

Freedom First

The Liberal Position

RETURN OF



THE PERMIT – LICENCE RAJ

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Bill, 2006

- ♦ Why Amendment to FCRA 1976 became Necessary
- ♦ Protection or Persecution?
- ♦ Controlling and Interfering with the Working of NGOs
- ♦ Adverse Impact on Civil Society

No Visas for Fulbright Scholars

- ♦ Controlling Scholarship and Research

Statement of Purpose

Freedom First speaks for the silent majority - the majority that wants to be left in peace to pursue its goal of improving its quality of life, but has been suffering in silence, the indignities heaped on it by insensitive governments who have abrogated to themselves the right to decide what is good for the people. In the process, the whole country has been turned into a cesspool of corruption. Public morality and character have reached an all-time low.

Freedom First affirms that much of the unrest and ferment in our society is a result of State intervention in the daily lives of our people. The economic reforms of 1991 reduced the State's stranglehold on commerce and Industry. Yet, while GDP growth in the last ten years has been impressive, the slide in governance is alarming. The mindset of permanent and elected representatives continues to be meddlesome and suspicious of civil society. This has to change if India is to step out of the quagmire of impoverishment, insecurity and instability.

Freedom First therefore stands for minimum government and maximum freedom, tempered by a sense of individual responsibility, in which the people's genius has a fair opportunity to develop and grow.

Freedom First rejects any ideology, movement or policy that sets one group of citizens against another, be it based on class, caste, religion or envy.

Freedom First

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BETWEEN OURSELVES...

There still appears to be some confusion about our journal's periodicity. We therefore need to clarify. *Freedom First* has been a monthly effective August 2006. There will therefore be twelve issues. The January, April, July and October issues will be of 44 pages. The February, March, May, June, August, September, November and December issues will be of 12 pages.

In the long run our hope is to even it out to equal number of pages all twelve months. But organisationally, and financially we are not ready for this. We need more subscribers, more advertisements and we need your support to be able to achieve this.

There was criticism from some quarters that the 12-page issue folded and posted in a brown wrapper could well be mistaken for some publicity junk mail and consigned to the trash can without a second look. The critics suggested a plastic cover instead which is in current fashion. Since the issue is not to be folded, the receiver will be able to know that what he has received in post is a copy of FF. Hence the March issue of *Freedom First* came to you in a plastic cover. So will this one.

This has not been appreciated by a reader from Bangalore who writes: "I am writing to suggest that you do not use a plastic envelope to mail the journal. Plastic is not biodegradable and there is far too much already. Please do not add more when you can avoid it by using a perfectly acceptable alternative (which does not pollute, at least in the long term). Kindly consider."

I am passing the buck to you dear reader. What would you advise? You can drop us a post card or email us your response. See below for the postal and email addresses.

The cover feature of the July issue of *Freedom First* is on India-China Relations. There are those who believe that in the long run China presents a greater threat than Pakistan; that China which is still a dictatorship will, one day, pull the bamboo curtain down and make a bid to replace the USA as *the* superpower and India will be at her mercy; that the Indian Communists' will willingly become Communist China's fifth column in India – as they were of the late unlamented Soviet Union. We could title the cover feature: China - Friend or Foe? Write in your views. The deadline is June 15, 2007.

Editor

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MANY VOICES

*"The deep moans round with many voices. Come, my friends
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world" - Tennyson*

Which is more dangerous is debatable: a politician who is temporarily a bureaucrat or a hardened bureaucrat turned politician.

Bunker Roy, a social entrepreneur,
DNA, November 2, 2006

Politicians didn't care much when the target of judicial activism was policy matters. It is only when so-called judicial activism focused on promoting accountability that politicians began getting riled.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, president, Centre for Policy Research, *The Indian Express*, December 11, 2006

When the demand for inclusion goes unheard, it gets articulated in the form of acts of disruption.

Editorial in *The Times of India*, cited by Jeremy Seabrook in *The Statesman*, March 27

When Bankers speak like Marxists and *The Times of India* articulates the thoughts of activists as though there were common sense, we recognise that we are no longer in the presence of ordinary events.

Jeremy Seabrook, *The Statesman*, March 25

The way our players performed is not only sad but it has given India a bad name... but attacking homes, throwing stones, burning effigies, is not part of our culture.

Balasaheb Thackeray, *The Indian Express*, March 27

Last week, China's National People's Congress passed a law to protect private property rights... This issue goes beyond the issue of reform. It is a philosophical challenge to the ideology of the system.

Editorial in the *Hindustan Times*, March 23

I have killed 11 persons for the party (CPM). I can kill 11 more to save my family.

Sheikh Najimullah of Kendyamari Jalpai Village in Nandigram, protesting the CPM government's decision to acquire 58,000 acres of agricultural land for special economic zones, *The Week*, February 25

Until we learn why Bengalis, who shine wherever they go, are so different when they are at home, we will never understand the hold an obsolete 19th-century totalitarian ideology has on state full of some of India's most talented and intelligent people.

Columnist Vir Sanghvi, *Sunday Hindustan Times*,
March 18

It is a well-settled principle of human rights jurisprudence that the state also has a positive obligation to promote fundamental rights by preventing non-state actors from *de facto* violating freedom of expression.

Soli Sorabjee eminent jurist and former attorney general of India, *The Indian Express*, January 30, 2007

True diplomacy is so much more than realism; it is hope with dirt under its fingernails.

William Buckley Jr. *National Review*,
December 18, 2006

If you are a stock market investor, the government is a risk you cannot ignore. Sectors with the possibility of government intervention always got a lower valuation. I thought things had changed, but the events of the last six months underscore the fact that this demon thrives. It had just been hibernating in good times. The gloves are off at the first sign of trouble.

Business columnist Udayan Mukhejee,
Hindustan Times, March 8

It is better to die at home than be admitted to a government-run hospital.

Bombay High Court Judge J. N. Patel,
Hindustan Times, March 8

The only way to rid the country of corruption is to hand a few of you from the lamp post. The law does not permit us to do it but otherwise we would prefer to hang people like from the lamppost (a government employees charged with corruption).

Supreme Court Justices S. N. Sinha and Markandeya Katju, *The Indian Express*, March 8

OF CABBAGES AND KINGS

Damaging Public Property: "Progressive" or "Reactionary"?

It depends on who is doing the damage. A report in *The Statesman* informs us that on March 22 CITU (the CP(M)'s trade union front) organized in Kolkata an exhibition of buses damaged during a *bandh* earlier that month on the Singur/Nandigram tussle. The *bandh* was called by the opposition parties - in Bengal opposition means parties those parties that oppose the Left Front government led by the CP(M) viz., the Trinamul Congress, the Indira Congress and the BJP.

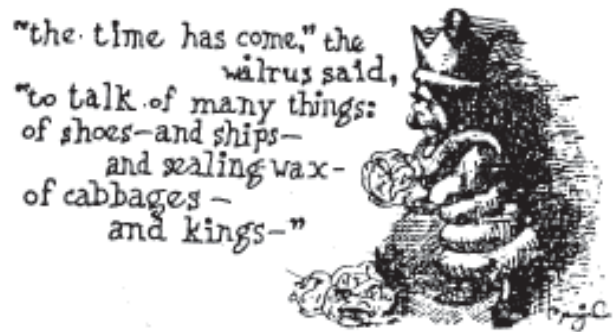
Says *The Statesman* report: "Twenty two buses which were allegedly damaged by *bandh* supporters belonging to several parties on 16 March, were put on display by the CITU to reveal to the public the "real face of the protestors". That the exhibition - however noble its purpose may be - disrupted the normal flow of traffic and caused hardship to the public was something the CITU leadership was least bothered about."

The damaged buses were put on display on a busy thoroughfare during rush hour traffic in the evening when office-goers were on their way back home. In Bengal the line between government agencies and the CP(M) is very thin - a fact that came out strongly at Singur and Nandigram recently. So it was no surprise that the Deputy Commissioner (traffic) said that the exhibition did not hinder traffic adding "There is enough parking space on the stretch anyway". When the CITU or CP(M) - the nomenclature really does not matter - organize strikes and *bandhs* and damage public property, such damage should be treated as "progressive" damage. Such is communist double-talk!

*

Be a Communist and get a Free iPod

When Communist Chinese President Hu was in India he gifted iPods to his Indian comrades. One of them was Sitaram Yechury of the CP(M). They did not know how to operate it because the operating manual was in Chinese. However, according to the



The Week which provided this interesting tit bit (*The Week* February 25) reassures us that our Swadeshi comrades "were able to get the better of the language and the gadget and got to hear a few recorded songs - all in Chinese" - must have been a real treat being in praise of their 'Great Helmsman' comrade Mao. In the old days they would have had to be satisfied with copies of Mao's Red Book.

*

Thank God for the Judiciary!

In earlier comments in this column on this topic we drew attention to judicial concerns over the appalling state of roads in Mumbai and the alacrity with which judges responded to PILs filed by civic minded citizens. Here's one with a little variation reported in the *Hindustan Times* of April 5. Arising from a Public Interest Litigation filed in the Mumbai High Court in 2005, the court which was hearing a report from a Road Monitoring Committee appointed by it, asked the counsel for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) whether he was happy with the roads in Mumbai. His answer (remember he was the BMC's defence lawyer) was surprising: "I am not happy with the roads. They need proper maintenance" he said. This prompted the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court to remind the civic body that it collected property tax and other taxes from citizens, in return for which the state was obliged to provide citizens with motorable roads: "You collect a fee for driving licence, so you must see to it that roads are worth driving on. One cannot even take a

driving test on such roads.” Good, as far as it goes. But what about ‘walkable’ footpaths for pedestrians and well marked pedestrian crossings? As for ‘driving tests’ – what ‘test’ is the honourable Chief Justice talking about? Most of the time these tests are a sham if tests are taken at all. It is one of those things that can best be described as an ‘open secret’! Ask anyone who is running a ‘Driving School’, he will let you in on the ‘open secret’ of how to obtain a driving licence without having to actually take a driving test!

*

Cricket is Dead. Long Live Cricket!

Like so many of my countrymen who cannot tell the difference between cover-point and cover-drive, I enjoy my cricket – watching that is. In the old days when an Indian player missed a ‘dolly’ catch or allowed the ball to travel between his legs to the boundary, we sighed with a shake of our head (as if to say why does he have to spread his legs). During Test Matches, the Brabourne Stadium was always full. For us it was a sort of ‘picnic’ a day out if we decided to watch the match - TV was still a decade or two away. The choice was either hear the commentary or be in the stadium and watch the match. On such occasions when we wanted to go round the corner, we could do so safely if the opposition was batting, confident that the ‘pair’ would still be there when we returned; but took no such chances when India was batting unless the two players at the crease were the two Vijays - Hazare and Merchant! Even when we lost, and often it was by an innings, it never entered our head to bash up the player who had scored a duck or missed a simple catch, let alone throw stones at his house. We took it in the right spirit murmuring, mostly to ourselves, ‘better luck next time’. And, when we won, we were happy considering that it was a rare achievement. If we couldn’t be at the stadium we would listen avidly to the running commentary on the radio or transistor by AFS Talyarkhan (AFST as he was better known) or Berry Sarbadhikari. Listening to AFST was a joy in itself or to Berry in his clipped accent and King’s English. Cricket then was a sport – nothing more and we loved it whether India won or lost.

But with the advent of TV, the opening up of the Indian economy and of course the one-dayers, came the sponsorships, the endorsements and huge sums paid to players, the Board, the ICC, the BCC; the idyllic situation soon gave way to cricket becoming big business. How this happened and led to cricket’s

downfall is a long story. In the early years of TV, during matches, advertisement spots would appear at the end of an over or after a player was out and before the next one took guard. Now, when a batsman hits a boundary, there is competition between the ball and the advertising spot. Even before we can be sure whether it was a boundary or a six or whether the batsman was caught, an advertising spot interrupts. I counted at least 20 such interruptions in 60 minutes of play.

Even today as I cross the Oval to take the bus back home, I cannot resist stopping to watch a youngster hit the ball and the shouts of the fielders, sometimes with choice Hindi expletives exhorting their team-mate to stop the boundary or else! On week ends there are at least four matches going on simultaneously at the Oval and often we don’t know where one match’s boundary ends and the other’s begins. That’s fun. That’s cricket!

So next time round India plays some other country my advise to cricket lovers: Keep a transistor handy (to keep yourself abreast but go to the nearest *maidan* and watch our youngsters enjoying their cricket. No fixers, no money, no tension!

*

Dividing India

Recently I came across a School Transfer Certificate issued by the Government of Tamilnadu’s Department of Education. Apart from the usual name of the School, location, name of pupil etc. It had the following:

“Community: whether he/she belongs to

- a. Nationality and Religion:
 - Adi dravidar (scheduled caste or scheduled Tribe)
- b. Backward class
- c. Most Backward Class
- d. Convert to Christianity from Scheduled Caste
- e. Denotified Communities.”

If the Pupil belongs to any of the five Categories mentioned above, write ‘Yes’ and also indicate the particular Community to which he/she belongs.”

Comment is superfluous.

SVR

Return of the Permit-Licence Raj

Move to Amend 'Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976

Ganesh Sovani

Given the enormity of the damage that any hostile module can cause (the 11th July serial train blasts in Mumbai comes to mind), reasonable restrictions, by way of regulation of receipt of foreign funds by any organization in the country, need to be appreciated.

The Bill introduced by the UPA government during the winter session of Parliament (2006) suggesting drastic changes in the 'The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act – 1976' has given rise to controversy.

Genesis

Smt. Indira Gandhi introduced a law during the emergency to regulate contributions by foreign agencies to political parties, trusts, societies and similar organisations in India. According to the then prevailing atmosphere, it was seen as a step to protect her government from being overthrown by hostile foreign powers. The hurriedly promulgated FCRA, initially as an ordinance, and later enacted by Parliament, left many loopholes.

There are over 32,000 NGOs and social organizations in India, receiving foreign funding. Many of them are not capable of generating funds on their own within the country, given the limited resources, manpower and lack of infrastructure. This vacuum is filled through the benevolence of foreign agencies. Most of the donors are Christian or Islamic missionaries from the United States, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia. The intentions of the donors and recipients are not above suspicion.

Inadequacies

In January 2007, the Central Bureau of Investigation came out with a revelation that one Abdul Hamid Rahmani through his Abdul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre was illegally receiving foreign donations and this Centre had many bank accounts in Saudi Arabia and Delhi. However, it had not disclosed the receipt of foreign funds to the

Government of India (GOI) for the last twenty-two years. Our security agencies had little inkling about this outfit, until a Delhi bank alerted the CBI about one hefty and questionable transaction. Though security agencies are meant to keep tabs on powers which are bent on causing damage to the country's internal and external security, they need legal teeth to do their work.

A note prepared by the Minister of Home Affairs (MHA) clearly spells out the fact that changes in the internal security scenario, increasing influence of voluntary organisations, the growing sophistication in the field of communications and information technology, the quantum jump in the volume of foreign contribution being received and the large growth in the number of registered organisations seeking or receiving foreign funds have necessitated massive changes in the existing FCRA.

Scope of Amendments

The Bill proposes the regulation of the acceptance, utilisation and accounting of foreign contributions and acceptance of foreign hospitality by a person and/or an association. Many NGOs have criticized the government's move to modify the FCRA and have dubbed it as an 'infringement of their freedom'.

Given the enormity of the damage that any hostile module can cause (11th July serial train blasts in Mumbai comes to mind), reasonable restrictions, by way of regulation of receipt of foreign funds by any organization in the country, need to be appreciated. The new Bill intends to cover not only organisations, i.e. clubs, societies, and the like, but

also individuals such as authors, journalists, judges and civil servants who are prevented from undertaking foreign jaunts or hospitality with the help of organisations abroad. The government obviously does not want our opinion makers to be influenced by foreign funds..

Many NGOs receiving foreign remittances spend a substantial part of the money on administrative expenses and not for the purposes of the organisation's aims and objectives, thus negating the purpose for which foreign funds are sought. To curb this malpractice, the government intends to put a cap of fifty percent (50%) on administrative expenses like expenses on infrastructure, staff etc. The move to put an 'organisation of a political nature, though not a political party' under the scanner of the FCRA has also created a lot of flutter amongst political

parties, which branch off into various off-shoots to avoid coming under the purview of 'The Representation of the People Act'.

The Act proposes to make giving false information and non-disclosure of foreign contribution as an offence punishable with one to five years' imprisonment. The Act also intends to suspend the registration of an organization under the FCRA, if it is found making false declaration, violating the provisions of the Act.

Though many NGOs will be affected by the proposed legislation, the interests of the country at large, rather than the inconvenience caused to NGOs, should be of paramount importance. The amended FCRA is not such a draconian measure it is made out to be.

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Protection or Persecution?

Ashok Karnik

It may be true that some organisations misuse foreign funds received by them but why obstruct thousands of genuine recipients for the misdeeds of a few?

There is a thin line between assisting a laudable programme through foreign funding and trying to influence the policies of the funded body. The State tends to view all such activities with a jaundiced eye and tries to control everything. Where can it draw the line?

That government is best which governs the least. This quote by Thomas Paine was often cited by Gandhiji. The interference of the State in societal affairs needs to be avoided as far as possible. However, the State does not often see it that way and considers it its duty to protect its citizens from all 'evils'. It is for civil society to judge where State intervention is needed and where it becomes an instrument of undesirable control. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Bill 2006 (FCRB) is one such legislation that does not readily fall in the acceptable category. The reasons for its non-acceptance are many, including lack of understanding about its need, its nuisance value for innocent citizens and the feeling that the Government does not want free functioning of NGOs, which can be troublesome for it from time to time.

Protection from Foreign Influence

Every country wants to protect its independence of action, policy making and free will. Other countries try to manipulate these through use of money power and leverage of their own powers, economic or military. In a developing country like India, where money makes things happen, the use of foreign funds to achieve these ends is common. Parliament questions are raised on payment of money, bureaucrats are on the take and NGOs hanker for funds just to sustain their existence. This scenario, which we might hate, is unfortunately true. The State is, therefore, occupied with the idea of preventing this from happening. Its aims can be delineated as follows:-

- 1) Foreign funds should not intervene in the process of policy making i.e. elections, decisions in legislatures, bureaucratic evaluations, and the like.
- 2) Foreign funds should not influence our opinion makers, including the press, electronic media, academicians, and the like.
- 3) Our political parties and their fronts should

remain outside foreign influence.

- 4) Social and cultural organizations, including NGOs should not be manipulated by foreign agencies.
- 5) Funds received for one purpose should not be used for a collateral purpose.

This is a tall order. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA 1976) failed to be effective and needed redrafting. Meanwhile, there are widespread allegations of foreign funds running madrasas, carrying out conversions through monetary inducements and spreading secessionist ideologies. Newspapers and magazines being bought over to propagate a particular line of thinking is not a new development. One has to admit that although all allegations may not be true, there is cause for concern. If the State tries to mend matters, it is a reasonable exercise of its authority.

Persecution by the State

There is a thin line between assisting a laudable programme through foreign funding and trying to influence the policies of the funded body. The State tends to view all such activities with a jaundiced eye and tries to control everything. Where can it draw the line? The arguments against State's intervention are valid from the perspective of those who are affected:

- 1) It may be true that some organisations misuse foreign funds received by them but why obstruct thousands of genuine recipients for the misdeeds of a few?
- 2) The major chunk of misused funds is available through black money sources and *hawala*. The Government should try to control these rather than those received through open banking channels.
- 3) Does the Government have the mechanism to scrutinize how foreign funds are utilized?

How many cases of wrongful use were detected in the last 30 years since FCRA 1976 was passed? Is it not a case of creating hurdles when the Government does not have the ability to prevent/detect the miscreants? Every State intrusion in people's lives is usually justified as a step to protect the nation, society or for the larger good. Does FCRA also fall in this category?

Is a Compromise Possible?

The State has the right to protect itself from foreign interference in its internal matters. There is nothing wrong *per se* in the idea of an act like the FCRA 2006. It does not impinge on citizens' rights. Nobody has an inalienable right to get money from abroad for his organisation's activities, howsoever, good these may be. Even the US, through its Patriot Act – post 9/11 –, has made it obligatory for banks to set up a mechanism to identify senders and recipients of money transfers abroad. This may seem to be an unreasonable burden on the banks; but that is where security concerns have driven the world. The problem lies in the cure being worse than the disease: Good NGOs being put to bureaucratic hardships for no fault of theirs. Is a compromise possible? Why not place only those receiving huge amounts like \$ 1 million a year under FCRA? To prevent NGOs splitting themselves to overcome this restriction, the Act could insist on their having different office-bearers, addresses and aims and objects. This may sound a little complicated but if the NGOs themselves come up with this suggestion, the Government may be moved to pay attention. There is no point in opposing a legislation, without coming out with an alternative solution, if the problem is accepted as genuine.

MR. ASHOK KARNIK, formerly Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. He lectures and writes on national security issues. He is a member of the Advisory Board of *Freedom First*.



I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Mine is not a religion of the prison house. It has room for the least of God's creations, but it is proof against insolent pride of race, religion, or colour

Mahatma Gandhi,
Young India, June 1, 1921

A Draconian Bill that will Adversely Affect the Working of Civil Society.

The Union Government has introduced the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Bill, 2006 which if enacted would repeal the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 1976. The Bill has now been sent to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs for further deliberations. The proposed Bill is draconian and is going to affect the working of civil society under the guise of regulating the flow of foreign money.

The Bill's main objective ostensibly is to stop the inflow of overseas funds purportedly intended to destabilize the nation. The opening sentence of the Bill reads "to consolidate the law to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or associations or companies and to prohibit acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the national interest and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto."

The Bill in short is dangerous, is of questionable merit and would choke the NGO community and therefore needs to be repealed rather than be reinforced. For example some of the salient features of the Bill are:

- First and foremost there is blanket prohibition against foreign contribution to an 'organisation of political nature, not being political parties'. This is quite subjective and may hamper the work of NGO's and their activities. Under the earlier act such an organisation could get prior permission to receive foreign contributions but now there is an absolute prohibition.
- A second provision of the Bill grants the Central Government the authority to determine whether such an organisation is "of a political nature" based on its activities, ideology, programmes or association "with activities of any political party". Vesting the Government with such unchecked power over the finances of NGOs may foreshadow the death knell of India's vibrant non-profit community.
- Thirdly there are restrictions on granting the certificate of registration. It is up to the Government to decide what constitutes a meaningful activity. The Bill states that the Central Government will provide a certificate of registration or prior permission for an organisation to receive foreign contributions if the Government is satisfied that the applicant "has undertaken meaningful activity in its chosen field for the benefit of the people" or "has prepared a meaningful project for the benefit of the people".
- Fourthly the FCR Bill requires recipients of foreign funds to renew their registration every five years, and introduces fees for registration, renewal and prior approval. Presently, registration under the FCRA is permanent and free. Renewal provisions such as these are completely unnecessary because all NGOs, whether or not they receive foreign funding, are subject to audits and financial scrutiny under existing legislation such as the Income Tax Act. The registration renewal requirement will generate uncertainty, inconvenience, and more seriously, harassment by petty bureaucrats.
- Fifthly the Bill limits the amount of foreign contributions that NGOs may spend on Administrative expenses to fifty per cent. It would definitely be taxing for those that are small one grant research organisations and they would be fully justified in spending their money on administration.
- The Bill would also prohibit any association, company, correspondent and editor engaged in the production or broadcast of audio/audio-visual news or current affairs programme through any electronic mode from receiving foreign contribution. This contrasts starkly with Government's own policy of liberalising the economy when in 2002, the Union Cabinet had opened up the print media to FDI allowing 26 per cent of foreign equity of the total holdings and in 2005, the UPA Government allowed 20 per cent FDI in private FM Radio Services.
- Above all, what is important to note is that the FCRA has disadvantaged small groups who can't get funds because of FCRA Registration and that if the government is concerned about who is sending money they must monitor the source which is done simply by asking for information from those who receive funds and this information is, in any case, available because of the banking registration that requires separate reporting on this.

For more information contact the CEO of (Voluntary Action Network India) VANI Mr. Pooran Chandra Pandey at pooranp@vaniindia.org or Roshni Mallik, Programme Manager – Media at roshni@vaniindia.org

A Needless Bill

Meant to Control and Interfere with the Inner Workings of NGOs

While the Government is liberalising the Indian economy and opening it up to various forms of foreign investment, its policy on foreign contributions to Indian NGOs is still beset by a knee-jerk paranoia and a strategy for social control that once ruled the for-profit sector. For thirty years, the Home Ministry has used its power to grant and take away Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration.

Misconceived

Although the FCRA's stated objective – to halt the inflow of overseas funds purportedly intended to destabilise the nation – may be legitimate, the Act has had a negligible effect in accomplishing this goal. Indeed, upon reflection, it is obvious that the means chosen to achieve the Act's ends would be ineffective. It is not fair to assume that the "anti-national" and "separatist" forces supposedly targeted by the FCRA would seek FCRA registration for their activities and then be caught as a result. Such groups or individuals continue to use illicit funds channeled through the 'hawala' route for illicit activities and ignore the FCRA. The FCRA adversely affects only legitimate groups that desire to play by the rules and work for India's national welfare.

Window Dressing

In early 2005, the Government announced its intention to repeal the FCRA, but simultaneously introduced an even more draconian replacement, the Foreign Contribution (Management and Control) Bill (FCMC Bill). After vocal opposition from NGOs, that Bill was dropped. However in late 2006, the Government reintroduced what was essentially the same FCMC Bill as the Foreign Contribution Regulation Bill 2006 (FCRB 2006). The Government's ploy of dropping 'management and control' from the Bill's title is mere window dressing on an initiative

intended to clamp down on India's non-profit sector.

Ironically, the FCR Bill also appears to run counter to the Government's own 2006 Draft National Policy on the Voluntary Sector. That Draft National Policy supports the creation of an "enabling environment for Voluntary Organisations (VOs)", including reliance on legitimate, "necessary financial resources from India and abroad". And, in fact, the Policy takes a dim view of the FCRA as a law that

"prescribes highly stringent screening norms that often restrict the ability for VOs to avail of foreign funds." Passing the FCR Bill would only make things worse.

Problematic Aspects

Cleared by the Union Cabinet in early November 2006, the FCR

Bill prohibits the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions for "any activities detrimental to the national interest" – a vague standard all but inviting politicisation of such contributions. The Bill enlarges the categories of persons and organisations that are prohibited from receiving foreign contributions. It also imposes enhanced penalties for violations of its provisions while failing to provide for grievance redressal mechanisms. Under the guise of protecting India's national interest, the Bill's only accomplishment will be to empower the Government to interfere in the inner workings of NGOs.

The implications of the more significant changes under the Bill are:

1. Prohibition against foreign contributions to "organisations of a political nature not being political parties"

Section 3(1)(f) of the FCR Bill has potentially far-reaching and grave implications for India's non-profit sector - it contains a blanket prohibition against any and all "organisations of a political

Although the FCRA's stated objective – to halt the inflow of overseas funds purportedly intended to destabilise the nation – may be legitimate, the Act has had a negligible effect in accomplishing this goal. Indeed, upon reflection, it is obvious that the means chosen to achieve the Act's ends would be ineffective.

nature not being political parties" receiving foreign contributions. Moreover, Section 5(1) grants the Central Government the authority to determine whether such an organisation is "of a political nature" based on its activities, ideology, programmes or association "with activities of any political party". Vesting the Government with such unchecked power over the finances of NGOs may foreshadow the death knell of India's vibrant non-profit community.

Almost any organisation or person can be said to be engaged in political activity, especially if they voice displeasure with the current state of affairs, advocate improvements in the lives of the Indian people, or simply disagree with the government of the day. All organisations working on advocacy issues – such as women's rights, rights of ethnic minorities, or children's rights, for example – are "political" in so far as they challenge existing power relations within Indian society. Section 5(1) provides little guidance in determining whether any given organisation is "of a political nature" – it primarily lists examples of where to look rather than what to look for. The FCR Bill invites the Central Government to engage in an entirely standard-less, subjective exercise. The end result will be a government with powers to seize, control, hinder or prohibit an organisation engaged in advocacy issues that may potentially have a bearing on the government's own political interests.

The key term "organisations of a political nature not being political parties" must be more clearly defined in the FCR Bill as *those organisations that have either formal or clear informal associations with one or several political parties*. Restricting foreign contributions to political parties and their affiliates has a legitimate purpose in protecting our democratic process from foreign interference. Indeed, the Representation of the People Act already obliges Indian political parties to account for their financing. It would be a simple matter to amend that Act slightly to prohibit political parties and narrowly defined "organisations of a political nature not being political parties" from receiving foreign funding. But the FCR Bill goes far beyond the legitimate purpose of safeguarding the democratic process. There is absolutely no foundation in any democratic country for restricting funding – and thereby controlling the activities – of any non-political party organisation or person

engaged in lawful, non-violent advocacy issues.

2. Prohibition against foreign contributions to journalists and news organisations

Sections 3(1)(g) and (h) of the FCR Bill are among the most puzzling portions of the proposed law because they are so starkly at odds with the Government's policy of opening up the media to foreign ownership. These provisions would prohibit any association, company, correspondent or editor "engaged in the production or broadcast of audio/audio-visual news or current affairs programmes through any electronic mode" from receiving foreign contributions. This represents an expansion of the scope of the FCRA, which already prohibits correspondents, columnists, cartoonists, editors, owners, printers, and publishers of registered newspapers from receiving foreign contributions.

This portion of the FCR Bill is especially poorly conceived considering that on 25 June 2002 the Union Cabinet opened up the print media to foreign direct investment, thereby allowing up to 26% of foreign equity of the total holdings. Further, in June 2005, the UPA Government allowed 20% foreign direct investment in private FM radio services – policy expected to "generate employment all over the country" and make radio services more competitive with the private sector. Quite rightly, concerns about national security did not appear to be uppermost in the minds of the Central Government when it liberalised India's restrictions on foreign ownership of the media. The voluntary sector is at a loss to understand how shares of Indian media companies can on the one hand be on sale to foreigners while on the other "foreign contributions" to media companies are to be prohibited.

3. Heavier restrictions on prior permissions to receive foreign contributions

The FCR Bill's Statement of Objects and Reasons cites the "quantum jump in the amount of foreign contribution being received and large scale growth in the number of registered organizations" as rationale for the draft Bill. Implicit in this rationale is the old-fashioned siege mentality where foreign contributions and civil society groups are still viewed as internal security issues. As much as the Government would like to portray the FCR Bill as

an exercise in financial probity, it is rather an expression of paranoia.

Through the proposed FCR Bill, the Central Government seeks to exercise complete control over who receives funding, from whom the funds are received, how such funds can be utilised, and for what purposes. This goes far beyond the reach of the FCRA. The draft Bill would result in nothing less than state control over every aspect of an organisation's identity and functioning, making a mockery of the freedom of association.

4. Restrictions on granting the certificate of registration or prior permission

A further example of the Government's intent to control the content of NGOs' activities is Section 12(3)(b) of the FCR Bill. Assuming other conditions are satisfied, this provision states that the Central Government will provide a certificate of registration or prior permission for an organisation to receive foreign contributions if the Government is satisfied that the applicant "has undertaken meaningful activity in its chosen field for the benefit of the people" or "has prepared a meaningful project for the benefit of the people". By claiming the discretionary power to determine what constitutes "meaningful activity" or a "meaningful project", the Government seeks to pass political judgement on the work of NGOs and other organisations. If the FCR Bill becomes law, the voluntary sector has little doubt that criticism of the Government will not be considered "meaningful" by the object of that criticism.

5. Renewals of Registration and Restrictions on Administrative Expenses

In contrast to the liberalising spirit animating some of the Government's recent economic legislation, the FCR Bill represents a triumph of bureaucracy over good sense. The FCR Bill requires recipients of foreign funds to renew their registration every five years, and introduces fees for registration, renewal and prior approval. Currently, registration under the FCRA is permanent and free. Renewal provisions such as these are completely unnecessary because all NGOs, whether or not they receive foreign funding, are subject to audit and financial scrutiny under existing legislation such as the Income Tax Act. The registration renewal requirement will generate uncertainty,

inconvenience, and more seriously, harassment by bureaucrats.

Further, in a move clearly intended to hinder the functioning of NGOs carrying out research and acting as government 'watchdogs', the Bill limits the maximum amount of foreign contributions that NGOs may spend on administrative expenses to 50%. Although less draconian than the 30% cap proposed in the FCMC Bill in 2005, many smaller organisations have only administrative expenses, and therefore they will be unable to legally spend foreign contributions without diversification of their operations.

The FCRA Needs to be Humane and Facilitative

If a hostile organisation receiving foreign funding was posing as a legitimate Indian NGO, the onus would be on the Intelligence Bureau (IB) or the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to investigate its activities and prove that they were unlawful. Neither the FCRA nor the FCR Bill is necessary for this task. For instance, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 criminalizes raising funds for terrorist acts and provides for seizure of proceeds of terrorism, cash that may be used for terrorism, and other forms of resources belonging to an unlawful organisation. Furthermore, the Money Laundering Act, 2002 could also be used in this manner.

A Needless Bill

The bottom line is that there is no reason to regulate NGOs in the way envisioned by the FCRA or the 2006 FCR Bill. NGOs, like for-profit companies, are subject to the ordinary laws of the land, which are quite adequate to deal with rogue organisations. Foreign assistance received by NGOs should be regulated in the same manner as foreign direct investment received by companies. A simple amendment to the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) could bring all foreign exchange transactions under a single uniform civil law for all entities dealing with foreign exchange, and under the purview of the Finance Ministry.

This critique has been prepared by Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), BB-5, 1st Floor, Greater Kailash Enclave-II, New Delhi-110 048; Ph: 011-29228127, 41435536; fax: 41435535; E-mail: info@vaniindia.org; Website: www.vaniindia.org

WHAT MINOO MASANI SAID BEFORE
INDEPENDENCE WAS “FREEDOM FIRST”.
AFTER INDEPENDENCE NOW WHAT WE
NEED IS THE “SAME FREEDOM” FROM
OUR OWN ELECTED RULERS



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No Visas for Fulbright Scholars

- Controlling Scholarship and Research

P. M. Kamath

Any one who has done research in any academic institution in India or abroad knows that he can do his research systematically if a 'guide' assists him. But have you ever heard of a government bureaucrat guiding some one on his research topic? Or a bureaucrat claiming to have the last word before the research scholar launches his research? While that is not uncommon in a communist state, in a democracy it is unheard of. Though India is a democracy, officials in the Indian Government, it seems, would like to play the role of guides as well, to scholars intending to visit India on Fulbright Fellowships.

Newspapers have recently reported as much with the Government of India asking American scholars planning to visit India on a Fulbright programme to change their research topics or asking them to modify them or deny them the satisfaction by working on a topic of their choice by the simple tactic of subjecting/delaying the grant of visas to Fulbright Fellows. As a result some have, in frustration, dropped the idea of visiting India altogether.

What is a Fulbright Fellowship?

One fallout of the public controversy on Fulbright visiting scholars is that a large number of the discerning public are now interested in knowing more about Fulbright fellowships! Until now, the information on Fulbright fellowships was limited to a circle of academics, academic administra-

tors and those dealing with these fellowships in two countries – the US and India.

Fulbright fellowships were initiated for international exchange of scholars by the US in 1948 after it emerged as a super power in the post-World War II period. J. William Fulbright, Jr., a professor of political science and a junior senator from Arkansas, introduced a bill in the US Senate. The purpose of his bill was to use funds accumulated by the US government by the disposal of surplus war materials in various foreign countries to sponsor American scholars abroad and to meet the transportation cost of foreign scholars chosen to study in the US. In a sense, "the Fulbright Act" converted left-overs of war into instruments of peace."¹

In India it was introduced in 1950 through a bilateral agreement. Until 1997, largely PL 480 funds in Indian rupees held by the US government in India, was used for the purpose. Since then more than 7500 scholars both Indians and Americans, have crisscrossed oceans to study and research in each other's country. Those who went under the Fulbright exchange programme have always returned much enriched in their respective fields of study. ²

One may ask: What are the social and political benefits of such an exchange of scholars to study in another state? Nation states in

the international political system are legally sovereign and independent. However in the post-World War II period, nations were becoming increasingly interdependent. In the 21st century in a highly globalised world economy, nation states fear losing their independent identity. An alarmingly large number of issues in domestic politics and the economy are slipping out of their control. Thus for instance, when former chairman of the US Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan, said recently that there exists in the US economy a one-third chance of a recession by the year-end, India experienced a visible impact. The Sensex at the Bombay Stock Exchange promptly fell by 2000 points.

In such a world, India needs experts who are knowledgeable of the US and vice versa. They are needed in government, business corporations and in academic institutions. In fact as a secondary player in a world dominated by the US, India's needs are more urgent than those of the US. What is true of the Indian economy is also true of other areas of social life. Americans need to know about Indian social and cultural life as Indians need to know about Americans.

However, in the case of Indians acquiring a deeper knowledge of the US, there are two problems: The first arises from the fact that both Indians and Americans speak a common language - English. As a result any one

and every one who has travelled to one another's country even for a week, thinks that he is an expert on that country, their systems of government, their society and their history. This is not true, for instance, of Russia. Hence, under such assumptions, specialization is sacrificed on the altar of superficiality. Doordarshan, for instance, once described that the electors to the Electoral College to choose the US president are elected on the basis of "proportional representation". In reality they are elected by a unique system of "winner take all."

Second, to begin with, soon after the end of the Second World War, until the demise of the Soviet Union, the USA was very keen to promote the study of US civilization and culture. Because of the American interest in funding the study of America globally, Indian policymakers took the stance that since 'Americans are spending, on promoting the understanding of America, India need not promote the study of America! The University Grants Commission (UGC) never considered the study of America as an area of study while they were willing to encourage the study of Latin America or even Canada! As a result, a large number of scholars who wear the mantle of promoting Canadian studies or the Latin American studies today, were to begin with specialists on America, who left it because of lack of job opportunities by studying America. However, their migration to study Canada or Latin America has not only made study of America poorer but also their newly embraced disciplines as well. The UGC needs to strengthen a properly planned study of America as well as other areas so that men working in the

study of an area have good grounding in it.

Despite the Indian government being disinterested in promoting the study of America, the American government was interested in encouraging Indian scholars studying in America and Americans studying in India. In the not so distant past, particularly during the height of the Cold War, the Government of India looked at visiting Americans with suspicion. A liberal American professor, a friend of India, who initially came as a Fulbright Fellow, was chased away in the 1980s despite his doing good work in the Bombay University. During the 'emergency' in India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was very suspicious of visiting Americans. So she was looking for ways to limit the number of Americans visiting India as Fulbright scholars. One fallacious yardstick she proposed was to say that India would give that number of visas to visiting Americans equal to the number of visas the US gives to Indians visiting the US on exchange programmes.

On the face of it, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's argument appeared to be a case of asserting the sovereign equality between the two nations. But her insistence on reciprocity was fallacious, because, though the programme is bilateral, there was hardly any monetary contribution from Indian government in the implementation of the exchange programme. Since it is the US that pays not only for Indians going to the US but also American scholars visiting India on a Fulbright fellowship, the one who foots the bill is bound to have Americans enjoy greater benefits under the programme than Indians.

In the first two decades of

the Fulbright programme in India, a large number of Indians who went on the exchange programme did not return to India. Thus, the Fulbright programme became another channel for Indians to seek American green cards. This was particularly true for instance of students from the Indian Institutes of Technology or Indian Institutes of Management. But those Indians, who returned, were also viewed with suspicion. In such a situation explaining and analyzing American actions were not easy tasks for Fulbright returnees.

At the same time, it cannot be said that the Fulbright programme had absolutely no Cold War aims like winning over friends to its point of view. In one of my interviews in 1977 with the founder of the concept of this Exchange Programme, Senator J. William Fulbright, I asked him about the reasons for having a larger number of Fulbright grants to small East European countries like Hungary or Poland in comparison to India. He admitted that such a Cold War purpose was unfortunately there. He had written so in 1965 that the "distinction between education and propaganda is sometimes forgotten and pressures are brought to bear to use educational exchange for short-range and shortsighted political purposes."³

However in another sense, no programme of exchange of scholars between any two countries is without the aim of winning friends. Do Indian academic bodies like the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research or the University Grants Commission give fellowships to foreign nationals without such a motive? I had, in my own writings, more than once advocated India establishing Gandhi Fellowships

for South Asian scholars to create a better understanding between ever suspicious neighbours! ⁴

But it should be remembered that even during the Cold War, American government agencies implementing exchange programme did not question the topics of research submitted by Indians selected to visit American universities. I had for instance, twice won Fulbright fellowships. I studied the controversial role of National Security Advisers in policy making by taking cases like the Bay of Pigs crisis, the Vietnam War⁵ or the Iran Contra scandal.⁶ Not only were my motives not questioned in researching such sensitive topics in 1976 and again in 1982, but I was extended all help in opening up classified papers in the Presidential Libraries! Archivists were more than helpful in informing me of my rights as a research scholar! As far as visa was concerned, I could get it within a few days!

However, in those days of the Cold War, there were instances of public hostility against my studying US national security policy. Generally in matters of foreign policy the public inherit government views of a country as their own. After I delivered a radio talk in Urbana-Champaign in 1987, in Illinois on the working of the American National Security Council, for instance, a caller asked in the programme, whether I planned to provide information about America to the Soviet Union. Probably, he did not know that Russian scholars enjoyed the same rights as Americans on US soil at least till the 1980s as much the Americans or visiting Indians.

But after Bill Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 to begin

with, and since July 2005 and George Bush's visit to New Delhi in March 2006 American public perceptions have radically changed in consonance with the positive change in government approach to support India and her national aspirations. This was very clearly evident in the American South Asia experts lobbying in favour of the civil nuclear deal.⁷

When such is the American changed outlook, it is unfortunate that Indian bureaucrats should continue with their Cold War mindset and see an 'American hand' in the topics selected by their Fulbright scholars intending to visit India. If American scholars wish to study Hindu-Muslim migration patterns, Left politics in Kerala or Right politics in Chattisgarh, let them come and study. There have been excellent studies by American scholars on Muslims, the Shiv Sena, the RSS, the Congress and other political parties – or even on the Indian nuclear bomb!

Indian literature on its society and polity is enriched by sharp and focused studies by American scholars. This in a sense complements Indian studies on similar subjects which suffer from limitations arising from the scarcity of resources under which Indian scholars work in those areas. Secondly, American scholarship on India is enriched by Indian policy makers and politicians' willingness to talk to foreign scholars rather than Indian.

It is high time our policy makers change their Cold War mindset to the new reality of developing a new India-US equation in a globalised economy. We need to raise the level of our cooperation

in the Fulbright Exchange Programme by increasing our contribution to this programme. To begin with by issuing visas expeditiously and without interfering in the topics of research.

DR P. M. KAMATH, Professor of Politics (Retd), Mumbai University was a Fulbright Fellow and currently President of the Fulbright Alumni Association, Mumbai Chapter.

¹ Walter Johnson and Francis J. Colligan, *The Fulbright Program: A History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p.1.

² For my own experience as a Fulbright fellow, see "Fulbright Experiences: Bringing Out Best in Me," Zeeshan-Ul-Hassan Usmani and Nibir K. Ghosh (Editors), *Beyond Boundaries: Reflections of Indian and U. S. Scholars* (New York: iUniverse, 2007), pp. 257-64.

³ Fulbright's Preface in Johnson and Colligan, *The Fulbright Program*, p. viii

⁴ See P. M. Kamath, "Institute Gandhi Fellowships to Promote Peace in Indo-Pak Relations," in P. M. Kamath (Ed.), *India-Pakistan Relations: Courting Peace from the Corridors of War* (New Delhi & Chicago: Promila & Co., Publishers, 2005), pp. 1180-6.

⁵ P. M. Kamath, *Executive Privilege Versus Democratic Accountability: The Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 1961-1969* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982) and

⁶ P. M. Kamath, *US National Security: Struggle for Supremacy in Policy Making, 1969-1989* (New Delhi: Shipra, 2003).

⁷ For details see P. M. Kamath, "Indo-US Nuclear Deal: Can it Cross Congressional Hurdles?" *The Icfai Journal of Governance and Public Policy*, Vol. 2 No.1 (March 2007), pp. 36.7.

Many politicians are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition that no people ought to be free till they are fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story who resolved not to go into the water till he had learned to swim.

Thomas Macaulay

Self-reliance : the keynote of our independence

Long before we won our freedom, self-reliance was the goal of those of our people who could think for themselves and shed the shackles of dependence: men of foresight and determination, like Ardeshir and Pirojsha Godrej, who had confidence in the country's capabilities and shared the same ideals with Tilak, Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru who practised self-reliance.

In Godrej, self-reliance has been considered indispensable to progress, the aim being not just self-sufficiency for the or-

ganisation but for the whole country. Progress can only be achieved in a milieu of progress.

Based on our country's needs, and exploiting the country's own resources, Godrej have diversified.

Made to international standards and backed by continuous technical innovation, their products range from locks and security equipment, machine tools, forklift trucks, architecture and furniture, typewriters, refrigerators, computers and electronic business

systems as well as soaps, detergents, toiletries, chemicals, animal feeds, agro-products and edible oils.

The Godrej industrial garden township at Vikhroli-Pirojshanagar is an example of self-reliance and progress. For their workers Godrej have provided—in a unique environment—many social benefits: extensive housing, schools and adult education, recreation, medical and family-planning benefits...

Self-reliance is both a means and an end.

For Godrej it is the essence of independence.



Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

Every issue has at least two sides. A wise man studies all sides before deciding what is right. This is an attempt to present different viewpoints for your consideration.

Bofors Again

● Quattrocchi arrested in Argentina! The Bofors ghost refuses to give up! It resurfaces periodically to reopen old wounds. There is nothing to show for the years of pursuit. Over Rs.200 crore have been spent on the investigations to bring to book those who swindled Rs.65 crore; and nobody has been punished yet. Frustration at the lack of progress makes one wonder if the whole chase is worth it. Are we nearer to catching some of the guilty? Or are we throwing good money after bad? Quattrocchi's arrest in Argentina was itself a surprise but will it lead to his extradition and prosecution? Past developments do not inspire much confidence in Government's ability or even willingness to do so. Why is there so much political uproar over a potentially lost cause?

The Bofors saga smacks of political shenanigans to protect the guilty. Hence the public furore every time there is the possibility of a breakthrough in the case. The history of the Bofors investigation reeks of political intervention: In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi requested the Swedish PM not to pursue the Bofors issue; in 1992, our Foreign Minister handed over a "non-official" letter to the Swiss authorities to wind up the Bofors money trail enquiry; in 1993, Quattrocchi was allowed to leave India when the Supreme Court was about to summon him; in 1996, Quattrocchi's frozen accounts in London were allowed to be de-frozen by India's legal representatives; the mystery of who did that at whose instance is not resolved with CBI claiming confidentiality in the matter. Quattrocchi's arrest in February 2007 was kept a secret for 17 days. Nobody doubts that political pressures are being exerted to protect Quattrocchi. The proximity of Quattrocchi to Sonia Gandhi makes things murkier. In the circumstances, Bofors is no longer an enquiry into Rs.65-crore kickback money; it is an inquest into the moral degradation of Indian polity.

Reservation Again

● The OBC reservation issue has come up again because of the Supreme Court's interim order staying 27% reservations in centres of higher education. Arjun Singh has declared that the government will take recourse to all constitutional provisions (which means what?). The Congress spokesman has bravely claimed that this is not a blow to the reservation policy as the Supreme Court has only asked for a new list of OBCs and not struck down the reservation policy. Very reassuring statements indeed! CPI and CPM leaders have criticized the order as retrograde and want the government to seek a review of the order. All claim that this has nothing to do with vote bank politics. V. P. Singh, the OBC messiah, has called for a referendum. If public polls could decide judicial matters, why at all have courts? Nobody thinks that any wrong was done to anybody. That is the beauty of politics. There is always an escape hatch available to avoid sinking.

The fact that the government depended on the 1931 census to determine the percentage of OBCs in the country and avoided all suggestions by the Supreme Court to exclude the creamy layer from the benefits of reservation made it abundantly clear that it was not interested in providing relief to the needy but in spreading its net as wide as possible to attract political support. Political considerations drove all political parties to forfeit commonsense and required the Supreme Court to wake them up. It would not end here, as many subterfuges will be attempted to bypass the Court order. How long will the country be divided among castes and creeds is anybody's guess.

Rahul Gandhi's Baptism

● Rahul, welcome to controversy! Rahul Gandhi had thus far acted with great restraint, never shooting his mouth off although he had the “dynastic” right to interfere in political matters. His was a studied silence, which was much appreciated. Now that he is projected as the party’s election campaigner, he had to make a foray in the election battle. He did so with a calculation that he had to win back the Muslim vote in UP to undercut Mulayam Singh’s hold on that community. He chose Deoband, orthodox Islamic citadel, to disown the stigma of the Babri masjid destruction. His claim that if the Gandhi family had been in power then, Babri masjid would not have been destroyed was meant to assuage Muslim sentiment. In the process, he distanced himself from the Congress Government led by Narasimha Rao in 1992 and reached out to UP Muslims. This gambit is fraught with uncertainties. There are more negatives than positives in this manoeuvre. The after shocks are already discernible. Rahul Gandhi has refused to backtrack which shows how badly his party wants the Muslim vote and that his statement was not an off the cuff remark but a well thought out strategy to wean Muslims away from the Socialist Party.

Rahul committed two sins through his declaration; he disowned a distinguished leader of his own party and blamed it all on Narasimha Rao (which is not very surprising in the light of his family’s relationship with the ex-PM); secondly, he forgot history; he overlooked the fact that the Ram Mandir locks were opened during Rajiv/Arun Nehru era to win the Hindu vote and further, Rajiv Gandhi allowed the “shilanyas” at the Ayodhya site in a desperate move to placate the Hindu vote on the eve of the Lok Sabha election in 1989 (which the Congress lost in spite of this capitulation). Rahul’s claim that the Babri masjid would have been safe in the Gandhi hands is thus specious. Rahul would now perhaps wake up to the perils of political gamesmanship!

Readers are invited to send in their points of view on serious issues of the day to avkay@mtnl.net.in

Cheats, Frauds and Hope!

The Times of India report made me despair this morning:

Coaching classes in the city of Bombay were teaching children how to cheat! This is what professors were teaching their children: When caught, never confess, I repeat never ever confess. If noticed, swallow the chits, and finally, if spotted make allegations of bias against the person who caught you!

Have we reached such a state that we send our children to special classes to become cheats and frauds? Don’t they learn enough at home?

“Dad!” shouts the little child, “there’s a call from that uncle you don’t like, shall I tell him you’re not at home?”

According to the newspaper report 16 year olds listen with rapt attention as eminent professors who are supposed to help them solve mathematical problems and teach them the intricacies of the English language tutor them instead to become cheats! Ah! Fagin you would have loved this wouldn’t you as you taught little Oliver Twist and Dodger, Nancy and Bill Sykes the art of picking pockets of Charles Dickens’ Londoners!

The other day I watched as a bold man called me on the phone and asked me to help stop illegal work being carried out in a complex. Earthmovers and excavators had been called in and work was going on at full speed. The next day instead of calling that man a hero for what he had done, I heard rumors had been floated that the man was drunk when he had stopped the work.

“He wasn’t!” I said.

“But that’s what Shetty said,” said my friend.

Today as I read the Times report, I see what the coaches teach: If caught, make allegations of bias against the person who caught you!

What monsters are we turning into?

Is there hope I wonder.

And then my mind moves from Charles Dickens to an ancient Greek legend: Zeus, furious because Prometheus had stolen fire and thus given independence to mortal men, sends Pandora to marry Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus. Pandora takes with her a box, which she has been forbidden to open. However curiosity gets the better of her.

She lifts the lid to see what is inside and in doing so all the evils of the world fly out and scatter about the earth.

Only one thing remained inside: Hope!

Where there’s life there’s hope isn’t it?

And it’s that we need to cling onto as we fight a world where deception is becoming a way of life; even being taught as an art in coaching classes.!

COURTESY: *Bob’s Banter* by Robert Clements

Reaping the Whirlwind

Sharad Joshi

The angry reaction of West Bengal's peasantry to the attempts to take away their land for SEZs is founded on the Left parties' trumpeting of the virtues of land reforms and the importance of owning land.

I visited Nandigram and Sonachura villages in Eastern Midnapore district of West Bengal, and managed to have fairly extensive interaction with the villagers as also with those injured in the police action, still in hospital. The West Bengal Governor, Mr Gopalkrishna Gandhi, himself admitted that it was filled with "cold horror". The Governor earned a lot of sympathy from the people at large and quite some admiration from the Opposition parties. Yet, "cold horror" is a rather mild expression for what has happened in that region since March 14.

A posse of over 5,000 policemen attacked a gathering of farmers protesting against the acquisition of their land for a Special Economic Zone to house a chemical complex to be constructed by Salem Corporation of Indonesia.

Travelling from Kolkata to Nandigram and further to Sonachura, would be obvious even to a casual observer that the area is essentially an agricultural zone. Small *badis* (houses) surrounded by coconut palms, fishponds and lush green fields, swaying gently to the breeze, nature seems bountiful to the agriculturists here.

But lying dangerously close to the refineries of Haldia make these lands the target for downstream chemical companies, and, now, West Bengal's Government and politicians.

Bengal and from the Governor himself.

By all accounts, the communists have used all possible techniques to hijack elections in West Bengal, and particularly in this region. The police and the Home Guards are apparently packed with young comrades. That by itself ensures victory in elections. Under the banner of land reforms, land has been distributed to small tenants and landless families; but the title documents are all said to be with the party apparatchiks. That ensures that the peasantry will march

to the polling booths and vote appropriately. Had the Left parties won the last Assembly elections with a less thumping majority, Nandigram and Sonachura would never have happened, is a refrain.

According to official statistics, twelve protesters were killed by the attacking forces, which, it is alleged contained, in large numbers, party cadres of the CPM. Because the policemen are said to have developed a fairly amicable relationship with the villagers over the period of the protests the comrades-in-uniform were said to have been unhappy with this development. According

The Rural Perspective



Unexpected resistance

In most villages on the Nandigram-Sonachura road red flags flutter with the 'hammer and sickle', 'sickle and corn', or the 'white star' emblazoned on them. Some villages also have the tricolour with 'TMC' printed on them. Clearly, this is a stronghold of the communists who never thought that their plans to acquire the land would meet with such stiff resistance. The villagers in the 'red' habitats were said to be quite enraged that 'the counter-revolutionaries' of Nandigram should be evoking so much sympathy from outside West

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to a report, the Chief Minister himself had addressed the cadres and asked a rhetorical question, "Enough of barking, when are the dogs going to start using their teeth?"

The villagers strongly dispute the estimate of twelve dead. They put it well above a hundred. Some claim to have seen three large trucks loaded with dead bodies taking off from the site of the shooting. Hopefully, the CBI, which has been charged with the investigation by the Kolkata High Court will get at the truth. In one hospital, I saw a number of patients, mainly women with blue and black marks on their bodies - the effect of the lathi-charge. I got an impression that the agitators had deliberately put the women and children in the vanguard in the hope that that would take the edge off the police attack. But these hopes were obviously belied.

The Governor cannot be entirely unfamiliar with the kind of terror the Left parties are said to have let loose in the West Bengal countryside. He could not be unaware of the manner in which these parties have reportedly marshalled refugees from Bangladesh. He should have felt "cold horror" at what was

happening during the elections that gave the Leftists a clear mandate.

Peasants Love their Land

One very remarkable thing in the happenings in Nandigram area is the peasantry's fierce love and pride in the land they possess. They all talk of giving up life rather than their land. This is not quite the case in some other States where farmers driven to suicide are willing to hand over their land provided the price is right. What makes the Bengal farmers different?

The Left parties are apparently reaping what they sowed. For decades they have trumpeted the virtues of land reforms and how important it was to possess land. The people have obviously learnt the lesson well and are now ready to lay down their lives for their land - the icon of social prestige. Once again the communists are coming to experience the wrath of the peasantry that is now going around tearing down the red flags and turning against their commissar tormentors of three decades.

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A Politically Correct Budget

Shailesh Sheth

A Budget needs to be economically sensible, fiscally prudent and unfailingly P. C. - 'Politically Correct'! The Fourth Budget presented by the Finance Minister, Shri P. Chidambaram does score heavily on the first two counts and is not a bad attempt at the third either!

How would one describe the fourth successive Budget presented by the Finance Minister on 28.2.2007? 'Dull' or 'Drab Affair' or 'Damp Squib' or 'Directionless' etc., as drubbed by his critics? Or 'growth-oriented' or a 'catalyst for growth' or 'for *Aam aadmi*' as hailed by his supporters?

Rising inflation and a falling stock market, impending defeat in Assembly Elections in Punjab and Uttaranchal (the final debacle came too late to make any impact on the formulation of the Budget), growing discontent among the people with the economic policies of the Government; remarkable growth in GDP coupled with dismal performance of the agriculture sector; sluggish growth in excise collection despite stellar shows by Corporate India - there were too many confusing and contradictory forces visible in the economy. Hence there was apprehension that some hard steps would be announced by the Finance Minister, at least, to curb rising inflation - very critical considering the proximity of the assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. With this apprehension also came great expectations of favourable announcements for the stock market and relief for taxpayers.

What finally came was nothing short of an 'anti climax'! Lack of any major announcement on 'economic reforms' or any big-

ticket announcements for capital market or any major relief on the direct tax front - both for the corporate sector and individual tax payers - were sufficient reasons for the critics to cry 'Foul'! There was so much disappointment that even a small increase in the 'Dividend Distribution Tax' or bringing the IT Companies under MAT led to a crash in stocks, though, neither of these proposals appears to be as illogical or bad as it is perceived to be! At worse, these measures are nothing more than 'sentiment dampeners'!

It is, therefore natural that some significant proposals in the Budget at the macro level were lost sight of. In reality, the tone of the Budget was already set by the Economic Survey 2006-07. The Survey identified two issues and three priorities in line with the 11th Five-Year Plan (2007-12) that targets an annual GDP growth rate of 9% during the period.

The two issues are:

- The sustainability of high growth with moderate inflation;
- The inclusive nature of such high growth.

The three priorities are:

- Rising to the challenges of maintaining and managing high growth;
- Bolstering the two pillars of growth, namely fiscal prudence

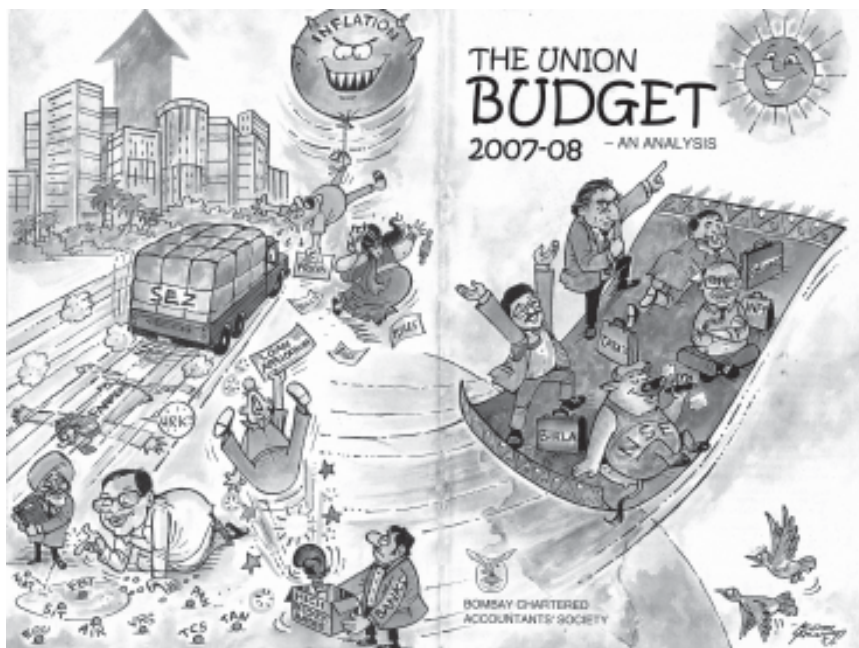
and high investment;

- Improving the effectiveness of Government intervention in critical areas such as education, health and support for the needy.

On a deeper and careful reading, it will be clear that Budget-2007 reflects the above priorities and makes serious attempts to address the issues identified by the Economic Survey.

The deceleration in agricultural growth witnessed in the last few years has turned out to be an Achilles' heel for the policymakers. What is alarming is the dwindling share of agriculture in GDP that has dipped from 39.7% in the 1970s to 5.8% in 2006-07 as against the rising contribution of the service sector from 38.8% in the 1970s to 72.8% in 2006-07. Economic growth is heavily skewed in favour of the service sector. When nearly 60% of the work force of the country is engaged - directly or indirectly - in agriculture, neglect of this vital sector can only be at one's own peril. The situation can only worsen if the percentage of people dependent on agriculture does not decline, at the same rate as the decline in the contribution of agriculture to the GDP. With rising number of mouths to feed year after year, we have become a country of 'empty stomachs and loaded uterus'.

Kautilya states in the



Well Said!

"Indians are an enterprising lot. It was always sad to see only a handful of Indian companies playing a role in the arena of the world market. For decades the draconian License Raj coupled with a controlled economy thwarted enterprise. But with the opening up of the economy a wee bit, the Indian entrepreneur has been unleashed. Despite limited support, the Indian Corporates have taken large strides. Unlike traditionalists who still grudge the FDI, these visionary Indians have gone and unfurled the Indian flag on foreign shores. We have witnessed with pride successful acquisitions of many large foreign companies by Indians in the recent past.

"But hey! This is the budget booklet and no mention of the budget or FM yet? Frankly the annual budget exercise is slowly becoming inconsequential. This year's Budget is a case in point. The FM is found to be tinkering with a few rates here and there, withdrawing or extending minor exemptions and pandering to populist measures. Sorry, but we fail to see any revolutionary measures or strategy. If he has not done anything strikingly positive, he hasn't done much harm too. And that's a large relief!

"So while the FM at Delhi continues to play marbles, the Indians are playing the bigger game. The focus has been shifting from FM (Finance Minister) to FM (Fast Movers). Also one can say shift is from one GI (Government of India) to the other GI (Global Indian)"

Note explaining the cover design of the publication the "Union Budget 2007-08 - An Analysis" by the Bombay Chartered Accountants' Society.

Arthshashtra that the main activities of the State are agriculture, cattle-rearing and commerce - agriculture being the most important constituent of the economy. He lays equal emphasis on education. It is now universally acknowledged fact that without substantial investment in human capital, sustained economic growth is not possible. We are, no doubt, paying a heavy price for the utter neglect of education since Independence.

Budget-2007, therefore, deserves to be applauded for its stress on 'faster and more inclusive growth' - its main theme. The significant budgetary allocations made by the Finance Minister towards Agriculture, Education,

Health, Hygiene and Rural and Urban employment generation aim at achieving the 'inclusiveness' of growth. At the same time, 'faster growth' is sought to be achieved through the policy measures announced for Infrastructure, Power, Technology, Textiles, Tourism, Petroleum and Natural Gas and Financial Sector. Unfortunately, these announcements did not receive the kind of attention and appreciation they deserved!

On the indirect taxation front, the Finance Minister has announced some significant proposals like levy of export duty on Iron Ore and Chrome Ores, dual duty system for cement and major concessions to Food Processing

Sector and Agriculture sector. Besides attempting to curb rising inflation by such measures, the Finance Minister also apparently hopes to put in motion a 'virtuous cycle' in place of the 'vicious cycle' that has gripped the economy mainly due to the neglect of agriculture.

The increase in the threshold exemption limit from Rs.1.00 crore to Rs.1.50 crores for small scale manufacturers of excisable goods and from Rs.4.00 lakhs to Rs.8.00 lakhs for small service providers will not only provide major relief to these sectors but will also relieve the over-stretched depart-

(Cont'd. on page 36)

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Is India Secular?

Farrokh Mehta

It is time we looked at the real freedoms that our citizens have a right to, beyond the pages of the Constitution

I have often been cautioned by “professional party-goers” that two subjects need to be avoided like the plague/bird flu/mad cow’s disease: religion and politics. So I was caught off guard when a foreigner at a gathering questioned India’s secularism. I responded fervently that other long-established democracies like the UK and France and even the US call themselves Christian states while India not only proclaims its secular status, it actually practices it. And then with the zeal of the patriot, I – like so many of us – educated my foreign acquaintance that we have had Prime Ministers and Presidents and Chief Justices from various religions. A secular state, India protects all religions; only the fanatic-fringes of all religions play the religion-card to the country’s detriment. This normally quiets such questioners. But I have a problem – the questioner within wants more answers, more assurances, more “democratic equity”.

The concept of secularism is in fact a sub-set of the basic acknowledgement that all are born equal and have the right to be treated equally. Secularism which means separation of religion from state should extend to separation of all attributes of birth — like caste also — from the state, to ensure real equality.

In a secular India, we have the great divide between BCs, OBCs, SCs and STs and All Others. There’s even a divide between

the BCs and the OBCs. And between them and what we choose to euphemistically call “the creamy layer”. I ask myself, what kind of secularism do we practice for such sharp divisiveness to flourish? Real equality should overcome all attributes a person is born with. Man should have the freedom to change all that is thrust on him at birth except his body. So what price “equality”? Alvin Toffler rightly stated that knowledge is the most democratic source of power.

In secular India, the ratio of men to women is increasingly getting skewed. Families still pray for the boy-child. Sonography of the foetus is a boom industry, progressing faster than the IT industry. And the government’s response? Heavy advertising messages in the media to support the girl-child, reminding parents that a daughter can be a blessing. After all, wasn’t Indira Gandhi a daughter? (Not a very good example, considering she was the only PM who imposed Emergency!) So what price “equality”?

You cannot draw water from my well if you are an “untouchable”. It is inconsequential that there is a drought and there are many who have no water to drink. You cannot take some vegetables from my field to feed your hungry children – If you do, I have the right to chop off your hands! Forget “equality”; can we not have humanity? Or must we carry through the tragedy of caste into the next century, to the next generations? So what price “equality”?

We perpetuate differences proudly with appendages to names that signal religion, caste, ethnicity and flaunt them like titles and state honours. Till we discard these ‘differentiators’, can we have a truly egalitarian society?

We frown on inter-faith, inter-community marriages. And frowns transcend to severance of family ties, and these rise to physical abuse and cruelty. As though the marriages are between religions or castes or communities and not between two individuals who wish to spend life together. So what price “equality”?

Disturbed by so many questions, all difficult to refute, I seek solace. India is as large and as diverse as Europe. After centuries, distrust still survives in Europe. There are prejudices, there are social and religious divisions in Europe. So how are we any worse? Surely, I remind myself, the question should be how are we any way better? We can always find some persons, some places, worse than us. It’s time we looked for people and places that are better than us.

It is time we looked at the real freedoms that our citizens have a right to, beyond the pages of the Constitution. Do they have the freedom to pray – without of course impinging on the rights of others? Can I “adopt” another religion without being questioned or challenged? Religious freedom

surely includes the right to pray to and owe allegiance to an Almighty of my choosing. Can I marry outside my religion and not be treated differently? Can I shed the traditions of my religion and still not be considered an outcast? Have we ever answered truthfully why some sections convert? The truth is, because they can live a different life, a better life!

All restrictions on my freedoms are no more than a game of Power and Privileges played by those that have them – Priests and Politicians. And they guard their power and privileges zealously, in perpetuity.

Perhaps our focus needs to be on education which can also help wipe aside the cobwebs of tradition and superstition and prejudice. What can “modernize”

our social fabric? Certainly Education, true Education which goes beyond equipping us for a job and equips us to ask questions rather than meekly accept what others may say and traditions may impose. Alvin Toffler rightly stated that knowledge is the most democratic source of power. When we can educate our youth without reminding them of what they would want to forget — the unholy differences of religion, caste, race, ethnicity, gender – and then education can liberate the mind. Man should have the freedom to change all that is thrust on him at birth except his body. That is his basic right and it must not be denied.

All this dialogue, fortunately is between I and Me. Like all patriots, I cannot accept criticism and questioning by others. But I cannot escape from the critic

within. If this article spurs an internal discussion in each reader, perhaps there is hope for a “secular” India where all people, all faiths, all castes, all are respected. That is our true fundamental right. *Not* just as Indians but as world citizens.

Rights assure us our freedoms. The two are symbiotic. Those that are outnumbered – even in a secular democracy – need their freedoms to be protected.

There can be no better way to end than to recall what Ayn Rand wrote: “The smallest minority on earth is the individual. Those who deny individual rights cannot claim to be defenders of minorities.”

MR.FARROKH MEHTA is a Corporate Advisor and Management Trainer.

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Are We Raising a Generation of Paupers?

Kusum Choppra

Today expectations of everything in life have heightened beyond the imagination of the middle classes of our generation or those of a couple of generations before us. Everyone wants a good life, not just now, but also in the post-retirement future, without the safety net that an extended or a joint family used to provide. We want nuclear families and at the same time post retirement safety nets. A case of eat our cake and have it too.

And how do we go about creating that post retirement prosperity when our present requirements are so large that more often than not, a good number of *Yuppies* are living on next month's salary thanks to easy availability of a multitude of credit cards? Every newspaper worth its ink has financial consultants to advise its readers on how to go about saving money in the many avenues currently available, Banks are fighting hard to retain their Fixed Deposits clientele by driving their interests higher. But this is an illusion.

One private bank boasted that it would offer, suppose, 9.5 % for 365 days but one percent more for 666 days. When asked, the clerk, or the executive concerned nonchalantly reveals that the extra one percent would only be applicable to that extra one day that the money would remain in the bank, not the full 666 days! Had the specific clarification not be asked for, how many would have been duped?

That aside, there are many avenues for saving money these

days, perhaps as many avenues as there are for wild spending. Advertisements for the good things of life find stiff competition from advertisements for SIP (Systematic Investment Plans) which are one large step ahead of the old fashioned recurring deposits), various types of deposits, online trading, or through the traders, short selling, daily selling, futures, etc; the more financially adventurous you are, the more the avenues and more attractive the returns while the market is raging. And in addition to these there are the claims of health insurance companies, life insurance companies, those promising to eventually fund your own home, car, your offsprings' marriages and their higher or foreign education, as the case may be, post retirement foreign holidays and so on.

Cruising through the advice offered by various financial consultants in the papers, the bottom line that emerges is that one has to put away massive amounts of money every month to pay for your and your children's future. After that, I suppose, the children would have to put away even larger sums of money to fund their old age and *their* children's futures.

Now, when one is putting away such large sums of money, what is left to live for the present of each generation? Virtual pauperism? A recent estimate has it that if one has 15 years left for retirement and expects a post retirement annual expense of Rs.5 lakhs, one has to put away Rs.22,173 every month (*Express Money*, April 9, 2007) .

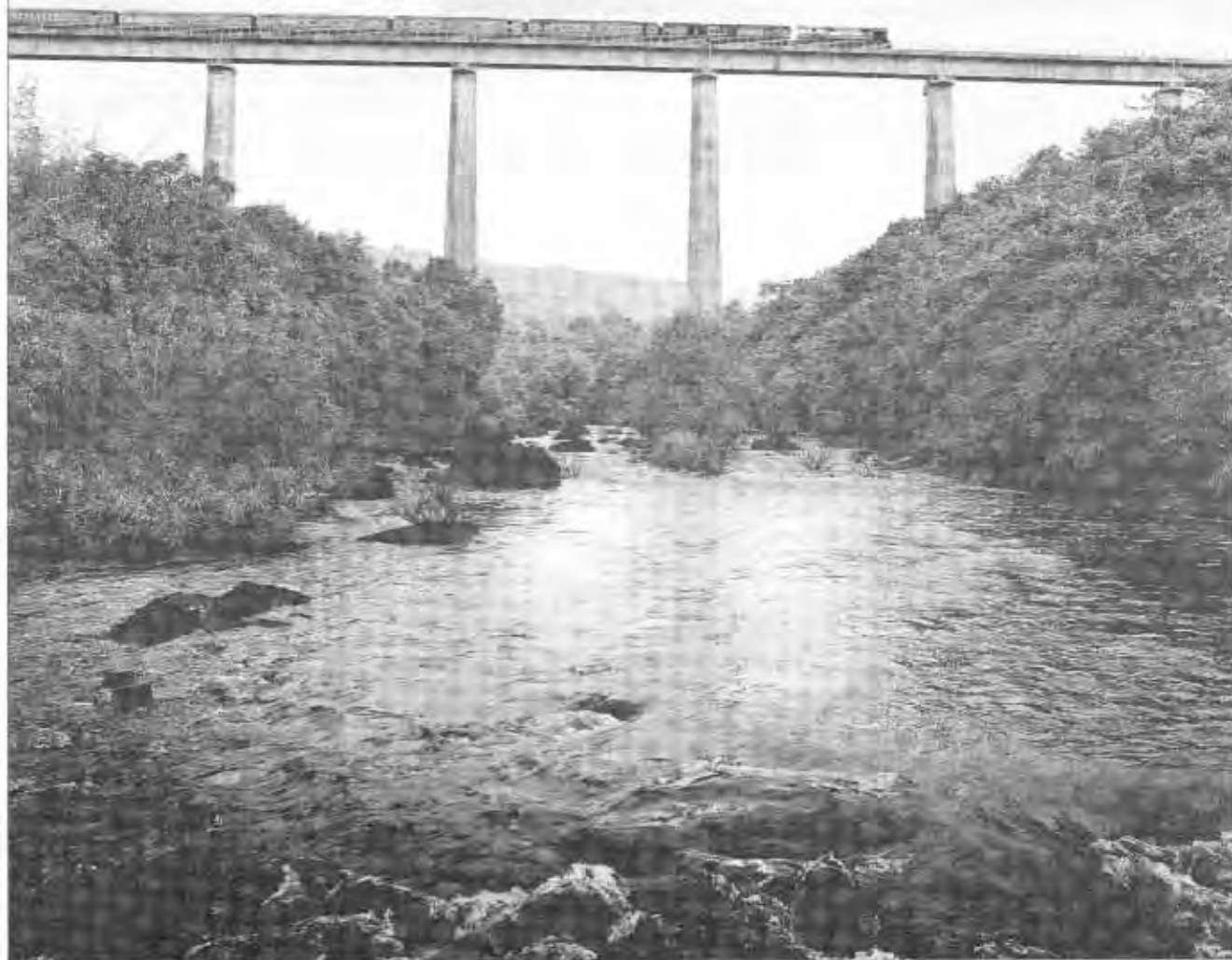
Let us analyse this: Once upon a time, we used to be happy to save anything above 10% of our monthly income. Now the threshold is supposed to rise much beyond the 30% level. At that rate to be able to save over Rs.22,000/- every month, one should have an income of at least Rs.75 to 80000 each month to be able to pay instalments for your new house, your fancy car, your children's education in a top-end school charging several lakhs per annum, their good life and yours.

If you earn less than that, you will be impoverishing and depriving your kids of a glorious childhood in order to hopefully pay for education abroad. Will India not be able to offer significantly better education by then? Education is not all. What about the constant stream of technological goodies, the holiday specials, etc., which one cannot do without these days, if one is in that income bracket? And if one is not, then there is no question of saving Rs.22,000/- every month!

Finally, how far will that Rs.Five lakhs per annum go fifteen years hence? Five lakhs means about forty odd thousand per month. In today's times, that may sound neat, but fifteen years down the line, with inflation eating into everything, how far will that Rs.Five lakhs actually go? Will it make today's pauperism worthwhile, when a similar pauperism awaits the following generations?

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Iraq And Afghanistan

Firoze Hirjikaka

Both in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States finds itself embroiled in conflicts definitely of its own choosing. They started both wars and now they are at a loss as to how to end them. Statistically, it appears very baffling. The world's sole military superpower pitted against ragtag militants, who do not even deserve to be called an army; and the might does not seem to prevail? What is going wrong? In this article, I will attempt to present a personal perspective of the conflicts and the reasons for the impasse.

In a recently conducted CNN poll, nearly 60% of US citizens wanted to see American troops leave Iraq either immediately or within a year. Their reasoning and angst is understandable. The more money and men America pours into Iraq, the worse the mess seems to be getting in that blighted nation. I believe the real catalyst for the disgust over the Iraq situation is not the money (it's not yet pinching pockets at home) but the thousands of young men and women in uniform who are being put in harm's way – with the numbers of those killed or seriously wounded growing exponentially every month. Nothing wrong with that sentiment, of course. The Bush administration is up to its neck in the Iraq quagmire; and the only sensible option for the US seems to be to cut its losses – gargantuan as they have become – and leave. But is it a sensible option?

What the Americans and other Westerners do not seem to be able to grasp is what an incalculable victory a military pullout would be to the Islamic terrorists. The Western mind calculates gains and losses in material terms, but it is not necessarily so in the Arab world. To them, it's more about perception and honour and loss of face. An American pull out would afford Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups a propaganda coup of enormous proportions. Osama Bin Laden would become a folk hero and thousands would clamour to join the 'armies of Mohammed'. Suicide bombers would line up to register for martyrdom.

The "Ugly American"

What is it about the West – and America, in particular – that inspires such venom in the Islamic world? Contrary to popular perception, it is not just a miniscule fundamentalist minority that harbours such antipathy. Sure, the vast majority of the population of Islamic countries is peace loving and would recoil at civilians – particularly women and children – being indiscriminately slaughtered; but a great many of them would feel a sense of satisfaction at the thought of Americans being humiliated; cut down to size. The 'Ugly American' abroad is not a myth in the Middle East; it is a reality. I know because I've lived there.

In a previous *avatar*, I was a civil engineer and my company in Bombay had deputed me as a technical adviser to the Iranian

Ministry of Energy. This was from 1976 to 1979 and I was living in Tehran. In other words, I was there before, during and after that country's Islamic Revolution and the arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini in January 1979. During the Shah's reign, there were hundreds of expatriates living in Tehran – a significant proportion of them being Europeans and Americans.

Many of the expatriates represented multinational companies, or were invited as advisors to government ministries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they lived a very good life; with their exclusive schools and clubs and golf courses and shopping centres. They were savvy enough to keep the right people happy. Senior government functionaries and top management of the Iranian companies they did business with were regularly gifted 'tokens of appreciation' – which could include a BMW or a Mercedes.

The Iranians

The Iranians are a proud people, who once ruled an empire extending from Spain to India – and who consider themselves to be culturally superior to their neighbouring Arabs. Tehran has its fair share of the poor, but you hardly ever see anyone begging. They are quick to take offence when they feel their dignity or their honour has been slighted. Unlike many folks in India and Southeast Asia, money is not terribly important to them. But respect is; and that is one thing they did not get from their white skinned employers and colleagues. Sure, the

locals were far from exploited and probably received better salaries than many of their peers; but they were treated – often unconsciously – with casual contempt.

They were forced to keep the seething resentment in check during the Shah's rule. The foreigners were the king's honoured guests; and any insolence was likely to earn them a visit from SAVAK, the dreaded secret police. Not unnaturally, the anger boiled over as soon as the Shah was overthrown and Khomeini arrived. Suddenly, the arrogant whites were legitimate targets. Khomeini and the clerics actually encouraged them to spy on the expats and pretty much do as they pleased with them. The hostages at the American Embassy were a natural corollary of this released resentment.

A Personal Experience

This is what I witnessed on a personal level. I shared an office floor with three middle-aged white engineers – technical advisors like myself. They joked and bantered with the junior Iranian engineers, but never *included* them. They would work with them, but not interact socially. Not unnaturally, the Iranian engineers resented this – they felt humiliated – but they had no choice but to treat the foreigners with deference. They knew that one word from the expats to their Iranian bosses could get them into major trouble. They were biding their time and – when the opportunity came – their anger and frustration erupted. On a cold January morning in 1979, the very day Khomeini made a triumphant return to Tehran, the Iranian engineers marched into the cabins of the Westerners. Coldly and deliberately, they tossed books, papers and personal effects (family

photos and such) out of the fourth floor window. Then they manhandled their “guests”, physically threw them out of the building; taking obvious delight in their bewilderment and humiliation. It was frightening to watch.

America's Military Might

Although I have no personal knowledge, it is a fair assumption that the attitudes displayed in pre-revolutionary Iran continue to prevail in Saudi Arabia and some other Middle East countries – especially those whose rulers are kept happy by the United States. It is another powder keg waiting to explode. What is keeping the lid on, is fear of American military might.

Make no mistake: for all the rhetoric and bombast spewed out by Al Qaeda, the Mahdi Army and other bad guys in Iraq, they are afraid of American military muscle. They are smart enough to realise that, in a straight fight, they would not stand a chance. They also know that Americans believe in decency and compassion and human rights and all such traits that they hold in contempt. But they know that the death of a single US soldier is a very big deal. This effectively shortens the odds in their favour. The insurgents are not naïve enough to believe they can defeat the American forces. Their game plan is to wear them down – and it seems to be working.

It is now universally accepted that invading Iraq was a blunder of epic proportions. However noble and well intentioned may have been the original intentions behind the (mis) adventure; somewhere along the way, Bush and his advisors lost the plot. If the intention was to topple

a sadistic despot, they should have done just that: go in with full military muscle, kick out the tyrant (or kill him) and withdraw. Instead, they confused the issue with high sounding notions of making the world safe for democracy and all that jazz. Bush fancied himself as a modern day Crusader.

Even that might have worked if they hadn't pussyfooted around. If you want the good guys to be in power, you've got to crush the bad ones. And that means doing whatever it takes. If there is some collateral damage along the way, that's tragic but hey! It's war. Sure, it is self-congratulatory and morally uplifting to be regarded as a nation that was founded on decency and compassion and all that good stuff. But the problem is: the other side does not play by the same rules. Decency is scorned and compassion is regarded as a sign of weakness. The militants treat the death of their own civilians with far less abhorrence than the enemy does. The Americans may or may not be on the side of the angels, but it is going to take far more than a heavenly choir to crush the devils. The one thing the bad guys fear and respect is pure military might. The US has it. Maybe, it is about time they started using it.

Afghanistan

Let us now turn to Afghanistan. In the red corner we have the world's sole superpower with the most powerful military arsenal in human history. In the green corner a bunch of semi-literate bearded guys with AK-47s and rocket propelled grenades.

In a war, the distinctions between right and wrong get blurred very rapidly. One side believes it is fighting to save the

world for democracy; the other that some divine power is directing its actions. Wars have always sought justification of some sort: but, in the final analysis, it is just people killing other people.

So what is going on in Afghanistan? The US and NATO military forces have been swatting the Taliban like bothersome flies for five years now; but they keep swarming around. They even seem to be breeding. There are a lot more of them now than there were two years ago. They are like the proverbial serpent. You keep cutting off its tail and it keeps growing back. And therein lies the problem.

America's Pakistan Ally

I'm sure the US is smart enough to realise that if they want to permanently eliminate the Taliban monster, they have to decapitate it. Trouble is, they can't get at the head. It resides in the home of that noble US ally, Pakistan. All that the monster needs to do is flick out its forked tongue devour some of the infidels and any Afghans who happen to be in the way and safely withdraw it. The good general in Pakistan, who, not so long ago, embarked on a charm offensive in America has the USA by the unmentionables and he knows it. Sure, everybody knows his country is the fountainhead of terrorism, but Mush is indispensable in the fight against Al Qaeda – or so he says. For a general who boasts that he is in total control of his country, it seems strange that he cannot find OBL, who has been hiding in plain sight for the past five years. Sure, Mush rounds up his sidekicks from time to time, but his motives are hardly altruistic. He reportedly receives a substantial bounty for each head delivered.

Dealing with The Taliban

As for the Taliban, let us not forget they are Pakistan's creation. Pakistan has nurtured them, armed them, and then let them loose. They are the general's trump card. They ensure that old-enemy India doesn't get a foothold in Afghanistan; they keep that pesky Hamid Karzai, across the border, from getting ahead of him. They make sure Mush remains "indispensable" to Bush.

So why isn't the US military getting it right? In theory, the Taliban are a much easier target than the insurgents in Iraq. They don't hide themselves among the civilian population. Afghanistan has vast, sparsely populated mountainous tracts and deserts. The US could bomb the crap out of them, without incurring too much collateral damage. So why are they stronger now than they've been in the recent past?

One reason could be that the Americans are conducting conventional warfare against an unconventional enemy. Might is not necessarily right in this case. The usual scenario goes something like this. A US convoy or platoon is ambushed by the bad guys. The Americans get mad as hell and go after them with guns blazing. Usually, it's a case of overkill. It has been estimated that US forces, on an average, expend 300 bullets and a hundred pounds of bombs on a single enemy combatant – and most of them have already slipped back to their sanctuary in Pakistan anyway. Ideally, The US should have commando teams, which can pursue the nasties all the way back to their hideouts – and then eliminate them. However, they would need to cross the border for that – and that would offend Musharraf's delicate sensibilities.

And so the stalemate continues. It has been recently reported that, immediately after 9/11, the general was given a "you're either with us or against us" ultimatum. Maybe, it's time he got another one.

The Afghan Farmer

Then there is this "winning hearts and minds" business. Admittedly, the Americans are doing a lot better in this department in Afghanistan than in Iraq, but some of the locals still appear to be pissed off. Why? Ignoble as it seems, sometimes doing the "right thing" needs to take a back seat to political expediency. The main grouse of the locals against the Americans and NATO is that they are pressurising the Karzai government to destroy their poppy fields. Sure, opium is bad: it gets converted into drugs that ruin American lives and so on. No argument there. But look at it from the Afghan farmer's point of view: (a) he has been cultivating poppies for centuries and (b) it fetches him a very good income. If someone asks him to destroy his means of livelihood and reduces him to penury, do you think he's going to be pleased about it? What do you expect him to do? There aren't a whole lot of employment opportunities in Afghanistan at the moment.

The basic dilemma of the Bush administration is that it is trying to take the moral high ground and wage war at the same time. There is nothing moral about war. It's dirty business. Bush can either worry about public opinion and ratings (they are going South anyway) or he can allow his military to finish the job. He cannot have it both ways.

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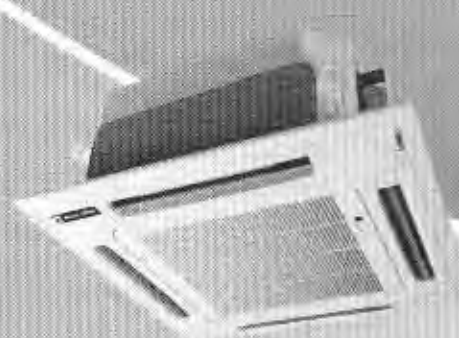
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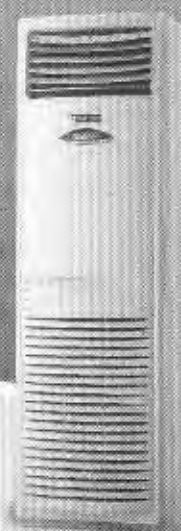
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Attacks on the Press

CPJ's Report for 2006

The 'Committee to Protect Journalists'(CPJ), an independent non-profit organisation that works to safeguard press freedom worldwide publishes a Report each year on 'Attacks on the Press'. According to the Report a total of 55 journalists were killed worldwide as a direct result of their work in 2006. 32 of them in war-torn Iraq, making it the deadliest year in a single country every recorded by CPJ. The number of journalists jailed for their work is 134. *Freedom First* in its February 2006 issue carried CNN correspondent Anderson Cooper's Preface to the Report which we titled "They Deserved More Than Silence." We now bring you the Introduction by Joel Simon, the executive Director of the CPJ.

The Rise of the 'Democratators'

Joel Simon

As Venezuelan elections approached in November, President Hugo Chávez accused news broadcasters of engaging in a "psychological war to divide, weaken, and destroy the nation." Their broadcast licenses, he said, could be pulled - no idle threat in a country where a vague 2004 media law allows the government to shut down stations for work deemed "contrary to the security of the nation."

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin signed a measure in July that equates critical journalism with terrorism, broadening the definition of extremism to include "public slander towards figures fulfilling state duties." Within months, a human rights publisher was shut down.

In Iraq, gunmen raced up to a group of journalists covering the February attack on the Shiite Askariya shrine, seized one of the region's best-known reporters, Atwar Bahjat, and executed her and two members of her crew.

And, as fighting raged in southern Lebanon in July, an Israeli missile killed photographer Layal Najib as she was traveling by taxi

to cover fleeing civilians. Israel later announced that all vehicles traveling in southern Lebanon, including those carrying journalists, would be subject to attack.

Controlling the Media – Legally

These four scenes, taken from the pages of *Attacks on the Press in 2006*, illustrate two grave and emerging threats to the press. Events in Iraq and Lebanon reflect the erosion in war correspondents' traditional status as neutral observers. Presidents Chávez and Putin represent a generation of sophisticated, elected leaders who have created a legal framework to control, intimidate, and censor the news media.

The rise of "democratators" - popularly elected autocrats - is alarming because it represents a new model for government control of the press. These leaders stand for election and express rhetorical support for democratic institutions while using measures such as punitive tax audits, manipulation of government advertising, and sweeping content restrictions to control the news media. The democratators tolerate the façade of democracy - a free press, opposition political parties, an

independent judiciary - while gutting it from within.

These leaders emerged as the authoritarian response to positive historical developments. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union discredited a political system that not only necessitated state control of information but also justified it in moral terms. Human rights and press freedom groups such as CPJ, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2006, have also made it far more difficult for governments to engage in overt terror, such as the widespread "disappearances" of Latin American journalists in the 1970s.

Even repressive governments are now compelled to present themselves as democracies in order to gain international legitimacy. That's a big advancement for press freedom and human rights, but the democratators' new techniques cannot be underestimated.

Leaders who jail journalists sometimes argue that they are complying with international law and are respectful of due process. The Ethiopian government raised the spectre of the slaughter in Rwanda

when it arrested and jailed more than a dozen journalists on charges of attempted genocide. In a meeting with a CPJ delegation in March, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi insisted he was acting within the law to protect the state. But CPJ's review of the evidence found the charges entirely without merit.

The 'Revolving Door' Approach

Other nations take a revolving-door approach, imprisoning journalists and releasing them before an international outcry. Iran is the best example. Since 2000, Iranian courts have banned more than 100 publications and jailed dozens of journalists; most were freed after relatively short periods but with the official threat of re-arrest hanging over their heads. Journalists get the message. In August, Akbar Ganji, one of the few Iranian journalists to spend an extended period in prison, visited CPJ's office and argued that the debate over Iran's nuclear ambitions has obscured the government's efforts to destroy civil society and wipe out a once-vibrant independent media.

Denying Advertising Support

Other nations manipulate state advertising to reward supportive news outlets and to punish the critical ones. In countries where government agencies and national companies are economic engines, the practice can be devastating to media organizations that ask tough questions. In Argentina, President Néstor Kirchner's administration directs an advertising budget of 160 million pesos without clear safeguards against partisanship. An independent Argentine research group said the advertising practices have caused serious damage to press freedom.

Certainly, there are countries that still rely on brute force; Cuba and Eritrea, where dozens of journalists are imprisoned, are among them. But overt repression, more and more, has given way to other techniques.

Calculated indifference is one. In "Deadly News," a 2006 CPJ investigation, our researchers found that 85 percent of journalist murders in the last 15 years were committed with complete impunity. Even when some convictions were obtained, masterminds were brought to justice in just seven percent of cases. This unsolved violence provokes massive self-censorship. And that suits many governments just fine.

Intimidating Journalists

Thirteen journalists in Russia, including investigative reporter Anna Politkovskaya, have been murdered since President Vladimir Putin took power in 2000. None of the killers have been brought to justice. This record causes reporters to ask fewer questions, to probe less deeply, to pass up risky stories. After all, one reporter told CPJ, to follow in Politkovskaya's path would be "taking on a suicide mission." Putin, while professing concern, benefits from this state of fear.

In Colombia, a long history of impunity has blunted critical reporting in provincial areas where violence remains rampant. President Álvaro Uribe Vélez had publicly denied the prevalence of self-censorship until he met with a CPJ delegation in March. After some prompting, Uribe acknowledged the problem and recognized that government officials who interfere with the press are "committing a crime against democracy."

Geneva Convention No Protection

The practice of journalism, in fact, is protected by international law. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right to seek, receive, and impart information; this right is reinforced in many regional human rights agreements. Journalists operating in war zones are also protected under the Geneva Conventions, which state that journalists are civilians who cannot be deliberately targeted.

But in an era in which even U.S. officials describe the Geneva Conventions as "quaint," these protections increasingly exist in name only. The breakdown of international norms is reflected in many ways. In southern Lebanon, Israel refused to make any provision to allow news coverage during the summer offensive, and, in several instances documented by CPJ, its forces actually targeted press vehicles.

Insurgency in Iraq

In Iraq, the most dangerous conflict in CPJ's history, insurgents so routinely target reporters that more than two-thirds of media deaths are murders, not acts of war. Fourteen journalists have been killed by U.S. forces' fire; while CPJ has not found evidence that the killings were deliberate, none were adequately investigated by the military. U.S. forces have also detained at least nine Iraqi journalists for months at a time without charge or due process. The most recent was Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Bilal Hussein of The Associated Press.

Journalists traditionally rely more on savvy than international

(Cont'd. on page 36)

From Our Readers

(A Thought of Importance or Interest or in response to an article published in *Freedom First*)

Fertilizer Subsidy – What a Colossal National Waste

In my article, "Fertiliser Subsidy" (*Freedom First* No.476, January 2007), I wrote: "In 2006-07, the budgeted amount for disbursement as fertiliser is Rs.16,251.90 crore. This is disbursed to various fertiliser manufacturers to produce urea. The inputs are naphtha and natural gas". I wrote this in December 2006. According to *The Hindu's Business Line* (January 14), the figure is actually a staggering Rs.34,035.75 crore. In a report accompanying this data, according to the Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers, Mr. Ram Vilas Pawan, 'the total fund requirement for payment of subsidy/concession to the fertiliser industry (including importers) during 2006 has been estimated at Rs.34,035 crore. This includes a sum of Rs.5,913 crore carried over from the previous fiscal'.

In other words, the Government of India is

throwing twice the amount I had stated in my January article, not to subsidise farmers but to subsidising the fertiliser industry which like Oliver Twist, is crying for 'more'. It is burning currency notes to create the ash needed to keep the roses blooming". We must strongly protest this colossal national waste, because we, the taxpayers are being milked for this admittedly political extravagance.

In the current year's budget, Mr. Chidambaram made a specific reference that the Fertiliser subsidy issue is being addressed seriously. A pilot proposal for direct assistance to farmers is being mooted. If the process is this slow, taxpayers continue to lose considerably with no benefit to the nation.

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Law Breakers and Criminals Operate with Impunity

There is a sense of insecurity amongst law abiding citizens in the country which is increasingly becoming evident. Most citizens who are not politicians or bureaucrats feel that their interests and safety is not being protected by the government. Therefore they live in fear all the time.

Most law abiding citizens want a fair and firm administration which may not even care as to who is in power as long as they are allowed to lead a secure life where the rule of law prevails.

Today persons with doubtful integrity often get into politics and take the law into their own hands by virtue of being close to those in power or being in power themselves. When dishonest, corrupt and criminal elements manage to get into positions in government through the process of democracy, the breakdown in the rule of law becomes inevitable, because those in power have got there by breaking or circumventing the law themselves.

The most visible arm of the government is the government staff at various levels of government machinery and the police force who come into direct contact with the public. When persons with a questionable track record are in positions of power, those serving in government departments and the police force are emboldened to indulge in malpractice

themselves. This is what is happening today all over the country.

Often, cases are reported where the ownership of properties such as land and buildings has been changed in the documents in the government offices by tampering with the records, without the owners being aware of it and then it becomes a disputed land with court hearing the cases for several years. Thugs are employed by the owners to force tenants to vacate their homes. Thugs are also employed to collect "fees" from the shop owners simply to live in peace.

The cases of lone women being molested and children being kidnapped and even abused are becoming frequently heard "events".

The ultimate enforcing authority for a government is the police to enforce law and order. Unfortunately, police are more feared than respected and entering a police station would be the last choice of a law abiding citizen even in the event of his being subjected to harassment.

In the rural areas particularly, the police are being looked upon by poor people as a force of terror and oppression and many would like to avoid coming in contact with the police in any manner.

(Cont'd. on page 36)

A Politically Correct Budget

(cont'd from page 23)

ment of wasting its resources on such sectors thereby enabling it to focus on high revenue contributors.

The procedural amendments made in the areas of Central Excise and Service Tax also could not have come a day earlier and deserve to be appreciated.

Though, the inclusion of new services in the Service Tax net was a certainty, the levy proposed on 'Specified Works Contracts' and on 'Renting of commercial immovable property' may become controversial, dispute-prone and litigable. The levy on 'Renting of immovable property for business/

commerce' has already invited widespread protest throughout the country and is heading towards a 'political war' !

When the revenue generated from Education Cess @ 2% introduced in Budget- 2004 has admittedly remained unutilized, the introduction of a new levy in the form of 'Secondary and Higher Education Cess' @ 1% has justifiably been frowned upon by all!

It is unfortunate that the significance of various announcements (many positive, some controversial) made by the Finance Minister in his speech was

lost in the din created over 'inflation' and the concession in duty granted to imports of 'Cat & Dog Food'! The mention of the latter in the Budget Speech was quite intriguing if one considers the trivial nature of the proposal. Or, was it a clever diversionary tactic employed by the Finance Minister? If so, then he has certainly succeeded in his endeavour. After all, the guiding principles of any Budget Speech are: Information, mis-information, no-information and diversion!

MR. SHAILESH SHETH is an advocate specialising in Central Excise, Customs and Service Tax.

Attacks on the Press

(cont'd from page 34)

law to stay alive in war zones, often promising insurgent and guerrilla groups an opportunity to get their message out to the world. But many insurgents today aren't interested in the bargain, preferring to speak via the Internet. Among these groups, journalists are dispensable.

China – Controlling Information

The state of affairs is deeply disturbing because it means that

the public knows little about vital issues - from the goals and leadership of the Iraqi insurgency to the implications of China's breakneck economic development. Even as China builds a modern and prosperous economy, it is depriving its citizens of basic information. More than 120 million people are online in China, but the government has erected massive firewalls and, at times, enlisted corporate cooperation to control the medium.

The flood of information that circulates in the Internet age can blind us to the fact that the enemies of press freedom still succeed in keeping vital stories from the public eye. As these pages make clear, we are saturated with information but often deprived of essential news.

MR. JOEL SIMON is executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

From Our Readers

(cont'd from page 35)

The police have a crucial role to play in protecting the lives of citizens; but when the police themselves become corrupt, what can honest and law abiding citizens do? Sadly, many of them think that they should buy peace with criminals to assure protection for themselves, as many think

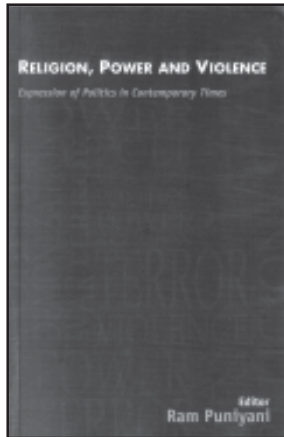
criminals are less demanding than the police!

These are highly disturbing conditions which should cause alarm to people occupying top positions like that of the President and Prime Minister and Chief Ministers. But, these functionaries

are not even giving an impression that they are disturbed.

N. S. Venkataraman,
Trustee,
Nandini Voice For The
Deprived, Chennai.

BOOK REVIEWS



RELIGION, POWER AND VIOLENCE, edited by Ram Puniyani, Sage Publications, B/11, Mohan cooperative Industrial Area Mathura Road, Post Bag 7, New Delhi 110 044; Year of Publication : 2005 No. of Pages : 332 Price: Rs.380

Reviewed by S. H. Deshpande, former Professor of Economics, University of Mumbai.

This book is an updated rehash of familiar Leftist arguments against Hindutva. It is a collection of 16 articles dealing with various facets of the theme which together present a strong, sometimes even a hysterical chargesheet as follows: Hindutva is an ideology whose main purpose is to protect the dwindling interests and privileges of the upper classes in the face of egalitarian and democratic forces of the hitherto suppressed classes. It is essentially Fascist in nature and aims at capturing state power so that the lower classes are subjected to oppressive laws based on *Manu-Smriti*. The uniting bond for Hindus is supplied by a scrupulously manufactured image of Muslims as monsters, Islam as sanctioning terrorism and Christians as greedy convertors.

This reviewer agrees with the characterization of the RSS as socially reactionary. However, so far as Muslims and Christians are concerned, he shares the RSS viewpoint. Let us consider two articles in this book which come in handy to begin the discussion.

Jawaid Quddas in his article "Islam, Terrorism and the New World Order" writes as follows: The perception of Islam that it sanctions

terrorism is incorrect; the Prophet "was determined to stop" the practice among pre-Islamic Arabs of having multiple wives and slave girls who were compelled to cohabit with their masters; forcible conversion is taboo for Muslims; Islam bars destruction of temples; Islam prohibits looting of enemy property; monarchy is prohibited in Islam etc. (pp.91-107).

My understanding of Islam is quite the opposite. Islam not merely permits Jihad but commands it. The 'tolerant' Quranic verses which 'progressive' Muslims generally quote belong to the Prophet's Mecca period when opposition to his preaching from idol-worshipping Arabs was widespread and he was not able to collect more than 200 followers. In Madina he took the sword in hand ruled most Arabia when the calls for Jihad became louder and sharper. Later verses cancel the earlier verses and the last but one Surah (chapter) No.9 offers the most clinching evidence. Verse No.9-5 says: "Then when the (four) sacred months have passed slay the polytheists wherever you find them and take them (captives) and besiege them and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor due (*zakat*), then leave them free." Indeed More's careful analysis of all *ayats* using the word Jihad leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that polytheism has to be obliterated from the earth on which no one except the Muslims will live. (More, Sheshrao, *Islam: Maker of the Muslim*

Mind, Rajhans, Pune 2004, Chapter 7 & 8). The Prophet did not stop the practice of multiple wives and sexual use of slave girls; on the contrary he sanctioned it. That the Muslims are allowed to have four wives is well-known. There is a Surah No.8, carrying the title 'war loot' and the latter word includes wives of the dead and captured enemies. The word *ghanimah* derived from *ghanim* (enemy) is used for war loot and means 'whatever is taken from the enemy'. The Quran even lays down rules of division of the booty (8-41). Forcible conversion is implied in the eradication of polytheism and the world being for Muslims alone. The Quran is so full of references to hell as punishment to idol-worshippers that Muslims' hearts will be filled with hatred for them so that the next step of idol-breaking would be natural; however, there is no direct command to destroy temples. And yet the Prophet's life is a role model for Muslims and he himself got destroyed under his supervision all the 360 idols in Kaba. About prohibition of Monarchy in Islam: Was not the Prophet himself, a 'monarch', when he became the absolute, unchallenged ruler of Arabia? Were not each one of the long line of Caliphs himself a monarch?

In this context, Ambedkar's views about Islam deserve notice. Anand Teltumbde in his article refers to Vinay Katiyar of the VHP as saying that Dr. Ambedkar was anti-Muslim; he (Ambedkar) called them

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'terrorists', and says further, "Any-one who has even perfunctory acquaintance with the writings of Ambedkar can say that these are pure lies". (221).

This is quite misleading. Perhaps the description of Ambedkar attributed to Katiyar may not be literally correct but the situation is closer to Katiyar than to Teltumbde. Ambedkar edited from 1927 to 1929 a Marathi fortnightly called *Bahishkrit Bharat*. In one of its issues, among many other things he says he was not prepared to trust the Muslims in case a foreign Muslim power attacked India; this, in short, is Dr. Ambedkar's assessment of the Muslim problem. (Moon, Vasant (ed.), *Doctor Ambedkaranche Bahishkrit Bharat ani Mooknayak*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 1990, p.224). In his later book *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra) first published in 1940, he has examined Hindu-Muslim relations from middle ages and commented adversely on Muslim behaviour and politics. The more important part of the book is his demonstration of the relationship of Islam and Muslim behaviour. He has analysed all the key concepts like the distinction between Dar-ul-Islam and Dar-ul-harb, the intention of Islamization of the whole world, the use of Jihad for this purpose, Islam's stand against territorial nationalism, etc. Who is telling 'pure lies'?

Sarto Esteves in his article

'Violence against the Cross', makes the following claims on behalf of Christian churches. (1) The church does not use any surreptitious methods in conversion; no fraud or material incentive is used (280). (2) Christian population is actually diminishing and therefore no bogey about Christians outnumbering Hindus may be raised. (285).

All the 'Six Sisters', especially three among them are a standing monument to the falsity of Esteves' first claim. Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram are almost wholly Christianised. This has happened in the post-independence period and it is unlikely to have taken place without mass conversions. Mass conversions can never be the result of genuine change of heart. The Bhavani Shankar Niyogi Commission set up by a Congress Government in Madhya Pradesh in 1954 detailed in its report all the reprehensible activities of the Christian Missionaries. (The Report was not available in any bookshop; wife of Niyogi, who was old and ailing, told Dr. Arwind Godbole that Christian Missions bought up every available copy so that no Hindus should read it. Arwind Godbole, *Christianity Ani Hindusthan*, Bharatiya Vichar Sadhana, Pune 2004, p.367). The North-Eastern region has more than a 100 extremist groups and their anti-national activities are suspected to be backed by churches who are flush with funds. The World Council of Churches is a forum of all Christian denominations of the world and it is of the opinion that the Dalits and

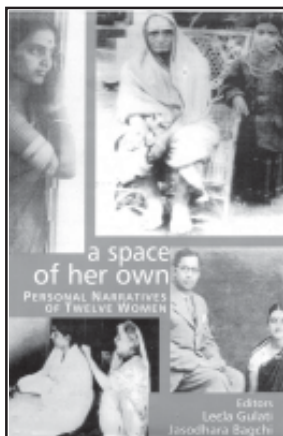
Adivasis in India have a *right of self-determination and setting up sovereign states* (Elst, Koenrad, *Indigenous Indians*, Voice of India, New Delhi, pp.242-243, 262ff). Esteves makes an elementary arithmetical mistake in saying that Christian population is diminishing, on the basis of census figures from 1971 to 2001 where the *proportion* to total population has fallen from 2.60% in 1971 to 2.21% in 2001. During this period, the *absolute* number of Christians has *risen* from 142 million to about 24 million. Moreover, the Christians population figures themselves are doubtful. The 'World Christian Trends' in its official report says that the real Christian population is 62.00 million or 6.1% of total population; this means the census figures capture only 37% of total Christian population. The reason given is that many Christians call themselves Hindu in order to avail themselves of various concessions. (Shrirang Godbole, *Vivek*, 12.6.2005).

The "Progressive' Hindu intellectuals like the Editor of this book are committing a grave error in not facing the truth about Islam and Christianity. I do not suggest that my line of thinking should be adopted, but Islam and Christianity must come on the agenda of debate. The result of the present state of affairs has been a superficial analysis of the entire political discourse in India. To discuss Islam and Christianity does not harm one's secularism or liberalism. In fact, it is the duty of secular and liberal intellectuals *not* to shun these subjects.



The civilization and culture from which we derive whatever happiness we get in life is one knitted fabric. And what a sorry state a knitting is reduced to, when the yarn that runs through and holds all the loops comes out in one of the corners; to that state will our civilization and culture be reduced and disappear if our traditional values are discarded by the mass of our people.

C. Rajagopalachari
Swarajya, December 26, 1964



A SPACE OF HER OWN : PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF TWELVE WOMEN edited by Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi; published by Sage Publications, B/11, Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area Mathura Road, Post Bag 7, New Delhi 110 044; Year of Publication : 2005
No. of Pages : 275 Price: Rs.340

Reviewed by Dhiren Narain, Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology (retired), University of Mumbai.

We were delighted when Professor Narain consented to review the book. Normally, due to space constraints, book reviews in Freedom First are restricted to around 1200 words, but this review is three times as long! If we were to abridge it to fit into the normative size of our reviews such a condensed review would do injustice to the reviewer who considered it important enough to review the book in some detail. We have therefore decided to publish this in three parts. This is the second part.

II

The place a young bride is able to carve out in her husband's home depends on a number of factors¹. Her personal attributes are obviously very important – her looks, nature (affectionate or quarrelsome), ability to manage people (elders, younger people, servants, especially old servants who become quasi members of the family) and situations (marriage, festival, birth, etc.). Each day is a trial for her. All eyes are critically watching her. Everyone, including those who should be affectionately inclined to her, can quickly turn into bitter critics. Whether the bride comes from a wealthy and powerful family or from a poor family can affect her position. Money is never silent. It speaks and speaks loudly. The *ability and willingness* of the father and the brothers to stand by her in times of need have a bearing on her position. Her family may be able but not willing; her family may be willing but not able. To the extent the girl comes from a wealthy and powerful family, it delays, if not actually inhibits her transition from being a proud daughter to a proud daughter-in-law. There are instances where sons have felt greater pride in being a son-in-law than in being a son. Some actually change their residence and in a reversal of roles, begin to live with in-laws. What status they thereby forfeit or gain will be a fascinating study but that has no place in this women-centric book.

Women are supposed to belong to their husband's family in a patriarchal society. How far this involves curtailment or even severance of ties with the natal family will empirically vary. This becomes critical when children, especially sons, arrive. The socialization of the child into growing up as proud members of father's family is in the hands of a 'stranger' (mother); in worst cases of marital discord, in the hands of an 'enemy' (the estranged wife). It is fascinating how society solves this complex and delicate problem in most cases. Birth of children, especially sons, also makes the stranger (wife) more and more an organic part of her husband's family, both *subjectively* and *objectively*. In an ideal case, this task is fully accomplished. Everyone is proud and happy, including (very much) her natal family. After all, it is a matter of enormous pride for the father and brothers to see their daughter/sister happily married and proud bearer of her husband's lineage. This, of course, is happy ending. It is not always so in real life. The cultural norm prescribes that a girl enters her husband's home, as a bride, in a *doli* (palanquin) and leaves it on *arthi* (funeral pyre) when she dies. This is the spatial limits of her existence. The case of widows is very poignant. There are childless widows and there are widows with children, especially sons. There are always widows in large Hindu households,

as one will see in this book. The way the widows have been treated is a lasting shame, the extreme case being *sati*. Much before Godhra, women were being burnt alive. The subject is too complex to be disposed off in a paragraph or two.

The discriminatory treatment of girls is a theme so often repeated, wherever one turns, that it must be true. Even so, would it be correct to assume that daughters received *no* love at all? That all our mothers were *unloved* daughters is a proposition I find difficult to accept. May it not be that while daughters are generally unwanted, they receive *some* love when they actually arrive? Nabaneeta's two daughters from Amartya Sen will not complain of lack of love. My mother would not have complained. A beauty, she was a darling of all. Similarly, my mother-in-law would not have², though geographically and culturally far apart – my mother growing up in a small town of Bihar³ and my mother-in-law in Triplicane, Madras. My wife and her sisters have no complaint. We live in an age where people talk of text and sub-text, of theme and sub-theme, of plot and sub-plot, of meaning within meaning, of richly nuanced and multi-layered reality. Why, then, do we take such a flat, uni-dimensional, yes/no, right/wrong, either/or view of girls – they are either loved or not loved. Can it not be *both*; sure, one

more than the other? I know people who *long* to have a daughter, 'cursed' as they are by succession of sons. Even in adoption, the view is gaining that girls are better than boys – they are more caring.

It is neither possible nor necessary to review all twelve contributions. They are all well-written. Obviously, I like some more. It may be vividious to single out a few. With profound apologies to those left out, let me begin with Maitreyi Krishna Raj though she is not the first. Actually her contribution is sixth. We have known both Krishna Raj and Maitreyi for years. My wife knew them before I did. In deference to friendship, Maitreyi comes first. She writes in the postscript (p.141) that Krishna Raj passed away very suddenly in January 2004. In fact, both of them had just returned from U.S.A., after seeing their newly-born granddaughter, son's daughter. It was very late in the morning and Raj was still sleeping. At first Maitreyi thought it was jet-lag and did not disturb him. Something about the quality of his sleep rang an alarm bell. When she went to wake him up, he was already gone. In the same postscript, she informs us that she has a son, a Ph.D. in Engineering who has settled down in the U.S.A., whose daughter they had gone to see. He was suffering from terminal cancer and he too is no more. They have a married daughter who lives in Bangalore. At the condolence meeting in Bombay to mourn her son's death, she was telling some of us that people think she is very strong but she is all broken inside. After reading her narration, I see the extreme pain in her 'broken inside' confession. Motherless⁴ at a very young age, she was a patient of T.B. at 16. "I was diagnosed with T.B. in a galloping stage and was given only a month to survive as both my lungs had extensive cavities". (p.13). She spent four miserable, lonely

years in a sanatorium⁵. "These four years were years of utter loneliness. My father visited me only once a month. He never talked to me or sat with me. He never asked how I was doing He made no emotional contact with me. He also complained a lot to everyone about the enormous drain on his finances by my treatment cost". (p.133). Mother dead and father aloof, living with him later was no joy. In fact, Maitreyi complains that men do not give importance to human relationship. "They give their profession exclusive priority. This is something I have missed even in my marriage". (p.137). The main text was narrated in 1984. Brief postscript brings the reader up-to-date till her husband's sudden death in 2004. I have informed the reader about her only son's death, at 38 or so, due to cancer. One can now see how full, indeed overflowing, her cup of misery has been. Though "broken inside", she is bravely carrying on. Salutations to your invincible spirit, Maitreyi. Keep it up till the end.

Nabaneeta Dev Sen's life is an inspiring story, full of remarkable and remarkably strong woman. Her mother became a widow at 13. She is the first wife of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. She has "two exceptionally talented daughters" by him. Surprisingly, Nabaneeta writes that Sen's English wife maintains very warm relationship with her two daughters as also with herself. "His present wife Emma has excellent relations with my two daughters and with myself". (p.35). (For more on this and other family details, see the long note no.10 on page 41).

Of her grandmother (mother's mother), she writes that she reigned over his son's household and "kept every breathing creature under firm control. We were terrified of her". P.22). When Nabaneeta's widowed mother came to live with her parents, she had to undergo the harsh

treatment prescribed for the widows. "Very soon, Radharani realized that she was alone, she was an outsider in her parental home". (p.27). She was an inauspicious creature with inauspicious habits." (p.27). Most amazing thing was that her mother-in-law was more sensitive, sympathetic and supportive. Radharani was sent to her dead husband's house. And, now, an absolutely fantastic thing happened. Radharani's brother-in-law told their mother: "Why don't you treat her as your eldest son from today, rather than the eldest daughter-in-law? So it was to be". (p.28). Her life, including physical appearance (shaven head, for example) was totally changed. In-charge of family finance, "she became the centre of the family in many ways". (p.28). She was encouraged to pursue her intellectual and artistic interests, allowed to attend literary and political meetings, the family car at her disposal". (p.28). Her drawing room was open to her literary friends. She blossomed into a well-known poet and was widely published. Love enters her life. "Radharani was 28. Narendra Dev was a bachelor and 15 years her senior". (p.29). "As a famous poet, my father was a cultural celebrity. He was affectionate and friendly with children Yet he remained distant as a father She was the only one who really mattered to him in the family. I was an extra". (p.30). Nabaneeta arrived eight years after her widowed mother married Narendra Dev. Both Nabaneeta and Amartya were given their names by Rabindranath Tagore⁶. "She (mother) wanted to live through me He (father) was not ambitious, Mother was the adventurous spirit She was too strong for me. She was a fighter. I was a shirker". (p.32). After her divorce, Nabaneeta allowed herself to be guided by her mother for the longest time. It is amazing how much Nabaneeta's mother *de-volved* her. Both mother and

daughter had many firsts to their credit. Even so, mother started living through her daughter. She gave all love but no freedom. "Being such a permissive and domineering guardian, she rendered me powerless, vulnerable and transparent". (p.33). Let the daughter speak more about her mother which she does with remarkable openness. "My mother was my best friend and she was also my worst enemy. I am what I am today only because of her, and what I am not, what I could not be, is also because of her"⁷. I meekly resist her overpowering ambition by not being ambitious at all She pushed me too hard. I was too weak to challenge her openly, so I resisted her inwardly, by being foolishly self destructive. I felt trapped within her dreams. I was smothered by her obsessive love for me". (p.33). It is a strange irony in life that what the parents have done, they do not want their children to do. A social rebel herself, mother was over-conformist. "She was overly sensitive about what others might say about me and made me value others' views as well. I feel today that all my life I have let my own desires float away from me in order to please others – mother, husband, in-laws, neighbours, colleagues. And now, daughters". (p.34). What a damaging, damaging confession? And, what a remarkable, remarkable recovery? Surprisingly, Amartya Sen was not above seeking others' approval. "Social codes and public gaze used to be very important for my husband, as it was for my mother". (p.34). And Sen was as censorious as her mother for her social faults⁸. After her divorce, when Nabaneeta began to live with her mother, she became *totally* dependent on her mother for *everything*. "She controlled all my activities from within, by being my only source of confidence. I had lost all faith in myself". (p.34). Repeatedly, Nabaneeta blames her mother's overpowering nature for the kind of

person she has turned out to be, viz. "a very self-destructive person". (p.34). Everyone blamed her for the failure of marriage, including very much her own mother. Nabaneeta writes that much later, 26 years after the event, both mother and mother-in-law understood better and both apologized to her for blaming her earlier. Divorce led to all-round insights. "It was also a moment of finding out more about myself, the self that no one had told me about before". (p.37). It is very, very curious that though the only daughter (child) of a celebrity father and wife of another celebrity, she has very little to say about they shaping her life, in sharp contrast to her mother's decisive role. And, it is absolutely amazing that starting with so low self-image, Nabaneeta has created such an enviable place for herself. It is simply breath-taking. There was a wonderfully warm and fulfilling relationship between Nabaneeta's mother and her two daughters, something not always found in the pages of this book.

(to be continued)

¹ The bride derives her rank from the rank of her husband. Wife of the eldest son becomes the eldest daughter-in-law. My own sister was the youngest in our family. On marriage, she became the eldest daughter-in-law as her husband is the eldest son. In her capacity as the eldest daughter-in-law, she had to supervise preparations for the marriages of as many as four sisters-in-law, a formidable task by any standard. But, by meeting challenges successfully, one grows and builds one's character as also improves one's own position in husband's family. Marriages are never arranged on the basis of matching the birth orders of the boy and the girl. It is a matter of no consideration whatsoever. Men do not face this problem.

² My mother-in-law gave birth to four daughters and then a son was born. Ordinarily this would have invited adverse comments. My wife, with justified pride, says that not only her widowed paternal grandmother did not say anything adverse herself, she did not allow anyone, in the large zamindari joint-fam-

ily in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, to say anything. It is truly remarkable.

³ I have heard the story, I do not now remember from whom (most likely my father, certainly not my mother) that she and her elder cousin (*mama's* son) had free run of the market in Jamui (a small town) and could have anything they wanted. It would usually be eatables, sweets in particular. What else could they desire and have? Ready-made clothes for children were long way off. I do not know how account was kept and eventually payment was made. Most likely, it was a good-will gesture towards her maternal grandfather's formidable reputation. I never asked my mother. I wish I had. But, then, I regret I should have asked her so many things but I did not. Alas, it is too late now. (My maternal grandfather settled down in the same town where his father-in-law was living, viz. Jamui. But he was not a *ghar-jamai*. He lived separately and had his own house. I remember everything about it. That is how *mama's*, maternal uncle's son is mentioned earlier.

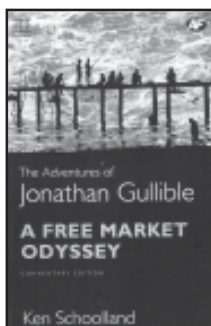
⁴ "I was unable to openly express my sorrow on the death of my mother and people got the idea that I did not feel the loss, but I was really inconsolable, watching my mother slowly sink and die. [Also a patient of T.B.] The grief was overwhelming. I used to go to the terrace and cry inconsolably". (p.131)

⁵ "I felt so totally abandoned when my grandmother just left". (p.132)

⁶ Tagore giving the name to Amartya is true and straight forward. It is not so in the case of Nabaneeta. The name was actually given to Nabaneeta's mother when, as a widow, she remarried Nabaneeta's father, Narendra Deo. Nabaneeta's mother already had two books under her own name and was unwilling to change her name. The name was waiting in suspense. When Nabaneeta was ten, this name was given to her. "When I was 3 days old, a letter was addressed to our house". The letter was from Rabindranath Tagore. He said in that letter, "Since you are too young to reject my gift, I give you this name which you have inherited from your mother". (p.30)

⁷ Can one get a clearer statement of ambivalence?

⁸ It is surprising that Amartya Sen never introduced Nabaneeta to his friends as a poet.



THE ADVENTURES OF JONATHAN GULLIBLE. A FREE MARKET ODYSSEY by Ken Schooland. Academic Foundation, 4772-73, Bharat Ram Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002 • Year of publication in India 2006 • No. of Pages 255 • Price Rs. 295.

Reviewed by R. V. Chari, Retired Professor of Commerce and Management and a freelance writer.

Comprising forty chapters, Ken Schooland has succeeded in putting forth his view on basic economic principles with the portrayal of Jonathan Gullible as the main character. In each chapter, a specific topic is taken up for discussion, which is analysed with the help of a brain-storming session. This way of treating the subject is quite interesting as it retains the attention of the reader.

The second chapter "Troublemakers" immediately captures our attention. We find a group of workers attempting to fell a tree, not with an axe or a saw, but with ordinary sticks hitting the trunk. Far away, a woman who had sawn a tree with the help of the latest saw is forcibly dragged away by two

burly persons. His curiosity raised, Jonathan questions the supervisor which leads to a lively discussion:

"We are tree workers. We knock down trees for wood by beating them with these sticks. Sometimes a hundred people, working round the clock, can knock down a good-sized tree in less than a month. ...That Drawbaugh woman came to work this morning with a sharp piece of metal attached to the end of the stick. She cut down a tree in less than an hour, all by herself! Think of it! Such an outrageous threat to our traditional employment had to be stopped."

Chapter six deals with the idea that equality of everything should be forced upon people. This is effected through taxes, licenses, permits and other control mechanisms, thereby, increasing the

cost of the product, which leads to a reduction in the demand for labour. The ranks of the unemployed swells, resulting in anti-social elements to take advantage of the discontented labour force.

In chapter seven the author deals with the *modus operandi* of the state when it seizes private property developed by individuals by paying a monetary compensation far below the cost of developing the land. The recent takeover by the state government of fertile agricultural land of the farmers at Singur in West Bengal for the purpose of handing it over to Tatas for the construction of a factory for the manufacture of passenger cars is a glaring example of brutal exploitation by the state.

The state has the power to take make more money in two ways. It can use its printing presses to

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print out more Rupee notes without any proper backing in terms of gold backing. Alternatively, it can levy taxes, easier route of printing more notes. With too many notes in circulation, prices of commodities start going up. This leads to discontent and unrest. Ken Schooland discusses this very lucidly in Chapter nine.

Malpractices and illegalities resorted to at the time of elections is graphically described by the author in Chapter 11. We are all familiar with the skulduggery that goes on at election time. Once elections are over the promises made by politicians and political parties are soon forgotten.

"Lords approve death penalty for outlaw barbers' screams a headline in a newspaper being read by a police constable. This arouses

the interest of Jonathan Gullible who inquires of the policeman as to whether it is a typographical error. After reading the report, the police constable confirms that it is not an error. Aghast, Jonathan Gullible asks: "Surely, you wouldn't put someone to death for cutting hair without a license?" "Of course, we would" replies the policeman adding "though it seldom comes to that. "Why" asks Jonathan. "Well, every crime escalates in severity. That means the penalties increase the more one resists. For example, if someone wishes to cut hair without a license, then a fine will be levied. If he or she refuses to pay the fine or continues to cut hair, then the outlaw barber will be arrested and put behind bars". And, said the man in a sober tone, "resisting arrest subjects a criminal to severe penalties." His face darkens. "The outlaw may even be shot. The greater

the resistance, the greater the force used against him..." He explains: "The number of licenses is restricted to the few who pass the rituals of guild membership. This eliminates the unfair competition of intruders with peculiar new ideas, overzealous enthusiasm, backbreaking efficient or cut throat prices."

Ken Schooland's book is inspired by 'Gulliver's Travels' as well as 'Atlas Shrugged' Ayn Rand's highly successful novel promoting individual freedom and free enterprise as the key to a country's prosperity. The book is priced at an affordable price and should be read by those desirous of gaining an insight into the workings of a government and its bureaucracy. It makes a strong case for minimum government and maximum freedom for the individual.



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