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AGRICULTURE

Bengal & Bihar can deliver swift boost in farm production

TK Arun

Rising prices of vegetables and of other articles of food are a problem, of course, but also an opportunity to give a boost to the incomes of rural producers, with a little imagination and organisation.

Two states that can deliver a swift boost in farm production and productivity are Bihar and Bengal, with their fertile soil and water ever present on the surface or just below it. Assam would also qualify, except for its greater logistical challenges in getting the produce to the rest of the country.

Policy is perennially schizophrenic when it comes to farm prices. Jai Kisan, shouts the government and promptly clamps down on exports whenever food prices turn up the political heat.

Procurement prices are the same as minimum support prices, and the latter are hiked every now and then, and surprise feigned when food commodity prices go up. Except in the case of procured grain, the link between the price the consumer pays and the price received by the farmer is tenuous. Middlemen not only add on huge margins but also are in a position to inflate these margins at the slightest indication of a supply shortfall.

A supply chain and trading system that give such enormous leverage to middlemen do serious damage of two kinds: one, transmission of the price signal arising at the consumer all the way to the farmer turns fuzzy

and, two, the trader acquires the power to manipulate prices. An organised retail industry is the only thing that can tackle this.

Organised retail brings Wal-Mart to mind. But why? Mother Dairy in Delhi and its counterparts around the country in the cooperative sector are also organised retail. Amul is an example of an efficient, farmer-friendly supply chain management company that captures the bulk of the price paid by the retail consumer for the farmer. We need to build more such institutions.

Opening up organised retail to foreign direct investment has been a major area of debate. The energies wasted in this would be better spent in building up a wholly domestic retail chain with the farmer as the starting point. We launched Operation Flood when resources were meagre and technology rudimentary, but Vergehese Kurien's pioneering cooperative movement built India's dairy sector into the world's largest.

Today, when the resources at our disposal are far greater and knowhow, far more sophisticated, we should be able to outdo Operation Flood. Instead, we have Paralysis Trickle.

However, Bihar and Bengal do not need to wait for a new distribution chain to be built to step up farm production and feed fast-growing India's rising appetite for food, superior foods and non-food agricultural commodities. In the short run, they can act to step up the output of vegetables of all kinds.

The increase in supply will both find ready takers in the existing retail formats, and halt the rise in vegetable prices. Since reining food prices in is of immense political significance for the Centre, it should be possible for these states to negotiate special devolution schemes from the Centre, linked to time-bound delivery of additional food output. These should be able to cover most of the outlay the state governments need to make in the effort.

What is crucially needed is organisation and administration, and money plays a secondary role. The crop that is best suited for a production boost in each micro region has to be identified fast. In all probability, the data exists, in local farm lore, if not in the regional agricultural university or some colonial catalogue meticulously compiled to make the best possible use of India's resources.

The government could make the needed inputs available, including seeds, manure, micro-nutrients and crop husbandry practices, but without subsidy.

Organising scattered, small-scale producers into production units that use standardised farming practices and seeds and other inputs and do so in coordination with one another is one crucial task. The other is procurement of the produce, its cleaning, packaging, sale, despatch and delivery to bulk consumers with speed, hygiene and efficiency while realising the best possible price and kicking it back to the producers.

What these tasks call for are new commercial organisations. Farmer companies, in which all members have the same voting rights and are free to sell stake to outside investors, should be just as welcome as cooperatives of the Amul kind. Let multiple companies/cooperatives be formed in each region.

It would be a good idea to invite fresh graduates of the IIMs and IRMA to lead these enterprises. The challenge and the opportunity to prove their worth should be sufficient incentive for young talent, even if a chance to solve the world's food crisis and step into V Kurien's shoes looks too daunting.

Enabling swift registration of companies/coops, keeping at bay the tentacles of red tape and seed capital should be the states' contribution.

Enthusing small producers to embark on a new adventure should be the prime contribution of political leadership.
Buddha and Nitish have little to lose by giving this a good try, and a whole new world to win, if they succeed. Let's hope they will.

CIVIL SERVICE

Bureaucrats to make assets public

PATNA: The Nitish Kumar government has made it mandatory for all bureaucrats to submit details of their assets, which would be made public by January 31 on the lines of the ministers.

"For bureaucrats who fail to comply with the directive their salaries will be withheld thereafter," official sources told PTI today.

They would have to file the details in the formats prescribed for the ministers, the sources said adding they would have to furnish moveable, immovable assets list along with property details of their spouses and children.

The ministers submitted the details of their assets on December 31, 2010 to the chief minister in his bid to bring in transparency in governance and to weed out corruption in public life.

"Now, that a decision has been taken to make the assets of bureaucrats public, Bihar would be the first state to do so and could prompt other states to take a cue from it," ruling JD(U) spokesperson Sanjay Singh said.

In Bihar, the sanctioned strength of IAS officers is about 242, while the number of IPS officers is 231. In the state cadre there are over 2,000 gazetted officers, including those in the state administrative service and state police service.

GLOBALISATION

HINDU 10.1.11 GLOBALISATION

The dark side of globalisation

Jorge Heine & Ramesh Thakur

The rapid growth of global markets has not seen the parallel development of social and economic institutions to ensure balanced, inclusive and sustainable growth.

Although we may not have yet reached “the end of history,” globalisation has brought us closer to “the end of geography” as we have known it. The compression of time and space triggered by the Third Industrial Revolution —roughly, since 1980 — has changed our interactions with the international environment. For many, globalisation — the intensified cross-border exchange of goods, services, capital, technology, ideas, information, legal systems, and people — is both desirable and irreversible, having underwritten a rising standard of living throughout the world. Others recoil from globalisation as they feel it is the soft underbelly of corporate imperialism that plunders and profiteers on the back of rampant consumerism.

Globalisation is not uncontrolled. The movement of people remains tightly restricted. The flow of capital is highly asymmetrical. Over the last two decades, overseas development assistance from the rich to poor countries has totalled \$50-80 billion per year. In the same period, every year, \$500-800 billion of illegal funds have been sent from the poor to rich countries. That is, for every one dollar of aid money over the table, the West gets back \$10 under the table and, for good measure, lectures the rest on corruption.

The benefits and costs of linking and delinking are unequally

distributed. Industrialised countries are mutually interdependent; developing countries are largely independent in economic relations with one another; and developing countries are highly dependent on industrialised countries. Brazil, China and India are starting to change this equation.

There is a growing divergence in income levels between countries and peoples, with widening inequality among and within nations. Assets and incomes are more concentrated. Wage shares have fallen. Profit shares have risen. Capital mobility alongside labour immobility has reduced the bargaining power of organised labour.

The deepening of poverty and inequality — prosperity for a few countries and people, marginalisation and exclusion for the many — has implications for social and political stability among and within states. The rapid growth of global markets has not seen the parallel development of social and economic institutions to ensure balanced, inclusive and sustainable growth. Labour rights have been less sedulously protected than capital and property rights, and global rules on trade and finance are inequitable. This has asymmetric effects on rich and poor countries.

Even before the global financial crisis (GFC), many developing countries were worried that globalisation would impinge adversely on economic sovereignty, cultural integrity and social stability. “Interdependence” among unequals translates into the dependence of some on international markets that function under the dominance of others. The GFC confirmed that absent effective regulatory institutions, markets, states and civil society can be overwhelmed by rampant transnational forces.

Globalisation has also let loose the forces of “uncivil society” and accelerated the transnational flows of terrorism, human and drug trafficking, organised crime, piracy, and pandemic diseases. This is the

subject of our new book, *The Dark Side of Globalization* (UNU Press, 2011). The growth of these transnational networks threatens state institutions and civil society in many countries.

What can developing nations do to manage the challenges of globalisation?

The outright rejection of globalisation and a retreat into autarky is neither practical nor desirable: who wants to be the next Myanmar or North Korea? As one wag has put it, opposing globalisation is like opposing the sun coming up every morning, and about as fruitful. Equally, though, who wants to be the next Iceland, Greece or Ireland? The notion that endless liberalisation, deregulation and relaxation of capital and all border controls (except labour) will assure perpetual self-sustaining growth and prosperity has proven to be delusional. The three Baltic nations that embarked on this course (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) — to which, for good measure, they added the flat tax — all had double-digit negative growth in 2009.

For developing countries, lowering all barriers to the tides of the global economy may end up drowning much of local production. Raising barriers that are too high may be counterproductive, if not futile. Countries that find the golden middle, like Chile and Singapore, tend to thrive, channelling the enormous opportunities offered by an expanding world economy for the benefit of their citizens. Those that do not, like many in Central and Western Africa, are marginalised and left behind.

Finding the right, if difficult, balance between openness and regulation requires keeping a watchful eye on trans-border crimes that thrive in the interstices of the national and the international. Illicit trade, accounting for 10 per cent of global economic product according to some estimates, could be growing at seven times the rate of growth of legal trade.

The growth in transnational flows has not been matched by an equivalent growth in global governance mechanisms to regulate them.

And yet the very nature of the structure of globalised networks, which intertwine global actors and interests, ensures that no single power is able to maintain its position within the newly emerging global disorder without making compromises with other global players.

In Africa, home to 36 of the world's 50 least developed countries, state weakness often has opened the door to transnational crime and terrorism. Garth le Pere and Brendan Vickers highlight six pathologies that are particularly prevalent across Africa: illegal exploitation of natural resources, terrorism, the drug trade, illegal migration and human trafficking, gun running, and money laundering. According to some, Guinea Bissau has already become the world's first narco-state.

One response to global governance gaps that have made these illegal activities possible has been regional governance. The transfer of state functions to supranational forms of regional governance could enhance the capacity of individual states to combat uncivil society. The sharing of expertise, institutions, policy tools, personnel and other resources can go a long way in stemming the tide of unwanted activities.

Human trafficking is among the darkest sides of globalisation, turning human beings into commodities bought and sold in the international marketplace. Women and children are among the most exposed to it. NGOs from all continents attempt to cope with this nefarious activity and report on those involved in it.

Southern Africa has witnessed the rise of elaborate transnational crime organisations. The illegal trafficking in narcotics, mineral resources, ivory, counterfeit products and stolen property is thriving. International crime syndicates exploit government weaknesses to make huge profits. Illegal migration and money laundering rob the state of valuable human and material resources, in a region that desperately needs them.

A different kind of challenge is posed by insurgencies that thrive as a result of the inequalities created by globalisation. The “development

dichotomy” explains why dramatic national-level progress in India has gone hand in hand with an ever greater gap between the prosperity of urban, middle-class Indians and the squalor still seen in many of its 600,000 villages where most Indians live. Uprooted from ancestral lands and unable to adapt to the demands of a modern economy, aboriginal populations (Adivasis) often see revolutionary redemption as the only way out of their predicament.

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, on the other hand, might well have been one of the most globalised terrorist movements anywhere. Part of the reason for their considerable, if ultimately transient, success was the effective way they relied on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora both to obtain resources and to marshal political support for their cause.

Jihadists have excelled at using modern IT and telecom technology to promote their cause and foster their objectives, building on the link between the drug trade and terrorism pioneered by the CIA in Southeast Asia, Central America and Afghanistan. Jihadis have perfected into an art form the international transfer of funds in ways that are essentially untraceable, by relying on ancient mechanisms that replicate the old-fashioned way Osama bin Laden gets his information — through pieces of paper brought to him by hand by loyal messengers — which is one reason he remains at large.

It remains to be seen whether the GFC has brought to an end globalisation as we have known it for three decades. But there is little doubt that the “dark side” of globalisation is here to stay.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATION

India must save Pakistan

Sudheendra Kulkarni

Pakistan is in need of help. India alone can provide the help—and will also benefit from this. Pakistan faces the danger of self-destruction if it fails to make amends with its folly of mounting the tiger of Islamic extremism. Look at the bizarre events that led to, and have followed, the assassination of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab and a courageous voice of secularism, last week. Which civilised nation can have a blasphemy law of the kind that has disgraced Pakistan? Taseer was killed because, in an atmosphere of fear created by the forces of religious terrorism, he stuck his neck out to call it a “black law” and pleaded for presidential clemency for a poor Christian woman who has been sentenced to death under that law. Shamefully, not only have a large number of clerics justified his killing, but they, and a significant section of Pakistan’s civil society, have also idolised his killer as a holy warrior.

A blizzard of bigotry is sweeping across Pakistan. This is evident from Taseer’s assassination, the likelihood of more secular critics of the blasphemy law being killed in the months ahead, the sword of the death sentence hanging over the hapless Christian woman, and the many religiously inspired extra-judicial killings of non-Muslims and Muslims accused under the law. It is also evident from the long series of ghastly terrorist attacks on religious places and followers of minority communities, and also of Muslim communities deemed to have deviated from the path of “pure Islam”. If only a partially Talibanised Pakistan can look so scary, a Pakistan under the complete control of the forces of

religious terrorism—a distinct possibility—will undoubtedly pose a far graver threat to itself, to India, and to the world at large.

Before it is too late, India must devise, and assiduously work on a strategy to stabilise and save Pakistan. India must help Pakistan strengthen its democracy; make its generals subservient to the people's rule; and defeat the forces of Islamic extremism without wishing to break its unity or to erase its Muslim identity.

Why India? Because no outside power can be a true friend of Pakistan or of other nation-states in the Indian subcontinent. Outside powers are mostly interested in taking advantage of the hostility between India and Pakistan, as has been clearly shown by our troubled history since 1947. The longer India and Pakistan continue to look, and act as incorrigible enemies of one another, the stronger the nexus between Pakistan's religious extremists and its military rulers will become. This will only accelerate the process of Talibanisation of Pakistan, and also the consequent export of terror to India.

There is yet another reason why India alone can help our hapless neighbour. We are both products of a common cultural, spiritual and civilisational heritage, and the unifying and regenerative power of that ancient heritage is far from exhausted. A tragic situation in our recent history, which was precipitated and exploited by our common colonial master, created Pakistan and India as two separate nation-states. But there is no reason why we must treat as unchangeable a flawed design that was imposed on us, and which our forefathers accepted out of a combination of myopia and helplessness, at the end of the colonial era.

India should pursue three bold ideas to help Pakistan and itself.

Firstly, India must strongly oppose America's continued military occupation of Afghanistan and also condemn its drone attacks on innocent civilians in Pakistan. It is high time we Indians realised that the US has aided the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan both by supporting the Taliban covertly in the 1980s, and also by fighting it overtly now. Indeed, America would do itself good by leaving Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to manage our own affairs, and resolve our own disputes. Moreover, today's economically weakened America has no stomach for prolonging its unwinnable war in Afghanistan. Therefore, here is an opportunity for India to play the role of a benign leader in South Asia, by winning the confidence of the peoples of neighbouring countries.

India's ability to play the leadership role, and thereby establish a new design for a secular, democratic and cooperative South Asia, critically hinges on early resolution of the Kashmir dispute. The longer Kashmir remains strife-torn, the more oxygen it will provide to religious extremists in Pakistan and also to anti-India sections in its armed forces. Therefore, there is an urgent need to intensify efforts in India for a national consensus on resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

The third bold idea is to unleash the power of Indianised Islam to bring the Muslims of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh into a closer fraternity, not as a dominant or separate community enjoying exclusive rights and a privileged status over others (such as is given by the blasphemy law in Pakistan) but as an equal member of a secular, multi-religious subcontinental family. This calls for a new confederal constitutional arrangement between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in which the three countries remain sovereign and yet adhere to the common principles of justice, secularism, democracy and protection of minorities in their

territories. In other words, Pakistan and Bangladesh must be re-absorbed and re-integrated into the Idea of India, with this important recognition that Islam is as much a part of the idea of India as Hinduism and other faiths are.

Only those people remake history who pursue a bold and enlightened vision.

Public diplomacy — the tasks ahead

Rajiv Bhatia

Though it has begun well, India has miles to go for securing optimal projection of its foreign policy concerns.

Confidentiality and conventional diplomacy go together. As diplomacy is about communication and negotiation involving governments, they have inevitably to undertake their sensitive work outside the media's reach.

However, the 21st century is characterised by globalisation, assertive public opinion, an ever present 24x7 media and Web 2.0 technology. This combination lends increased significance to public diplomacy. Recognising the magnitude of the changing scene, India has begun well, but it has miles to go for securing optimal projection of its foreign policy concerns.

What is public diplomacy? Barack Obama told the Indian Parliament that he was “mindful” he might not be standing before it as the U.S. President “had it not been for Gandhi[ji] and the message he shared and inspired with America and the world.” Michelle Obama won hearts by dancing with Indian children. Carla Bruni, the French President's wife, communicated by doing a perfect namaste, besides informing the public that she prayed for “another son” at a shrine near Agra. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao proclaimed that China and India “would always be friends and would never be rivals.” Our distinguished guests were thus using tools of public diplomacy to connect with their hosts in India.

Public diplomacy is a web of mechanisms through which a country's foreign policy positions are transmitted to its target audiences. The term

was first used by U.S. diplomat and scholar Edmund Guillion in 1965. He saw it as “dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy, the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries ...” Indian diplomats, however, rightly maintain that public diplomacy has to do with both foreign and domestic audiences. When you put out a story on television, blog or YouTube today, it is consumed by a university student in Bhopal as much as by a financial analyst in Toronto.

Delhi conference: Recently the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) hosted, in collaboration with the CMS Academy, a two-day conference and workshop in Delhi to explore the challenges of “Public Diplomacy in the Information Age.” Attended by a cross-section of scholars, communication experts, media personalities, business leaders and diplomats, it aimed at crafting a new understanding of how India could exploit the full potential of public diplomacy.

Participants, including this writer, gained much from the presence of four top experts in public diplomacy and communication in the world today, namely Nicholas J. Cull and Philip Seib, both professors from the University of Southern California, Prof Eytan Gilboa from the Bar-Ilan University in Israel, and Nik Gowing, chief presenter, BBC. Select panels of Indian and foreign speakers, interacting with an informed audience, examined diverse themes such as “Public Diplomacy in a Globalized World,” “21st Century Statecraft and Soft Power,” “24x7 News and Public diplomacy,” “Web 2.0 and the New Public Diplomacy,” and “Corporate Diplomacy.” Three workshops were also held focussing on fascinating aspects of the subject. It may be useful to recall the key takeaways for a broader audience interested in foreign policy projection.

Key conclusions: First, public diplomacy and “new public diplomacy” (which uses social media tools for reaching younger audiences) need to be situated in the post-Cold War context. With a clear trend towards

multipolarity, globalisation and democracy, non-state actors, NGOs, business enterprises and others have been playing an increasingly important role. The emergence of global television and Internet-based communication have now empowered governments to reach out to constituencies as spin doctors of yesterday could hardly dream of. Hence the importance of the medium has grown enormously.

Second, the message nevertheless retains its significance: if it is not clear and credible, it will not get through. The former Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor, suggested that while “Incredible India” has been a great campaign, what we needed was to project a “credible India.”

Third, the link between public diplomacy and foreign policy formulation is inextricable. If policy is flawed, projection alone cannot help. Therefore, senior public diplomacy officials should have a seat on the policy-making table.

Fourth, thinking about how to put across one's message has undergone a fundamental change. The advice now is to transcend government-to-public communication and, instead, focus on two-way communication, on “advancing conversations.” Public diplomacy is about listening and articulating. Beyond the traditional media, the cyber space sustains a “Republic of Internet” and a “Nation of Facebook” which cannot be ignored. If the government does not cater to their needs, someone else, possibly with an adversarial orientation, will. Perhaps this perspective led the MEA to embark on a new journey last year, establishing an interactive website, a Twitter channel, a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, a BlogSpot page and a presence in online publishing sites like Scribd and Issuu. These may still be “baby steps,” but they are laudable.

Fifth, the importance of speed in communication was repeatedly stressed. “Tyranny of deadline,” impact of the ticker, “Breaking news” and “citizen-journalist” were referred to. Image managers no longer have the luxury of time nor leisurely weekends. Addressing them, a

television professional put it bluntly: “If we don't sleep, you don't sleep!”

Sixth, management tools such as planning and evaluation are essential for devising and assessing the impact of public diplomacy strategies. They clearly form part of a continuing process, to be handled with transparency, integrity and professionalism.

Finally, the concept of nation branding is highly relevant to the task of projecting India.

After the conference, Prof. Seib, a keynote speaker, reportedly observed that India lacked “a consistent profile that it can present to the world,” that it did not have “a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy.” I find it difficult to accept this assessment. India's foray into public diplomacy in the digital era may be new, but it can certainly lay claim to a decent record of projection abroad. Turning Western public opinion in Delhi's favour prior to the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 is a shining example. India has a broader conception of public diplomacy encompassing all facets: media, cultural, educational, and economic and Diaspora diplomacy. Speaking at the conference, Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao aptly observed that “the tradition of public outreach and interpretation of foreign policy positions” had been “ingrained in our conditioning as diplomats.”

Tasks ahead: In the MEA, projection is driven by the External Publicity division as well as the Public Diplomacy division. Beyond them, the bulk of work is handled by our missions abroad, often the unnoticed members of our collective choir.

They all perform very well, but room for improvement exists. Our ambassadors should be trained to become savvier at handling TV interviews. Our diplomats should rapidly acquire skills relating to Web 2.0 technology. The rising importance of non-state actors should be factored in fully.

Finally, the striking disconnect between India's self-perception and the world's view should be addressed. Amidst unprecedented visits by leaders of all P-5 states within five months, our nation's attention was primarily focussed on internal concerns — scams, onion prices and excessive politics. Assuming we want India to become a truly Great Power, we, as a polity, must deepen interest in world affairs. The MEA would do well to use all its weaponry of public diplomacy to increase our awareness of the world and India's place in it. It must sustain its initiatives to project India's soft power. The task begins at home!

(The author is a former ambassador with considerable media experience.)

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JUDICIARY

PIONEER 12.1.11 JUDICIARY

By civil means, or otherwise

Manvendra singh

Never mind civil society's rant. Even as parts of the state have abdicated their responsibility, a trial court in Chhattisgarh has made history

A lot of people one grew up with, and a lot of people befriended along the way, became members of the 'civil society'. Everyone, after all, evolves in differing directions intellectually. The lure of the lyrical attracts some to seek membership of civil society. Those not motivated by the quixotic remain on the outside of the civil society, denied entry by passes reserved for ideological authenticity. In this manner, civil society membership is a club with a certain exclusivity. Rights of admission are reserved for those in possession of the card. The club card serves as a licence to pronounce opinion on all matters anywhere anytime. But it is opinion always expressed discriminately, subjectively, and with prejudice.

Civil society has been most vocally agitated by the trial court verdict on the sedition case against Binayak Sen. When the court found him guilty of activities that were deemed to be seditious, members of the civil society from Bilaspur to Boston came out to parade their anger and agony. The niche and the famous have devoted much time and energy in expressing their verdict on that of a central Indian court. And consumed yards of news space in print and television with their expressions of dismay at what they have declared to be a case of match-fixing between the lower judiciary and the polity.

It was always a case of 'the court in the BJP-ruled State', forgetting for

every moment the remarkable divergence of sentiment between the civil society of India and the sentiment of *madhya* Bharat. This subjective sense of the civil society was best exemplified when the Central Bureau of Investigation called it quits over its disgraceful handling of the Aarushi murder case. Even before the ink had dried on the Binayak Sen posters, the CBI was wriggling out of the Aarushi case.

The shame that spread across the country was not a shame shared by the civil society: Its silence on the Aarushi murder case was remarkable for its volume and the decibels reached. Because it was not a case that pitted political ideologies against each other, the civil society did not have an opinion about it. Even though a young girl had had her murder case closed by the principal investigating agency of the Union of India on the ground that some people were not cooperating with it.

Talk about the state seceding from itself, which is acceptable to the civil society, but not when one organ of the state passes a verdict on a case revolving around sedition. An un-investigated murder case is kosher, but not a guilty verdict for sedition. There is clearly something amiss somewhere in the sensibilities of those that claim a monopoly over the sentiments of civility.

And this was most apparent in the ghastly assassination of Salman Taseer, the brave Governor of Punjab, in Pakistan. By right, and by practice, members of the civil society can pass strictures and opinions on events anywhere, be it Bosnia, Baghdad or Bir Zeit. But when the Governor of Punjab was felled in Pakistan by Mumtaz Qadri for expressing his opinions, there was none expressed by the Indian civil society. The Pakistani chapter was brave enough to take to the streets in whatever numbers it could muster. Pakistan's civil society at least got its opposition to the killing expressed through print, television and public marches. But the Indian civil society, which has the licence to opine on all matters everywhere, expressed its view with a silence that was even louder than what they had reserved for poor slain Aarushi. The

pattern is apparent, and it is odious in its insensitivity, and selectivity.

Which then begs the question, why Binayak Sen, and not Salman Taseer, or justice for Aarushi? After all justice is what it is about when the warble is so high over Binayak Sen. The agitation is over a gold-medallist doctor of the poor who got it from the lower court for cohabiting with the Maoists. It doesn't take a long march of imagination to figure out the lines that are to be taken when the case goes into appeal in the High Court. Things are fairly predictable on that score. What is not predictable, however, is the nature of the battle in confronting insurgency and terrorism.

The largest percentage of the subversives operates over the radar. Even as those with their finger on the trigger are a number that can easily be counted, it is the unarmed ones who are more difficult to quantify and identify. It is fairly well known, for example, how many lads and ladies have left which villages to live by the gun, and pull its trigger. What is much more difficult in tackling an insurgency is keeping a tab on those who have joined them on the long march. Marrying the card-carrying with the gun-carrying is the trick, to use counter-insurgency parlance.

For in a curious twist of fortune those that do not carry guns don't in fact make it into the radar cross-sights of the security apparatus. They are, after all, teachers, lawyers, politicians, journalists, businessmen, policemen, and all those others who comprise civil society. And because they remain unarmed they prove difficult to identify as perpetrators of violence.

Violence of the insurgent, the terrorist or the comrade, cannot happen, after all, without the ideological and logistical wherewithal offered by the overground workers. In the words of Chairman Mao, they provide the water that allows the fish to swim. For without them the fish would not have been able to swim — or hunt. Just as the final solution would not have blackened human history had it not been for the twisted

ideological intervention of Adolf Hitler.

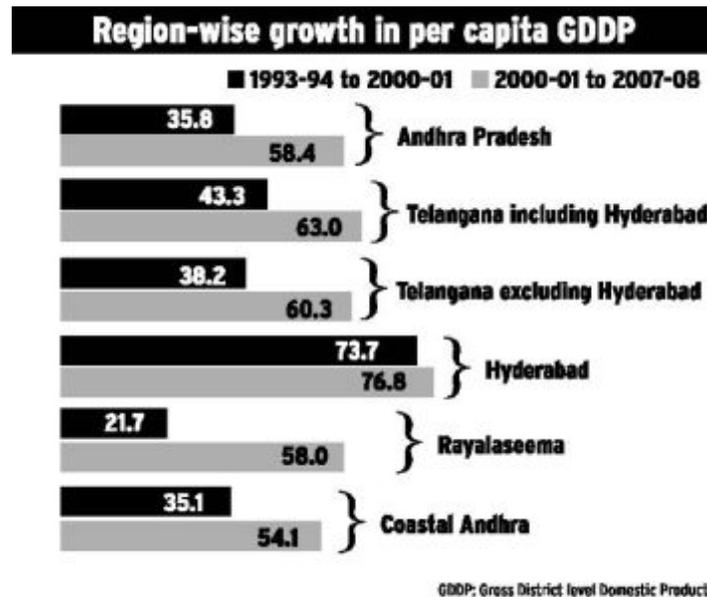
Hitler may not have pulled the lever on every gas chamber, but he was guiltier than all the prison guards for providing the ideological sanction to commit crimes against humanity. Much like the atmosphere of support and licence that has been created in Pakistan allows a Murtaza Qadri to ride the tide as if he were a 21st century Saladin.

Such crime cannot be tackled without also grappling with those guilty by complicity. Which then makes the Binayak Sen judgement come at a very interesting moment. Even as parts of the state have abdicated their responsibility a trial court in Chhattisgarh has made history by identifying an overground worker guilty by association. This is a first for modern India, and a test for state and society, civil or otherwise. Collusion, after all, we are told from the roof tops, is as much of a crime as the crime itself.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

The complex way forward

S. Nagesh Kumar



Source: GOI, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

The Srikrishna Committee has accomplished its task with competence and professionalism. However, for the ruling Congress the road ahead is riddled with political landmines.

A crisis triggered by conflicting political interests can be solved only through political intervention. This realisation has so far inhibited any knee-jerk reaction to the option suggested by the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee that keeping Andhra Pradesh united with constitutional safeguards for Telangana would be the “best way forward.”

On the shoulders of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) now lies the responsibility of choosing among the two key options — a united State with a model for Telangana's development, or a bifurcation with Hyderabad as the capital of Telangana.

The adverse implications of bifurcation have been enunciated

unambiguously. It would give a fillip to similar demands outside Andhra Pradesh. Also, it would be for the first time after the re-organisation of the States that a political demand to divide a State constituted on linguistic lines would have been conceded, by the creation of two Telugu-speaking states. The Committee wanted the issue of whether a region could be allowed to decide for itself its political status, to be viewed in the larger context.

What stands out in the Srikrishna Committee's report is its sagacity in debunking, on the basis of facts, certain dubious and time-worn theories that were in circulation. The report showed that Rayalaseema, a region rich in mineral resources, was more backward than Telangana. The growth in per capita Gross District level Domestic Product (GDDP) between 2000-01 and 2007-08 was 58.4 per cent in all of Andhra Pradesh, while it was 63 per cent in Telangana including Hyderabad, 60.3 per cent excluding Hyderabad, 58 per cent in Rayalaseema and 54.1 per cent in Coastal Andhra.

The Committee was pragmatic in acknowledging that the demand for Telangana was not unjustified. In fact, it did not flinch in saying that a separate Telangana state would be viable economically as its Gross Domestic State Product (GDP) would be above that of even smaller States such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, though this was a neutral factor in its decision-making relating to Telangana. Telangana's per capita income would in fact be a notch higher than the all-India average.

The Committee put the record straight on the extent of support in Telangana for a bifurcation of the State. Strong pro-Telangana elements existed in Warangal, West Khammam, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, southern Adilabad, Siddipet area of Medak, parts of Nalgonda and Mahabubnagar and some areas of Ranga Reddy. The most vociferous and agitating sections were students, unemployed youth, lawyers and non-gazetted government employees.

An appreciable segment of the population was neutral. It included the original population of Hyderabad; people living in villages bordering Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema; people from the 'settler' villages in the Telangana heartland (migrants from Andhra); and the migrant population in Hyderabad. A large section of the tribal people, particularly those belonging to the hill tribes, even favoured a separate State of 'Manyaseema' comprising parts of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The Scheduled Castes, the Backward Classes and the minorities had their own aspirations for political space, economic development and reservation benefits. This incisive observation is borne out by the clear caste divisions witnessed among the Telangana joint action groups, including those on the Osmania University campus.

Also, the Committee placed on record what everyone knew but hesitated to articulate — the exploitation of educated youth by politicians, causing inter-regional and inter-community disaffection. The mismatch between the skills of many of the graduates with those required by employers, given the poor quality of private colleges (engineering colleges in particular), was resulting in graduates being able to find only low-paying jobs, or no jobs at all. Their frustration was being exploited by politicians, ascribing their problems to discrimination against the people of Telangana.

Addressing a genuine concern of the people of Telangana, the Srikrishna Committee advocated steps to strike a regional balance in making appointments to key posts such as that of the Advocate-General, and to positions in administrative tribunals. It wanted the government to provide fair representation to all regions while making choices for senior positions in the Secretariat and the Directorates, a safeguard not available in the Presidential Order of 1975.

The Committee, though, was not correct, politically or factually, on every score. Suggesting 'Rayala-Telangana' as an option and then ruling it out was seen as a red-herring aimed to give the impression that it had reached its final conclusion after weighing all options. Not many people had treated this demand seriously and it was voiced by a minuscule section. The Committee erred in recommending a medical college for North Telangana; one already exists in Adilabad.

The question of the future status of Hyderabad apparently influenced the "optimal solutions/options" furnished by the five-member panel. It finds a mention in four out of the six options. A bifurcation of the State without Hyderabad going to them is not acceptable to the people of either region, because of sound economic reasons as well as sentimental factors.

The destabilisation of the economy of, or flight of capital from, or erosion of business confidence in India's fifth biggest city would be to the detriment of all regions of the present State, considering their economic inter-linkages with Hyderabad. In fact, the information technology industry in Hyderabad was connected more to the national (through investment) and global (through the market) economies than it was to the regional economy. The IT industry accounted for 15 per cent of India's software exports in 2008-09.

The Committee drew a distinction between the situation in Hyderabad and in Brussels, the Belgian capital. In 1968, riots broke out in Belgium on the question of who had the claim to Brussels as three languages are spoken in the country — Flemish, French and German. The capital region of Brussels was, therefore, organised as a separate bilingual capital region with a separate administrative set-up and jurisdiction. However, Andhra Pradesh by and large has a common culture.

A significant observation was that Telangana with or without Hyderabad was likely to experience a spurt in Maoist activity. The

report did not furnish further details beyond saying that a note was submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs in a separate cover.

Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram convened a meeting of eight recognised political parties on January 5, 2010, which paved the way for the constitution of the Srikrishna Committee. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) was one of them. It was well understood then that the Committee's recommendations would mark the way forward, though the final decision would rest with the Centre.

None of the parties to that decision, including the Central government, the Congress and the TRS, can now disown the report just because the 'best way forward' is either not politically inconvenient or because sections or the whole of the parts are not in its favour. This is especially so of the Congress, which should not be influenced by the argument that the panel has no statutory backing. Conscious of the opposition that its last option would inevitably encounter, the Committee noted that the initial reaction to it would be one of total rejection. It may fuel violent agitations in Telangana and put pressure on MLAs, MLCs and MPs to resign and lead to the demand for a Regional Council in Rayalaseema and the other backward sub-regions of the State.

The Srikrishna Committee has accomplished its assignment with competence and professionalism as claimed, but the road ahead for the Congress is riddled with political landmines. Exercising the option to keep the State united may mean erosion of its already weak base in Telangana. Dividing the State will not enhance its popularity as it has to contend with competition from N. Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party and from former Kadapa MP Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy in the 'Seemandhra' region.

It can emerge from this zero sum game only through "firm political and administrative management" of the unfolding situation, as suggested by the Srikrishna Committee. High expectations rest on Chief Minister N.

Kiran Kumar Reddy, who has given every indication of being resolute in the face of pressure. Much is expected also from the all-party meeting convened by Mr. Chidambaram towards the end of January to discuss the 461-page report.

Give EC more teeth

Proposal for interim ban on criminals just

CHIEF Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi has rightly reiterated the need to ban criminals from contesting elections. The Centre would do well to act upon this pressing electoral reform which has been talked of since 1998. Dr Quraishi says that when a person in jail during the pendency of trial cannot exercise his franchise, which is a statutory right, he should be barred from contesting an election too. In the present system, a person can be barred from contesting an election only if he/she is convicted by a court of law. The Election Commission has recommended to the Centre that if an undertrial is facing serious criminal charges like murder, rape and extortion, where punishment on conviction may exceed five years of imprisonment or more, he should be barred from contesting an election during the pendency of trial.

The Centre has not implemented this recommendation, perhaps, because of the political parties' perception that some of the charges framed against politicians are politically motivated. However, there is a general impression that if criminals are kept at bay during elections, it would help cleanse the political establishment of the influence of criminal elements and protect the sanctity of Parliament and state legislatures. The Election Commission's recommendation is just, reasonable and meets the ends of justice because it has suggested an interim ban on undertrials during the pendency of trial.

The commission's other recommendation for vesting in it the power of disqualification of MPs and MLAs under the Third Schedule (and not with the Speakers) also merits due consideration. It is common knowledge how the Speakers of Karnataka, Goa, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh Assemblies had misused their power of disqualification to bail

out the ruling party in these states. The commission should also be given the power of deregistering fake political parties. Clearly, when it has the power of registering a political party, it should also have the power to deregister a fake one. Today, a small group of persons, by making a simple declaration under Section 29A (5) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, can be registered as a political party. This has resulted in mushrooming of non-serious political parties which, in turn, are causing a huge burden on the commission in electoral management. Moreover, once a party gets registered, it cannot be de-registered. Parliament should add a clause to Section 29A of the RP Act authorising the commission to regulate the registration and de-registration of political parties.

Fresh debate on Emergency
Congress should apologise to the nation

Kuldip Nayar

EVEN if history is a mere record of important events that happened to a country, it has to be accurate and dispassionate. The official account of the 125-year-old Congress achievements is neither honest nor factual. The Indian nation may forget what the party leaders have said but it can never forget what they did.

The biggest blemish on the Congress is the suspension of the constitution during the 1975-1977 Emergency. I am a witness to the events of those days when the party gagged the Press, smothered effective dissent and detained more than one lakh people without trial. I expected the Congress to seek an apology from the nation for its illegal, authoritarian rule. Instead, the official history of the party has the cheek to say that people welcomed the Emergency when it was imposed. There was so much regret over losing the democratic way of functioning that the nation was initially in a state of shock and then of stupor, unable to realise the full implications of the government's actions.

And how can the party deflect the blame to Sanjay Gandhi? No doubt, he ran the government. But his acts had the approval of his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. R.K.Dhawan, then an aide to both Sanjay Gandhi and Mrs Gandhi, has correctly commented on the Congress history — he is a member of the party's working committee — that Mrs Gandhi possessed such a strong personality that the responsibility should not be put on Sanjay Gandhi.

It is known to everyone that Mrs Gandhi imposed the Emergency because she did not want to be out of power. The Allahabad High Court had unseated her for six years on the charge of misusing official

machinery for election purposes. The Congress does not even refer to the judgment in the book it has published. In the recent days one more fact that is now in the public domain is that she did not even sign the letter which advised the President to impose the Emergency due to internal disturbances and insecure conditions obtaining in the country. Even her contention of insecurity has been found incorrect by the Shah Commission which went into the whole gamut of the Emergency.

The commission says: “There was no threat to the well-being of the nation from sources external or internal. The conclusion appears in the absence of any evidence given by Smt Indira Gandhi or anyone else, that the one and the only motivating force for tendering the extraordinary advise to the President to declare an ‘internal emergency’ was the intense political activity generated in the ruling party and the opposition, by the decision of the Allahabad High Court declaring the election of the Prime Minister of the day invalid on the ground of corrupt election practices.

There is no reason to think that if the democratic conventions were followed, the whole political upsurge would in the normal course have not subsided. But Smt Gandhi, in her anxiety to continue in power, brought about instead a situation which directly contributed to her continuance in power and also generated forces which sacrificed the interest of many to serve the ambitions of a few...”

As coincidence has it, the two-judge bench of the Supreme Court has admitted that the 1976 judgment endorsing Indira Gandhi’s emergency role violated the fundamental rights of a large number of people. The bench has considered the 4-1 judgment “erroneous”. Obviously, the pronouncement by the two cannot supersede the verdict given by the five-judge bench. But it is time the government prepared an appeal for review. Law Minister Veerappa Moily, supposed to be a man of principles, owes it to the nation to have the 1976 judgment quashed to

see that nobody, however high and mighty, can play with our democratic traditions in the future.

It was impossible to believe that a detention order tainted by mala fide could not be challenged during the Emergency. Justice H.R. Khanna courageously differed with the majority judgment. He ruled that “even during the Emergency the state has got no power to deprive a person of his life or personal liberty without the authority of law.

That is the essential postulate and basic assumption of the rule of law in every civilised society.” Mrs Gandhi did not make him the Chief Justice of India when his turn came. The Congress history doesn’t mention this.

No doubt, the ruling Congress is under pressure because too many scams of corruption have come to light, one after the other. But initiating a debate on the Emergency, however important, is not going to divert the nation’s attention to anything else. The government has to accept the fact that there is no alternative to a probe by the Joint Parliamentary Committee which might unmask the faces which have hidden their identity so far in the 2G spectrum scandal.

In any case, no other demand has had the entire Opposition, from right to left, united since Independence. The more the government resists it, the greater is the doubt of its credentials. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s appeal to the people on New Year’s Day not to be cynical and gloomy has had little effect because the country is convinced that the government is hiding something big, something sensational.

The deterioration in public life, in the Congress as well as in other parties and groups, is matched by growing disruptive tendencies, rooted in factors like province, religion, caste and language. People are forgetting major issues and getting excited over minor matters and thereby harming the country’s unity, strength and progress. There is need for new thinking, not in terms of slogans and dogmas but of idealism related to both modern conditions and human values.

I vainly looked for such an approach in the history that the Congress has brought out. It is a pity that a party with an experience of 125 years has not risen above petty politics and has not depicted the past as it has taken place. The party has lost a golden opportunity to assure the people that its actions were neither in the interest of the Congress nor the nation as a whole.

LAMENT FOR A COG

- Does the prime minister matter?

ASHOK MITRA



Thanks to the plenary session of the Congress, things have got cleaned up; everyone knows, or should know, his or her place. The individual who is the prime minister, for example, should know that he serves a very specific purpose, he — a nobody — is needed to fill nominally the slot the Great Renouncer decided to vacate, even before occupying it, in order that she could be hailed as the Great Renouncer and accorded the same quality of reverence as was once bestowed upon that other cognizable renouncer in the nation's history — what was his name, ah, yes, Mahatma Gandhi.

Renunciation is, however, no liberation from responsibility. Mahatma Gandhi spurned all formal positions in the Congress, but he could not escape the fate of being all powerful in the party. None could remain party president if Gandhi disapproved of him; members of the party's highest decision-making body, the working committee, had to be named by him, resolutions adopted by the party had to be given the final touch by him, each single decision the party took needed the imprimatur of his blessings. This was the state of affairs until the Mountbattens, husband and wife, arrived on the scene.

Renouncers are fated to enjoy such omnipotence. The new renouncer, too, is. She continues as the supreme entity in the party. She decides who will hold which position in the party hierarchy down to the *taluka* level. She names chief ministers and other ministers in states where the

party is able to form governments: she again decides which chief minister has to be removed and when. And, of course, she is chairperson and prime mover of the coalition which forms the administration at the Centre. She has renounced the position of prime minister, but is very much more powerful than the prime minister. If the government scores a major success, all plaudits belong to her. Similarly, if a crisis visits the government, it has to be resolved by her. The burden of renunciation is simply awesome.

Where does all this, though, leave the formally named prime minister? Please consider the circumstances. A private gentleman in retirement can concentrate on tending his garden and not bother to make his wishes for the new year known to the public. One designated formally or the head of the country's government is in no position to choose that option. He therefore sticks to grammar and pronounces two resolutions for the new year: (a) to fight to the hilt corruption in government, and (b) to bring down prices.

The moment the prime minister utters these wishes, he knows it is not within his domain to ensure their fulfilment. Even in the past he had made the appropriate noises against corruption; that has not stopped events from taking their own course. He had promised some six months ago that food prices would come down to the level of five to six per cent by end-December; prices, in fact, have now climbed back to around 15 per cent.

Does not the prime minister realize that he does not really count? Even within the party he formally belongs to, he does not count. Most other prominent leaders in the party have their own groups or factions. When an occasion arises, they can throw their weight about within both the party and the government. The prime minister does not enjoy that luxury since he has no political base of his own. Other leaders, including ministers, are courteous to him because he has been nominated for the part by the Great Renouncer. Crucial decisions within the party as well

as within the government, they know, are to be taken by her. It is an awkward, anomalous arrangement; the buck, supposed to stop with the prime minister, does not stop with him: it stops elsewhere.

That such is the nitty-gritty of reality is borne out by the correspondence, now available to the public, between the prime minister and the gentleman who was his minister of communications during the period the curious events of the 2G spectrum scandal assumed shape. On November 2, 2007 the prime minister writes to his minister on the issue of the spectrum allocations, enclosing a note emphasizing points that should be gone into and urging the need for fairness and transparency in the allocations and expressing the hope of being kept informed before any further action is taken. The minister, nonetheless, took the prime minister for granted. On December 26 of the same year, he informs the prime minister about certain decisions already taken in the light of discussions at various levels. The details of these discussions are not mentioned. The prime minister responds to the minister's letter on January 3, 2008 with a polite, single-sentence acknowledgment. He does not say whether he agrees with the contents of the minister's letter, nor does he indicate whether the decisions the minister has referred to are or are not at variance with what he, the prime minister, had indicated in his earlier letter. It is by now widely known — courtesy such sundry things as the Radia tapes — that such formal exchanges of letters between the prime minister and one of his cabinet colleagues do not mean a thing; there are other actors behind the scene and other events, too, unfold behind the scene.

The minister of communications could flout the prime minister not so much because he belonged to a party in the coalition which had enough clout of its own. Even within a coalition regime, certain minimum norms are followed; since a political person of sufficient stature usually assumes the post of prime minister, he or she cannot be treated as a negligible quantity. In the situation currently obtaining in this country, this, however, is not the case. The prime minister, a minister knows, is

not the final arbiter of official decisions, the centre of power is situated in a different location, and there is hardly any necessity to be extra-deferential to the designated prime minister.

Whether the government henceforth will or will not fight corruption with somewhat greater seriousness is also a decision which will be reached at the level not of the prime minister but of the Great Renouncer. The prime minister may provide his input; whether that input will be considered worth its weight in gold is a different matter though. Similarly, he may post his proposals concerning ways and means to fight inflation, but the minister of agriculture, or the petroleum minister, for instance, may have other slants on the issue of upwardly moving price levels. The interests of class friends too have to be taken into consideration.

Is it not egregiously irrelevant in such a situation to wax eloquent over the prime minister's integrity? For consider the goings-on during the 2G spectrum episode. Were nothing known of the prime minister's correspondence with his minister as well as of the Radia tapes, two alternative assumptions are still possible: either that the prime minister was aware of the irregularities that were being plotted but was unable to do anything about it, or that he was totally ignorant of what was happening.

In case the prime minister knew that large scale larceny was taking place within the portals of government, the natural question to ask is, why did he not put his foot down instead of accepting the developments philosophically — in other words, why did he agree to go along with corruption? Is he not, technically, an accessory after the fact? Cross over to the second hypothesis: while the prime minister was a man of first-class integrity, he was not aware of the shady things happening within his premises. If a prime minister does not know what is transpiring within the ambit of his authority, does it not reflect on his efficiency and, therefore, his suitability for occupying the position?

It was, after all, the personal decision of the individual who is prime minister to accept the position in full awareness of the overwhelmingly important conditionality attached, namely, that he must abide the preferences, prejudices and inclinations of the Great Renouncer. If the prime minister is feeling humiliated by the snide comments swirling at this moment around his person, he can only lay the blame at the door of the decision he took in 2004 to be a cog in the dynasty's wheel. It is for him to ruminate whether tending his private garden would not have been a superior choice.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

**Higher wages for rural poor
NAREGA becomes more attractive**

THE government has linked the wages paid under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to inflation from January 1. This will raise the wages paid under the Act — Rs 100 a day at present — by 17 to 30 per cent. Accordingly, the government's spending on this national programme will go up from the present Rs 40,100 crore a year. The cash-strapped government has resisted Congress president Sonia Gandhi's pressure for aligning the NAREGA payments with minimum wages. The government cannot afford to make a commitment it cannot keep.

Passed in 2005, the landmark legislation initially covered 200 districts and was extended to all 593 districts in the country in 2008. It serves the twin purpose of undertaking measures like flood control, water conservation etc and providing guaranteed employment for 100 days in a year, or unemployment allowance if no work is given, to a rural adult with a job card. NAREGA, as the scheme is popularly called, has raised rural incomes, checked migration from villages and promoted inclusive growth, and also contributed to the Congress' return to power.

The scheme has faced problems like delayed payments, resistance to the issue of jobs cards and fudging of records, but it has brought in transparency and accountability in providing entitlements to the rural poor through a bottom-up approach in a system notorious for leakages. The unemployment allowance results from an administrative failure and the amount paid is deducted from the pay of the erring officials. All wage payments are supposed to be made through banks and post offices. The administrative costs cannot exceed 6 per cent of the amount spent. The entire expenditure on works and workers is put on the NAREGA

website. Details of works undertaken and material purchased are provided on the walls of panchayat buildings. Rajasthan has led the states in NAREGA implementation, while Punjab and Haryana have lagged behind. But awareness about the scheme is spreading and workers are getting organised to demand their entitlements from reluctant state governments.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Irresponsible activism

Tavleen Singh

Last week in the Idea Exchange page opposite was the interview of a man who has been responsible for terminating a project that could have turned India into a hub for aluminum production and brought enormous prosperity to Orissa. I read the interview with N C Saxena carefully to try and understand what he did and was astounded to discover his reason. He said that if Vedanta had provided 500 jobs to local people, the environmental inquiry committee that destroyed its bauxite refinery in the Niyamgiri hills would have taken quite a different view.

The reason why this was so astounding an admission was because it is impossible to believe that someone prepared to invest more than

Rs 11,000 crores in a project should not have been able to take care of 500 jobs. Mr Saxena admits that the adivasis of Niyamgiri were as keen on improving their lives as anyone else. “They also want to see TV and own cell phones, because now they have seen that some of them who are lucky enough to get a job in the factory have a cell phone. They also want to have that kind of life. No one has given a thought to what can be done to improve the lives of the 100 or 500 families there.”

So, we have a situation in which because 500 people did not manage to get jobs in the refinery, an investment of Rs 11,000 crores will go waste and a project that could have helped double the revenue of Orissa stands terminated. Even more worrying is that a member of the committee that

recommended the closure of Vedanta's refinery should admit that they did this despite noticing that the adivasis would have benefited if the project had not been closed. It is important here to note that Mr Saxena is on Sonia Gandhi's National Advisory Council (NAC) so we must assume that he represents a wider consensus at the top.

As someone who visited Koraput and Kalahandi during the drought in 1987 when adivasi women were selling their babies for as little as Rs 40, may I say that the poverty I saw was hideous. The sight of small children dying slowly of hunger on the dirt floor of mud huts is one of the worst things I have ever seen. Things have improved since then but only barely as most adivasis in most parts of India continue to live off what they can make from marginal farming. Their lives are so devoid of even minimum comforts that nobody can hope that they should continue to live forever off their small scraps of land. And, yet there are mighty NGO crusaders these days who want to 'preserve' what they call 'tribal culture'.

They see the hideous poverty and the mud huts of 'forest dwellers' as charming and romantic without noticing that the adivasis do not agree with them. This is evident from the fact that it is from the ranks of adivasi forest dwellers that the Maoists recruit their troops. This is evident from the eagerness with which adivasis embrace modernity and the benefits of the 21st century any chance they get. The young adivasi girls who greeted Rahul Gandhi when he went to Niyamgiri to tell them that he was their 'sipahi' in Delhi had hairpins in their hair that could only have come from a modern shop.

This brings me to another interesting aspect of the closure of Vedanta's refinery. Nobody seems sure why it happened. Rahul Gandhi in his speech the day after the refinery was closed said he was happy that the

adivasis had managed to save their land. The Environment Minister announced that he was closing the refinery down because it violated forest laws and now we hear from a member of the ministry's inquiry committee that the problem was 500 jobs. What is really going on?

Whatever it is, the only people who are winning are those who would like to see India's poorest people remain poor forever and ever. If Vedanta's project had not been closed and if Posco manages somehow to go ahead with its steel plant, the revenue of one of our poorest states could double. How can this be a bad thing?

Only massive private investment can bring the schools, hospitals and basic living standards that India's poorest citizens desperately need. For more than sixty years, taxpayers' money has been poured into government schemes that have served mostly to make some officials very rich. So when a major private investment is delayed or cancelled on flimsy grounds, it is an act of extreme irresponsibility. It is India's misfortune that this kind of arbitrary action is becoming the leitmotif of Dr Manmohan Singh's government. As an economist, he knows the irreparable damage being caused. Why does he not stop it?

TERRORISM

Terror has a religion

Samar Halarnkar

More worrying than the assassination last week of Salman Taseer, the outspoken governor of Pakistan's Punjab, was the aftermath: the joy on the faces of those who showered rose petals on Taseer's radicalised and ever-smiling bodyguard (no doubt convinced of rewards in the hereafter) and the zeal with which imams warned anyone from mourning the slain governor.

Though there has been enough evidence of growing radicalisation on the fringes of our society, it's hard to imagine anything this extreme in modern, outwardly secular, democratic India. But the great cause for worry is a quietly accelerating religious conservatism and a spreading atmosphere of intolerance and hate. India tomorrow could be more threatened than Pakistan is today, for a mass radicalisation will consume not one religion but two.

To address these issues, it is important to stop the denial implicit in the slogan so beloved in India: Terror has no religion. Terrorism is almost always driven by religion. That's evident in every terror investigation since before the demolition of the Babri Masjid, which, along with the Gujarat riots of 2002, set off a wave of urban, Islamist terrorism.

Here's part of a motivational speech — submitted as evidence by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 1993 — by Dr Jalees Ansari, a Mumbai doctor sentenced to life for masterminding more than 30 bombings, most of them before the Babri turmoil of 1992: "We should pressure the government and the majority Hindu community by

whatever means, even if it means destruction of life and property to any extent... we want to terrorise them and government, particularly the police."

The latest confession comes from Jatin Chatterjee, or Swami Aseemanand, the botany post-graduate and Hindu evangelist who on December 18, 2010, revealed to a magistrate (as opposed to dubious confessions made to police forces renowned for torture) a nationwide web of terror around the Hindu cause. His confession supposedly joins the dots between five bombings (Malegaon, Maharashtra, 2006; Mecca Masjid, Hyderabad, 2007; shrine of Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Ajmer, 2007; Samjhauta Express to Pakistan, 2007; and Malegaon, 2008) that claimed 119 lives and resulted in many young Muslims being arrested and charged with terrorism.

Of the 14 Hindu men arrested or absconding over the last two years, nine were members of the RSS, whose chief Mohan Bhagwat on Monday said the organisation has always asked members with "extremist views" to leave. Even so, the RSS and the BJP find it hard to accept that its members could ever cross over to the dark side. Instead of recognising the cancer within, they belligerently allege conspiracies. This is not too different from the denial practised in the past by the Sunni Ahl-e-hadees sect that spawned Dr Ansari and some other Muslim bombers.

Whether Islamist or Hindu, terrorists rise from denial, regarding themselves not as attackers but defenders of a faith they see as being under siege. They believe God is with them, that their cause is right and just and cannot fail.

Terrorism in India is yet a fringe phenomenon. Intelligence and police officials estimate there may be fewer than 200 individuals — they know of — both Hindu and Muslim, committed to being terrorists. But there is no count of sympathisers who might cross the line in an atmosphere of intolerance — something that is spreading through mainstream India.

A leading doctor in Mumbai tells me how some of his friends (almost all Gujarati Hindus, he notes) abhor the 'M' word, refusing to give jobs to Muslims. A young Muslim from the Mumbai ghetto of Nagpada tells me how some of his friends think it's unIslamic to befriend idolators.

Hindus and Muslims find it harder than ever to live in areas inhabited by the other. Young people often grow up with no friends from another religion. As prosperity and education grow, so do ambition and competition, and so, consequently, does the influence of religion as a life anchor. Few blink at the creeping invasion of religiousness into public life.

"It's true, most of our patrol vans and police stations have idols mounted on the dashboard, and gods on the wall," says one senior Mumbai police officer when I discuss my observations. "Can minorities possibly feel confident in such an atmosphere? Are we not going the way of Pakistan where police pray in their uniform?"

One uniformed man who succumbed to a general anti-Muslim feeling was Lt Col Shrikant Purohit, alleged supplier of explosives for the 2008 Malegaon bombings. The first Indian army officer accused of terrorism, he also tried but failed to recruit fellow officers into the shadowy Hindu outfit Abhinav Bharat.

The modern Indian terrorist is — unlike the semi-literate Ajmal Kasab, the Pakistani captured during the 2008 attack on Mumbai — often well-educated, rational and as a person, usually quite pleasant. Mirza Himayat Baig, the 29-year-old prime suspect in the February 13 bombing of Pune's German bakery, was a good student in the Maharashtra town of Beed. He allegedly became a jihadi after attending meetings where young Islamists spoke angrily of the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat. Among those arrested this decade include dentists, engineers and traders.

Terrorist actions, a British professor called John Hull once noted, represent the rational mind at the end of its tether in a troubled world,

searching for a coherence that rationality can no longer offer. So, religion takes over. "The rationality of religion," says Hull, "produces the irrationality of terror."

Could Indians, one day, become irrational enough to shower rose petals on terrorists and murderers? It is a good idea to think about the unthinkable.