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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Fragile recovery: Global economic upturn may help India

Jayshree Sengupta

INDIA has a few serious economic problems that are surfacing clearly as we are coming out of the global financial crisis. Number one is inflation, which is almost double digit at 9.9. First only food articles were getting expensive, but now all other items in the basket for the wholesale price index are becoming dearer. The only way out for the government was to let the RBI raise the interest rates and the cash reserve ratio of banks to act as a brake on inflation. The RBI recently hiked the repo and reverse repo rates (overnight lending and borrowing rates) to 5.25 per cent and 3.25 per cent. These can be translated later to a hike in bank lending and deposit rates.

The cash reserve ratio or the portion of deposits that banks park with the RBI has been raised to 6 per cent. This may have the effect of sucking out liquidity from the market as less cash would be available for lending. People will be putting money in the banks instead of consuming more goods, and thus the demand push inflation will be controlled.

Second, many manufacturers are facing a cut-throat competition from China. The Indian rupee has been rising against the dollar, but no amount of pressure is working on China's determination not to revalue the yuan against the dollar. China has a \$16 billion trade surplus against India.

Recently when External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna went to China

he complained about the burgeoning trade surplus China has with India. Chinese exports have been growing at 17 per cent. China has to import more from India, the US and other countries. Recently it has declared that after six years it is experiencing a trade deficit of \$7.2 billion. This probably goes to show that China is importing a lot of raw materials and other inputs needed for its manufacturing industries from the rest of the world. Its GDP growth has been impressive at 11 per cent in March.

Many economists are sounding alarm bells regarding the deteriorating current account situation (the summary of trade flows of goods and services, including remittances from Indian migrant workers abroad), and what it would mean in terms of depreciation of the rupee. But contrary to what such a situation demands, the rupee is strengthening. India, however, does not have much to fear because it has nearly \$300 billion in reserves. Thus, there is little reason to expect a sovereign bankruptcy but individual pain is possible as companies go bust, especially when they cannot compete with a formidable foreign rival (China).

The third problem is that of capital inflows into Indian markets. The problem of high value of the rupee against the dollar originates from the huge inflow of foreign institutional investments (FIIs) into the Indian financial market. This has been happening over the last few months and the government has resisted taking a drastic policy measure to abate the flow. The recent inflow of FIIs has been due to the high interest rates in emerging markets like India.

All over the world, the interest rates have been kept low to encourage and sustain recovery. But in India the interest rates have been slowly hiked to contain inflation, which has also made this country an attractive destination for parking funds by foreign investors. Also the stock market has been on an upswing and crossed 17K and, therefore, the returns are relatively higher than in other markets. It is this

uncontrolled inflow which is increasing the supply of dollars in the financial system and leading to the hardening of the rupee. If the RBI had intervened, it would have bought dollars from the financial markets. But this has not happened.

The hike in the interest rates may further exacerbate the dollar inflows and lead to the hardening of the rupee to less than Rs 44 which will hurt exporters more. If exports slow down from their recent recovery phase - it did so for 13 months --- industrial growth will also decline because 12 per cent of industrial production is exported.

India's industrial growth has been impressive at 16.5 per cent in February and manufacturing growth, which is the main component of the index of industrial production, has been growing at 15 per cent in March. The interest rate hike will hurt industry where many units have just started undertaking fresh investments. There is a fear that this initiative will be thwarted. Even the demand for goods can be impacted if food inflation continues.

To control food inflation, the supply of essential commodities like pulses, sugar and cereals have to be enhanced. Otherwise the continued thrust and buoyancy of the consumer demand that even Tim Geithner, US Treasury Secretary, noticed about the Indian economy would peter out.

The fact remains that the recovery is still fragile, especially when exports are also dependent on the economic recovery of its global partners. Unless the global economy recovers, India cannot experience robust recovery and, as the Prime minister also hinted at, there is a growing fear of protectionism. The glitches common to all the emerging economies - inflation, exchange rate and capital account problems — will make it harder for the government to attain sustainable development, especially in backward areas. Already there is plenty of disturbing news about the rise of insurgency in these

backward regions which is going to be a security threat to investment.

Lastly, a rise in the interest rates will increase the debt service payments of the government because of its huge borrowings from the market. Interest payments already comprise 19 per cent of the government's total expenditure. During the last two years since the global financial crisis began, the government has been generously doling out money to boost the consumer demand as a result of which this cost has escalated. With the interest rate hike, the government may find it difficult to increase social spending to counter the ill-effects of inflation on the poor, who have not only suffered from job losses due to the recession of the last two years, but have also fought malnutrition. As is well known, India has the highest number of malnourished children in the world.

How to govern the country better with fewer resources and also have inclusive development programmes may be one of the key challenges before India. Like India, the problem of rising internal debt and its servicing is also plaguing some of the countries of Europe and they are facing a double-dip recession. According to the IMF, India's governmental debt is at 82 per cent of the GDP, up by 3 per cent from what it was two years ago. But India's growth prospects are higher and the country may be saved from the double-dip recession scenario.

EDUCATION

HINDU 24.4.10 EDUCATION

For access & excellence in higher education

M.A. Baby

The institutions to be set up by foreign educational providers are unlikely to improve access and quality. More public investment in higher education and academic collaboration with the best universities could bring in the desired results.

Kapil Sibal, the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, has claimed that access to, and the quality of the Indian higher education would improve substantially with the entry of foreign educational providers in the country. The new institutions would add to the opportunities available in higher education, thereby potentially increasing enrolment. Improvement of quality could occur both directly and indirectly. The off-campus centres would directly provide “world-class education” to the students who can afford it and indirectly ensure better performance of Indian institutions through competition, so goes his contention.

Such arguments assume that there are universal parameters for quality and that competition would inevitably bring about improvement of

quality.

The first of these assumptions ignores the organic character of higher education. Quality in education cannot be manufactured to order or transplanted across continents. It is rooted in the environment and the tradition in which it grows. It is linked up with time and milieu, with the project of nation-building. It evolves itself gradually. The short-cut of manufacturing quality through foreign universities or their Indian imitations ignores the importance of creativity. New knowledge is created through an arduous process of research. Scholars point out that the essence of modern research is interdisciplinarity, which is enriched through assimilation of knowledge from diverse sources, but degenerates through transplantation or imitation of external models. Courses transplanted across continents through off-campus centres will have little authenticity and relevance to the new environment.

The impact of even the best of off-campus courses of the best of universities delivered by the best of faculty on the overall quality of Indian education would be marginal. Our IITs and IIMs give us the clue. These have all along been isolated islands of excellence, contributing little to the general improvement of Indian higher education. While there may be some truth in the accusation of social insensitivity of these premier institutions, the reasons for their failure to significantly invigorate Indian higher education run deeper. External agencies can only play a minimal role in the process of quality enhancement. Improvement of quality is brought about through an internal process. External agencies can at best assist the process, but cannot substitute internal processes.

The unquestioning faith in the usefulness of competition is based on two myths: that the foreign educational providers would have the same mission as Indian universities and that both would share the same platform for their operations. The avowed mission of public universities in the country is to contribute to the project of nation-

building. It may be that a majority of the institutions have failed in their mission. The mission would still be potentially relevant in guiding their destinies. The public universities continue to undertake the study of basic disciplines, research and extension because of the compulsions of their vision and mission.

Would the foreign educational providers be bound by the mission of nation-building? It is very unlikely that foreign universities would be driven by altruistic motives of improving Indian higher education — which is what Mr. Sibal's bill would apparently expect — if it has no prospects of profits to offer. Those who come for profit are unlikely to invest in the study of basic disciplines and research where the prospects of immediate economic returns are not very promising.

Unhealthy competition

Given the colonial hangover for foreign labels, a substantial number of bright students are likely to prefer off-campus centres of second-rate foreign universities to the best of Indian universities. They would not only ruin their academic prospects, but also potentially contribute to the intellectual impoverishment of Indian institutions. Whatever little research is undertaken in the Indian institutions is likely to suffer as a result of unhealthy competition with foreign educational providers. In their struggle for survival, average universities might compete with foreign educational providers in offering marketable courses at competitive rates and neglect their primary responsibilities towards the study of basic disciplines, research and extension.

The National Knowledge Commission presumes that setting up 1,500 universities and 50,000 colleges could address the question of access. A mere increase in the number of institutions or seats alone would not ensure greater access. What we need is equitable access, which foreign educational providers will not provide, more so as there is no cap on the fees and no provision for reservation of seats — both of which

would tend to strengthen the existing inequities in Indian higher education. In a country like India where the majority of the people live below the poverty line, access to higher education would be critically dependent upon the quantum of subsidies available.

How, then, do we increase access to and quality in, higher education? The modernisation of higher education requires huge investments. The requirement of inclusiveness further demands massive public investment. At present, government expenditure on education as a whole is only 3.5 per cent of GNP. The sectoral allocation for higher education is a meagre 0.37 per cent of the GNP. Going by the recommendations of the Kothari Commission and a committee appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), public expenditure on education should be increased to at least 6 per cent of GNP, of which 25 per cent should be set apart for higher education. The promises made in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the first United Progressive Alliance government to gradually increase public expenditure on education to 6 per cent of GDP is yet to be acted upon. With all the rhetoric about the 11th Plan being an “education plan,” the actual allotment in the Plan for major schemes in higher education is estimated to be only 12 per cent of the actual requirement of Rs. 252,000 crore. The rest of the investment is sought to be raised through public-private-partnership (PPP), which could actually result in large-scale privatisation of public assets, thereby shrinking even the limited spaces available for the poor. The Central budget for higher education for the current fiscal shows only an increase of 15 per cent over the last year. This compares poorly with the 112 per cent increase in Kerala's budget for higher education over the same period.

Academic collaboration

Academic collaboration with the best of universities could help improve quality, unlike direct intervention by foreign educational providers. While such collaborations have always existed, we need to

increase their scope and extent in the future. As a matter of fact, efforts are being made in different parts of the country to promote collaborative learning. The Kerala State Higher Education Council, for example, has evolved two innovative schemes for national and international academic collaboration. The national-level programme envisages exchange of teachers between the universities in the State and universities in other States. Exchanges have already taken place between universities in Kerala and West Bengal. Tamil Nadu has evinced interest in such exchanges with universities in Kerala. The scheme is likely to be implemented in the next academic year.

The “Erudite” scheme which has been implemented in the State is a scholar-in-residence programme which provides avenues for teachers and students to collaborate with internationally reputed scholars. A large number of scholars including Nobel laureates have visited the universities in the State during the last one year. Testimonies of the teachers and students of these universities and the visiting scholars show that the benefits have been mutual. The essence of such mutually beneficial academic collaboration is partnership based on equality. It cannot be based on a relationship of superiority and inferiority. It has to recognise the kaleidoscopic character of quality in higher education and the value of mutually enriching collaborative learning processes.

(The writer is Minister for Education and Culture, Government of Kerala.)

E-GOVERNANCE

TIMES OF INDIA 27.4.10 E-GOVERNANCE

UID gets new name with 'national appeal'

NEW DELHI: Government's ambitious UID project was on renamed 'Aadhaar' and its new logo unveiled with chairman Nandan Nilekani underscoring that the scheme would lay the foundation for effectively delivering services especially to the poor.

Nilekani, chairman of Unique Identification Authority of India, said Aadhaar translates into a 'foundation' or 'support' and the project, aiming to give a 16-digit number to all citizens of the country starting from February next year, will now be known by the new name.

"We wanted a name that could effectively communicate its transformational potential and its promise to residents. Something that had a national appeal, that could be recognised across the country, could resonate in different languages and easy to remember and speak," he told reporters, adding the acronym UID was confusing.

Nilekani, who was addressing a seminar organised by the UIDAI here, said the same standard was also set for making of the logo, which shows a sun in yellow and a fingerprint in the centre, and has been

created by a Mumbai resident.

The logo, selected after a nationwide competition, was unveiled by Dhaneshwar Ram, a farmer from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh who was invited by the UIDAI to speak on the hardships faced by the common man in getting an identity proof.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

TIMES OF INDIA 26.4.10 INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Developing nations get more say in World Bank affairs

WASHINGTON: Emerging economies, including China and India, were given a greater voice at the World Bank, as member nations approved a slight shift of voting shares in favour of developing countries, while agreeing to raise more money for global aid.

The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded their annual spring meeting here by increasing the voting rights of India, China and Brazil, among others, thus giving them more say in the institutions' functioning.

This represents a total shift of 4.59 per cent to developing and transition countries since 2008, the IMF and the World Bank said in a joint communique after the meeting.

As a result, India's voting power increased from 2.77 per cent to 2.91 per cent while China whose rights increased from 2.77 per cent to 4.42 per cent was the biggest benefactor.

The shift places India at the seventh biggest place after the United States (15.85 per cent), Japan (6.84 per cent), China, Germany (4 per cent), France (3.75 per cent) and the United Kingdom (3.75 per cent).

"The change in voting-power helps us better reflect the realities of a new multi-polar global economy where developing countries are now key global players," said World Bank President Robert B Zoellick.

The change gives emerging nations more say in how the bank is run and how its funds are disbursed.

"This change in voting share, giving developing countries over 47 per cent, is a significant step," he told reporters here, hoping shareholders will review the approach in 2015.

Membership of the financial institution gives certain voting rights that are the same for all countries, but there are additional votes which depend on a country's financial contributions to the organisation.

Zoellick said at a time when multilateral agreements between developed and developing countries have proved elusive, this accord is all the more significant.

This increase fulfils the Development Committee commitment in Istanbul in October 2009 to generate a significant increase of at least 3 percentage points in Developing and Transition Countries (DTCs) voting power.

"We, in calculating this, looked at size of the world economy, using purchasing power but also exchange rate measures, but also, as a development institution, the contribution to development including the contribution to IDA, our fund for the poorest".

The governments also approved over USD 90 billion in extra money for

the World Bank's various arms that provide aid and capital to member countries.

Zoellick said the shift in voting powers was designed to try to reflect past contributions, citing the example of Japan that has been "a very gracious contributor".

Zoellick added the change was also "to encourage new ones, including for some of the developing and transition countries".

The 186 countries that own the World Bank Group also endorsed boosting its capital by more than USD 86 billion for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the arm that lends to developing countries.

The increase would come from a general capital increase and a selective capital increase linked to the change in voting-powers, including USD 5.1 billion in paid-in capital. It further agreed on a USD 200 million increase in the capital of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank Group's private sector arm, as part of an increase in shares for developing and transition countries.

IFC will also, subject to board approval, consider raising additional capital through issuing a hybrid bond to shareholding countries and through retaining earnings.

The IBRD 2010 realignment will result from a selective capital increase of USD 27.8 billion, including paid-in capital of USD 1.6 billion.

An increase in the voting power of DTCs at IFC to 39.48 per cent -- a total shift of 6.07 percentage points.

The IFC 2010 realignment will result from a selective capital increase of USD 200 million and increase in the basic votes for all members.

Noting that this represent a dynamic transformation for the World Bank Group, Zoellick said the additional capital means that the bank will no longer face the possibility that it would have to cut back its lending later this year. "We came into this crisis well capitalised thanks to sound financial policies. We have provided a record USD 105 billion in financial support since the crisis began to bite in July of 2008.

"This additional capital means that we will be able to continue to play the role that is demanded of us," he said.

DECCAN HERALD 28.4.10 INTERNATIONAL RELATION

SAARC leaders meet to project 'green and happy South Asia'

IANS

Heds of eight South Asian countries, including Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, will on Wednesday seek a joint initiative to tackle climate change threats and also boost trade and regional cooperation among SAARC nations that more often than not do not see eye to eye with each other on most issues.

As the 16th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) conference gets under way in this serene and pollution-free capital city of Bhutan the summit's key theme "Towards a Green and Happy South Asia" seems only apt.

Seeking a fresh approach to global climate talks the SAARC leaders will pitch for observer status to the bloc at the Mexico conference on global warming later this year. This will enable the eight South Asian nations - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan besides India - to expressive their concerns collectively and

effectively, an Indian official said.

The next global climate talks after Copenhagen in September last are likely to be held in Cancun in Mexico in December.

The Thimphu summit is also marks the silver jubilee celebration of SAARC that was formed in Bangladesh in December 1985 with the aim of eradicating poverty and improving the living standard of 1.5 billion people of the region through mutual cooperation.

Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna hoped that the dialogue on climate change would be carried in a "meaningful manner" at the summit.

A pact on climate will help in exchanging practices and knowledge, capacity building and transfer of eco-friendly technology in areas like coastal zone management, wildlife conservation and environmental impact assessment studies.

The eight nations are also expected to sign an agreement to promote trade cooperation among the member countries. The pact will enhance collaboration in services like health, hospitality, communications, information technology and air traffic and enable the realisation of the region's immense potential in these services.

Another highlight of the summit is the inauguration of the Permanent Secretariat of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) with initial capital of \$ 300 million to support the socio-economic projects in the region.

Ahead of leaving for Thimphu, Manmohan Singh asked SAARC to see how it can play its rightful role in the changing world.

"The winds of change are blowing across the world. South Asia cannot be immune to the trend of greater integration, both at the regional and global levels," he said.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

TIMES OF INDIA 25.4.10 INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Change For The Better

Though rising deficits and growing unemployment still plague rich and poor countries alike, it appears that the worst of the world's financial crisis is over. Now, the question becomes how the international community can devise exit strategies from the "Great Recession".

That conversation has already started and it will, to a large degree, take place in the Group of Twenty (G20), culminating at the summits in Canada in late-June and in South Korea in November. In spite of its leading role in the response to the global financial, economic and development crises, the self-appointment of the G20 represents, from the point of view of international law and multilateral principles, a major step backwards in the way international cooperation has occurred since World War II.

Over the past few years, the G20 has rapidly established itself as the premier forum for international financial and economic decision-

making. It has replaced the G7 and G8, and is progressively sidelining established international organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. With each meeting it holds, the G20 is institutionalising itself as a major body of global cooperation and governance and the political significance goes beyond saving the global finance system.

That development has had its benefits. The unprecedented cooperation and coordination the G20 enabled among established and emerging powers helped stabilise a world economy driven to the brink by financial crisis and contagion, thanks to rapid and massive intervention in global markets. But now that the worst of the crisis has begun to fade, the G20 should address the question of its own legitimacy and evolve to better reflect the interests of the nations its actions affect.

To be sure, the G20 is more representative than the G7 and G8 bodies of industrialised nations that preceded it – but it is lacking in legitimacy.

It is not an elected body, it is a self-appointed group, established without the consent of other nations. A number of countries that have been central to international cooperation in the past, including Norway and the Nordic countries, are excluded from direct membership. Low-income countries and the continent of Africa are almost entirely without the needed representation.

Whereas the G7 was a group of the world's richest economies, the G20's composition lacks such clarity; indeed, a number of non-participants, including the Nordic countries, are major financial contributors to development and to the Bretton Woods institutions and they are of greater "systemic significance" and have a larger GDP than several G20 countries.

As the response to the financial crisis showed, there is value in having an effective, smaller forum of nations, equipped to act quickly when

necessary. But, within that framework, there are simple ways to make the G20 more representative of the world it influences. As a first and immediate step, G20 members and non-members should consult on a framework for interaction.

More fundamentally, a system of geographical constituencies – along the lines we already have at the IMF and the World Bank – freely constituted and with the present G20 members as a core, would go a long way in remedying the weaknesses of the present system. For instance, the Nordic and Baltic countries have long been effectively represented at the IMF and the World Bank through a regional constituency, a model that could be usefully replicated within the G20.

After all, the global economy is just that: global. We live in an interconnected world, where any country's economic decisions can have a bearing beyond its borders, with Greece's recent debt troubles just the latest example. Representation at the G20 will become all the more important as its agenda moves beyond economic concerns to include issues like public health, development and climate change – issues with real economic and political consequences for all nations, including those who currently have no voice at the G20 table.

Respect for international law and global legitimacy as the basis for multilateral cooperation is a necessity, in the interest of all countries. It is also a tradition Norway holds dear, as one of the largest contributors to development aid and international organisations worldwide. Our faith in multilateralism is derived not from naivete, but from hardnosed idealism, forged in the aftermath of a brutal war that nearly tore the world apart. The founders of the great postwar institutions recognised the merit of limited or weighted membership within the larger bodies – but they also insisted on the importance of multilateral approval anchored in international law for these measures. Now is not the time to turn back the clock.

We are no longer living in the 19th century. The spirit of the Congress of Vienna, where great powers assembled to effectively govern the world, has no place in the contemporary international community. If G20 cooperation should effectively result in decisions being imposed on the great majority of other countries, it will quickly find itself stymied. The house of global governance cannot stand if divided against itself.

*(*The writer is the foreign minister of Norway.)*

MASS MEDIA

HINDU 24.4.10 MASS MEDIA

This journalism requires no sweat

Vidya Subrahmaniam

New-age reportage recently in evidence crosses the boundaries of decency and sets worrying new principles.

It is futile to expect a delicately mannered anchor with a commitment to facts and fairplay to beat the competition

Witch-hunt journalism in the mainstream media sets a new principle: That it is kosher to get into people's personal territory

Years ago, a newspaper editor taught me a few principles of story writing. "Never make direct personal attacks. Twist the knife ever so tenderly and you will be surprised at the results," he advised. His own favourite story was his description of Shiv Sena lion Balasaheb Thackeray as "the gentle Mr. Thackeray." The media veteran earned a torrent of abuse for it!

Rookie reporters also learnt other dos and don'ts: Attribute, confirm and hear out the other side - rules that could be set aside only when the story was a major scoop needing protection and secrecy.

But that was another world and another time, and as much hit me like a thunderbolt as the IPL mega scam exploded on television and print media alike. TV is by definition loud, fast and sensational. It is futile to expect a delicately mannered anchor with a commitment to facts and fairplay to beat the competition, much less bring the coveted TRPs. Most certainly not when a story breaks with the force of an avalanche as happened when Minister of State Shashi Tharoor was revealed to be complicit in a deal that offered a bounty to his lady friend. The Shashi Tharoor-Sunanada Pushkar story was god's own gift to the TV channels and they grabbed it with both hands, delving into Ms. Pushkar's past with all the finesse of a rampaging bull.

Reporting epidemic

In the days since, the IPL reporting fever has spread like an epidemic, taking in its embrace mainstream newspapers as well as reputed magazines. Over the past week, scoops and stories have tumbled out at a breathless pace, some of them truly able to expose the rot behind the glamour and glitz of cricket's brashy new offspring but many others irresponsibly speculative. By all accounts, IPL is a humungous wheels-within-wheels affair. Just how many people it will eventually implicate, if it does so at all, is anybody's guess given the complex pattern of franchise ownership, benami stake-holdings and a score of affiliated legal and illegal activities, ranging from telecast rights to money laundering, betting, match-fixing and so forth.

When imagination takes flight in this volatile situation, the results can be tragi-comic. A reported e-mail sent from Minister Praful Patel's office to

Mr. Tharoor had two newspapers reach opposite conclusions. One held Mr. Patel guilty of helping Mr. Tharoor. The other accused him of trying to mislead the former Minister into giving up the Kochi Consortium bid. A weekly magazine in its last issue dug its nails deep into Sunanda Pushkar, turning Mr. Tharoor's companion into a virago with an insatiable appetite for men, power and money. The author might have been Ms. Pushkar herself, considering the easy and expert access she seemed to have had to her subject's mind. The "belle from Bomai (in Kashmir)" was apparently so devilishly clever that she mapped out her future while still a teenager in college, taking the "marriage route" to escape the dreariness of everyday valley life, ensnaring her husband's best friend on the way and chasing after the good life with a "vampire-like" thirst that ironically, by the author's own admission, did not get her subject too far. For, despite "clawing her way" into Dubai's event management and entertainment circles and charming a variety of sponsors (she had them "eating out of her hands"), not to mention a talent for acquiring a procession of "companions", Ms. Pushkar, the author says, struggled to stay afloat for the most part, "orbiting into the inner circles of the mega rich" as recently as 2009. The author concludes that though aided by "heavy make-up, false eyelashes and seductive couture," Ms. Pushkar ought to be reconciled to the fact that pedigree-obsessed Delhi would not accept a "wannabe".

With so much venom packed into the narrative, it is hardly any surprise that the Pushkar profile and its author have become the toast of the glitter-twitter world. Author and gossip queen Shobaa De posted the "juicy, masaledaar" piece on her website. Complimenting the "hugely talented" author on her "delicious" reportage, she wished she had written it herself.

Salacious details

Not to be outdone, a Mumbai tabloid gave out salacious details of a surgery performed on Ms. Pushkar by plastic surgeon Ashok Gupta. Dr. Gupta, a 2009 Padma awardee, confirmed to the paper that Ms. Pushkar came under the knife. Not only this, he supplied the "before" and "after"

photographs to prove the transformation. So much for the Hippocratic oath and so much for the Padma awards!

It is not my case that Mr. Tharoor and Ms. Pushkar are innocent of all wrongdoing. Far from it. However, their "sins" do not fall in the same category. Mr. Tharoor can be accused of a corrupt practice but not Ms. Pushkar who, as a private citizen, was free to accept job and equity offers, provided she did not run afoul of the law. To be sure, there are legitimate questions about whether her professional qualifications were such as to earn her a large "sweat" equity.

However, none of these concerns warrant the dissection of her personal life. Those who claim to have been entertained by the weekly profile of Ms. Pushkar must ask themselves this question: Entertainment at whose cost? Tragically, many of Ms. Pushkar's detractors are themselves successful women basking in the fame and spotlight of Page 3 events and parties. Ms. Pushkar has been pilloried for her ambition. Which woman who has reached any position of importance can claim to have got there without ambition?

Now imagine a man with qualities attributed to Ms. Pushkar. Surely he would have been seen to be on the fast-track - a workaholic focused on his job and able to connect with a wide cross-section of people. And so what if he broke a law here and there? That would only add to his dash. A woman similarly placed becomes a social-climber, especially if she was a "wannabe" without the social sanction afforded by "pedigree." When witch-hunt journalism of this kind comes into the mainstream media it sets a new principle: That it is kosher to get into people's personal territory. That no attribution need be made, that if the person being profiled is judged to be completely without a virtue, her version can be dispensed with.

Fortunately, good taste does seem to prevail outside the rarefied circles of Metro high society. The reader response to the Pushkar profile (posted on the weekly's website) was one of revulsion. Said one reader: "Every sentence in it reeks of a deep-seated upper class prejudice which ridicules and sneers at the ambitions and processes of social mobility of many people of India, especially those from mofussil regions."

Commented another: "This writing looks to be a case of libel. Vindictive and sexist to the core."

I could add a line: This journalism requires no sweat.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

DECCAN HERALD 28.4.10 POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

This above all... Squandermania

Khushwant Singh

"There is no law against erecting status of oneself," says Mayawati, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. She is right: there is no law forbidding misuse of public money to indulge in self glorification. Several chief ministers do so by advertising themselves as pioneers of progress their states with their own photographs as illustrations.

But you, behen Mayawatiji have outdone all of them on the Silver Jubilee of the Bahujan Samaj Party. You asked your public relations department to take out full page advertisement in all newspapers of

India, with half pages devoted to your own picture and the other half for vastly exaggerated claims to development under your benign rule.

And you had yourself garlanded with high denomination currency notes worth crores of rupees. You have had dozens of marble statues of yourself put up in Lucknow and other cities. Has the money collected during the Silver Jubilee been deposited in banks in the name of BSP or is it in your personal account?

Your past does not inspire confidence. As soon as you became chief minister, you began acquiring large tracts of real estates in different cities, including Delhi. None of it was registered in the name of your party but in your own name or that of your relations. You also bought expensive jewellery to adorn yourself and explained it as gifts given to you by admirers.

As for your admirers, the less said about them the better. They are a time-serving bunch of sycophants who will bootlick anyone in power.

Just think what you could have done with all the money you collected. Instead of marble status, if you had opened a chain of Mayawati primary and secondary schools, Mayawati free clinics for the sick, Mayawati night shelters for the homeless, etc, your name would have gone down in history as the greatest Dalit leader of India. All you need to do is instead of lending an ear to 'khushamdi tattoos' (flattering ponies), listen to the likes of me and the 'avvaam' (common people), who honestly wish to see you fulfil the dream of Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram. Don't let us down.

Maharaja Dalip singh

Dalip singh, youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit singh, is not on my list of heroes of Sikh history. His mother, Rani Jindan, was the daughter of the royal kennel keeper. I have nothing against her. She was said to have

been a great beauty. As a child he was exposed to violence and cold blooded murders of relations and courtiers. That left deep scars on his psyche and warped him for life.

When the Sikh kingdom was annexed by the British in 1849, he was taken hostage and made to hand over the Kohinoor diamond and was put under the guardianship of an English cleric. He converted to christianity, cut off his long hair but kept his beard so that with a turban he could still pass of as a Sikh.

He and his mother were taken to England. He was given a large estate and a handsome pension. He became a great favourite of Queen Victoria and wore her miniature picture in a diamond necklace.

When his mother died, he was allowed to bring her ashes back to India to immerse in the holy Ganga. But, he was not permitted to visit Punjab.

On his way back to England he was shown a bevy of nubile girls in an orphanage in Egypt. He picked Bamba Muller, the illegitimate daughter of a German through an Egyptian woman. She bore him many children.

He lived an extravagant life of self-indulgence. He became a heavy drinker and a glutton, he put on weight, became paunchy and lost whatever good looks he had as a youngman. He ran into heavy debts and began to dream of the unaccountable wealth he was entitled to as Maharaja of Punjab.

He rebelled against Queen Victoria and tried to get the Tsar of Russia to help to regain his crown. Nothing came of it.

When Bamba died, he took another wife, and moved to Paris. Ultimately he begged Queen Victoria's pardon. She absolved him of treason, paid off his debts and allowed him to return to the state. He died a miserable death in Paris.

His progeny continued to suffer from delusions of grandeur. Once I wrote to his daughter Bamba Southerland, asking for an interview and inviting her to tea at the Ritz Hotel in London. She regarded all Sikhs as her subjects and turned down my invitation. Her letterhead from a cottage in Buckinghamshire where she lived on a pension read ‘H R H Princess Bamba Southerland of Punjab, Kashmir and Beyond’.

Dalip Singh’s life is well recorded in ‘The Exile’ by Navtej Sarna, India’s Ambassador in Israel. No matter what the true facts of his life, many Sikhs have nostalgic memories of the rulers of the Sikh Kingdom. The latest example is the publication of ‘Sovereign, Squire, Rebel Maharajah Dalip Singh’ by Peter Bance. Peter’s real name is Bhupinder Singh Bains. Based in London, he specialises in Sikhs diaspora. His earlier book ‘The Sikhs in Britain’ was well-received. His book on Dalip Singh is about the most lavish I have seen. It will be a valuable asset in any library on Sikh history as a collector’s item.

POVERTY

TRIBUNE 28.4.10 POVERTY

**Poverty of mind and media
IPL does not represent emerging India**

Aruti Nayar

NOW that it is curtains down on IPL for the time being, we can get on with the business of focussing on real issues. Not only the media space but also precious Parliament time went on to debate the games our politicians play in the garb of sport. Just when we were devouring every sound bite and taking salacious delight in the masala that the IPL controversy had become, there was a tiny news report on how India now

has 100 million more people living below the poverty line than in 2004, according to official estimates released last week. The estimates will remain “official”, this reality never becomes “personal”, thanks to the increasingly insular lives we lead.

There is no media space for such news because with the increasing focus on either celebrities or sports icons or politicians and their shenanigans, hard news has been edged out in this race to grab eyeballs. Newspapers compete not only with each other but also with the electronic media. The latter has an edge with its rapid-splice images suited for strapped-for-time individuals.

Dismal social indicators should be a cause for concern but they do not make a dent into our consciousness because our preoccupations remain limited to our cocooned interests. Small wonder that this bystander apathy translates into social apathy and the youngsters, who are our resource for the future, too imbibe attitudes that make them self-centred. Such statistics rarely shock them into an awareness of how a vast majority of the populace lives, rather subsists.

The stark reality

- India now has 410 million people living below the UN-estimated poverty line
- A third of the world’s poor are in India, living on less than \$2 per day
- The government spends only 1 per cent of the GDP on healthcare

There were surprised looks when at a get-together, a woman settled in the US for more than 40 years had said that she had specially sent her daughter to India to be aware of how there are people who barely get to eat, “to sensitise her to the plight of the people who do not have privileges which she takes so much for granted. It will help her grow up in the real sense.”

In the party that post-liberalised India has become, the poor have not only been edged out of the agenda but also out of news space and our

mind space as well. The content and form of infotainment is fit for “the pastries” we have got used to (as an acerbic ex-boss would point to the lifestyle-related focus of the newspapers). He would compare this focus on trivia to junk and say the media needs to dish out real food. The dumbing down of content, focus on irrelevant, though seemingly “happening” (oh that buzz word that gives you an illusion of action even though you may be running to stay in the same place) ensure that the marginalised remain on the margins of our consciousness.

So comfortable is the middle class in its cocoon that it does not even feel the need to sensitise its children to the world down there, so diametrically opposed to the sheltered and cosy existence that we pull out all stops to provide to our kids. So it is a celebration of life with disposable incomes without ever feeling the presence of a vast economic divide.

Not that one can regiment the growth of children but an awareness of the yawning gap would not only generate an awareness of the schism but also ensure that the working professionals who emerge out of this pool are socially aware and at least know about the living conditions of a vast multitude, that a few may choose to act will be a bonus. In the absence of a social conscience and confusion of values, one has to consciously bring up a generation that is not narcissistic and connects to the society it lives in.

There are no absolutes but it is certainly not too much to expect that an effort should be made to inculcate some of this consciousness-raising in the formative years. How does one do it? Obviously through the two primary agents: the family and educational institutions, that is through child-rearing practices and moulding the educational syllabi. The latter are caught in a time warp and the process of sensitisation would go a long way if the policy-makers focus on “emerging India”.

Showing often works better than telling to the very young. There is no harm in acquainting our children with the filth, squalor and abysmal

living conditions. Just as it would do no harm and perhaps a lot of good if we give a break to unbridled consumerism (which has contributed to this disconnect between society and individual) and tell our future citizens that there are so many like them who get no food, medicines or shelter.

Unlike the assumption that IPL represents “emerging India”, one would like to think and believe that emerging India has much more to offer us than shady deals and wheeling-dealing. It is up to us to channel the vast reservoirs of untapped energy and enthusiasm if we are to ensure they do “social networking” with a difference.

SOCIOLOGY

TRIBUNE 28.4.10 SOIOLOGY

Haryana: Economically up, socially down

Mahabir Jaglan

DESPITE taking a great leap forward in the economic sphere, Haryana continues to be socially underdeveloped. It lags behind a large number of states in the country in terms of access to education, healthcare, nutrition and sanitation. Social backwardness is also reflected in the discrimination against women in the social, economic and political spheres. In terms of the ratio of female/male child mortality (often taken as an index of gender equity), Haryana is bracketed with the worst-performing areas in the world.

Access to education, without doubt, is the most crucial indicator of social development. Women's education in particular plays a vital role in the development process and overall social development. There are a number of studies revealing that it has a direct bearing on the quality of life of a family. It also ensures exceptionally high social returns in terms of lowering the rates of fertility and infant and child mortality.

Moreover, the rise in the level of women education is also found to have a positive impact on child nutrition and education.

Haryana is among the five states – the other being Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — which exhibit extreme gender discrimination in the attainment of education. Rural women in the state are in the most disadvantageous position with regard to access to education. It is not a surprise as studies in the demographic and social history divulge that Haryana happens to be the part of the north-western territory of the country that has treated women insensitively. The position of rural women in the region has not improved substantially in the wake of growing prosperity in the rural economy in the last four decades or so. Rather the traditional cultural bias against females has persisted and remained entrenched.

The level of literacy may be taken as a broad indicator of social and cultural development in the rural society. The figures of literacy obtained from the 2001 Census reveal that in terms of female literacy 17 states are doing better than Haryana. The literacy level in Haryana is lower than that of Kerala, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh and Goa. Incidentally, all these states are far behind Haryana in economic development. The large gap in the literacy level of males and females (23 percentage points) and the urban and rural females (22 percentage points) in the state indicates the extent of social deprivation of rural women.

The north-eastern region of the state comprising the districts of Ambala, Yamunanagar and Panchkula lies beyond the influence zone of khap panchayats. It is not incidental that this region has the highest total literacy rate (73.56 per cent) and rural literacy rate (67.37 per cent) in the state. This region also records the highest female literacy rate (57.45 per cent) and the least gender disparity in rural area. On the other hand, the rural female literacy in the western and southern regions of the state is as low as 45 per cent.

When the level of educational attainment is seen in relation to different social groups, it presents interesting revelations. As expected the Scheduled Castes are placed at the bottom as their overall educational attainment rate is 37.89 per cent. But the socially and economically backward castes (artisan communities) are performing better than the socially and economically dominant intermediary (peasant) castes (Jats, Ahirs, Gujjar etc.) in the educational sphere.

It goes without saying that in Haryana khap panchayats wield considerable influence on the land-owning communities, particularly the Jats. Claiming to be the representative of the socially and economically dominant communities, these medieval institutions at the collective level carry the bandwagon of patriarchal value system which perpetuates discrimination against women in all spheres of life, including education.

Hence, it is no surprise that these communities have failed to maintain the desired pace in the educational sphere. It does not require further elaboration to conclude that the socio-spatial domain of the khap panchayats in Haryana is discernible by social backwardness and utmost gender bias. It does not require satellite imagery to interpret as what lies underneath the canopy of khap panchayats.

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