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EDUCATION

New Lessons

Given the occasional stridency and the volatile nature of the debate about attacks on Indian students in Australia that has raged for the past few months, the fallout has been interesting to observe. For the most part, New Delhi has handled the matter admirably, taking a firm stand on the safety of Indian citizens but refusing the temptation of jingoistic rhetoric. Even more interesting as an illustration of its successful diplomacy has been the way it has managed to create opportunity out of the entire troubling affair. It might have been a low-key development, but the announcement of an India-Australia education council during Union minister of human resource development Kapil Sibal's recent trip to Australia could provide a template for broadening the scope of bilateral relations with various countries, as well as strengthening the education sector.

The kind of education diplomacy this initiative represents bringing together the government, academia, business and industry of both countries to boost cooperation in education is not something that New Delhi has tried before. The timing for it is particularly propitious given the ongoing push to open the education sector to foreign universities. The obvious benefit of the council initiative if it is implemented properly is the enhancement of ties with Australia. But there are other benefits that could be more far-reaching.

The poster-child of India's economic growth has been its IT industry, but it is dogged by the perception that western companies funnel low-skill, high-quantity work to it while retaining projects higher up the food chain for themselves. The reality is that this is simply no longer the case. Increasingly, developing nations, including India, are becoming hubs for

low-cost but high-impact innovation that has revolutionised the market in industries as diverse as automobiles and cellphones. But if India wishes to sustain this, it must deal with the problem of an education sector that is moribund on many levels, capable in elite niches of inculcating technical excellence but severely lacking when it comes to research and development.

This is where the council and others like it can be of tremendous help. When it comes to innovation and research, western universities remain unparalleled. If New Delhi could leverage their expertise establishing cooperative initiatives at the highest level to draw upon their best practices and experience it would accelerate the process of establishing and attracting world-class universities. And for foreign universities, the incentives would be obvious; a vast, talented labour pool to drive research projects. As far as diplomacy goes, such opportunities for mutual benefit must be leveraged if India is to become a knowledge power.

ENVIRONMENT

Still cutting edge

Anuradha Srivastava

In a progressive move, the University Grants Commission (UGC) is considering banning animal dissections from the zoology and life sciences curricula. As a veterinarian and someone who cares about both animals and science, I urge the UGC to make the progressive and scientifically sound decision to end the cutting up of animals in classrooms. Banning dissection would not only save the lives of countless animals every year, but it will also ensure that every student benefits from the very latest and most effective teaching methods.

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that even those students who have not thought about the moral implications of harming animals as part of their coursework may not be learning to their fullest potential when dissection is part of the course. Dozens of studies show that non-animal teaching methods — like virtual dissection software — have an equal or even superior ability to provide students with an understanding of anatomy and complex biological processes.

A recently published peer-reviewed report examined 17 studies and found that the results associated with the non-animal method of instruction were, in each case, as good as — and in some cases better than — the results associated with dissection. Non-animal teaching methods are also associated with increased learning efficiency, higher examination scores, student confidence and satisfaction.

The use of non-animal learning methods also improves the preparedness of students pursuing careers in medicine. Nearly 95 per cent of

America's medical schools, including institutions such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford, have discontinued the use of live animals in teaching. No US medical school expects or requires students to have dissected animals.

Students forced to dissect animals when they ethically oppose to it may lose interest in pursuing scientific careers, according to a number of published research articles. Imagine the contributions from thoughtful, compassionate and promising young scientists we have lost because these young people would not consider the thought of violating their principles?

A one-time purchase of a computer programme can be used to teach an unlimited number of students for years on end. Ending dissection is the right choice for universities, students, animals and the future of scientific research.

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The views expressed by the author are personal

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

SAARC: From Dhaka to Thimpu

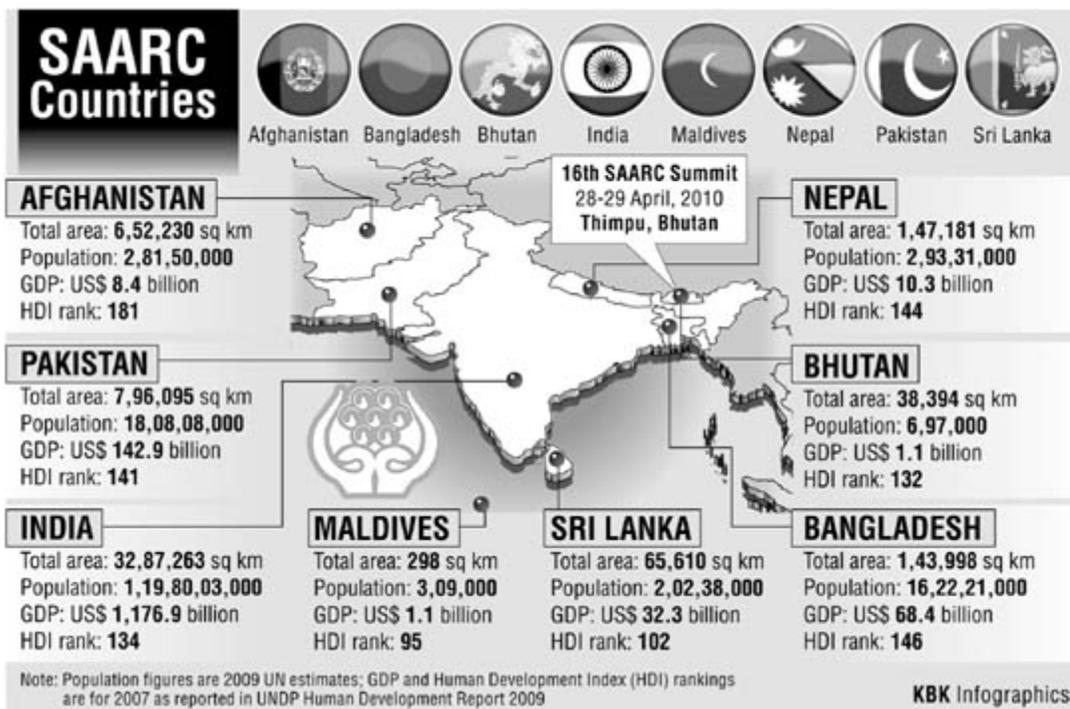
Regional cooperation holds the key to prosperity in South Asia

Eduardo Faleiro

THE Sixteenth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will be held in Thimpu, Bhutan, on April 28-29, 2010. The little Himalayan kingdom is all set to host the summit this time after skipping it thrice due to its poor infrastructure.

SAARC was created in 1985 to promote economic development and social progress in South Asia through regional cooperation. Presently, it has eight members — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India was the Chair of the SAARC Summit in 2007 and this was arguably the most productive summit that SAARC ever witnessed. The launching of negotiations to bring services into the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA), the unilateral granting of zero duty access by India to SAARC Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the formal induction of Afghanistan into SAARC as the eighth member, the setting up of the South Asian University, the establishment of the SAARC Food Bank and the SAARC Development Fund, the signing of the Convention on Mutual Assistance on Criminal Matters were significant steps for regional integration taken at the Delhi Summit. The momentum generated was carried forward by the SAARC Summit in Colombo in 2008.



The economic and social welfare of a country is greatly advanced if it interacts as part of a regional block rather than individually. The emergence of a number of regional blocks in Asia, Africa and America are evidence of this reality.

An integrated regional economy accelerates the economic growth of member countries through the advantages of geographical proximity and economies of scale. Furthermore, member countries enjoy better leverage in dealing with the global systems of finance, investment, and trade.

A regional block also provides a stabilising cushion from the destabilising fluctuations in the global economy. Regional cooperation is pivotal for prosperity in South Asia. Economic synergy often leads to solutions of disputes including political differences. However, intra-regional trade among SAARC countries is at present less than 5 per cent, whilst it is 62 per cent in the European Union, 55 per cent in the North American Free Trade Area and 35 per cent in the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations. SAFTA is the first step towards a more intense synergy which should ultimately lead to a South Asian Union and a single currency.

Though the governments of SAARC nations have made efforts since independence to improve the condition of their people, these attempts are often thwarted by multifarious religious, ethnic and linguistic problems. Discontent and frustration among the masses, faced with such tribulations, emboldens subversive forces both within and outside to exploit national inadequacies.

The solution to our common predicament requires peace and an atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation rather than of conflict and confrontation. Peace is essential for national as well as regional prosperity. For centuries, the European continent was the stage of power rivalries and war. Now Europe appears to be a rather peaceful continent. The very first step towards peace was found in the doctrine of “defense and détente”. While defense is an element indispensable in uncertain circumstances, detente stands for dialogue, arms control, the exchange of views at all levels and alternative thinking.

Detente influences the understanding of a situation and broadens the scope of ideas on how to deal with a tense situation that causes war and affects the image of a country abroad. Europe has now progressed beyond “defense and détente” and has entered the path of effective regional integration.

Bilateral agreements between countries of South Asia are mutually beneficial. The Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement became operational in 2000 and has produced good results within a short time. The Indo-Nepal Trade Treaty is also a good example of bilateral cooperation. India has now bilateral agreements with Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. There are problems sometimes and stumbling blocks on the way to economic cooperation but they should be removed in the larger interests of all the countries.

It is sometimes claimed that unless economic cooperation between India and Pakistan is normalised, South Asian economic cooperation will not succeed. The normalisation of trade relations between the two countries is indeed crucial for SAARC success.

India, Pakistan and other SAARC members ought to join hands across national borders and religious differences, agree on zero tolerance towards every form of extremism and terrorism and redress the grievances of the disaffected and marginalised. They must beware of the machinations of neo-imperialism and its strategy to divide and rule.

Civil society, intelligentsia, the business community and NGOs should also promote awareness about the need and advantage of regional cooperation. There ought to be a much greater interaction between civil society and the political class across the different countries of South Asia. Regrettably, such an interaction is minimal.

South Asia continues to have the highest number of people in the world living below the poverty line, outstripping sub-Saharan Africa in this regard. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), among the 154 countries for which data are available, 28 are not expected to attain any of the three objectives which the international community gathered at the World Education Forum had agreed should be achieved by all nations by 2015.

The three goals are: universal primary education, free schooling of acceptable quality, and the removal of gender disparities in education. All the countries of South Asia with the exception of Sri Lanka are among these 28 countries.

Regrettably, the subcontinent invests more in armaments than in social infrastructure. India and Pakistan spend more than three times as much on weaponry as they do on education or health. There ought to be a drastic reduction in the defence expenditures of both countries so that

our scarce resources are utilised towards our people's welfare rather than on the purchase of military hardware from abroad.

The ensuing SAARC summit is an appropriate occasion for both India and Pakistan to initiate a serious and responsible dialogue which should include all issues of concern between the two countries.

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Peace, Not Partition

MADHU PURNIMA KISHWAR

While it is imperative for India's well-being that we seek a peaceful resolution of our long-standing conflict with Pakistan without resort to war, it is equally important that we do not make peace with the ideology that created Pakistan through India's bloody partition in 1947. That would mean accepting the perverse notion that Hindus and Muslims cannot coexist peacefully within the same nation and society. Pakistan can afford to hold tight to that destructive ideology because it allowed a near-total ethnic cleansing of Hindus, Sikhs and other minorities at the time of partition. But Mahatma Gandhi and his colleagues had the good sense to avoid making India a mirror image of Pakistani state and society.

The core issue for Pakistan is Kashmir. But the core issue for India is not just terrorism but protecting our pluralist democracy. Kashmir is not mere territory to be kept under Indian jurisdiction at all costs. But we cannot accept the Pakistani agenda because that would mean accepting the logic of partition: that within the territory of each arbitrarily carved out nation state, every ethnic majority of its region is entitled to subjugate, eliminate or push out a minority. That will push us to the inexorable logic of a nation state where tragedy after tragedy of ethnic cleansing, murderous riots and political chaos overtakes its democratic and secular character.

As long as the subcontinent's Hindus and Muslims believed they were two religious-cultural communities living and sharing a common soil, they could easily work out decent norms for co-living on the basis of

other common layers of identity such as language, village and culture. But once the corrosive power of ethnic nationalism invaded us from Europe in the late-19th and early-20th century, religious differences began to be dragged into the realm of politics for mobilising communal monoliths. Once a group begins to subjugate its multi-layered identities in favour of one single voracious identity, especially if that identity is acquired politically and asserted as a nationality primarily in opposition to some other group, rather than used for self expression and internal cultural bonding, it becomes a sure recipe for civil strife and inter-group enmity.

Muslim politics in the subcontinent moved through distinct phases in the 20th century. It started with Sir Syed Ahmed describing Hindus and Muslims as the "two eyes of Bharat Mata". Thereafter, it moved on to dealing with power imbalances within the framework of sibling relationships with Hindus described as elder brothers who needed to take the extra step to accommodate the aspirations of their younger Muslims brothers. It required the genius of Iqbal and Jinnah to convince themselves and their followers that "the two eyes of Bharat Mata" were actually two irreconcilable nationalities.

Iqbal, the leading brain behind the idea of Pakistan, had in his early years composed many a beautiful verse in praise of the composite culture of Hindustan. His famous poem, 'Sare jahan se achchha Hindustan hamara' evokes a sentimental image of Hindus and Muslims singing joyously together in the same gulistan (garden). However, he rejected Indian nationalism after returning from Europe in 1908 and became obsessed with forging Muslim solidarity as a distinct 'nationality'. His demand for Pakistan was based on the head-counting majoritarian principle imbibed from Europe.

Jinnah succeeded in convincing a section of Muslims that they were a monolithic community incapable of peaceful coexistence with Hindus. Consequently, millions were uprooted from their homes and the land

they considered their own. The logic of majoritarianism identifying a group by certain objective characteristics, and then claiming the right to drive them out or subjugate them as a hated minority is inherently arbitrary and divisive.

The Pakistani claim to Kashmir rests on the assumption that Muslim-majority J&K should become part of Pakistan. Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment has a deep vested interest in keeping the Kashmir issue on permanent boil to destroy India's pluralist democracy. Jihadi rhetoric and the politics that goes with it allow them to keep their people in a permanent state of frenzy, overshadowing important issues related to internal politics and government accountability, thus allowing Pakistan's army an excessively prominent role in the political, administrative, cultural and even religious life of the country. If Pakistanis see Hindus and Muslims live peacefully in India, they are bound to question the need for partition.

The inability of Pakistan-inspired secessionists to carry even a token minority of Kashmiri Pandits of the Valley, Buddhists of Ladakh, Dogras, Gujjars, Sikhs and other minorities of J&K, along with them, shows that the slogan of "azadi" is not proof of their democratic credentials. It is only a cover for the Pakistani agenda of forcing yet another partition on the basis of religion. This ideology leads a section of Hindus to believe that if Muslims cannot coexist peacefully with them in areas where Muslims are a majority, why should Hindus be forced to live with Muslims where Hindus are a majority? Why should there be plebiscite only in Kashmir? Why not all over India? But that would mean India becoming another Pakistan a fate we should avoid at all costs for it means destroying the core values of our culture and civilisation.

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LAW

Lawmakers beyond law:Need to promote constitutional literacy

Jagdeep S. Chhokar

THE period of nine days from March 18 to 27, 2010 will remain etched in the memory of observers of the functioning of legislatures in the states, particularly in Punjab. The importance of the period is that it shows a rare moment of candor on the part of legislators, an attempted legislative overreach, and that it contains lessons for all the legislatures in the country.

First a gist of the reports in The Tribune. The matter came to public notice first on March 17 when the Speaker, on enquiry from an MLA during the zero hour, read out a letter that the Deputy Speaker had written to him on March 11. Complimenting the Speaker on his magnanimity in pardoning Leader of the Opposition on the charge of hurting the image of the position of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker expected the atmosphere in the House will become cordial in future.

Wanting “to go a step further”, he wrote that “the House must pass a resolution for withdrawal of court cases associated with important people (political leaders).” Not wanting to be accused of being vague and general, the Deputy Speaker clarified, “In particular I am referring to cases against Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, Minister Ajit Singh Kochar, Captain Amarinder Singh, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and others.”

He was confident that this will improve the political atmosphere of the state and prove to be very beneficial to the development of the state. He concluded by saying, “If this happens, Punjab could get on the road to progress and emerge as the number one state.”

The proposal seemed to have been widely supported with calls to end political vendetta. Several worthies expressed a desire to go even further than the Deputy Speaker and include all “political workers” in this attempt to improve the political atmosphere and put the state on a firm path to development.

There was also the expected bickering with members of every political party attributing motives to the others. The excitement finally abated with the sobering opinion of the Punjab Advocate General that the House had “no powers to interfere in the matter.”

What does this episode tell us and what can we learn from it? For a constitutional functionary to propose passing of patently unconstitutional resolution by the legislative assembly should alert us to the acute need for much greater constitutional literacy.

The legislators seemed to be unaware of the principal of separation of powers between the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, one of the basic features of the Constitution. This is the essence of “education for citizenship” that is sorely lacking in the country, which can create awareness, active and responsible citizens and mitigate the apathy that is often mentioned to be the cause of most of our social ills.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, is reported to have described a citizen as “one who knows how to be ruled and also how to rule.” The mistaken notion that once elected, the elected representatives can do whatever they like afflicts not only the elected representatives but also a vast majority of electors.

Aristotelian citizens would realise that what the legislature can and should do and what they cannot and should not do, is not determined by resolutions passed in the House but by the Constitution of the country, which also determines what kind of resolutions can be or cannot be passed.

The episode also gives an inside look at the state of the “rule of law” in the country. We must remember that law and order is a state subject. An almost unconditional admission that cases have indeed been instituted on the basis of what is called “political vendetta”, and an implicit acknowledgement of having used (or misused) the law and order machinery for partisan purposes, is unlikely to create a cordial and congenial atmosphere in the state as far as the common populace of the state is concerned. It proves the painful fact that not only is the law and order machinery being misused for partisan political purposes, it is also being prevented from doing its legitimate duties that it owes to the common folk.

With the admission establishing that there are indeed cases which have been instituted because of political vendetta and therefore which may not have a basis in fact, also raises the issue of the loss or wastage of public resources on these seemingly frivolous cases at the behest of the state. It is anyone’s guess what will be the quantum of money if all types of resources such as time, effort, etc. could be quantified in terms of money but it is likely to be substantial.

This episode also highlights the prevailing confusion about the role of legislators and legislatures. All the legislatures, in states as well as Parliament, spend hardly any real, clock time on their main function, legislating, and end up spending most of their time, and even the effort, on executive activities or blocking actions of one or the other agencies. Notwithstanding the pretensions of the District Collectors being the appropriate authority for sanctioning and getting the projects done, the MPLADS and MLALADS schemes are a blatant example of legislators usurping executive authority by the back door.

The confusion about the role of legislators also exists in the mind of the citizens who tend to “approach” the legislatures with requests to get all kinds of executive work done. The legislators are, of course, always happy to oblige in a mutually reinforcing manner.

What can be done to first reduce and then eliminate this malaise? A possible answer lies in education — that of the legislators and of the citizens. Legislators will, of course, consider it presumptuous for any one to suggest that they need to be educated or trained but there seems to be dire need for our legislators to understand the intent and the philosophy of our Constitution and also its working.

There seem to be some attempts at training of newly elected legislators, including members of Parliament, but they seem to be limited to procedural matters. The citizens, on the other hand, need to learn not only their right but also their responsibilities and duties, and how to fulfil them.

The most important lesson for citizens is, to put it in the words of former US Supreme Court judge Felix Frankfurter, “no office in the land is more important than that of being a citizen.”

The writer is a former Dean and Director-in-charge, IIM, Ahmedabad

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Not Just The Centre

The BJP rally against price rise in the capital on Wednesday was the party's first road show since it got a new president. Nitin Gadkari couldn't quite hold out in the summer sun and had to shift to the shade. Will the UPA government fare better as the heat from soaring food prices gets to it? It will look for solace in monsoon predictions for this year, expected to be a lot better than last year. So, price rise may be blunted in coming months. The opposition, of course, won't wait that long. The Left parties and the BJP blame the Centre for the runaway prices. The concern is valid and welcome. But is food inflation the sole charge of the Union government? Should not state governments partake of some of the blame for wrong policies that have created bottlenecks in the production and distribution of essentials like cereals, sugar and vegetables?

The point is, state governments and the Centre must work in tandem if food prices are to be brought under control. Opposition parties that take to the streets to protest the price rise rarely recognise this link. They find in the food crisis a convenient tool for political mobilisation. Few of them back up their attack on the Centre's policies with an alternative plan. A rollback of fuel prices alone is unlikely to help matters, it will simply kick the inflation football down the road. State governments, many of them led by parties outside the UPA, can intervene effectively in food production and distribution processes. Better productivity and less wastage of produce will help to contain prices and benefit both producers and consumers. Nothing prevents them from acting on these matters.

PUBLIC POLICY

And Accountability For All

RAJIV DESAI

In many ways, the government has embarked on a path-breaking route, in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. For instance, sometime ago, the issue of fertiliser subsidies came up. In one fell swoop, the government changed the game by targeting subsidies on the basis of nutrients. Thanks to the policy change, farmers will look to nutrients other than urea. This will increase yields dramatically. Urea-based fertilisers were once good and government policies championed their use. Over the years, it became clear that they had passed the point of diminishing returns. Everywhere in the world, governments have promoted sulphur-based and other nutrients in the mix to increase yields and protect the soil.

With all the noise about food inflation, the government has pointed to the exploitative role of middlemen in the journey farm products make from the fields to the market. In recent times, the finance minister has made several references to the need for organised retail in the grocery business, most recently at the CII national meeting in Delhi.

Coming to taxes, the finance minister cut individual taxes while increasing some indirect levies. The idea is sterling: put more money in the hands of middle-class families and let them decide what they can or cannot afford. If I am considering buying a car and it costs a few thousand rupees more, it is my call. By putting economic decisions in the citizens' hands, the government has been making a major paradigm shift.

The emphasis on infrastructure is also welcome. Roads, ports, airports and railroads are being built. The trouble is that modern infrastructure is at the disposal of government agencies and citizens with zero ethics or civic consciousness. Thus, it gets caught up in bottlenecks caused by lackadaisical enforcement and citizens who habitually violate the law.

For instance, many cities now have modern airports. They are like white elephants because, the minute you step outside, there is total chaos. It's the same thing for highways. We recently travelled to Chandigarh from Delhi. The road is work-in-progress and there are significant flyovers and wide pavements. But there is total traffic chaos.

Even as you rev to the top speed of 90 km per hour, you find yourself having to deal with vehicles going the wrong way, underpowered trucks, three-wheeled vehicles, bullock carts, cycle rickshaws, handcarts, herds of cows and sheep and, scariest of all, daredevil pedestrians trying to cross the highway. They make the journey a nightmare. There is simply no policing, no signage or other facilities that go with modern highways. It's almost as though modern amenities are made available to citizens with a pre-modern mindset by officials with no clue about modernity.

The tragedy is that the police have no authority to enforce the law. Even worse, they don't even know the law. Just recently, I stopped a police car on the spanking new expressway that connects Delhi and Gurgaon to airports. I told the police officer that the unchecked use of the expressway by two- and three-wheeled vehicles was a major traffic violation and that there were signs that these vehicles were not allowed. He told me to mind my own business. The government needs to show its hard-headedness in such matters as much as it is doing with the Maoists in central India.

Talking of internal security, the government has made major moves. It has taken on the Maoist movement with force. True, there are complaints of security forces riding roughshod over the ultras. But then,

the Maoists are not known for grace and diplomacy either. A tough approach will not only contain the insurgents but also send a clear message that this is a hard government that will not stomach violent agitations.

On national security, the government has embarked on a new course. Even while initiating talks with Pakistan, it authorised a major air force exercise sometime ago in the Rajasthan desert to demonstrate its fighting capabilities. It was a brilliant move to invite most defence attaches of diplomatic missions, leaving out the representatives of China and Pakistan. The idea was to exhibit hard power.

To reinforce the government's hard line, the prime minister went to Saudi Arabia and urged its authorities to weigh in with Pakistan to control terrorist groups operating from there. It is clear Pakistan's government has neither the wherewithal nor the will to rein in various terrorist groups with a free run within the country's borders. A Saudi nudge could go a long way to boost the crippled civilian government against rogue elements within the army and intelligence agency.

In the end, however, you have in India an enlightened government beset by a crude political class, a malignant bureaucracy and a pre-modern citizenry. Also, the ship of state seems unable to deal with casteism, communalism and corruption. Bureaucrats blame crass politicians and the ignorant citizenry. Politicians castigate the bureaucracy. Citizens berate politicians and bureaucrats. It's a sort of beggar-thy-neighbour view enabling the entire system to elude responsibility. If everyone's to blame, nobody is accountable. What's clear is that citizens have to take on responsibility; blaming the government and politicians is not enough.

The writer is a public affairs commentator.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

MCD officials held for threatening RTI applicant

Dwaipayan Ghosh

NEW DELHI: Two MCD engineers have been arrested in northeast district after they allegedly threatened an activist who had filed an RTI application seeking details of illegal construction in Shahdara (North).

"We have arrested the engineers — assistant engineer Umesh Singh and executive engineer B M N Rao. Our investigation revealed the two had gone to the house of the complainant in Dilshad Garden and threatened him. The third accused — junior engineer Hari Singh — is yet to be arrested. We have certain leads and will arrest him soon," said S S Yadav, DCP (northeast).

The arrests came after the victim approached the information commissioner Shailesh Gandhi, seeking help when the local police did not take him seriously. Incidentally, a few policemen from the area were recently suspended by senior officers after they allegedly helped a trader kill his maid in Ghaziabad. Sources said when the activist approached Gandhi, the local policemen feared action against them and some progress was made in the case.

Mohit Sharma, 33, had filed an RTI application seeking information from the MCD on unauthorized constructions in Shahdara (north). Instead of furnishing the details, MCD engineers tried to put pressure on him to back out. When Sharma refused to comply, they landed at his house and threatened him with "dire consequences".

Sharma complained about the engineers at the Seemapuri police station

but he got no relief. Sources said that when Ghandi came to know about Sharma's struggle, he wrote a letter to police commissioner Y S Dadwal. In his letter, he urged the police chief to look into the matter. A few days later a case was registered against the accused.

According to the FIR, Umesh had threatened Sharma directly. "You are too young to play such dangerous games. It is like playing with fire," he reportedly told the activist. "Umesh also told me that no one can survive after clashing with MCD officials. I will demolish your home" claimed Sharma in his complaint.

NGOs getting govt aid in RTI ambit: HC

NEW DELHI: The Delhi high court has held that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which get government funds should come under the purview of RTI Act making it mandatory for them to disclose information pertaining to their functioning.

"The term public authority has been given a broad meaning not only to include bodies which are owned, controlled or substantially financed directly or indirectly by the government but even NGOs, which are financed directly or indirectly by the government," justice Sanjeev Khanna said while declaring the stock exchanges as public authorities in a recent order.

The court said it is not necessary that the government should have pervasive and deep control over an organization to bring it under the purview of the Transparency Act. "Even private organizations, which are enjoying benefit of substantial funding directly or indirectly from the governments, fall within the definition of public authorities under the Act," the court said.

The court made these observations while passing an order on a petition filed by the National Stock Exchange (NSE) challenging a Central Information Commission order which had directed it to disclose information under the Act. The court dismissed the NSE plea that it cannot be forced to reveal information to public under RTI.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The caste basis of Indian socialism

Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

I have written repeatedly that socialist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, as well as left intellectuals, suffered from a deep inferiority complex. They simply did not believe Indian business could compete globally.

My view has been contested hotly by some readers. One says there was no trace of inferiority in Nehru's Discovery of India, or in Constituent Assembly and Lok Sabha debates. "It sounds illogical that Nehru and others who spent the better part of their lives fighting for independence on the grounds that we were competent enough to rule ourselves, should after independence feel inferior to the ousted colonial powers." When Gandhiji was asked what he thought of western civilisation, he quipped "it would be a good idea" Very funny and very superior.

Yes, early leaders of independent India saw themselves as morally, civilisationally, and intellectually superior to whites. Many were also bitterly critical and ashamed of the caste system and Indian feudalism, and sought to modernise traditional social structures. Nevertheless they claimed moral superiority.

Yet this superiority complex on morality co-existed with an inferiority complex on business. Leaders claimed that Indian industry had been stunted by British rule. So, did they plan to open up and compete globally after a transition period to overcome the alleged British stunting? Not at all. As a matter of principle they sought self sufficiency

over trade, and attacked foreign investment, to attain what they called economic independence to buttress political independence.

This approach, they claimed, reflected not an inferiority complex but the superiority of their socialist thinking. Many had witnessed the collapse of capitalism during the 1930s, and saw the Soviet model as the one to follow. Yet their lack of intellectual honesty was plain in their refusal to draw lessons from the phenomenal post-war success of capitalist countries — including Germany and Japan, the losers of World War II — which soon left the Soviets far behind.

Anand Chandavarkar's recent book *Unexplored Keynes and Other Essays* has a lovely anecdote about Nehru's unwillingness to see beyond Fabian socialism. Nehru asked B P Adarkar, Trade Commissioner to West Germany, "What is the secret of Germany's phenomenal economic recovery?" Adarkar forthrightly responded: "Mr Prime Minister, I know the answer but you will not like it. It is free enterprise." An impassive Nehru merely looked out of the plane window!

Some socialists — intellectuals and politicians — defended their policies on the ground that infant industry protection was legitimate, mainstream economics. Yet they did not bat an eyelid in protecting textiles, the second oldest industry in the world after prostitution. Indian socialists sought to protect infants, geriatrics and all others without discrimination. For all their claims to moral superiority this reflected a deep inferiority complex in economic matters.

Rajni Kothari and several other contributors to *Economic and Political Weekly* forecast in 1991 that economic reforms would make Indian industry collapse or become indentured labour to MNCs. They also claimed that accepting patents in the Uruguay Round would destroy India's pharma industry. Events soon proved them economically

illiterate and intellectually bankrupt. Kothari moaned in 1989 that India had moved from self-reliance to Reliance. He could not even conceive that it would be a change for the better!

Nimai Mehta of American University makes a separate point. Nehru and other Indian leaders did not have an inferiority complex, he says. Rather, they had a superiority banias complex with respect to their own citizens — shudras and lower castes — whom they regarded as lesser mortals requiring a guiding hand from great minds. “The trade of ordinary Indians, whether in gold or food grains, was suspect from the start. In this sense, Nehru perhaps was equally infected by what Hayek has termed as socialism's fatal conceit — the belief that others should live their lives as per his wishes.”

Mehta is right. Nehru and Co felt that Indian Brahmin-intellectuals were superior to whites, but also that Indian marwaris and banias were inferior. Their superiority complex on the moral and intellectual plane co-existed with a deep inferiority complex on the business plane. Their solution was to go for central planning. This approach assumed that benevolent planners knew better than producers or consumers what should be produced or consumed. The licence-permit raj asserted that people were best off when they had no power at all to decide what should be produced or consumed — that was best left to the rulers!

But this was more than what Hayek called the fatal conceit of socialism. Their socialist conceit was compounded by caste conceit. India's high-caste leaders could not stand the marwari and refused to believe that any economy could thrive if it gave marwaris more freedom than Brahmins.

Let me quote a telling passage from Nehru's Autobiography.

“Right through history, the old Indian ideal did not glorify political and military triumph, and it looked down upon money and the professional

money-making class. Honour and wealth did not go together, and honour was meant to go, at least in theory, to the men who served the community with little in the shape of financial regard.” (Readers, please note this was Nehru's own Brahminical viewpoint: non-Brahmins like Shivaji and Jagat Seth would have disagreed.) “The old culture managed to live through many a fierce storm and tempest, but though it kept its outer form, it lost its real content. Today it is fighting silently and desperately against a new and all-powerful opponent — the bania civilisation of the capitalist West. It will succumb to the newcomer, for the West brings science, and science brings food for the hungry millions. But the West also brings an antidote to the evils of this cut-throat civilisation — the principles of socialism, of cooperation, and service to the community for the common good. This is not so unlike the old Brahmin idea of service.”

So there you have it from the horse's mouth. Nehru himself says that socialism is a form of casteism, one that rightly puts the bania in his place. Will today's socialists please own up too?