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CORRUPTION

Corruption: The change we need

Harsh Goenka

Corruption has been on the mind of every Indian these last few months. Thanks to [Anna Hazare](#), a scourge that has been engulfing and destroying our polity is finally centrestage. The information and opinions thrown up in the wake of the agitation have generated a debate that needs to be taken to a logical conclusion if we are to reduce this overpowering problem.

While it was generally believed that the end of the licence raj and protectionism would see a reduction of the parallel black economy and competition would break the unfair political-criminal-business nexus, the reality has been vastly different. Corruption has become worse. According to the 2010 figures of [Transparency International](#), India has more black money than [the rest](#) of the world combined. The recent scams - 2G and [Commonwealth Games](#) - have involved unimaginably large sums of money, and have scarred the mightiest and the noblest.

The voracious appetite of our political leadership and bureaucracy for money to fund elections has fuelled these unscrupulous practices. The total spending for the 2009 Lok Sabha elections is reportedly pegged at Rs 10,000 crore. A mere Rs 1,300 crore of this was spent by the [Election Commission](#), another Rs 700 crore by the Centre and state governments. So a whopping Rs 8,000 crore came from political parties and individual candidates. No rocket science is necessary to deduce where this money was generated from.

The tragedy and moral dilemma for India Inc is the coercion to indulge in corrupt practices. Of course, the unscrupulous have registered a

meteoric rise in a short span thanks to political patronage. Even [Ratan Tata](#) said the other day at a [Harvard Business School](#) event, "If you choose not to participate in this, you leave behind a fair amount of business." Many of us have also come to be resigned to the malaise, and feel there is no way out of it. I have often heard it debated in social circles that it is perhaps more desirable to have a corrupt political leader who does his work efficiently than to have a clean politician who is inefficient.

In India, [politics](#) no longer depends solely on funds from business. There are enough avenues - whether it is [real estate](#) or projects - for the unscrupulous to make money. The openness with which money is extracted, in fact the brazen attitude of some of the officers, certain of their impunity, is a direct reflection of how low our moral standards have fallen and how tolerant and defeatist our approach has become.

Regulations are what we urgently need. Now, for the first time, there seems to be some hope that these pressures on the government may lead to the formation of some effective deterrent mechanisms. Parliament may perhaps agree to the formation of an independent ombudsman, empowered sufficiently to initiate probes and take action against the guilty. Apparently, of all the cases on corruption that are referred, the government grants sanction for prosecution to less than 2% cases, and of these, the conviction rate is only around 3%!

[No doubt](#) we need agencies with teeth, so that the fear of punitive action will make it risky to indulge in unscrupulous practices. But given these dismal figures and the loopholes in the system, one has some reservations on the efficacy of deterrent regulation. Even the recent open letter to the government by 14 prominent Indians including [Deepak Parekh](#), [Azim Premji](#) and members of the judiciary, appealing for more action against corruption, emphasised that the Lokpal was a small but critical step in this fight and many other reforms were necessary.

More importantly and simultaneously, i feel we need to reduce the opportunities for corruption. There must be transparency across the board. Firstly, political party expenditure limits should be realistic, with payments only through the banking system. Secondly, to break the stranglehold of babus, there must be a methodical deletion of their discretionary powers at all levels. There must be fair, open methods for awarding contracts, especially in areas like roads, infrastructure, mining and land acquisition for industry. Regulatory bodies are necessary to ensure standardisation and quality, and that`s all they should do - regulate, not control, as otherwise they become breeding grounds for extracting money.

Just as the Right to Information has made a major difference to the accountability of various arms of the executive, when documentation and processes will be available online, there will be far greater transparency. E-governance will reduce malpractices as it will minimise the points of contact between public and officials.

It is clear given the magnitude of the problem that a multi-pronged approach is necessary. Continuous and sustained pressure on the government to act against graft while simultaneously resisting corruption in everyday matters may perhaps reach the necessary critical mass. The only way in which any of these ideas can come to fruition or genuine change occur is if we have the commensurate will. All this recent churning and debate will have been in vain unless, and i can`t [stress](#) this enough, we change our attitude and style of functioning. Develop the determination to press for new policies and ensure their implementation; resist graft, and adopt ethical practices.

As businessmen, we must pledge to do all of these. Merely wearing the Anna cap and attending rallies is surely not an answer.

The writer is the chairman of an industrial group.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Need for austerity measures
Difficulties in maintaining high growth

Jayshree Sengupta

INDIA'S economic growth seems to be slowing down from its previous high level because of global and domestic problems. Rated as one of the fastest growing economies, India may now achieve around 7 or 8 per cent growth and not 9 per cent. On the domestic front, though there are no serious signs of recession, problems of managing state finances are slowly cropping up.

Even for ordinary people, managing personal finances is becoming difficult since inflation seems to be up and down the same high range of 9 per cent. It is making people feel reluctant to spend on extras like consumer durables, cars, travel and entertainment as the monthly food and fuel bill is getting higher. This is affecting the demand for goods and services and will hit business sentiments.

The stock market is also going up and down frequently because huge sums (Rs 2000 crore) had been withdrawn by the FIIs in September due to global uncertainties. India is still attractive as an investment destination but slowdown in industrial growth and a falling corporate profit profile are taking away some of the shine. There are many other markets which are doing better and FIIs are moving their money to such markets and people are even investing in gold and silver once again.

Apart from high food inflation, the fiscal deficit seems to be getting out of control and in the first five months of the current fiscal year, 66 per cent of government expenditure has already been recorded which means that the government will have to go in for big market borrowing of Rs

280 billion during the rest of the financial year to meet its dues.

Apparently, the huge public spend has been on account of oil and other subsidies. This is because while oil prices have been going up, domestic prices have been maintained at nearly the same level through subsidies.

Clearly, the government is going to cut some subsidies, and it is likely that fuel subsidies will be axed further. There is already a talk of linking domestic fuel prices with international prices. Inflation will be stoked when diesel and cooking gas prices are raised next.

Government borrowings too could be inflationary because the government will borrow from the public and the market by issuing bonds which will enable it to spend money on its various programmes. This will release money into the financial system which will end up stoking inflation. The credit rating agencies like Moody's and Standard & Poor's will be watching how the government manages its finances in the next few months. Moody's has already downgraded the State Bank of India from C grade to D+ because of its growing non-performing assets. The government has already promised infusion of Rs 8000 crore for its recapitalisation. Similarly, another hole in the exchequer's pocket will be the bailout of Air India, ailing for a long time. There may be more such expenditure in the future, making it all the more difficult to control overshooting the targeted fiscal deficit.

Moody's downgrade of the State Bank of India is probably going to shake the confidence of the people in India's premier bank. The problem seems to be mounting NPAs and among various reasons given, the behaviour of its top brass and political patronage seemed to be behind it. In the case of Air India, its current malaise has been not being able to cut losses. So many seats are blocked for VIP travel in every flight abroad for which no revenue is earned. But not all public sector enterprises are loss-making and we have some of the best examples in the oil sector.

All over Europe the new mantra is austerity. Though India's exports have been doing well since last month with a surprisingly high growth

rate of 40 per cent, this may not be sustained in the future if our big trade partners are busy tightening their belts and trade credits dry up. There is also the rather disappointing news of manufacturing and service sectors contracting in India which cannot isolate itself from the global happenings. The revenue collection too has not been high enough to cover the extra expenditure of the government. Clearly, India will have to go in for austerity measures or a “hair-cut”.

Recently the Greek government has announced a number of austerity measures, including scaling back the public sector to cutting down pensions as part of the condition for releasing the next installment of \$11 billion in aid from its “troika” of foreign lenders — the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the IMF. Earlier it went for an increase in taxes and wage freezes. These measures have increased the misery of the already unemployed and have been met with huge resistance, strikes and violence in the streets.

India still has an option because its situation is not as bad. Instead of cutting subsidies and raising prices of petrol, diesel and gas, other austerity measures can be implemented. The Prime Minister is already vetting VVIP trips abroad. Every time a minister and his entourage travels, millions of rupees are spent. There are many other ways in which austerity measures can be undertaken by the government instead of burdening the common man or woman by raising fuel and food prices. Many of the public sector enterprises need trimming and are made more manageable. Much flab can be cut from government activities that have failed to benefit the poor.

If austerity measures take the form of cutting expenditure on essentials like infrastructure development, the worst sufferers will be the poor. The upgrade of rural and urban infrastructure could be postponed and the much needed affordable housing, supply of clean potable water, sanitation and sewage disposal programmes could receive less government help. Public money has to be spent on cushioning the

adverse impact of slow economic growth and high inflation on low-income groups because unlike the EU, India does not have any social safety net for the extremely poor.

There is a lot of money which the government can tap for making provisions for the poor and the needy despite austerity measures. Unfortunately, only 3 per cent or 31.5 million of the population pays income tax as compared to 45 per cent in the US. Getting more people in the tax net and eradication of corruption could mobilise huge sums of money into government coffers. Cutting subsidies, however, would be the most acceptable way to get back on track regarding fiscal deficit management by the government, and it will be a measure approved by the credit rating agencies. So, expect more pain from austerity measures.

EDUCATION

HINDU 5.11.11 EDUCATION

Barefoot - Way of the rainbow

Harsh Mander

Finding spaces for street children in regular schools is the best way of providing them a humane and inclusive schooling.

It was in the early decades of the 20th century that the colonial government in India first accepted the legal responsibility to look after children without responsible adult protection, including street children. Since then, even in six decades of democratic freedom, in practice most governments have fulfilled this approach mainly by virtually incarcerating large numbers of these children in custodial, jail-like State-run institutions. Children are not just locked up but what I describe as 'locked away' in these cold, loveless institutions for the entire duration of their childhood. When the child grows into adulthood — and sometimes earlier, at the age of 14 years — the child is suddenly discharged without support, guidance or care into the impersonal adult world, to fend for himself or herself. This is sadly the approach of several private and religious charities as well.

In these institutions, segregated from the outside world, children are usually housed in large dormitories, with stern and disciplining staff who rarely build loving and nurturing bonds with these children. Children report sexual and physical abuse, and a sense of profoundly unloved loneliness. Street children whom we work with describe these as chillar jails, chillar meaning small change, and describe entire childhoods of running away from these institutions, only to be caught and locked up once again. Street children, more than others, long for freedom of choice and agency, and these homes rob these from them.

Alternate view

In stout opposition to the custodial care approach, many NGOs developed a variety of street-based outreach programmes. They believe that children and youth have the right to choose whether or not they wish to stay and remain on the streets; and should continue to retain their independent agency and economic independence, which they have fought for at a young age, and which they value highly. They have a sense of belonging to the streets, and find within it emotional and material satisfaction. According to this view, street life is a conscious choice of those children who find it as a better alternative to the betrayal of abusive relatives or parents. It is also better than abusive State custodial homes. This choice of children should be respected. We should not impose our own beliefs regarding their need for adult protection, if it violates a child's own aspirations.

They strongly believe the child on the streets has acquired a certain set of skills and abilities, which harsh street life has taught him. They live life on their own terms. They negotiate with adults around them to earn a living for themselves and may also take care of their siblings and families. These basic survival skills should not be taken away from these children, but instead these should constitute the base of working further with these children. On the foundations of what they have themselves learnt on the streets, what should be provided to the children is skill-based training, to help them take up vocations in the course of time. Innovative street-based approaches include drop-in shelters, contact centres, night shelters, evening classes, play activities in public parks, de-addiction and health services etc.

Although it avoids the abuses of custodial care, the biggest disadvantage of this approach is that it accepts that children will continue to work at an age when they should be in schools. While they get support from street-based approaches, the non-formal education programmes may provide more chances of being literate than being educated. They have

limited options for careers, except in some low-end options like rag-picking and unskilled labour, or a career in crime, with limited chances for higher education. After the passage of the Right to Education Act, an approach that supports the child being out of school is, in our opinion, no more a legally tenable option.

When children are required to take decisions like adults, what they miss is responsible and caring adult protection. Children start handling money at an age when they are not capable of choosing which option is better for them. There are high chances of substance abuse among children. They are free to buy drugs on the streets. The street environment is stressful, dangerous and highly unhygienic. They also are denied access to nutritious food, and health-care services. They grow up with many ailments, mental health problems born out of abuse and neglect, and often drug dependence. There is insufficient research, but we find a large number of such children die very early. We talk often of 'missing girls and women' in India. We believe that there are also 'missing street children and youth'.

The third set of approaches — to which I subscribe — attempts to secure the rights of the most vulnerable urban child — those who are forced to make the streets and railway platforms their home, and who earn by picking rags, begging or other street-based work — by extending to these children voluntary comprehensive care in open residential homes. It believes that a child's rights to protection, education, food, health-care and recreation must be upheld, but in ways that do not take away the freedom of choice of the child, in ways State custodial institutions do.

The main strategies of this approach are reaching out to the street child guaranteeing comprehensive, long-term care to the child, and her rights to protection, love, food, health-care, recreation and education, in voluntary, open, non-custodial homes. These are guaranteed to the child with no conditionalities, with love but no sense of charity, and for as long as the child needs these, as one would ensure for one's own child.

We learn from the pioneering work running such homes by Sister Cyril, the Don Bosco brotherhood, and the magnificent service for over 50 years in Snehalaya, Mumbai, which provides family-like care in smaller units of 20 children each, supported by foster parents. In Delhi and Hyderabad, we have attempted to scale up the Rainbow and Don Bosco models, by working closely with state governments.

Healing potential

The best approach, and one that indeed has the potential of enabling us to reach every street child, is to share spaces in existing schools, that are vacant maybe 16 hours, and these are the very hours in which a street child is most vulnerable. This is the most economical model. The same building needs only small additions for toilets, bathing places and a kitchen. It also leads to integration, dignity and the learning hands-on of egalitarian compassion and pluralism.

What has come to be celebrated as the Rainbow School approach began when, several years ago, a street girl, barely four-years-old, was raped outside the gates of an elite girls' school, Loretto Convent, Sealdah, in Kolkata. The Principal of this English Medium School, Sister Cyril Mooney, was deeply troubled. She resolved to open up the doors of her school to these children, and she fought opposition by parents and school managements, to develop one of the finest models of inclusive and humane schooling in India. The children enjoy the benefits of being inside a regular school with all the activities, the interaction with the more privileged peer group of the regular school, the rough and tumble of normal school life and the friendly interaction with other children of various backgrounds, creeds and castes. This positive environment enables each child — the most privileged and the most disadvantaged — to grow together and respect and learn from each other. In the classrooms of such a school, do we see the realisation of a new humane egalitarian India?

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Challenges ahead for India's nuclear diplomacy

Siddharth Varadarajan

Indian officials will have taken heart from French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe's (left) public articulation in a recent interview that Paris did not consider itself bound by the new guidelines when it came to nuclear commerce with India. Photo: AFP

Nullifying the effect of the Nuclear Suppliers Group's ban on enrichment and reprocessing exports will require diplomatic finesse and commercial hardball.

After the diplomatic successes of 2008, when the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) exempted India from the cartel's ban on atomic sales to countries that have not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or placed all their nuclear facilities under international safeguards, 2011 has not been a very good year at all.

Negotiations with the Japanese on a nuclear agreement have run aground, India's liability law is being unfairly attacked by its potential partners and, of course, the 46-nation NSG adopted new guidelines for the export of sensitive nuclear technology this June — Including enrichment and reprocessing (ENR) equipment and technology — that made the sale of these items conditional on the recipient state fulfilling a number of “objective” and “subjective” conditions. The first of these conditions, namely NPT membership and full-scope safeguards, were specifically designed to dilute the 2008 waiver India received and were not needed to ban ENR sales to any of the other three countries outside the NPT (Pakistan, Israel and North Korea) since the NSG's original

guidelines — with their catch-all NPT conditionality for the export of any kind of nuclear equipment — continue to apply to them.

Though Washington denies targeting New Delhi and says it has been working to restrict the sale of ENR equipment and technology for many years now, the new guidelines' redundant reference to the NPT was introduced in order to fulfil an assurance that Condoleezza Rice, who was U.S. Secretary of State at the time, gave Capitol Hill in 2008. Some Congressmen feared other nuclear suppliers would steal a march on the United States by offering India technologies the U.S. wouldn't. To allay their concerns, the U.S. administration said it would ensure an NSG-level ban on sensitive nuclear technology exports to India. A draft was circulated in November that year and finally approved in June 2011.

The Hindu's report

The fact that India failed to prevent the adoption of the new guidelines despite knowing they were in the pipeline for more than two years suggests a certain complacency on the Manmohan Singh government's part. We know from WikiLeaks cables that the issue was dutifully raised by Indian diplomats in many of their meetings with U.S. officials. But never was the proposed ENR ban projected by the government as an attempt by Washington to unilaterally rewrite the terms of the nuclear bargain it had struck with India.

When *The Hindu* broke the story about the G-8 deciding to implement such a ban in 2009 pending its adoption by the full NSG, senior Indian ministers took the view that this did not matter. It was only when the Nuclear Suppliers Group finally adopted the new guidelines this June that South Block decided to put on its punching gloves.

The fact is that the NSG's 2008 decision to lift its embargo on India was not some kind of unilateral concession. It was part of a complex bargain involving reciprocal commitments by both sides. If the supplier nations agreed to drop their insistence on the NPT and full-scope safeguards and

open the door to full civil nuclear cooperation with India, India committed itself to fulfilling several onerous steps, including the difficult and costly separation of its civilian and military nuclear programmes, the placing of its civilian facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, the signing of an Additional Protocol, as well as extending support to a number of nonproliferation and disarmament-related initiatives at the global level. At a fundamental level, the logic of this bargain hinged on two components. First, the NSG was making a judgment about India's status as a responsible country with advanced nuclear capabilities. Second, the NSG and India were acting on the basis of reciprocity.

India's expectations

Though Indian officials made their anger known almost immediately in off the record briefings, External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna finally provided the government's formal response to the new NSG guidelines in a *suo moto* statement to Parliament in August. Noting the concerns that had been raised by MPs, he made the following “clarifications”: (1) The basis of India's international civil nuclear cooperation remains the special exemption from the NSG guidelines given on September 6, 2008 “which contain reciprocal commitments and actions by both sides.” (2) That exemption accorded “a special status to India” and “was granted knowing full well that India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.” Pursuant to the “clean” exemption, “NSG members had agreed to transfer all technologies which are consistent with their national law” including technologies connected with the nuclear fuel cycle.

Mr. Krishna said the only outstanding issue is the “full implementation” of the September 2008 understanding. “This is what we expect and our major partners are committed to.” This understanding contained commitments on both sides. “We expect all NSG members to honour

their commitments as reflected in the 2008 NSG Statement and our bilateral cooperation agreements.”

The Minister then noted the statements made by the U.S., France and Russia following the NSG's June 2011 meeting in which each country tried to assure India that the new guidelines would not “detract” from or “affect” the original waiver granted in September 2008. Stating that not every NSG member has the ability to transfer ENR items to other countries, Mr. Krishna added: “We expect that those that do and have committed to do so in bilateral agreements with India, will live up to their legal commitments.” He also held out a carrot — the huge expansion planned for India's civil nuclear industry — and repeated once again in that context that “we expect that our international partners will fully honour their commitments in this regard.”

French example

While the three big nuclear suppliers have all said the new guidelines do not “detract” from the grand bargain of 2008, South Block should not set much store by these assurances. The fact is that there has been a setback and a diplomatic effort is needed to recover lost ground and ensure that India is excluded from the purview of the new ENR restrictions imposed by the NSG.

The one supplier that has been the most forthcoming so far is France. Indian officials will have taken heart from French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe's public articulation in an interview in Delhi last month that France did not consider itself bound by the new guidelines when it came to nuclear commerce with India. The Minister confirmed that notwithstanding the NSG rules, Paris remained free to sell ENR items and technology in a manner consistent with its national law and its bilateral agreement. French diplomatic sources also told this writer that the French delegation at the NSG meeting in June had entered a verbal reservation to the new ENR guidelines questioning their applicability to

India. The French intervention was not challenged and was duly recorded in the minutes, the sources said.

Of course, the challenge for India will be to hold the French to their word, as and when the requirement for cooperation in the ENR field is required. Though India has its own capabilities in these fields, there is no reason why it should not seek access to the best international components and equipment for the new reprocessing plant it has committed to build. With both France and Russia, India must make it clear that the multibillion dollar contracts which are on the anvil for the purchase of new reactors will also depend on Paris and Moscow's willingness to follow through on their promises and commitments on full civil nuclear cooperation. The U.S. has not so far committed itself to sell ENR equipment to India. New Delhi can live with that. But not with American efforts to block others from cooperating with it.

MASS-MEDIA

Does the media need controls?

Tavleen Singh

As a humble cog in the vast and wondrous machine of the Indian media, I want to extend my personal thanks to Justice Markandey Katju for his recent comments. He has been berated by the Editors Guild for his ‘tendentious and offensive’ remarks, but my own view is that we owe the new Chairman of the Press Council a small debt of gratitude. It is true that in his interview to Karan Thapar, he used unusually strong language. He described journalists as illiterate ignoramuses who lacked ‘knowledge of economic theory or political science or literature or philosophy.’ Phew! Justice Katju must have a high opinion of his own erudition to speak this way. But, this is not what I want to thank him for. I want to thank him for admitting publicly that the Government of India (and doubtless all our state governments) use their advertising campaigns, not for the public good, but to control the press.

When he told Karan that he would like the electronic media to be brought under the Press Council so that he could deny government advertisements to misbehaving TV channels, I could hardly believe my ears. Those of us who cover government and politics in Delhi have known forever that the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting uses government advertising to control newspapers, but nobody, to my knowledge, has admitted this openly.

If the government uses its advertisements to coerce newspapers into printing only good news about the government, it amounts to press censorship. It is a tactic Indian officials learned in the days when the Soviet Union was our role model. It is a tactic that has no place in

today's world in which the Internet has made censorship almost impossible even in totalitarian countries like China.

On a personal level, Justice Katju has done me another favour. I have been waiting for some time to find a week in which I could use this space to draw attention to some very bad things that have started to happen in the media and his insulting remarks provide me with this chance. Of these bad things, the worst is the habit that our news channels have developed of media trials. No matter what someone may have done, they have the right under Indian law to be considered innocent till proven guilty. Our news channels deny them this right and this is not just wrong, it is against the fundamental principles of justice. It is time for those who control our major news channels to come together and evolve a code of conduct.

If some public figures are treated as guilty till proven innocent by our TV anchors, there are others who are treated with a reverence that is equally disturbing. Anna Hazare comes to mind as someone who was treated this way. As for the Nehru-Gandhi family, it is as if our TV channels had come to a secret understanding to deify them. The Prime Minister is routinely reviled for his indecision and his lack of leadership but the family who gave him his job is treated as sacrosanct. Why?

Without wanting to sound like Justice Katju, I feel obliged to add that some of the so-called reporters employed by our news channels should have no place in journalism. They rush about hysterically from one sound byte to the next without noticing that instead of reporting a story, they are actually doing no more than shoving their microphones into the faces of different people. There are more than 300 news channels in India now and not one of them seems able to go beyond the manic frenzy of 'breaking news'. When is the last time you saw a truly memorable bit of investigative journalism on Indian television?

Justice Katju went too far when he described the whole media as ignorant and illiterate but nobody who watches television news on a daily basis can deny that improvement is needed. Junior reporters need basic training in the fundamentals of journalism before they are unleashed on our screens. And, some of our celebrated anchors need to remember that they do not speak for ‘the people of India’.

On account of needing to compete with ‘breaking news’, I am forced here to sadly admit that print journalism standards have declined. No longer do we see the sort of investigative stories that this newspaper was once famous for. The only way for newspapers to compete seriously with television is for them to go deeper into a story than is possible in a news bulletin. Sadly, the opposite has happened and, more and more, we see reporters getting stories from ‘sources’ instead of from their own investigation. But, this must not be taken to mean that we need Justice Katju to whip us into what he considers good behaviour. He definitely needs another job.

Follow Tavleen Singh on Twitter @ tavleen_singh

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

**Learning from byelections
Unlikely to influence 2012 polls**

T.V. Rajeswar

THE recent byelections consisted of a Lok Sabha poll for the Hisar seat in Haryana and three Assembly seats of Daraunda in Bihar, Khadakwasla in Maharashtra and Banswada in Andhra Pradesh. The Lok Sabha byelection drew maximum attention because the Anna Hazare team got involved in the electioneering process.

Anna team member Arvind Kejriwal addressed public meetings exhorting people not to vote for the Congress. The results were on the expected lines —Janhit Congress candidate Kuldeep Bishnoi emerged successful. He is the son of redoubtable former Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal and his victory was more or less a foregone conclusion.

The Hisar Lok Sabha byelection was, therefore, entirely local in character and had no traces of national politics. If anything, Mr Kejriwal's participation only betrayed the unnecessary belligerence of Anna Hazare team members. Anna himself was observing "maun vrat".

The Daraunda Assembly byelection in Siwan district of Bihar witnessed a keen contest among the Congress, the RJD of Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav, the Lok Janshakti Party of Mr Ram Vilas Paswan and the JD(U) of Mr Sharad Yadav and Mr Nitish Kumar, the Chief Minister of the state. The byelection arose due to the death of the sitting member, Jagmato Devi of the JD(U). In the contest, Jagmato Devi's daughter-in-law, Kavita Singh, emerged victorious. This election was entirely confined to Bihar participants.

In the Banswada Assembly byelection in Andhra Pradesh, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) nominee was declared the winner. This was expected especially after the TRS had given a call for an agitation throughout Andhra Pradesh, Telangana in particular. This led to the total disruption of communication as well as administration. Banswada itself is in the heart of Telangana and it was natural that the seat would go to the TRS. It was the reiteration of the fact that no candidate other than TRS nominees stood a chance. The only tangible lesson from the byelections is that a decision in favour of Telangana is long overdue.

In the Khadakwasla Assembly byelection in Maharashtra, the Nationalist Congress Party candidate lost to the Shiv Sena-BJP combination. This was a warning to both the Congress and the NCP in Maharashtra.

Fresh Assembly elections are due to take place early in 2012 in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Manipur and Goa. In the Hindi-speaking states of UP and Uttarakhand, all the major political parties will be in the contest. The Congress will be pitted against the BSP of Ms Mayawati, the Samajwadi Party led by Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, the BJP and the RLD of Mr Ajit Singh, apart from some local organisations.

The issues in 2012, though these are the Assembly elections, would be mainly of national importance like the price rise and corruption. Apart from these, some local issues are also likely to be raised. Senior BJP leader L.K. Advani is on a 40-day Rath Yatra and would cover UP and Uttarakhand in the first leg. In UP, there are two other yatras which would be under the leadership of Mr Rajnath Singh and Mr Kalraj Mishra. While Mr Rajnath Singh's yatra will start at Varanasi, Mr Kalraj Mishra's yatra would begin at Kanpur. It was the plan of Mr L.K. Advani that at some point or the other, his Rath Yatra would connect with the two other yatras led by Mr Rajnath Singh and Mr Kalraj Mishra.

The BSP, the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh, will try its best to repeat its 2007 performance, which brought chief ministership to Ms Mayawati. In

2007, she made a path-breaking alliance with the Brahmins, who form a formidable voting percentage in the southern and eastern parts of UP. In the next Assembly elections, she will try to win a large percentage of Muslim votes as well as those of the backward classes for her party. She had recently written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asserting for reservation of jobs and seats in colleges, etc, for the Muslim community as well as for the OBCs.

As for Mr Mulayam Singh of the SP, rallies are already being held by him and his son Akhilesh Yadav all over UP. Mr Mulayam Singh's chief lieutenant for wooing Muslim voters is Mr Azam Khan from Rampur, a former Cabinet minister. It is believed that the SP has a sizeable following among the Muslims in UP, more than any other party. Mr Mulayam Singh and his lieutenants would obviously try to ensure that their Muslim vote bank remains intact.

The Congress is making preparations for carrying out continuous rallies led by party General Secretary Rahul Gandhi and others. There is also a proposal to hold a massive rally accompanied by a public meeting in Lucknow, likely to be addressed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress President Sonia Gandhi and other leaders like Mr Digvijay Singh. The Congress is reportedly negotiating with the RLD of Mr Ajit Singh which has its stronghold in the Jat-dominated districts of western UP. In the past, there had been an alliance between the Congress and the RLD. Efforts are said to be on to renew this alliance. Mr Ajit Singh, known to be a tough negotiator, may be accommodated as a Cabinet minister as a part of the package deal between the Congress and the RLD.

In Uttarakhand, the ruling BJP was shaken by allegations of corruption against Chief Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal, who had to step down in favour of Mr Khanduri. The Congress may try to exploit the allegations of corruption against the ruling BJP. While the Congress may succeed in

several constituencies, it is doubtful whether it will be able to capture power in Uttarakhand.

In Punjab, it is a contest between the Congress and the Akali Dal-BJP combine. The Akali Dal-BJP combine is in power and there have been several allegations of irregularities and corruption against Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and his son, Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal. Capt Amarinder Singh of the Congress is trying to repeat the party's past performance, but whether it will be able to capture power is rather doubtful.

Whatever issues that may be raised in the 2012 Assembly polls — in UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Manipur and Goa — these are unlikely to be influenced by the results of the recently held byelections.

The writer is a former Governor of UP and West Bengal.

Time to liberate India's history

SHASHI SHEKHAR

The Left's politically correct and sanitised reconstruction of history has prevented a free and open inquiry into India's past. Similarly, the Left's claim to a monopoly on diversity and dissent has stymied genuine and plural discourse. Both should be challenged so that history is not held captive by a sanctimonious few

In the aftermath of the controversy surrounding a curriculum revision by the Delhi University, a curious line of argument has been advanced by many Left-liberal commentators and a few Liberals who would otherwise mark their distance from the Left on economic issues. At the heart of this line of argument is this blind and almost fanatical faith in the sanctity of 'dissent' to the point where the pursuit of such dissent becomes an end in itself. As Pratap Bhanu Mehta remarked in a recent article, the invocation by the Left of diversity is a mere formal gesture with no real space to discuss in depth even a version of that which is considered to be diverse.

The debate on how history is taught and popularly perceived must go far beyond the specific controversy over AK Ramanujan's essay. The political Right has not helped itself with its egg-headed response to the controversy that has only ended up reinforcing previously held negative stereotypes based on past incidents of violence.

Much of the political debate over history has been burdened by unresolved emotions over Muslim conquests of 'Hindu India'. Emotions which to this day fuel secular-communal polemics within India while

continuing to offer a deeply flawed existential rationale to the failed state of Pakistan.

A politically correct reconstruction of the sub-continent's history has not helped resolve these emotions. Far from bringing closure it has had the opposite effect of fuelling and sustaining conspiracy theories, thus breeding bigotry within all shades of political opinion.

A popular retelling of the story of those many conquests of India starting with the Arab conquests of Sindh begins the process of removing some of those prejudices and overcoming those unresolved emotions. It is interesting that all of the Muslim conquests of India have been well-documented by chroniclers writing of events in their lifetime, albeit through the lens of the conquering armies. It must be said that the tradition of documenting these conquests from the Arabs to the Mughals is remarkable and praiseworthy.

Such a popular retelling will have to rely on texts like *Chachnama* that recount the earliest of the Arab conquests to texts like *Tarikhi-Rashidi* that offer a fascinating glimpse of the Islamisation of Kashmir. A reading of these texts also puts Al-Beruni's work and Abul Fazl's *Ain-e-Akbari* in perspective in their attempt to understand a Hindu India. As one treks the lifetimes of successive Muslim dynasties through the eyes and records of these observers one also gets a glimpse of the evolution of their own engagement with a Hindu India. Last but not the least are early British records that offer a picture of how dysfunctional this process of engagement had become by the 1700s.

One must thank Google Books for compiling a comprehensive digital archive of the British era and the subsequent English translations of these mostly Arabic and Persian texts as well as a wide collection of digitised British era records. At the risk of being accused of making an exaggerated claim, it must be said that the body of knowledge available digitally of original texts and English language translations allows for an

amateur reconstruction of the events of that era with near professional accuracy and completeness.

A reading of the *Chachnama* reveals in letters exchanged between the Arab ruler and his general leading the conquest, strategic advice with striking similarity to the *Arthashastra* on how to engage with the enemy. This early Hindu influence puts Al-Beruni's India written almost 300 years later in perspective, for Al-Beruni never really ventured into the Hindu-ruled heartland of India while sourcing almost all of his material from scholars within Sindh and frontiers of present day Punjab within Pakistan.

While the Mughal era is popularly understood within India, more riveting are the raw accounts of conquests during the pre-Mughal era spanning the Ghori invasion, and the Turkic Slave dynasty years followed by Tughlaq's rule. These accounts narrate not just the plunder of temples and cities but also the factional intrigue and many mutinies. Accounts of *fidayeen* style assassination attempts and sectarian violence at the old Jama Masjid remind us of contemporary incidents of terror in Pakistan. Where Delhi is described as the City of Islam out of bounds for non-Muslims, there is also the bizarre tale of an openly gay Muslim ruler and his cross-dressing lover.

So in Delhi there was an era of permissiveness and intimate contact. The manner in which Amir Khusro completely glosses over Khilji's homosexuality and the surrounding palace intrigue of that era should lead us to question the credibility of his historical records. In stark contrast to Khusro's sycophantic narrative is the raw detail of that era captured in chronicles like *Kitab-i-Yamini*, *Tabakat-Nasiri*, the two *Tarikh-i-Firoze-Shahis* and the *Futuh-at-i-Firoze-Shahi*.

The British era compilation titled, *The history of India as told by its own historians* and available digitally on Google Books fills the gaps on many works that do not have independently available English translations. Also noteworthy is the digitally available copy of the *Early*

Records of British India by J Talboys Wheeler that completes the picture on the dysfunctional nature of political and administrative engagement between islands of Hindu and Muslim controlled India as the Mughal Empire declined.

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is often quoted on his sage advice that a book must be answered with a book. The Left's politically correct reconstruction of Indian history and the Left's claim to a monopoly on diversity and dissent must be challenged by an alternative tradition that is neither burdened by political correctness nor overwhelmed by victimhood. Perhaps a beginning can be made with a popular reconstruction of medieval history.

PUBLIC POLICY

An eye on identity

Subimal Bhattacharjee

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) completed a year of the launch of the Unique Identification number (UID), Aadhaar, on September 29. The Authority has already enrolled 100 million individuals and generated more than 37.5 million UID numbers. It has also achieved the fantastic feat of enrolling 1 million residents in one day and is progressing well towards reaching its mandate of generating 600 million numbers by 2014. As of now, it has achieved the capability of enrolling 400 million persons per year.

Despite such good progress, there have been questions on cost escalation, the Authority's scope of work and the wisdom of running such a massive programme. The Union finance and home ministries as well as the Planning Commission (to which the Authority is attached) have also expressed their concerns on the way the project is moving forward. With the National Population Registry (NPR) being created as part of the Census 2011 operations and its enrolment process almost similar to the UIDAI, there have been questions on the duplication of work (enrolment) and the costs involved. After these concerns were raised, the Authority came out to explain the uniqueness of the UID project and the fact that the Indian government has already pledged financial support to it.

But there are a few issues that need to be addressed so that the vision and approach behind Aadhaar remain clear and it can achieve its targets within the set timeframe. On the controversy around the duplication of work issue, the Cabinet Committee on UID is supposed to meet very soon to clear the air.

To understand the issues at hand, it is important to go into the heart of the confusion. In its mandate, the Authority has clearly laid down how it would build the required technical infrastructure and network to support the enrolment process and generate and distribute the UID numbers. The Authority plans to leverage the existing infrastructure (both in the government and private sector) and also act as a regulatory authority. It will manage the Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR), which will issue the UID numbers, update residents' information and authenticate identity of residents.

In the process, the Authority will involve multiple registrars to facilitate the enrolment process and interact with the residents. About 50 registrars — mostly state governments, Life Insurance Corporation of India, banks, oil companies and the National Population Registry — have started doing this job of collecting demographic information and biometric details (photo, fingerprints and iris of all residents over the age five years).

The trouble started with the NPR doubting the authenticity of the data being collected by the registrars, forgetting that much of such data is being collected by government agencies and employees who are also NPR's foot-soldiers. In fact, in March, the Authority and the Registry signed a Memorandum of Understanding on how they can work together. To avoid any duplication, they decided to follow this procedure: the Registry after collecting its data would send them to the Authority and the latter would then de-duplicate and generate an Aadhaar number.

But there is another problem: other registrars have already started enrolling residents and there would be a huge database of duplicate information. So what can be done about these since the costs of collecting biometric data (particularly iris) is high. According to some estimates, these duplicate databases could cost the government more than a couple of thousand of crores of rupees.

The question remains that since it was well known that the NPR would be generated around the Census 2011, why was it not aligned to the Authority's registry selection process? In fact, the other registrars should have been given a specific mandate or NPR should have been mandated to use the database of the other registrars of the Authority.

Both these projects have advantages and disadvantages. But now it is important to take a decision on these problems since the next 500 million in the current phase and the remaining 600 million will cover the total population of India. The duplication around the issuance of identity cards should be addressed at this stage. Moreover, there should be an effort to make both processes homologous since there are now discussions that Aadhaar numbers will be printed on identity cards and the NPR respondents will also receive this in the same format.

Further, a midcourse review of the security and confidentiality systems governing such a massive central registry and the registrars' databases must be made to ensure that the systems are hacker-proof.

Since the online authentication will be done on a massive scale, it will be wise to evaluate the robustness of the technology, its scalability and the resilience of the infrastructure. It is only when the security and sustainability of the project is verified, can it give other countries a chance of exploring the possibility of implementing such a scheme.

However, at this point, it is most important to save the taxpayers' money from being spent unwisely and strengthen the Authority to accomplish its mission.

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