

Contemporary media industry

Nauguration of 60-crore National Media Centre in New Delhi was also an occasion for the Union Government to come out with a big mix of ideas and perceptions about the media industry in the country as it will be taking shape in an age of advanced information technology. The stage belonged to the Government and the Congress party, wherefrom the twin operatives subtly reflected on what they consider is media's over-reach. Their emphasis is on assessing whether it is consistent with the established norms of investigative journalism. The tone and tenor of three main speakers, the Prime Minister, the Congress Chairperson and the Information Minister, though varying minimally in force of persuasion, left little doubt in the mind of their listeners that they were giving vent to their suppressed and subdued reaction to three-year long media battering of the Government on a number of scams. They raised some fundamental questions with the clear intention of insulating the Government against new trends in investigative journalism that, according to them, seemed to be sitting on judgment allowing them the liberty of indulging in campaigns of calumny or witch-hunting. There are genuine questions; for example, where is the dividing line between media trials and fair judicial trial or the issue of anonymity masquerading as privacy or the reconciling of the interests of the investors and the readers/viewers etc? These are theoretical questions and have surfaced owing to the unprecedented expansion of information technology and economic reformation.

There is dimensional change in information industry in our country. The Prime Minister has emphatically claimed that this change has happened because of economic reforms introduced during last two decades. Nobody would challenge that claim. The big change in the social and economic life of India is visible and need not be contested. But the consequences of economic reform should not necessarily mean downside of standard and patent ethical values that media in a democratic system is expected to maintain. Liberalization has opened space for vast private investment and new channels of information have stepped in. The investors in media industry have stakes and the finesse of relationship between the providers and the viewers/readers remains in place. It sometimes brings the media in a confrontational stance with the Government and the latter has only limited space for substantiating its position. Thus while the viewers enjoy the right to information, the Government would not want to be left starved of the same right. This is the justification that the speakers on the occasion put forth for opening the National Media Centre.

Perhaps it is the social media that has raked debate in public about the dimensions of its new role. The term freedom of press or the functions of the fourth estate also have assumed new meaning and new dimension in Indian democracy. The ethical aspect is not a subject of new debate and its frame remains what it is. But the fact is that people have become highly obsessed with urge for inquisitive and deeper enquiry into the system of governance. The citizen emerging more in the profile of a tax payer is also eager to know what rights the state provides him to make his life comfortable.

Lastly, while the media cannot have the freedom of indulging in calumny campaigns and witch hunting, the state cannot become intolerant to objective criticism. If a scam is being probed into, individual names will naturally come in. Enquiry is a process which is carried out in different ways and shapes. Ultimately, the tax payer has a right to know where his money has gone and to whose benefit. Is he the beneficiary? That is what he would like to be told.

The proposed National Media Centre is perhaps to function as a wing of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. As such, the Government will be provided space for disseminating information on its position on various issues facing the nation and also supplement it with full justification of its action. It can lock horn with the other in an open debate. We think that the Government has the right to information on its own and should exercise it whenever needed. The Government needs to look at media as facilitator and organizer of public opinion and not a policeman keeping close watch on each and every move it makes. People want cooperative and not confrontational attitude between the media and the state. We are confident that the proposed organization called National Media Centre will prove highly beneficial to promoting healthy aspects of social media in our country and that it will be handled by very capable persons of wide nationalistic vision.

Pen down strike

Employees have resorted to one-day pen down strike throughout the State which led to the paralyzing of business. They claim that the Government had made some promises when negotiations were conducted after the previous strike by the employees. But these promises have not been fulfilled. What is the reason that the Government is unwilling to implement those commitments? The leaders of the unions have referred to the unfulfilled commitments. A look at these shows that there can be the possibility of resolving the irritants and issues, and that the employees should not be pressed hard. Pen down strike causes difficulties for the public. We think that employees' units should have intensified their contacts with the concerned authorities before taking the decision of giving a call for strike. Many departments were exempted from strike because not doing so would have caused serious problems. Employees have many ways of expressing their dissatisfaction or complaints and resorting to strikes on the smallest of pretext is not advisable. While appealing to the employees for restraint, we strong emphasize on the Government that it should fulfill all the commitments made in previous negotiations. And if it has real and unavoidable difficulty in implementing parts of the negotiated commitments, it should come out for a frank debate on the issues to forestall calls for strike.

Government in denial mode

Kalyani Shankar

Even as the political parties are gearing up to an election mode, will the sliding economy and the dipping rupee become a major poll issue in the ensuing Assembly and the Lok Sabha polls? Isn't it time that the others learnt a lesson or two from US President Bill Clinton who rose to power on the 'economy stupid' slogan in 1992?

While the political parties may try to strategise on the communal / secular divide and caste politics, they are not paying adequate attention to the rising prices, inflation and slow economic growth which affects the common man. While the Congress hopes that that its welfare measures like the Food Security Bill, MNREGA and such other populist measures could be a game changer other regional parties also are searching for new populist schemes forgetting the real issues that touch the everyday life of the aam admi. All that people want today is good life and enough income to meet both ends meet.

Right now the Indian economy is facing a crisis even though Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asserted last week that there is no question of going back to 1991 situation when the country had to go with a begging bowl to the IMF.

Look at the depressing economic scenario. The economic growth was just five per cent last year, the lowest in the past decade while the industrial production shrunk. The inflation and food inflation have reached a ten per

cent mark. The manufacturing sector is not growing while the service sector and the industrial sector too have shrunk. Added to that is a huge fiscal deficit and current account deficit, which will increase further after the implementation of the Food Security Bill and other welfare measures. The foreign exchange reserves are just enough for the next seven months. The crisis has touched the financial sector and the stock markets. With the steep fall in the rupee and the expectations that the rupee may touch 75 to a dollar in the next few months things are not looking good for Singh. An Economic Times poll recently found that the gloom surrounding the Indian economy may deepen in the next three months with the rupee weakening further and inflation remaining high.

What led to this situation? Worsening current account flow and the insufficient flow of FDI despite the promises of the continuation of reforms are two main reasons for the crisis. Thirdly, overseas investors have pulled out about 3 billion dollars recently from the capital markets. Fourthly, rising import bill is yet another reason for the present crisis. In addition, the global economic scenario, too, is not good.

It is not as if the government has not done anything but it is not enough or timely. The RBI has come out with its own set of remedial measures but they are not effective. The government has put ten per cent import duty on gold and silver to contain inflation. But the smuggling of

gold has started already and most of the gold is coming from Dubai via Sri Lanka and Nepal. Chandrabarm is making bold attempts to reduce Government expenditure to fill up the gap by borrowing but there is doubt about meeting the targets.

The Congress is facing the flak, more so the economist prime minister. The opposition has got an issue to beat the UPA and the Congress with. The CPI-M, which blocked economic reforms in UPA-I, blames the Government for the high current account deficit. The CPI has slammed the Congress for its neo-liberal policies. The BJP chief Rajnath Singh has observed, "The Government is failing to take effective steps to revive, restart and recharge the economic situation in the country." The Janata Dal (U) has asked the centre to strengthen the infrastructure instead of concentrating on foreign investment.

The question is why did the government not see what was coming? There is clearly a lack of direction or economic vision that while inviting foreign capital, there is also the subsidy burden.

Secondly, the Government is in a denial mode but country should be told of the real crisis so that austerity measures could be adopted both at the Government level and the public. Did we not do that in 1991?

Thirdly, some schemes like the voluntary disclosure schemes and the issue of gold bond should be attempted to tide over the situation in the immediate future.

The black money stashed away in foreign banks should be brought back.

Fourthly, there is an imperative need to build investor confidence and restore the sagging image of the country abroad. India should not lose the hard won place on the high table.

Fifthly, a more productive economy could be the best way to deal with the fiscal and current account deficit, which are increasing in an alarming way.

Sixthly, Indian industrialists should not be allowed to invest abroad and instead be persuaded to put their money in India.

Above all, the political class cannot escape from taking responsibility. It is no use just blaming the government. If the Parliament had functioned these past four years, important legislation like the land acquisition bill could have been passed to improve economic growth. Political parties are vying with each other in coming up with populist schemes, which are not asset producing. There is no doubt that the poor should be taken care of but they should be helped to help themselves and not provide just free doles.

The falling rupee is a warning signal to wake up as every Indian has a responsibility to build up the country's economic wealth. India has moved up the ladder and it is the responsibility of everyone, politicians included to see that it goes up further. China has proved that economic muscle gives the real power for a global face. (IPA)

An historic press statement: analysis

K.N. Pandita

On August 10, a rare document, in the shape of press release on India-Pakistan relations, has come from the members of an India-based organization called India Strategic Community.

Forty-one high ranking distinguished civil and military officials, who had held top positions when in service, including Chief and Deputy Chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force, Secretaries to Government, Intelligence Bureau, RAW and Police bosses, Ambassadors, Foreign Secretaries, Strategic Experts and media czars have signed the press release. Many among them, by dint of high positions they held, have been privy to highly guarded and most sensitive secrets of the State. This gives weight and credibility to their pronouncements.

For two reasons, I call it an historic document. Firstly, it puts on record, albeit succinctly, the highly objective perceptions of some among India's top-most (retired) echelons of civil and military services on the subject of Indo-Pak relations. Secondly, it emphatically suggests Indian State's revised approach to Pakistan from unproductive appeasement to productive activation.

There is very little rather nothing to contest the fecundity of facts of history recorded in the document. And these leave virtually no space for deducing conflicting inferences.

But content-wise, the document is at best only a narrative and not a critique. It is something like rundown of consensual view on a particular happening in the sub-continent. Objective analysis, if and when attempted, will uncover hitherto hidden but eloquent dimensions of the saga of Indo-Pak bilateral relationship.

The question is should we look at the history of Indo-Pak relations only from a frozen mindset? Isn't there the need to understand the functional structure of the State of Pakistan, which compels it to behave with India as she does? To me, understanding the structure of the State of Pakistan is more important than reacting hurriedly to what stance she adopts towards us at

times odd and even.

The conflictingly tenuous domestic scenario of Pakistan is that it is a military state that has rendered civil society powerless in projecting its image. A civilian Government ---- elected or imposed---- has to go by the dictate of the Army. The Army clinches absolute authority on foreign affairs and Kashmir question.

The Army, therefore, enjoys maximum maneuverability of polarizing Pakistan's civil society and letting moderates sulk while patronizing belligerent chapters that have, after sustained motivation, now graduated to jihadist avatar. Consequently, religious injunctions become oxygen to its lungs. In the eyes of Pak Army, this works as a nightmare to the elected Government that is dreaming of reconciliation with India. At the same time, the jihadi force is a dependable strike force in case of hostilities with India turning into another open war.

Whenever Pakistan's civilian Government----elected or imposed----, tried to tiptoe onto Army's exclusive fiefdom, viz. foreign policy or Kashmir, the dragon stretched out its carnivorous fangs. Assassination of Zulfikar Bhutto and his daughter Benazir, and ignominious ouster and banishment of Mian Nawaz to Saudi Kingdom substantiate the point.

Insiders in Pakistan's Army establishment have said it often that resolving Kashmir issue is direct existential threat to Pak Army. Consequently it must scuttle all attempts of resolving the imbroglio. Keeping insurgency pot simmering is the option.

The role, which Mian Nawaz perceives for himself as popularly elected leader, is to function as a buffer between his country's resentful civil society and the over-imposing military establishment. More than anybody else, Mian Nawaz is fully conscious of the perils he is inviting, somewhat recklessly.

For refurbish his capability of playing the role of buffer, he envisions reduction of tension with India a bolstering factor. Therefore, his conciliatory tone before and after he was sworn in

as Prime Minister, exemplifies astute statesmanship. The emphasis is not on solidifying Indo-Pak friendship but on neutralizing obstructionist posturing of Pakistan Army and its affiliates vis-à-vis Pakistan civil society.

One may ask why India should become an instrument in the hands of Mian Nawaz who seeks consolidation of his position. The other way of asking this same question is why should our Prime Minister agree to meet with Mian Sahib on the sidelines of an international meet in NY? This is the crux of the press release under discussion.

In my opinion, the precise question is what good accrues to our country by Mian Nawaz successfully buffering between two contradicting entities in Pakistan's polity?

The answer is to be searched in the following narrative. Pakistan Army has been virtual ruler of that country ever since its birth. She waged three wars with us, besides the ongoing proxy war. Western powers led by the US and UK, and lately China, have been supportive of military regimes in Pakistan. India, on the basis of the principle she set for her foreign policy, declined to negotiate with military regimes, and insisted on talking only to elected civilian regimes, which, however, have been just rubber stamps. Why, despite winning battles on ground in wars with Pakistan, we have not been able to consolidate the hard won gains? The fanged dragon is intact. Not only that, our appeasement of the dragon by returning Haji Pir Pass in Uri Sector of Kashmir, and letting it off the hook in Shimla, proved disastrous.

We do not talk to Pakistani Army, and we will not talk to Mian Nawaz. What do we do then? Should we do something that will result in consolidating the position of Pak military organization or should we look for options that can have the potential of muzzling its mouth and tying its hands and feet? Is fuelling Baluch insurgency the right thing to do? India is a big responsible country. We are not petty so as to resort to gimmicks.

In its resolution, India Strategic

Community advises Government of India to "devise policies that impose cost on Pakistan for its export of terror to India." It can't be so simplistic. Most of the signatories to the resolution were in positions of big power when they were in service. Were they ever able to make a single concrete suggestion that would have vindicated their pontification? The resolution should have spelt the options. Not talking would mean deadlock, and deadlock is considered bad politics. Pakistan scores a point in that. We will be strengthening the hands of Pak Army organization and weakening the effort of the elected Government in that country. Actually what we should do is to adopt a diplomacy that dilutes and dissipates the dikat of Pakistan Army in terms of domestic policy of that country.

True, in recent past, and more particularly after Mian Nawaz assumed power, infiltration bids across LoC in Kashmir and incidents of firing on the border and attacks on our posts have seen a spurt. That is precisely how Pakistani military wants to scuttle the process of bilateral talks.

Don't assume that Mian Nawaz is not disturbed by the incidents of escalating tension on the border. He knows this gimmick is meant to destabilize him and his Government.

Because the US has revised perception of Pakistan's role in the region that is why there is a definite shift in US' earlier pro-Army stand. US has begun to realize that a democratic Pakistan would be more dependable a friend than Pakistan under the iron heels of a military man. Mian Nawaz wants to cash on it though, quite naturally, he cannot easily forget how sorely Clinton had treated him. Politicians have capacity of absorbing shocks.

Before I close this analysis, let me say that current regional and international political scenario, besides Pakistan's domestic disorder are such as make it immensely impracticable for General Kayani to hazard a military coup. That will mean implosion of this Islamic Republic, something like a new dimension of Arab Spring.

Temporary relief for America

Dr Bharat Jhunjhunwala

American economy is presently on the upswing. I have doubts whether this will be sustainable though. Reason is that present buoyancy is due to huge loans being taken by that country. The stimulus packages implemented by the US Government have put money in the hands of people. But this is not their own hard-earned money. This is a loan that the government has taken from the global investors. America is the largest and most open economy thus investors feel that it cannot go down under. But there is a limit upto which the US economy can sustain the debt. Sooner or later a tipping point will come and the US economy will again be engulfed in another crisis.

The debate in the US at present is about how much the Government may be allowed to borrow. Increased borrowing requires permission of the US Congress. Both major parties-Democrats and Republicans-had agreed last year to allow the Government to borrow more monies till an agreement could be reached. It was also provided that 20 percent across-the-board budget cut would come into effect if an agreement was not reached. This deadline expired on March 1st. As a result all US Government departments have been subject to reduction in budgets. There are fewer controllers on the airports and less support to the unemployed and the elderly.

This battle between the two parties assumes that the US economic crisis is only a short term affair. The country needs to tighten its belts till the crisis blows over. I think this needs reexamination. The crisis is deeper and requires more forthright efforts to reduce the standards of living of the American people.

The first argument in favour of the crisis being short term is that this is part of the business cycle. It is created by an imbalance between investment and consumption. That does not seem to be the case presently because investment and demand are both falling. Less investment is taking place in the US as American companies invest in manufacturing and service operations abroad rather than at home. Manufacturing has shifted mainly to China while BPO and KPO operations are shifting to India in a big way. Simultaneously there is less demand because wages of American citizens are under stress. Cheap goods and services imported from China and India are leading to low prices of these commodities in the US market. Accordingly the ability of US businesses to pay wages higher than those prevailing in China or India is impaired. President Barak Obama's call to 'bring those jobs back home' is indicative of the mood of Americans.

In few years the situation may change dramatically with new inventions coming from India or other countries. The ability of the US economy to pull out of the present crisis on the strength of new inventions will be accordingly less.

Second argument in favour of the crisis being of a short duration is invention of new technologies. Truly most commercial inventions in the last century have taken place in America. These include manufacture of cars on assembly line, nuclear power, personal computer and the internet. The US has sold these inventions to other countries at a hefty premium and collected huge 'technology rents'. The IPR regime was included in the WTO at the behest of the US in order to protect this source of income. Argument is that the US is likely to come up with new inventions and the US economy will look upwards once again. This is precisely what happened in the late nineties. A slowdown in the US led to less imports from East Asia and plunged Thailand and others into a crisis. This, in turn, boomeranged on the US and pulled it down. But the dot com boom heralded by the internet changed the scene. Once again US-based IT companies like Microsoft and Cisco made huge profits and were able to pull the US economy forward. The NASDAQ was booming then. This experience is true but its replicability is not. Take the example of England. That country invented many of the commercial inventions in the seventeenth century-steam engine and power looms, for example. It was called 'workshop of the world'. But it did not sustain and the UK economy lost its global grandeur. The same can happen to the US at present time.

Indeed it cannot be said with certainty whether new technological inventions will lift the US economy or not. The US continues to hold the lead in new technologies like ipod and blackberry. However, indications are available that such may not happen. Knowledge Process Outsourcing-software, design, research and clinical trials-is shifting to India. Although the US corporations will still own the patents but the knowledge will certainly spread in the Indian economy. For example, the software written by an Indian engineer for a US corporation will be proprietary property of the latter. But the Indian engineer will get knowledge of writing and marketing software and will be later able to do the same outside the US umbrella. Indian companies have also started making substantial investments in research and are filing patents in larger numbers. We have acquired many frontline technologies like spaceship launch and supercomputer with our own efforts. Thus the lead of the US, though strong at the moment, is weakening. In few years the situation may change dramatically with new inventions coming from India or other countries. The ability of the US economy to pull out of the present crisis on the strength of new inventions will be accordingly less.

Last argument in favour of a short crisis is the flow of petrodollars. The US economy had faced a short crisis of similar nature in the eighties when the OPEC countries had hiked the price of oil as has happened now. But the US economy soon rebounded. The dollars paid by US oil companies to the oil-exporters came back into the US as petrodollar investments. I reckon this flow will be much less at present. The US dollar was the unquestioned leader in world currencies at that time and the US economy was strong. Presently the US economy is being challenged by China and others. Oil-exporters stand to take a huge hit if they invest their incomes in the US dollar. They will certainly diversify their portfolio which means that monies flowing into the US will be much less than previously.

The present American crisis is fundamentally different from the past on all three counts. Both investment and demand are falling presently; technological invention is being outsourced; and flow of petrodollars towards the US is weakening. The present flow of global money towards the US is due to the stimulus package implemented by the government. This cannot go on indefinitely. In this circumstance the present buoyancy is not likely to sustain and the US is likely to face a deeper crisis as soon as the level of debt becomes unsustainable. I think the solution will come from adjusting the standards of living of the American people downwards-closer to the standards of living of people in India and China.

Readers Write

Amarnath Yatra

Sir,

Barring some minor incidents, the annual Amarnath Yatra passed off peacefully this year. Though there was sharp decline almost 50 percent in number of yatis as compared to last year, almost 3.5 lakh devotees visited the sacred shrine located at a height of 14500 ft among the Himalayas. The credit for smooth yatra goes to Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board allied agencies, para medical staff and above all security forces who provided security cover right from Jammu upto the shrine.

Besides, it was also a matter of satisfaction that the number of pilgrims who died during course of pilgrimage came down from 93 to 13 this year. Despite so many precautions taken by the Government, there are several aspects that need to be taken into consideration. There are complaints from pilgrims about ponywallas and transporters. There were reports that ponywallas sometimes misbehaved with the yatis over rates. At times they were charged more than what has been notified by the concerned authorities.

Besides, the yatra did not get controversial as was the last year. Let's us hope, the yatra bridges the gap between people of different religious denominations in the coming times.

Yours etc.....

Ramesh Khajuria
Bakshi Nagar, Jammu

Defining love

Sir,

It is heartening to read that Presidency University Kolkata is all set to introduce a new course on 'love' from the next Semester. Love is a basic human emotion and it is in fact, the basis of all life. Our emotional need for love is just as great as our physical need for air, water and food. True and unconditional love for someone is not bound by the laws of human behaviour and it has the power to heal all wounds. It can not be defined though it is possible to experience love. It can not be bought or sold. It can face every obstacle and it is the life's greatest blessing of God. For one cannot love others unless one starts loving oneself. True love demands sacrificing everything without demanding anything in return. It cannot be forced or demanded and it takes time to bloom.

Love is the most popular theme of literature and all creative arts. If we take 'love' out of literature nothing is left. But love has different connotations for different people. For a philosopher, love is a passionate commitment between two people. We have love for parents, children, partner, country and so on all having different qualities. For a lover, love for this beloved is such a strong drive that deprived of it he feels all consumed and hollow from within. He can dig tunnels through mountains, write passionate poems or kill hundreds

to take revenge on a rival-all for the sake of his beloved.

But unfortunately, no sincere effort has been made to conduct research on this most sublime and basic emotion so far. Now the prescribed course on love will help the scholars conduct research on the sociological and psychological implications of this sublime emotion and offer them an opportunity to decipher its true/real meaning and differentiate between what love is and what love is not.

They will get a chance to conduct intensive research as to what was it that inspired Shah Jahan to build, The Taj Mahal, drove Romeo and Juliet as also Antony and Cleopatra to end their lives. We will also come to know whether orders of the Khap-Panchayats not to opt for love marriages, acid attacks, rapes and murders committed in the name of love are justified or not. Last but not the least, we will be able to analyse different types of love, strength of bond between them and resolve the enigma if there is any love more powerful and sublime than a mother's love for a child.

Yours etc....

Ashok Sharma
Lecturer in English
Govt. Hr. Sec. School,
Barolla (Udhampur)