

perspective

“It is at Bombay that the smell of All Asia boards the ship miles off shore — Rudyard Kipling

Lack of political will dogs the force

In his address to the recent conclave of state Directors-General of Police, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said that the government will appoint a task force chaired by the National Security Advisor to come out with a road map for tackling terrorism within 100 days. He has also proposed setting up of a standing committee of five DGPs - on a rotation basis - to advise the central government on policing and related legal issues and assured that more senior police officials will be inducted in the Union home ministry. No one will dispute the need for a holistic strategy and greater coordination between the police forces of different states at a time when the country is confronted with multi-dimensional threats from home-grown and cross-border terrorists, insurgents and Left extremist groups. However, how efficacious these belated measures will be at a time when the present government's tenure is ending?

The Prime Minister has also asked the top brass of India's police forces to avoid stereotypes that might wittingly, or unwittingly, enlarge the fault lines in society. The police are the most visible symbol of the state. In a pluralistic democracy like India, it must project an image of fairness and impartiality. However, this is easier said than done, and this rhetoric is no substitute for real policy. After India's Independence, the Indian police was supposed to shed its colonial mindset. Their inability to change has shaken the people's faith in them as guardians of law and order. Of late an impression is gaining ground that the law enforcement agencies are increasingly becoming a tool of politicians. BJP leader LK Advani may have a political axe to grind when he accuses the Congress-led governments at the Centre and in Maharashtra of using investigations into the Malegaon blasts to achieve a political objective. But by officially, or unofficially, leaking sensational information during the process of investigation, the investigating agencies have done nothing to further their objective of tracking down the terrorists and prosecuting them.

It is unfortunate that in many cases, the police have come to consider human rights and legislative norms as an occupational hazard. The politicians who control the police believe that the laws and standards that demand accountability and transparency in police work are impossible to meet. The politicians, therefore, oppose any attempt to address these concerns. In September, 2006, the Supreme Court had directed the central and state governments to set up procedures and draft laws to free the police from political control. This was to be done by December, 2006. Yet, many state governments have refused to comply. Some have asked for an extension of time, while others have questioned the need for the required police reforms. This clearly shows the reluctance of our political class to free the police from their control. Until this is done, the perception about the impartiality and unfairness of the police force cannot be dispelled.

Marathi cuisine just not vada-pav

Shiv Sena executive president Uddhav Thackeray has promised that his party's latest enterprise, 'Shiv Vada-pav', will soon become a global phenomenon. In its initial days too, the Sena had exhorted its cadres and sympathisers to become batata-vada-pav vendors. Those were the early days of the Sena. Marathi youth were not getting any work anywhere. So the Sena leadership had a brainstorming session and came out with the idea of the vada-pav business. Its capital and manpower requirements were low, but the demand quite high. There was a sudden mushrooming of Shiv Sena-sponsored vada-pav vendors across Mumbai. It's not known how many of those early entrepreneurs graduated to something better, how many continue in the business with sufficient success, and how many threw in the towel within a few weeks. Much water has flown under the bridge since.

The Sena has become a significant political force. It has formed a government in Maharashtra for one term in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party. But now, in the 21st century, the next-generation leadership of the Shiv Sena has again been enamoured by the vada-pav idea. This time, the scale is bigger. 'Shiv vada-pav' will be a brand. It will undergo regular tests to guarantee the norms set for hygiene, preparation methods, quality of oil and consistency in taste. But why the fascination for vada-pav? Can't the Marathi youth, as the Sena sees them, attempt something more ambitious? It is said that low aim, not failure, is a crime. Why is the Sena, led by a computer-savvy Uddhav, so diffident, unsure of itself? Why does the Sena not have the confidence that the Marathi *manos* can handle greater challenges?

The Sena has to grow out of this vada-pav fixation. Across India, most hotels, including those in Maharashtra, offer South Indian cuisine, Punjabi dishes and Bengali sweets. How many offer Maharashtra food? And it is certainly not because Maharashtra does not have some great dishes. *Puranpoli* and *shrikhand* can be a match for any sweet dish from around the world. Then there's *thalepeeth*, *sabudana-vada*, *chakali*, *kothimbir-vadi* and *missal*. Konkani *kokum-sarbat* and *Khandeshi bharit* add to the regional flavour, with *kharvas-vadi* as the crowning dessert. The Sena can surely diversify and include other delicacies to spread outside the state!

Mumbai in a mirage?

Marathis won't simply touch certain jobs, yet Senas make them feel inadequate

When Calcutta's decline began in the 60s, a Bengali visitor to Bombay saw a reflection of his favourite city in the flourishing western metropolis. Bombay's cosmopolitanism, pleasant middle class localities, safe streets, polite taxi-drivers, vibrant nightlife were all reminiscent of what Calcutta had lost.

Kipling's city of the dreadful night was then on its way to become Rajiv Gandhi's dying city with its violent political temper, deteriorating civic amenities and a sense of foreboding. It wasn't safe for anyone, especially a young man, to venture into an unknown area lest he be mistaken for a police agent or the member of a rival party. The days were gone when a family could indulge in the city's favourite pastime of seeing night shows and walking home through somnolent neighbourhoods without fear.

Instead, what was common was to see areas being cordoned off by the CRPF (with slogans on walls describing it as an occupation force) while a search operation was on for suspected Naxalites. Whether day or night, the sound of explosions reverberated through the various localities as political opponents fought each other with home-made bombs and pipe-guns. As a *Statesman* editorial noted on Christmas day: *Peace on earth, goodwill to men. Crash! Bang!*

What the description of the CRPF showed was that Calcutta and West Bengal regarded themselves - or were made by their political bosses to see themselves - as entities distinct from the rest of India. The state's faltering economy was ascribed to the Centre's step-motherly attitude, evident in the equalisation of freights which was said to have robbed the region of its locational advantage in the matter of coal deposits and industrial base. The intention was suspected to be to boost industrial development in the western region.

Yet, Calcutta's decline as a result of the flight of capital and the departure of the brighter among the students, mainly to Delhi, did not lead to the rise of a parochial force. Whatever parochialism was displayed was a patent political ploy. There was no resentment against the out-



AMULYA GANGULI

sider. The city, of course, had long been a magnet for the job-seekers of virtually the entire eastern region, especially from Bihar, eastern UP and Orissa.

The Biharis dominated the lower end of the employment market as in the jute industries, for instance. The entire community of coolies in Howrah and Sealdah stations were Biharis. As were the tram drivers and conductors and peons in mercantile offices. It was only the State bus drivers and conductors who were Bengalis since the public sector corporation was set up by BC Roy with the express purpose of providing jobs to the East Bengal refugees.

One reason for the ubiquitous presence of migrants was that the locals were reluctant to take up jobs involving hard labour. It was the Biharis reared on *sattu* who came to Calcutta in search of these jobs while the fish-and-rice-eating Bengalis virtually monopolised the profession of clerks. But the dominance of outsiders elsewhere was not resented. Nor was the fact that certain localities in Calcutta were virtually out of bounds for the natives. Burrabazar, for instance, was for Marwaris while the Park Street-Eliot Road area was known for its Anglo-Indian residents. Incidentally, it was the Anglo-Indian women who bagged most of the stenographers' and telephone operators' jobs. And Park Circus was known as a Muslim area.

If there was any reason for a parochial outfit like Amra Bangali to take root, it was during this period of decline and gradual ousting of Bengali residents from the generally affluent localities like Alipore and Ballygunge by the Marwaris and Punjabis. The argument that it was the Left orientation of the Bengalis which did not allow chauvinism to flourish may not be valid given the strong undercurrent of Hindu communalism which is noticeable

in the middle class. But what may have helped the Bengalis to weather this (still continuing) phase of social and political life is their innate sense of superiority. The Bengalis simply refused to concede that those who had begun to dominate the city's social and economic life were a more accomplished breed.

In Maharashtra, it is the opposite. The entire four-decade-long sub-nationalism of the Senas is built on a feeling of inadequacy among the Marathis. Or a cynical exploitation of this attitude by self-serving leaders. The agitation for a united Maharashtra in the Sixties, for instance, was fuelled by the feeling that the commercial life of the then united state of Bombay was controlled by the Gujaratis, known for their entrepreneurial skills. It is worth noting that when the Marathi chauvinists, among whom was Bal Thackeray's father, Sitaram Keshav Thackeray, were bent on dividing the *mahadwibhaskar* rajya or the great bilingual state of Bombay into Maharashtra and Gujarat, the chief ministers of West Bengal and Bihar, BC Roy and Srikrishna Sinha, were toying with the idea of uniting their states.

After the departure of the Gujaratis, the Shiv Sena turned to the "Madrasis", as the south Indians were called, because of their successful idli-dosa joints and felicity with typing and shorthand, which made them much sought after as office secretaries all over India. Again, the sense of inferiority complex was at work. It is the same now when the Biharis are being targeted because of their willingness and capacity to work for long hours as taxi-drivers and vegetable vendors.

Just as a Bengali wouldn't be caught dead in the uniform of a Howrah station coolie, these are some of the jobs which the Marathis will not touch. Unfortunately, they have allowed themselves to be manipulated by narrow-minded politicians to adopt postures which does discredit to them and their state with its proud history of stalwarts with broad national vision like Tilak, Gokhale, MG Ranade, Jotiba Phule, Pandita Ramabai and others in the past, and Vijay Tendulkar and Sachin Tendulkar in recent times.

(The writer is a senior journalist and commentator)

BLOG POST

Far more lows than highs

It is not a great time to be an England cricket fan at present. In fact, going back to the 5-0 Ashes mauling by Australia the winter before last, it is fair to say there have been far more lows than highs. Though, now the fortunes have nosedived yet further. That debacle of a Stanford Super Series in the West Indies proved how tacky it is when players represent their country for the lure of lucre rather than the pride of wearing the national jersey.

That embarrassing episode has swiftly



been followed by mauling after mauling in the one-day international series in India. The hosts have already wrapped up the seven-match series with three games to go. Nothing to play for? Don't bet on it. England would say (Andrew Flintoff has) that they are playing for pride. A counterpoint would be to argue they are playing to avoid total and utter humiliation.

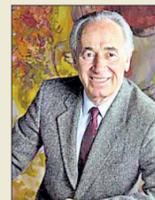
There is no pattern to the play or team selection. One moment Matt Prior is chosen to open the batting, the next he finds himself down at eight, the same could be said of Ravi Bopara. Defeat follows defeat and the knee-jerk reaction is to throw all the pieces up in the air and hope at some stage they fall down in the right order.

http://timesonline.typepad.com/line_and_length

BLOG SURF

Peres 'lying' about Obama?

I don't know whether there are many foreign eminences who are trying to trap Barack Obama into their own positions. But there is certainly one, and he is Shimon Peres, the insatiably vain president of Israel. Peres has been telling people that in conversation with Obama on his summer visit to Israel,



the president-elect confided to him that the 2002 Saudi peace plan had "impressed" him greatly. Peres has, however, denied that Obama whispered to him further that he thought

Israel would be nuts to reject it. Who can tell what, if anything, Peres says is ever the truth? The fact is that Peres is a liar, actually a mythomaniac. I was told this many many years ago by Golda Meir, who was honest and, if anything, honest to a fault. In any case, duplicity and sanctimony are seen as Peres' essence by the Israeli population which is why he was never elected prime minister. He also never served in the armed forces.

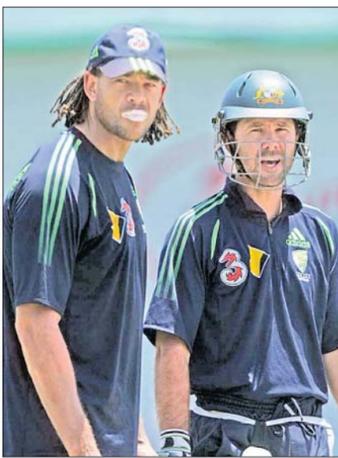
http://blogs.tn.com/tn/blogs/the_spine

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Probes should reveal the terror mindset

WHETHER IT is the Malegaon blasts or the scores of other explosions killing innocent people; the probe should unravel the motives. It is the mindset, the driving force, which prompts them to commit these acts. It has to be exposed. It could be the hurt religious sentiments after Babri Masjid demolition; revenge for Gujarat riots; frustration over the delay in punishing convicted terrorists. The mental aberrations should be treated with mass awareness campaigns. We should set clear social goals and set to achieve them by involving sensible elements from all communities.

P K K Menon, Pune



Yellow card for cricket's 'gentlemen' players

The idea of introducing yellow card in cricket shows that the era of the gentleman's game is over. A series of incidents worldwide is responsible for this. The pressure to win a game at any cost has produced a lot of friction between players and has destroyed what was once known as 'sportsman's spirit'.

Yellow cards will certainly reduce the frequent chaos on the field, but will it bring back the glory? The players alone are not responsible. Commentators have increased our hunger for excitement rather than the game. We have lost patience. We want everything instantly.

Deepanjan Paul, Pune

OFFBEAT

Gulf Indians all too happy with skidding rupee

BY GOPAL SUTAR

The Indian currency has crossed the 50 mark against a US dollar yet again sending alarming signals in Indian markets, especially to those dependent on the greenback fluctuations. However, a large section of Indian Diaspora in the Gulf is not complaining.

Hardly a year ago the Indian rupee (INR) was below 40 mark against the US dollar and the current price is 20 percent higher in favor of dollar in just one year. With low returns on remittance and high inflation rate in India, last year was bad for millions of non-resident Indians (NRIs) especially for those based in the Gulf as they remit money regularly to their families.

The Gulf NRIs had to endure high inflation in the Gulf and poor conversion rates for their currency made matters worse. Some even wondered whether it was worth staying on in the Gulf given the robust economic prospects that seemed to exist back home.

However things have now changed completely. It is a paradox that even as world economic goes through one

of its worst slow-downs, for Indian community in the Gulf, it is life as usual, in fact a shade better.

"I now get more money in Indian currency when I send. The inflation in India has slowed, things are said to be cheaper than what they used to be. This means my family can buy more goods and save better", says a Riyadh based NRI.

"Even if the inflation on the ground remains little more than government figures which show sharp decline, the remarkable fall of Indian rupee has made our life a little easier", adds another. A year ago "experts" were predicting the rupee to register a high of 35 against the dollar but contrary to that it somersaulted and collapsed to 50.

"I converted most of my dollar savings to Indian rupees to hedge my imagined losses. But it turned out to be a wrong move, and I wonder whether I should believe these experts at all", says an employee bitterly. He works for a large petrochemical firm in Riyadh but does not want his name to be quoted.

Indian rupee hit a record low of 50.60 per dollar on November 20 and opened near its record low on Novem-

ber 21. Traders said its fall was stopped by aggressive dollar sales by some state-run banks reportedly at the behest of India's central bank. This means rupee could go further down as the situation is unlikely to improve in short term. Some "experts" are forecasting rupee to touch the 55 mark in near term. Sometime back, Indian Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram had announced that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) would do the needful to arrest the depreciating trend.

The bank did intervene over the last two months but that has not been able to arrest the slide so far. It is also not clear till what level the RBI would keep intervening though it may not admit to having any such target figure. The ongoing volatility has left some investors at cross roads. At what level they should convert their dollar denominated investments into INR remains a key issue.

There can be no clear insight as experts have been going wrong time and again with their predictions and analysis. The investors need to make their own call. As in case of equities it seems difficult to predict things right in the currency market.

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