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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Read the symptoms

Sitaram Yechury

With a long leg and a short leg, a slip and a leg slip, a point and a silly point, Left Hand Drive has crossed the century mark. Thank you for your indulgence and endurance.

Soon we shall be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Indian Republic. All ancient civilisations consider the completion of 60 years — Sashtipoorti — very auspicious. This signifies the resolve for continuing to live healthily. The quality of life, thus, assumes greater importance than longevity. It is, therefore, an appropriate occasion to assess the health of our nation measured by the quality of the life of our people.

Tragically, this has to begin on an ominous note. A Planning Commission study completed in 2009 on the basis of surveys conducted in several villages showed that healthcare expenses were responsible for more than half of all people declining into poverty. On the basis of the National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) data for 2004-05 (unfortunately, it is the latest year for which such data is available), it is estimated that an additional 39 million people were pushed into poverty due to healthcare expenses in that year alone.

During these years of liberalisation, economic reforms, along with all other public services, healthcare in our country has been increasingly privatised. While public spending on healthcare has been around a measly 1 per cent of the GDP, private spending has grown alarmingly to 4.2 per cent of the GDP. It is estimated that more than 70 per cent of the

entire health expenditure in India is borne by the people from their own resources.

With galloping privatisation of healthcare over the last five years, such expenditures have been rising, especially for the poor and the marginalised sections. Further, the NSSO data shows that over 80 per cent of healthcare expenditures is on the purchase of drugs. It is common knowledge that the drug prices have risen exponentially in recent years. It means that a large number of people must be sliding into poverty.

Based on the data for 2007, the United Nations Human Development Report has shown, among others, a decline in India's per capita income over the previous year. It has also shown a decline in life expectancy at birth and in the gross enrolment ratio in schools. Forty-seven per cent of our children are underweight due to malnutrition and nearly 17 per cent fail to make it to the age of 40. It is estimated that nearly 75.6 per cent of our people live on less than \$2 a day. Adjusting this in purchasing power parity terms, we come very close to the estimation made by the Prime Minister-appointed committee that 77 per cent of Indians survive on Rs 20 a day.

The liberalisation pundits often scoff at such data and argue that faster the economy grows, faster would be the reduction in poverty. The PM himself, recently, has been defensive on this logic and was on the backfoot while expressing concern at the insignificant reduction of poverty levels.

The myth of a stronger economy and a faster growth rate leading automatically to better health for its people has been exploded once again. The current pre-occupation of US President Barack Obama with his new healthcare policy was based on the fact that nearly 16 per cent of the US population has no coverage of health insurance. One half of all personal bankruptcies in the US have been due to medical expenses. Though the US Congress and the Senate have approved two separate legislations, despite tough resistance by lobbies of vested interests, they

now need to be combined and approved as a single proposal before the President can sign it into law.

Despite spending nearly a fifth of its huge national income on healthcare (huge profit avenues for private capital and insurance companies), the US's overall health indicators are worse than neighbouring socialist Cuba, which has a one-twentieth per capita income. Between 1955 and 2008, Cuba increased its life expectancy from 53 to 79 years while in the US it went up from 69 to 78 years. Both in terms of child mortality and infant mortality, Cuba fared better than the US. In fact, Cuba's per capita daily calorie intake is marginally higher than that of the US.

This can only be explained by capitalism's inexorable drive — more pronounced under globalisation — to reduce all public utilities into commodities in the pursuit of its *raison d'être* — profit maximisation. Capitalism has little need for commodities like health, education, sanitation, etc, which have an irreplaceable 'use value' determining the quality of life of human beings. Capitalism needs to convert these 'use values' into commodities with 'exchange values' that generate profit.

Thus, growth per se does not guarantee better health for its people. Reliance on private capital to provide healthcare can never improve the situation for the vast majority, as such investments pursue profit maximisation and not social benefit. What's required is a political will and a social commitment to vastly enhance public expenditures in health-care. Public pressure must ensure that this happens. It's the only way that India, for the sake of its people, must celebrate its Sashtipoorti.

Sitaram Yechury is CPI(M) Politburo member and Rajya Sabha MP

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

HINDU 13.1.10 INTERNATIONAL RELATION

India and Pakistan: deadlines for dialogue

Suhasini Haidar

Every impending deadline, coupled with the window of opportunity for talks in Kashmir, underscores the need for a new line of engagement between New Delhi and Islamabad.

As a slew of new track-2 and track-3 initiatives try to build a ‘roadmap’ for a new India-Pakistan dialogue, it may be time to look at some of the circumstances in which dialogue has been derailed in the past — and hunt clues for the future. In the parlance of India-Pakistan ties, specifically in the past decade, it is the top leadership that has proposed new initiatives for peace, and it is terrorists and those who direct them who have been most easily able to dispose of them.

On the night of the Mumbai terror attacks of November 26, 2008, just an hour before the attackers fired the first shot, the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers were holding a press conference in New Delhi. The tension between the two countries at the time was over the Indian cricket team’s hesitation to go play a series in Pakistan after the Marriott hotel bombing in Islamabad. Coincidentally, India’s Home Secretary was in Islamabad, where the two countries had issued a comprehensive Joint Statement on fighting Terror and Drug Trafficking. India and Pakistan had agreed to ‘fast-track’ the 5th round of the Composite Dialogue. Hours later all dialogue was suspended, and

history was written once again by the terrorist's gun.

While the Mumbai attacks led to what's become the most prolonged suspension of talks since the year 2000, it is part of a distinct pattern. In May 2006, negotiators were close to a breakthrough on demilitarising the Siachen glacier, which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had hoped to make a "mountain of peace." According to those who knew, talks with Pakistani officials had entered an advanced stage, due to be taken forward that summer. But first deadly attacks at the Congress party rally in Srinagar on the eve of the Prime Minister's roundtable conference, and another brutal attack on tourists pushed Siachen talks to July, when the Foreign Secretaries were due to meet. In July 2006, just nine days before that meeting, the Mumbai train bombings left more than 200 dead and with them buried all talk of talks for months.

In 2007, revived talks made strides on the Wullar dispute. On Sir Creek they had all but agreed on a settlement, when the Samjhauta blasts took place. Again and again, the dialogue was buffeted in a series of blasts, in Hyderabad, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and Delhi, where more than a hundred were killed.

In 2008, it was the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul and then the Mumbai attacks that finally halted all talks. Through these brutalities, the composite dialogue has lurched from event to event, sustaining itself on the oxygen of meetings on the sidelines of international summits — Havana, Colombo, New York, L'Aguilla, Yekaterinburg and Sharm El Sheikh — and always going into dialogue-ICU after the next big attack. Closer home, the attack on Fazl Haq Qureshi in Srinagar and the fidayeen hotel siege at Lal Chowk have followed reports of dialogue being initiated between the Central government and separatists.

The Mumbai attacks, however, cannot be clubbed with the rest because of the deep scar they left on our nation. Even Islamabad seemed to get

the message from India's pain and the international community's outrage — that there would be no going back after 26/11. In the months that followed, Pakistan took unparalleled action, beginning with the reluctant admission that the attackers were Pakistani, to the investigation it undertook on the basis of Indian dossiers. And then in October, the pressure on Pakistan seemed to double. The revelations from the Headley investigation and subsequent indictment by U.S. officials for the Mumbai attacks brought his handler, a former Pakistani army Major, into focus and with it fresh impetus for Islamabad to act. Within a month, Islamabad charged seven men with 26/11. While Indian statements have kept up a steady focus on Hafiz Saeed, they have failed to acknowledge that the men now awaiting trial at a Lahore court are far from 'small fry.' LeT operational commander Zaki Ur Rahman Lakhvi, for one, known as the 'Imam of jihadis,' Abu Al Qama (wanted for the Red Fort and Akshardham attacks), and computer expert Zarar Shah. If shutting down the LeT and the JuD and arresting Hafiz Saeed are impossible tasks for those in Islamabad who created them, these indictments could at least be considered a start.

But the gains from keeping the pressure on Pakistan have now hit the law of diminishing returns — and diminishing sympathy from the pro-peace constituency in Pakistan, which believes India should show more concern about the terror attacks that paralyse ordinary Pakistanis every day.

At least the first decade of the 21st century gave our leaders many opportunities to kickstart and restart the dialogue process. The next decade, however, is unlikely to afford that leeway for at least three distinct reasons. In fact, the next 18 months may be all the time for flexibility they have.

For one thing, the next 18 months are the only space the United Progressive Alliance government and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have for any bold foreign policy initiatives. Uttar Pradesh and other key

States will head for Legislative Assembly elections in 2012. If he so chooses, Dr. Singh will also be able to counter the sizeable strategic community opposed to talks with the lowered threat perception that has arisen amongst the larger national community after the past 13 months of relative freedom from major terror attacks. Already, several people-to-people, and media-to-media initiatives are starting without the public outcry they would have faced a year ago.

Another deadline is the one announced to the American people by President Barack Obama, to begin the pullout of U.S. troops from Afghanistan by mid-2011. If this is met, it will certainly change the power structure in that embattled South Asian nation. As American troops thin out on the ground, India, with its consistent refusal to be part of peacekeeping forces, may find Pakistan, the U.S.'s ally in the 'war on terror,' gaining leverage and perhaps less willing to yield in talks.

Finally, the unspoken deadline that looms before Pakistan and is an equal threat to India is the time changes will occur within the Pakistan army structure. India has always seen the Pakistani army as its biggest enemy, one that has raised and pushed militants over the LoC. Paradoxically as a cohesive, centrally commanded force, it is also best placed to protect India from the jihadi terror that savages Pakistan's cities today.

But many inside the Pakistani establishment point to a timeline 18 months hence: when some of the army recruits enlisted during General Zia-ul-Haq's 'Islamicisation' drive in the mid-1980s (1984-1988) would reach Brigadier rank and above. In his widely acclaimed book, *Crossed Swords*, Shuja Nawaz, whose brother Gen. Asif Nawaz was Army Chief from 1991-1993, describes the former military dictator's efforts: "Zia tried hard to change the ethos of the army, making Islamic ritual and teachings part of the army's day to day activities, changing its motto to '*Iman, Taqwa, Jihad fi Sabeelillah*' (Faith, obedience, struggle in the path of Allah). The Jamaat-e-Islami took advantage of the

changing demographics and nature of the army by sending out directives to its members to sign up for the army by taking the Inter services selection board examinations.”

It is those army recruits who could soon reach the highest levels. The fear, of course, is that some will answer not to the military high command — but to a ‘higher’ one. During the recent 18-hour siege of the GHQ in Rawalpindi, the generals were reportedly worried during the first few hours that the fidayeen attack had been engineered by ‘Talibanised’ elements of the army itself. The fears turned out to be unfounded. But the GHQ attack established a different pattern of worry for the country — that of the South Punjabi Lashkar, trained in PoK, carrying out an attack for the Taliban in Waziristan, Pakistan’s triangle of terror, quite literally closing in on its central command structure, and putting both Pakistan, and India on notice. All those in India who today wonder, “Yes, talk — but who to talk to?” may find the current lack of options nothing compared to what may follow.

All these impending deadlines, coupled with the window of opportunity for talks in Kashmir hasten the need for a new line of engagement between New Delhi and Islamabad, an engagement that understands that agencies that have unleashed terror attacks to derail the process in the past will shadow the next round too.

Finally, the question most often asked, ‘Why talk at all?’ may well find its answer in George Mallory’s response to the question, ‘Why climb Everest?’ ‘Because it’s there,’ the mountaineer replied. Why talk to Pakistan? Because it will always be there. And we still can.

(Suhasini Haidar is Deputy Foreign Editor, CNN-IBN.)

HINDU 12.1.10 INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Changing the rules of the energy game

Vladimir Radyuhin

With the launch of a major oil pipeline from Eastern Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, Russia can now ship oil to not only its traditional customers in Europe but also the ever-growing energy markets in Asia.

The year 2010 will see the global energy map redrawn as Russia, the world's largest producer of hydrocarbons, reorients its oil and gas flows from Europe to Asia. On the eve of the New Year, Russia launched a major oil pipeline from Eastern Siberia to the Pacific Ocean (ESPO). For the first time, it is able to ship oil not only westward to its traditional customers in Europe, but also to the ever-growing energy markets in Asia, which already account for a third of the global oil consumption.

Initially, the new pipeline will move 30 million tonnes a year, but in four years the throughput is projected to increase to 50 million tonnes and then to 80 million tonnes, or about a third of Russia's current export volumes. Today, more than 90 per cent of Russian oil exports goes to Europe and only 3 per cent to Asia. Last year, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia as the world's biggest producer and exporter of oil. The ESPO pipeline will help Russia ramp up oil output to an all-time record of 530 million tonnes by 2030 despite declining production at the mature

oilfields of Western Siberia.

So far, the first 2,757-km stretch of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) has been completed. It runs from Taishet in the Irkutsk region to Skovorodino near the Chinese border, where a 64-km spur to China has been built. The spur will carry 15 million tonnes of oil by 2012 when a 1,000-km pipeline on the Chinese side will connect it to Daging. Another 15 million tonnes will be hauled by rail from Skovorodino to the newly built Pacific terminal at Kozmino 2,100 km further east. By 2014, Russia will extend the pipeline from Skovorodino to Kozmino and build more pump stations along the 4,188-km ESPO pipeline.

It is symbolic that the first tanker loaded with Siberian oil headed for Hong Kong. China will be the main winner of the new Russian export route. Under a \$100-billion contract signed last year, it will receive 300 million tonnes of oil via the ESPO pipe alone over the next 20 years. Deliveries may double as ESPO ramps up capacity.

The ESPO project will further cement strategic ties between Russia and China. But Beijing will not be able to tell Moscow what to do as the new pipeline gives the latter a choice of customers. When the project was still on the drawing board, China and Japan fiercely lobbied Russia to get exclusive access to the Siberian oil riches. The way the ESPO was eventually routed will allow Russia to sell oil to the highest bidder, be it China, Japan, South Korea or even the United States.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Russia looked forward to winning a much bigger share of the Asian oil market than its current 5-6 per cent compared with nearly 70 per cent for Gulf-originated crude. East Siberian crude, to be marketed under the name of ESPO, is similar or even superior to the Middle East crude and the new pipeline will take it close to Asian customers.

India also stands to benefit from the new pipeline, as it will be linked with oilfields in Western Siberia, including the Tomsk region where

India's Imperial Energy has operations. Imperial Energy, bought by ONGC-Videsh from British owners a year ago, plans to quadruple the output to 25,000 bpd by the end of this year. The company, which has 13 licences in Tomsk, plans to bid for more Russian oil assets. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's latest visit to Moscow in December 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev promised to grant India access to several other oil reserves, including the Trebs and the Titov fields in the Timan Pechora region in Russia's north.

The ESPO pipeline will give a powerful boost to the development of Eastern Siberia. The region is fabulously rich in hydrocarbons and other minerals, but their exploration has been hampered by a lack of infrastructure aggravated by hostile climate conditions. According to Transneft Vice-President Anatoly Bezverkhov, who oversaw the ESPO construction, practically all infrastructures for ESPO had to be built from scratch as the route passed through uninhabited territories that lacked roads, electric lines or any other communication. Hundreds of km of the new pipeline were laid across permafrost; the builders had to cross more than 500 rivers and lakes, blast their way through solid rock and work in freezing temperatures of minus 40 degrees C.

Geologists believe that only 35 per cent of Russia's oil reserves have been discovered so far. In Eastern Siberia alone, a thousand of likely oil and gas holds have been identified. The construction of the ESPO pipeline is expected to attract multibillion foreign investments in oil exploration in Eastern Siberia that will transform the region.

The ESPO pipeline is set to change the rules of the energy game in Europe as well. For years, the European Union has been trying to dictate its will to Russia taking advantage of Europe being the only market for Russian oil and gas. The EU proposes to ban Russian companies from its retail energy market and moots the setting up of an "energy NATO" to stop Russia from flexing energy muscles. Europe has been planning for years to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and

gas supplies, but, ironically, it is Russia that has moved to diversify its energy exports away from the European market. By 2012, Russia's natural gas monopoly Gazprom will build a gas pipeline alongside the ESPO oil pipeline. Another gas-pipeline system, Altai, will be built to deliver gas from Western Siberia to China.

At the same time, Russia is working to consolidate its position as Europe's irreplaceable energy provider by coordinating its energy strategy with China and former Soviet states of Central Asia in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's "energy club." A gas glut on the European market provoked by the global crisis has forced Russia to scale down its plans to buy all of Turkmenistan's gas for re-export to Europe, but whatever resources have thus been freed will now go to China and Iran via newly built pipelines. There will be little left for the U.S.-lobbied Nabucco pipeline designed to bring Central Asian and Caspian gas to Europe bypassing Russia. In a further blow to Nabucco, Russia last October reached a deal to buy gas from Azerbaijan, the only gas-exporting ex-Soviet state which previously had no contract to sell the fuel to Russia. On January 1, Azerbaijan also started selling gas to Iran across a Soviet-built pipeline with a throughput capacity of 10 bcm a year.

Even as Russia undercut European efforts to build the Nabucco pipeline, it pressed forward with expanding its own pipeline network to supply gas to Europe — the Nord Stream that would connect Russia and Germany across the Baltic Sea and the South Stream running across the Black Sea to south Europe. The new pipelines will bypass transit countries — Ukraine, Poland and Belarus which have a long history of acrimonious price disputes with Russia. The same goal — to avoid the transit route — motivated Russia to build a major oil pipeline and a terminal on the Russian coast of the Baltic Sea.

Alternative export pipelines give Russia greater leverage in negotiations with the West on not only the price of its energy resources, but also the

far more important issues of Russia's strategic interests in the former Soviet Union and access to the West's cutting edge technologies that Russia needs to modernise its economy.

The diversification of export routes that reached its high point with the launch of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline last month is a key part of Mr. Putin's energy strategy set in motion after he assumed Russian presidency in 2000. In the earlier phases, Mr. Putin reasserted state control over the oil and gas sector, cancelled the hugely unprofitable production-sharing arrangements with foreign majors and limited their access to major Russian oil and gas fields.

The next big goal in Mr. Putin's plan is to challenge the U.S. dollar-denominated oil trade by switching trade in Russian oil to roubles. Mr. Putin first declared Moscow's intention to use rouble in its oil and gas transactions in his 2006 state of the nation address. The following year, Russia began trading Russian oil for roubles at the Russian Fuel and Energy Exchange set up for the purpose in St. Petersburg. The scheme failed to make an impact partly because the new mix offered for rouble trade, West Siberia's REBCO (Export Blend Crude Oil), could be supplied only in small volumes.

The East Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline could act as a game-changer. Tens of millions of tonnes of East Siberia's ESPO blend supplied along the pipeline to Asian markets would establish a new pricing benchmark and pave the way for large-scale oil trading in roubles. This would generate tectonic shifts in global power equations.

JUDICIARY

HINDU 13.1.10 JUDICIARY

CJI comes under RTI Act: Delhi High Court

J. Venkatesan and Nirnimesh Kumar

Single judge order proper and valid, it says

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court has held that the office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) is a “public authority” that comes within the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act and it is bound to provide information about the declaration of asset details by Supreme Court judges.

A Bench of the High Court, comprising Chief Justice A.P. Shah and Justices Vikramjit Sen and S. Muralidhar, on Tuesday upheld the judgment of a single judge and dismissed an appeal filed by the Secretary-General of the Supreme Court.

Soon after the ruling, Atul Nanda, counsel for the appellant, made a request for grant of a certificate for appeal to the Supreme Court under Article 134 A of the Constitution. The Bench granted the certificate to file an appeal as important questions of law were involved in this case.

On September 2, 2009, the single judge dismissed an appeal from the Chief Public Information Officer (CPIO) against an order of the Central Information Commission (CIC) asking the Supreme Court Registry to furnish to RTI activist Subash Chandra Agarwal information in the CJI’s possession on the judges’ assets.

“We are satisfied that the impugned order of the single Judge is both proper and valid and needs no interference,” the High Court Bench said, rejecting the submissions of Attorney-General G.E. Vahanvati, who

contended: “We cannot expose our judges to public scrutiny or inquiry because it would hamper their functioning and independence.”

Writing the 88-page judgment, Justice Shah said:

“The CJI cannot be a fiduciary vis-À-vis judges of the Supreme Court. The Judges of the Supreme Court hold independent office, and there is no hierarchy, in their judicial functions, which places them on a plane different than the CJI.

“The declarations are not furnished to the CJI in a private relationship or as a trust, but in discharge of the constitutional obligation to maintain higher standards and probity of judicial life and are in the larger public interest.

“In these circumstances, it cannot be held that the asset information shared with the CJI, by the judges of the Supreme Court, is held by him in the capacity of fiduciary, which if directed to be revealed, would result in a breach of such duty.”

The war within

Samar Halarnkar

India was still Indira when I first saw those army regiments marching down Rajpath. To a small-town boy who came from the baking, backward Deccan — a land of quiet desperation, black magic and lost glories — a Republic Day parade conveyed an absolute reality: That these magnificent men marching to Saare Jahan Se Achcha were a cut above, that they could do no wrong.

A half-truth mired in a perceived reality fades hard. Whatever I may write today, I guess I still like to believe that India's defence forces, and its judiciary, are the nation's last bastions of righteousness.

With the judiciary closer to our lives, the incorruptibility of judges is a weaker half-truth, but it endures. For this I blame my father's old friend, the late James Sequeira Esq., a morally upright district judge in Karnataka. In a time before self-made tycoons and powerful politicians, the judge, collector and superintendent of police were the most prominent men in town. Yet, Judge Sequeira travelled in his personal car, a white Fiat. His wife usually travelled by a tonga or cycle-rickshaw. He practised all that he often preached to wide-eyed me, about simple living and high thinking.

Understanding a teenage state of mind is important because India is younger now than ever before. More than 550 million are below 30 years of age, and in their formative years, they will form warped realities from the half-truths on offer today.

The army chief is now accused by his rank and file of being soft on some of his generals in a dubious land deal. The Chief Justice of India is

not only refusing to open himself and his justices to the Right to Information Act — as politicians and bureaucrats are — but is also seen as reluctant to clean up an admittedly overburdened but increasingly dishonest and opaque system.

If these gentlemen do not act immediately, they should never blame young people in this age of media-delivered reality for instant beliefs that permanently damn both institutions and damage India's strongest foundations. General Deepak Kapoor must realise that even modest hopes of filling his 11,000 officer vacancies will quickly evaporate.

Absolute realities don't die easily. So, it is important that the truths on offer not just look, but are, complete.

Even a depressing first brush with the dark side of the defence forces eight years ago wasn't enough to scrub my reality.

In consternation, I watched a neat patch of green — called the Field Marshall Cariappa Park, no less — being demolished in Mumbai's Colaba military area in collusion with a builder. All manner of law was sidestepped and ill-considered permissions granted by an unholy confluence of army officers, bureaucrats and politicians. Not surprisingly, representatives of all three branches of government got flats. My colleague Shailesh Gaikwad (now bureau chief at the Hindustan Times, Mumbai) and I reported the dark deal as it unfolded. The apartment block was delayed, but it was built, and even as I wrote it, I kept asking myself, "Have we got it wrong? How could army and navy officers be a part of this?"

So, I was less disbelieving but still crestfallen when news broke last year that four top army generals helped reverse an army objection to the transfer of 70 acres of land near an army base in West Bengal to a dubious educational trust run by a real-estate developer called Dilip Agarwal, a friend of Military Secretary Lt. Gen. Avadhesh Prakash, an officer who the Eastern Army Commander says must be dismissed. That

may still happen, but why has he been spared a court martial, under which all army officers accused of wrongdoing, except murder and rape, are tried? As embittered junior officers point out, many have been court martialled for less: fake allegations of sexual harassment and pilfering the odd shipment of supplies.

Only one of the generals, Lt. Gen. P.K. Rath (once slated to be Deputy Chief of Army Staff, now thankfully dropped from consideration), faces a general court martial. The others, Gen. Prakash, 11 Corps Commander Lt. Gen Ramesh Halgali and Major General P. Sen, have been asked to explain their actions. The Eastern Army Commander said last month in an internal inquiry that Lt. Gens. Rath and Sen should face a court martial.

It is certainly true that these officers have not been proven guilty. But the Indian Army's summary court martials, introduced after the Indian mutiny of 1856, don't require counsel, detailed judgement or evidence.

In trying to find out why their regular army units had rebelled when the Punjab Irregular Force (PIF) — its origins in the old Sikh army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh — had not, the British found that a PIF commanding officer also served as judge and civil authority, feared and respected by his men. The army chief's actions presently invoke no fear among his officers or respect in the young nation beyond the cantonments.

Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan will see a greater erosion of faith, a process accelerated in his tenure, unless he starts doing the right thing quickly. As a three-judge bench of the Delhi High Court — an institution that has been a particularly strong votary for justice and truth this past year — said on Tuesday: “A judge must keep himself absolutely above suspicion.” If Justice Balakrishnan appeals this judgement in his own court, the suspicion that he has something to hide will stay.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Actions tweet louder

Rajdeep Sardesai

If the twitterati were India's voting class, then Shashi Tharoor would be the Supreme Leader. A few weeks ago, when Tharoor's tweet on the government's visa policies generated much fuss among his ministerial colleagues, I had jocularly tweeted, "Maybe, Tharoor should quit politics and join journalism. He would have greater freedom as an edit page writer than as a neta!" Within minutes, I was hit by an avalanche of angry Tharoor followers on Twitter, suggesting that I had committed the ultimate 'sin' by questioning their Twitter icon's credentials to hold public office.

Unfortunately for Tharoor, his parliamentary constituency of Thiruvananthapuram isn't quite the Twitter universe while his Congress party workers reserve their adoration for only one Family. Which is why Tharoor the politician is at odds with Tharoor the twitterer. The success of Twitter is built on the idea of having an open and constant conversation among a mix of anonymous and influential people and is designed to bridge social divides. Indian politics, by contrast, thrives on being an exclusive club of the power elite, with minimal contact with the masses. Notions of transparency which the Twitter world claims is its defining badge are alien to those who reside in the forbidding corridors of Lutyens' Delhi.

The Congress party increasingly resembles a closed shop, with little space for internal debate and dissent. When was the last time we knew what exactly transpired in a Congress working committee meeting? When did a post-election Congress legislature party meeting result in anything other than a one-line message authorising the ubiquitous high

command to decide leadership issues. Banal press releases and platitudinous statements are the staple diet of political communication in the Congress.

It's not just the Congress party which is secretive. The Left is, if anything, even more inclined to stifle internal democracy. Politburo meetings are, by all accounts, an exercise in Soviet-style functioning where no one is allowed to question the prevailing party line. A majority of regional parties are run like tightly-controlled family businesses.

Perhaps, the BJP has been the most 'open' of our major political parties, often at some cost to its well-being. Witness a series of public 'rebellions' in recent years, the most graphic of which was undoubtedly Uma Bharti's infamous walk-out from a party meeting in 2004.

Tharoor, of course, faces another peculiar problem. As a first-time MP who has been catapulted into a ministership, he arouses envy and insecurity among his contemporaries. For the many netas waiting in the queue, the fact that a 53-year-old electoral debutante has taken the elevator to political success is enough for them to look for ways to cut him down to size. Lateral entrants are still a novelty in Indian politics: the many years that Tharoor spent as a UN diplomat count for little in the heat and dust of Bharat. An anglicised, accented, foreign-returned Tharoor is almost a caricature for a vast majority of netas who derive their legitimacy by claiming to be genuine desi 'sons of the soil'.

In a sense, by turning to Twitter, Tharoor is seeking to legitimise himself amongst a constituency he more naturally identifies with: the youthful, urban, English-speaking middle-class. This is the class which uses social networking as a weapon to express its solidarity against a 'system' it has lost faith in. Just as a candle has become the preferred symbol of middle class activism, the 140-character limit of Twitter is perfect to express a strong opinion without having to actually get involved in the muck of public life. For this chattering class, which despises the traditional dhoti-kurta politician, Tharoor is a role model: an educated Indian who

‘sacrificed’ professional comfort to plunge into the uncertainty of political life. As India’s first Twitter hero, one can appreciate why Tharoor feels an urge to reach out to this large constituency. If a Lalu and a Mulayam have their caste alliances, a Rahul has the family name, a Narendra Modi has a Hindutva appeal, for someone like Tharoor with no mass base, Twitter is integral to his brand recognition in the political marketplace.

And yet, there are limits to Twitter power that Tharoor must come to terms with. For a film star like a Shah Rukh Khan or a Priyanka Chopra, being on Twitter adds to their celebrity quotient and perhaps promotes their films. For a journalist like me, Twitter is another means with which to engage with the viewer and share news breaks. Tharoor is neither a glamorous film personality nor is he a journalist. At the end of the day, he is a minister in the government of India, bound by the oath of secrecy and the principle of the ‘collective responsibility’ of the cabinet system. He does not have the same freedom that an ordinary citizen would have in sharing information or expressing an opinion in a public space like Twitter. The opaqueness of the state may infuriate us, but to expect Twitter to effect a radical transformation in government functioning is to overestimate its capacity. Moreover, Tharoor, in the end, will be judged not by the number of followers he has on Twitter (or for that matter, the number of books he releases), but simply by the work he does for his constituency and his achievements as a minister. For example, as a Minister of State for External Affairs who is responsible for the Gulf region, why doesn’t Tharoor take up the issue of working conditions for migrant workers? A tweet on his actions might earn him more goodwill than telling us who he lunched with! Post-script: Tharoor and I come from the same school. He has over six lakh followers, I have a little over 30,000. Since Twitter can be one giant ego massage, must confess to being a little envious!

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PUBLIC POLICY

Time for new land reforms

TK Arun

Food prices are sky-high and the governments at the Centre and the states can do little more than blame one another. The present rise in food prices

cannot be tackled through conventional means, because food prices are going up because of higher demand from all sections of society. In other words, high food prices represent a problem of prosperity and it will only get worse as growth accelerates. It is time to implement radical reforms in farming, to tackle the shortage of food, in relation to rising demand.

The conventional wisdom is that high food prices make the poor worse off. India's growing prosperity and welfare schemes such as the employment guarantee scheme turn conventional wisdom on its head. When people who could never afford to eat their fill suddenly get purchasing power in their hand, the first thing they buy is more food, and better kinds of food. Because the poor are better off, food prices are going up.

In the eighties, the Soviet Union had a food crisis, when their grain output was double India's, for a population that was one-third or so India's. Why did India, with a per capita grain output that was about one-sixth the Soviet Union's, not have a crisis, while the Soviet Union was pushing up world grain prices with panic buying? Because most Indians ate mostly grain, while most Soviet citizens ate mostly meat — in other words, they fed their grain to animals and ate the animals. This is how the bulk of the developed world lives.

Consumption patterns are changing in India, too, with people eating less of cereals and more of pulses, vegetables, milk, meat and eggs. Even the NSSO surveys that sadly underestimate total consumption and yield the horror tales of poverty that warm the cockles of reform critics' hearts show that consumption across the board is undergoing a shift to higher value foods and processed foods. That shift raises the total food demand, even as people consume fewer calories, thanks to ever-diminishing dependence on manual labour.

This rise in demand for food is taking place across the world, as the five years prior to the global crisis had seen growth accelerate everywhere, including in Africa. World food prices are also at a record high, making it difficult to tackle domestic food price inflation through imports. World prices, in fact, put upward pressure on Indian food prices, even as we ban exports and try to keep Indian food prices repressed.

And the trend in food output has failed to keep pace with the demand. The same green revolution of the '60s that ended India's dependence on American aid for food has plateaued productivity in Punjab and Haryana, turned the soil increasingly infertile, and stunted policymaking imagination on raising food output. That green revolution model is not what will work now. We need to think anew, in four directions.

One, the absurdity of growing sugarcane in arid regions of Maharashtra, and not in Bihar and eastern UP, must end. Perverse subsidies make Maharashtra grow cane, instead of focusing on crops suited to its agro-climate, and the pastoral potential that made the Vithoba cult as big as it was in the state. These subsidies must go. If law and order improves to a stage where it is safe to set up and operate sugar factories in Bihar, that state has the potential to be India's sugar bowl.

Two, India faces a massive shortage of water. Groundwater is nearly depleted and surface water runs off to the sea. We need an intelligent

combination of large and small dams, planned on a river basin basis. Large investments are required. For them to become viable and free of conflict between upper- and lower riparian claimants on water, we also need realistic water charges, clearly defined water entitlements and democratic management of water supply.

Three, food production and procurement must be planned on a global scale, with Indian-initiated farming in Africa, Latin America and Australia to grow crops in demand mostly in India, such as pulses and oilseeds.

Four, we need a new breed of land reforms in which land is consolidated, rather than fragmented, to accommodate the indivisibility of capital and realise economies of scale and mechanised, know-how intensive farming. For this, we need a new organisational form, to replace the farmer cultivating his field with own, family and some hired labour. Farmers need to be organised into farmer companies that pool land, and acquire organised muscle while negotiating prices for inputs and their produce.

As retail gets organised and can beat farm-gate prices down with their volume purchases, it is vital that farmers achieve organised strength. Farmer companies can do some value addition before selling their produce, raising the value retained by farmers. These can farm oil seeds and pulses abroad as well.

Cooperatives have been failures, except in Amul and Amul-type initiatives. They have been hijacked by politicians, their functioning taken over by officials. Companies represent a viable alternative. Organising farmers into companies is the real challenge. Governments can only aid the process. Politicians invited. Power-brokers excuse!

TERRORISM

Put security under a new type of scanner

Barkha Dutt

There's that famous joke that the brilliant Arab-American stand-up comedian Ahmed Ahmed likes to throw at the crowd. In an acerbic, but simultaneously good humoured swipe at what air travel can mean for people of his faith, he says, mockingly, "All you White people have it easy. You guys get to the airport, like an hour or two hours before your flight. It takes me a month and a half."

And then the knife digs deeper in. "They asked me at the gate if I packed my suitcase myself. I said- Yes. So, they arrested me."

The self-deprecating witticisms would be uproariously funny if they weren't almost true in a world once again polarised by the debate around racial profiling. Ahmed himself embraced comedy after a quick sample of Hollywood-style profiling.

The only roles on offer were — Oil Sheikh, Terrorist, Grocer — and soon Ahmed evolved into a superstar humourist instead. But as he travelled the world he would soon discover that with a name like his, he couldn't make it to Duty Free without a pitstop at what he likes to call the airport's "Brown Room". "There's normally about a dozen or so people of a Brownish colour, looking around and saying — you look like a terrorist, no you look like a terrorist," he quips.

But enough of the jokes. What does a terrorist supposedly look like? Fair-skinned, light-eyed and almost Caucasian like David Headley? Or Black, clean-shaven and with a footballer's body like Umer Farouq Abdulmutallab? These days the stereotypical image of the terrorist as an uneducated jihadist with the skull-cap and the unkempt beard keeps getting shown up as an unintelligent caricature.

And yet, as America transits from the Shoe Bomber (Briton Richard Reid; strapped explosives to the base of his boots) to the Underwear Bomber (Nigerian Abdulmutallab; carried a liquid bomb in his underclothes) liberal rantings against the profiling of passengers are now being labelled flights of fancy. Panic-stricken after the Christmas attempt to blow up an airliner, the Obama administration has listed 14 countries for enhanced screening at airports. These include allies like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, as well as countries like Yemen and Nigeria.

If the Shoe Bomber triggered the mandatory surrender of footwear at X-ray scanners, the Nigerian bomber has ensured that if you are travelling from any of these countries, you will have to go through body scanners first. It's not so much racial profiling- as much as national profiling — the Americans are arguing.

Despite an intuitive recoil from the notion that an entire faith or nation should be branded because of deviants in its midst, I'm beginning to wonder whether the old politically correct formulations hold either. Of course, prejudicial typecasting is terrible and liberal resistance continues to ensure some accountability and fairness from the system. The Nigerians, for example, have every right to debate why the United Kingdom is not under the scanner considering Abdulmutallab was radicalised there, as were several other terrorists of the al-Qaeda. If a homegrown, desi terrorist found his way to the international stage (it could happen; remember Glasgow?) and India were branded as a country to watch out for, we would all be enraged.

That said, those who dismiss new security measures by arguing that if terrorism changes the way we live, we let the bad guys win — are talking a load of nonsense. Look at us — as we stare warily at that abandoned bag in the restaurant; as we meekly surrender our laptop, shampoo and shoes at security check; as we start at the sound of firecrackers and sometimes mistake them for gunshots; as we wade through the crowds at a railway station and always think of how easy it

would be to set off a bomb- who are we kidding? Terrorism has already changed the way we live and the best we can do is to find effective ways to minimise its impact on our well-being. There's no denying the fact that some personal liberties will have to be sacrificed at the altar of security. This means hammering out a new paradigm of what constitutes fair-play for troubled times, without allowing the State to turn Spy on its citizens.

As India grapples with the same dilemma — how to be safe, without being paranoid — our debates should centre more around effectiveness and less on philosophical hand-wringing. Take body scanners, for instance. In the US, the debate is now shifting from the ethical question of an immigration officer being able to stare into your private parts to whether the machines can pick up the kind of explosive the Nigerian bomber had stitched into his crotch.

Critics of the scanners say they are visible ways of appeasing public fears, but offer no guarantees. Some experts say you can walk through a scanner with an explosive worn inside a condom. Other countries are pushing for technology that allows computers instead of men to conduct the full-body scan. Either way the debate gives you a chilling glimpse into how creative security needs to be.

In India too, we don't debate efficacy enough. In all the arguments over whether the controversial new visa rules will keep away tourists we haven't focused enough on whether they can really help stop another Headley from making nine undetected trips in and out of the country.

Of course, better intelligence may be the most potent antidote as all the unheeded warnings about the Nigerian Bomber prove. Likewise with creating barriers for the Headley-style infiltrators. It's dangerous to mistake the wood for the trees. But, equally, we will have to concede that a new culture of security rituals is taking shape and we cannot remain philistines in a changing world.

Ahmed Ahmed likes to joke that it's easier for people of his faith to arrive for a 'pat-down' in a g-string. But, now even strip-searches aren't enough. As all the old rules get re-written, we must be ready to find a new balance between civil liberties as we once knew them and the ever-dangerous mind of the modern terrorist.

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HINDU 11.1.10 TERRORISM

The alphabet soup of internal security

Praveen Swami

Will the National Counter-Terrorism Centre bring about a radical improvement in India's internal security infrastructure?

“Future historians,” wrote Walter Lacquer, “will be intrigued and puzzled by the staggering disproportion between the enormous amount of talk about terrorism and the tiny effort made to combat it.”

Ever since the savage Lashkar-e-Taiba attack on Mumbai in November 2008, Indians have been demanding that the government add muscle to the country's counter-terrorism defences. Speaking at a lecture organised by the Intelligence Bureau on December 23, 2009, Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram laid out the government's response, outlining his vision for the “broad architecture of a new security system that will serve the country today and in the foreseeable future.”

India's counter-terrorism response, Mr. Chidambaram said, will soon be led by a single agency with control over intelligence, operations and investigation — the National Counter-Terrorism Centre. The NCTC will have access to counter-terrorism intelligence generated by India's covert services, as well as authority over the National Security Guard and the National Intelligence Agency. Newly-created electronic databases will make up the NCTC backbone, providing it with vast access to real-time information. India's new intelligence czar, the Director-General of the NCTC, will report to a Minister with just one responsibility — ensuring

India's internal security.

Will the new organisation bring about a radical improvement in India's anaemic internal security infrastructure? Or will it, as critics contend, prove to be just one more ingredient in the rich alphabet soup of semi-functional organisations kept warm by India's burgeoning security budget?

Ghost of Mumbai

As Mr. Chidambaram acknowledged in his speech, the ghost of Mumbai has haunted his year in office. "In a few days from today," he said, "2009 will come to a close, and I sincerely hope that we may be able to claim that the year was free from terror attacks. However, there is the danger of a terror-free year inducing complacency, signs of which can be seen everywhere."

Mr. Chidambaram's claim of a terrorism-free year wasn't quite accurate. Three hundred and seventy-eight civilians, and 311 security force personnel, estimates by the authoritative South Asia Terrorism Portal show, died in Maoist violence through 2009 — numbers that will likely be revised upwards when the official figures are released next year. Assam saw 386 fatalities, a majority of them civilians and security forces. Even Jammu and Kashmir, where civilian fatalities fell to a historic low of 55, saw fighting which claimed the lives of 72 security personnel.

But the Union Home Minister's turn of phrase demonstrates the deep impact the November 2008 carnage had on policymaking in New Delhi. Killings by terrorists in India's heartlands have become part of the rhythm of everyday life — what the Pakistani-American author, Rafia Zakaria, evocatively calls "the new normal." Mumbai, by contrast, demonstrated that terrorism could hit India's élites and damage the country's economic growth. Mr. Chidambaram's proposals are driven by the imperative of preventing similar mass-

casualty attacks.

How real is the threat of such attacks taking place again? Most experts believe the question ought to be when — not if — they will occur.

National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan has been asking in recent meetings with key officials from the intelligence services why no major terrorist attack took place in 2009. Many in the intelligence services believe that the successful disruption of jihadist networks in India made it difficult for groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba to stage major attacks in India. Moreover, they argue, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate can no longer allow its nationals to participate directly in major operations for fear of international opprobrium.

But most experts believe the cessation in major jihadist attacks is temporary. Jihadist training camps are up and running — ready for the time when international pressure eases on Pakistan. Already, the ISI has been testing India's responses by targeting its interests abroad. In October, the Afghan authorities blamed Pakistan-based terrorists for an attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul, while the police in Bangladesh prevented an attempted assault on the mission in Dhaka the following month.

Capability deficits

Will Mr. Chidambaram's plans help deter — or, at least, better defend against — a new attack?

India's NCTC is similar to the United States National Counter-Terrorism Centre, which Mr. Chidambaram visited last year, and came away impressed. Established by the Intelligence Reform Act of 2004, the NCTC was intended to close the gaps in intelligence-sharing that allowed a number of September 11, 2001 hijackers to

enter the U.S., although the Central Intelligence Agency had identified them as terror suspects.

The Nigerian-born jihadist, Umar Farooq Mutallab's evasion of the NCTC computer systems that should have stopped him from staging a near-successful attempt to bomb an Amsterdam-Detroit flight illustrates the system's limitations.

Last month, Nigerian banker Alhaji Umaru Mutallab told officials at the U.S. embassy in Abuja of his concerns about his son. In July, he said, the family had agreed to Mutallab's request to study Arabic in Yemen. But the father became worried about his safety when Mutallab sent a text message severing all connections with his family. The information provided by Mutallab's family made its way into the computers of the U.S. NCTC.

But it had over half-a-million names on its database — numbers no intelligence system can reasonably be expected to seriously investigate. Indeed, the U.S. has in recent years cut back the number of individuals it denies entry to flights from 30,000 to 18,000, responding to complaints that innocent travellers were being harassed. Chennai-based businessman Abdul Haye Mohammad Illyas sparked off an international travel alert in December 2004, for no better reason than that his name was similar to a key al-Qaeda operative.

India's experience of the Multi-Agency Centre — the intelligence clearing-house which will form the kernel of the NCTC — has been similar. Intelligence services have been inundated with information passed on by often unreliable informants. Early this year, uncorroborated intelligence that the LeT had despatched six pilots — and, for some mysterious reason, 30 women — to stage terror attacks sparked off nationwide panic.

“We need better systems to collate intelligence,” says a senior IB

official, “but also the resources to assess and corroborate it. You cannot produce the people needed to do that overnight.”

Words like these aren’t spoken idly. India’s Research and Analysis Wing, sources have told *The Hindu*, has just over a dozen officer-grade employees with expert Pakistani language and area expertise — and less than that familiar with key areas of concern like Central Asia and the Arab world. The IB, for its part, suffers from a chronic shortage of experts familiar with the northeast, and the adivasi languages spoken by the rank and file of Maoist groups.

Filling these gaps has proved less than easy. International relations and area studies programmes, even at premier institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, are poorly funded. Hiring policies designed to funnel new graduates into the civil services, as well as reluctance to look to the private sector for technology and knowledge, have further crippled the intelligence services.

India never carried out a full assessment of the lessons of Mumbai but the available evidence does not suggest that an NCTC-type mechanism would have deterred the attacks. The Maharashtra government’s official enquiry, led by former intelligence officer Ram Pradhan, noted that the intelligence services had issued at least 17 alerts on Lashkar attacks on the city starting from August 7, 2006. In both May and August 2008, they issued warnings that the Taj Mahal hotel and the Oberoi hotel would be targeted. The Mumbai police officials took the warnings seriously, the enquiry found, but lacked the resources to mount an effective response.

Put simply, no institutional response is likely to be effective until it is supported by an effective police infrastructure.

Mr. Chidambaram’s speech makes clear that he understands the problem. “The failure to perform essential police functions,” he noted, “is where the rot lies even today.” For those police functions

to be effectively performed, he noted, the States would have to hire 400,000 constables in the next two years. He pointed to the desperate need for better police infrastructure and training. But there is still no agreed national road map on how these needs will actually be met — and when.

Peter Clarke, head of the Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism command, said in 2007: "the most important change in counter-terrorism in the U.K. has been the development of the relationship between the police and the security service [MI5]." He said "the joint working between the police and the MI5 has become recognised as a beacon of good practice." That was possible because both MI5 and the police were extensively equipped and trained to deal with terrorism. In India, the process is just beginning — and at a pace which would put a tortoise to shame.

The key problem is not the lack of institutional arrangement for the management of India's counter-terrorism response but system-wide deficiencies in skills and capabilities. Vision and hard work will be needed to address them.

