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Unsustainable Chinese Policies

Indian Navy's Plan

Disappointed Congress in Gujarat

Wake Up Call For Political Class

and many more

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Indian Foreign Policy Challenges

- *Kanwal Sibal*

Indian foreign policy already faces many challenges. These challenges have not been met and will continue to confront us in the future. An understanding of what they are will help to devise future approaches. We must therefore identify what the existing challenges are. There is a caveat. “Future” covers an indefinite time span. Are we looking at the near future, mid-term future or the long term perspective? Many exercises of identifying issues and challenges in the 20 and 30-year horizons are being done by governments and non-governmental institutions. They are useful in indicating trends. But it is impossible to predict the unpredictable. No one could predict the collapse of the Soviet Union when it occurred, though many wished for it.

The rapidity of China’s rise at the pace at which it has occurred and its impact on global affairs was not predicted with assurance.

The nature and timing of the financial crisis that has afflicted

the US and its impact on its international role was not predicted by observers either, though many were warning that the US was living beyond its means.

So soon after the collapse of one superpower, the Soviet Union, we are talking about the decline of another, United States.

Many alarm bells are being rung that the Chinese policies are unsustainable and that China is heading for a crisis. Many may wish that to happen so that the muscle-flexing China is cut down to size and its neighbours feel more comfortable. But no one can predict with certainty what lies ahead.

The element of innovation and technology that can change global scenarios is unpredictable too. There is a line of thinking that many of the future challenges that are linked to energy and food security, for instance, could be met with technological breakthroughs. Even the success of nations in

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meeting a variety of challenges will be measured, it is believed, by their technological innovativeness.

The nature of conflicts may change with technological innovation, especially in cyberspace.

With all these caveats and uncertainties let me delve into the subject of this talk.

A big challenge for India is to maintain coherence and balance in its foreign policy. It is axiomatic that protecting and advancing the country's national interest is the goal of its foreign policy. This is all right as an enunciation of a general principle; the problem lies in the practical implementation of such principles.

Defining national interest is not as easy as it might seem. National polls are not conducted to define a country's national interest. A broad consensus can be built over years on the essential parameters of such interest. But situations change and judgments have to be made. Often wrong and highly

controversial ones are made. Vietnam, Iraq and unleashing Islamic fundamentalism against the Soviets are examples in the American case. India made an error of judgment, for instance, at Simla in 1972.

In reality, countries do not always act in their national interest. It is no country's interest, for example,

In reality, countries do not always act in their national interest. It is no country's interest, for example, to have difficult relations with neighbours, but many countries do, either because they want to dominate them or are insensitive to their concerns. Smaller countries too overplay their hand and provoke their bigger and stronger neighbours.

to have difficult relations with neighbours, but many countries do, either because they want to dominate them or are insensitive to their concerns. Smaller countries too overplay their hand and provoke their bigger and stronger neighbours.

The enlightened interest of any country is undermined by tensions and conflict. Yet, many countries willfully pursue policies that threaten peace.

If pride makes individuals obstinate and unwilling to compromise, nations too suffer from the "loss of face" syndrome.

Is the form of government relevant in properly defining what would be best in a country's national interest? In other words, do democratic systems with public debate on policies enable leaders to form a better view of national interest, rather than dictatorial or authoritative systems where policy formulation is personalized and can be whimsical?

But we see that even the most democratic countries make huge mistakes in foreign policy choices and impose costs on themselves and others.

There is the issue of national power and national interest. A powerful country will expand the scope of its national interest in tune with its ambitions and the reach of its power. A weaker country will interpret its national interest more narrowly so as to avoid unnecessary problems.

Globalization and interdependence has also changed the notions of national interest because countries know they do not have a free hand and have to give and take much more than before.

In some cases, like the European Union, national interest has been submerged in many ways within a larger community interest. Even

sovereignty has been pooled in some key areas.

National interest is a fluid and uncertain concept. A big challenge for India is therefore to be able to define its national interest with discernment, realism, objectivity and foresight.

This is not easy as the backdrop against which analysis and choices are made keeps changing. A broad national consensus on what constitutes the national interest is important.

I had earlier spoken of coherence and balance in foreign policy as a continuing challenge.

The international scene has changed a great deal in the last two decades or so. India has needed to adjust its foreign policy accordingly. During the Cold War, India considered the Soviet Union a reliable strategic partner, even though the term strategic partner was not used then.

With a world divided into two blocs, India's compass was nonalignment, with its political empathies more with the eastern bloc whose rhetoric was friendlier towards the third world.

India's relations with the western bloc were problematic because of the west's non-proliferation injunctions, pro-Pakistani policies and economic philosophy.

The nature of our relations with the US has been altered in the last few years. Our policies have become convergent in many ways. Improved relations with the US have given India more room to manoeuvre regionally and internationally.

Strategically, we are being pulled towards the US. This means that our relations with the US allies have become better too, as, for example, with Japan, South Korea and Australia.

Simultaneously, our relations with Russia have lost the centrality of the past. Even as India's economic growth is changing its global profile, our economic ties with Russia have relatively shrunk.

Yet Russia is important for the balance of our foreign policy. A

weak Russia is not good for the global system. In fact, the space vacated by Russia has been filled by China. US political lobbies still see Russia as a geopolitical threat, as Romney's statements during the US presidential election showed.

India can do little to boost Russia,

except by maintaining the regularity of summit meetings, nurturing the traditionally close defence ties that assure non-disruption of supplies at critical moments as well as access to sensitive technologies, and partnering it in political groupings such as the Russia-

India-China dialogue and the BRICS where the

west is absent.

The challenge for us is to expand our economic ties with Russia. Energy cooperation provides an opportunity so far insufficiently exploited.

The nature of our relations with the US has been altered in the last few years. Our policies have become convergent in many ways. Improved relations with the US have given India more room to manoeuvre regionally and internationally. Strategically, we are being pulled towards the US. This means that our relations with the US allies have become better too, as, for example, with Japan, South Korea and Australia.

India and Russia share the agenda of multipolarity, respect for sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of countries, geo-political abuse of the human rights issues, regime change policies, the proclivity to use military means to find solutions to the highly complex issues.

This agenda puts India at cross purposes with many policies of the west. The challenge for India is to maintain the basics of its position but avoid a direct clash with the west over these issues.

Yet, in terms of markets, investment needs - especially to develop our poor infrastructure, access to modern technologies in health, energy, agriculture, industry, building a knowledge economy, participating in global supply chains, etc., the Indian needs are much better served by the west. Our people to people relations with the west are strong.

In fact, the needs of the growing Indian economy are such that we cannot avoid doing business even with an adversary like China. Not surprisingly, China has therefore emerged as India's biggest trade partner in goods.

The challenge for India is to successfully play on all geo-

political chess boards and optimize what it can extract from others for its own development. This means India should preserve its independence of judgment and action as much as possible even as it conducts itself as a good and reliable partner where partnerships have been formed.

The US rhetoric about its relationship with India being a defining one in the 21st century is heady. India-US relations have certainly achieved a degree of balance and maturity, with rapid expansion of bilateral and multilateral engagement. Contentious issues between them have receded into the background.

The US robustly affirms its strategic partnership with India, presenting India with the challenge of leveraging its new strategic ties with that country, while maintaining its strategic autonomy.

It has to be borne in mind, however, that in maintaining its global supremacy, but with declining means, the US needs to co-opt partners outside the Euro-Atlantic bloc, and India stands out as an obvious one because of its size, human resources, expanding

economic base, reasonable military strength and democratic polity.

Even with regard to its new policy of rebalancing towards Asia, intended without being openly stated to put constraints on China's ambitions, the US sees India as a lynchpin. The assumption is that India alone is big enough in Asia to counter China and that India has concerns about China's rise for its own security, given outstanding border differences and Chinese policies in India's neighbourhood.

Some political elements in the US find India's ambivalence towards the west and its unwillingness to endorse western policies as the lingering malaise of nonalignment. They see India's desire to preserve its strategic autonomy as a smokescreen for its nostalgia for nonalignment.

This is, to my mind, a misreading of reality. By strategic autonomy India means friendly ties and mutually beneficial relations with all countries, with its own legitimate- not purely selfish-interests primarily in mind.

It is in this spirit that India has strategic partnerships with a variety of countries. The idea is to develop the basis of long term

relationships to mutual advantage, create trust and avoid any policy that hurts the legitimate interests of the other partner.

The US has interests spread all over the world by virtue of it being a global power. It cannot expect India to support its policies everywhere. The US would want to fit India in the global architecture of its policies. India has no such global architecture in which it wants to fit the US. It cannot easily fit the US even into the regional architecture of its policies, whether this relates to Pakistan, China's territorial claims on India, the post Dalai Lama phase in Tibet, Iran, etc.

The challenge for India's foreign policy in the years ahead is to be courted by all and to succumb to no one. Even if India cannot lead, it must not be led.

India has, in fact, shown great resilience, despite its economic and military weakness, to try and stand on its own feet strategically in international affairs. Even big European powers, which have in the past ruled many parts of the world, do not have strategic autonomy today despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and

communism as an ideology. They willingly subordinate themselves to the US.

By choosing strategic self-reliance, India has to cope with challenges largely on its own. This requires that India avoids getting into situations it cannot handle, in the main, on its own. It does not have allies to shore up its positions.

The west has never supported India so far on issues of core concern to it, whether political, military or technological. It has now removed certain technological disabilities on India but far from fully.

The developing countries haven't supported India either on Pakistan, China or nuclear related issues.

This explains why the Indian foreign policy tends to be cautious and reticent in taking partisan positions on highly divisive issues.

There are pressures on India to be more forthright, not sit on the fence, be willing to incur costs in upholding the international order and not be a free-loader. India will have to resist such pressures in the years ahead, because many of these arise from the aggressive, dominating habits that the west

has not been able to shed, which drives its efforts to shape the world according to its values which it considers universal.

India's challenge is not to be simply co-opted into the existing international order that is controlled by the west. It must find its due place in it in its own right and be in a position to change the rules rather than simply adhere to the existing ones.

Reform of the international institutions is, therefore, very important and India's discourse on this is legitimate. India should have a greater say in these institutions. Getting a permanent seat in the Security Council will remain a challenge as resistance to this will not go away soon.

Self-esteem and confidence are reflected in India's claim to a permanent seat. India is not begging; it is claiming. India should pursue this quest, if only to remind that the existing international institutions that uphold the present world order are no longer representative of the international community.

We have to carefully weigh the China factor in seeking redistribution of power at the global level. The gap between

India and China has grown so big that in any re-ordering of the world order China can gain more. With China's world view, its sense of itself, its historical grievances and its territorially expansionist policies, India, which has serious differences with China, cannot be comfortable with a more powerful China within the international system.

China has become too powerful economically and financially and too integrated with the global economy to be contained in the way the Soviet Union was and the way Russia is still being pressured by the west. The US pivot towards Asia is not intended to actively confront China; it is to caution it against any adventurism.

The US-China relationship is much more intensive than the US-India relationship. We should not pay much attention to the democracy rhetoric. China becoming more democratic is no guarantee against a more muscled Chinese foreign policy.

The US and its democratic allies have muscled foreign policies too, as they are using their force in many parts of the world at great human cost. Political and moral justification for military action can always be found, with globally powerful media helping to rationalize such action.

Democracy is no insurance against the use of military means to achieve national ends.

Nationalism can be a powerful driver in foreign policy. A more democratic but nationalist China will not be any less of a problem for others.

Unfortunately, China has made it clear that it does not intend to solve the border issue with India; it says it wants it to remain dormant and leave it to the next generation to resolve it. But then, as we have seen in the latest maps on Chinese passports, China is establishing its claims in insidious ways. These actions reveal the longer-term strategy China has in mind.

Unfortunately, China has made it clear that it does not intend to solve the border issue with India; it says it wants it to remain dormant and leave it to the next generation to resolve it. But then, as we have seen in the latest maps on Chinese passports, China is establishing its claims in insidious ways. These actions reveal the longer-term strategy China has in mind.

It is clear that Tibet has not reconciled with China's rule. Dalai Lama's succession can revive tensions between India and China. India has to make sure that Bhutan does not yield to China's blandishments. China's rising profile in Sri Lanka and Nepal is a cause of concern. The China-Pakistan axis remains a grave problem.

India has to develop its economic and military muscle to counter the China threat. There is no other way. This is a big challenge for us ahead, even as we engage China as others do.

India cannot risk a confrontation with China; its strategy should be to dissuade China from taking the risk of confronting India with visible and independent strategic strength.

India has to find the right balance between engaging China and hedging against it.

Some would say that a critical foreign policy challenge confronting India is the

maintenance of friendly ties with its neighbours. India, it is claimed, cannot rise to its potential if it is embroiled in conflicts or tensions with its neighbours. India has supposedly failed in this regard.

Having good relations with neighbours is not a unilateral exercise; it is a reciprocal one. If India should have good relations with its neighbours, then it is

equally incumbent on the neighbours to have good relations with India. No one can argue that India's conduct alone is deficient.

India should, of course, try to do its best to win over the neighbours, but if the neighbours see it in their interest

to balance a much larger India by drawing in external powers, and prevent their national identities from being overwhelmed by India's civilisational and cultural pull by emphasizing differences with India and stoking anti-Indian national sentiments, there is little India can do. This challenge will not go away.

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The argument that India, as the bigger country, should be more generous with its neighbours is fallacious. Big countries like China and the US do not believe in the merits of this approach. Vietnam and Cuba come to mind.

India's economic growth will be of key importance for tying our neighbours economically to the Indian market. It will be important to give stakes to a cross section of people in our neighbouring countries in the various sectors of our economy. In this context, the strengthening of SAARC should be a priority.

Our improved relations with the US have excluded one external factor that in the past complicated our relations with our neighbours. China, however, remains a problem in this regard.

Pakistan remains a perennial problem. While some aspects of our relations with that country are improving, as for example, in the trade area, larger questions about the rise of Islamic radicalism there and fears that Pakistan could become a failing state are being debated.

There is little that India can do to help Pakistan fight its own internal demons. India is, in fact,

the reason why these demons exist in the first place. Unless Pakistan radically changes its attitude to India, ceases to whip up religious sentiments against us that feed the jihadi groups, the problem of radicalism in Pakistan cannot be successfully controlled.

India should continue to encourage more economic and people to people ties with Pakistan, but should also be clear-sighted about the serious obstacles in normalizing relations with that country.

We should shed the belief that concessions will make Pakistan more amenable.

India does not need to re-assure Pakistan about its intentions or make Pakistan trust us. The reverse is needed: it is Pakistan that needs to make the requisite effort to convince India that it has abandoned the use of terrorism as a state policy.

Do we have a stake in Pakistan's survival as a united country, or should we encourage the break-up of the country? As long as Pakistan is adversarial, we have no stakes in Pakistan's territorial integrity. It would be ironical for India to be supportive of Pakistan's geographical health

when it wants to slice away a part of the Indian territory.

We should not, however, actively seek to de-stabilize Pakistan, as managing a fragmented Pakistan would raise its own problems.

On the other hand, a broken up Pakistan loses value for the Chinese. Even a chronically unstable Pakistan loses value. It is unlikely that the Chinese will want to rescue Pakistan with economic largesse. In that context, disarray in Pakistan is not unhelpful to us.

Obversely, we cannot have a viable Central Asia and even Afghan policy if Pakistan remains unstable. If this whole region is to be integrated economically, with energy and trade connectivity, the geo-political key is in Pakistan's hands.

The US is backing the project to link Central Asia with South Asia, with TAPI symbolizing this vision, but the US's ability today to bend Pakistan to its will has suffered erosion.

Stability in Afghanistan and containment of the Taliban threat there in a regional context is another challenge that will

acquire sharper contours post 2014.

The west is looking for a compromise with the Taliban, believing it can live with an Islamized Afghanistan so long as it is not anti-west. The backing which the Muslim Brotherhood is receiving from the west in the Arab world would indicate that practical, realpolitik deals can be made with Islamic radicalism and rationalized. Such a scenario is not in our interest, but the means we have to forestall this are limited.

We have, therefore, a multifold challenge in Afghanistan, of retaining our presence and influence in that country, creating internal support for us there that can be used to counter the Taliban and the revival of the radical forces there that can threaten our security directly with Pakistani support.

Lack of direct access to Afghanistan exposes the lack of a credible Indian policy towards Central Asia. We have to galvanize Iran to cooperate with us for an alternative access to Afghanistan through Chabahar.

The Iranian nuclear issue has serious implications for India should there be recourse by the

west to take military action against that country. The destabilization of the Gulf region which will occur as a result would be very costly for India, as India has huge energy, manpower and financial interests in the region. India would have to steer clear of the rising Shia-Sunni conflict in the Muslim world.

India's Look East policy is now facing new challenges with the erstwhile equation between China and East and Southeast Asia disturbed by China's muscle-flexing in the South China Sea.

India has concerns about the freedom of passage through the international waters, but otherwise India's priorities and concerns are in the Indian Ocean area. However, for geo-political reasons, India would need to come closer to those countries targeted by Chinese claims, though without getting directly embroiled in the territorial disputes.

In the Indian Ocean area, India should try to maintain its

dominant status as a littoral state as much as possible, knowing, however, that at some stage Chinese presence in these waters will increase, as is portended by China's active search for port facilities in this area.

India has concerns about the freedom of passage through the international waters, but otherwise India's priorities and concerns are in the Indian Ocean area. However, for geo-political reasons, India would need to come closer to those countries targeted by Chinese claims, though without getting directly embroiled in the territorial disputes.

India's declared openness on cooperation with China on maritime issues should be based on the legitimacy of not only China's presence in the Indian Ocean but also India's maritime presence close to China's shores.

India would need to give priority to its relations with Myanmar, now that the latter wants to loosen the Chinese grip over the country. Myanmar is of key importance to create east-west connectivity in this region from which India can benefit greatly. Our challenge is to implement our infrastructure projects in Myanmar without inordinate delays.

As a part of our Look East policy, keeping the Chinese dimension in view and bilateral benefits that can accrue to us, India would need

to boost its relations with Japan, including mobilizing Japan's clout in the ADB to finance the east-west corridors in Asia. Our increasing strategic engagement with Japan is a welcome move.

Beyond all these challenges, there are those of energy, food security and of climate change.

The energy issue is not one of foreign policy alone, but it has a strong external dimension for us because of our huge dependence on energy imports.

Our diplomacy will need to facilitate investment in hydrocarbon fields abroad as a part of our energy security drive, besides

working on avoidance of conflict in areas which are our biggest source of oil and gas. We have a shared interest with the US in this, but the US policies in the Gulf region, driven by the Israeli and the Iranian factors, are not in line with our interests as they keep the area on the boil.

Energy, of course, is one area where technology can achieve such breakthroughs as can change the global energy scenario.

Climate change issues, in which energy use and environmental concerns intersect with issues of competitiveness and market openings for western technologies will become a source of increasing external pressure on India in the years ahead.

The water issue in South Asia-Tibet region looms ahead. Apart from countering Pakistan's cynical manipulation of the water issue to sustain its negative postures towards India, securing Chinese cooperation in transparent handling of the Tibetan dimension will be a challenge.

In the competition for access to natural resources,

China is already far ahead of India because of greater financial resources at its disposal and its ability to organize a coordinated national effort to that end which our system does not permit.

A new Indian approach that goes beyond relying on the private sector to make economically rational decisions from their perspective would be needed, but

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that implies a different way of economic governance.

At the end of it all, the internal and the external cannot be compartmentalized in any country. Success or failure at home will mean success or failure abroad.

The economy is the building block of a successful foreign policy, as required resources then become available to erect defenses at home and to pursue interests abroad.

While it may not be a foreign policy issue per se, the establishment of an indigenous defence manufacturing base is vital for acting independently on the world stage. No country that cannot independently defend itself can reach big power status.

Our external dependence on arms and technology supplies limits the options available to our foreign policy.

In conclusion, it can be said that India faces unique geo-political challenges that will continue to exist in the years ahead.

It has two strategically hostile neighbours, China and Pakistan. Both are strategic partners against India. China has

transferred nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan to neutralize India strategically.

Both have claims on India territory. India is the only country of magnitude and importance in the world whose borders are contested, with a Line of Control in J&K with Pakistan and the Line of Actual Control with China. This is an unstable situation inherently whatever the agreed CBMs.

The challenge for India is to engage with both constructively and yet be prepared to confront them if necessary. India needs to avoid a two-front situation but it cannot make any undue concessions to either adversary.

India cannot expect backing from external powers on its border differences with China and Pakistan. In fact, the US is responsible for drawing the LOC in J&K from NJ9842 to the Karakoram Pass arbitrarily. We should demand redress and a return to legality on this issue from the US.

The US supports China's territorial integrity but has not extended such support to India's territorial integrity. We should

engage the US on this point as a strategic partner.

India gets better understanding on the terrorism issue it is faced with, but the west is unable and unwilling to sanction Pakistan adequately because it needs Pakistan for ensuring an orderly withdrawal from Afghanistan, besides the need to engage Pakistan as a major Islamic and nuclear-armed country.

This explains why despite the west's willingness to use military means to combat proliferation elsewhere, Pakistan's rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal is being countenanced, adding to threats to India's security. The signs of revival of the agenda to limit proliferation in South Asia, excluding the Chinese factor, have to be scotched by us.

The political turmoil in the Arab world, with the Muslim Brotherhood gaining political power in many countries, is steering the Islamic world away from secularism. The growth of influence of Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as an increasingly Islamized Turkey is not likely to encourage more liberal and modernist thinking in our neighbourhood in the mid-term.

The disturbance of the existing balance between Shias and Sunnis in our neighbourhood can have negative repercussions for us, even internally. We have to remain watchful of these developments in the years ahead.

Upgrading the military infrastructure in the north quickly and accelerating our naval strength in the Indian Ocean are the challenges ahead.

The priority of priorities is to improve governance at home because the strength of our external limbs depends on the strength and depth of our roots in the ground.

Finally, if there is any truth in the dictum that more things change the more they remain the same, then it would seem that the future foreign policy challenges for India will remain the same in a different form: protection of our independence and sovereignty, friendship with all and enmity with none and a peaceful environment in which we can economically grow and meet our internal challenges.

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President Putin In India

- *Prabhat P Shukla*

The thirteenth Indo-Russian Summit was a fleeting affair, with President Putin spending less than twenty-four hours in Delhi. It came as the stakes in the extended neighbourhood are growing higher – Afghanistan, Iran, and the broader West Asian region are all in a state of flux that has serious implications for both India and Russia. Similar stakes are in play in the East, and once more, as India seeks to step up its engagement in the Asia-Pacific Region, there are implications for our interface with Russia here too. The bilaterals are reasonably well-known, and there are serious attempts ongoing at all levels to find ways to deepen the engagement, and to find solutions to issues that have dominated the discourse over the past few years – the Vikramaditya, the nuclear liability, the low levels of trade and investment, etc. So, too, are the benefits of the cooperation, whether it is INS Chakra, or Brahmos, or diplomatic support on key issues like permanent

membership of the UN Security Council, which we take for granted from a country like Russia.

There are also problematic issues that need to be addressed, and were discussed in some detail. Apart from the issues of our defence cooperation, there were the nuclear liability question, and that of the 2G license for the Sistema-majority owned SSTL. On these, there is nothing in the public domain, but the Russian press commentaries have suggested that the nuclear liability issue could be resolved by raising the cost of the projects, thus building in some element of protection in the event that the supplier has to pay compensation. On the Sistema issue, there does not seem to have been much progress.

Where there was welcome progress, it was on the purchase of LNG from Russia. This is an issue that has long been discussed, including at the highest levels. However, while there had been no progress so far, we seem to have

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made the breakthrough. Of course, there is a better way to take this forward to higher levels: this would involve a four-way swap arrangement, involving the Persian Gulf suppliers, and their buyers in East Asia [South Korea, Japan], India and Russia. The swap arrangement would involve the Gulf suppliers diverting their supplies to East Asia to India; in return, Russia would make good the diverted deliveries and supply to East Asia. All four parties would gain from reduced transportation costs, and that would be welcome in these times, when all major economies are facing difficult challenges.

Another noteworthy outcome of the visit was the reference to the discussions between India and the Eurasian Economic Commission on a possible Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. There has been one such study done between India and Russia in 2007, but that was never seriously

pursued. Now that Russia has formed the Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, it is a good time to launch another such examination. Hopefully, this can provide answers to the current slow growth of economic relations between India and Russia.

However, there is insufficient attention being paid to the regional issues that affect both India and Russia, and on which there is not enough dialogue at the official level, and which do not get sufficient attention among commentators. And it is important to understand these issues from the Russian perspective. That way, we shall not face any surprises in what our friends in Moscow do, and they, in turn, will understand how we in New Delhi are looking at things and deciding on policy choices.

Without doubt, the most important is Afghanistan and the impending pull-out/thinning out of the ISAF in 2014. From our

perspective, things do not look very reassuring: recent reports of the activities of the High Peace Council suggest that a serious effort is in hand to pave the way for the Taliban to return to at least some share in power in Kabul, with Pakistan being accepted as the major arbiter. The accepted view is that the US is agreeable to such a dispensation, as is NATO. China, of course, will back Pakistan. Alone among the major powers, then, Russia could be expected to show some understanding of the Indian fears over such a plan.

Regrettably, we are not seeing enough engagement between India and Russia on this issue, even though both countries share similar approaches. Indeed, we had collaborated in the 1990's – a time when Russia under Yeltsin had not fully recovered from the trauma of the destruction of the USSR – in order to blunt the Taliban offensive inside Afghanistan. Today, what we are seeing is Pakistani service chiefs visiting Russia, the DG ISI in Moscow, and the Pakistan President offering Russia access to the warm waters on his own visit. There is a real risk of our being isolated, all the more so because we are also seeking to put distance

between ourselves and Iran – the other country that might be expected to share our concerns over the plans for post-2014 Afghanistan. This remains true, notwithstanding the high-level bilateral contacts we have maintained with Iran over the years.

The second issue of concern flows from the Iran situation, and the related one of Syria's future. During the Putin visit, the two sides found agreement on Iran's right to peaceful uses of, and research in, nuclear energy, while calling for all issues to be settled by peaceful means only. On Syria, too, there is common ground in terms of the UN Resolutions and a call to all sides to seek a peaceful settlement. But, of course, there will be no peaceful settlement, that is the one thing all sides are agreed upon. But, more important, shorn of this kind of fudge, there are clear differences between India and Russia on how to approach both Iran and Syria. It is instructive to compare what we have said in the current Joint Statement, and what the Russians said with the Chinese when Putin visited Beijing in June 2012. The Russian-Chinese statement contained a more forthright expression of support for Syrian

independence and territorial integrity; it also spoke bluntly against foreign interference and said that the two countries were “resolutely opposed the attempt to resolve the Syrian crisis by way of foreign armed intervention and imposition of ‘regime change’”.

This would suggest that the Russian position on Syria did not get the full endorsement from India that it got from the Chinese.

The last substantive issue relating to the immediate neighbourhood is that of the so-called New Silk Road strategy for South and Central Asia. The Russians have their own approach to the region, and they are

themselves keen to develop ties between the two regions. They call it CASA, and are keen to begin by selling surplus electricity from Tajikistan to Pakistan. They have a quadrilateral of their own – themselves, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan – which has been pushing this project for several years now. It was under this rubric that President Putin was to visit Pakistan earlier in October

last year. These transport and other linkages have been much in contention ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union, and are invested with heavy geo-strategic significance. Both India and Russia will need to tread carefully, and be willing to engage each other in an open and honest dialogue to remove any potential for misunderstanding in any of these projects.

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The last substantive issue relating to the immediate neighbourhood is that of the so-called New Silk Road strategy for South and Central Asia.

There is also the emerging situation in the Asia-Pacific Region. America and some of the other key members in the region have been promoting the idea of a Concert of Democracies to stabilise future developments in the area. Much of

this is driven by concerns over how China will evolve as it grows both economically and militarily. Here, Russia is not considered a major actor by any of the other leading actors; neither is it a potential partner, nor is it seen as being in the Chinese camp. However, India is very much in the reckoning of almost all the drivers of such a policy. However, we need to recognise that Russia sees China –

at least in the short term – as an important partner in the difficulties it is facing with the West in general and America in particular. It will therefore not be sympathetic to any combined effort that will have China as its objective. Equally, if it has serious frictions with any country in the region, it is Japan; and Japan is obviously an essential component of any strategy involving the democracies of the region.

All of this argues for an open and candid dialogue with Russia, so that each side understands the other's concerns, and red lines. This has not been happening so far, and the truth is that where we

are willing for a substantive conversation, they are not; China is an example. On the contrary, where they seek a frank dialogue, we tend to hold back; Afghanistan is an illustration. And yet, it is the interests of both sides to keep up a regular conversation. Both India and Russia face the problem of isolation; we have a tradition of friendship and trust that few other major powers have, and it needs to be maintained and nurtured.

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Safeguarding India's Maritime Interests

- *Nitin Gokhale*

In July, days before he retired, the then Navy Chief, Admiral Nirmal Verma, commissioned a Naval Air Station at Campbell Bay on Great Nicobar Island, christening it INS 'Baaz', thereby signaling India's intentions to keep a close watch on the new developments unfolding in East and South East Asia. On 3rd December, 24 hours before celebrating Navy Day, Admiral Verma's successor, Admiral DK Joshi announced that the Indian Navy is practicing to operate in the South China Sea to protect its economic assets.

Speaking to reporters in New Delhi, Admiral Joshi told reporters that, "Where our country's interests are involved, we will protect them and we will intervene."

The Eastern Naval Command - which looks at India's eastern sea board and is likely to play a key role when the Navy is deployed in

the South China Sea - is also being strengthened.

That the Indian Navy was strengthening its Eastern Fleet and was looking to expand its cooperation with key countries in East and South East Asia like Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Philippines and Indonesia, is well known. But no Navy Chief or for that matter any senior government official in recent memory had spelt out India's plans to counter China in the South China Sea, in such a clear manner.

The declaration that the Indian Naval ships could be deployed in the South China Sea if need be comes days after the Chinese state media announced that the southern Hainan province, which administers the South China Sea, approved laws giving its police the right to search vessels that pass through the waters. Also, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan and India protested against a map on the new Chinese passport that depicts disputed areas as

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belonging to China. The Philippines also issued a statement saying it wants Beijing to "clarify its reported plans to interdict ships that enter what it considers its territory in the South China Sea."

Admiral D K Joshi said that India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has 4 oil exploration blocks off the coast of Vietnam. "If required we will intervene to protect (them)," he said and added that it is the navy's duty to protect India's sovereign assets. India, the Admiral said, had two basic concerns- "freedom of navigation in international waters and protection of our internal assets."

It is in this context that INS Baaz, the southernmost air station of the Indian armed forces, becomes an important springboard for India's forays further east.

In July, Admiral Nirmal Verma had said: "The archipelago, separated as it is by more than 650 nm from our mainland, offers a vital geostrategic advantage to India. Not only do they provide the Nation with a commanding presence in the Bay of Bengal, the Islands also serve as our window into East and South East Asia".

He had added: "They also sit astride some of the busiest shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean, most carrying strategic cargo for the East Asian economies".

Emphasizing upon the strategic location of INS Baaz, Admiral Verma had reminded those gathered that "INS Baaz overlooks the Strait of Malacca, while also dominating the six-degree channel".

Since July 2012, India has clearly signaled its intention to increase its involvement East of the Malacca Straits by deploying frontline warships as a part of India's 'Look East' Policy. The four Indian Navy ships, Rana, Shivalik, Karmukh and Shakti, under the command of Rear Admiral P Ajit Kumar, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet were on an operational deployment to the South China Sea and the North West Pacific. Earlier in the deployment, the first bi-lateral maritime exercise between India and Japan 'JIMEX 12' (Japan India Maritime Exercise) was conducted, coinciding with the commemoration of 60 years of diplomatic relations between India and Japan.

The Navy's long-term Maritime Capabilities Perspective Plan in fact has identified a mix of two major roles for the force: One, the traditional blue water operational capability and two, a plan to effectively counter threats closer to the coast.

According to the report of the Standing Committee on Defence, tabled in Parliament in the last week of April, the Navy's short-term plan has the following objectives:

- Augment airborne maritime surveillance, strike, anti-submarine warfare and air defence capability through induction of shore-based aircraft, integral helicopters, carrier based aircraft, space based AIS and UAVs, along with suitable weapons and sensors.
- Develop ASW (anti-submarine warfare) capability through induction of suitable platforms, weapons and sensors.
- Build adequate standoff capability for sea lift and

The Navy's long-term Maritime Capabilities Perspective Plan in fact has identified a mix of two major roles for the force: One, the traditional blue water operational capability and two, a plan to effectively counter threats closer to the coast.

expeditionary operations to achieve desired power projection force levels, influence events ashore, and undertake Military Operations Other Than War.

- Induct assets and develop suitable infrastructure to augment forces available for Low Intensity Maritime Operations (LIMO), protection of off-shore assets and Coastal Security framework.

• Induct force multipliers like satellite based global communications, reconnaissance and network enabled platforms to achieve Battle-Space dominance capability and perform network centric operations.

- Induct state-of-the-art equipment and specialised platforms for Special Forces to enhance niche capabilities to conduct Maritime Intervention Operations and other envisaged roles.
- Develop support infrastructure in island territories to support the planned force levels as well

as support infrastructure for ships/submarines/aircrafts at ports and airbases.

Given the extensive plans presented to the Parliament, it is evident now that the Indian Navy is in the middle of its most ambitious expansion plan in the past three decades. Senior officers point out that the Indian Navy's perspective-planning in terms of 'force-levels' is now driven by a conceptual shift from 'numbers' of platforms - that is, from the old 'bean-counting' philosophy - to one that concentrates on 'capabilities'.

According to its near-term plans, the Indian Navy has plans to become a three Battle Carrier Groups force by 2020. But given the delay and cost overruns in both the aircraft carrier building programmes, the Navy may find itself operating the 1960s vintage INS Viraat.

While it's most prestigious acquisition-Russian Aircraft Carrier Admiral Gorshkov, to be renamed INS Vikramaditya - is unlikely to be inducted into the

fleet until late 2013, one more carrier being built indigenously is way behind its original schedule.

Currently, India operates a lone Aircraft Carrier, INS Viraat, a British-built 1960s vintage ship that is on an extended lease of life thanks to the Navy's innovative engineers and planners.

Vikramaditya, once -- when -- inducted, will give India the much needed edge in its maritime capabilities since it will come with the latest MiG-29 K series of aircraft. Indian Naval Aviators are already hard at work training themselves on the planes but away from the ship.

Defence Minister AK Antony in fact told the Naval Commanders conference earlier in 2012 that: "India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and the professional capability of our Navy bestows upon us a natural ability to play a leading role in ensuring peace and stability in the Indian Ocean Region."

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Little wonder that the US wants India and especially the Indian

Navy to play a major role in its quest to form new and lasting regional alliances in Asia. By clearly signaling India's intention to boldly deploy in South China Sea, India may have added a new dimension to the emerging maritime rivalry in Asia. How will Beijing react?

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Obama's Visit To Myanmar: Implications For India

- *Vinod Anand*

President Barack Obama's visit to Myanmar last month was recognition of measures taken by the current regime towards opening up of Myanmar. The visit has largely been viewed as a part of the Asia Pacific 'pivot' announced by the US President in November, 2011. Further, the US was also aware of significant inroads being made by the European countries particularly Germany, UK and France in Myanmar and therefore, did not want to be left behind, especially in the era of economic downturn

The visit took place despite the fact that there was a lack of consensus in Washington on the Myanmar policy with resistance from human rights groups as well as from the nuclear non proliferation lobby given the revelations of North Korea supplying some missile related material to Myanmar.

Political Gains

From the political perspective the visit has had a significant impact. Firstly, this has reinforced the commitment of President Thein Sein and the reformers who are flagging the benefits that have been received post opening up of the polity and economy. The government was quick to release another set of political activists prior to the visit; such tools may be used again for greater concessions from the US and the West.

Secondly, the separate meetings that President Obama had with President Thein Sein, Aung Suu Kyi, as well as the parliament speaker U Swe Mann is indicative of the broad based approach that the US is following to support the reforms.

A major advantage gained in Myanmar was for civil rights groups, political activists and human rights agencies given that

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the space for information and activism has considerably opened up by the Obama visit.

From the Indian perspective, there is a hope that the course of reforms would be progressive even though they may occur at a relatively gradual pace. There is a general belief that the core of resistance from the military is likely to continue and they need to be pushed by the international community in the right direction. India has continued with a broad based and balanced relationship with the political leadership as was evident from the highly successful visit of Aung Suu Kyi to the country in November 2012. The military in Myanmar was also engaged through the visit of the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Chief Marshal Norman Browne to Myanmar in the same month.

Moderating the Chinese Influence

Myanmar's recent political and economic reforms seem to have been driven by Naypyidaw's desire to reduce its overdependence on China.

With the U.S. and the Western nations engaging Myanmar, the strong influence of China in Myanmar is likely to be impacted.

Due to China's imposing presence and its exploitation of Myanmar's resources against the popular will, there has been considerable public opposition to the Chinese projects. Last year, construction of Myitstone dam was suspended by the President, Thein Sein. The opposition against the project brought together conservationists, environmentalists, Kachin activists and the political opposition. Popular opinion has been building up against some of the other Chinese sponsored projects in Myanmar. Recently, there have been protests against a copper mining project in Monywa, Sagaing Division, jointly undertaken by China and a military sponsored local company. An enquiry commission headed by Suu Kyi has been appointed to investigate the issue.

China's larger interests are likely to be certainly affected, but to what degree and extent is not clear so far. Firstly, China may lose its sole beneficiary and benefactor relationship, but only to become the most preferred partner. Subsequent developments would also be dictated by what stand the next governing duo in China, Xi and Li take to ensure primacy in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's leadership has been attempting to balance its emerging relationship with the U.S. and China. President Thein Sein visited a trade fair in China in September 2012 and Soe Win, the Deputy Commander of the Burmese army headed a military delegation to Beijing for strengthening military and cultural ties before the Obama visit.

Secondly, the links between Yunnan province of China and Myanmar are well established and are thus likely to be sustained.

Thirdly, the U.S. has not lifted sanctions on trade in jade and related items, a crucial component of trade with China; thus trade relations with Yunnan/China are not likely to be impacted.

Fourthly, entry of major global energy players in Myanmar may be a setback for Chinese companies as increased competition would prevent greater off-takes for Beijing.

In addition, the US offer to the Myanmar army to participate in the Cobra Gold Joint exercises in Thailand in 2013 is also being seen with much wariness in Beijing. These exercises have now expanded from a bilateral U.S.-Thai format to a multilateral one with many American allies such as South Korea participating in the same.

On the whole, however, Beijing is likely to remain wary of the US attempting to make an imprint in its backyard and in other parts of South East Asia. Additionally, increased engagement with the U.S. and the West could also be useful to Myanmar to extract more developmental and economic aid as well as trade and economic concessions from China. Beijing would have to tread cautiously to keep Myanmar in its sphere of influence by adjusting its policies to suit the new circumstances.

Security Concerns

Meanwhile, Myanmar's leadership has been attempting to balance its emerging relationship with the U.S. and China. President Thein Sein visited a trade fair in China in September 2012 and Soe Win, the Deputy Commander of the Burmese army headed a military delegation to Beijing for strengthening military and cultural ties before the Obama visit.

From the security point of view, Indian concerns are mainly related to, firstly, the influence of the PLA through military largesse to the Tatmadaw (Myanmar armed forces) and sanctuaries offered to the North East militant groups in Myanmar and the ongoing conflict in Kachin areas. The U.S. President was non prescriptive during his visit on the ethnic issues and only highlighted challenges faced by the country. India needs to further strengthen its own equation with the Myanmar government in order to curtail anti-India activities by some of the Myanmar based rebel groups.

In the military field, India is ramping up cooperation with high level visits by the Defence Minister, Mr A K Antony, in January, 2013 and the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Norman Browne who visited Myanmar in November 2012. The Myanmar army is looking for hardware and there is some scope for India to provide items such as transport aircraft,

helicopters and so on, as well as expand training and capacity building.

Balancing the Chinese influence off the Myanmar seaboard with the entry of the U.S. is also likely and could be seen to be beneficial from the perspective of maritime interests of the country. However, this will continue to be a contested zone in the long term as China is unlikely to give a free run to

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others in the area, which it sees as critical to its energy security.

Opening of the Myanmar economy presents a good opportunity for India to strengthen its trade and economic relations besides increasing

venues for Indian investments in resource rich Myanmar. Hopefully, Myanmar's engagement with the west would lead to some progressive reforms in governance supported by the US and the Western institutions including the non government sector, aid agencies and business groups. Entry of international agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, ADB and others is likely to lead to

expansion of the economy, particularly in terms of effective regulations for investment and conduct of business. Moreover, the unlocking of Myanmar's resources particularly oil and gas could be seen as beneficial to India given its dependence on West Asia so far. These factors indicate that support to transformation by Mr. Obama during the visit may provide an indirect impetus to Indian plans of economic engagement with Myanmar, particularly to boost bilateral trade planned to increase from the paltry USD 1070.88 million in 2010-11 to over USD 5 billion by 2015.

There is a need to explore the scope for joint India China infrastructure projects in Myanmar to include oil and gas, transportation both road and rail and construction of dams. Indian and Chinese companies are presently engaged in the Shwe gas and pipeline projects which may provide a model for the future.

including the railway and road network, ports and transportation is seen to be beneficial for the LEP and the prospects are likely to be enhanced. In this, it is India's own inefficiencies in project implementation that is of concern for New Delhi and how it will be able to get its act together remains to be seen.

There is a need to explore the scope for joint India China infrastructure projects in Myanmar to include oil and gas, transportation both road and rail and construction of dams. Indian and Chinese companies are presently engaged in the Shwe gas and pipeline projects which may provide a model for the future. GAIL and ONGC Videsh Ltd. own a 30% share in the A1 fields and intend to acquire a share in the A 2 fields which could be jointly exploited along with other majors such as Daewoo Corporation.

Impact on India's Look East Policy

Myanmar being the land route to South East Asia is the lynchpin of India's Look East Policy (LEP). In addition, the Chennai-Dawei sea corridor is seen as another growth highway for the LEP. With the opening of Myanmar's economy, the LEP is likely to get a boost. This apart, the overall development of infrastructures

India also has a large number of projects in the pipeline in Myanmar, many of which are

languishing due to lack of impetus and of tardy implementation. These include upgradation and resurfacing of Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road; construction and upgradation of the Rhi-Tiddim Road; Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project and high speed data link in 32 Myanmar cities. ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), GAIL and ESSAR are also working in the energy sector in Myanmar. M/s RITES is developing the rail transportation system and is supplying railway coaches and locos. Tamanthi and Shwezaye Hydro-Electric Power projects are also in the pipeline.

How much progress can be achieved in this direction will depend on the trust that each country, India and China, can repose on the other and a favourable equation that can be worked out by the enterprises in what the Chinese term as, “win-win,” agreements.

India-West joint projects also have major prospects in the fields indicated above. Some initiative will have to be taken by the Indian industry as well as such bodies as the CII which has a programme of cooperation Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of

Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI). Indo-US/EU Business Councils and similar organizations may act as a catalyst for this purpose. A joint initiative will pay rich dividends in this direction.

Further, with Myanmar slated to chair the ASEAN Summit of 2014, it would also make efforts to move positively on the path of democracy and further political and economic reforms.

Finally, the domestic reform in Myanmar and its reconciliation with the U.S. and the West is expected to open up many economic and strategic opportunities for Myanmar. India is well positioned to cement its growing economic and strategic engagement with Myanmar both on bilateral and multilateral basis. Myanmar's steps in balancing its relationship with China need to be supported. For India, Myanmar will remain a strategic land bridge for engagement of South East Asian nations. Improving regional connectivity and integration of regional economies would serve the interests of both Myanmar and India well.

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We, The Living! Need To Revise Land Use Policies

- **Dr. M N Buch**

In Delhi along the Yamuna River a stretch of 371 hectares, that is, approximately 927 acres, has come under cremation ground, samadhi, etc., of people perceived as the leaders of the nation. These include Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and now IK Gujral. All these seemed to merit cremation at new sites, reserved individually for each, instead of at Nigambodh Ghat, also on the Yamuna River but meant for ordinary mortals whom Yamaraj has taken away from the world. Over 900 acres of land, therefore, now stands assigned to people who are no longer living and who do not have any use for the land. A samadhi for Mahatma Gandhi one can understand because he was truly unique as not only the person who launched our movement for independence but also as one who united this nation as has never been done before. The whole of India is his, whether or not we commemorate his memory through

brick and mortar, by assignment of land or by any other means that this nation chooses. No one else, not even Jawaharlal Nehru, comes anywhere near the stature of Mahatma Gandhi. The irony, of course, is that this ascetic, this man who genuinely lived and died for India and who had no desire for anything material, is still honoured not by our practicing what he has taught us but rather by creating monuments in his memory. He who did not own a square inch of land when he was alive now virtually finds himself the owner of a huge chunk of land in Delhi.

Morarji Desai, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and Gulzarilal Nanda fortunately decided to die otherwise than in Delhi and it is to the credit of these leaders, their followers and the cities in which they cast aside their mortal coil that they have not transferred land to them in death which they did not aspire for in life. Of course, we have a contrast in Tamil Nadu

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where, first, the Annadorai Memorial swallowed up a substantial portion of the Marina Beach in Madras, to be followed by the M.G. Ramachandran Memorial and no doubt with advance reservation for the present leaders in that State. The only parallel one can think of is the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt who, when they died, were buried in what are virtual underground cities in which the dead symbolically still live. These cities of the dead, these necropolises, are covered by pyramids, themselves built by slave labour, many of whom died in building monuments to the dead. Of course no one honoured them with a pyramid. Are we in modern India trying to emulate the ancient Egyptians in assigning large areas of land to the dead, not because they may come alive but because we cannot think of any other, more sensible method of perpetuating their memory?

In India we have two methods of disposing of the dead. The vast majority of the population being Hindu, cremation is the preferred method. Normally, the funeral pyre is used, though besides the pyre we also see the emergence of electric crematoria which provide an advanced, scientific and

technological method of quickly reducing the body to ashes, with minimum pollution. Whether it is the funeral pyre or the electric crematorium, cremation does not call for much space and the same platform on which the pyre is lit can be re-used after the remains are removed. In terms of use of land there is nothing more economic than cremation. The second method is burial, because both Christians and Muslims bury their dead. I suppose this is because the followers of both religions believe in the Day of Judgment for which purpose the body is resurrected, which would not be possible if it had been cremated and reduced to ash. Even here there is an anomaly because whilst the Christian invocation at burial is “ashes to ashes and dust to dust”, meaning that the body will go back to its constituent elements, in Islam the invocation is “Supurd-e-khak”. This means that you are consigned to the earth, to the dust from which you have been created. If you are reduced to dust, or to ash by burial do you have a better chance of resurrection than if you are reduced to ashes through cremation? If the Almighty can reconstitute a person’s body from dust, why not from the ashes of cremation? In Islam a burial

ground as such has no sanctity and, for example, in Saudi Arabia it is considered legitimate after a certain period, say twenty years, to recycle the burial ground. Christians, however, consider a cemetery to be hallowed ground, which means that burial is final and the land cannot be recycled. Christian cemeteries are well maintained but they are by no means a necropolis of the Pharaonic variety.

Hindus seem to revel in perpetuating the memory of departed powerful politicians by monuments which are no less than the samadhis of saints. This seems to be a complete waste of time and money because it takes a

Prince Siddhartha to live on as the Buddha, or the Enlightened One. No monument can enhance his glory, nor lack of monument retract from it. Our politicians are like the thousands of princes and kings whose memory is obliterated by time. None of them will be a Siddhartha and, therefore, the necropolis built for them on the Yamuna River front will not delay

Our politicians are like the thousands of princes and kings whose memory is obliterated by time. None of them will be a Siddhartha and, therefore, the necropolis built for them on the Yamuna River front will not delay by a moment the day of forgetting. What we need, therefore, is to celebrate not the memory but the forgetting of the person in question because that is the reality of the *"kaal chakra"*.

by a moment the day of forgetting. What we need, therefore, is to celebrate not the memory but the forgetting of the person in question because that is the reality of the *"kaal chakra"*.

We do not stop at building a city of the dead at the spot of cremation. We go much further and we reserve the houses once occupied by these celebrities as monuments

to be preserved, but not used by those who are living and are entitled to a house of this category. The house at Tees January Marg, known as Birla House, is where the Mahatma was assassinated. He never wanted a monument to himself but we

have converted Birla House into a monument in memory of the Mahatma's martyrdom. I have already said that Mahatma Gandhi is unique and, therefore, a monument to him does not really call for any comment. Teen Murti House, once the residence of the British Commander-in-Chief of India, the second most powerful person in British India, was

rightly taken over as the residence of the Prime Minister, the most powerful man in India, by Jawaharlal Nehru. After his death his successor did not occupy the house, in sharp contrast with the practice in Britain where 10, Downing Street is the official residence of the Prime Minister. The incumbent Prime Minister vacates the house prior to the new Prime Minister being sworn in so that his successor comes straight from Buckingham Palace to 10, Downing Street and begins his tenancy. Teen Murti House became the Nehru Memorial, a library and a major centre for academic studies and, therefore, one can perhaps overlook its no longer being the official residence of the Prime Minister. But look at what has followed. Indira Gandhi was shot at the boundary between 1, Safdarjang Road and 1, Akbar Road and both houses have now been pulled out of the official pool and have become a monument to the memory of Indira Gandhi. This has happened to the house on Janpath occupied by Lal Bahadur Shastri as Prime Minister. Babu Jagjivan Ram's official residence is also reserved in his memory. 7, Race Course Road is the Prime Minister's residence and I am amazed that on the death of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur that

whole complex of houses has not been converted into his memorial. Perhaps this is because he was not in power when he died, nor was the Congress Party. All these houses have been built with exchequer funds, duly voted upon as part of a grant of the Central Public Works Department. When the grants are discussed, the government has to give justification for every item included in the budget and I am absolutely certain that when these bungalows were built in British days the construction must have been justified as being necessary for housing senior officers and Members of the Council, the British equivalents of our ministers. Therefore, when these bungalows are converted into monuments, the purpose for which they were erected is defeated, which means that in a way the approval of the Parliament for their construction is bypassed and perverted. This is a clear misuse of public funds and the legitimacy of their conversion becomes highly suspect and open to objection.

Why do we indulge in such futile exercises? If the answer were to be in only one word, it would be "sycophancy". Because those close to the departed person or related to him are in power or are likely to

come to power, flatterers and sycophants hasten to gain favour by commemorating the memory of the departed in such a way that the heirs and successors feel pleased and, in this state of being pleased, they might throw a crumb or two to the flatterers. The Sanatan Dharma in its purest form is not idolatrous or polytheistic and there is belief in one God, by whatever name He is known. The ultimate goal of every

human being of the Sanatan faith is to achieve a state in which one can be absorbed permanently into the God-head or Brahmatma.

However, because the Sanatan Dharam gives the freedom of choice to select one's own

path to salvation, this has manifested itself in sects in which the Lord is worshipped in many forms, including devis and devtas, who are symbolised by idols. In the course of practice, the basic tenet of there being only one God is forgotten, the symbolism of different forms of God is lost sight of, and ritual becomes all important and, therefore, the artificial discipline imposed by

ritual ultimately replaces the divinity of God by the artificial sanctity of idols. When the idol achieves an identity of its own we become idol worshippers and, therefore, slaves of empty ritual, which overtakes that which is sacred. This calamity seems to have overtaken us as a people. The true worth of our leaders is forgotten, invoking their name has become a ritual, being sycophantic to them has become worship and

the balance that should exist in society is disturbed. If ritual becomes more important than religion, then we shall certainly believe that the idol of Ganesh drinks milk and, therefore, we insist on feeding milk to

an idol. Our cupidity is fed by unscrupulous priests who convince us that the idol is actually drinking the milk. That piece of stone then become more important than Ganesh himself. That is precisely what is happening to us as a people when we build cities of the dead for departed leaders, a few of whom have been nation builders but the rest of whom have only been powerful politicians, a

The Sanatan Dharma in its purest form is not idolatrous or polytheistic and there is belief in one God, by whatever name He is known. The ultimate goal of every human being of the Sanatan faith is to achieve a state in which one can be absorbed permanently into the God-head or Brahmatma.

few being good in government and the rest being no better than Pindaris. Regardless of this we still build monuments, reserve huge stretches of land for their remains and convert houses for the living into mausoleums for the dead. I find this absolutely sickening.

Let us come to the living. About forty percent of the population of every city in India consists of the very poor who have come in search of a job and who cannot find shelter for themselves. These are the squatters or encroachers who, on the failure of administrators and planners to accommodate them, have used their native intelligence to build some sort of shelter on unoccupied pieces of land. In Bombay and Calcutta they have converted whole pavements into shanty towns and the self built homes of the poor have gifted to Bombay what it touts to be the largest slum in Asia at Dharavi. Anything between thirty to forty percent of every major town is either squatter colonies or unauthorised colonies. These people are looked upon as criminals because they have encroached on government land, dirty as they live in slums which have no services, intriguers because they try every tactic

under the sun to retain the foothold that they have established in the city and potential crooks because every theft in the city is attributed to slum dwellers. The authorities, the middle class, the affluent all look upon squatters as people who have no right to shelter and for whose eviction the bulldozer was created.

These squatters are the very people who provide the city almost its entire unskilled work force, its construction workers, maintenance personnel who keep the buildings and services in good repair, most of its craftsmen, almost all the domestic servants and without whom the city would simply not function. These are living people who keep the cities functioning and yet they are denied the very thing that we lavish on the dead, that is, a right to living space and shelter. This is a completely skewed approach to city planning and development. The dead who have no need become masters of acres of land and the living, who need it the most, do not have access even to that much piece of land on which

we can put the point of a needle. The Constitution mandates justice and equality, equal protection of laws and a social order which promotes welfare. Under Article 39, the State is directed to secure that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub-serve the common good. It also mandates that operation of the economic system must not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment. A system which concentrates land and housing in the dead to the detriment of the living can hardly promote welfare. The very act of setting aside in perpetuity large parcels of land for memorials for a few people hits both at the principle of equality and promotion of welfare.

A system which concentrates land and housing in the dead to the detriment of the living can hardly promote welfare. The very act of setting aside in perpetuity large parcels of land for memorials for a few people hits both at the principle of equality and promotion of welfare.

The reservation of 927 acres of land along the Yamuna River front, including Rajghat, is an

affront to the Constitution and directly aimed at the common man. Shivaji Park at Dadar in Bombay is meant for the citizens of Dadar, Matunga and perhaps a part of Mahim. This is a place for recreation, for future Sachin Tendulkars to fine hone their cricket skills, for the elderly to walk morning and evening and for the citizens of the area to give their lungs a chance to breathe in this open space. Not an inch of it is

meant for memorials. If the Shiv Sena is so concerned about Maharashtrians and Bombay, it should come forward and remove whatever has been erected there in the name of Bal Thackeray and gift the park

back to the citizens of Bombay, free of all encumbrances. But then we should remember that our priority is monuments to the dead and not land for the citizens. It has been argued that the Yamuna River front has been saved by reserving 927 acres as a monument to the dead, but it is not a monument to all the dead. It is a monument to certain leaders only and though it is claimed that

the Yamuna River front has been beautified thereby, the fact remains that this is not a public park open to every citizen of Delhi. It is very much a closed and regulated monument to the dead, a new necropolis with restricted access. The lawns of the Central Vista along Rajpath are meant for the living because people congregate there in the evening and during the holidays. Rajghat and its surroundings is not a place for normal public access and, therefore, it can only be defined as a necropolis. Therefore, the title of this paper: 'We, the Living!' Do we not have some rights? I am not for a minute suggesting that we build

housing along the Yamuna River front but just to give you an idea of the scale of this stretch of land, we could have accommodated approximately 50,000 houses on this much land and accommodated a population of about two and a half lakh people. In the scales of justice we have half a dozen leaders who have now deceased, occupying this much of land, on the other side would be two and a half lakh people, none of whom is given legal access to even one inch of land. In whose favour is the balance tilted? That is our real tragedy!!

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Hounding Businesses Is Good For Stocks

- *Dr. V Anantha Nageswaran*

From the United States in North America to Pakistan in South Asia, the great 'disconnect' between financial markets and the macro economy is back with a vengeance. It was the case in 2007 and five years later, we are precisely in the same situation. Investors have displayed a myopic streak that is extraordinary and beyond any attempt at rational explanations.

In the US, the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) reported one of the biggest slumps in confidence among small businesses in November. This was despite the NFIB excluding the effect of hurricane Sandy. The survey respondents – several thousands of them – have collectively concluded that the outlook for their businesses in the next six months is dismal. The sub-index

measuring this sentiment plunged from two in October to -35 in November. The Chief Economist of the NFIB writes that it is unlikely to be a merry Christmas for many small businesses. The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago publishes an index of national activity. That index is heading towards recession levels. Third, orders for durable goods (capital goods) in the US are no longer growing but contracting. US stock investors cannot be bothered nor are investment banks that are back to egging on investors to buy stocks at these levels painting a rosier 2013.

This situation is not peculiar to the United States. It is a global phenomenon. The reason for that too is the United States monetary policy. The world operates on a *de facto* US dollar standard. The US sets monetary and exchange rate policies for the rest of the world.

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On 12 December 2012, the Federal Reserve decided to purchase 45 billion dollars of longer dated US Treasuries every month on top of the 40 billion dollars of agency and mortgage backed securities it is already buying. The rationale for pumping so much cash directly into the economy is elusive except to Mr. Bernanke and his dovish colleagues. The yield on the US ten year Treasury Note is already quite low at 1.1%. The most recently available data on the annual rise in consumer prices (mistakenly referred to as inflation by most of us) is for October and that is 2.2%. In real terms, it is already negative. American corporations are flush with cash and they do not need lower interest rates. What it achieves, however, is the adoption of beggar-thy-neighbour monetary policies around the world. The result is easier monetary conditions worldwide than warranted. That is what leads to asset prices decoupling from fundamentals.

In Europe, the German DAX index is near 5-year highs although the

German economy is flirting with recession and industrial production is down 5% year-on-year. The situation is worse in Italy and France. Finland and the Netherlands are officially in recession. Yet, all European stock markets are up more than 20%. In the UK, inflation expectations are rising. Bank of England survey puts the inflation expectations at 3.5% in the next twelve months. Industrial production has not recovered after the crisis, despite the massive depreciation of the British currency in the last four years. An extreme example is that of Greece where the economy is in depression with the rate of unemployment at 50% and the Athens stock market index is up 28% year-to-date. Investors, it appears, are not only myopic but also heartless.

At this stage, readers can be excused for posing a counter-argument: should stocks reflect macro-economic and political fundamentals or should they reflect corporate fundamentals? Well, that is a fair question but not a difficult one. In the United

States, the corporate sector is flush with cash simply because the public sector has not yet retrenched. One is the mirror image of the other. Without the US government running high fiscal deficit, the corporate sector will not be generating those surpluses. In other words, the so-called healthy balance-sheet of S&P 500 companies is not a reflection of the underlying vigorous economic activity but public sector profligacy. Now, it is easy to answer the question of whether investors are right in ignoring macro-economic fundamentals.

Further, in Europe, even that fig leaf is missing. Both financial and non-financial corporate sectors are not in great shape. Further, recently, the UK government has managed to extract an additional 'ex-gratia' tax payment from Starbucks coffee. India pursuing tax claims against Vodafone is regressive but Britain hounding Starbucks is fair game. That is anti-business as it can get. Investors have simply brushed it aside. FTSE 250 stock index is up 26.0% year-to-date.

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In India, there was the hilarious response in banking stocks to the much-discussed move on the part of the government to issue new banking licenses. Bank stocks rallied. Competition is not good for shareholders but good for consumers. Existing stocks should have

declined. Indian economic growth rate is down some 80% from the peak whereas the stock market is down only 8% from the peak in 2010.

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The year 2008 closed the gap between asset prices and economic fundamentals. We are likely to see history repeating itself in 2013.

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Rape, Rage, Reality Check

- *Sushant Sareen*

The massive outpouring of outrage on the streets, not just in Delhi but also many other urban centres around the country, by the ‘mango people’ over the bestial gang-rape in the capital city has left the political class completely nonplussed. Until a few years ago, the only demonstrations in Delhi that used to shake the ruling class out of their somnolence were shows of force, either by political parties or by farmers groups. But since the Jessica Lal murder case, a new phenomenon is being witnessed: the demonstration of street power by ordinary, middle-class people demanding justice from an insensitive, uncaring, callous and venal political system.

This was a class of people which was increasingly seen as a selfish and self-serving bunch which had steadily distanced, if not divorced, itself from the workings of the political system. Since they largely also comprised the non-voting class – most would take off for a long weekend holiday during

elections or prefer to stay at home on election day – the political class simply ignored them. In turn, these people, constantly cribbing, complaining and cursing the system, made their own arrangements: private schools, private security in gated colonies, private transport, private sources of electricity (inverters and generators to get around power cuts), and what have you.

But now things seem to be coming full circle. The non-voting class is staking its own claim and displaying street power to demand action and accountability from the political class on a range of issues. In this sense, the demand for justice for the gang-rape victim and the clamour for stronger laws and stringent punishment against perpetrators of crimes against women is a continuum of the anger that was witnessed during the anti-corruption agitation last year, and before that in the protests following the 26/11 attacks where a Mumbaikar held aloft a poster which summed up

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the national mood: A Nation of Lions led by Donkeys!

The ruling establishment – politicians and babus – of course have responded to this demonstration of people power in their own typical, and tired and tried manner, which in a word can be described as meaningless symbolism. Basically, this means make some empty gesture to defuse the public sentiment. No surprise then that we have bizarre, even stupid, suggestions coming from the political class which only highlight the sheer bankruptcy in their thinking, if not also the total absence of any sense of proportion. An unseemly competition is on for who can come up with a more idiotic recommendation. A demand for awarding the victim with Ashok Chakra was matched by a demand for either naming a law after her or making a monument in her honour. Someone wanted a state funeral for her only to be countered by some other luminary who came up with some even more bizarre suggestion.

True, the poor victim showed remarkable grit and bravery and her spirit to survive was commendable. But apart from the fight she put up, it was the horror of the crime, the brazenness of the

criminals, and most of all their bestiality that brought the people on to the streets.

This is precisely why, even though the public activism needs to be celebrated and cherished because it inspires hope of change and hope of a better and safer future, a reality check also needs to be sounded. Equally important is the need for some introspection among lawmakers, media and ‘mango people’, not the least of which is that had the six accused been sons of powerful politicians or some rich businessmen who could twist the system, hire the best lawyers, and generally stall the wheels of justice, would they not have escaped punishment? How do we ensure that rich and politically well-connected people don’t get away with such crimes? After all, running over six pavement dwellers is not a small crime – remember the supposedly open-and-shut BMW case? And had the media and public activism not raised hell, wouldn’t a certain Manu Sharma, Santosh Singh and other such low-life characters also have escaped justice? Obviously, it isn’t always going to be the case that there will be public demonstrations on every rape or murder. Therefore, the system has to be reformed in way that fear of

and respect for law is firmly established.

Harsher laws and stricter punishment, including death sentence, for rape and other criminal and sexual assaults against women are certainly required, but they form only one part of the reform agenda. There is also a case to be made for shifting the burden of proof in such cases on the accused. In addition, severe penalties need to be imposed on officials who are guilty of either not registering the cases in time or carrying out shoddy investigation in these cases in order to let the accused go scot free. Speedy trials, water tight definition of what constitutes crimes of rape and sexual assault, changed processes and procedures for dealing with such crimes are all welcome. At the same time, care needs to be taken to ensure that these laws and procedures are not misused as in the case of anti-dowry laws or the SC/ST act. Without adequate safeguards, these tougher laws will become an

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instrument for vengeance and harassment.

The media played a sterling role in highlighting the crime and giving voice to the agitating crowds. But the media also needs to ensure that it doesn't give the oxygen of airtime or print-space to misogynist politicians. If anything, these characters need to be named and shamed and campaigns need to be carried out against them, including in their constituencies. Such sustained targeting will ensure much better and more gender sensitive behaviour from the politicians. Police officers also need to be held accountable for any crimes against women in their jurisdiction. They also need to be made to understand that if on their watch they turn a blind eye to such crimes, then similar crimes could happen to their loved ones under someone else's watch. The example of the police sub-inspector who was shot dead by a low-life politician in Amritsar because he protested against the harassment of his daughter is just one example.

Another example is that of the daughter of a senior IPS official who was molested in Lucknow by the sons of some powerful politicians. Moral of the story: you don't stand up for someone else's wife, daughter, and sister, no one will stand up for your wife, daughter or sister.

For the 'mango people' the simple lesson is that scrupulously following traffic laws is the basic building block of good law and order. Today you flout traffic laws – jump red lights, go on the wrong carriageway to take a short cut, drive drunk, etc. – and think that you can bribe your way out and generally treat the law as an ass and the police-officer as a buyable commodity who should be treated with contempt, then tomorrow a Ram Singh will not just get the same idea but even think he can get away with rape and murder. Bottom-line: get the basics right, other things will follow.

The political class needs to wake up to the new and emerging

reality of India – a vocal and assertive middle-class which until now had been ignored. It is no longer good enough to wash hands of a lawmaker accused of serious crime by saying that he hasn't been convicted by a court and is innocent until proven guilty. Nor is it any longer acceptable to ignore the comments of people like Sanjay Nirupam, Botsa Satyanarayan or Abhijeet Mukherjee, not to mention the collection of obnoxious characters in the Haryana cabinet. Political parties must demonstrate their seriousness and sincerity on the issue of crimes against women by taking action against, and expelling, these people.

Finally, it remains to be seen how this phenomenon of public activism will translate in the political sphere. Unless this outpouring of outrage can be channelized politically, the change that many of us hanker for will not come. The crowds might be politically alive, but they are not politically aligned or active. The

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real challenge for the political class will be how they can convincingly articulate, assuage and address the sentiments of the people, something that it has until now singularly failed in doing. More than anything else, this is a

disturbing sign of the deepening disconnect between the state and society.

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The Undisputed Vote Ka Saudagar!

- *A Surya Prakash*

The resounding victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the recent Gujarat Assembly election has once again reinforced the argument that with good governance and a strong development-oriented agenda, it is possible to buck the anti incumbency trend in state elections. While the party has romped home for the fifth consecutive time since 1995, the Chief Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi has secured a renewed mandate for the third time. Interestingly, the Chief Minister has secured a fresh approval from the people with by and large the same proportion of votes and seats as in the past.

While a plethora of issues bombard voters during an election, Mr. Modi's campaign revolved solely on his development plank and on his achievements over the last 11 years. Those who have seen elections being won and lost in

many states in recent years on the triple issues of Bijli, Sadak and Pani (Electricity, Roads and Water), can easily discern why the Chief Minister secured a renewed mandate in such a convincing manner. The Modi government's commitment to ensure power supply to every home in the state, has improved the quality of life of the people in many ways. Every homemaker in the state says that

assured power supply has brought in three advantages: It is a boon for school and college-going children in the family. They are able to devote more time to their studies at home; it has helped many homemakers augment their family income with some cottage-industry kind of activity; and finally, it enables them to watch some of their favourite TV soaps. Guaranteed water supply to large parts of the state has also reduced the drudgery of women, who walk many miles to secure potable

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water for their families. The improvement in the quality of roads has meant better communication between towns and villages and consequently a better quality of life. These are three of the key factors which have contributed to what Mr. Modi calls the “pro-incumbency” vote in Gujarat.

All this is not to say that the other issues – specially the gnawing ones relating to the post-Godhra riots of 2002 and the conflict between the state government and the union government on minority-related

issues – did not matter in this election. They did, but only marginally. These issues have been flogged for an entire decade and although not irrelevant, has led to a kind of ennui among the people of the state. A study of the results from the 182 assembly constituencies in the state, is

revealing in terms of how the public perceived these issues in this election. Here are some pointers:

For the BJP, barring this little set back of not reaching 117, the Modi-led campaign has been remarkable. The party was the winner or the runner-up in 180 of

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The party’s most spectacular win was in Ghatlodia where its candidate trounced his Congress rival by over 1,10,000 votes. Chief Minister Narendra Modi won his Maninagar seat by the second highest margin in the state (over 86,000). He secured over 75 per cent of the votes polled. Also

significant from the point of view of the political debate that has been on in the state and all over the country over the post-Godhra riots of 2002 were the results in two other constituencies – Naroda and Naranpura. Ms. Maya Kodnani, a minister in the Modi government, who had won the Naroda seat in 2007 has since been convicted and jailed for life in a riots-related case. She had won this seat by a record margin of 1.80 lakh votes in 2007. In 2012, the BJP candidate trounced his Congress rival by close to 70,000 votes. In Naranpura, the BJP fielded Amit Shah, another minister in the previous Modi government who is being prosecuted in a fake encounter case. Shah too won this seat by a huge margin of 63,000 votes this time. However, the voters firmly rejected Mr. Gordhan Zadaphia, a key minister in the Modi government at the time of the

riots, who later deserted him. Mr. Zadaphia who contested on the Gujarat Parivartan Party (GPP) ticket from Gondal lost to his BJP rival by 45,000 votes. These results offer some clue in regard to the attitude of the voters to the riots of 2002, which were triggered by the gruesome incident at the Godhra Railway Station when 59

Hindu kar sevaks were burnt alive by a mob.

As far as the Congress is concerned, the overall approach of the party to the assembly election in Gujarat came as a disappointment for all those who expected it to give Mr. Modi a stiff fight. Everyone knew that the Gujarat Assembly election was due at the end of 2012, but the Congress Party failed to get its act together in time for the big contest.

Mr. Modi a stiff fight. Everyone knew that the Gujarat Assembly election was due at the end of 2012, but the Congress Party failed to get its act together in time for the big contest. It did not position a strong state leader to counter the Chief Minister, nor did it stitch up clever electoral

alliances that could have meant an accretion to its vote share. The party's failure to promote its state level leaders also led to the defeat of its state party president Mr. Modhwadia by over 17,000 votes in Porbandar and the Leader of the Congress Party in the State Assembly, Mr. Shaktisinh Govil in Bhavnagar Rural by 18,000 votes. For some inexplicable reason, the Congress campaign was marked by hesitation and a lack of purpose.

The 2012 results show that, although the Congress could not have defeated the BJP, it could surely have narrowed the margin of victory if it had galvanised the state unit ahead of the poll. For example, the Congress secured 38 per cent of the votes as against 49.12 per cent of the BJP in the 2007 assembly poll. This time around, the party has got 40 per cent of the vote (an increase of 2 per cent), while the BJP's vote share is down by one per cent to 48. Thus the gap between the two parties has narrowed to 8 per cent. Mr. Keshubhai Patel managed to garner over 3 per cent of the vote.

These figures show that with some clever electoral engineering, the Congress could have given Mr. Modi a credible fight. But the party was so dispirited that it chose to rest its guns on the shoulders of NGOs and social activists. Even its national leaders – Ms. Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi - registered only a token presence in the state during the campaign.

Although the GPP of Keshubhai Patel got rather ambitious and put up candidates in most of the constituencies, the party put up a fairly decent fight in just about a dozen constituencies. Everywhere else, they got a severe drubbing and secured under 2000 votes – the kind of support that first-time independents manage to muster – in an election. Overall, the GPP got just over 3 per cent of the votes and upset the BJP's calculations a wee bit. The results show that the BJP lost at least five constituencies because of the GPP. Thus, all that Keshubhai achieved was to prevent Modi from crossing the psychological barrier of 117 –

the number of seats the party had won in 2007.

This election in Gujarat was unique for yet another reason – the enthusiasm of voters to exercise their franchise. Over the years the voting percentage in elections has been just about average in this state. In 2002, 61 per cent of the electors came out to vote. In 2007, the voting percentage touched 60 per cent. This slumped to just 48 per cent in the Lok Sabha election held in 2009. However, in 2012, over 71 per cent of the electors came out to vote. The turnout was heavy both in the rural and urban constituencies and across regions in the state and lent itself to much interpretation, the most popular of which was that it would hurt the prospects of the incumbent government. The results however showed that there was a proportionate distribution of

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the additional ten per cent votes between the contenders.

As usual, there was the usual play of words after the election results came in. Although the BJP won the assembly election by a convincing margin and had a clear 8 per cent lead over the Congress in terms of vote share, the Congress has stubbornly refused to concede defeat and several of its leaders have advanced the most convoluted arguments to run down the winner and to deny him victory. For example, the Union Finance Minister, Mr. P. Chidambaram has said that since the Congress had improved its tally in the Gujarat Assembly by 2 seats in this election and since the BJP had not crossed 117, the Congress Party was “a clear winner in Gujarat”. The results (BJP - 115, Congress - 61), showed how exaggerated the claims of the Congress were. Also,

according to him, though the BJP had won the state, large sections of the population in Gujarat “felt left out”. The Congress Party has argued since the riots of 2002 that when the BJP is in power in Gujarat, the religious minorities get a raw deal. After December 20, the Finance Minister claimed that many more communities felt disenfranchised - “Saurashtra feels left behind; the tribals feel left behind”. Saurashtra accounts for 54 seats and as many as 26 seats are reserved for Scheduled Tribes in Gujarat. Further, there are over 30 seats in which the Muslim vote counts for more than 20 per cent. How can a party bag 115 seats (constituting 62 per cent) in the 182-member assembly after excluding Saurashtra, the tribals and the minorities in a state like Gujarat?

Several other ministers and Congress Party spokespersons applied this logic to the results. The Human Resource Development Minister, Mr. Kapil Sibal declared most ungraciously that though Modi ran a 3D campaign, he had secured only a

2D victory. These remarks stem from the Congress Party’s skewed sense of victory and defeat in Gujarat. It believes that since the BJP did not cross 117, it was “defeated”, although one needs just 92 seats for a clear majority in the Gujarat Assembly. Also, by the same token, since the Congress had 59 in the previous House, any increment would constitute a “victory”. The persistence with which so many union ministers kept using this yardstick to assess the electoral outcome in that state is indicative of the growing trepidation in the Congress about having Mr. Modi as its main opponent in 2014. They are already conceding that he is a formidable rival, public posturing to the contrary notwithstanding.

Moreover, the results show that the BJP did well in every region of the state and secured support from every social segment. The BJP also picked up a majority of the 40 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as also a majority in Central and South Gujarat and in both the rural and urban areas. As

mentioned, its overall vote share was around 48 per cent, a clear 8 per cent ahead of the Congress. Poll analysts found that the BJP had won most of the seats even in the 24 assembly constituencies that were the worst hit in the 2002 riots. In constituencies having a sizeable Muslim vote (over 20 per cent), the BJP bagged 70 per cent of the seats. The Congress was completely routed in urban constituencies and performed poorly even in constituencies dominated by scheduled tribes and Muslims. So, either the voters did not buy the Congress argument that it is more “inclusive” than the BJP, or they saw this line of argument as promoting divisiveness rather than harmony in their society.

Interestingly, although one of Mr. Modi’s ministers has been convicted in the riots case to life imprisonment and another is facing trial for an equally serious criminal offence, the Congress Party consciously avoided any reference to the riots or to issues relating to the rights of religious

minorities, especially Muslims. The Congress Party’s studied silence on these issues made commentators wonder whether the party had kept aside its core ideological plank just to garner votes in a state that still carried the scars of 2002. Strangely, throughout the campaign the party never uttered the “M” word. Ms. Sonia Gandhi had described Narendra Modi as *Maut ka Saudagar* (Merchant Death) in 2007, thereby holding him wholly responsible for the riots that broke out in 2002 after the horrific burning of *kar sevaks* in Godhra, however assiduously avoided any reference to him. Strangely, she chose not to put this label on him in 2012. In 2007, when Ms. Gandhi pinned this appellation on him, Mr. Modi returned with a thumping majority, prompting a national daily to declare that he was the *Vote ka Saudagar* (Merchant of Votes). In 2012, Mr. Modi has proved that this is certainly a more appropriate label.

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GMR Contract Termination And India-Maldives Relations

- *Dr. N Manoharan*

India was upset when Maldives announced the termination of the \$511 million contract with the Indian infrastructure company GMR Infrastructure Limited (GIL) on 27 November 2012. The GIL-MAHB (Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad) consortium with 77 and 23 percent stakes respectively won the project in June 2010 to maintain and develop Ibrahim Nasir International Airport in Malé. Despite the fact that it was done through a global tendering process conducted by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Maldivian government under President Mohamed Waheed justified the contract termination “on grounds that there were many legal, technical and economic issues.” The Singapore High Court initially stayed the termination, but later ruled that “the Maldives government has the power to do what it wants, including expropriating the airport.” Even before the Court’s final ruling, the

Maldivian government conveyed its termination decision as “non-reversible and non-negotiable” and “no such injunction can be issued against a sovereign state”.

Significantly, when the project got underway in November 2010, it became the single biggest FDI into Maldives, that too at the time of global economic recession. It was to upgrade, maintain and operate the existing Airport as well as build a new terminal by 2014. In the process, the aim was to increase the traffic from 2.6 million passengers per annum to over five million. Located in the Malé Atoll, the airport is not only the largest in Maldives, but is considered as one of the fastest growing in the region. All these have come to a naught now despite GMR spending over \$230 million. Malé has agreed to compensate GMR, but the termination has sent negative signals to investors in general and India in particular. If the reason is legal, Maldives should not have had much

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problem in abiding by the Singapore High Court's stay on the termination. If the reason is technical, the project would not have stayed alive successfully for two full years; even otherwise Waheed, who was Vice President in Nasheed's government, and later as President, had enough time to sort it out. If the reason is economic, Malé would have accepted GMR's offer waiving the \$25 airport development fee for all Maldivians flying out of Maldives. The atoll state indeed has every right to take a call on matters that suits its national interests. But, what annoyed India most was the unprofessionalism displayed by Waheed's regime on the issue and its disregard of international agreements due to local political considerations. Surprisingly, even the Indian Foreign Minister Salman Kurshid's suggestion to iron out the differences between Malé and GMR through a neutral international expert was not considered by Maldives. As a large donor to Maldives, India is

But, what annoyed India most was the unprofessionalism displayed by Waheed's regime on the issue and its disregard of international agreements due to local political considerations. Surprisingly, even the Indian Foreign Minister Salman Kurshid's suggestion to iron out the differences between Malé and GMR through a neutral international expert was not considered by Maldives.

concerned that such thoughtless cancellations would hurt the interests of the atoll state in the long run. The move is not an encouraging one for prospective investors, especially Indian ones. New Delhi quickly reached out to Waheed when he succeeded Nasheed, the first democratically elected president of Maldives, in a bloodless coup this February. It looks as if the Indian gesture went in vain. However, the fact that fringe parties like Adhaalath Party could dictate terms to the government of Maldives shows that President Waheed is not in control of things. What is of greater concern is the anti-Indian sentiment shown by the groups that have been behind the termination of the GMR contract. This got India worried as to the safety of about 30,000 Indians working presently in Maldives and the state of Indian interests there.

What is even more worrying is the favourable disposition of these groups towards China, which has

been desperately looking for a strong foothold in the Indian Ocean region. In a tweet, Adhaalath Party stated that “We would rather give the airport contract to our friends in China, who now make the majority of our tourist population.” It further stated, “...the addition of Maldives as a friend [by China] would be a massive blow to future Indian power in this region.” Beijing has for long been building maritime and other linkages with the countries of Eastern Africa, Southeast Asia, Seychelles, Mauritius, West Asia, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The avowed objective

Sino-Maldives interactions have increased in the recent past to the extent of China opening an embassy in Male in 2011. The Chinese are among the top visitors to the Maldives lately. Beijing has evinced keen interest in developing infrastructure in Ihavandhoo, Marao and Maarandhoo Islands of the Maldives.

extent of China opening an embassy in Male in 2011. The Chinese are among the top visitors to the Maldives lately. Beijing has evinced keen interest in developing infrastructure in Ihavandhoo, Marao and Maarandhoo Islands of the Maldives. Not without reasons that the current dispensation in Male holds the view that “It will be to the detriment of Maldives not to engage with China.”

Maldives may find China attractive now, but India’s long-term commitment and help in developing the island is in the long-term interests of the Maldives. India’s Standby Credit Facility to

behind is to ensure the security of its sea lanes, especially unhindered flow of critically-needed energy supplies from Africa and West Asia. At the same time, these linkages have had the impact of encircling India, which some call the “String of Pearls” construct. Maldives is undoubtedly an important “pearl”. Sino-Maldives interactions have increased in the recent past to the

Maldives runs into millions of dollars. Several state and private Indian institutions have been playing a vital role in the economic and cultural development of the Maldives. Above all, it was India that promptly dispatched its armed forces in 1988 to foil a coup attempt (“Operation Cactus”) aimed at deposing the then President Gayoom.

Ideas like suspending economic aid to Maldives until it falls in line are being floated in India. But, any such move would not work and in fact push Maldives further into Chinese hands. Any punitive measure would also help in strengthening radical anti-Indian forces in the island. New Delhi should, of course, let Malé know of its disappointments and the costs involved in the long run, and be prepared to impose these costs if things do not improve. At the same time, what is required is

patient handling of the issue in the interest of Maldives, in the interest of India-Maldives ties and in the larger interest of regional peace and security. On its part, the Maldivian government, instead of outright rejection, should consider negotiating with GMR and flesh out an amicable settlement. Narrow political considerations should not come in the way of the best interests of the island, and its ties with India.

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Need To Expedite The Creation Of An Indian Cyber Command

- **Radhakrishna Rao**

Along with outer space, cyber space is rapidly emerging as a new and sophisticated theatre of warfare with serious consequences for the security of the countries that lack the expertise and infrastructure to ensure the safety of their information and communication networks, and mount counter offensive. Indeed, the overall lethality and destructive potential of the cyber war, where the adversary remains invisible and difficult to detect, has been increasing at a phenomenal pace. Because stealth and anonymity are the distinct advantages of cyber war, it is possible to inflict unprecedented damage on the civilian and military assets of a targeted country at short notice and that too without any of the elaborate preparations normally associated with a conventional war.

Moreover, cyber attacks could also easily be mounted on corporate and industrial entities to cripple their operations and put them out

of business by a breed of smart cyber hackers. “In the past, we could count the number of bombers and tanks your enemy had. In cyber war, we really can’t tell whether the enemy has the weapons until he uses them,” says Richard Clarke, a former Chairman of White House Critical Infrastructure Protection Board.

Because cyber communications continue to be a dynamic and rapidly evolving area that is subject to the process of sustained innovations and refinements, there is no fool proof firewall capable of insulating the information networks and computer systems from the malicious maneuvers of well trained and highly motivated cyber warriors. The recent defacing of the websites of some of the key Government of India organizations, including the ones belonging to an advisor to the Prime Minister and DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) cannot

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but be a wakeup call for India. Of course, this cyber attack that reportedly took place on October 31 2012 resulted in the temporary shutdown of a few Government of India (GOI) websites. However, GOI sources in New Delhi made it clear that these websites maintained by the NIC (National Informatics Centre) did not contain any classified information. There were also intelligence reports in November, 2011 about the probable compromise of computers of the Eastern Naval Command located in Vishakhapatnam.

It was the shocking Mumbai terror attack mounted by the Pakistan-trained terrorists that spurred the US Government to announce measures to strengthen its cyber security system. Indeed, US President Barack Obama, citing the use of GPS and net phones in the Mumbai terror attack, described the cyber attack as the “future face of the war.” Obama was clear in his observation that, “the terrorists that sowed so much death and destruction in Mumbai

relied not only on guns and grenades but also on GPS and phones using voice over the Internet.”

Indeed, both the US political establishment and their defence set up are fully aware of the ground reality that a US\$100-billion plus global cyber crime market has emerged as a major headache for the defence forces and security agencies in various parts of the world.

Even the seemingly all powerful Pentagon has not escaped the bouts of cyber attacks. US intelligence and security sources say that classified data on aircraft, avionics, surveillance technology, satellite communications systems and network security protocols stored in Pentagon information systems have been siphoned off.

For there have been instances of theft of critical data stored in ostensibly high security systems of the defence establishments of various countries. Even the seemingly all powerful Pentagon has not escaped the bouts

of cyber attacks. US intelligence and security sources say that classified data on aircraft, avionics, surveillance technology, satellite communications systems and network security protocols stored in Pentagon information systems have been siphoned off.

In fact, the super intelligent breed of cyber criminals are finding it

easy to disrupt the data flow and communications links of the defence forces scattered across a widely dispersed geographical space. Moreover, since all the wings of the services are making extensive use of cyberspace for their coordinated warfare strategy, cyber criminals and terrorist groups are devising novel techniques to break open the security walls put around the data storage systems and communications links of the defence forces. Banks, financial services and public utilities including power supply systems and transportation networks could easily be paralysed by well executed plans of cyber criminals. According to the Boston based Core Security Technologies, cyber criminals could gain access to a “country’s water treatment plants, natural gas pipelines and other critical utilities,” through imaginatively conceived and well executed plans.

Meanwhile, in keeping with the growing threat perception, the US Cyber Command charged with the task of ensuring the security of the networks being operated by the US Department of Defense (DOD) and also launching offensive operations in cyber space in pursuit of the national interest, is

all poised to be upgraded with an independent status. This elevation would put it on par with its parent organisation, the US Strategic Command, which is responsible for US space and nuclear operations. In fact, this development follows the revelations by US intelligence agencies that Chinese cyber hackers are hyper active insofar as penetrating the high security networks of the Pentagon containing classified strategic information is concerned. But then the Chinese Government sources in Beijing have consistently been denying the involvement of Beijing in many of the cyber attacks that are said to have their origins in China. “China is totally opposed to various kinds of hacking activities on the internet and we are committed to relevant counter hacking initiatives,” says a spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

But it would be wrong to come to the conclusion that China alone is responsible for all the vicious cyber attacks reported from various parts of the world; far from it. For, it is widely perceived that the US in association with Israel had carried out an attack on Iran’s disputed nuclear centrifuge facility through the highly malicious Stuxnet malware in

2010. And a section of the US officialdom believes that the malware Shamoon that temporarily paralysed the Saudi based Aramco in August 2012 had its origin in Iran. The attack on Saudi oil firm Aramco has left USA deeply worried. In October this year, the US Defence Secretary, Leon Penetta described the attack on Aramco as the most sophisticated yet launched on a private company. Even as Iran is suspected to be behind this attack, sources in Tehran have denied any involvement in the Aramco attack.

Meanwhile, there is a growing body of evidence pointing to the Chinese hackers focusing on mounting economic espionage and paralysing high security networks of the countries considered inimical to the interest of the mainland China. Against this backdrop, the three day all India executive committee meeting of the 87 years old Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) held in Chennai in early November 2012 had cautioned against growing threat to India's security from China based "cyber criminals". Pointing out that China posed a serious threat to India's cyber and communications network, the RSS resolution said that China is capable of crippling

the technological capabilities of even advanced nations such as the USA. Against this backdrop, RSS has called for the formulation of a comprehensive national security policy with a particular focus on strengthening cyber safety.

A fact-filled report prepared by McAfee in association with the SDA (Security and Defence Agenda), a Brussels based defence and security think tank, ranks India as the fifth most cyber crime affected country. "Much of the vulnerability is explained by the widespread computer illiteracy and easily pirated machines," points out this report. Making reference to Indian cyber security scenario, Cherian Samuel of the New Delhi based think tank, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), says that, "In India, we went straight from no telephones to the latest in mobile technology. It is the same with internet connected computers. They came in all of a sudden and no one was taught even the basic facts about cyber security". Cyber security experts feel that the main challenge for India now is to train and equip the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, particularly outside the big cities like New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. Low conviction rate of

cyber criminals in India is an area of concern as far as the strengthening of the cyber security mechanism is concerned. Awareness programmes and educational campaigns need to be stepped up to bring home the importance of cyber security in all its manifestations, say experts. India, which lags behind the Western countries, in terms of putting in place the latest genre of tools to ensure cyber safety, is highly vulnerable to the attacks from cyber space for the simple reason that it boasts of more than 120-million active internet users. Further, with electronic payments making rapid inroads in the country, threat of “economic damages” being inflicted from across the borderless cyber space has assumed serious dimensions. According to Karl Rauscher, Chief Technology Officer of the New York based East West Institute, the explosion of internet connectivity in India could very well become a double edged sword. “Since India is one of the top

Not surprisingly, then there is a growing realization of the magnitude of the threat that India faces from cyber space and the need to ensure the safety of information networks, both civilian and defence. But then to face the cyber threat, India would need to come out with a comprehensive and holistic cyber security policy that will be properly coordinated through a nodal authority.

generators of spam in the world, it is particularly important for the network operators, service providers and government agencies to apply the best practices as applicable,” points out Rauscher. The dark spot of the Indian cyber security scenario is that India’s advances in the area of information technology and software services have not been harnessed to make the information networks in the country impervious to cyber hacking.

Not surprisingly, then there is a growing realization of the magnitude of the threat that India faces from cyber space and the need to ensure the safety of information networks, both civilian and defence. But then to face the cyber threat, India would need to come out with a comprehensive and holistic cyber security policy that will be properly coordinated through a nodal authority. It is in the fitness of things that the National Security Council had taken a decision to create a permanent

joint working group with the private sector to overcome cyber security challenges. In particular, the abuse and misuse of social media platforms to foment sectarian discontent has been amply illustrated by the panic migration of the North Easterners settled in various parts of the country in the wake of disturbances in Assam. All said and done, international cooperation and coordination is of paramount importance in warding off the threat from cyber space. For India's cyber security continues to be a matter of grave concern for multinational enterprises and western governments alike.

Against this broad canvas, the Indian defence set-up has felt the need for creating a full-fledged and well equipped cyber security command. Recent reports suggest that the three wings of the Indian Defence Services are seriously mulling the creation of a cyber command that would draw assets, resources and expertise from all the defence establishment of the country. But as of now, the structural nuances and operational philosophy of an Indian cyber command are far from clear. Whether it would be an independent entity or a part of the

larger strategic command, the Indian defence set-up should be clear in its vision before it gets the green signal for the setting up of the cyber command. Further, the functional aspects of such a command should be articulated in a well defined manner to provide it with the "punch and power" it deserves. One important question that needs to be addressed is whether the Indian cyber command would draw on the expertise available in Indian IT companies and research organisations possessing expertise in the area of information network security.

While the immediate focus of this proposed cyber command would be on protecting the high security information networks of the Indian defence forces, in the long run, it should try to expand its scope to the civilian networks with a view to insulate the country as a whole against the multifarious threats emanating from cyber space. Of course, the Indian cyber command should in unison with the civilian agencies endeavour to protect the information networks and computer systems cutting across the structural jurisdictions. Similarly, the Indian cyber command should have expertise and resources to launch offensive

operations. In this context, it could take a leaf out of the experience of the US cyber command.

By all means, the creation of an Indian cyber command should be taken up on a war footing by shunning the lethargy and delay typical of the decision making process at the higher echelons of the military bureaucratic structure of the country. Of course, the setting up of the cyber command is just a small step towards the long journey of ensuring cyber security in India in all its manifestations.

From the security perspective, India cannot remain a silent spectator to the lead China has taken in creating a hackers' brigade. For in recent years, China based cyber warriors have become the most persistent source of a variety of cyber attacks experienced by a number of countries including India. Not long back, Chinese hackers are known to have used social networking sites to break into the computer networks of parts of the Indian defence establishment. Among the

institutions targeted by the Chinese hackers were the National Security Council Secretariat, 21 Mountain Artillery Brigade based in north eastern sector and the Air Forces Station in New Delhi.

What is more, the computer systems being operated by the Indian military colleges were taken over by the elusive Chinese cyber spies. Some of the

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documents accessed by the Chinese cyber warriors are known to have included secret assessments of the security situation in north eastern India as well as the Maoist uprising in parts of India. Following

this, the Indian army directed its officials to keep away from social networking sites including Twitter, Facebook and Orkut. In particular, they have been asked not to post any sensitive and classified information including their posting location.

According to the Norton Cyber Crime Report 2012, over 42 million net users in India became victims of cyber crime during

2011-12, suffering approximately US\$8-billion in direct financial loss. As per this report, 66% of adults in India have been victims of cyber crime in their lifetime. “Cyber criminals are changing their tactics to target fast growing mobile platforms and social

networks where consumers are less aware of security risks,” says Effendy Ibrahim, Internet Safety Advocate and Director, Norton (Asia).

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Acquiring The Heritage Tag – Is It Enough?

- **Dr. Anirban Ganguly**

Early December 2012, a United Nations Committee ‘tasked with protecting the world’s oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, craftsmanship and knowledge of nature’ added twenty new items to the world List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The intangible heritage concept encompasses those ‘practices and living expressions’ that are handed down from one generation to the next’ and includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

The high point of the recent list is the inclusion of the Buddhist chanting of Ladakh. The selection Committee recognised the pervasiveness of the practice of chanting in the region and found it to be fulfilling a number of stipulated criteria. For example while examining the possibility of

its inclusion, the Committee interestingly noted that:

‘Buddhist chanting is a pervasive cultural practice in the Ladakh region not only in monasteries where monks chant daily but also among villagers who recite these chants on special days.

The wider objective of this inclusion is to ensure the documentation and dissemination of knowledge ‘about traditional Buddhist chanting’ and of trying to ‘improve the living conditions of the monks so that they can pass on the practice to younger generations.’ As one of the vital civilisational and cultural outpost of India, this world wide recognition of Ladakh and the Ladakhis’ ways of life and belief is an occasion to rejoice and to re-lay Indian cultural footprints in civilisational terms. In fact, it would perhaps be a useful exercise to draw up a list of Indic cultural and religious practices of these types that continue to exist and

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vibrate all along the Indian border and to look into measures and projects that could be initiated to preserve, encourage and strengthen them. At least, in this case it is a positive signal for the challenged cultural traditions of the country to see a number of official and non-official agencies and cultural bodies collaborating to see the process through.

lack of basic amenities, while accommodation and connectivity shortages plague the entire area. Despite the temples having sufficient peripheral land, no effort seems to have been initiated till date for developing them as compact cultural and historical zones that can attract both the serious scholar of Indian culture and the lay tourist.

But the acquiring of a heritage tag can also become an occasion for reflecting on the status of heritage – tangible and intangible – nationally. The tag itself does not guarantee automatic protection or development. For example, the

The legendary 13th century Sun Temple of Konark in Odisha, another prized Indian architectural wonder with the world heritage tag is also plagued with problems. The heritage tag has not prevented its deterioration over the years. In 2009, for instances, the temple caught the attention of conservators worldwide when five rocks fell from the temple edifice.

The legendary 13th century Sun Temple of Konark in Odisha, another prized Indian architectural wonder with the world heritage tag is also plagued with problems. The heritage tag has not prevented its deterioration over the years. In 2009, for instances, the

conferring of the world heritage tag to the Western Ghats and the historical sites around it has not seen much improvement, at least in the case of the famed Chennakesava and Hoysaleswara Temples in Belur and Halebid in Karnataka. Marvels of Hoysala temple architecture, these places of historic importance continue to face infrastructural neglect and a

temple caught the attention of conservators worldwide when five rocks fell from the temple edifice. Citizens' initiative groups had also expressed concern then that the edifice and temple super structure were being severely affected by water logging and the cleaning up job by unskilled workers done under aegis of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) was further

affecting the structure and damaging images. It was also alleged that antique pieces were being regularly smuggled from the area. The members of the local Konark Suraksha Samiti had also pointed out that the chemicals used for preservation were not the right kind and, as a result, over 40% of the images in the precincts have faded beyond recognition. Between accusations and counter-accusations, the condition of the structure continues to weaken. In fact, it is interesting to note that as far back as 1949, the preservation of the Konark Temple figured on the priority list of the Prime Minister himself who had then written to the Premier and Governor of the state after a visit to the temple that the 'magnificent' and 'unique structure' 'deserves preservation.' Against the current backdrop it is instructive to read Nehru's note on the matter.

I found many pieces of stones and rock lying about all round the temple. Many of these pieces were of value and should have been separated and kept apart in some kind of museum or at least a shed. There was a small museum where some important pieces of sculpture had been arranged. But much more could have been done and

should be done. As it is, there is a grave danger of our losing some valuable specimens. Indeed, I was told that people took away many of these pieces, either as souvenirs or for some other purpose.

Nehru directed that the Central government and the Provincial government cooperate to immediately take up the issue of conservation; otherwise there was 'always the danger of the parts of the temple collapsing.' The situation has come round to being much the same. On the other hand, the ASI continues to suffer from an acute shortage of staff and experts, and faces apathy and sloth in official policy making. Acquiring a heritage tag is not sufficient in itself it entails and imposes greater responsibility and cultural accountability but our system in place is hardly responsive to the needs of culture.

The world heritage sites are not alone in suffering the vagaries of modernisation and official apathy. Other legendary temples, equally ancient and intertwined with the cultural and spiritual ethos of the land continue to face neglect and challenges. Last November, for example, an entire one-tonne stone fell from the dome of the western gate of the Jagannath

Temple at Puri. Major incidents of stone falling from the structure have been reported since 1990 and yet no long term plan seems to have been put in place in order to arrest the decline. Around the same time, the five hundred years old tower of the Sri Bhavannarayana Swamy temple in the Guntur district of the state of Andhra Pradesh collapsed. The 75-foot tower which had been cracking for sometime was a victim of the usual lack of coordination among official agencies and the temple endowment committee. The collapse of the Rajagopuram of the Srikalahasti Temple, one of the most famous Shiva temples in the country, is another case in point displaying our inability to initiate urgent and concerted inter-departmental action for preservation of these unique architectural feats.

In fact, the vision that places such as these can be really developed into cultural hubs with the founding of cultural and historical research institutes or regional languages and traditions' documentation centres perhaps must have never occurred to our cultural policy makers. It suffices for them to see these places as revenue earning tourist hubs and

even there they seemed to have spoilt the entire effort at such a development by adopting a *laissez faire* attitude. Unplanned urbanization and modernisation have also taken their toll on some of our most important heritage sites – those identified in the Indian imagination with traditions of chivalry and honour. In answer to a question (unstarred question num.2663) raised in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) this September, on whether illegal construction and sewerage lines were weakening and eroding the foundations of the famous Sonar Kella at Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, the Indian Ministry of Culture accepted that such a thing had in fact happened and had 'caused damaging effect on different structures including the Fort wall and bastions.' It was also revealed that the ASI had undertaken a survey of the extent and nature of the damage and had taken up 'different conservation works'. The point is not whether the ASI can salvage the situation; the larger issues under the scanner are our policies or non-policies of urbanization. The amount earmarked for the conservation of the famed fort was a paltry Rs.60.00 lakhs for the current financial year. The idea that protection of heritage needs to be

inscribed into development policymaking has still not been accepted as a cardinal factor while envisioning development. And to add to this culture of heritage neglect, an RTI disclosure last year (2011) has revealed that more than 300 hundred protected historical structures in the country were 'either damaged or encroached upon in 2010 alone and of the 311 FIRs lodged against encroachers and desecrators 27 were against government officials for complicity in such acts!

But as pointed out above, it would be wrong to give the impression that such a situation existed from the beginning, i.e. right from after independence. Colonial conservators, despite their aversion for their Indian counterparts – as displayed in a 1911 public statement of J.Ph Vogel, then officiating Director General of the ASI doubting the Indians' capacity to undertake archeological research and study – did contribute hugely to the preservation of our tangible heritage. Post independence, when politicians were multifaceted and did evince occasional interest in culture, it is interesting to read again Nehru's exhortation for preserving and developing heritage sites. Delivering the

inaugural speech of the National Art Treasures Fund at New Delhi in 1952, Nehru argued that these sites with great art must eventually be developed into 'places of artistic pilgrimage for us so that we may learn from them not only something of the past but something of the grace of life which can, perhaps, affect our present life also.' Unfortunately, the vision of developing these places into artistic pilgrimage centres seems to have completely failed.

The town itself, which was highly developed during the Chola period and where inscriptions on the codes of elections to various assemblies were found, should have been developed as a model by establishing a leading epigraphic research and study institute. But India lacks qualified epigraphists and numismatists and perhaps lakhs of inscriptions that could majorly help in reconstructing our history remains unread and undocumented. According to the experts, these inscriptions are banks 'of literary, scientific, social and even engineering knowledge.' Is there any point then in lamenting the fact that external experts are indeed setting the discourse and the pattern of studying ancient India through an

assiduous study of our scriptures? In the Kailasanathar, restoration initiative by government funding was nil and experts from the Indian Institute of Technology at Chennai had to be enlisted for the complicated granite-stitching process. After a painstaking process, the restoration of the temple was complete with the insertion in the cracks of 'high grade stainless steel rods with a high percentage of chromium' which would not corrode for another five hundred years.' The stark reality is that the government is able to only preserve a mere 5% of the total monuments existing in India and most of the preservation efforts, such as the one at Uthiramerur, have been undertaken outside of officialdom and at times in spite of it.

But perhaps it would not do to blame the governments alone for this inability to preserve our past. Corporate India too seems to have failed to rise to the occasion. The National Cultural Fund (NCF), created in 1996 as a trust under the Ministry of Culture, with the

mandate of introducing 'innovative patterns of cultural funding' in the country and to 'facilitate public-private partnership in the field of heritage conservation and promotion' had written to major corporate players seeking assistance for and involvement in heritage preservation. A list of hundred monuments in need of urgent assistance accompanied the letter. But two years down the line, the response from corporate India has been disappointing.

A list of hundred monuments in need of urgent assistance accompanied the letter. But two years down the line, the response from corporate India has been disappointing. Except for a few PSUs, no private sector company 'has even bothered to respond' and the proposal continues to be stuck.

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The larger question at stake is whether sufficient efforts

are being made by all concerned to first preserve our heritage nationally before aspiring to adorn them with an international tag. The case of the culturally rich and vibrant Majuli Island in Assam, which embodies the ancient Vaishnavite heritage of the state and its people, is a stark example of such systemic indecisiveness. Holding a large number of satras and their libraries and museums, the island is a veritable treasure

house of ancient manuscript and artefacts and is symbolic of the ideals, spiritual and cultural traditions of the Vaishnavite saint, Srimanta Sankardeva, and yet it faces severe neglect from apathetic cultural administrators who have been slow in addressing the erosion issue and encroachment of sattral land on the Island. As a result of this apathy, Majuli also missed out getting the world heritage tag due to the concerned officials missing the deadline for filing nominations to the category. But beyond this, the immediate issue to be addressed is whether the unique Island, a cultural-sphere in the true sense, shall soon see remedial measures which would address its decay, as well as meet the challenges to its cultural-spiritual institutions.

The conferring of the status of world heritage is indeed a privileged recognition of the efforts made for preserving heritage and culture, but it should also be an occasion for serious reflection on the actual state of our heritage, both tangible and intangible, and on the need to urgently address a rapidly declining scenario. It does not really help to simply deliver regular homilies on the grandeur of our ancient civilisation and to dilate ad nauseam on its epochal

achievements. Our past civilisational achievements and their physical and cultural expressions need much more than mere assurances today, they require a dynamic and creative doze of assistance in order to be able to survive for posterity. Otherwise, there will very soon be little left to extol about.

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Politics Of Corruption In Bangladesh

- *Neha Mehta*

Corruption is rampant in Bangladesh in almost every sphere of life. However, a series of high profile corruption scandals, such as in the Padma Bridge project, the Railway Scandal, the Hall Mark Group scam, Destiny Group and last year's share market scam under the current Sheikh Hasina government, that involved high ranking ministers and officials has brought the credibility of the government under the scanner. In a situation of continuous political strife and with elections fast approaching, a series of corruption scams of such magnitude has led the general public to question the motives of the government that came to power on the platform of taking firm action against corruption. Adding to this, the dismissive and defensive stance of the government has only worsened its position.

In Bangladesh, with politics getting intertwined with corruption, the cycle of blame game starts with the tenure of

each party forming the government alternatively, to take political advantage, in their pursuit for power. The continuous political bickering over corruption issues in Bangladesh has been a constant over the years, with each party in power probing scandals that involved party leaders of the opposition and in turn getting rid of their own cases that were being pursued by the last government.

Institutionally the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was established in 2004 to have a neutral, independent institution to enact preventative and retributive policies to fight corruption in a variety of entities, both governmental and non-governmental.¹ However, in the latest report on Bangladesh brought out by the International Crisis Group², the ACC was termed as a "toothless tiger" by the chairman of the ACC, Ghulam Rahman, who said that it is now required to obtain the government's permission before investigating officers, which in

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turn increases the chances of the corrupt suspects putting pressure on their subordinates to not give information or cooperating with the ACC. In addition, the old cases against senior party leaders have been wiped out by finding loop holes in the judicial process with the help of the National Committee on Withdrawal of Politically-

Motivated Cases that recommended the dismissal of 315 corruption cases through Feb 2012.³

However, there is no mistaking the fact that the Awami League government has had credible success on many fronts like in destroying terrorist networks

functioning in the country, jailing extremists and stopping foreign funding of terrorist organizations operating from its soil. From the verge of being declared as a state sponsor of terrorism during the last BNP led government, it has come a long way. In the domain of foreign policy, it has taken constructive strides, especially in

improving relations with India, mainly by addressing its security concerns and making efforts to find solutions to long standing issues between the two countries. Additionally, the economy has grown at an impressive rate of around 6 percent⁴ as well as strides made in education, healthcare and women upliftment

under Sheikh Hasina's leadership has been much appreciated.

However, inspite of all the positive steps taken by the government, there is a rising discontentment and disillusionment against a government that is considered the secular face of Bangladeshi politics and which

came to power with a thumping majority in the elections of 2008. A series of corruption allegations involving government functionaries among others has tainted its image.

Corruption allegations in various domains especially in the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project led

However, inspite of all the positive steps taken by the government, there is a rising discontentment and disillusionment against a government that is considered the secular face of Bangladeshi politics and which came to power with a thumping majority in the elections of 2008. A series of corruption allegations involving government functionaries among others has tainted its image.

multilateral lending agency like the World Bank cancelling the pledged \$1.2 billion credit for the \$2.9 billion Padma bridge project on June 29 2012, stating that it found 'credible evidence' of corruption in the project. This in turn, gave a huge setback to the image of Bangladesh abroad and embarrassed the Awami League government. A country that is highly dependent on development aid from external agencies, it becomes all the more crucial to keep a clean image. The World Bank is an important credit provider for development projects in Bangladesh and it pulling back due to the issue of corruption, in turn brought the Padma Bridge project to a standstill, as other donors like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) could not move forward without it. The Padma Bridge Project, which was conceptualized with the aim to overhaul the transportation infrastructure that intended to connect the South-Western region of the country, "in order to

stimulate economic growth by facilitating inter-regional, cross-river transport of passengers and freight, and transmission of natural gas, telecommunication and electricity in a cost effective manner"⁵, is particularly crucial to the Awami League as it formed part of its election manifesto. Therefore, fulfilling its promises becomes imperative as it would definitely have a bearing on the elections due next year.

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lack of evidence in the case was the reason behind their inaction. However, the need to get the project started, along with the dire need to get the finances, they had to albeit reluctantly comply to the conditionality that was put forth by the World Bank officials with a promise to have a credible investigation and transparent implementation of Padma bridge project.

Further, allegations against the Railway Minister of the Sheikh Hasina government, Suranjit Sengupta, over the issue of taking cash bribes from applicants seeking jobs in the state run railway led to his resignation and brought a barrage of criticism against the government. Although he denied taking money from the applicants and subsequently even resigned, but was made a minister without portfolio after he submitted his resignation, which caused great disappointment to the public who expected stern action against the accused.

In addition, cases of corruption in the financial sector like the illegal disbursement of a loan of Tk 3,547 crore to the Hallmark Group and five other companies between 2010 and May 2012⁶ by Sonali Bank, in which the alleged involvement of the Prime Minister's Health and Family Welfare advisor, Syed Modasser Ali in the scam, brings into focus the connection of a high level government functionary in the scandal. Besides, the off-hand remark of the Finance Minister AMA Muhith on this issue that "Tk 4,000 crore loan scandal out of the Tk 40,000 crore loan in the country's banking sector is not a big deal", showed the casual manner in which such an issue

was being addressed. In addition, the share market scam in which about Tk 20,000 crore were swindled and the Destiny group scam, have all affected the popularity of the government severely, especially amongst the people who viewed their coming to power as a welcome change as against the corrupt and radical policies of the last BNP led government.

Transparency International's latest report on "Positive and Negative Roles of the Members of the 9th Parliament: A Review" that put forth its findings, raked up a political storm with strong reactions from the Awami League. The report stated that around 97 percent of the MPs are involved in "negative activities and 70 percent were involved in criminal activities" ⁷. Ministers from the Awami League, however, questioned the motive as well as the timing of the report saying it is "ill motivated" and considered it as a conspiracy to bring non-elected people to power as well as to damage the image of the elected MPs. The issue was extensively politicized and they even contemplated action against the international watchdog, which shows little tolerance for criticism. Rather, the Awami League should

make efforts to improve its image than to take action against independent agencies.

Criticism against Sheikh Hasina has mounted over the months domestically as well as internationally, especially by various international agencies that have been critical in their assessment of her policies. The scrapping of the provision of a caretaker government to oversee elections by adopting the fifteenth amendment to the constitution, has led to a political stalemate over the issue. In addition, actions against the Grameen Bank and other issues have been viewed negatively. Adding to it, the cases of corruption against the government has deteriorated its standing.

However, Bangladesh is not new to corruption and has rather struggled to keep a clean image. The state of governance and corruption during the BNP led government had reached at its

lowest ebb. Bangladesh was at the bottom for five years (2001-2005) in the annual corruption perception index (CPI) by the Transparency International (TI) during the tenure of the BNP led government.⁸ However, in the following six years it improved slightly. From 2006-2011, it ranked third, seventh, tenth, thirteenth, twelfth and thirteenth respectively.⁹

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The need for a progressive Bangladesh demands secular credentials and a corruption free image. A series of scandals of such magnitude and frequency has gone against the incumbent government, that came to power as an alternative to a

government, that was viewed as being radical, corrupt and extreme in its approach. The opposition parties, especially the BNP, on the other hand, are trying to use the discontentment of the people to their advantage, by projecting themselves as the alternative, proposing radical policies. The need of the hour, however, is stern

action against the accused and less politics over the issue to turn around the battered image of the Awami League. The future of Bangladesh would suffer due to the mistake of a few corrupt people which might result in bringing a radical government to power, governed by Islamists that would only take the country backward and would not benefit anyone.

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Interaction With CIISS On Political Change Over In China

A five-member delegation from the CIISS (China Institute for International Strategic Studies), a think tank with strong military background, visited the Foundation on December 19, 2012 for an exchange of views with a select panel of VIF scholars and experts focusing specifically on the political change over in China, but also going over the entire gamut of bilateral issues. The visiting delegation was led by Maj Gen Huang Baifu (Retd), Vice Chairman CIISS and comprised four other scholars - Mr Zhu Guorong, Senior Research Fellow, Maj Gen Miao Pengsheng (Retd), Senior Advisor, Mr Yu Hanmin, Senior Research Fellow, and Mr Zhu Jie. The delegation was also accompanied by the Deputy Defence Attaché of China in India.

The interaction encapsulated the broad strategic environment



surrounding the bilateral ties, articulated briefly in the opening remarks by Mr. Ajit Doval, KC Director VIF. He opined that improved economic engagement between China and India, expectedly touching USD 100 billion mark by 2015, would be a major catalyst in improving the overall relationship – people to people contacts and creation of more employment opportunities, but more significantly, it would lead to a marked improvement in political and security relationship. China and India have evolved a greater understanding in recent years on a number of international issues – the latest example being Syria where both countries have, by and large, a similar approach favouring non-intervention. He also expressed his views that together China and India can contribute significantly to global

peace and security, a view shared by Maj Gen Huang Baifu who also said that China and India, two emerging economies in Asia, can help each other in meeting common challenges for peace and prosperity of both the countries.

With the once-a-decade leadership change in China now generating lots of curiosity in India as elsewhere, the audiences were treated to a lively Chinese perspective on the future trajectory of China through 2020. China has a vision to double its GDP and the people's income by 2020 while continuing with its policy of 'peaceful development'. The challenge however lies in striking the right balance between the socialist and the scientific development. It also envisions more democratic rights for the people, allowing them a greater say in decision making. The new leader knows what the people think and what their aspirations are: better living conditions for the average Chinese, better health, education and housing facilities etc. The leader is pragmatic and people have faith in him. Corruption is a major issue in China and the leaders need to lead by example. The visiting scholars through their presentations and subsequent interactions with VIF

scholars also underscored China's core national interests underlying its foreign policies in the region and beyond.

The interaction also witnessed several contentious issues between the two countries being thrown up for discussion. The vexed border issue between China and India, South China disputes, the US' re-balancing strategy in Asia, Af-Pak situation etc. were among the several issues which figured prominently during the discussion. While speakers on the VIF panel underscored the need for early delineation of the land boundary, the CIISS delegation held that frequent border stand-offs between the two countries were more of media creations in India. The Chinese urged the Indians to have patience in resolving the border dispute. Allaying Chinese concerns vis-à-vis the US' re-balancing strategy in Asia, Mr. Doval stressed that India's thrust on 'Look East Policy' predates the re-balancing strategy and is driven more by economic imperatives than strategic imperatives.

The Indian contingent of scholars and speakers comprised a much broader spectrum and included, among others, Mr. VK Kapoor, former Lieutenant Governor,

Delhi, Ambassador P P Shukla
Joint Director VIF, Ambassador T.
C. A. Rangachari, General (retd)
VN Sharma and General (retd) NC
Vij, both former Chiefs of the
Indian Army, Lieutenant General
(retd) Ravi Sawhney, former
DGMI, and Major General (retd)

Dhruv C Katoch, Director Centre
for Land and Warfare Studies, a
Delhi-based think tank.

Report prepared by Sanjay Kumar

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