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Freedom First

The Liberal Magazine

TOWARDS DOOM?

TOWARDS DOOM?



C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

Who is leading the country towards doom? Reacting to a statement by Mr.J.Nehru that the Swatantra Party's policies would lead the country towards doom, Rajaji said, "Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru says he is convinced that if India followed the new Party the country will be doomed. Would Mr. Nehru be good enough to state which one of the 21 principles of the Swatantra Party* will take the country to doom?

"If the Prime Minister means that we seek to perpetuate spiritual values and preserve what is good in our culture and tradition, we plead guilty."

In another statement at the Chandigarh session of the AICC in October 1959 which raised Rajaji's ire, Mr.J.Nehru said, "Mr.Rajagopalachari has got a medley of companions in the Swatantra Party and it is difficult to know what their stand is. But, broadly speaking, he stands for the perpetuation of the traditional system, leaving the big industrialists to go ahead and do what they like. Ultimately, they will change the system but on a different plane than I would like it to be. But I don't see how by means of that traditional system you can ever get rid of the problem of poverty. Therefore, I cannot imagine how any person can base any approach on merely perpetuating the traditional structure". Rajaji replied, "Our nation is a medley. No one can deny this or ignore the fact. If I have a 'medley of companions' in the Swatantra Party, I believe it is not only natural but also fair....I take the reproach of the new Party being a medley as a compliment... I fear he (Nehru) tries to find out our stand from the prejudices he has developed in respect of the various personalities who have publicly associated themselves with the Swatantra Party and he has not cared to study the principles accepted by the Party as constituting its stand. "...If this procedure was followed, it could be seen that the Swatantra Party does not intend either to 'perpetuate' anything or 'leave the big industrialists' to do what they like. "...On the other hand, our Party is opposed to leaving the Government to do what they like..."

**The 21 principles of the Swatantra Party and the full text of Rajaji's statement that appeared in the Party's very first publication in 1959 titled "Towards Doom", is available on our website www.freedomfirst.in.*

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Mr. J. Nehru was clear that a free economy would take the country to its doom. Rajaji took the other view – too much government would take us towards doom. A mere 2 years later after Narasimha Rao freed the economy, Masani, in an open letter in 1993, warned that the change in economic policy had been brought about by compulsion and not conviction, he worried that the Narasimha Rao reforms would run out of steam and it would be back to the policies of the *ancien regime*. In what was to be his last statement before old age and failing eyesight caught up with him, he called on his young friends to organise a movement to ensure that statism does not make a comeback though he was afraid it would. He wrote: “If such a movement does not emerge soon I am afraid the reforms process will, in the not so distant future stutter to a stop and when that happens we will once again find ourselves at the bottom of the heap.” We are there now – at the bottom of the heap, stinking of corruption, mal-governance and the unholy efforts of 10 Janpath and its ‘family retainers’ to ensure that the tenancy of 10 Janpath is retained by its masters in 2014 and many years thereafter. For this is what it is all about. Please, after reading this, turn to page 27 for an excerpt from an article by Gopalkrishna Gandhi in *The Telegraph* on what C. Rajagopalachari and India’s second President Professor S. Radhakrishnan prognosticated would become of India and Indians after independence.

Editor

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From Our Readers

The Uttarkhand Disaster

Dr. Jyoti Marwah, Durba Das, Khusbu Mishra, Agnes George, Rita Bhambi and Louisa Rodrigues have all blamed the local development activities like Tehri Dam, Road building, construction for building hotels, residences, and deforestation for the Uttarakhand disaster. None of these activities have any effect on the quantity and intensity of rain (*Freedom First*, No.555 September 2013). The cloud burst and the torrential rains and the resulting flash floods, were caused by Global Warming and not due to any local human activity. Most of the cloud bursts occurred above the tree line, in areas above 10000 feet altitude, where there are no trees because the ecology there does not support tree growth. So there were no trees there to cut. The Tehri Dam did nothing to cause the cloud burst, but served to protect the lower regions from the flash floods.

The local population there had not ever had experience or memory of such a cloud burst, because such a thing had not occurred in hundreds of years of known history. One cannot plan ones activities to suit events that have never occurred before. You cannot blame the Japanese, people, the Government or TEPCO for not being prepared for a tsunami. You cannot blame people of Ladakh and Leh, for not being prepared for a cloud burst, because normally Ladakh is a cold desert, where precipitation is in the form of snow, which does not flow and cause floods. The Ladakhi people and the soil and the hills and the streams are used only to about 2 inches rainfall per year! You can reasonably expect the population of Orissa and Bangladesh to be prepared to face hurricanes, but you cannot expect the same thing from the population of Mumbai.

It is true that with increase in population and resulting increase in construction activity, the damage due to unforeseen natural disasters will also increase in that proportion, but we have to accept that. We can be prepared to face only foreseen events.

One cannot blame human actions for events like earthquakes and tsunami, but there is a definite link established between extreme climatic events and global warming. We should direct our efforts at reduction of emissions of CO₂ and other green house gases. Therefore, support Nuclear Power, which is our main instrument to reduce CO₂ emissions caused by power generation.

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Why Finance Minister C. D. Deshmukh resigned

You have re-published in *Freedom First* No.555 September 2013, the comments that appeared about the resignation of Late C. D. Deshmukh in 1956.

I am surprised at the editorial coverage given by V. B. Karnik, an eminent Marathi trade unionist and writer and author.

Shri C. D. Deshmukh was elected from Kulaba (now Raigad) constituency. Most of the people who became martyrs for the cause of Samyukta Maharashtra hailed from Konkan that is erstwhile Kulaba and Ratnagiri districts. Keeping Mumbai (Bombay) separate from Maharashtra was the game plan of S. K. Patil and Nehru who was opposed to inclusion of Mumbai in Maharashtra.

The entire economy of Konkan was dependent on Mumbai. S. K. Patil hailed from Konkan but was elected from Bombay that is Mumbai in Marathi. It is a common practice in England to address a member of Parliament by the name of his constituency and remind him/her of constituency. He acted honestly by not clinging to his Ministerial position, when his electorate was deprived of their livelihood.

CD was applauded by Maharashtrians for this resignation and is remembered for that timely action.

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Of Under-18 'Criminals'

If the justice system in our country does not see the light of day and continues to treat criminals under 18 with kid gloves, we'll soon have gangsters deliberately recruiting "underage" persons for gangland killings, and every horny "youngster" will hasten to commit rape before he turns 18. With the benefit of only three years maximum period of detention no matter what the crime, it's now an open invitation to the criminally-inclined to hasten up and fulfil their aim and ambition before the magic deadline.

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*

Pakistan Cannot be Treated As a Spoilt Child

I do not agree with Mr. Firoze Hirjikaka's piece on the border incursion ('Politics of an Incursion' *Freedom First* No.555, September 2013). It is too naive and overlooks all the experience of 66 years. One may feel sorry for Pakistan and want to support its democracy but if a country is bent on cutting its own nose to spite India, how long can India bend backwards in the hope that things will change. In international affairs it is suicidal to give a signal that you are prepared to tolerate all nonsense like you do for a spoilt child.

S. R. Ramakrishnan, Mumbai.

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The Demonization of Narendra Modi

I read with interest the excerpts entitled "The Demonization of Narendra Modi" in *Freedom First*, July 2013.

Ms. Madhu Kishwar has made excessive 'effort' to prove that Mr. Modi is being victimized, unnecessarily.

She is right that there have been communal riots all along since Independence and Muslims, Christians or Sikhs have been the targets. Certainly Muslims have suffered the worst. The important question is why people are not ready to forget the 2002 riots of Gujarat while others have generally been forgotten, although not really.

As far as a few Muslims in Gujarat becoming richer in recent years is concerned, there are various reasons for the same. In the entire country the rich are getting richer with time. Probably, a few Muslims in Gujarat have also benefited. But that is not the general trend. Next, question of Muslims supporting the present government can be easily understood. They have no choice. History is full of instances where people have been targeted after elections by the ruling parties for supporting the opposition. In fact Gujarat has no opposition party in the actual sense.

About not forgetting the 2002 riots : Different people may have different ideas about it. Certainly, one reason has been the deep involvement of the state administrative machinery in the Gujarat riots. Now it is coming out that the riots were well planned, months in advance. The issue of burning of the train coach was simply used as an excuse. Also, there have been reports that the burning was stage managed. No one can confirm that except those who did.

Even the leaked British High Commission report clearly indicates that the riots were planned months in advance. We know that British Government and their High Commissions are not at all sympathetic to Muslims, anywhere in the world. Otherwise the situation in

Afghanistan, Syria, Egypt, Palestine etc. could be different from what they are.

Another issue is that there have been regular fake encounters in the state targeting Muslims before and after the riots. Involvement of the ruling politicians and administration in those encounters has also been proved again and again (refer: recent Tehelka tapes). It is another issue that people involved in them or their supporters continuously try (although unsuccessfully) to divert attention from those evidences.

I feel that one more important reason has been the reach of electronic media. Reading something in newspapers/magazines has different impact, which is temporary. Watching the visuals and listening to people have totally different impacts. TV has certainly made the change. Now we see things happening while sitting in our drawing rooms. That difference has made deep impact on the minds of persons in the country. By the time the Gujarat riots took place the electronic media had become very strong.

Finally, the contribution of secular minded people, especially from the majority community, has done great service. They have brought out the facts with lot of efforts and they have seen to it that the facts are not buried by the interested parties.

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Of Landslides and Robberies

Landslides have become very common in the Himalayas. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), failed to observe the Met's warning and got into the rescue rather late.

Sometime back, when the Dam on the branch of the Amazon river burst, the authorities acted very quickly and rescued most of the animals in the dam-site. When this is a fact of life and the Brazilians could respond so fast, is life so cheap in India that we are unable to rescue human beings, let alone animals, before so many perish?

Law and order in Tamil Nadu has deteriorated. House robberies are on the increase. Last week a rural cooperative society bank locker with gold (pledged against agriculturists' loans) worth Rs.50 lakhs was robbed near Kotagiri. Every day there are more reports of house-breaking and the police and government seem to be inactive. Most politicians are more worried about the next elections than about law order.

RAMAN D., Lovedale P.O.
The Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, RIP



(1945 - 2013)

How Dangerous It Is To Be Too Good!

“It shows how dangerous it is to be too good!” This is what George Bernard Shaw said after M a h a t m a

rooted in both rural and urban regions. The activists come from all classes, castes, and religions of Maharashtra and work voluntarily spending from their own pockets, imposing the least expenses on the organization. The movement fired the imagination of a young German scholar who spent two years with its activists to study the movement and earned his Doctorate in the process.

Like Dr. Dabholkar many members of the ANiS though atheist, have no quarrel with any religion or religious practices because they accept freedom of worship granted to every citizen of India by our Constitution. All they insist on is that people should be open minded and be prepared to critically examine religion, be tolerant towards other religions and help stop exploitation in the name of religion. Dr. Dabholkar always kept his cool; he did not react to criticism or threats; several suits were filed against him in various courts all over India but he went on with his own work unperturbed.

Dr. Dabholkar belonged to a high cultured, family of intellectuals. His wife Shaila, his son Hamid (the name is suggestive enough of his outlook) and his daughter-in-law are all doctors. His daughter, Mukta, is a social worker. He had not practiced medicine for the last 25 years. His family and other near relatives in the extended family admired his efforts and supported him wholeheartedly.

He was well aware of the risk involved in exposing godmen and their gimmicks, but declined police protection offered to him because by accepting police protection for his own person he could endanger the lives of his colleagues. He had received open threats from his enemies that they would soon make him another Gandhi. On August 20 they finally succeeded in extinguishing this flame and plunged all of us into darkness. But only for a short while; for multitudes have now united together to fight irrationality in all fields; the government has promulgated an ordinance; and politicians from other States are demanding similar laws in their State. The best tribute to Dr Dabholkar's memory would be to work towards the triumph of Rationality.

Mrs. Suman Oak, author, social activist is, along with Mr. P. K. Nanawaty, editor of “*Thought and Action*” the official journal of the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti

*

Gandhi's assassination. Sadly, his words have come true once again. Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, the spearhead of an all-encompassing reformist movement, called the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (AniS), was brutally shot down on the morning of 20 August 2013. Dr. Dabholkar, even in his death, succeeded in bringing the masses, intellectuals, social activists, politicians and even religious people like the Varkaris together, not just to condemn the cowardly attack, but to strengthen the resolve to put a stop to growing intolerance, irrational beliefs, debunking of science and scientific attitude, casteism, and the hypocrisy of godmen.

He campaigned for the enactment of legislation which, immediately after his assassination, was hastily put in place through an Ordinance called: “The Maharashtra Ordinance for the Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic 2013”. At condolence meetings held at Satara, Pune, Mumbai, Nashik and many other places in Maharashtra, people from all walks of life gathered to demonstrate their support and determination to carry forward the campaign organised by Dr. Dabholkar.

Although Dr. Dabholkar had come to symbolise the AniS, it was not the only cause he was dedicated to. Besides ANiS, he was the editor of the Marathi weekly Sadhana started by Sane Guruji. He established an institution for de-addiction named ‘Parivartan’, at Satara. He founded, along with other like-minded friends, the ‘Saamaajik Kritadnyataa Nidhee’, a trust for providing financial support to social activists.

An outstanding speaker with a photographic memory he could quote from many Sants like Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram to modern poets like Kusumagraj and Padgaonkar. He had a vision, at once microscopic and macroscopic. He could connect with ordinary people as well as intellectuals with equal ease. His movement was

Bullets of Intolerance

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, is dead, gunned down in Pune while on his morning walk in Pune. He had been petitioning the Government of Maharashtra assiduously for the last 18 years to legislate against exploitative practices arising out of superstition and magical beliefs.

Apprehension about the unknown, about the future and its implications for one's own self and a distrust of things going automatically well, rooted in some sense of guilt are motifs in almost all biographies. On the other hand, the age old question of human life - how to negotiate complex ethical and political issues while remaining true to a reasoned, rational way of thinking is equally omnipresent. This affinity for rationality and empiricism is a miniscule minority persuasion, but is stubbornly persistent through all the ages. The saint poet Samarth Ramdas (CE1608-1682), in this very Maharashtra, has soundly castigated the so called miracle men and wonder workers of his time, stating that they were available three to a penny and should be rejected thoroughly. The very quest for rationality and empiricism spurs some of the seekers towards probity, sobriety and scrupulous honesty in their personal lives. The lifelong endeavour of Dr. Dabholkar claims descent from this tradition.

Dr. Dabholkar could challenge and question the society he was a part of, and enjoyed a great degree of esteem in the eyes of the reading and thinking Marathi public. That is, until now. His reprehensible murder now, rather than at the time when he actually went and laid bare the petty tricks and schemes of Hindu Godmen to fool their gullible followers, must make his supporters think a bit. Even in the reactions to his murder, one heard endless and one dare say, mindless, repetitions of the

adjectives "fascists, reactionary, right wing", accusing the as yet unknown murderers. This is bigotry dressed up as supposed non-belief. Parroting prejudices and inability or unwillingness to think or choose words to describe the world cannot be a part of the rationalist tradition of Dr. Dabholkar.

The true adherents of the rationalist tradition would oppose all manner of exploitation stemming from promises of miracles, cures and gain. Our country abounds in Hindu Godmen, Muslim-sounding Peers and fortune tellers who advertise on the local trains, Evangelists from the Charismatic Church, and all of them must be prevented from practicing their noxious trade. The worrying addition to the list is that of the eco-warriors, who on the flimsiest of knowledge base and with no justification, assume the moral high ground everywhere, claiming to speak for the majority. Their stock position being that there is an Unknown up ahead, but we know that anything done now is going to make it worse, so do as we say, which usually, is nothing.

One can only hope that the tribe of rational and empirically minded citizens grows and takes on these malpractices wherever and in whatever guise they occur. That would be a true tribute to Dr. Dabholkar's tradition.

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Freedom First salutes, a rationalist, a thinker and a doer who died a martyr to his cause and convey its deepest sympathies to Mrs. Shaila Dabholkar and her family and all his close associates in the rationalist movement. For more on Dr. Dabholkar please turn to page 22 "Assault on Reason".

Narendra Dabholkar – A Tireless Crusader

Much of the "black magic" he dealt with had simple, sad causes behind it. The wild, convulsing women in the temples of Ambabai and Dattatreya were not possessed, but were mentally ill, hysterical after years of poor food, risky births and mistreatment by their families. One case, where a family was petrified by halved lemons strewn outside the house, clothes torn and the milk spoiled with salt, was traced to a daughter-in-law whose husband would not take her to the movies. When the poor came to his "mobile science" vans, bringing their stories of terrifying horoscopes, Dr Dabholkar would hand them a telescope and patiently explain the profound indifference of the stars.

The only inexplicable thing, he would say (all other "inexplicable" things being rationally explained by natural laws) was that India in the 21st century was still so full of superstition. It launched its own satellites, but before a launch the gods would be invoked with flowers and sandalwood paste; its IT was the envy of the world, but even middle-class people would not start a new project on "inauspicious" Saturdays. The cult of the individual was gathering pace, but people still believed that their fates were in the hands of the gods, not themselves. They clung blindly to karma, which was a law for "sheep" and "slaves".

He also taught by example. His life was pure and simple: vegetarianism, teetotalism, abstention from religious rites of any kind. Even his children were married without pomp or fanfare, in a ceremony that took an hour rather than several days.

From an Obituary in *The Economist* of September 14, 2013.

Report

A Nation in Denial: A Political Theatre of the Absurd

H. R. Bapu Satyanarayana

This is a quid pro quo government confident that it can tide over the threat of being defeated in parliament by cultivating unholy alliances with corrupt allies.

Utter Paralysis of Action (UPA) in its second Avatar that has manifested the political scene defies description. All these developments have the potential to plunge India into a tail spin of uncertainty. There does not appear to be any silver lining in the horizon nor any redeeming feature. The UPA Government is deeply mired in corruption of mega proportions and 'Breaking News' every day is either the unearthing of another scam or some dismal news about the economic doldrums into which the country is being pushed. When there is a resource crunch and the Government is at its wits end to control inflation, the situation is made worse by pushing through in parliament a deceptively packaged mega project like the Food Security Bill costing a whopping Rs.1.85 lakh crore. Then there is the Rs.1.83 crore Coalgate scam in which the Government stands accused of committing gross inequity in allotting coal blocks and has fallen a willing victim to corporate greed.

The Central Bureau of Investigation, entrusted with carrying out its investigation, is hamstrung because the files concerned are missing! Gross anomalies are reported in the distribution of coal blocks during 2006 and 2009 when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was in charge of the Coal Ministry. It is surprising that till now no FIR has been filed in the case – or is it! It may be relevant in this connection to refer to the scams in case of 2G spectrum allocation or the Commonwealth Games. The same pattern is discernible in the mega Coalgate scam.

As regards the new Land Acquisition Bill replacing the 1894 Act when India was a British colony, it has come too late in the day. The enhancement of compensation by five times; provision of wide consultation and proviso for retrospective effect will only adversely impact the economy and will hold development to ransom.

The Government Shenanigans

By now this Government has learnt the art of dodging and diverting attention, confident that it can tide over the threat of being defeated in parliament by cultivating unholy alliances with corrupt allies in a *quid pro quo* for government's support to protect their leaders

who too are facing charges of corruption. In the absence of definitive proof the Supreme Court remains helpless. The only hopeful sign in the enveloping gloom of corruption is the fact that the Supreme Court is personally monitoring the case of the missing files. This may, hopefully, help in taking a giant step to expose persons however high a position they hold in the ruling hierarchy. If this happens, it will signify the beginning of ushering in real democracy in the country and the supremacy of rule of law.

The Congress during its five decades in power has indulged in wanton disregard of what is good for the country in its one point agenda of retaining power, even if it meant subverting all institutions to thwart investigation. It is reported that 162 parliamentarians have a criminal record including being accused of rape, murder etc. and yet the law has been unable to touch them by virtue of their being members of parliament.

The usual ploy of the Congress has rested on four hollow pillars of fighting for the cause of the aam aadmi (common man); propping up minority on the false slogan of secularism; calling the main opposition, the BJP, that represents the majority Hindu ethos, as untouchables; and, when caught in mega scams, to blame it on the previous BJP-led NDA government's policies. Whenever any discussion takes place on any current issue on main stream TV channels, the 2002 Godhra incident is invariably highlighted whether it is relevant or not. All this is done to perpetuate the Nehru-Gandhi Dynastic rule at any cost. The dawn of real democracy is only possible if the people of the country, the opposition parties, political commentators, media and institutions join in demolishing these hollow four pillars.

Now a brief on some specific cases:

1. The case concerns the harassment of Indian Forest Service officer, Sanjiv Chaturvedi, fighting corruption in the Congress ruled Haryana Government and facing the wrath of the State. He was repeatedly transferred, charge-sheeted and faced suspension for daring to unearth a multi-crore forestry scam in which two

political appointees in the State Chief Minister B. S. Hooda's office are involved. Yet a Union Minister in charge of the Department of Personnel and Training went out of his way to help the beleaguered Haryana Government and not the aggrieved officer concerned. Why? Because Mr. Robert Vadra, the son-in-law of Sonia Gandhi, figures in the land deal.

2. The latest revelations of a Comptroller and Auditor General's report blames some of the highest officials of the environmental ministry as well as the State in a massive scam amounting to Rs.23,697 crore of forest land given in violation of the Supreme Court orders and forest laws. In random test checks, the names of corporate entities include miners in Goa and Karnataka, Reliance Power, TISCO and many others figure.
3. It is reported that the Supreme Court granted the Centre and petroleum minister, Veerappa Moily, six weeks to file their response to a public interest litigation against a decision to double, from April next, the price of KG basin gas to \$ 8.4 per million British thermal units. In a new application, it was alleged that the Minister was determined to collude with RIL, NIKO and BP Exploration so as to make a mockery of arbitration proceedings. In the main writ petition, the petitioners said the government had acted illegally and irrationally and with the malafide intention of granting the respondents excessive benefit, virtually bankrupting the exchequer and adversely affecting the economy.
4. Though the Delhi rape case in December 2012 attracted huge public attention, it appears that the incidence of gang rapes has only increased showing that the rapists have no fear of the law. In fact statistics indicate that in the majority of cases persons below 18 years have been involved and yet the court is reluctant to lower the cut-off age of juveniles. Clearly the existing rape laws are inadequate. Another factor to be noted is that while the lower courts have become lately severe in their verdict on punishment in the aftermath of the Delhi rape case, higher courts invariably still tend to reduce the severity of punishment.
5. While the exchange rate of the rupee versus dollar is experiencing a free fall, the government's favourite excuse is to attribute it to a global phenomenon. Even here they make a selective reference to countries to mislead. The basic fact is the government has mismanaged the economy and when they are at their wits end they take knee jerk decisions like inviting Walmart (which is itself facing opposition in the US) and others luring them through FDI and going overboard to accede to their further demands.
6. The Food Security Bill kept in hibernation has now been passed because Sonia Gandhi wanted it. For one,

it is untimely and contradictory because it will involve an expenditure of Rs.1.25 crore annually while the economy is reeling and facing the dire prospect reminiscent of the 1991 crisis. Even otherwise, it is full of contradictions because it is intended to benefit 67% of population covering 80 crore. It makes a mockery of the lower figure of the poverty level. It is already known that there is a massive fraud in the issuance of ration cards to the poor which does not reach the intended but benefit others by manipulation. When such is the case, how can governments make available to 80 crore people (75% villagers and 50% urbanites) rice at Rs.3, wheat at Rs.2 and pulses at Rs.1 per kg? Clearly it is a cruel joke and a crude gimmick to woo voters.

7. On 10 July 2013 the Supreme Court ordered that those in jail cannot vote as per Representation of the People Act and that an amendment once passed by the parliament shall come into effect from 10 July 2013. However, in a move to negate the Supreme Court's order, the Rajya Sabha approved a proposal to maintain the right of those in jail to contest elections! The Law Minister Kapil Sibal commented that the courts orders are 'enthusiastic' to portray politicians as criminals. Moving the amendment, Sibal said that the court judgment was 'clearly erroneous' and advised the judiciary to be 'extremely careful' in giving rulings! Sibal in effect was implying that in case any future ruling impacts the polity of the country, the parliament would take steps to negate it!
8. The Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) had passed an order bringing political parties within the purview of 'Public Authority' under the Right to Information Act. The CIC, in his order on 3 June 2013 declared six political parties as 'Public Authority' since they are substantially financed by the government. This rattled the politicians and the result was a Bill to amend the RTI Act to keep political parties out of the purview of the Act. It included a new section 31 in the principal Act which says that the amendment will "apply notwithstanding anything contained in any judgment, decree or order of any court or commission...." and will prevail over "any other law for the time being in force". After noting the large public protests, the government, on 26 August referred the amendment Bill to a Standing Committee of Parliament for further study.

Postscript: If the Congress has failed the nation, it is a reflection of the failure of the opposition too and in the final analysis of 'We the People'

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China's Intrusion in Ladakh

Brig. S. C. Sharma

The Foreign Minister, Salman Khurshid, takes the cake by declaring on 5 September that he had no time to study the report. What has he been busy about for a month?

The media carried extracts from a report submitted by Mr. Shyam Saran, Chairman National Security Advisory Board [NSAB] to the PMO. He had visited Ladakh at the direction of the Prime Minister [PM] from 2 to 9 August and had submitted his report on 10 August. According to the media, the report pointed out that the Chinese forces had occupied 640 kms of Indian Territory along the border in Dopsang, Chumar and Pangung Tso region in Ladakh. Indian Forces were prevented from patrolling in Dopsang bulge on 15 April. The report further mentioned that in the absence of an agreed border, the patrolling limits became the de facto Line of Actual Control [LoAC]. China on purpose has not handed over any maps about their version of the alignment of LAC which the two countries are to respect.

The news created a furor in parliament. The government denied any ingress by Chinese forces. Shyam Saran himself was the first one to water down his own report. Instead of contradicting the news as given by the media, he observed that the NSAB was not concerned with operational matters. Why then did he comment on operational matters? If the media report was wrong, he should clearly state that no limits had been laid down for patrolling. The Foreign Minister, Salman Khurshid, takes the cake by declaring on 5 September that he had no time to study the report. What has he been busy about for a month? He considers it to be acute to be tolerated or even "enjoyed". He rubs his point further by commenting that we cannot have the army everywhere and action is taken as and when any information is received and that there was no cause for alarm. Since when has he assumed the responsibility for deployment of the Army? The Opposition in the Parliament raised the issue without any success. Let them visit Ladakh and invite the media for a discussion in order to call the bluff of the Chairman NSAB.

The Army has received a gag order and the performance of the Defence Minister in Parliament was pathetic. With a smile, he declared his firm resolve not to cede any territory to China. There is no comment on the Chinese intrusion or denial of patrolling by Indian Forces. He has maintained his silence as to why it was necessary to land a C130 J aircraft at DBO. We are witnessing events similar to the 1962 debacle – a denial of facts. Let him

explain why the 15-year border infrastructure development plan framed under Indira Gandhi was shelved and why the ITBP posts in forward areas have not been placed under the operational control of the Army.

His smile and assurances have no credibility due to a gap between the military strengths of the two adversaries. You can press your claims only from a position of strength. We have been hearing about raising two divisions for almost a decade. Even the present forces are short of critical weapon systems and officers.

A committee presided over by a Lt. General had identified Chinese designs in area DBO in 2010. The report had suggested that the Chinese would avoid the Chushul sector and would try to make encroachments in the DBO area. The report warned against lowering our guard. We should not ignore China's military capabilities, its ambitions and strategic culture. Deterrent military responses are necessary. Their immediate intention may not be to occupy territory but keep the controversy alive and strike at an appropriate time.

The two sides have been talking pleasantries of maintaining peace for too long a time. Let us define the alignment of the LoAC on a priority basis.

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Wishful Thinking when the Nation's Security is at Stake

"It is a fact that we (India-China) still have an undefined boundary and therefore, differences in perception – something that appears from time to time to become an insurmountable problem. But we know, deep in our hearts we know, that this is not an insurmountable problem," Khurshid said while inaugurating the first India-China media forum.

He also said that both India and China were "completely and totally committed to eradication and removal" of hindrances from bilateral ties.

Khurshid's comment came at a time when New Delhi and Beijing are preparing for Singh's visit to China in the third week of next month.

Salman Khurshid, Deccan Herald, September 22 2013,

Three Cheers for Zubin Mehta

Nitin G. Raut

*Music may not have prevented war but neither has opposition to music ensured peace.
So what were the opponents of Zubin Mehta's concert trying to prove?*

Music represents the refined values of society, and each society, whether it is a Chattisgarh tribe living in a forest and playing with rudimentary bamboo instruments or a modern hi-tech Western Symphony orchestra, has its own distinctive stamp but the essence is music. In the old days the blowing of trumpets spurred the soldiers on the battlefields. Today too, in modern Armed Forces ceremonies like reveille and retreat (closing ceremony and not to be confused with 'defeat') and parades are accompanied by inspiring music as much as solemnity of deaths on the battlefield is commemorated with soulful music.

In this context the controversy over the performance of Zubin Mehta-led Bavarian State Orchestra (BSO) in Jammu and Kashmir exposes the absurdity of the protestors. Arguments like Jammu and Kashmir is an allegedly "disputed territory" (legally speaking it is not) or that it is racked by violence are not only extraneous but reflects a dangerous mindset of people wanting to suppress cultural freedom and regiment a society in the name of blind and opaque religious dogmas – dogmas which are merely a viewpoint of bigots and self appointed custodian of 'public morality' by misrepresenting religion contrary to that great statesman who called it "Dharma".

Zubin Mehta, a gifted son of India, ought to have been welcomed with open arms but his programmes are often dogged with political controversies and subverted by powers that be. Many years back, he as conductor of the World renowned Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra was banned from conducting musical programmes in India only because it was politically inconvenient to allow the Israelis in India! In frustration Zubin Mehta had even gone to the extent of saying that he would never like to perform in India.

Against this background the Ehsaas-e-Kashmir (Feelings of Kashmir) concert in the scenic and flowery Shalimar Bagh must have blended the mellifluous notes of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky with the local music into

a mesmerizing melody by the famous conductor and the musical notes definitely echoed the message of peace and harmony louder than the reverberation of guns and bombs.

Role of the Civil Society

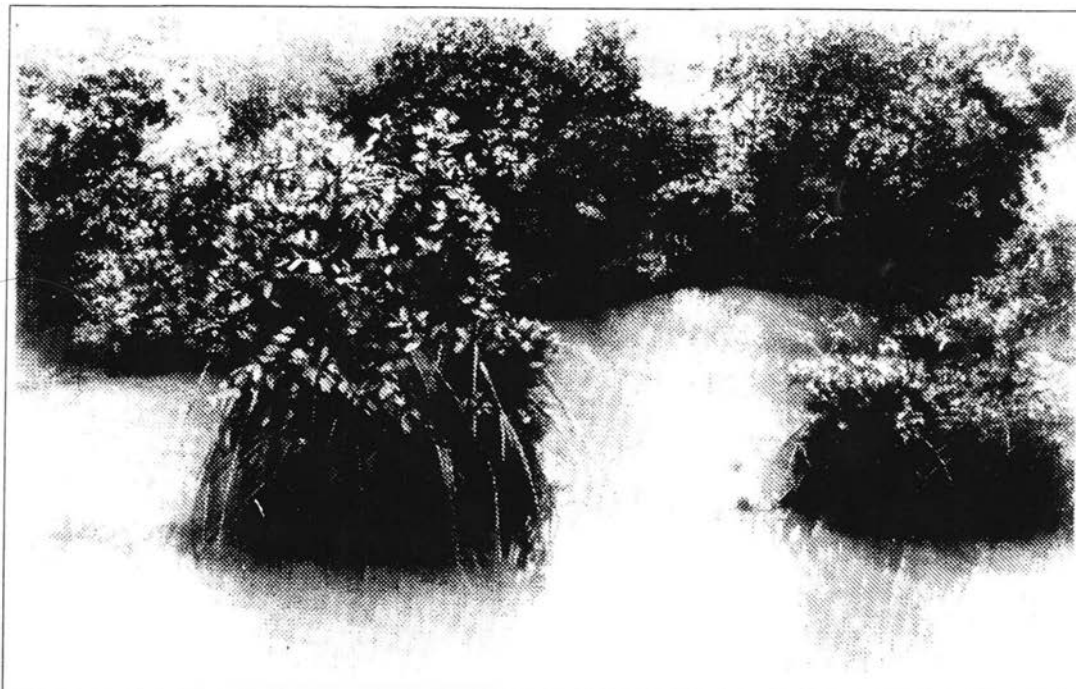
The civil society staged a rival concert in protest billed as Haqueequat-e-Kashmir (Reality of Kashmir) along with the Hurriyat. Instead of being a rival concert it could have complemented in the form of 'Antakshari', had it not been for the political colour given to the programme.

While Zubin Mehta conducted it as a cultural and humanitarian gesture, the civil society and its political abettors made it an issue of political ideology and turned it into 'feeling' versus 'reality'. The civil society encouraged divisive 'feelings' while Zubin endeavoured to unify a fractious society. The civil society succumbed to the protest of the lumpen and the intolerant while Zubin Mehta marshalled moral courage to defy the threats posed to a free society. The former subjugated itself to populism while the latter overcame and emerged literally smelling roses, the fragrance of which infused with the rhythm of Zubin Mehta's music created a sublime atmosphere. The civil society only made the democratic process difficult while the BSO concert heralded pluralism. At a time when the civil society ought to have played a mediatory role it sought to poison minds.

Music may not have prevented war but neither has opposition to music ensured peace. So what were the opponents of Zubin Mehta's concert trying to prove? It has neither won them friends nor is violence and threats the solution. The BSO event no doubt was marked by protest and violence in some parts of the valley, which was not even condemned by the civil society. Indeed who then is the Nero who was fiddling? Be that as it may, its Three Cheers for Zubin Mehta.

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CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



A unique feature of the Industrial Garden Township, Pirojshanagar, is a large expanse of swamp, one of the very few such areas existing in the city under original mangrove forests.

At a time when mangroves are being destroyed at an alarming rate in the process of excessive and damaging reclamation..., Godrej has taken steps, at considerable care and expense.

to preserve and protect this Nature's gift in the awareness that mangrove destruction leads generally to loss of food, breeding grounds and shelter for numerous forms of life.

It is almost unbelievable that, like the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Borivli, such a mangrove still exists in the excessively congested and polluted megapolis that Mumbai is

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WELFARE : ENVIRONMENT / POPULATION NEXUS...

The Rajan Effect – A Flush of Exuberance!

Sunil S. Bhandare

In the quest for providing a soothing touch, Dr. Raghuram Rajan's observations should not create a false sense of complacency among market players.

After a prolonged phase of doom and gloom, there has been a welcome convergence of some encouraging trends in the key economic parameters during the first half of September 2013. And all these fortuitously coincided with the change of guard at the RBI with Dr. Raghuram Rajan taking over as its Governor. Strengthening the rupee, contraction of balance of trade deficit, recovery of industrial growth, some softening of retail inflation rate and a surging Sensex (with some retreat in between) have together started embellishing the country's economic scenario. And the mood seems to be turning around. Skeptics and rational hard core observers of the economy are not fully convinced, and perhaps rightly so. *Would there be a long arduous wait for real celebrations?* We have no option but to wait and watch!

What then are the proximate causes for the current flush of exuberance? The obvious factors are: (a) some respite from geo-political tensions – the prospects of likely easing of the Syrian crisis; (b) some softening of international crude oil prices; (c) anticipated bumper agricultural output promising to kick-start of higher investment and consumption cycle; (d) perception that the UPA government has been able to put its act together and steer through a few important legislative reforms as well as clear a huge backlog of investment proposals; and (e) return of FIIs inflows in stock markets. Above all, a widely perceived *“the Dr. Rajan effect”*!

But there could be another side of the story. Illustratively, witness what the Chief Equity Strategist of CLSA, Chris Wood has to say: “Indeed, it remains remarkable how little foreign net selling of Indian equities there has been in recent years, given the macro distress and the related plunge in the GDP growth rate. CLSA's economics team is now forecasting real GDP growth of 4.2% this fiscal year and 5.2% for the next.” He also cautions that *“India in the Asian markets remains most at risk of a sovereign debt crisis.”* May be, this is somewhat of an extreme view, but its relevance cannot be brushed aside.

Deciphering the so-called “Dr. Rajan Effect”

Be that as it may. What is striking at this moment is the surfacing of a positive economic outlook – both in stock and currency markets – following the change of guard at the RBI. It is, indeed, premature to judge whether it is justified or is it going to be enduring. However, many keen observers are greatly impressed by the manner in which the incumbent RBI Governor, Dr. Raghuram Rajan has spelt out quickly the agenda of action for the RBI in his comprehensive Statement. Equally importantly, in the Q&A Session at the Press Conference immediately thereafter, he has sought to construct *“a virtual feel good environment”* about the state of the economy.

First, he assures that *“we are a very stable and very solid economy*. There is no reason to be down. Yes, we are going through challenging times”. ...*“All the sort of doom and gloom is probably overdone”*. He even dismisses the S&P's recent concerns – *“I wouldn't read more into the S&P statement”*. Second, he asserts that *“there are so many low hanging fruits in the economy and that if we only pluck them we can accelerate growth substantially. ... We can in a sense go back to stronger growth but also to financial stability, financial market stability we deserve”*. Third, he also points out that *“... if you go back and see what the RBI has done, what the Government has done over the last year and half, you will find that a substantial amount of work has been done”*.

In substance, Dr. Rajan's strategy seems to convey to all concerned, and in particular, to market players, business and industry and foreign investors, the message that India has the capacity to deal with current challenging times effectively. Also, there is a definite sense of conviction that the monetary policy would steer through the current trilemma of managing growth-inflation-exchange rate. Incidentally, in his interesting article written just before he became the Governor (and published subsequently in 12th September issue of *Mint*), Dr. Rajan proclaims that *“for the most part, India's current growth slowdown and its fiscal and current account deficits are not structural problems*. They can all be fixed by means of modest

reforms. *The immediate tasks are more mundane*, but they are also more feasible: clearing projects, reducing poorly targeted subsidies and finding more ways to narrow current account deficit and ease its financing”.

However, this sounds rather too simplistic an assessment of India’s current acute problems of stubbornly high inflation, growth stagnation, fiscal and CAD imbalances, decelerating investment, etc. – all of which are challenges essentially of structural nature. By no means, any one of these tough issues can be considered as mundane; and they cannot be resolved by mere announcement of good intentions either by the RBI or by the government. In fact, even a cursory glance at almost all the RBI’s monetary policy reviews during the last couple of years reveals that most of the problems afflicting the economy and related risk factors are either the deficiencies of supply side or fault-lines of structural rigidities. Indeed, most of those also happen to be *very tough issues of political economy*.

Witness, even what the latest RBI Annual Report has to say: “monetary policy encountered difficulties in supporting revival in the face of *the predominant role of non-monetary factors* in the slowdown and the persistence of high inflation”. Subsequently, it also points out that “the economy is currently cruising in slow-speed mode along a rough road. Strategically, it is necessary to first patch the rough spots by putting in place a set of complementary policies *to address the structural constraints*.” The Report brings forth many crucial policy issues concerning fiscal consolidation and combating imbalances of current account and balance of payments. Illustratively, it talks about issues of growing subsidies restricting investment opportunities, including those in agricultural sector.

It is no one’s case that Dr. Rajan is not conscious of or concerned with the challenges of these complex issues. But in the quest for providing a soothing touch, his observations should not create a false sense of complacency among market players. In this context, one is tempted to recall the famous quote of former US Fed Chief, Alan Greenspan: “I guess I should warn you, if I turn out to be particularly clear, you’ve probably misunderstood what I’ve said”. This may perhaps be a good dictum for our incumbent Governor!

Dr Rajan’s Immediate Policy Direction

Let us then quickly turn to various significant policy proposals, which form an integral part of Dr. Rajan’s *separate Statement* and which are likely to be implemented in the short-term – perhaps over the next few months. What transpires there-from is his *five-fold thrust* on

- (a) Inclusive development through thrust on financial inclusion;
- (b) Liberalization of banking and financial markets;
- (c) Movement towards rupee internationalization and increased capital inflows – former through increased settlement of trade transactions through rupees and the latter through mobilization of FCNR (B) deposit dollar funds by banks (swap scheme);
- (d) Improving financial infrastructure covering a whole gamut of issues from credit bureaus and rating agencies, Electronic Bill Factoring Exchanges to improving efficiency of recovery system [Debt Recovery Tribunals] and cleaning up of banks’ balance sheets; and
- (e) Affording better comfort to households on their savings, banking and payment system, Inflation Indexed Savings Certificates; national giro-based Indian Bill Payment System, etc.

All such policy reforms and their implementation *would augur well for reforming and strengthening the financial sector in general and banking sector in particular*. The RBI Governor has promptly proposed setting up of several internal and external expert panels/committees to progress with these policy directions. While many of these proposed policy initiatives are expected to be implemented over the next few months, we believe that the beneficial impact of these in terms of promoting competition, expanding the reach of banking and financial markets, reducing transactions costs and improving productivity of the financial system and of the economy, would only be of long-term import. So much of ground work will have to be done.

Summing up, there is a whiff of positive sentiments in the economy accompanying the change of leadership at the helm of RBI. The fortuitous outcome of good monsoon season is also adding to the cheer. But this cannot make us oblivious of extraordinary stresses and strains through which the Indian economy is currently going through. The recent positive trends in some of the key economic indicators, and in particular, the strengthening of exchange rate of Indian rupee vis-à-vis the US dollar and other major currencies, as well as surging Sensex, may perhaps symbolize the economic turnaround, but there are still many promises to keep both by the RBI and the Government of India so that the current exuberance becomes justifiable and enduring!

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Rhetoric and Reality

If Elected to Power, Will the NDA be Any Better?

Ranga Kota

How would the principal opposition party today suddenly change their stance on fuel subsidy when in power? Can their government override the party's or coalition's concerns?

The steep fall of Rupee since June 2013 and a sub-five GDP growth in the first quarter of FY 2014 are making the ruling establishment (UPA) and the India Inc. nervous. The only constituency that seems to be happy with the falling GDP growth and plummeting Rupee is the political opposition to the Congress. With its moral credibility having vanished quite some time back, the UPA sullied its economic record of high growth in six out of nine years of its rule with a below par GDP growth and a plunging Rupee.

Anyone who dislikes the UPA could find many reasons for the serious financial crisis that it finds itself in. But the general consensus among economists and business analysts is that the unsustainable fiscal deficits with attendant high inflation and high interest rates over the last few years led to the present predicament of nose-diving GDP growth and found the Rupee at its historical low against the USD.

In one of its recent articles, *Mint* presented an analysis of what led to higher deficits in the second term of UPA. It found that the steep rise in subsidy for petroleum products was the key element of increased subsidy burden in the last few years. The UPA government, following Kirit Parikh's report in early 2010, should have decontrolled both petroleum and diesel prices immediately and rationalized the subsidies for LPG and kerosene. With Mamata Banerjee in the government for better part of its tenure, it could never summon the nerve to take the bold initiative of setting market determined prices for diesel and rationalization of subsidies on domestic cooking gas and kerosene. With the BJP taking a position almost along the lines of Mamata and the Left, the government remained policy paralysed.

The ballooning fertilizer subsidy (particularly urea) is another holy cow the political parties would loathe touching. No wonder the UPA with a large contingent of MPs from an agriculturally important State like AP, could not attempt to cut subsidy on urea. The minimum support price (MSP) and Food Subsidy are linked. One appeases the farmers and other is expected to protect the poor. No bold measures there either.

What if NDA had been in power?

The present government is responsible for not acting decisively in cutting subsidies, which led to higher and higher deficits. This is not debatable. But, what is questionable is the rhetoric of the principal opposition party. Day after day its veterans tear into the present government on economic mismanagement. Not one of them offers any insight into what NDA would have done about subsidies if they had been in power from 2009. It is not difficult to conjecture what their approach would have been.

Every time the present government raised the price of petro products, much below the required level, the principal opposition party went hysteric. This only means that if they are opposed to petro price hike in 'principle', they would not have bartered on their 'principle' had they been in power. Fuel subsidy burden on the union budgets would not have been much different. Perhaps it would have been more had they failed to affect even the minimal price rises that UPA did with considerable difficulty. With the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the coalition, there would have been little chance that fertilizer subsidies would have been pruned either. So would have been the case with MSP.

If NDA in power could not have acted any differently from UPA in power, how could they have averted the crisis UPA has precipitated? The only thing they could have done would have been to raise the revenue steeply to pay for the subsidies. One way would have been to raise taxes. And the second would have been to ensure growth of the economy at a much faster rate than what the UPA managed between 2009 -2012.

Faced with the 2008 financial meltdown in the rich western nations, the NDA government, had it been in power in 2009, could not have withdrawn the stimulus in the form of reduction in indirect taxes that the UPA injected in 2008 to protect the economy from the collateral damage from the western meltdown. The UPA started withdrawing the stimulus in stages commencing from FY 2010-11

completing it in 2012-13. The loss of revenue due to the stimulus was considerable and added to fiscal deficits. India Inc. kept warning that the withdrawal of stimulus would hurt growth. To maintain high growth rates, the NDA like the UPA would have been tempted to keep the stimulus intact for an extended period. The case for enhanced tax revenues would not have received solid support from the industry.

Growth till FY 2012 was good considering the low world economic growth and in the context of severe debt crisis that gripped some European nations in 2011, and 2012. The falling growth rates in Brazil, Russia, and South Africa and even in China, with better energy stability or currency stability, would indicate that the world economic situation weighed in good measure on GDP growth of emerging nations during this period. It is, therefore, doubtful if India would have grown faster than what it did if the NDA had been in power from 2009 -2012.

The consequences of the telecom scam and mining scams have left its impact on the economy. They may have cost up to one percent of GDP growth in FY 2013. NDA can claim it could have averted these scams. But it is instructive to note that one of the largest mining scandals had its political hue in Karnataka.

Inflation is one area where the current dispensation has a miserable record. While the government attributes it to supply /structural factors, and opposition attributes it to government's wrong policies, we are not wiser as to what the worthies of opposition would have done to stem the steep rise in inflation. Economists cite that the ballooning fiscal deficits to finance subsidies have injected more money into system, without commensurate real growth in output, fuelling inflation. If major subsidies were on account of fuel, food and fertilizer, there was little chance any government in power would have drastically reduced them. The chief causal factor for high inflation would have remained.

Breaking out of the mould is a must for NDA but difficult to accomplish

The present government has to bear the cross for the present economic situation while the opposition indulges in the luxury of rhetoric without being specific on the economic measures they would have taken to prevent the economy leading to the present situation. Unfortunately this luxury will desert them when the NDA is expected to be in power in 2014. They will be tested on all economic issues of consequence.

Despite all the brickbats the UPA receives for the

economic mismanagement, the fact remains that the average economic growth of UPA regime over two terms was the best the country has ever had. While the opposition may attribute this to excellent global environment for the better part of UPA's first innings, when it comes to the latter part of the UPA's second innings, it holds government's mismanagement, not external factors, responsible for the situation. Therefore, sound management by NDA in power from 2014 should deliver an average economic performance higher than that of UPA's 6% for the second term. They are unlikely to get the benefit of a good monsoon this year, which goes to UPA. If they cannot beat what they term as UPA's miserable performance in economic growth numbers, they will have reality staring them in their face.

The global economic scenario is expected to remain depressed for the better part of FY 2014 and the new government taking bearings around mid-2014, will be watched with great interest within and outside the country for the bold measures they unfold in the budget for FY 2015. If they have someone like Mamata in their government or even in the coalition, the chances of breaking out of the mould will be difficult. Any new government that cares for international rating agencies has to commit to fiscal discipline which is entirely dependent on the subsidy regime. Market driven diesel pricing, steep reduction in LPG subsidy and rationalization of subsidy on kerosene are essential elements of this fiscal prudence. How would the principal opposition party today suddenly change their stance on fuel subsidy when in power? Can the government override the party's or coalition's concerns? If it cannot, we see no breakthrough in containing the fuel subsidy in their term unless the nation faces a very severe financial crisis. With the principal opposition party supporting the Chhattisgarh's model for the Food Security Bill, it is unlikely that we will see any roll back on food subsidy. SAD in the coalition will ensure regular increases in MSP with attendant impact on food subsidy.

With little chance of drastic pruning on the expenditure, the NDA government in power will have to raise revenues either through increased taxes or enhanced economic growth. There will be little resistance from the coalition partners for raising corporate taxes or raising the peak slab of personal taxes since that does not affect their political constituencies. But India Inc, facing a difficult environment, would raise a hue and cry and it would dampen their high expectations from NDA government. It will dent the reformist credentials of the new government. It will go against the general consensus among the economic and business experts that India has to keep its tax rates moderate and stable to attract investments from within and without. Besides, it would also put more

pressure on the government's resolve to control tax avoidance and black money creation.

To raise the level of economic growth above UPA's average annual rate of 6% in the second term, the NDA will have to adopt a two-legged approach; one leg consists of raising the aggregate demand in the economy for goods and services through lowering of interest rates, which is contingent on RBI's decision to lower interest rates even against persistent high inflation. This has to be supported by the second and the most important leg of steeply raising the availability of goods and services to a level that exceeds growing demand. This requires massive investments in agriculture, manufacture and infrastructure that will create more employment and personal income. A supply surplus economy will see lower inflation with attendant lower interest rates.

Resources to Fund Massive Investments in Infrastructure

With heavily leveraged balance sheets, India inc. has lost the appetite to invest in infrastructure projects alone or even in public private partnerships. This puts the onus on the new government to find the resources. They can finance this in good measure if they can cut subsidies drastically. It will require great courage of conviction on the part of the new government to go for this much-needed but politically dangerous gamble. The odds are very low for the new government to chart a new economic course of this kind in view the populist credentials the principal opposition party acquired when in opposition.

If money cannot come from subsidy cuts, then massive investments will have to be funded from borrowings either from overseas or domestic. Massive borrowings need servicing and this would add to widening deficits with attendant currency risk for the loans sourced from abroad (late ninety Asian crisis should serve a reminder for using overseas borrowings for investment).

New Realities

Besides finding the capital, it has to deal with the new reality in acquisition of land for infrastructure. The recently passed land acquisition bill would raise the costs and delay the process of acquiring land. Since a heightened investment-led growth is not possible in the near-term of the new government, infrastructure boost for economy does not appear a possibility in the short term.

The UPA government had lost control over policy making in its second term. Public interest litigations on any economic policy of the government could paralyze the incumbent government. Now the decisions on spectrum

or any natural resources are subject to intensive judicial scrutiny. FDI in retail and aviation or even setting up of nuclear plants could all be challenged in courts. The principal opposition party was happy at this turn of events as it helped put UPA on mat within and outside the parliament. It is unlikely they would escape the public or judicial challenge when in power. This would obviously narrow the scope for some out of box policy initiatives

They will also be tested on their ability and fairness while untangling the mess the telecom, mining and FDI in retail. Any move that deviates from the rhetorical position of the NDA constituents would receive howls of protest from the opposition benches or from public interest groups. Revenue maximization policy, on the other hand, will leave the industry cold towards investments in telecom, mining and energy sectors, so essential for growth.

After having perfected the art of disrupting parliament for the better part of the UPA regime the NDA will have to brace itself for a similar approach from the defeated Congress and its close associates. They will have no moral ground to accuse the opposition for stalling the parliament and delaying the passage of crucial bills for better economic management.

Contrast Effect, the Flip Side

The NDA in power has to face the consequences of its rhetoric from the opposition. They have to live up to their rhetoric if they have to pass muster. That will require much better governance and economic management than that of the UPA. They will be judged on numbers. They will face comparison with the numbers of UPA regime. Today, the contrast effect is working for them. UPA's economic performance in the second term is compared to a few high-flying opposition ruled States. They will face the same contrast effect from the numbers of UPA in the second term and also from the numbers of these very States they used for comparison. They will have to perform well enough to come out a winner. The odds of their doing so are not high.

They can, however, indulge in another pastime of blaming UPA's mismanagement for their shortcomings. That could be a face saver for the ruling NDA, but not for the millions of Indians who voted them to power. They will feel short changed. They cannot escape from a political landscape where rhetoric rules over reality.

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Talking to Pakistan: Back to Square One

B. Ramesh Babu

There is hardly any hint of the much needed advance preparation for such a Summit Meeting. Experience tells us that rushing into such ventures without the ground work on both sides invariably leads to failure. Subsequent disillusionment puts the clock back.

Countries cannot choose their neighbours. India and Pakistan have no option but to deal with each other all the time, peacefully or otherwise. “To talk or not to talk” has been the recurring dilemma that comes to the fore each time a new dispensation comes to power in Pakistan. As far as peace between the two countries is concerned, dialogue or no dialogue made any difference, whether the Army was in command or a civilian Government was in place in that country. This glaring fact should not be forgotten at any time. Engaging Pakistan does not and should not ipso facto mean an immediate resumption of the “composite dialogue” at the very top at this time.

Prudence and seven long decades of sad experience clearly indicate that the renewal of interaction with Pakistan at this time should begin at the level of field commanders on the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir. Gradually, depending on actual progress on the ground, the dialogue process should switch to the civilian side and creep up to the level of preparing an agreed agenda for a meeting between the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries. The two Foreign Ministers could then meet and prepare the ground for a Summit Meeting between the two Prime Ministers. If all goes well, this process could take a year or two.

Such an orderly and pragmatic approach would give the new Prime Minister of Pakistan enough time to settle down in office and build a stable equation with the other centres of power in the country, namely the Army, the Judiciary, the religious forces on the right, and the terrorist elements. Before taking up the hazardous peace initiative with India, it is vital that Nawaz Sharif transforms his stunning electoral victory into a credible and durable primacy of civilian power in the hapless country.

Too Good to be True

However, since the election of Nawaz Sharif as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the issue of re-starting the interrupted dialogue with our hostile neighbour to the west came to the fore all over again. Recent developments in

Pakistan indicate the possibility that things could be different this time around, probably more auspicious than ever before. An elected government peacefully succeeded a civilian government that completed its full term. This indeed is unprecedented in the turbulent history of the country. Furthermore, during the election campaign there was no competitive ‘India baiting’ among the major contenders for power, which was also very unusual and all the more welcome for that very reason. In fact, Nawaz Sharif, the leading contender for the high office, went out of the way to declare that peaceful relations with India were his top priority. The first thing he would do in office, he said, would be to promote open trade with India. Over reaching himself, he went on to say that if he won the elections, he would go to New Delhi for peace talks, whether he is invited or not! Soon after winning the elections, Nawaz Sharif invited Manmohan Singh to grace the occasion of his assuming the Office of the Prime Minister of Pakistan! On his part, Manmohan Singh greeted the new PM of Pakistan warmly and enthusiastically. Obviously, such a visit could not have materialized just like that!

Be that as it may, there is a nagging feeling that all this is too good to be true! The historic cycle of Indo-Pak relations, the negativism of seven decades of mistrust and hostility, re-asserted itself and the possible positivism was nipped in the bud. All the recent indications tell us that Sharif or no Sharif, the Army still calls the shots in Pakistan, particularly with respect to relations with India. The leaked Abbatobad Commission Report, the foiled attack on our Consulate in Afghanistan, and the latest dastardly killing of five of our jawans by the Pakistani soldiers in Kashmir are testimonies to the harsh realities across the border. Since then there have been dozens of ceasefire violations across the LOC in Jammu and Kashmir. Naturally, the Indian side retaliated in equal measure. As usual the Pakistani side settled into their well established denial mode. We did no wrong and India is to be blamed for the escalation of tension, was the refrain. Historically the Pakistani Army in general and General Kayani in particular are against any accommodation with India, let alone peace talks. They are ready to “shoot down” such prospects whenever they come to the fore.

Ground Realities

As recently as 6 September 2013, the chief architect of the 26/11 terrorist mayhem in Mumbai, Hafeez Saeed addressed yet another “hate India” rally organized by Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) – a front for Lashkar-e-Toiba, which was banned by Mushraff months after the 9/11 carnage in New York city. It must also be added that the Punjab Government headed by Nawaz Sharif’s brother granted Rs. 61 millions to JuD in support of “the services” it renders! It may not be out of place to recall that the Kargil war occurred under Nawaz Sharif’s watch! It is foolish to ignore facts and be carried away by sentiments.

Initially, the Government tried to downplay the armed incursions on the border as the handiwork of the jihadi elements. But, in response to the national outcry against the killing of our brave soldiers and after ascertaining ‘the facts’ of the case, the Government confirmed that it has evidence of the intrusion of Pakistani soldiers and the involvement of the Pak Army on the border. That seemed to be the end of the issue of holding talks with Pakistan.

But in India, no decision is final. There are wheels within wheels. Things are not always what they seem. The personal inclination of the PM seems to be tilting the balance in favour of a meeting between the two PMs later this month. Discreet efforts are on to keep the door ajar on the question of Manmohan Singh meeting Nawaz Sharif on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly Meeting in New York towards the end of the month. There are inspired reports in the media articulating the view that talks should be held with the new PM of Pakistan. It is argued that such a meeting would strengthen “the constituency of peace with India” in that country.

Starting with a bang at the very top may lead to a welcome break in the tortuous relations between the two hostile neighbours, they aver. The latest news on this front (*The Times of India*, 6 September 2013) is that our External Affairs Minister Salman Kurshid will meet Sartaz Aziz, Pakistan PM’s National Security and Foreign Policy Adviser, in Bishkek (capital of Kyrgyzstan) on 13 September 2013, on the sidelines of the Summit Meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). India and Pakistan have the status of Observers in the SCO. On his way back from the G-20 Summit in Russia (8 September 2013), Manmohan Singh stated that before taking a decision on meeting Nawaz Sharif he had to take into account “certain harsh realities on the ground.” He said that it was difficult to take the decision “if terrorist acts do not stop, if those who voice terrorist thoughts move about freely, if there is no significant progress in

bringing the culprits of the Mumbai massacre to book.”

Courting Failure? Or Pray for the Best

Notwithstanding the harsh statement of the PM, it seems that the normal logistical preparations for the Manmohan-Nawaz meeting in New York are “pretty much on.” What is intriguing in all this is the misplaced perception of an urgent need to start the dialogue at the very top without any clarity on the agenda. There is hardly any hint of the much needed advance preparation for such a Summit Meeting. Experience tells us that rushing into such ventures without the ground work on both sides invariably leads to failure. Subsequent disillusionment puts the clock back. Even earlier gains may be negated. However, the continuation of democracy and peaceful overtures of the new PM from across the border were welcomed by one and all in India. As is well acknowledged, Manmohan Singh is personally more than favourably inclined to meet his Pakistani counterpart at the earliest opportune moment. In fact, Manmohan Singh is anxiously looking forward to his State Visit to Pakistan before his innings are completed. All leaders (big and small) want to leave an indelible mark on the history of their country! No wonder, our PM wants to be remembered as someone who opened a new chapter in India’s relations with Pakistan. Nobody needs to have a grudge on this score! If the gamble pays off, I will be the first one to welcome the peace offensive in the making!

Today (9 September 2013) is the auspicious day of Bhadrapada Suddha Chaturdhi. Let us all pray God Vighneswara to bless the proposed meeting with Avighnamastu!

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When organised disruption becomes the business

A nation has the right to have whatever politics it likes. Since 1969 when Indira Gandhi recast the Indian party system in her personal image, parties have ceased to be internally democratic. She also deprived the legislature of any power to do as it pleases. Over time the legislation against defections from political parties has deprived backbenchers of any power to disagree with their party’s whip. The result is that Members agitate or rush to the well, strictly in obedience to commands from their party whips. What may look like anarchy is actually organised disruption of business.

**MEGHNAD DESAI, *The Sunday Express*,
1 September 2013**

Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

Every issue has at least two sides. A wise man 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.

Indo-Pak Peace Conundrum

1. India and Pakistan are always in a state of hostility for one reason or another. If it is not a terrorist attack in India, it is the LAC violation; or an intemperate rant by jihadis like Hafeez Saeed. Intermittently, there are talks about negotiations and CBMs (Confidence Building Measures) but these are half steps that lead nowhere except frustration. Pakistan is not a stable State and it is futile to expect a unidirectional approach from it. If the Government talks of peace, the Pak army has a contrary view; the militant organizations in Pakistan which are half-backed by the State have an anti-India agenda. To find space for peace in this chaotic situation is nearly impossible. Our warnings that Pakistan should take concrete steps against terrorism before talks could begin should not become empty gestures. Our Government cannot sap the will of the people by bending all the time to accommodate Pakistan's frailties. It is nice to accommodate the tantrums of the younger brother but international relations are not built around family bonhomie. It is getting increasingly difficult to explain the Pakistan PM's compulsions when he himself is seen to be pandering to the anti-India sentiment on the one hand and talking of making a new beginning with India, on the other.

1. Everyone understands that war is not a solution for any dispute. Wise men advocate peace, negotiations and dispute resolution despite war like atmosphere. The advice becomes untenable when the adversary is demonstrably aggressive and defiant and treats negotiations as a sign of weakness. The attempts to understand the adversary's difficulties fly in the face of public sentiment. Dr. Manmohan Singh perhaps wants to be remembered as a man who healed the Indo-Pak wounds of the last 66 years. With every LOC breach, his hopes fade, as the uproar caused by the death of Indian soldiers is hard to ignore. Even the suggestion of talks raises people's hackles. By the time this is published, Dr. Manmohan Singh might have met the Pak PM in New York. If so, good luck to him in a thankless task! There are excuses that the Pak Government does not effectively control the army and that militants are impossible to control any way. The hardliners argue that there is no point in talking to a Government that is not in control. Others argue that it is not for India to find excuses for Pakistan; it is for PM Nawaz Sharif to put his house in order before talks. Track II diplomacy has taken a back seat now. It will take leaders of great charisma and persuasive powers on both sides to mend matters.

Indian Mujahideen (IM)

2. The arrest of Yasin Bhatkal (August 29), co-founder of the IM, was a big breakthrough for the much maligned Intelligence services of the country. This followed the arrest of Abdul Karim Tunda, the bomb maker. It may never be clear how they were actually nabbed but in the end, it is their arrests that matter. There were leaders even from the ruling party who had started questioning whether the IM really existed. Our expertise in creating controversies over non-issues is perhaps unparalleled. A Congress spokesperson saw a great opportunity to throw mud at Narendra Modi's Government and claimed that the communal policies of the Gujarat Government were responsible for turning Muslims to terrorism. He did not understand that he was creating an alibi for terrorism. The Union Minister for Minority Affairs jumped into the fray and declared that Muslims were not sure if the IM existed. He forgot that his own Government had banned the IM in 2010. All political parties must resolve not to seek political mileage from security issues.

2. It is tempting to link the Gujarat riots with terrorist activities in India as it obviates other awkward questions. The terrorist attacks in fact predate the riots. The Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), banned in 2001, had come to notice for anti-national activities well before the Gujarat riots. It got re-incarnated later in a much more virulent and underground form as IM. The IM became very active after the 2008 Mumbai attack when Pakistan realized that any attack originating from its soil would attract world-wide (read US) condemnation. The ISI/LeT combine thereafter decided to use the Indian militants to launch attacks in India. The infamous 'Karachi Project' was set up to train Indians in Pakistan. A few Muslim youth affected by the Gujarat riots might have joined the IM but the dislike for Modi should not be made an excuse for anti-national activities. Yasin Bhatkal in flesh and blood is evidence enough of IM's perfidy; his arrest should help the security agencies to expose the network of IM modules and hopefully prevent further attacks for the time being.

Assault on Reason

3. Dr. Narendra Dabholkar's murder (Pune - August 20) was an attempt to block an invaluable social reform. Dr. Dabholkar was not one of those firebrands so ignited with their own zeal that they treat all ideological opponents as Neanderthals. He was a patient man prepared to debate his views even with the intellectually less gifted. He knew that his ideas had to be made acceptable to people steeped in blind faith and belief in the supernatural, opting for quick remedies whenever faced with complex problems. He was a rationalist but first he was a reasonable man. He understood the frailties of men and was prepared to accommodate genuine doubters and meet their apprehensions. He amended the Andhashraddha Nirmulan Bill several times to bring everybody on board. His persuasive nature won over many cynics but his end came at the hands of unreason. It is a pity that good men have to die before their cause is understood! In Maharashtra, which boasts of the reformist tradition of great saints like Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram, and leaders like Shahu Maharaj, Agarkar, Phule and Ambedkar, a man trying to remove the blot of ignorance had to die trying to help the people understand that they were being cheated by charlatans.

3. Dr. Dabholkar's battle against religious frauds led to his tragic end. Such a disgrace! The State Government, which took 18 years to accept the Bill he was advocating, is really guilty of his murder because if the Bill had been passed his murderers might have lost the reason to kill him. The fact that within a day of his murder, the same Bill was adopted as an ordinance reveals that there was no reason to delay its passage. Every political party declared that the Bill was acceptable but came up with objections to this or that provision of the Bill to delay its passage. Most political parties are guilty of obscurantism and hypocrisy. There are indeed difficulties in drawing a line between faith and uninformed (blind?) faith (Shraddha and Andhashraddha) but Dr. Dabholkar was prepared to bend backwards to accommodate all forms of 'shraddha' to carry the genuine believers with him. "Blind Faith" does not carry the correct nuance of 'Andhashraddha', which includes the predilection to be duped. Dr. Dabholkar was opposed to exploitation of the faithful by charlatans. Babas and vaidus sprouting over the countryside were his target. In his death, his immediate mission succeeded but his work has to be carried forward. We lost a GOOD man. A society that cannot preserve and protect its good men cannot pride itself as a civilized one.

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, 400 001.

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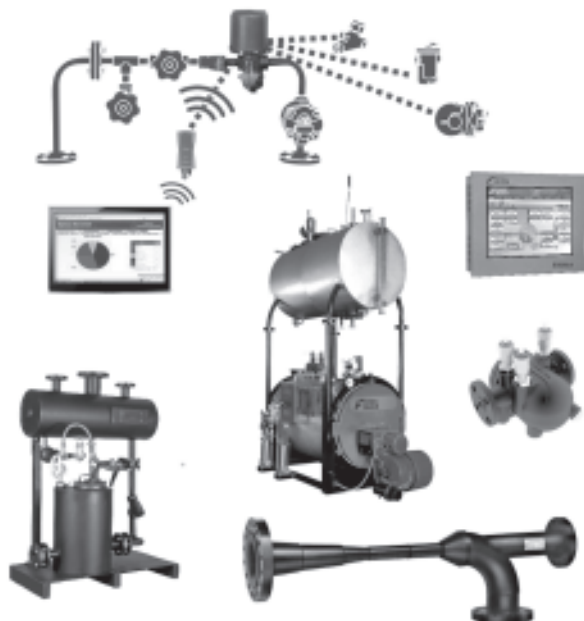
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Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjika

Transparency is the Bane of Indian Politicians

The tragedy is that we, the people, can do hardly anything about it.

In recent weeks, I have been receiving a number of emails purportedly from Aruna Roy of the National Advisory Council (NAC) and other NGOs urging me to sign a petition to protest against our political parties' adamant stand against subjecting themselves to the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The parties have gone to the extent of trying to amend the Constitution of India to shield themselves from declaring their assets and other pertinent information. According to the latest communication, the NAC has now approached the President Of India to use his authority, moral if not constitutional, to prevail upon the politicians to refrain from attempting to subvert democratic principles that are prevalent in over 40 other nations. To me, the whole episode has shades of Don Quixote tilting at windmills.

The irony is not lost on the people of India. For almost half a century, our politicians have made a mockery of the Constitution to further their own vested interests; and now they are trying to use the same Constitution to legalise their transgressions. Their effrontery is blatant. Political parties who lose no opportunity to tear into each other are now demonstrating startling solidarity in banding together to dispel any idealistic notion that they are open to scrutiny. They are in effect showing the people that they cannot be challenged; and that the facade of democracy is a mere chimera to be trotted out when it suits their purpose and trampled on when it does not. The tragedy is that we, the people, can do hardly anything about it. Even our vote is powerless, since obscurantism is the domain of all our political parties. We cannot change anything. As for the well-intentioned petitions, trust me, they will be consigned to the dead storage locker and forgotten.

India's original Constitution was a noble document, because it was drafted by men of impeccable integrity and a genuine sense of service to the nation. Subsequent political dispensations came to the conclusion that there was little in it for them in terms of personal comfort and profit; and so they set about amending it at regular intervals. The one aspect of the Constitution that appealed to them was that it did not specifically mandate disclosure of the workings of parliament or how executive legislative decisions were arrived at. Ministers and bureaucrats took

full advantage of this loophole. Secrecy became the cornerstone of their activities. Their decisions were final and not to be questioned. And if they enriched themselves in the process, well the public could suspect, but prove nothing.

Then came Sonia Gandhi. A comparative novice to politics, she retained the delusion that in a democracy, it was the peoples' right to know how their government functioned. She egged on her Congress Party to push through the Right to Information (RTI) Act. She is probably wiser now. Politicians across the board, including members of her own party were aghast; but the deed was done and they just had to grin and bear it. Of course, they used every trick in the book to stall, if not subvert, the legislation. They were after all masters at the art of procrastination. However, with the economical and intellectual advancement of the middle class, it was becoming increasingly bothersome to keep secrets. To make matters worse, a new breed of activists sprang up, who specialized in the provisions of the RTI and left the politicians and bureaucrats very little wriggle room.

The final blow came when the nation's Supreme Court mandated that political parties too should come under the ambit of RTI. This was going too far. If parties were forced to disclose the source of their funding, it would become virtually impossible for them to function as they always had much less contest elections. Something had to be done, and soon. They were aware that going against the widely respected Supreme Court would be a very unpopular move, but they had no choice. Their survival was at stake. The only effective weapon in their arsenal was legislation to amend the Constitution; and they seem determined to use it.

We, the people, may fume and fret, but we will have to live with it. Even with a powerful ally like the NAC, we are powerless. Faced with an existential threat, all political parties including the Congress have solidly united to guard their privileges, however shady. Even the writ of the Empress will not run in this case. It requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament to overturn a Constitutional amendment. I doubt if even a handful of legislators will oppose it. So there you have it. For decades, a gullible

or indifferent public has allowed our political masters to exclusively grab the power and privileges that should rightfully be theirs. There is always hope, but I fear we have left it too late.

Author's note: At the time of going to press, we learn that the BJP had in fact developed either a conscience or cold feet; and expressed reservations about the proposed amendment. One would like to believe it was for the right

reasons, but I suspect it was the risk of alienating India's substantial middle class, which is solidly behind the activists. I believe the other parties have realized this too and hence activity on the amendment is likely to remain dormant until the general election. Once either party is entrenched in power, however, one can be assured that they will find common cause again to protect their privileges.

Coalgate : No Way Out

The overriding consideration is continuation of the dynasty.

Of late, our somnolent Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seems to have risen like a phoenix from the ashes. Not only has he been combative in Parliament, he actually managed to look angry; an emotion many believed to be outside his range. He asked the Opposition - and the public - not to conclude that there was something "fishy" about the missing files pertaining to the out of turn allotments of lucrative coal blocks to favoured parties; often at bargain basement prices. Well, Mr. PM, I am afraid only a complete moron would believe that there was nothing fishy. There may not yet be actual evidence that would stand up in court, but it is painfully apparent that the PM, his ministers and the Congress party are scrambling for cover.

One can understand their dilemma. The files if produced, will lay bare their sins of commission and omission in black and white. In themselves, there are not likely to be any earth shattering revelations in the files. Most people have already surmised the contents. After all, granting and receiving of favours, particularly monetary, has been the way business has always been conducted by all political parties, not just the Congress. Where the Congress slipped up was in becoming complacent, in believing that they could follow the traditional route of cover up. They cannot really be blamed for taking this course. Audit reports by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) have been critical of government functioning for almost 50 years. Hitherto, however, they were quietly filed away before the public got a whiff of them. In the case of Coalgate, the CAG, probably with political ambitions of his own, selectively leaked the contents to an increasingly aggressive and inquisitive media. That started the Opposition juggernaut rolling and I suspect it will not stop until they have tasted blood - preferably the PM's, but at least that of the Coal Minister. Minister Jaiswal looks deeply troubled; and he has just cause. He is probably remembering that his erstwhile colleague, Ashwini Kumar, was effortlessly dumped by the Congress high command for a lesser transgression.

It will be fascinating to observe how the Congress extricates itself from this debilitating tangle, if at all it can. They need the cooperation of the Opposition to pass a number of bills, which they regard as powerful vote-getters. On the other hand, if they reveal the incriminating files, they will have no plausible defence. The files will undoubtedly either reveal questionable transactions; or award of coal blocks without any genuine due diligence. In other words, the government will be caught between a rock and a hard place. The Congress will probably offer the Coal Minister as a sacrificial lamb; but the Opposition is moving in for the kill and may be satisfied with nothing less than the PM's head.

I suspect the empress and heir apparent are already mulling over various scenarios. The overriding consideration is continuation of the dynasty. If push comes to shove, they may even dispose of Manmohan Singh. He will not go willingly, of course, but hitherto he has not displayed the backbone to resist Madam and son; and I doubt if even his new-found gumption will be equal to the task. The Family may even consider appointing a caretaker PM like Chidambaram to take the party to next year's general election.

The last may actually be quite a smart move. The BJP may be salivating at the prospect of the PM's ultimate humiliation now. However, they may not realize that that if they obtain Manmohan Singh's scalp, they may not be left with any other significant stick to beat the Congress with. This may sow some confusion in the BJP's ranks. After all, for the past nine years, the BJP's single point agenda has been to relentlessly oppose and berate the Congress, almost without exception. Bereft of this weapon, they will be forced to inflict only pinpricks, or completely rethink their strategy. Even that master rabble-rouser, Narendra Modi, may find himself nonplussed. Whatever happens, the next few months are going to be very entertaining.

Social Etiquette for Yuppies

Debrett's, of course, are "recognized internationally as the arbiter of etiquette and behaviour"

Many Americans have a love-hate relationship with the aristocracy. They raise their eyebrows and groan when they read about the antics of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his brood, but would fall all over themselves – and start practicing curtsies – if they ever got a chance to meet him. So I wonder how many of them have heard of Debrett's Peerage. This venerable volume has been in continuous publication for three hundred years and meticulously records the personal details of every Lord and Lady in England's green and pleasant land.

Which is why it was quite a shock to find (even long after the fact) that even Debrett's had finally capitulated to the distressing republican notions the Yanks have been propagating all over the world; and come out with a guide for commoners, entitled "Etiquette for Girls." Debrett's also seem to have acquired the American panache for catching eyeballs. The book's dust jacket pictures a stunning young thing, eating oysters. How classy is that?

Debrett's, of course, are "recognized internationally as the arbiter of etiquette and behaviour" (their description, not mine) and their stated noble purpose for bringing out this tome is to act as a "survival guide for modern life" to needy women in metropolises around the world. (Did you think it was about profit? Gosh! You're common.). It offers measured advice for modern women on how to break up with a married boyfriend, deal with your boss, attend a rock festival or commit the social sin of smoking. Who says they don't move with the times? Way to go, Debbie!

Debrett's editor, Jo Aitcheson, intones (as only the English can) "Manners make society a much nicer place",

no matter that it involves such plebeian activities like text message adultery or after-work partying. In other words, you can fool around and still be polite about it.

Only those familiar with Debrett's would realize what a huge leap into the unknown this is for them. Debrett's has always laboured under a dusty, if distinguished, image as a chronicler of all things English, such as the correct way to address the wife of a Duke. Long years ago, Jane Austen referred to Debrett's "Guide to Etiquette and Manners" as the bible for good manners, but the new Etiquette for Girls bears only a passing resemblance to the original stiff advice on grouse shooting, house parties in the country, or how to curtsy and behave at Royal Ascot.

However, Aitcheson insists, "Debrett's time-worn status as arbiter of old-fashioned manners gives it great authority to indicate the right way to behave in racier, more unbuttoned times." Don't you just love Britspeak?

There is some good stuff in this volume. Like this gem. "A one-night-stand is a bit like fast food: tempting, but with nauseating afterthoughts, but if one must do it, make health and safety a priority, avoid dark-alley gropery, and unladylike fumbling in the back of a cab; discuss the necessities to avoid planting any love children or disease, and you're away." Well said, ed. Miss Manners, eat your heart out.

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

Actress Nandita Das' campaign against fairness creams

An online movement against fairness products has found a star in Nandita Das, who is perhaps the only actress to have resolutely refused to change her skin tone despite the push and pull of the entertainment industry. The actress who resents the tag of 'dusky' ("don't add an adjective to make me feel different" she says is exhorting women to 'Stay Unfair, Stay Beautiful'...

"I never thought the campaign would assume such proportions" says the actress..

"Actresses who are wonderful at their work, but look unconventional, have struggled to make it. Men who are not conventionally good looking, had to try hard as well, but they still managed to be hero in films.

The obsession with fair skinned women is just symptomatic of a deeper and more sinister problem, cautions Nandita. "It is disrespect for women which comes out in various ways...this is just one of them.

"Stars endorse a lot of products they never use. Women have been endorsing fairness creams for years. That is their call" she reasons.

"We can't blame history or marketing forces...It is about the mindset of society. The enemy is not the star or the brand that advocates the product, but in our own heads", she concludes.

Excerpted from Tweet @ _ MumbaiMirror July 30, 2013 by Chandrima.Pal@timesgroup.com

Onam: Hope for Good Governance!

P. Koshy

*Onam commemorates the prosperity of the Kingdom of Raja Mahabali!
That prosperity was the result of good governance, more than anything!*

Onam, the festival celebrated by Keralites across the world, has significance in today's context, not just because it is a festival that is being celebrated by one and all, but has other interesting festivities associated with it. Its message needs to be recollected and meditated upon each year. Onam commemorates the prosperity of the Kingdom of Raja Mahabali! That prosperity was the result of good governance, more than anything!

Good governance is the result of many factors; good policies, transparent administration, faith of the people in the government and commitment of the rulers to the nation. One could attribute many other aspects too, but the most important is the commitment of the rulers to the nation. For King Mahabali, the people of his State, Kerala, was his commitment and his priority. His motive was their welfare, prosperity and happiness.

Businesses could operate freely. People had faith in each other, as the governance apparatus had faith in the people. King Mahabali had faith in the people surrounding him too. More importantly, he never wanted anything for himself. Neither the king nor his official, bureaucrats or local government officials indulged in corruption. There was a Planning Commission too! But all those who were working in the Planning Commission, including the Deputy Chairman and other secretaries were trained locally. Though there were applications from many foreign educated youths, he never had faith in them, it seems. The King himself took interest in providing and ensuring good training to his officials in matters of administration.

King Mahabali was very keen on carefully executing existing rules and not burden his kingdom with unnecessary complications called "reforms" by introducing new rules. Ethical business practices were the rule for businesses and that happened without much regulatory apparatus.

King Mahabali could of course demand ethical business practices from the traders and businessmen. Traders and businessmen on their part never had any

problem in conducting business in an ethical manner without cheating. They never had to pay bribes to people in the government. The Planning Commission was focused on understanding people's problems, the challenges of traders and business houses, agro-farm entrepreneurs and making the lives of people easier. No favouritism was acceptable in the affairs of policy, planning and economic management. Documentation and keeping of records was so perfect that files never went missing! The system was so transparent too! Even the slightest failure would make the King take very strong action.

When Keralites celebrated Onam this year (September 16), Kerala was busy discussing an "alleged" fraud committed by team SOLAR. At the national level, there were of course much larger cases, scandals and frauds. From 2G and Coalgate to CWG! Thousands of land and real estate cases and allegations involving those close to the highest political bosses! There was no limit to scandals, scams, corruption cases this time when we celebrated Onam.

There is a greater concern for environmental issues these days. There is a general consensus that the devastation caused in Uttarakhand was at least in part due to environmental degradation of fragile mountain slopes and thoughtless commercialization. Unfortunately those who are at the top policy planning and advisory levels think differently as "green issues impede development". When they visit today's Mahabali Kingdom, i.e., Kerala, from Indraprastha as Delhi was known then, they preach their 'imported ideas' that in modern Kerala, paddy fields should be levelled and Kerala should construct buildings instead of cultivating rice and vegetable. Kerala should forget about agriculture, they say! They oppose infrastructure investment for developing public transport, as they opposed clearance to the Cochin Metro project, for instance. Better public transport system would probably negatively impact car sales and so obviously they have to protect the interest groups concerned. They advocate better financial management while crying out loud about fiscal deficit and blaming subsidies!

Prosperity won't come and cannot be created

without any efforts from any government! In Mahabali's kingdom, there was a good entrepreneurial eco-system. Agriculture and farming enterprises used to thrive as well as businesses and traders! People had jobs. There was no unemployment, so people had no reason to steal and rob. There was no cheating either. People had faith in each other, in government and in businesses! The market system worked perfectly!

However, at the end of it, as all of us know, King Mahabali deviated slightly from his initial approach. His

leniency to a foreigner caused the whole damage! The good governance system established in Mahabali Kingdom is a lesson for us - basic to prosperity and growth is good governance and, at the core are people with integrity, truthfulness and commitment to their own nation!

Wish you a Happy Onam!

Mr. P. KOSHY, based in Delhi, is associated with Samadhan Foundation and working with a focus on the Informal Sector, Micro and Small Enterprises. Email: caushie@gmail.com.

The First Three Bharat Ratnas Saw the Future With Clarity

Three Indians were decorated with the Bharat Ratna in the very first year – 1954 – that the civilian awards were instituted: the elder statesman, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the vice-president, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and the Nobel laureate, C. V. Raman. No one said at the time that all three were south Indians, all three Brahmins. Their pre-eminence was manifest. They accepted the decoration with respect and went about their work according to their lights.

CR was a prisoner of the *raj* in 1921. Holed up in Vellore Jail, he could have been bitter about his jailors, about the imperial power. He could have looked forward to swaraj as one might to a dreamlike goal. But no, he did something that surprised his contemporaries then and surprises us now. He wrote in his jail diary: "We all ought to know that Swaraj will not at once or, I think, even for a long time to come, be better government or greater happiness for the people. Elections and their corruptions, injustice, and the power and tyranny of wealth, and inefficiency of administration, will make a hell of life as soon as freedom is given to us. Men will look regretfully back to the old regime of comparative justice, and efficient, peaceful, more or less honest administration. The only thing gained will be that as a race we will be saved from dishonour and subordination."

This was a full quarter century before swaraj was attained.

Radhakrishnan was a member of the Constituent Assembly on the midnight of August 14/15, 1947 when, with Jawaharlal Nehru, he made a speech of surpassing value. Reminding the nation of "our national faults of character, our domestic despotism, obscurantism, narrow-mindedness, superstitious bigotry", he said almost exactly what CR had said 25 years earlier. Radhakrishnan's words: "Our opportunities are great but let me warn you that when power strips ability,

we will fall on evil days... From tomorrow morning – from midnight today – we can no longer throw the blame on the British. We have to assume the responsibility ourselves for what we do. A free India will be judged by the way in which it will serve the interests of the common man in the matter of food, clothing, shelter and the social services. Unless we destroy corruption in high places, root out every trace of nepotism, love of power, profiteering and black-marketing which have spoiled the good name of this great country in recent times, we will not be able to raise the standards of efficiency in administration..."

That was said at the very moment free India was born.

I do not have access to any comment made by C. V. Raman on the eve of Independence but the following observation of CVR's to young Indians is an agnatic cousin of CR's and SR's: "Success can only come to you by courageous devotion to the task lying in front of you and there is nothing worth in this world that can come without the sweat of our brow."

Today, those three Bharat Ratnas would have been saddened to see their apprehensions and prognoses coming true. Generalizations are wrong but who can deny that efficiency of administration is not India's best introduction? Who can deny that our elections have brought us a great stature in the world but have also brought corruption? And where is the doubt that the power and tyranny of wealth – CR's startling phrase – rules the land?

Power, political and monetary power, outstrips ability by a long measure. And corruption in high places – Radhakrishnan's astonishingly prescient expression – has disfigured the image of our public life.

Excerpted from the article by Gopalkrishna Gandhi in *The Telegraph*, August 15, 2013

Milestones:

Birth Centenary Tribute: Avabai Wadia

Pioneer in Family Planning

J. S. Apte

*She developed interest in Reproductive Health and Family Planning
which later became her life-long mission.*

Parsis are a shining symbol of India philanthropy. Tatas, Wadias, Godrejs and other Parsis have made a significant and lasting contribution to India's growth in industry, commerce and trade. Avabai Mehta joined the Wadia family after her marriage to Dr. Bomaji Wadia, a Harvard Graduate with a Doctorate from Colombia University. Born on 18th September, 1913 in Colombo to a well respected Parsi family, Avabai Mehta had her school education in Colombo. Her father was a high ranking official in a shipping company. Her mother was a home maker, an independent and strong willed person. Avabai's brother Phirozashah, 11 years elder to her, who had a passion for music went to England for higher education. Avabai was close to the family and especially her brother. She was also related to the well-known Bhicaji Cama through her mother's family.



became an active member of the All India Women's Conference after joining it in 1944 when Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was the President of AIWC. She developed interest in Reproductive Health and Family Planning which later became her life-long mission. With the initiative of Shrimati Dhanwanthi Rama Rao, and others Avabai Wadia, established the Family Planning Association of India on 23rd July, 1949 at Bombay.

Shrimati Dhanwanthi Rama Rao was the founder President and Avabai Wadia the Honorary General Secretary

of the Association. She was elected as President in 1964 which post she continued to hold for 34 years. She had strong ethical and moral concerns and was convinced about the role of family planning in improving the lives of women and establishing gender equality. She thought that family planning was a means of helping women to get out of the trap of biological compulsions and social pressures for frequent child bearing, which leads to deterioration of the health, neglect of children and financial problems in the family. Avabai strongly believed that family planning could be successful only if it was voluntary and done through informed choice.

During her leadership, Avabai expanded her work all over India to more than 15 States. She initiated branches all over the country to reach the maximum number of people.

Between 1963 to 1980, Avabai started family planning services for industrial workers, and low income communities in cities like Mumbai, Thane, Kanpur, and also in rural areas. These services were broadened by adding programmes on sex education, population education, and women's empowerment. From November 1952, she guided the work of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) initiated in Bombay,

On Dr. Annie Besant's suggestion to go to England for higher education, Avabai shifted to Cambridge with her mother. Her childhood dream was fulfilled in England when she became the first woman lawyer from Ceylon, to pass the Bar examinations. With her close association with Dr. Annie Besant, Avabai met activists like Margaret Cousins, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Sarojini Naidu, Muthulaxmi Reddy and others. She was an excellent speaker. She gave her first public speech at the age of 18 at a conference organized by the British Commonwealth League on 'Voting Rights of Indian Women'.

During her stay in London, she was also associated with the Women's Indian Association and the Women's Freedom League. In 1938 Avabai represented All India Women's Council in Geneva.

Family Planning Association

Avabai moved to Bombay permanently in 1941. She

establishing World Wide Regional Offices. She founded autonomous family planning associations, under the umbrella of the Federation and raising funds for its work.

Recognition of Avabai's Work

She was the President of IPPF from 1983 for two terms when IPPF was awarded the UN Population Award in 1985 and the Third World Prize in 1987. During Avabai Wadia's term as a President of IPPF, the Federation could not avail of American aid of 17 million dollars due to the disagreement of IPPF with the American stance on abortions.

Avabai Wadia was a world trotter. She travelled across the globe, addressing many public meetings and seminars and her speeches were well appreciated by the learned audience. She was conferred an Honorary Doctorate in May 2005 by the International Institute of Population Studies for her contribution to the field.

Avabai Wadia was an intelligent, sensitive and energetic person with a strong memory and affection for human beings. She used to surprise people by recognizing them by their first names even after many years and also recalling details about their previous meetings. Avabai, throughout her life, continued to campaign and advocate

human rights and greater understanding of the concept of 'Vasudhaive Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) among people and spread the message of unity and equality.

Avabai was a prolific writer too. She was the editor of the *Journal of Family Welfare* from June, 1956 and continued till April, 1999. In 1993 the Journal received the Golden Media Award of the Population Institute, USA. Her autobiography, "The Light is Ours: Memoirs and Movements", is a detailed and fascinating personal account of one of the great revolutions after the Second World War. Avabai Wadia wrote a column for 5 years in *Blitz*, a weekly published in Bombay.

Family Planning Movement in India summed up her life mission thus: "I found that my own life has been so intertwined with my work with people and organizations that I find it impossible to detach the two."

Avabai Wadia breathed her last on 11th July, 2005, World Population Day, a fitting day.

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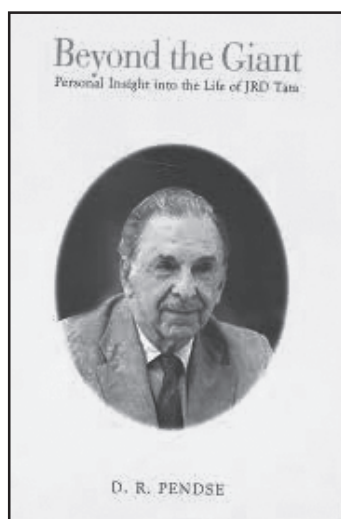
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BOOK REVIEW



BEYOND THE GIANT By D. R. Pendse, National Book Trust of India ● 2008 ● Pages 208 ● Rs.75.

Reviewed by Brig Suresh Sharma (Retd.), adviser to the telecom industry, freelance writer, and member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*. Email: brigscs@gmail.com.

The author was chief economist of the Tata Group and gives an account of the events, based on his personal insight. He had the confidence of J R D Tata. It covers J R D's rare qualities as head of the Tata Group, his

airport when he returned from a business trip. He took a taxi. The driver was late and waited for a long time after which he phoned JRD's home. JRD picked up the phone and told him to return. He had a sense of humour. A girl who entered the lift while he was going down said to him "Sir, you are so much like JRD Tata." He looked at the mirror and said "Yes, I think I do."

He had a personal rapport with Nehru and Indira Gandhi and he met them on specific issues. They did not show any interest whenever he spoke about macro-economic subjects. Due to avowed socialist policies, the political leaders felt shy of taking advice from business leaders. A Japanese economist had come to India to study TISCO for his Ph.D thesis. He remarked that the Japanese were economic animals while the Indians were political animals. Politics is important in India while business and industry are important in Japan.

He had a great fascination for the aviation industry, and had piloted a plane at the age of 70 years. He led Air India to become a front ranking airline. He agreed to continue as chairman of Air India even after it was nationalized. The author has given an account of the political intrigues that resulted in his ouster from the airline. Surprisingly, he was succeeded by the former Air Force Chief Lal who was retired by Krishna Menon and JRD invited him to head India Tube Company, an associate of TISCO. The Moraji Government left it to Lal to inform JRD to decline the offer. He certainly felt hurt but held no rancour against Lal. His knowledge and integrity was well appreciated by the Government. He was asked to head committees to recommend selection of planes for Air India and Indian Airlines and for a site to locate the MIG factory. Their recommendations based on sound operational and commercial logic were set aside for political reasons.

India's young population and state controlled economy were causing serious problems. The Government was not giving any attention to these issues and was making state control even more rigorous. The commanding heights of the public sector had given way to the demanding depths of the public sector. He was perturbed

heart warming attitudes and his acute frustrations due to the economic policies of successive Governments. Tata considered the economic policies to be a handicap to the growth of industry but he never thought of violating the rules based on this policy. He firmly believed that what was good for India was good for the Tatas. He advocated the concept of trusteeship in that the profits from the industry should be treated as trust funds for the benefit of our countrymen. In a speech on the occasion of award of D.Litt. by the Bombay University, he outlined his vision of a per capita annual income of Rs.22,000 at present prices by 2030. It could be achieved by achieving 6% growth and holding the population at one billion.

JRD was always on the look out for talented people to join the group. He did not wait for a vacancy to occur. He knew that in a large organization like the Tatas, there would always be a place for such people. He gave them freedom of action and due appreciation. Keeping strong men together is a difficult task and he met them regularly to ensure team work. For him, the interests of the organization came first, followed by the interests of the people and his own convictions or interests were the last. He strove for excellence and insisted that all reports be hundred percent accurate. The author has given a few examples of JRD's flair for detail. He was generous and cared for his colleagues. When he learnt that Pendse had consulted a physician for some complaint, he enquired about his welfare from the physician. The result was an improvement in the treatment beyond recognition.

He was too gentle a person about his personal comforts. On one occasion, his car had not reached the

by the mindless nationalization of industries, monopolization of financial resources in the Government's hands and encroachment of fundamental rights.

The economic policies of the Government had started biting the Tata Group and were shaking its foundations. These forces were giving rise to internal forces weakening the cohesion of the Group. The author has not given an analysis of these internal forces. He has mentioned the symptom of lack of regular attendance by senior executives and directors at various meetings. This erosion in cohesion of Tata Group caused JRD frustration.

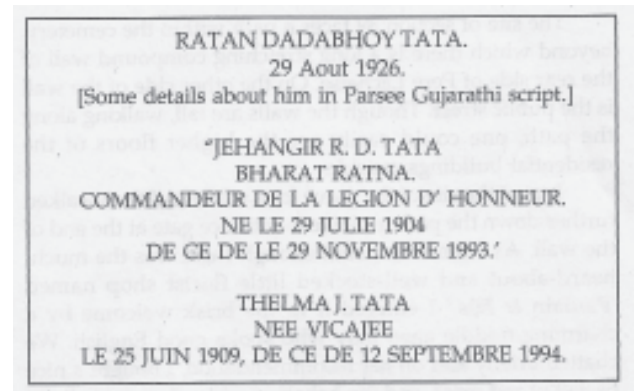
He had other reasons as well for frustrations in personal and business matters. He felt an inferiority complex for not having completed a degree course at Cambridge. His father recalled him to look after TISCO and did not consider it necessary for him to take a degree from Cambridge for a career in the steel giant. It is not well known that he had served in the French army for a year. Not having a child was a constant source of personal frustration but he seldom talked about it. The idea of a high quality think tank as a Tata project came too late in life. Committees of eminent people were appointed to examine the proposal. The National Institute of Advanced Studies [NIAS] had been set up at Bangalore in 1988 and was going through tremendous teething troubles. He did not want to execute another project for a few years. The proposal remained a dream and another cause of frustration.

The author has narrated a few anecdotes to bring out JRD's insistence on excellence, accuracy in data and appreciation of good work. He encouraged his managers to express their views without reservation. Once Pendse had some difference of opinion with a director. JRD sensed the problem and advised him to sleep over it for a day or two and then examine it dispassionately. If he felt that he was right he must stand firm. A mistake must be accepted. Above all the language used must always be courteous.

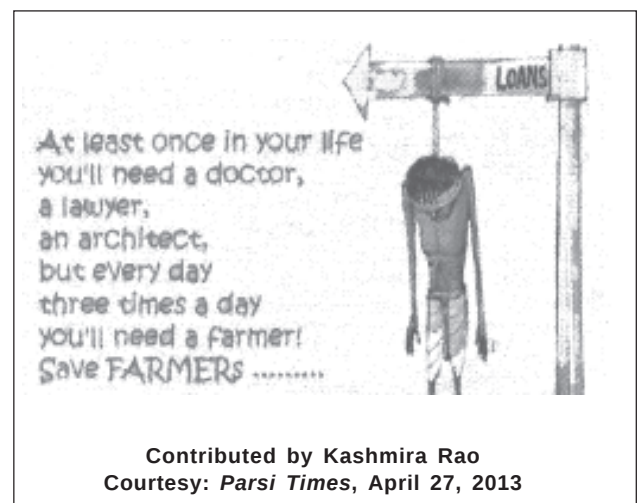
Several examples of appreciation of Pendse's work have been given in the book. He corrected and guided him where necessary. Galbraith, the US ambassador, had commented that JRD did not criticize the Government when out of the country and never stopped criticizing it in the country. Some of the Indian business leaders too would explain and justify the policies of the Government in talks overseas. Pendse started observing the same practice. JRD advised him not to take two different stands. It was all right for Galbraith as he was a politician. Care should be taken to use temperate language and criticism should be constructive.

Under the company rules, Pendse was scheduled

to retire on 1 October 1990. JRD wanted him to continue his work in the Tata group. He faced many road blocks from his work from colleagues. There are road blocks for



favourites in all organizations. Hints were dropped to him to quit the Tata job. His requests for clarification of the compensation package were ignored. He writes, "While managing the boss or care for people of your department are common knowledge, I was surprised to see a capsule of peer management in the Defence management course. JRD helped in overcoming some of the difficulties but he could not reject the advice of the Group Advisory Committee to appoint a new head of the Economic Department." On 27 February 1990, he was called for a meeting by JRD. He left it to Ratan Tata to convey that Pendse was to retire. He was offered an extension as consultant at Rs.10,000 per month. He would have no office in Tata House and no support from staff there. Pendse quit the next day. In March, JRD complained of angina pains. He quit on 27 March and passed away on 29 November in a hospital in Geneva. His body was laid to rest in Paris alongside the grave of his parents.



Educating Adults

The Right to Education Act (16)

This is sixteenth in a series, examining the various aspects of the Right to Education Act (RTE).

Government and Private Schools

Suresh C. Sharma

We have a right to expect Government institutions to always follow rules that have been laid down. In this case the Government has quietly armed itself against violation of the rules.

It should be the primary responsibility of the State to ensure good education for all children. Prior to Independence, the Bhore Committee had drawn up a 64-year plan to achieve universal literacy. This was considered too slow by our leaders after Independence. The stark situation today is that we are far away from the ideal of universal literacy. The magnitude of the task was well understood by the fathers of the Constitution, hence they placed universal education under the Directive Principles of State Policy and not in the chapter on Fundamental Rights. The present Act aims at compulsory education for all children as a Right. The States have enacted rules governing implementation of this Act. It prescribes teacher/student ratio, number of class rooms required, eligibility tests for teachers, norms for buildings and facilities like drinking water and toilets.

All private schools are required to obtain a recognition certificate from the State or local authority to be able to function. Failure to obtain a recognition certificate attracts a fine of Rs. 1 lac and Rs 10,000 per day till a certificate is obtained. They are also liable to be closed down. Surprisingly, government schools which do not comply with the norms of infrastructure can continue to function. We have a right to expect the government institutions to follow the rules laid down by the government. In this case the government has quietly armed itself against violation of rules.

Private schools have shown better results. In 2010, the representative of Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

said at a meeting of senior citizens that the Government spent more money per child compared to private schools and yet hadve poorer results. The Education Minister of Jammu and Kashmir narrates a similar experience – “Despite the presence of highly qualified teachers in the Government schools, academic results are not what we would like it to be. Steps have been taken to fix accountability for poor performance. Directions have been issued to Education Department officers to monitor and inspect schools in a regular manner.” The Minister is aware that the problem is due to lack of accountability.

Preference for Private Schools

Whereas former HRD Minister, Kapil Sibal wanted that 90% children should study in government schools, parents prefer to admit their wards in private schools. This is not only true about the few public schools patronized by the rich elites where fees are exorbitant, but India Initiative, a Think Tank, found that 85% of the children in Patna attend private schools. Parents of 70% of the students attending government schools would prefer to shift their children to private schools if they could afford fees of Rs.50 to Rs.500 per month. Poor parents opt for private schools due to poor quality of learning in government schools, where at any given time 25% of teachers are absent. The Minister of State, Shashi Tharoor, admitted that we hold the world record for teacher absenteeism. It is all the more shocking that it is so in spite of the fact that teachers’ salaries have been increased to Rs.15,000 to 25,000 per month. Recently, shirtless children



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in a government school in Mumbai staged a demonstration due to absence of teachers. They shouted “You have given us uniforms and books. Give us teachers also.” Disciplinary action against teachers is difficult due to teachers unions. In USA, a chain of private schools which came up to improve education standards amongst poor students employs non-union teachers.

A journalist touring Rajasthan to assess the impact of the RTE Act did not find a single good government school. A young school boy pointing to a crumbling building in a field full of weeds and garbage said “Only poor children go to this school because it is so bad.” The toilets were a couple of filthy hovels. That was the condition in most of the schools in the rural area.

Private schools have mushroomed because parents have realized the need of good education for advancement in life. The results of the students are much better than those in government institutions. One of the attractions of private schools is the English medium of instruction. The willingness of poor parents to pay for education is a healthy sign for the future of India. It is no surprise that Indians settled overseas work hard and save every penny to put their children in medical or engineering colleges.

Closing Government Schools

Instead of making efforts to improve their schools, the Government has come up with stringent conditions for running private schools. It has been alleged by official agencies that a deliberate attempt is being made to denigrate government schools as private school chains are being run by influential people. In some places they want the schools to be closed down in order to use the land for commercial purposes.

There are 13 lac primary and secondary schools in India. Schools which do not comply with the norms specified in the RTE Act should have been shut down by a competent authority. About 4 lac private schools face closure or heavy fines which will lead to their closures. These schools, termed budget schools, have come up in slums, villages and small towns through the efforts of entrepreneurs. They charge low fees and are the alternative to crumbling poorly managed government schools, which the establishment and media have ignored. The underprivileged know that the English knowledge is a passport to upward mobility in society. The aim of the Act is to force the children from poor families into government schools.

The Andhra Pradesh Government wants to close down 1,300 government schools as no children want to join these schools. The drop-out in these areas is more than 50%. Educationists in the State attribute it to poor infrastructure and indifferent teachers. 47,000 of the 76,000 primary schools do not have toilets and drinking water facilities. The educationists are critical since the State Government returned Rs. 300 crore grants received from the Centre. It could have been used to upgrade the infrastructure in schools. As a natural consequence of better learning standards provided in private schools, the government is negotiating partnership with corporate bodies to establish new schools. Punjab too is planning to close down some schools for similar reasons. By 2018, 50% of children may be in private schools. The situation is totally different from what was visualized by Minister Sibal wanting 90% students to be in government schools.

Efforts to Improve

Some States, notably Uttarakhand, have initiated a system of giving vouchers of Rs. 3,000 per month to orphans and drop outs. Some NGOs are managing schools for children of underprivileged families. Dr. Bhandari has established a school in the Brahampuri slum in New Delhi. The Centre for Civil Society has given vouchers to 400 girls selected at random. These students are free to choose a school.

The Maharashtra Government has accepted the need to encourage private schools. It has given permission to 2,417 institutions to establish or upgrade existing schools. Out of this 1,977 are for new schools and the remaining ones are for upgrading existing schools. Out of these schools, 1,166 are for Marathi medium, 1,145 for English, 26 for Hindi, 79 for Urdu and one unspecified. The government has received more than seven thousand applications. The expenses will be met by the management and no aid will be given by the Government. The management will create an endowment fund. The Central Government has negotiated a similar scheme with India Inc to establish chains of schools.

The Maharashtra Government has realized the need to improve the quality of teaching English in secondary schools. About 20,000 secondary school teachers will be trained to speak English. Last year, a similar programme was launched to train 67,000 primary school teachers. The British Council and Rashtriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan have signed an MOU for making secondary school teachers proficient in English. The State Government has

established a cell for Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] to organize effort of companies interested in supporting education. This cell will provide a platform for interaction between the Government and corporate houses for training of principals and education officers. The activities will include funding for infrastructure and scholarships. The cell will cut down red tape which discourages parties to

help. The British Council will be the lead content and training partner. It will be a good development if it leads to participation by industry in drawing up syllabus and should not become only an exercise to collect funds.

BRIG. SURESH C. SHARMA (Retd.) is adviser to the telecom industry, and a member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*. Email: brigscs@gmail.com.

Uttarakhand Disaster

A Lesson To Be Learnt

The torrential rains in north India led to a tragedy that shook the nation in mid June 2013 devastating the lives and homes of people in Uttarakhand. However, it is not only the nature but also man's contribution for his selfish interest that resulted in this tragedy. Some of the very important Hindu pilgrim centres were totally eroded in the rains. All the construction which was unfortunately constructed on the bank of rivers, i.e. Alaknanda, Mandakini, Bhagirathi and Kalinadi were swept away.

A very sincere and serious introspection needs to be done to understand the reasons for such disasters which are termed as man-made disasters. The self-centred interest of the government in the name of development has added to the destruction. Extensive deforestation of the mountain tracks, sand mining and the large number of dam building activities on the various rivers in the region are the major reason for this tragedy. Many of the settlements have been built right next to the rivers in blatant violation of environmental laws. There is huge growth in the vehicular traffic, illegal and poorly designed structures which go unchecked in the name of tourism. The Himalayan ecosystem has been fragile and destabilised, thus creating

the biggest threat to the biodiversity.

With the indicators of the severe climatic changes there was urgent need of disaster management in the region but was ignored by the State government leaving thousands of tourist and pilgrims to die and to be stranded in the hilly region. These people should have been given alerts and advised to discontinue their tours which could have worked as a saviour plan.

There is need to review the development projects and construction activities in the region through a regulatory body as this will ensure in the safety and security of the region and its people and in future such catastrophe can be avoided.

Above all a national consensus need to be evolved as this will pave the path for safeguarding the Himalayas from future dangers. Also lessons are to be learnt from such incidences.

Dr. R. K. Cheema
G. N. Khalsa College
Mumbai.

Uttarakhand Disaster

Uttarakhand is a land of religious places. Every year a large number of people take pilgrimages to these holy places. As we know, it's the monsoon and nature's fury was visible in Uttarakhand. Heavy rains resulted in the cataclysmic floods which tore apart the entire state. This was probably the wettest day Uttarakhand has ever witnessed because not only were the rivers full but also were the eyes of many people.. Suddenly the rains got

wilder and it resulted in flooding leading to mass destruction. From then on, I asked myself two questions- 'how bad was the scale of destruction' and 'did the rescue people do enough in saving lives...?'

The tragedy slowly unfolded itself. It was beyond everyone's worst imagination. For almost three days, the road were almost broken or washed away! The towns and

Rahul Sunilkumar

the villages were wiped out by the raging Mandakini River! The images had shown to us almost presented Uttarakhand as a ghost town! The horror could be seen in the eyes of the people stranded there thinking whether it could be their last day on earth. The government could do little to nothing as the roads and all other means of communication was cut off! The flash floods had almost ripped apart entire mountains. It had knocked out houses like a pack of cards!

The TV channels and the newspapers describing the situation there made me feel a part of them! People raised their hands and looked up to the sky probably thanking god or breathing the clear air after 3-4 days! The amount of destruction is huge! Lives, property, temples all got washed away! It will probably take many years to come close to rebuilding lives and villages! People in

Uttarakhand have started to pick up the pieces of their lives! The only question which remains unanswered is whether or not we can face a disaster of such huge proportions and magnitude? How can we prevent such disaster in future? Who should be blamed, Man or Nature? I believe, man's interference with the nature creates an imbalance which leads to destruction and falls back on man. Building too many dams, mining work, cutting down mountains to reach the religious destinations and many such actions of man destroys the nature. These need to be stopped.

Rahul Sunilkumar
S.Y.B.A., G. N. Khalsa College,
Mumbai

Catastrophe at the Pilgrim Centre in Uttarakhand

Fareen Qureshi

Uttarakhand, one of the beautiful States in the northern part of India is also referred to as the Land of the Gods. It is surrounded by the Himalays, the Bhabhar and Terai and has a population of 10,11,752. Ganga at Gangotri and at Yamuna at Yamnotri originate in this region. Along with Badrinath and Kedarnath, Uttarkhand forms the *Chotta Char Dham*. In June 2013 heavy rainfall triggered devastating floods and landslides and the chorabri glaciers at height of 3800 meters melted. The scenes of flood damaging the entire village and settlement were unbearable. 70,000 people were held up in the region. The damaged roads restricted the movement of the people. Many dead bodies which eroded were found in faraway places like Bijnor, Allahabad, Bulandshahar etc. sending a quiver in our spine. Army, Air force, National disaster response force, Public works department and local administration worked together for quick rescue operations. From 17th June to 30th June the Indian Air Force ratified a total of 18,424 people flying a total of 2,137 sorties and landing of 3,36,930 kgs of relief material and equipment.

This incident sent a shockwave throughout the country. What has actually added to the problem is Man's intervention with the natural environment. Huge constructions being carried in the vicinity of the temples in the form of accommodation for the pilgrims and eateries etc. added pressure. I feel the visit of the pilgrims should

be planned systematically and in small numbers from time to time, avoiding pressure on the region. There is a need to keep a balance with the environment. People need to be educated and a national consensus has to be created in planning the safeguard of the Himalayan region. We all have our sentiments attached to the pilgrimage centers but at the same time we also must understand that they are our heritage and therefore need preservation. Awareness programmes related to preservation and conservation must be conducted and local people of the region must be guided on these lines. Their contribution alongwith the government is very valuable in protecting the Himalayan environment. Also well planned disaster management programme need to be in place. Alerts and precautions must be taken seriously by the people as well as the government.

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After 65 years of independence, there need no longer be any fear about the unity of India. The country is not about to Balkanise, nor is it about to become a dictatorship. The real problems in India today have to do with the quality of governance. Smaller states may be one way to address the problem.

**Courtesy: *The Hindu*, January 30, 2013.
Excerpted from Historian Ramachandra Guha's
Article, "Living Together Separately".**

Women's Security

‘Woman Thy name is Chastity’ – Chaste thou shall be with the valiant disposition of such men!!

Dr. Jyoti Marwah

*If dowry is punishable under Section 498A and can wrap up the whole family
then why punishment on similar lines should not be meted out for crimes
and outrage against female modesty?*

Women, nationwide, have been enraged over the question of safety and concerns, affecting their lives in spite of the grand discourse on gender equality. The Women's' Grievance Cell, the Women's Development Cell and the Women's Welfare Groups working for women have only been belittled and ridiculed by the failure of law and audacity of crime against women by our men – young and old.

The brutality of crime towards women has raised many questions and the most important being 'should a juvenile rapist escape maximum punishment'? The law goes by the written word and is blinded to the psychology of a juvenile, who, though underage, yet has a 'mature' mindset and is self-obsessed with the use of muscle power. A mind which is aware of asserting the male psyche of domination has the confidence that no power on earth can deter his intent in exhibiting his superiority irrespective of religion, caste, creed, and gender.

A juvenile being sent to reformatories where they continue to be in the company of inmates of a similar mindset is inexplicable. Will this change them for the better or for the worse? Their families need to be counseled too. Is all this so easy?

Punishment for the Family

How does a society where loss of virginity before marriage has had deep seated cultural and patriarchal roots, accept this today? To overcome the stigma accompanying a rape needs quick and fair justice with appropriate punishment. What the girl and her family suffer must be felt by the entire family of the perpetrator of the crime. If dowry is punishable under Section 498A and can wrap up the whole family then why punishment on similar lines should not be meted out for crimes and outrage against female modesty? All members of the family irrespective of their age, status, education should suffer incarceration for some time. The family members should be shamed and dishonored for their failure to bring up their off-springs in an atmosphere of acceptable values in society.

A rapist is the result of a family's failure to bring up their children well. The four key pillars in a child's life are family, school, peers, and community; each playing an important role in addressing and understanding child and preventing youth crime. Each of these pillars has to be held equally responsible for these crimes. Fault lies with those who deal with children at home, in schools, in the neighborhood and in the community itself. Without resolving these concerns criminal justice will remain wanting and continue to appear unjust and unfair and we will continue to train our anger on the system and the offender, never really reaching the root of the problem.

It is true that since December 2012 there has been a slew of increased outrage against women including the one in Mumbai. What's worse is that such acts are being carried out with greater impunity and shamelessness throughout the country. Is it all because men are unable to keep pace with the growing challenges thrown up by women? Is their helplessness is taking recourse to such atrocities against women?

A small, but effective, survey conducted by 'War against Railway Rowdies (WARR)' just a week before the Shakti Mill incident in Mumbai, revealed harassment of women in the city is eroding their peace of mind and sense of safety. The survey revealed that 84% women encounter sexual harassment every day, 83% women fear male touch and 78% women do not find effective policing. If this is the scary picture of women's security in the foremost city of the country, what do smaller cities have in store? Do we need to revive the practices of medieval times and fall back on the obsolete veil or the purdah system?

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Indian Women Lack Safety and Security

Dr. Rita P. Bhambi

We generally play the blame game for any such incidence and hence do not succeed in reaching the root of the problem.

Women in India today – a better half of Indian society are becoming the most vulnerable section in so far as their safety and security are concerned. Every day, headlines in newspapers report cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, molestation, sexual harassment, rapes, trafficking, and violence against women. This certainly implies that there has been an increasing trend towards sexual overdrives in the present generation.

Our supreme law, the Indian Constitution, has envisaged a vision of true social, economic and political democracy which guarantees the laudable and moral principle of equality for our citizens but this has not yet been fully realized.

The recent case of a 23-year-old photojournalist who was gang raped at the Shakti Mills compound in Mumbai brings back the horrible memories of the December 16 Delhi gang rape case that shook the country by the horrific nature of the crime. It is unbearable to imagine the plight of women who suffer such crimes. It shakes the confidence of women, of society and in our judicial system. Besides, it has cascading effects, which affect a woman's life.

Root Cause

Who do we think is responsible for this? Is it only a lapse in the country's legal system of our country, or on the part of the police or the public when such incidents occur or is the entire Indian society to be blamed? We generally play the blame game when any such incidents occur and are therefore unable to get to the root of the problem. Most problems have two approaches for a solution; the first is a short-term solution and the second one a long-term one. These can be either of a curative or preventive nature.

We all know that India is a land with a variety of social customs, traditions and of religious beliefs. These customs, are a deep-rooted and often form the core of the minds and hearts of every Indian, defines our lifestyles, our thoughts, our expressions and our beliefs, be it man

or a woman. This has given enveloped the male with a feeling of masculinity in every aspect of thought word and deed. Not surprisingly most Indian males perceive themselves as physically and mentally superior than their female counterparts while Indian women themselves treat their males as superior beings – so obvious for instance in the tradition of women performing such ritual as Karwa Chauth where treats men as god.

Other instances can be seen in parents preferring a male child to a female. In every aspect of life, women are denied or given less preference than the male, whether it be education or access to health care. Women are expected to function within the prescribed limits while the males have the freedom to do whatever they want. This system instills a feeling in the male that they are superior and hence can dominate women. This also inculcates in the male a sense of hatred against women if they see her crossing the limits the males have set.

Social Reforms the Solution

Therefore, the problem is not just of one or two factors, but a sum total of a large number of factors. We need to plan a more integrative approach to arrive at a solution. This requires large scale social reforms which will channelize women's potential into various streams of development through such measures as quality education and enhanced moral and spiritual teachings so that the deep-rooted seed of enmity, which is sown through our customs and traditions, is uprooted. Moral and spiritual education will give impetus to curb the sexual desires of men and women and keep them from indulging in such heinous crimes. This solution is an ideal one but needs the comprehensive support of all stakeholders of society.

Therefore, to see India as a flourishing nation as envisaged in our Constitution, it is time we realize what is right and what is wrong and act in a manner that enables women to be seen as an asset contributing to the socio-economic prosperity of the nation.

In other words, we need to take action not by force

but by a firm determination to make our country more secure and safe for women and bring about reforms in the desired direction so that woman can also enjoy their freedom and rights, feel more empowered and fearless as assured them by Constitution of India - the Supreme Law of the land.

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Crimes Against Women Rising

With India's poor record of conviction in rape cases with most rape cases ending in acquittals due to lack of evidence and many other reasons, the situation has gone from bad to worse. Though the government has recently given serious consideration to the need for reviewing the present laws, so as to provide for speedier justice (like fast track courts) and enhance punishment in cases of aggravated sexual assaults, rapes and other crimes against women, the crimes against women are on the rise.

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Mumbai Ranks Low on Women's Safety

Heena Sagir Ansari

The city of Mumbai fares very poorly when it comes to women's safety ranking sixth among eight of the biggest cities in the country according to a new report. In an analysis of eight cities based on three yardsticks of female security index (FSI) – gender ratio, incidences of rape and dowry deaths – it was only better than Ahmedabad and Delhi.

The report from the Tata Strategic Management Group (TSMG), revealed that Chennai had the Highest FSI, followed by Bangalore, Kolkata, Pune and Hyderabad. The findings come in the run-up to the International Women's Day on 8th March. Though the report says, "Mumbai is second of 588 districts in India on the well being index (WBI) a tabulation of eight parameters indicating economic well being -it fared poorly on women's security.

"The best districts on well-being are not necessarily the best in women's security 'said Raju Bhinge, Chief

Executive, TSMG. Mumbai has the second highest number of rapes per lakh women at 3.3 (in a tie with Pune) second to Delhi at 6.3. In the remaining two parameters it is joint fourth in the number of dowry deaths and fifth on gender ratio with 900 women per 1000 men.

Recently, a 23-year-old photojournalist was gang raped in Mumbai, revealing a huge cultural problem.

"Community life has been disrupted in the past 10 years and Mumbai has become more unsafe", said, Prof. Vibhuti Patel, Prof. of Economics, SNDT University. In Mumbai and Delhi the level of alienation is the worst and child abuse is also high. In the state rankings, Maharashtra is 13th on the WBI and 16th on FSI. The need of the hour time is for better laws and amendments to existing laws to ensure the safety of women.

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**It's got layers of corruption within -
deeper you go, more a nation cries.**

Contributed by Kashmira Rao, Courtesy: Mumbai Mirror.

THE LIBERAL POSITION

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P. V. INDIRESAN

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(Author, Parliamentarian, Doyen of the Post-Independence Liberal
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Ayn Rand
Atlas Shrugged, 1957

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