

The Killing Fields of Nandigram

“Enough is Enough”

Text of a statement to the press by West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi on 9 November, 2007

The ardour of Deepavali has been dampened in the whole state by the events in Nandigram. Several villages in Nandigram are oscillating from the deepest gloom to panic. Large numbers of armed persons from outside the district, have, it is undeniable, forced themselves onto villages in Nandigram Block I and II for territorial assertion.

Thousands of villages have consequently been intimidated into leaving their homes in villages such as Daudpur, Amgachi, Jambani, Simulkundu, Brindabanchak, Tekhali, Nainan, Kanongochak, Takapara, Sarengabari, Ranichak, Kamalpur and Keyakhali.

Even as of 4 pm this day (November 9), I have received phone calls from responsible persons in Nandigram saying that several huts are ablaze. Large number of villagers have taken refuge in the local high school in Nandigram, bereft of food and personal security.

At the time of writing, the most accurate description for Nandigram is the one used by our Home Secretary, namely, it has become a “war zone”. No Government or society can allow a war zone to exist without immediate and effective action.

I am fully aware of the fact that, earlier in the year, many villagers in Nandigram, who were perceived as sympathisers of the ruling establishment had been obliged to leave the villages and seek shelter in Khejuri. I am also aware of the apprehension that some Maoists, their numbers being unverified, are believed to have entered the area.

Those who had to flee Khejuri must come back with full confidence and dignity. And no quarter should be given to the cult of violence associated with Maoists. But the manner in which the ‘recapture’ of Nandigram villages is being attempted is totally unlawful and unacceptable.

I find it equally unacceptable that while Nandigram has been ingressed with ease by armed people on the one hand, political and non-political persons trying to reach it have been violently obstructed. Some of them were bearing

relief articles for the homeless. The treatment meted to Smt Medha Patkar and other associates of hers last evening was against all norms of civilized political behaviour.

A group of the MPs and one MLA, representing the CPI-M met me this morning and urged me “to apply my good offices for the peace processes in Nandigram”. Peace is the need of the hour in Nandigram. For that peace to come, I told them,

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effective action will have to be taken in terms of action initiated against those responsible for the March 14 events in due process.

The alert and observant people of West Bengal have a right to know that following discussions with political leaders like Smt Mamata Banerjee, MP, Shri Partha Chatterjee, Leader of the Opposition, West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Shri Pradip Bhattacharya, Working President, West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, Shri Manas Bhuiyan and non-political persons, I have been in regular communication with the Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and requested the State Government to take certain immediate steps. These include (i) the immediate return of the ingressers; (ii) the giving of urgent relief to the displaced persons in Nandigram and (iii) the facilitation of their return to their homes.

I have also asked the administration to remove the new unauthorised manmade blocks at entry points to 1.

Chandpur-Rai Para-Phulni More-Khadinbari-Nadia; 2. Nandakumar-Kapaseria-ferry to cross over to Nandigram; 3. Heria-Nandigram; and 4. Potashpur-Nandigram in order that the isolation of Nandigram from the rest of the State ends.

I have made it clear that unless these steps are taken within hours, and the syndrome of "capture and recapture" is not ended, the beginnings for a resumed dialogue through the package announced by the Chief Secretary last night will not get off the ground and the peace talks process will remain grounded. Peace talks must resume soon and, despite the lateness of the hour, I welcome the pragmatic optimism expressed in this regard by our elder statesman, Shri Jyoti Basu.

Let me conclude by saying: Enough is enough. Peace and security should be restored, without any delay, from where they have been evicted from Nandigram.

An Exchange of "Open Letters"

Earlier, in an "Open Letter" to West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi published in the *The Hindu* of 1 November, former Supreme Court Judge V.R. Krishna Iyer pleaded with the Governor as "the head of the State of West Bengal, to consider what measures, if any, may be taken to see that the people of the State, particularly of Nandigram, enjoy security and liberty; possession of property, without threat of deprivation in the guise of land acquisition for industrial development, and assuring peaceful co-existence of progressive agriculture and industry with promise of more employment, is true rural-urban harmony..."

In Justice Krishna Iyer's view "Nandigram is a traumatic mix of these confusing conflicts maybe. This complexity of issues bringing into focus the Gandhian vision of advanced agrarian India is the central object of modern development and the reverse reality of villages suffering a setback on account of aggressive pressure of the technological illusion that foreign-funded profit-hungry, 'Westoxicated' Industrial Renaissance is the only salvation from privation for the Indian humanity..."

"It is unfortunate" he wrote that "disproportionate emphasis on industrial progress and disorganised political conflict opposing even necessary industrialisation have given rise to human casualties and damage to property in Nandigram and other parts of India..."

He suggested a "high-level commission, with the cooperation of political parties", to "establish democratic Gram Swaraj process."

Concluding, he wrote "I submit to you, respected Governor, and through you, the innovative Marxian Chief Minister, to command the resources of the people for constructive ends so as to redeem our historic 'tryst with destiny'."

And the Governor of West Bengal Gopalkrishna Gandhi reply was prompt though carefully worded. He wrote among other other things:

"It may not be 'standard' for a Governor to respond to an 'open letter' through a reply in the same mode. But how can I not do so, when the letter has come from one as eminent and respected as you and has been read by thousands of seriously concerned readers?"

"I do not intend to recount here the events in Nandigram or attempt a comprehensive analysis of the situation. But let me just say, briefly, that the continuing violence and counter-violence there have caused me, as they have done to all those who have observed the sequence, great anxiety and sorrow. I shared with the people of the State some questions that I was posing to the State Government, immediately after the tragic event of March 14. Not long thereafter, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West

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Bengal announced that the petrochemical hub being planned for Nandigram would not be sited there, if the people of Nandigram did not want it. That should really have brought the main tension to an end, with issues of compensation to the victims and the fixing of responsibility for the March 14 deaths remaining to be settled. An abatement in the tension and violence has, however, remained tragically elusive, with the making and hurling of 'hand-bombs,' resultant deaths, displacement of people from homes, disruption of livelihood and school schedules continuing..."

As *Freedom First* reader K.Vedamurthy commented on this exchange: "The 'Open Letter' to Mr.Gopalkrishna Gandhi, by the nonagenarian Justice V.R.Krishna Iyer, on the Nandigram incidents, is addressed embarrassingly respectful to a celebrity so junior to him in age, who happens to be in the limelight because of his office as Governor of West Bengal. What is, however, sought to be conveyed to the politicians of West Bengal through his 'open letter' is, actually, a very pertinent message to every patriotic citizen of India which, in sum and substance is: "Please don't sell your soul for a mess of pottage!"

Why the Commies Bared their Fangs!

The Governor's "Enough is Enough" public statement, the exchange of 'open letters' between the Governor and Justice Krishna Iyer who is known to be a friend of the communists - He was also Law Minister in the first democratically elected communist government in Kerala - and the ruling of the Kolkata High Court" were too much for the commies to bear so they bared their fangs and poured out vitriol which how commies normally react in such situations.

A Division Bench of the Calcutta High Court ruled that the police firing on March 14 in which 14 Nandigram residents were killed was unjustified and violative of the Constitution. This pronouncement infuriated the commies. The *Sunday Statesman* of November 18 reported: "...the CPI-M leadership made it clear... what it thought of the judiciary especially the Calcutta High Court, the Governor, intellectuals and the media. CPI-M state secretary Mr. Biman Bose, senior CITU leader Mr. Shyamlal Chakraborty and senior leader of the CPI-M's peasant wing Mr. Benoy Konar spewed venom at a rally" in Kolkata "on November 17.

Mr. Biman Bose: "If the court decides everything, what is the use of the executive or the legislature in a democracy?...If the Centre thinks it can have a democracy by increasing the salary of the judges, then so be it" he said."If a judge passes this way and is obstructed by the assembled multitude - I see a multitude of heads before me - a catastrophe will take place. Please make way for the judge so that such a thing does not happen." (The veiled threat is so obvious!)

Mr. Shyamlal Chakraborty: "The court has held the 14 March police firing at Nandigram unconstitutional and illegal and ordered the CBI to probe. What's the point of a probe if the High Court has already made up its mind.

Mr.Chakraborty found it "strange" that the plight of CPI-M supporters from Nandigram "compelled to flee their homes" could elicit no sympathy from the Governor...but the CPI-M recapture of Nandigram happened to be abhorrent enough to dampen the ardour of Deepavali for Mr.Gandhi"(the reference was to his "enough is enough open letter).

Mr. Benoy Konar: "The honourable judge must be aware that policemen escorting him carry revolvers too... It's part of their job. If your office under attack, will you ring up Lalbazar(police station) and ask the authorities to send policemen armed with rose petals?" Directing his ire at the Governor Com. Konar said: "I am asking the Governor to openly act like a politician if that's what he really wants to... You are free a free citizen and you can carry the flag of the Trinamool Congress.

The silent march of the intellectuals seem to have riled the CPI-M leadership no end. The *Statesman* report noted. "A woman film director who participated in the march has asked what do I know of Nandigram, Mr. Bose said, "Unlike her, I do not stay in a south Kolkata mansion... Had she been a true *buddhijibi* (intellectual) she would have sympathised with the plight of our party activists living in refugee camps for the past 11 months.

Just what would have been the fate of the residents of Nandigram if the CPI-M were in power in Nandigram. We would not have even heard of the revolt in Nandigram let alone getting the High Court involved. We would have "People's Courts" which would have exonerated the killers and punished the victims!

Communism is a doctrine bred of poverty, hatred and strife. Its spread can only be arrested by diminishing the area of poverty and hatred

Philosopher and Nobel Laureate Bertrand Russell

Nandigram – India's Kronstadt

T. H. Chowdary

Kronstadt was a naval base on Kotlin Island near the head of the Gulf of Finland. Peter, the Great, Emperor of Russia captured the island from Sweden and built it into a naval fortress to protect his new capital, Petrograd, (renamed Leningrad after communist take-over of Russia).

During the Bolshevik [communist] revolution that finished off the Czars and ushered the "dictatorship of the proletariat" that is, of the Communist Party, the naval ratings at Kronstadt rose up against the Czars in collaboration with the communists. After some time, they revolted against the communist rule because it was oppressive and denied ordinary human rights and decencies. The uprising of these former soldiers for communist revolution was brutally suppressed by Lenin's red army. Thousands of these communist revolutionaries were shot down under Lenin's direction, by communists organized by Leon Trotsky.

Trotsky himself was hounded out of the communist party and the Soviet Union under Stalin's dictatorship. Trotsky took refuge in Mexico. He was got assassinated by Stalin. That a communist regime could brutally shoot and kill its former foot-soldiers outraged many a sincere communist and intellectual around the world. Those living within the communist USSR could not speak up but when discovered to have remorse, were picked up and shot dead under Stalin's orders. A number of sincere individual communist intellectuals outside the Soviet Union were deeply distressed and disillusioned by the brutal suppression of free speech and killing of protesting communists at Kronstadt. They distanced themselves from the distasteful dictatorship which was going by the name of communism and rule of the proletariat. In the book, *The God that Failed*, a number of former communist intellectuals had written that Kronstadt opened their eyes to what in truth communist dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism meant.

The world witnessed a second "Kronstadt" in Beijing in 1989 when over 3500 students peacefully demonstrating for an open society, freedom of expression and association were ridden over by tanks and shot dead. This mass murder of peaceful students who were not opposed to communism but only wanted freedom of expression and association, shocked intellectuals who were still fellow-travelling with communism.

Now, Nandigram which has been voting communists to keep them in power for over 30 years has

become the Indian Kronstadt and the Chinese Tiananmen square (Beijing). Some of the peasants whose lands were sought to be acquired by the communist government of West Bengal are also communists but they could not, like the peasants in the former Soviet Union and China, but resist their lands and farms being taken over by government and given to private industrialists. The usually communist-supporting and voting farmers in Nandigram resisted the take over of their lands for setting up of industries [whether industrialisation is necessary or not; whether it should be located in Nandigram's farm lands or in districts like Bankura and Purulia and Burdwan, which are sparsely farmed is a different matter].

Like the Leninist-Stalinist-Communist government of the former USSR, the communist government and the Party in West Bengal put down the Nandigram farmers' resistance by terrorizing them and killing them and performing as many atrocities (as rape) as opportunity presented. Just as in Kronstadt and Tiananmen Square some communist fellow-travelling Indian intellectuals took courage to condemn the Communist Party of India (Marxist) for its actions in Nandigram. We can be sure that just as the worldwide condemnation by intellectuals of the brutal communist suppression of former communists asking for civil rights did not affect Stalin. Prakash Karat, Brinda Karat, Sitaram Yechury, Biman Bose and Buddha Deb Bhattacharya will not be daunted by "any criticism. Their "dialectical" arguments will frighten, fault and silence their "Left" intellectuals.

The sailors in the Baltic Fleet in Kronstadt were mostly of peasant origin. Peasants/farmers, unlike industrial labour, cherish freedom and detest dictatorship. Petrichenko, leader of the Kronstadt of March 1921 was himself a Ukrainian peasant. Among the demands of the Kronstadt 'red' sailors were :

Immediate new elections to the Soviets by secret ballot, and should be preceded by free electoral propaganda; ● Freedom of speech and of the press for workers and peasants, for the Anarchists, and for the Left

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Point Counter Point

Ashok Karnik

Every issue has at least two sides. A wise man studies both sides before coming to a conclusion. This is an attempt to debate all sides so that a considered opinion can be formed.

The General's Experiments With Truth

1) General Musharraf has always been a smooth talker. He is notorious for being economical with truth. In the past, some applauded his brashness; witness his virtuoso performance at the long-lamented Agra summit where he hoodwinked even the most hardened journalists; then his assurance that he was joining the war on terror. And now his declaration that he had to impose emergency because of the recalcitrant judiciary and the militants. Then wilting under US pressure, he blithely gave up his uniform and agreed to lift the emergency. All that he achieved through the calamitous declaration of emergency was to get rid of the judiciary and guard against his own disqualification. He then advocates a different style of democracy. Takes us back to Sukarno's 'Guided Democracy' for Indonesia! What he will do next is as much a gamble for him as for his country. The ex-General is clever. Musharraf suffers from an illness that Churchill described as "terminal inexactitude". So, never be sure of what he will do next, except saving his skin to the last.

1) The problem for the world - and India - is that Musharraf refuses to fade away. He struts around as a viable ruler, not because he is good but because the alternatives are worse. The landscape is bleak; politicians are as unreliable as the ex-general. Elections are imperative but there is no guarantee that the army or the militants would allow an elected government to function. A state in chaos might make us wish that a duplicitous Musharraf is preferable to mad mullahs. It is a matter of choosing between a known devil and an unknown one. The difficulty is compounded because there is no scope for trial and error in Pakistan. A nuclear country cannot risk a meltdown. The outside world can only hope that democracy would be allowed to reassert itself in Pakistan - if Musharraf ever allows it to breathe! Meanwhile, the US still trusts him to deliver democracy and control terrorism, which is not saying much, given the US record of depending on the undependable.

Nandigram Nightmare

2) Since January 2007, Nandigram in West Bengal is threatening to blow the lid off the CPI(M)'s hold in the countryside. The trouble started over acquisition of land in a block of villages in Nandigram 70 kms from Kolkata. The local protests organised by the "Bhumi Uchehed Pratirodh Committee"(BUPC) were exploited by CPI(M)'s opponents like the Trinamul Congress to drive out CPI(M) cadres from the block. Maoists took advantage of the turmoil as they always do. CPI(M) cadres then tried to regain the lost ground through use of the police. On March 14 the police opened fire to quell CPI(M)'s opponents killing 14 farmers. It failed to budge the protesters. The exercise was repeated in November 2007 by armed goons to help CPI(M) regain the territory, rendering thousands homeless. The November action was more inhuman than the March firing. The concept of conquest of territory harks back to colonialism and the more recent Stalinist thirst for expansion of the communist paradise. The state government's contention was that CPI(M)'s opponents had used violence and the CPI(M) had paid them back in the same coin. The Calcutta High Court came down heavily on the government's action against the protesters

2) The CPI(M) and its government brazenly justified the use of force by CPI(M) cadres. They forgot Weber's dictum that in a civilized society, the State alone should have the legal monopoly over the use of physical force. Other entities doing so need to be treated as criminals. The state government's connivance in such use of force is fraught with constitutional impropriety. It is one thing for the government to use force and another to allow private parties (CPI(M) cadres) to use muscle power. Another frightening aspect of the Nandigram developments is a doubt whether CPI(M) cadres use the same tactics all over West Bengal to keep the people under their thumb? Does that explain CPM's continuing hold over the West Bengal for decades, despite failing on many fronts like poverty elimination, absence of industrial development, poor health care, education et al? Does the invisible gun keep the populace in line?

"The issue of land is yielding a bitter crop - conflict. Tussle for the acres has left Nandigram blood-soaked."

The Week

and termed the police firing on March 14 as “unjustified and unconstitutional”. The state government has refused to take the rebuke lying down and termed the High Court’s verdict as interference in the Executive’s functioning. The leftist intellectual elite of West Bengal that had refused for years to see anything wrong with the State’s strong-arm methods against its opponents, for once was aghast at the Nandigram depredations.

“Nandigram cannot be understood without analysing the issue of development-induced displacements and people’s reaction to such events elsewhere.

The Week

The New Lows of Karnataka

3) Democracy was brought to shame in Karnataka. Karnataka politicians should hang their heads in shame. BJP and Congress (I) were as much victims of betrayal as greed. The people of the State share vicarious responsibility for electing such leaders. That Deve Gowda was once our Prime Minister reflects on our sagacity too. It is said that you get the leaders you deserve. In the last two years, our venerable ex-Prime Minister ditched the Congress to form a Government with the help of the BJP; ditched the BJP when the time came to hand over power to it, tried to cozy up to the Congress (I) and, when rejected, went back to the BJP promising it support to form a Government; and finally deserted the BJP again to try out a deal with the Congress (I). Deve Gowda’s somersaults were disgusting. Congress (I)’s refusal to have an alliance with Deve Gowda again showed that it has finally understood the value of credibility. However, that may not be the last word in this political farce.

3) BJP hopes to gain public sympathy as a victim of betrayal. The first time when it was let down by JD (S), it had the right to that sympathy but when it accepted JD (S) support the second time round, it was fully aware of the nature of its ally. Since it was betrayed again, it should blame itself. The truth is that the lure of power overwhelmed its common sense. Yashwant Sinha (BJP), when asked if it was right in principle to trust somebody who had betrayed his party only weeks earlier, blithely replied that his party was not stupid enough to reject power. Sinha should now see who looks more stupid! Congress (I) leaders, suddenly smelling power, also regurgitated the tiresome talk of unity of secularist forces to justify their possible re-alliance with the JD (S). In such a dismal scenario whom do the people vote for? All state politicians have gone morally bankrupt. Can we at least hope that the JD (S) would disappear from politics after its harlotry? Or is this too much to expect from a caste-ridden electorate?

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MINOO MASANI

A Biography by S. V. Raju

Published by the National Book Trust, India in their National Biography series

This book is a brief biography of Minoo Masani based on the author’s 40-year association with him. It traces his roller coaster ride as writer freedom fighter, parliamentarian from the Constituent Assembly to the Fourth Lok Sabha. His journey from Marxism to Liberalism and his role in the formation of, and the decline of the Swatantra Party.

This is the story of a principled politician – an oxymoron in current political dialogue. Today the word politician draws sneer and derision. That it was not always so the author seeks to establish in this biography of Minoo Masani whose life and work spanned the greater part of the twentieth century.

Price: Hard cover: Rs.200; Soft cover: Rs.40

Available at leading booksellers or from the National Book Trust offices in your city.

National Security – The Contemporary Paradigm

V. Balachandran

There is a mistaken belief in certain circles that national security could be ensured with strong defence forces or by effective internal policing system. The desire to upgrade weaponry is out of this belief. However USA was subjected to a humiliating terrorist attack on Sep 11, 2001 despite having the best weaponry and second largest army in the world (over 14 lakh soldiers). Russia was not able to prevent repeated Chechen attacks on various targets despite having the third largest army (12.5 lakh soldiers). Similarly India could not prevent an attack on our parliament on Dec 13, 2001 or the earlier Kargil incursion, despite having the fourth largest army with almost 12 lakh soldiers.

Globalization has loosened States' control over their polity. Stanley Hoffman called this "erosion" as the "emergence of a transnational society that includes multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, criminals and terrorists."

The corporate sector has encroached into the security arena, wresting some areas from government, such as vital industries, communications, financial and commercial management, which are also subject to trans-border developments. To give an example, the media recently highlighted that Vodafone, which has bought Hutch in India, has more than 160 million customers in 26 countries. It is only for this reason that the United States, in the wake of 9/11, acknowledged that over 100 different sectors had vital roles to play in national security. The Department of Homeland Security was set up to represent such diverse elements, including the corporate sector, instead of casting the responsibility only on traditional institutions like the Department of Defense, intelligence services and FBI. Several governments have also realized that armed forces, police and intelligence agencies themselves cannot prevent breaches of national security or terrorism in a "stand alone" fashion without active involvement of regulatory wings in various government and private sector entities like transport and communications. Unfortunately there is as yet no such realization in India.

Internal and external security are two sides of "National Security". To quote the "Group of Ministers"(GOM) report in February 2001 after the Kargil War: "National Security is a function of a country's external environment and the internal situation, as well as their interplay with each other". Both are inexorably woven together and have many components: Ensuring territorial integrity, preventing political and economic subversion, protecting national leadership and vital installations as well as safeguarding our society's character as envisaged

by our founding fathers which would include preserving inter-community relationship. The "GOM" further said: "A strong sense of nationalism and good governance also form an integral part of national security; as does the ability to retain political and economic sovereignty and autonomy in decision making, in an era of globalization and increasing economic interdependence".

Of late security has been classified as "traditional" and "non-traditional". Non-traditional security issues (NTS) like migration, human security, disaster, epidemics, diseases like HIV and AIDs, human trafficking, small arms, transnational crime and environmental security are given more attention now. Control of epidemics like SARS is no longer the worry of one country. It affects the entire region. Similarly the Indonesian "haze" affects all the countries in the region. Based on this there is even an attempt to re-define "sovereignty" on the ground that the principle of non-interference and state sovereignty cannot deal with NTS. As Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, former Thai foreign minister said: "One has to therefore revisit the sanctity of the concept of sovereignty."

Pressures on national security change quite often beyond the control of national governments on a kaleidoscopic pattern in a fast changing "Wired world". Turbulence in a country has serious security implications on its neighbours as the case of Pakistan/Afghanistan, Nepal/India, Bangla Desh/India and Srilanka/India.

Mr. V. Balachandran, formerly Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, read a paper on 12 October 2007 at the Annual Conference of the Maharashtra Regional Branch of the Indian Institute of Public Administration on *A New Paradigm for Indian Internal Security Management*. Since the topic is of crucial importance, particularly in the current context, we are, with Mr. Balachandran's permission, reproducing excerpts in four instalments beginning with this one which is an introduction to the subject. The next instalment will deal with Challenges to National Security.

– Editor.



Cornucopia

Firoze Hirjikaka

India – A Craven Superpower

All this talk of India becoming 'world class' will remain a pipe dream, until Indian leaders get the basics right.

It is now proved beyond reasonable doubt. Other countries may regard India as a world power, but India itself does not. Time and again, our government cravenly caves in to the slightest hint of pressure.

After the Ajmer blasts, it was widely suspected that the mastermind behind the barbaric act was holed up in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is recognized internationally as being a basket case. Yet India, with all its clout, put no real pressure on its puny neighbour to have the culprit extradited to India to face judgment. More recently, a minister in Malaysia publicly criticized one of our senior Chief Ministers for speaking out against the maltreatment of ethnic Indians in Malaysia. In terms of economic and military strength, Malaysia is no match for India. Yet the Malaysian government felt emboldened enough to issue a public reprimand to one of our very senior politicians. Why? Because, unfortunately, this is the kind of cowardly reputation India has acquired in the international arena.

The latest example is the news that the Bangladeshi writer, Taslima Nasreen, has agreed to withdraw certain passages from her autobiography, because they 'offended' some Muslim fundamentalists. I have no doubt she was pressurized by the Indian government – under the guise not risking communal tensions. In other words, the mighty Indian state is successfully being held hostage by a bunch of fanatics. If there is an easy way out of a difficult situation, you can be sure our government will grab it – no matter

how unprincipled and humiliating it may be.

Contrast this with the principled and courageous stand of the British government in offering state protection to Salman Rushdie, when Islamic fundamentalists issued a fatwa against him for his novel, *Satanic Verses*. The British correctly came to the decision that the right to freedom of expression for one of its citizens deserved protection – even at considerable expense to its government. Why cannot the Indian government provide similar protection to Taslima Nasreen? After all, it has no compunction in spending lakhs on Z-plus security for a nonentity like Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law.

All this talk of India becoming 'world class' will remain a pipe dream, until Indian leaders get the basics right. It is shameful that – 60 years after attaining independence – Indians cannot get rid of the ingrained obsequiousness forced on them under British rule. Domestically, the British masters have been replaced by megalomaniacal party leaders. Hence, one witnesses the revolting spectacle of politicians falling at the feet of their party supremo. Internationally, India is one of the top ten countries in the world, economically and militarily. Unfortunately, this reality has not struck home in the psyche of those who govern us. They have petty, craven minds; and much weaker countries take advantage of this to bully us. It is a shameful state of affairs.

The Small God of All Things

In my opinion, religious obeisance, devotion or whatever – of any faith – is a personal communion between the individual and his Maker.

A minor news item in a recent issue of *The Times of India* caught my attention. The report stated that devotees from all over the world can now have *darshan* of the idols of the Hindu God Vitthal and Goddess Rukmini merely by clicking on a website.

This is nothing new, of course. There are now innumerable websites, where one can get a *darshan* of a wide variety of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. One can even perform a *puja* over one's mobile phone. Music companies

promote cassettes and CDs of *bhajans* et al, guaranteed to bring peace and prosperity to your home, by the mere act of playing the CD on your home stereo.

I cannot help wondering if we are trivializing God with this display of rank commercialism. God has now become a marketable commodity – to be bought and sold like any other product. And it is not as if only mindless

cont'd. p.14

Rites, Rituals and Festivals

Suman Oak

This year, the Shivalinga at the holy place of Amarnath melted away due to the tremendous increase in the number of visiting devotees and global warming. Then there is the intended demolishing of the Ramasetu in the far south. The former is caused by the imbalance in nature; the latter involves commercial interests. Both issues have hurt the religious sensitivities of the Hindu community. Whatever the politicians might regard them as, it is high time that we, the common people, religious or otherwise, belonging to any religion, should make up our minds and decide what we should learn from such issues, and to what extent we should let our faiths and religiosity take hold of our minds and brains.

Like other institutions religion too is a form of institution - the earliest one for that matter - that evolved out of the necessity for stabilising society and is a part of its culture. Every culture has two aspects; the first is intellectually enlightening and the other pertains to social conduct. The foundation of the intellectual aspect of Indian culture was laid down by our ancient sages. They strived to progress from ignorance to knowledge. The rebels among them stayed away from the madding crowd and lived in forests to write their *Aranyakas* (literally meaning works written in forests). What these sages discussed, debated and passed on to the later generations was beyond the understanding of the common people. The other aspect i.e., social conduct was taken care of by intelligent but shrewd and sharp men with very little consideration for the lofty philosophy of the sages. For a peaceful society they strengthened the social structure laid down by the *Varnashrama* system. For the moral rectitude of the masses they reinforced ritualistic devotion by writing the *Brahmanas* that gave concrete shape to rituals of worship and thereby assimilated almost all tribes and their deities into the eclectic Hindu religion. They also compiled the *Smritis* in order to lock the society into one socio-economic-administrative framework.

With all these schemes and strategies, they managed to engender a peculiar mass psyche i.e. uncritical belief and uncomplaining acceptance of one's lot. Most of us accept the role assigned to us and faithfully observe all traditionally inherited customs and rituals. We are annoyed if any one causes any interference in these practices. Social conduct based on uncritical belief which is not restrained by intellect, leads to unrest in society. It gets commercialized leaving no place for moral values and ethical behaviour that depends more on conscience than on religiosity or religious dicta. Our outlook still remains other worldly because of our weak psyche and intellectual inertia despite the fact that the right of every Indian to education is enshrined in India's Constitution and many of us are educated.

We have to overcome this weakness and inertia

and start thinking afresh about our customs and rituals and especially those rituals and religious observances forced upon our women to keep them chained within the four walls of the home. All that is harmful and degrading to human dignity should be discarded forthwith, retaining the healthy practices necessary for emotional development.

The Indian mind is not content with the 3.3 million Hindu gods with additional gods of other monotheist religions, all dwelling in the other world. So we instal deities in the earthly rivers, mountains stones, animals, trees, souls of the departed, ghosts, saints, fakirs and what not. Instead of conserving the revered rivers, mountains, trees and animals we ruin them in the name of religion. All the more annoying are the suddenly propping up temples of some 'Swayambhu' (self-born) deity in the shape of a stone smeared with red lead. The faithful gullible start worshipping the deity and the temple priest secures profitable means of livelihood. Somewhere else a beautiful cloth is spread over a road side tomb and it suddenly becomes very popular as a *Peer* that answers people's vows. In every religion there are plenty of *Babas*, *Buvas*, *Bhagwans*, *Avalias*, dead or alive, all with superhuman powers. Religious fanatics who are out to cut the throats of people of faiths other than their own eagerly look up to all these *Babas* for solace. Those who advocate conserving the original pristine nature of their own religion do not bother about this intrusion of alien deities, *Babas* and rituals; on the contrary a conflict flares up if the administration curbs a ritual that causes a law and order situation. For instance when carrying coconuts and other stuff for worship at Mumbai's Siddhivinayak temple was banned as a safety measure, there was a hue and cry demanding resignation of the government.

The intention, here, is not to condemn all rites, rituals and festivals outright but to look at their utility, propriety and necessity critically, and loosen their grip on the minds of our people. With this end in view I intend to informing readers of *Freedom First* to be published in its issue during the month in which such a ritual/festival

occurs. This will largely be an examination of the observation of such festivals by Maharashtrian Hindus. The limitations of this writer is the cause of this narrow regional focus. We begin with *Makarāsankranti* that is

observed in January. The information has been mainly drawn from the two books: *Bharateeya Sanskriti Kosh* edited by Pandit Mahadeva Shastri Joshi and *Aryanchya Sanancha Prachin va Arvachin Itihas* by Rigvedi.

Makarsankranti

The return of the sun from the tropic of Capricorn towards north is celebrated in India as a festival of joy promoting camaraderie and burying old rivalries.

This festival occurs in the month of *Paush*, according to the Hindu calendar, corresponding to January. The duration of this festival is supposed to be a '*Punya Parva*' i.e. a period during in which a good action confers especial merit upon the performer. On this day the sun enters the *Makar rashi*, the zodiac sign Capricorn. This is the only festival that is based not on the lunar but the solar calendar and therefore falls each year on the 14th of January. When the sun moves towards the north it is *Uttarayan* and when it moves towards the south it is *Dakshinayan*. Even a school child knows that the sun remains steady with respect to the earth; it appears to be moving towards the north or south because the earth's axis of rotation is inclined. This apparent movement of the sun brings about change in the climates on the earth and in the duration of day and night.

Sankranti is a purely natural phenomenon. There is no harm in celebrating it as a festival of joy since it indicates the end of long nights and the beginning of longer and brighter days and hints the end of the severe winter and the approaching spring round the corner. This is all the more important for those in the colder northern region. But the compilers of our *Puranas* have turned this pure and simple joyful event into one originating from mythological legends. Very briefly one mythical story tell us:

Hema Rishi undertook a long and severe penance at Kumbhakonam. Pleased with it the god Sharangapani appeared before him on this day and hence the celebrations. In Madura the God Sundareshan appeared in the guise of a magician and fed sugarcane to the stone statue of an elephant. Sadly the living elephants as also men of today are not as pious as the stone elephant of the bygone era to be fed by the god Sharangapani. When the importance of the goddess *Shakti* increased *Makara Sankraman* became goddess *Sankranti*. She is said to have killed the demon *Sankarasur* on this day.

However the benevolent goddess *Sankranti* who destroys demons, is depicted in every Hindu Almanac in a very queer fashion. She looms large spreading over seven *Yojanas*, i.e. roughly 35 miles; she has a broad mouth with thick lips, a hugely long nose, one mouth and nine arms;

she has a frightful and hideous masculine countenance. In short she looks terrible. Every year she rides a different animal, carries a different weapon. Every year, her Tilak – the mark on her forehead, Jyoti – the flame, foodstuff that she prefers, the dinner plate in which she eats, etc., change. She does not grow older but her age and her corporeal state changes every year. She acquires a new name each year. All this is given in the *Panchang* – the Hindu Almanac in the beginning of the year. So we come to know in advance what commodity is going to be costly, what will be plentiful, where calamities will strike.

This year the sun will enter the zodiac sign of Capricorn at 7 minutes past midnight on January 14 (i.e. 00 07 AM on 15th Jan. 2008). The auspicious period will therefore commence at sunrise on the 15th and last till sunset. This year's Sankranti is attired in red clothes, holds a bow and arrow for her weapon and a leaf of the sacred *Bel* tree for fragrance. She is in a sitting posture, drinking milk. She adorns a *Gomed* (a pale orange stone) ornament and belongs to the class of beasts. She comes from the south and proceeds towards north looking in the north-east direction.

During this auspicious period Hindus are supposed to bathe in the sea or a sacred river like the Ganges and donate part of their wealth to Brahmins. Before bathing they are supposed to apply a paste of sesame seeds all over their bodies. Imagine the amount of sesame paste washed in our sacred rivers if all Hindus decide to observe this dictum religiously! The priestly Brahmins are offered rice and sesame seeds on this day. Sesame oil is used to light the lamps in Lord Shiva's temples offering rice and sesame seeds. In Maharashtra married women (whose husbands are alive) offer small earthen pots containing sugarcane pieces, wheat, cloves of turmeric roots, cotton and coins to Brahmins and other married women. Such pots might have been useful for storing things in small quantities in the ancient days when metal containers were not available. Their utility value now is practically zero but the wasteful practice continues.

There are some good customs like distributing *Tilgul* to all friends and rivals alike. The *til* (Sesame) in the *Tilgul*

cont'd. p.14

Human Development Index and Gross National Happiness

Sadanand B. Kumta

Gross National Happiness (GNH) was a term coined by Bhutan's King Jigme Wangchuck in 1972

All of us are familiar with Sensex and economic growth. Perhaps less familiar are we with Human Development Index (HDI) and even still less with Gross National Happiness (GNH). Surprisingly both these terms originated in Asia. HDI was developed by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq. It was accepted by United Nations and UNDP regularly publishes its report on HDI every year. The latest report was out on 9th November 2006. GNH was a term coined by Bhutan's King Jigme Wangchuck in 1972. Let us have a closer look at these terms.

What is HDI? It is composite index measuring three parameters: Health, Education and Literacy, and Standard of Living. It should be obvious that it is not a comprehensive measure of human development. India ranks as low as 126 out of 177 countries listed. Ranking is in three main categories: Those with high values from 1 to 0.8, Medium values (0.799 to 0.6) and Low (0.599 and less). India has a medium score of 0.611 and is ranked 126th. Norway, Australia, Canada and Sweden have high HDIs (values above 0.95) followed by Japan and USA. Mauritius with HDI of 0.8 ranks 63rd. In the medium category, Sri Lanka (93rd at 0.755), China (81st at 0.768), Iran (96th at 0.746), and South Africa (121st at 0.653) are above us. Pakistan ranks below us at 134.

Parametric details:

Health:

Health very much depends on availability of clean drinking water and good sanitation. Nearly two-thirds of India's population has no access to sanitation even today. Of the 1.8 million deaths due to diarrhea in the world, 0.45 million are from India. Good governance and efficient water management are our real problems.

Life Expectancy:

Life expectancy in India has improved. It is now 63.6 years. In Japan, it is 82.8 years.

Happiness:

Vanuta – a Pacific island, heads the list in Happiness at No.1. India stands at No.61. Bhutan at 13, Sri Lanka 15, China 31, Pakistan 112, Japan 95, U.K. 108 and USA at 150.

It is apparent from the above, that Happy Planet Index does not exhibit any co-relation with Human Development Index.

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Of Leaders and *Netas*

Kusum Choppra

Remember the "Let a hundred roses bloom" of yore? Why not in India?

Developing Young Leaders ..

The Lead India campaign is no doubt a welcome initiative. But why are we limiting ourselves to discover one leader for all of India? Is that possible, when our country is so huge with so many disparate elements, each of which presents problems which need solutions specially tailored to them.

When we are saluting all these young people, each of whom has attained excellence in the effort they are making within their social ambit, why not endorse their efforts with concrete support. Imagine the India ten years down the road with not one but eight or ten energetic young leaders working in their respective arenas and coordinating with each other.

Such efforts go out in concentric circles of development and we may just see such leaders emerge not just in eight or ten major cities, but also perhaps at each district level or even lower in a true spirit of *Chak De India!*

... and The antics of *Netas*

Woe to India the day that the *netas'* ambitions overshadow national interests. Sixty years ago, the Father of the Nation wanted to see his Jawaharlal become Prime Minister before he died. Lo and behold, India took birth as a truncated state, scoured by the ravages of mass murder in the Partition.

We then had a Prime Minister, Vajpayee who aspired to a Nobel Peace Prize. Was that perhaps why we were manoeuvred through a "war" and later a grandstand peace with Pakistan, which was aborted thanks to the machinations reputedly by his own jealous teammate?

Now we are witness to another desperate bid for prime ministership (before I die) attempt. The dramatic announcement of a prime ministerial candidate when no elections have been called, the self-same candidate whose candidature was refuted the

last time it was raised, by the "elder statesman and former prime minister" who has not yet accepted the candidature – only said to have been done so, by sources!

The same sources who have perhaps released the desperate election-eve endorsement of Narendra Modi by Atal Bihari Vajpayee who has hitherto been resolute in not doing so. So long as the advertisement does its election eve magic, what does it matter if the Leader later refutes it, eh?

Many Gujaratis will recall that in the aftermath of the 2002 Godhra genocide, Vajpayee had mourned "What face will I take abroad?" right here in Ahmedabad. A few weeks later, at a party show, he did his famous about turn, refusing to acknowledge any wrongdoing in Gujarat.

Why this Advani desperation? Is it merely to achieve prime ministership or perhaps to ward off the latent threat from the *Hindutva* fury he himself unleashed first on India and then on Gujarat, which now threatens to overtake and outstrip him?

KUSUM CHOPPRA is a freelance journalist.



COURTESY: Asian Age, 27 October 2007.

Book Review



WINNING WITHOUT CORRUPTION by Feroza H. Seervai • Published by Public Concern for Governance Trust, B/2, Mahalaxmi Chambers, 22 Bhulabhai Desai Road, Mumbai 400026 • Year of Publication 2006 • Pages 84 • Price: Rs.180

Reviewed by Mr. N. Vittal, formerly Chief Vigilance Commissioner, Government of India.

There is a charming legend about how the Zoroastrians who arrived in Sanjan in south Gujarat from Persia, nearly a thousand years ago got permission to settle down in our country. The local ruler sent a bowl of milk filled to the brim to indicate that there was no space in his country. The leader of the Zoroastrians added sugar and sent the bowl back indicating that like the sugar sweetening the milk the refugees would merge with the local society and add value to it. The Parsees have been true to this spirit over the centuries. I wonder whether there is any other community in the world where so much contribution in so many spheres of human activity have come from so few.

This 84 page booklet by Feroza H. Seervai, who was married to the late H. M. Seervai, former Advocate General of Maharashtra, is a delightful example of the Zoroastrians' spirit of holding high values and displaying the never say die spirit. Corruption in public life is a sad reality of India today, but so long as there are people like Feroza H Seervai, there is hope. This booklet is very elegantly written, full of anecdotes but with a common serious thread. The entire message of the booklet has been spelt out in the Epilogue. In short, this book is a distilled essence of the wisdom of Feroza who for 60 years has been a voluntary social worker and who have been winning without leading to corruption. Her advice for action is clear. To list a few:

1. Be prepared to give time and effort.
2. Do intensive homework, i.e. study the matter thoroughly
3. Persist, persist and persist. Don't give up and don't give in when obstacles appear (almost a flow back to Churchill's advice to the students of his alma mater, never give up, never give up, never never give up!)
4. Seek transparency, for the citizen has the right to know; exercise your right to information.
5. Recognize different types of corruption, and don't offer to do a favour if or when your work is done, for the official has done no more than he or she is there to do – but at the same time be sure you are not asking for more than what ought to be done.
6. Argue with facts and figures – in this your homework is crucial.
7. See the top person concerned with the business in hand: do not be fobbed off by underlings, who are

naturally not authorized to make necessary decisions.

8. Whenever you suspect that unauthorized work is being carried out somewhere, apply to the relevant authorities, to know whether the requisite sanction was sought, is pending or was granted."

Feroza's never say die spirit and commitment to be on the side of good against evil comes through, even though she underlines the fact that she is an atheist. One charming aspect of this book is the anecdotes sprinkled across with interesting insights. Take her encounter with the redoubtable Morarji Desai. At a party, attended by the then Chief Minister, Morarji Desai, she introduced her husband Homi Seervai, who had till then not met him. "I said to Mr. Desai, "Would you like me to introduce to you our new Advocate General?" Mr. Desai turned to (or should I say turned on?) Homi and said, "Earlier this year, your wife gave me a threat!" Homi with his customary calmness, replied, "Well, Sir, I quite agreed with the view she took"

On a much earlier occasion, when the Mantralaya building was yet to be the seat of the state government, and Morarji Desai, then Finance Minister, sat in the old Secretariat (now the City Civil Court Building). Feroza had occasion to meet him a few times – "I can't remember for what purpose. I kept arguing with him. Then he asked me, 'Did you teach your husband to argue, or did he teach you?' I answered, 'We both had Professor D'Andrade as teacher, and I also had Dr. Lawande as my professor"

Above all, this is a very timely and effective action-packed book. It has a message of optimism and explodes many of the pessimistic myths held by many people in the country today. For example after her successful defence of Princess Victoria Mary Gymkhana's land, she sums up: "This is how at every step, we dispelled the superstitions that there could not be a successful outcome in Government matters without inducements; that the long arm of the Government and Municipal Machinery can squeeze its citizens – in particular, elderly ladies – and that Government and the Municipal Corporation can have it their way at every turn".

Right through this little booklet, the charming doughty personality of Feroza Seervai shines through and leaves the reader in a spirit of cheerful optimism and greater determination in fighting corruption.

Nandigram – India's Kronstadt (cont'd. from p.4)

Socialist parties ● The right of assembly, and freedom for trade union and peasant organizations ● The liberation of all political prisoners of the Socialist parties, and of all imprisoned workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors belonging to working class and peasant organizations ● The abolition of all political sections in the armed forces ● The immediate abolition of the militia detachments set up between towns and countryside ● The equalisation of rations for all workers, except those engaged in dangerous or unhealthy jobs ● The abolition of Party combat detachments in all military groups. The abolition of Party guards in factories and enterprises ● The granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil,

and of the right to own cattle. We request that all military units and officer trainee groups associate themselves with this resolution.

Can any sane person, true socialist and genuine democrat hold these to be anti-people, anti-country demands? But to communists any one questioning them is a fascist, a stooge of America, an enemy of the people and so deserves to be eliminated as vermin.

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Cornucopia (cont'd. from p.4)

idiots are taken in by these advertising gimmicks. I know some highly educated professionals who are hooked onto these quick fixes to attain *nirvana*. How they can imagine that this shortcut devotion might actually influence the Almighty. totally foxes me.

In my opinion, religious obeisance, devotion or whatever – of any faith – is a personal communion between an individual and his Maker. A short prayer, uttered with sincerity, would make a far more powerful impact than long distance *aartis*, or ostentatious displays of wealth, in the guise of devotion. I read recently of a totally ridiculous, but serious, proposal to install a throne of solid gold for the Shirdi Sai Baba. Amitabh Bachhan regularly donates frightfully expensive jewellery to various Gods. It is totally ludicrous to believe that the saint would be at all impressed, or pleased, with this profligate display of material

ostentation. Surely the super-*bhakt*s would be much more certain of obtaining Sai Baba's blessings if they utilized the same money for genuine charitable works and Bachhan should be savvy enough to realize that those expensive baubles are probably disappearing into the pockets of the temple trustees.

I am painfully aware that we live in a highly materialistic world today. The one true god is the acquisition of wealth – by any means. We hold nothing sacred; not even the Almighty. God is said to possess infinite patience, but even He must be at the end of his tether. Is it any wonder, then, that I am somewhat apprehensive about the future of mankind?

MR. FIROZE HIRJIKAKA can be contacted at leonardo8_99@yahoo.com

Rites, Rituals and Festivals (cont'd. from p.10)

signifies attachment and affection and the *Gul* (jaggery) stands for kind and pleasant conversation. The *Tilgul* is exchanged expecting affection and pleasant relationship with each other. A similar commendable custom is observed in the Konkan region. There, married women carry rice from their own homes and put it in a pot of boiling water for cooking it in the neighbour's kitchen for the neighbour's use. They also put a green coconut in the neighbours' homes. This give and take promotes camaraderie. Another good custom is the *Haladi-Kumkum* ceremony where women get a chance to know each other and develop friendships. But the drawback in all these ceremonies is that widows are banned from observing or attending any of them.

In the valleys of the Himalayas they make bird-like shapes from flour and deep fry them in ghee. These fried

flour birds are then hung round the necks of small children. On the next day these birds are fed to the crows. In Bengal *Sankranti* is celebrated as '*Thuva*'. A sweet called *Pishtak* made out of rice powder, ghee and sugar is distributed. At Prayag a big crowd gathers for bathing in the holy river. Similarly people gather in large numbers to bathe in the river Tamraparni and in the sea at Vedaranya in the south. This festival is called *Pongal* in the south and is celebrated for three days. Thus the return of the sun from the tropic of Capricorn towards north is celebrated in India as a festival of joy promoting camaraderie and burying old rivalries.

MRS SUMAN OAK, retired lecturer on education, SNDT University. Associated with *Sreehitakarini*, Centre for the Study of Social Change and the *Andhashraddha Nirmoalan Samiti*. She is a freelance writer in Marathi and English and has also translated books from English into Marathi and vice-versa.

From Our Readers

The Nuke Deal

In July this year *The Hindu* had published in some detail an interview its correspondents had with national security chief M. K. Narayanan on the Nuclear Deal. In the context of our Prime Minister's deep anguish on the fate of the nuke deal, published in the press on October 24, and appreciative of that interview I wrote the following letter to *The Hindu* which was not published. *Freedom First* readers will be interested in the contents of this letter.

"The lasting impression the interview is likely to leave is that our motherland's sovereignty is quite safe in the hands of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The picture of President Bush that emerges from this interview is that he is neither buffoonish nor a madcap as most of the cartoonists here and even in the US make him out to be! The top officials of the US Administration with whom Mr. M. K. Narayanan had (and still have) to deal come out as men and women of stuff who take their office seriously, without bothering themselves about media criticism of their day to day functioning – they appear indeed to be 'insulated' against it!

"Patriotism, intense patriotism seems to inform the majority of them and not any craving for personal popularity. As for Mr. M. K. Narayanan himself, reading him in this interview, reminds one of seasoned diplomats like late K.P.S.Menon, the late B. K. Nehru and the present West Bengal Governor, Gopalkrishna Gandhi.

K. Vedamurthy
Chennai.

Dream Sellers

By email one receives more letters than one cares to keep count, saying you have won millions of DMs, Aus.\$s or Sterling pounds. Letters of this kind are best ignored.

But this time round, the letter was different. It bore a photograph of Bill Gates stating that the sponsor is Microsoft Corporation. Microsoft Corporation is reported to have set apart a fund of sixty millions to be distributed to 75 winners (like me) in various countries picked up by computer.

I was given to understand that I had won in the first category of winners a whopping Stg. Pounds. 800,000.00. However, no money was claimed from me while putting up the claim. Only I was to convey my Bank Swift Code, account number details etc., in order to enable them to transfer the amount by TT. Of course for reasons of security I was requested to keep total secrecy in this regard. If the amount is not claimed within 30 days, the amount would be handed over to some charitable cause, I was informed.

I emailed back: "I'm delighted to receive your message. You have surely made it highly convincing supported by a photograph of Bill Gates. Kindly let me have fuller details to enable me to get to believe in my good luck. Promptly I received a reply inviting me to London to collect the amount with an affidavit and a certificate from UK Gaming Commission and a non-resident tax clearance from the Internal Revenue Services within 18 days. In the event, I am unable to personally come over to London I have to pass on all the details to their paying Bank. (Details of that paying bank were not furnished)

I wonder how many of you have received this kind of email. Obviously, this is no effort to make money. Some sadist is engaged full-time in selling dreams – or is it!

Eknaath Nagarkar
Bangalore
eknaath_nagarkar@yahoo.com

Between Ourselves ...

We deal with the killing fields of Nandigram. We are especially appreciative of the role played by Gopalkrishna Gandhi the Governor of West Bengal who has incurred the wrath of the communists for his role as the people's conscience keeper. What Mr. Gandhi has done is to merely fulfil his role as the Governor. The Constitution provides that in certain critical situations the Governor is vested with certain discretionary powers. Shall we say that by restricting himself to advising the state government to handle the Nandigram violence firmly but within the law and making his own distaste for what happened and is happening, publicly known, he has done his duty to the people of India who have, in a sense, placed him there. All honour to him.

We begin what could be a regular series on Rites, Rituals and Festivals. Religion has been making a comeback and according to some analysts, attracting the younger generation to a greater degree than before. This is both welcome and, at the same time, a matter of concern - depending on the religion concerned and the levels of tolerance or its opposite that it advocates. Perhaps it is time that we start talking about it. For a beginning we draw

attention to the underlying truths in our rites, rituals and festivals.

Just to remind you that the April 2008 issue will deal with the future of parliamentary democracy and the kind of political party or parties is needed if India is to survive as a liberal democracy.

Renewals have been coming in slowly, not thick and fast as we would have liked it to be! If you are a subscriber and have received a reminder to renew your subscription do please attend to the communication and send in your renewal cheque as soon as possible.

The January 2008 issue's (the next one) cover story is a review of the economic reforms in the context of an examination of the four Liberal Budgets released so far and which have been reported in *Freedom First*. You are welcome to send in your views on the status of the reforms process, provided we receive your contribution (which must be brief and focussed) not later than 10th January. Only soft copies please at freedom@vsnl.com.

Editor

Many Voices

"His (Deve Gowda's) migration semaphored by a lucky constellation of stars in the southern sky, from the fertile farmlands of Karnataka politics to the treacherous heart of Delhi, marked the lowest point in the politics of alternatives".

S. Prasannarajan, *India Today*, December 3

"One man with a gun can control 100 without it" Lenin had said. And they did in Nandigram, as armed CPI(M) cadres looted, raped and killed hundreds of peasants clinging to their land as the police stood by.

Antara Dev Sen, *The Week*, November 25

Welcome to Britain. But don't mention bribery and corruption. This is business.

Heading in the *Guardian* on the occasion of the Saudi King's visit to England. Hasan Suroor, *The Hindu*, November 12

Those calling for a boycott of Beijing's Olympics are focussing on China's support for Burma's brutal generals - or on its continued occupation of Tibet...we should also look at the way China treats its own citizens in the shadows of the flashy new Olympic sports stadiums.

Aidan Hartley in his article "Inside China's Secret Jail" for the *Spectator*, reproduced in *The Asian Age*, October 27

"I think Putin is a democrat...This isn't the democracy that we will ultimately get to - it's transitional democracy"

Former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Wall Street Journal* published in the *Mint*, December 3

Why don't you all join politics?..Politics is not that bad.

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi addressing the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit in Delhi, *Hindustan Times*, Mumbai, October 26

The sordid spectacle of billionaires and trillionaires revelling in obscene opulence whilst the majority of mankind are struggling hard to keep body and soul together makes a mockery of the solemn rhetoric of the (UN) Declaration (of Human Rights).

Eminent jurist and former Advocate General Soli J Sorabjee, *The Indian Express* December 10

I have been ruling (the state of Gujarat) for seven years now. If a 40 year-old-man or a 70-year-old woman are illiterate, is it my fault? I am responsible only for those above the age of 12 years. The Congress government is responsible for all the other illiterate people.

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, *The Sunday Express*, December 9

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Publishers: Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (ICCF), 3rd Floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai 400 001.
Phone: +91 (22) 2284 34 16 • E-mail: freedom@vsnl.com
Published by J. R. Patel for the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (ICCF) and printed by him at Kaiser-E-Hind Private Ltd., Plot No.A-191, Road No.16A, MIDC, Wagle Industrial Estate, Thane (W) - 400 604. Phone: 25804162
Typeset at Shubham Print & Web, 59, Dr. V. B. Gandhi Marg, 1st Floor, Fort, Mumbai 400 001. Phone: 2284 2619 • Mobile: 98929 21277
Single Copy: Rs 10 • Annual: Rs 150 (Add Rs 50 for outstation cheques) • Overseas (1st Class Air Mail) Annual: \$20 or £10
Cheques to be drawn in favour of ICCF and mailed to the publishers at the above address