incidence of farmers suicides in the wake of sharp setback to the agricultural sector in 2014-15 – indeed, untimely rains and hailstorm in certain parts of the country during the last rabi season has aggravated the problems; [b] rising rural indebtedness; and [c] the opposition parties desperately seeking to anchor all their criticism of government's policies on alleged [or perceived] neglect of this sector. It is being fervently argued that negligible increases in minimum support prices [MSP] for agricultural produce by the NDA government during 2014-15, soft-peddalling of procurement operations, reduced allocations for MNREGA, lack of adequate credit [or even absence of loan waiver policy] and inadequate and untimely relief measures have been the main causes of rural distress.

There surely is some element of truth in some of the above squabbles. Unfortunately, the real issues of long-term structural fault-lines of the agricultural sector – the perennial fragmentation of land holdings; vulnerability and lack of economic viability of farming operations; the failure to bring about the next agricultural revolution, including more extensive and effective system of crop insurance; and so on – have been left in lurch. No meaningful dialogue or strategic policy formulations on the future of India's agriculture can be expected in such surcharged political ambience. As a consequence, rhetoric rather than rational policy debate on real challenges confronting the rural economy has been dominating the show.

It is imperative in this context to reflect more objectively on some of the key issues raised by the opposition leaders and politically motivated pundits relating to "perceived" causative factors of rural distress. In this article, we would prefer to reflect mainly on the MSP issue to illustratively bring out the falsehood in their sanctimonious sermons. How does raising MSP help in mitigating the rural distress? Let us put some facts straight: during the UPA government's tenure from 2004-05 to 2013-14, increases in MSP applicable to various crops were unprecedented. The proclaimed objective was to

incentivise farmers to increase their productivity and offer them larger income support. The average annual increase in MSP during the reference period was more than the double digit rate – over 11% for rice and wheat; between 11 to 15% in case of jowar, bajra and various pulses. In the case of cash crops like cotton, groundnut and sugarcane too, the increases in MSP were of similar magnitude.

How much production/productivity grains were secured during this period? Witness that annual growth rate of wheat production was about 2.9% [from 72 mn tonnes in 2003-04 to 96 mn. tonnes in 2013-14], less than 2% in case of rice [88.5 mn tonnes to 106.5 mn. tonnes] and meagre 1.4% in case of coarsegrains [37.6 mn. tonnes to 43 mn. tonnes]. The story with respect to major cash crops is not much different although there has been superlative performance in case of cotton, wherein growth in production has been at double digit rate during this decade. But this has much to do with the Cotton Mission program, and effective absorption of Bt Cotton technology by farmers, which enhanced farm yields significantly.

Who have then gained from the generous increases in MSP for the agricultural produce? Obviously the medium and large famers – that is those who have maximum capacity to generate marketable [potential] surplus and convert them into actual marketed quantities. No one would certainly grudge the accrual of such gains to this farming community – they certainly deserve! But, in India, as several studies and reports over the years indicate that a predominant majority of farming population – 75 to 80% have very small size of land holdings i.e. less than two hectares. They have to perforce use their foodgrains output [especially, rice, wheat, jowar, bajra, etc] almost entirely for self-consumption. There is hardly any marketable surplus left with them. As a matter fact, most of them often have to buy sizeable quantity from the market for their balanced annual consumption needs. Thus, MSP increases do not help such marginal and small farmers, except where they produce sizeable quantities of such crops as maize, pulses [tur, gram, moong, etc] and/or cash crops like cotton, sugarcane or groundnuts.

Where is the maximum incidence of suicides? It is

mostly in the case of marginal and small farmers to whom MSP increases are of virtually no consequence – in fact, it often hurts their meager family budgets. Has the incidence of farmers suicides increased due to inadequate increase in MSP in 2014-15 under the NDA regime? There is no such evidence. Unfortunately, what is evident is that farmers' suicides is becoming an endemic phenomenon in our country. To quote from a very incisive study of P Sainath released in July 2014, as many as 2,96,438 farmers committed suicides since 1995. In this, the record of Maharashtra has been extremely worrisome with total number of 60,750 farmers taking their own lives since 1995. The study further suggests that Maharashtra's picture has got lot worse after 2004 with average of 3,685 farmers committing suicides every year between 2004-13. Thus, the period during which MSP increases were at their peak, the incidence of suicides has been very high.

It is equally relevant to mention that between 2003-04 and 2013-14 [i.e. during the tenure of UPA government], the average inflation rates – both WPI and CPI – have been stubbornly high around 7% per annum in the case of former and over 9% in the case of latter. Indeed, rising MSP has created a “ratchet effect” on general inflationary conditions in recent years – in effect, it has broken the tendency for prices to soften even in the years of bumper crops and larger releases of foodstocks procured through Food Corporation of India. In substance, the strategy of indiscriminate increases in MSP not only hurts urban poor, but also the rural poor. That perhaps may have been clear economic rationale why the NDA government has sought to taper off the MSP increases in 3.5% to 4% range in case of most agricultural produce during 2014-15. Incidentally, several RBI studies/reports have also shown that “since minimum support prices are intended to be a floor for market prices, they have sometimes directly set the market price when increases have been substantial, for key crops the rate of price inflation seems to relate to the increase in MSP in recent years”.

Just as indiscriminate MSP increases could often be counter-productive, so also more aggressive food procurement operations could be! When there is bumper foodgrains production, there usually are huge pressures of procurement – as it happened in 2012, when foodgrains procurement was at its peak – over 73 mn tonnes, but since then it has fallen to 59 mn tonnes in each of the subsequent two years. Is there any point in excessively building up food stocks through procurement operations and allowing Food Corporation of India to manage these incompetently – often let them rot? The best way is to move towards more strategic buffer stock operations and not judge national food security policy of the government on the basis of how much quantity of foodgrains is being

procured and at what price. Like-wise, there is nothing sacrosanct about enhancing the budgetary allocations for MNREGA or raising the target of bank credit to the agricultural sector. What is more important is how efficiently and productively such allocations/ targets are being deployed.

In summing up, in the current politically vitiated debate on agrarian crisis, the long-term real structural challenges afflicting the agricultural sector seem to have been relegated to the background. The focus ideally should have been on forcing the government to engage on crucial issues like [a] Why is the reforms process bypassing the agriculture sector? [b] What has happened to the promise of ushering so-called “second green revolution”? [c] How to reduce the pressures on rural economy not only by creating more avenues of non-farm jobs, but also to manage social tensions associated with continuous fragmentation of land holdings? [d] What needs to be done to diversify cropping pattern – say, towards pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables as well as poultry, meat and fisheries – keeping in view the changing pattern of household consumption? [e] How to bring urban comforts and amenities to rural surroundings by building up rural physical and social infrastructure, promotion of food-processing industries, village and small-scale industries, rural banking, insurance, warehousing, modern storage and logistic management systems, et al? If the opposition prefers to be myopic in their critique of government, at least the NDA government should proactively push forward the recharged agricultural reforms agenda in the second year of its tenure.

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Poor Kishen

There was a farmer named Bharat Kishen,
Tilling the land was his only mission;
He grew the rich grain,
A good life was his aim,
But he was forced to face
Death as his ration.

**Adi F. Merchant
Mumbai**

Modi Goes to China:

Development at Home and Peace on the Border

B. Ramesh Babu

As of now India has no option but to continue with its double edged China policy of cooperation for prosperity and containment for peace in Asia. The two dimensions are intertwined and reinforce each other a bit better under Modi's energetic and brave leadership.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is all set for yet another foreign tour. So far he has visited 16 countries in 11 trips abroad. Before his Government completes one year in office, he will be going to China, Mongolia and South Korea during 14-17 May 2015. The forthcoming visit to China will focus on economic ties between the two Asian giants, which are poised for a qualitative jump, and the long festering border dispute. In the words of President Xi Jinping, the bilateral relations are poised to enter "a new phase." External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's preparatory meeting with the top Chinese leaders in advance of Modi's visit aroused high expectations. The large scale Chinese investment promised during President Xi's visit to India earlier is expected to materialise in the wake of the Modi visit. Nuclear technology and aviation sectors are added to the already impressive list of areas of cooperation between the two countries. Furthermore, the two sides agreed that the border dispute would not be left as an unresolved legacy to the next generation. Such optimism over the border row has been the constant refrain every time the top leaders of the two countries met over the past several decades, it must be added.

At the recent Russia, India, China (RIC) trilateral meeting, Russia and China supported India's entry into the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC). India endorsed the launch of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), which is seen as a rival to the US sponsored free trade agreement called the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). On the security front, China succeeded in getting Russia and India to sign on the UN Sponsored collective security arrangement in the Asia-Pacific, which seems to counter America's "pivot Asia" policy.

India and China are partners in the BRICS Development Bank, which is conceived as a rival to the World Bank. India is a founder member of the Chinese sponsored Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). As for President Xi's pet project called "the belt and the road," India has been more cautious. India will participate in specific segments of the Maritime Silk Route (MSR)

like the Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (BCIM) project linking our northeastern States with Southeast Asia via Bangladesh. This is an important constituent of Modi's Act East and Link West policy. Beginning June 2015, a shorter alternate route to Manas Sarovar via Nathu La pass comprising 5 batches of 50 pilgrims each was announced while Sushma Swaraj was in Beijing.

The sum total of these recent developments, projects in the pipeline, and the earlier cooperation over the years between the two countries indicate that India-China equation is poised for a geo-economic and geo-political relationship that is unprecedented in scale and sweep, if all goes well with the forthcoming visit. The potential for exponential growth in the future is even more enticing, if the two leaders are able to achieve a real breakthrough on the border issue. That indeed is a real big if.

The Himalayan Obstacle Remains

Another war or a serious military conflict in the Himalayas would negate everything in a jiffy. To avoid such a disaster is the supreme goal of both nations. However, it is necessary to recognize that the anxiety on this score is not shared equally by the two sides. As the occupying nation enjoying strategic advantage in the mountains and superior fire power, China is in a position to call the shots. Keeping the simmering border conflict alive, escalate it into an armed conflict, or opt for full scale economic and political cooperation with India is a choice that is essentially in the hands of the top leadership of China. As far as India is concerned, enhanced cooperation with China is contingent on peace on the border and an amicable settlement of the dispute as early as possible. How to deal with the dragon in the north, a treacherous and proximate adversary? That really is the crucial challenge confronting India today and for the past seven decades. Will Modi's forthcoming Beijing visit make any material difference to the uneasy and crisis prone stalemate in the Himalayas?

The signals from China are mixed, as always. The

dragon continues to blow hot and cold on the border issue. During the recent visit of Sushma Swaraj, the Chinese side made the usual friendly noises about the importance of maintaining peace and tranquility on the border. However, as recently as February 2015, the Chinese lodged a strong protest against Indian Prime Minister's visit to Arunachal Pradesh! They chose to do so for two days in a row. It seemed to be much more than a formal and routine reiteration of a long standing position for the record.

At the same time, within days of the substantially friendly dialogue at the Foreign Ministers level between the two countries, another key bilateral meeting was held in Munich. India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's Special State Councilor Yang Jiechi held talks on "resolving the border issue." This meeting precedes Doval's scheduled visit to Beijing ahead of Prime Minister Modi's forthcoming visit to China. "The positive interaction between China and India is increasing and the momentum of cooperation is increasing" according to Yang. Doval and Yang "appeared to be working on formulations that could lead to the resolution of the Sino-Indian border row" according to newspaper reports emerging from Munich.

Such optimistic and vague statements on the border dispute are not new, as pointed out earlier. However, the saving grace is that in all these years the talks continued, the confrontation persisted, but the two sides did not engage each other in a serious armed conflict. But the dangerous stalemate, the protracted crisis on the border had become an eternal fixture in the overall India-China equation.

However, it is important to note the significant changes Modi initiated in the Indian policy of dealing with China. On the border issue the historic posture of 'deference and diffidence' was ended and a more confident and "muscular" approach is put in place. Military commanders on the ground are given more leeway to deal with the recurrent armed confrontations and border incursions as they deem fit tactically and strategically. "Tit for tat" is the preferred attitude now. More importantly, Modi has given up the inherited policy of equidistance between the US and China. He moved very close to the US politically and strategically and did so openly and enthusiastically. Modi dropped India's historic strategic and political refrain that it would not seek to contain China. Modi joined hands with Obama against the "not peaceful rise" of China. His policy is that of multi engagement with all the major powers of the world including Russia on one side and also with the US, Japan, Australia, Indonesia and others to counter the aggressive expansionism of China in Asia-Pacific. India-US Defense Technology and Trade

Initiative (DTTI) promises enhanced security and prosperity to both nations.

Chinese Expansionism

China never made a secret of its overarching goal of emerging as the global super power challenging American supremacy in the world. Revival and expansion of the old overland "Silk Road" across Eurasia and joining it with the new Maritime Silk Route (MSR) across the oceans all the way to East Africa reveal China's long term designs. The "Road and Belt" is the new short name for President Xi's very ambitious pet project towards this end. There are many new signs of Chinese aggressive designs in the South China Sea and beyond. In a massive show challenging all nations in the Asia-Pacific region, China is dredging coral reefs on a gigantic scale and using the sand to build up land mass to create what are dubbed as "facts on water." An island of about 9,850 feet long and 985 feet wide is created about 200 miles west of Mischief Reef, (an ironically apt name) in Spratly Islands. The newly built island is capable of docking warships and supporting military aircraft. This audacious activity is a strategic and legal challenge to all nations in the vast region and the world as a whole.

As a part of its global ambitions, China has just signed a 40 year lease agreement to operate the Gawdr port in Pakistan. China's forays into Nepal and Sri Lanka are well known. Latest reports talk of China's negotiations with Ethiopia for setting up a military base in Djibouti, where several other nations have access to similar facilities.

It so happens that the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was on a State visit to the US towards the end of April 2015. In his historic address to the joint session of the United States Congress, Abe declared that Japan was willing and able to "take yet more responsibility for peace and stability in the world." He hailed the US-Japan Alliance as an "alliance of hope" and pressed the American law makers to support the 12 nation Trans-Pacific Trade Treaty (TPP), which specifically excludes China. Significantly, President Obama made it a point to state that the strong US-Japan alliance should not be seen "as a provocation" by any one. He referred to the ongoing maritime and jurisdictional disputes in the South and East China Seas and remarked that "flexing muscles is the wrong way to settle them" is what we say to all nations including China.

Conclusion

As of now India has no option but to continue with its double edged China policy of cooperation for prosperity and containment for peace in Asia. The two

dimensions are intertwined and reinforce each other a bit better under Modi's energetic and brave leadership. The big question before India and the world is whether his policy of close proximity to the US, the multi-vectored engagement with the major powers, along with enlarged and enhanced economic and political cooperation with China will work? The other side of the coin is whether in the process we are confronting China before we are militarily and strategically ready? Let us hope that the more confident and courageous approach of Modi will, and is more likely to yield desired results than the earlier meek

and cautious approaches.

We will find this out soon after Modi returns home from the three nation tour.

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The Year That Was ... (Continued from page 9)

scavenging which according to statistics there are 23 lakh is a blot on the nation's psyche and is on BJP's agenda. A decision to take up the campaign by contacting every family and educating them and rehabilitate them would be addressed. After Jan Dhan, Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao, Modi in his out of the box thinking made an emotional appeal to the affluent sections of people of society to forego subsidy on gas to help the poor. He cited the plight of the families of rural India where mothers struggle daily using firewood.

Epilogue

Till now Modi has not taken a false political step and yet there are puzzling questions that arise that need answers. Despite seeming contradictions his followers, distracters and admirers are not able to size him up and must be wondering when the real Modi will step forward.

For that to happen, the country perhaps has to wait for the Report Card of his government at the expiry of the present term. Carping criticism and taunts of 'acche din' is hasty and misconceived when so much has happened. The first major setback Modi has suffered is in respect of Land Acquisition Bill which has been opposed by the Congress and other opposition parties. There are votaries who support it also. Now Modi wishes to approach the farmers directly. Of course, the final option is to go through ordinance route as the NDA government do not have the required numbers in the Rajya Sabha. The government has made a strategic move by asking those governments who do not support new land acquisition bill to implement it as per original bill. It is a master stroke for apparently those Stats will suffer.

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Twin DVD pack of *Freedom First* and QUEST

We are happy to inform our readers that the work of digitizing *Freedom First* and QUEST is now complete. The twin DVD with the search function contains archives of

- *Freedom First* starting June 1952 upto June 2013 (61 years)
- QUEST starting August 1955 upto May-June 1976 (22 years)

While readers are aware that all issues of *Freedom First* are available on its website www.freedomfirst.in, the work of uploading QUEST is on and it should be available online very soon.

For more information, kindly get in touch with the office. You can e-mail, telephone or write to us.

Agriculture and Rural Indebtedness - VIII

R. M. Mohan Rao

*Freedom from British Rule did little to improve the lot of the farmer.
This is so even today 67 years after Independence.*



In this, the VIII part of the series on the indebtedness of farmers, Professor Mohan Rao continues the discussion on farmers' participation in development programmes and various policy initiatives such as the role of the State vis-a-vis Indian agriculture, the phenomenon of rural indebtedness, rural credit and the nature of safety nets to deal with risks and uncertainties.

III

Policy Initiatives

8. Reforms of extension system

- Farming in India in general and small farm agriculture in particular is a diversified activity with farm and off-farm pursuits. This calls for a holistic approach towards farm as well as farm households' activities covering aspects such as nutrition, food security, sustainability, risk minimization, income and employment generation and marketing strategies of farm and off-farm products. Viewed from this perspective, a farming system approach to extension is suited in Indian conditions.
- Multi-Agency approach to public extension is desirable for expansion of coverage. But effective measures should be taken for better coordination to avoid wastages and for reasons of accountability. Similarly, private sector extension through farmers' organizations, SHGs and farmers' interest groups is desirable for better acceptance of the guidance offered.
- Though utilization of para-extension workers helps to ease the stress on the public extension system, extension through input suppliers and dealers who are not trained for the purpose are more inclined only to push their product brands. This is evident from the experience in suicides of cotton farmers in Andhra Pradesh during 1997-98. This has to be curbed.
- Private sector extension with focus on profits particularly involving input suppliers and dealers and corporate sector gravitate towards better-endowed regions and farmers. In view of this, the State has to continue to play a central role in technology dissemination with a focus on economically backward regions, landless, marginal and small farmers likely to be untouched for reason of poor profitability by the corporate houses.
- Media has emerged as a major source of information to the rural people and this must be used much more extensively than at present to disseminate extension through support from government for a separate channel for agricultural extension in regional languages on radio and TV.
- The Extension system has to be recast with a focus on gender and marketing issues, in the

context of the agro climatic and socio-economic diversity of the country.

9. Marketing

Agriculture marketing is an area waiting for thorough revamping. The urgency for such action is all the more in the changed context of liberalization. The following steps are suggested:

- Freedom and Liberalization for all, except farmers, sounds odd, irrational and unjust. Farmers must be given freedom to transport, process and sell their product according to their will, if government really wants them to be equal partners in the country's development.
- Steps must be taken to provide marketing extension services, together with measures for more effective dissemination of market arrivals, and prices at different trading centers similar to stock exchange news. A toll-free market intelligence service is the need of the hour.
- Greater use of electronic media for creating awareness and motivating farmers in marketing practices, like proper grading, handling and packaging of products at their level for obtaining better prices.
- Creation of a price stabilization fund for select commodities which are volatile to market fluctuations and putting an end to *ad hoc* market interventions in export of agricultural commodities with proper price stabilization mechanism deserves serious attention.
- Post harvesting credit is crucial to avert distress sale and loss of price particularly among the marginal and small farmers. Credit against warehouse receipts is totally absent. Traders are given pledge-credit against goods stored in their premises while farmers are denied the same facility. These discriminatory policies need to be reversed.
- Market access calls for proper connectivity. With more than one half of the villages not connected with *pucca* all weather roads, and 41 per cent of villages without telephone facilities are examples of how not to prepare farmers for global trade! This calls for corrective measures.
- Even private agencies can be encouraged to

procure farm produce on the lines of the FCI.

10. Reforms in the social sector and farmer's participation

Social sector

In the light of the poor state of social infrastructure like education and health in the countryside the following interventions deserve attention.

- The quality of primary education offered in government schools must be improved with due attention to physical access, to ensure participation of all children
- At the secondary stage, the introduction of vocational subjects like agriculture, communication and dairying helps rural youth to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills.
- Educational loans must be extended to farmers' children on par with their urban counterparts.
- Ensuring improved rural water supply, which goes a long way in preventing water-borne diseases, needs priority in rural development programmes.
- Over-emphasis on curative aspect of health care without due attention to preventive and promotional aspects has had an adverse impact on public health, particularly in the countryside. Greater attention must be paid to improve this aspect of health care facilities in this regard.
- A separate scheme of rural health insurance with group insurance concept is essential for coverage of farmers' groups at reduced premia where such plans are already there.
- Institutional credit should also take into account the consumption needs, education of children, health and social expenditure.
- Insurance limit under KCC be revised upwards to Rs.1 lakh and must be extended even after the loan period.
- Special health insurance scheme for small and marginal farmers with provision for waiver in case of death should be explored.

11. Farmer's participation

In view of the significance of farmer's participation

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for accelerated development of farm sector, the following is suggested:

- Administrators look at participation as people's involvement in the implementation of development projects or programmes, which generally comprise components like contributing labour or finances and participation in group activity to carry out the pre-determined decisions of the government. This concept of participation is lopsided and people must be involved at all stages of the project or programme right from the stage of decision making planning etc., with due weightage to their concerns.

Conclusion

To conclude, in the final analysis, in the post-reform era, the agricultural sector has to compete in an integrated world economy. This calls for reversal of many past policies and new initiatives to bring about parity between agricultural and industrial sectors and a recognition that private investment is not forthcoming since it is not paying and therefore public investment should continue as the majority of the vulnerable farmers who cannot be left in the lurch owing to market forces. Towards this end, the State must clearly redefine its role vis-à-vis the agricultural sector.

PROFESSOR R. M. MOHAN RAO, retired NABARD Chair, Waltair, Andhra Pradesh. The purpose of serialising his Paper is to invite readers to share their views on the issues raised and recommend policies that would ensure a fair deal for India's farmers.

With this, we conclude the series on indebtedness of farmers. The full text of the VIII-part series is available at the office of Freedom First. You can write / email / telephone us and we shall post you a copy.

Concluded.

Nurturing a Tradition

They were two disparate people. Minoo Masani was thoughtful, insightful, oft times stubborn statesman turned editor, and S. V. Raju restless, energetic and pragmatic. Raju took on the editorship of *Freedom First* (FF) when his mentor Masani tired. When Raju passed away on May 19, 2015, the monthly journal lost its helmsman of many years.

Raju saw the transition of FF from a quarterly into a polished monthly with articles and columns on current affairs, history, book reviews in a well-designed format with pertinent covers printed on art paper. He did not sacrifice form for content or vice-versa. He ensured that all points of view were published, stressing on the liberal antecedents of the magazine.

A one-time secretary of the Swatantra Party that opposed the socialist policies of the Nehru-Indira Gandhi regimes and espoused economic liberalization, Raju remained staunch in his espousal of liberal values especially as far as the economy was concerned. He welcomed the Narendra Modi government's scrapping of the Planning Commission that he and many others viewed as a body that stifled commercial growth and shackled free enterprise.

He was sympathetic to the pro-business Bharatiya Janata Party and, at one time, thought well of its president L. K. Advani. But the demolition of the Babri Masjid soon put an end to that admiration.

Like Masani, Raju for the most part steered clear of endorsing any particular political party, keeping a distance from all. FF under his stewardship therefore remained an independent publication almost till his end. His esteem for the pro-economic policies of the Modi government steered him in favor of the Gujarat strongman though serious doubts remained amongst several of his FF editorial board colleagues towards the BJP and Modi's outlook toward minorities, especially Muslims.

While Modi publicly has distanced himself from the anti-minority hotheads and hardliners in his party and affiliated bodies, there was still consternation that he had not done enough to reassure the minorities. Raju tended to dismiss some of these worries, panning an article in *The New York Times* expressing concern about the government's willingness and capacity to ensure the well-being of minorities. The frequent attack on churches, the ghar wapasi (return to your original religion) program and the purported anti conversion bill raised concern not only in India but also abroad. The attacks on Greenpeace and the Ford Foundation added to the concern. Raju channeled his considerable energies in defending the Modi government rather than condemning its illiberal policies while at the same time attacking the Congress and its leader Sonia Gandhi.

When the only major disagreement in the editorial board over a column attacking Modi played itself out, Raju, to his credit, finally allowed the piece to be carried as an article with minor editing. Perhaps he was a little peeved since he had been taking on all the editorial and financial responsibilities of publishing FF and his judgment was being questioned.

The half day FF editorial meetings held quarterly at the spacious hall of the Ripon Club, followed by a contributory dhansak lunch, were the high points of the year. There was much discussion, give and take, and bonhomie among the disparate members of the body. Actually Raju was continuing a precedent set by Masani and members of the Democratic Research Service which would meet over dinner several times a year. The dinners held at the residences of some of the members eventually stopped as differences arose among them and people were involved with their personal lives. The editorial board lunch was also put on hold.

Thus, both Masani and Raju, whatever their individual preferences or eccentricities, were totally devoted to the journal. What makes an individual take on such onerous responsibilities? A periodical has to publish on schedule. There is no scope for capriciousness.

The need to express oneself freely, to take up causes, to fight for one's beliefs is what drives one to publish journals. All other considerations have to fall by the wayside. During the Emergency, Masani shut down FF rather than be subject to the whims of the censors, but not without first challenging the arbitrariness of the censor in the Bombay High Court. Soli Sorabjee, one of the country's foremost jurists, had then appeared for FF pro bono. The judgment laid down guidelines for censorship but the Indira-Sanjay Gandhi government was not the type to be bound by any judicial niceties. When the Emergency ended two years later, the publication of FF resumed.

Raju's energies were devoted to the editorial side of the magazine. As long as there were funds to continue publishing, he did not devote much effort to increase advertising or subscription income. But a publication runs on funds and, in an increasingly digital world, a printed journal is like a dinosaur, difficult to sustain when resources are scarce. But with foresight Raju had ensured the magazine's archives were digitized and uploaded on the journal's website www.freedomfirst.in. These remain there for anyone to access free of cost. Even if the publication ceases, FF's contribution to the country's development is there for all to witness.

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