

Ladakh air connectivity

Ladakh is a unique region in more than one sense. Physically being contiguous to the Eastern Province of China and Tibet, it occupies great strategic importance. Culturally, it stands out as a distinct ethnic and linguistic region with traditions of ancient Buddhist culture prominently in vogue among the populace. Politically, creation of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (Leh and Kargil) gives it slightly different status from other regions of the J&K State. But apart from all this, the more notable thing about the region is that it remains cut off from the rest of the country and the world for more than six months in a year owing to heavy snowfall that closes vehicular traffic on Srinagar - Leh road. At present, necessities of life have to be stored in Leh to meet the requirements of people during long winter months. Accessibility to the region remains highly restricted. The only link with Ladakh during winter months is by air.

The good news is that after a long wait and debate at various levels, the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation has taken some crucial decisions in regard to air connectivity with Leh. A high level meeting was held in which seniors of Civil Aviation Ministry, Airport Authority of India and State officials including the Chairman of LAHDC participated. Some very useful and much needed decisions have been taken. The existing airport in Leh will be expanded, a mini airport will be considered for Zaskar, air fare of flights to Ladakh will be regularized to bring relief to the people of Ladakh and State and Central Government employees posted in the region, frequency of flights between Delhi/Srinagar and Leh will be increased etc.

Though a belated decision, nevertheless it will go a long way in alleviating the connectivity problem of the people of Ladakh. At present there are very limited flights and in severe winter months, there is much rush of air passengers and the agents sell the tickets for Delhi at an exorbitant price, something that is outside the affordability of ordinary Ladakhis. The problem becomes very acute when there is the urgency of taking an ailing person out for treatment or carrying the dead body to or out of Leh. All these difficulties have been discussed and sorted out.

The decision taken will bring much needed relief to the people of Ladakh and will help in removing their isolation during winter. Apart from this, the question of road connectivity with Ladakh region is also under close consideration of New Delhi and Srinagar. It will be reminded that digging of two tunnels at Gagangir and Zoji La on Srinagar - Leh road is under execution. Once the two tunnels are brought to completion, the road connectivity to Ladakh is likely to remain open round the year. That will bring about a sea change in the life and economy of the entire region. We are also told that rail link between Srinagar and Leh is under contemplation at relevant quarters and if that project is given green signal, then Ladakh will become one of the choicest regions in the country for visitors, traders, scholars and administrators. Ladakh has been neglected for too long and the people despite raising their voice have not been delivered justice, as it should be. Streamlining air connectivity with Ladakh is not the end of the game rather it is the beginning of wholesome development of the region. Ladakh has emerged as strategically very significant ever since the Chinese have upgraded infrastructure on their side of the border. They are reported to have brought roads close to the border and have built airstrips to facilitate landing of airplanes close to our border. We cannot ignore these developments and shall have to respond to the moves of the Chinese strategists.

All that we have to say is that the decision now taken to streamline air connectivity is belated one. Nevertheless we welcome it and impress upon the authorities that these should not remain decisions on paper only. The crucial decisions need to be translated into practice. The real appreciation will flow only when these are implemented on the ground.

Atrocious traffic police

Traffic policemen have become brazen faced to the extent of demanding bribes from truck, mini bus and three-wheeler drivers on one or the other pretext. The case in point is the sordid story of auto rickshaw driver who was beaten by three traffic police officials at Rotary Chowk Naka behind the office of State Vigilance Organization the other day. Despite pleading that he was not carrying any passenger and, therefore, would not pay the "entry" money the three traffic police officials took the law in their hands and beat him mercilessly, created a row on the chowk and disrupted the flow of traffic. On the intervention of the crowd that gathered there, the seniors of traffic police intervened, took the victimized auto driver to hospital for treatment and ordered the attachment of errant policemen. The incident shows to what extent corruption is rampant among the traffic police functionaries. Is the attachment of errant officials just eyewash or not, who can say. Why the people did not lodge an FIR against the errant traffic policemen is the sad part of the story. However, we should appreciate the courage and resistance of the auto driver, who refused to pay bribe and get away unscathed.

Kargil War

By Col J P Singh, Retd

An unfriendly and treacherous neighbour forced a 4th war on peace loving India in 1999 which came to be known as 'Op Vijay'. It was a near repeat of 1947 and 1965 wars with raiders surreptitiously sent across the LoC. They intruded and occupied dominating heights in the Kargil Sector which had been vacated by the Indian troops during winters. On 3rd May 1999, a local shepherd reported this intrusion. A patrol led by Capt Saurabh Kalia, dispatched to verify this report, was captured on 5th May 1999. Their mutilated bodies were later returned after they were brutally tortured to death against all norms of Geneva Convention. This front page news shocked the nation. This otherwise a border skirmish turned into a full-fledged war due to Pak treachery. It necessitated large mobilisation of Indian Army from outside J&K. Indian Air Force also got involved in this operation in a big way. Having heard glory tales of Skardu, Gilgit and Chitral battles from forefathers, survivors of those wars, and being in HQ Northern Command during 'Op Vijay', it was but natural for me to take keen interest in following this conflict. What was later clear that Pakistani soldiers and Mujahids had violated the LoC in March - April 1999 with the objective of blocking the Srinagar - Leh road and cutting off Leh town from rest of the country thereby forcing India to mobilise its forces. By escalating this intrusion into a war, Pakistan could internationalise Kashmir issue and revive the dead militancy. It happened soon after Indian Premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee had travelled to Lahore by bus to promote bilateral ties aimed at resolving the simmering bilateral Kashmir issue. Pak intrusion in Kargil sector was a betrayal of trust. By crossing the LoC and occupying Kargil, Pak wrecked the bilateral peace process for which it got a stringent rap from international community including President Bill Clinton of US.

Kargil is a District town of J&K located at 205 Kms from Srinagar. It is 173 Kms from Pak controlled Skardu town which is a major logistics support base for Pak army. Like any other areas in Himalayas, its summer are moderate and short whereas winters are chilly and long. During winters temperature often drops down to - 50 degree C. National Highway NH 1D connects Srinagar to Leh. It cuts across Kargil. 180 Kms stretch along the Highway from Dras to Batalik which was infiltrated through and occupied by Pak intruders overlooked this arterial route. The posts on these ridges were between 16000 to 18000 ft which used to be held during

the summers and vacated during winters. The reason why Kargil was chosen was its vulnerability to pre-empt seizure being vacated. Hence Pak elite SSG and Seven Northern Light Infantry Battalions backed by Kashmiri insurgents and Afghan mercenaries held the Kargil heights. They were sure of cutting off Leh from Srinagar and altering the LoC. But two Divisions of Indian Army backed by 10,000 paramilitary forces, 250 Arty Guns and 3,600 civilian porters foiled their designs.

day light attacks on such posts are suicidal, all attacks and approaches for them were made in darkness thereby escalating the risk of freezing during slow moves and halts thereby adding to the casualties.

Army launched its final assaults in the last week of July as soon as Dras sector was cleared of Pak intruders. Fighting came to an end on 26 July 1999 and Army declared the war won. The day has since been marked as 'Kargil Vijay Divas'. 527 brave Officers and



Kargil Vijay Divas

Army's first priority was to recapture dominating posts closer to NH 1D. Hence Tololing and Tiger Hill were captured first. Their capture, tilted the combat in India's favour. As the operation progressed, Arty Guns were used in direct firing role for blasting the enemy bunkers. Bofor Guns, though disreputed by the associated scam, played a vital role despite constraints of space for their deployment. Yet many dominating posts could not be engaged by the Arty or the Air Force. They could only be dislodged by physical assaults. Therefore Army mounted direct frontal attacks on many posts as high as 18000 ft. As per military tactics, frontal attacks are better avoided. Army could have done the same by going behind, cutting off their lines of communication, blocking supply routes and virtually creating a siege. Such manoeuvres would have involved crossing the LoC as well as mounting air attacks on their soil. India avoided to undertake such maneuvers because it would have led to expansion of theatre of war and reduced international support for its cause. Since the

Men laid down their lives for the motherland. 1,363 were disabled / wounded. Grateful nation acknowledges their sacrifices. 8 civilian Porters of 'Tanda Tiger Force' were also martyred besides over 150 wounded in Pak shelling. They are yet to get due recognition although KP Singh was awarded 'Army Commander's Commendation Card' and a 'Letter of Appreciation' from His Excellency, Sh. Girish Saxena, the Governor, for his contribution in raising 6 Porter Coys. Pakistan casualties are estimated to be close to 700. 8 Pak soldiers captured during the war were repatriated on 13 August 1999.

Media played a remarkable role in telecasting the Kargil War live from the battle zone in a style reminiscent to the coverage of Gulf War by CNN. This conflict became first 'live war' in South Asia. Besides getting valuable diplomatic support for its restraint, it evoked tremendous nationalism among young boys and girls due to remarkable impact of mass media on the public psyche. Importance of Kargil victory will go unjustified if the heroic deeds and sacrifices of thousands of Indian sol-

Secularism Vs Communalism

Upendra Prasad

Now it is clear that Narendra Modi is in the centre of the Congress' strategy for the next Lok Sabha elections. Congress spokespersons and other leaders are reacting against the remarks of Gujarat CM in a manner, which suggests that by demolishing Modi, they can win the elections. The latest in the series of 'Demolish Modi Campaign' was a tweet by Congress spokesperson Shakeel Ahmad, in which he claimed that Indian Mujahideen was formed only after the Gujarat riot of 2002. Through his tweet, Ahmad wanted to blame Modi for the formation of Indian Mujahideen and the terror attacks unleashed by this outfit all over the country. But the tweet backfired and Shakeel Ahmad was not only condemned by BJP and RSS, but many Muslim leaders and intellectuals also took strong exception to his tweet.

BJP and RSS painted Shakeel Ahmad as the spokesman and representative of Indian Mujahideen. Ahmad has represented Madhubani Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar in the past. Of late, many so-called IM activists have been arrested from Madhubani district. A BJP spokesperson even dubbed Shakeel Ahmad to be the head of Madhubani module of the terrorist organisation.

Some Muslim leaders and intellectuals have condemned Ahmad because of reasons of their own. They saw in the misguided tweet the acceptance of the existence of militancy among the Muslim youth. What Shakeel's comment indicated was the unwitting acceptance of the misleading claim by the RSS and BJP that Muslims are terrorists and responsible for serial bomb blasts all over the country. It is for this reason that the Muslim leaders have taken a strong exception to the comment by the Congress spokesman that covertly suggested that terrorism has arrived in India via its Muslims. Many among these leaders, in fact, do not even accept the existence of any organisation named Indian Mujahideen.

Even Congress did not seem to be convinced with the tweet. The spokesman had to take the help of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to save his skin, and he clarified that his comment was not based upon any inside information on Indian Mujahideen, but, rather, it came from analyzing the chargesheet filed by NIA after the Bodhgaya blasts. No one knows of any such chargesheet, and, it's obvious that Ahmad was merely doing some face-saving exercise by resorting to an imagined NIA report. A research on Indian Mujahideen reveals that this

This strategy of Congress is fraught with danger. First of all, Narendra Modi is a great orator. He has a skill to create mass hysteria by his speeches. Congress does not have a leader, who can match that skill of Modi, as the latter knows how to keep his audience thrilled by his words power.

organisation was formed in 2001 after the banning of Students Islamic Movement in India (SIMI). Some say that it is not a new organisation at all, but only SIMI has been renamed as IM. Some say that militant elements from SIMI recombined to form the IM. Its formation took place well before the Gujarat riots of 2002. That is why the reason for its formation as given by the Congress spokesman Shakeel Ahmad was contrary to the facts.

Notwithstanding the embarrassment caused by Shakeel Ahmad's misfired barb against Narendra Modi, Congress is poised to make the Gujarat CM as its main poll plank in the next Lok Sabha elections. This strategy is based on the belief that Modi is a strong polarising factor and not only all Muslims, but also all non-Muslim secularists would like to vote for the party, which is most suited to prevent Modi from coming into power. Congress strategists think that their party is the only one, which can block the BJP coming into power and that is why all such forces would rally behind it in the next Lok Sabha elections. This is the reason, why Congress wants to keep Narendra Modi as the talking point in Indian politics. It is making all efforts to create and sustain the negative hype on Narendra Modi.

This strategy of Congress is fraught with danger. First of all, Narendra Modi is a great orator. He has a skill to create mass hysteria by his speeches. Congress does not have a leader, who can match that skill of Modi, as the latter knows how to keep his audience thrilled by his words power. Making Modi the election issue means providing him more opportunity to hit back and his partymen would be seen defending him throughout the campaign.

As far as Muslim voters are concerned, they are already against BJP and they have already been voting for those who could defeat BJP candidates. Their first choice in Uttar Pradesh is Mulayam. In Bihar, they predominantly vote for RJD. In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee has emerged as their first choice. If Congress leaders think that they can change the preference of Muslim votes in these three states and garner a chunk of them, it is wrong. Congress is practically nonexistent in Bihar. It could win only four Vidhan Sabha seats in the last Assembly Elections of Bihar. In Uttar Pradesh, it is placed at the fourth position. In the last Lok Sabha elections, it did perform better, but in the last Assembly elections it was against pushed to the fourth place and, since then, the whole rank and file of UP Congress has been demoralised there. In West Bengal, Congress is placed third in political strength. In case of polarisation of votes, the third and fourth parties are loser, not gainer. Even through its efforts, Congress manage to polarize Muslim votes against Modi and BJP, it cannot do that in its favor at least in the three states of UP, Bihar and West Bengal, which accounts for 162 seats in the Lok Sabha. Muslim polarisation will benefit only other anti-BJP parties.

So far as non-Muslim secular votes are concerned, they have their own existing choices. The leftists have their own organisations and Ambedkarites have their own. They are not going to vote for Congress, even though they are hard core Modi-baiters. The secularist supporters of Lalu, Mulayam, Nitish, Mayawati and Ramvilas Paswan will vote for the parties of their own leaders. The secularism of these casteist leaders has its own variety, where the caste and communal combination is used to win the elections. If that combination does not work, their supporters cease to be secular and follow their caste lines.

So, it will be wise for Congress not to be too obsessed with Narendra Modi. By such strategy, Congress is only making Modi stronger within the BJP and giving him a chance to use the same tactics at the national level, which he had used in Gujarat to win many elections amid the strongest possible resistance. (IPA)

Socialist royalty

On a rainy morning in Delhi last week I decided to go and have a coffee in the Taj Hotel. The coffee shop, Machaan, is one of my favorites and I have known it well from when it first opened in the late seventies. This morning as I sipped my mug of hot, freshly brewed coffee I found myself puzzling over the small army of security personnel and lowly officials I had encountered in the lobby on the way in. A few discreet inquiries was all it took to discover that they were part of the entourage that a regional political leader had brought with him from one of our southern states. This information put me in a reflective sort of mood and I found myself wondering if they had all flown to Delhi? Even if they came by train who would have paid for their tickets? And, the political leader himself, who would have paid for him and his family to stay in exactly the sort of five star hospitality that our political leaders love to rant against in public?

These days our 'socialist' political leaders have become so open about their hypocritical ways that it is almost impossible to go to the Taj hotel in Delhi and not encounter those whose hearts bleed so publicly for the poor'. That rainy morning I spotted a group of young Congress ministers eating in the Wasabi. Later while wandering about the lobby I ran into a close associate of the very socialist chief minister of Bihar and discovered that a meeting of the board of the proposed new Nalanda University was being held in one of the hotel's meeting rooms. Why not in the humbler rooms of Bihar Bhawan?

Do not get me wrong. I am not a

leftist of any kind. I want in my lifetime to see an India in which more and more people can afford to live well so it pleases me that even 'socialist' chief ministers do not hesitate these days to patronize five star hotels. What bothers me is their hypocrisy. Why do they not admit openly that they quite like five star hotels instead of raving against 'five star culture' in their public speeches? The reason why I am writing about the fraudulence of our political leaders this week is because while I was sipping my coffee reflectively that morning in the Taj coffee shop I had an epiphany. I suddenly realized that hypocrisy (fraudulence?) has been the leitmotif of the Sonia-Manmohan

ON THE SPOT TAVLEEN SINGH

Government in the past nine years.

It has come to so define even those who are close to this Government, like the venerable Amartya Sen, that they no longer try to hide their hypocrisy in public. So last week we heard this Nobel prize winning economist announce that 'as an Indian citizen' he was uncomfortable with Narendra Modi becoming prime minister because he did not think his secular credentials were up to scratch. This prompted me to ask on Twitter if Dr. Sen ever had any problems with Rajiv Gandhi for exactly the same reasons and I can happily report that I was inundated with tweets that mostly shared my concern.

Had Dr. Sen's hypocrisy been limited to his political opinions he would have done less harm. Unfortunately, he and his comrade,

Jean Dreze, have proffered to the Sonia-Manmohan Government some pretty hypocritical economic advice and it has been acted upon doing serious damage to the Indian economy. Whenever the advice of these two Marxist economists has been questioned or criticized they have responded by saying that it is only when it comes to schemes that help the poor that people (like your columnist) start complaining. The truth is that the reason why expensive, centralized welfare schemes are criticized by people like me is because they do not work. The reason why we know that they do not work is because they were tried in the socialist seventies and eighties

and failed abysmally. Dr. Sen and Comrade Dreze bring nothing new to the table. They have simply copied the vast, unwieldy schemes of Indra Gandhi's socialist days and pretended that they are new ideas.

It is our bad luck that Sonia Gandhi has surrounded herself with people of their ilk who have in the name of the poor come up with ideas that have done almost nothing to help the poor. What saddens me particularly is that if the thousands of crore rupees we have spent on MNREGA had been spent on improving schools, hospitals and roads in the villages we would have done a real service to those who live in rural India. A horrible tragedy like the one that just occurred in Chhapra in which children died from eating a midday meal in a government school would

not have been possible if the school had minimum standards of hygiene or education. It is improving those standards that have to be India's priority not handing out cheap food grain and dole. If Dr. Sen does not know this then perhaps it is time that he took a short motoring trip through rural India. Actually, he need not even go that far. In the slums of Mumbai he could discover that free kitchens run by reliable NGO's like Akshay Patra can do more than expensive Government schemes to reduce malnutrition in children.

Meanwhile, let me take you back to that rainy morning in Delhi last week when I found myself in reflective mood in the coffee shop of the Taj Mahal hotel. The regional leader whose entourage filled the lobby descended from his suite, accompanied by his bejeweled wife and young son, while I was still drinking my coffee. His servitors leapt to attention and there was a huge hulla-balloo as they rushed about trying to make themselves visible to the leader, trying to be of service in any way possible. Watching quietly from my window table in the coffee shop I found myself wondering if there could have been more fuss over a Maharajah, in times of yore when the princes were the main Indian clientele of the original Taj Hotel in Mumbai. I doubt it very much. Our socialist maharajahs live in much grander style than rulers have lived in Delhi since a Moghul Emperor ruled from the Red Fort, or at least since the times when a Viceroy lived in that sandstone palace on Raisina Hill. Nehruvian socialism has done well by our hypocritical ruling elite. Not so well by democracy.

Monitor Mid-day Meal Scheme

Sir,

The tragic incident of the death of 23 children in Bihar has sent shockwaves across the country. Forensic examination of the killer meal served to the children on that fateful day has found that it was contaminated by a pesticide. More shocking is the fact that the school Headmistress, who has been absconding, did not bother to taste the food herself or have it tasted by the teachers before serving it to the innocent children.

Mid-day Meal scheme is an important welfare scheme covering about 12 crore Indian children in 12 lakh Primary and Upper Primary school everyday. Such a vast scheme certainly calls for strong commitment of implementation by officials and bureaucrats and parents need to be trained to monitor the quality and infrastructure for supply cum storage as also the nutritional standard of food grains. Effective social monitoring by parents is the soul of the programme and they must be empowered to demand accountability from the schools and officers responsible for the implementation of the scheme. Safety of food being served to the students is of paramount importance and none can understand this better than the mothers of the children who have to eat it. So Mother's Groups should be formed on the local basis to oversee the delivery and cooking of food grains. Food grain need to be safely stored to make them free from pest infestation. Cooking costs and carriage charges

need to be enhanced in view of the rise of price of eatables and fuels. The wages of cooks should also be enhanced. It must be ensured that the food is stored and cooked in hygienic places and water supplied is pure and uncontaminated. Regular inspection by the officers be conducted and any lapse on their part be viewed seriously. This scheme has been launched with the objective of improving nutritional status of children studying in Primary and Upper Primary classes and encouraging the poor kids and drop outs to attend school and improve enrolment in such schools. There have been complaints of sub standard and half cooked food being served to the students. As such social auditing of the scheme is must to implement the scheme, achieve the desired objectives and prevent such unfortunate incidents in future.

Fortunately, no such incident has taken place in J&K but we cannot afford to be complacent. We must learn lessons from the Bihar tragedy and adopt multi prolonged strategy to implement the scheme successfully and efficiently. Doctors and Food Inspectors should be asked to inspect samples of cooked food periodically to ensure quality of food being served to the poor children so that they may not become victims rather than beneficiaries of Mid day meals.

Yours etc....
Ashok Sharma
Flat No. 4/A Housing Colony, Udhampur

Readers Write

Bharat Ratna for Dhyhan Chand

Sir, The decision of the Sports Ministry to recommend hockey legend late Dhyhan Chand for prestigious Bharat Ratna is more than welcome.

The recommendation has been made keeping in view the contribution made by Dhyhan Chand in hockey.

If Bharat Ratna is conferred on three time Olympic gold medallist, who passed away in 1973, it will a great tribute to the legend. Dhyhan Chand who won three gold medals at the Olympic in 1928, 1932 and 1936 is considered as the greatest hockey player the world has ever produced. His achievements made India proud in the comity of Nations at a time when India was under the British Yoke, and there were no such facilities available to players as are now. Besides, Bharat Ratna will bring sports stream in limelight. It will give a new recognition and place to sports in the country.

The Sports sector has not developed much as it should have been by this time in the country. It may be expected that the selection committee may consider the legend for the highest civilian award-Bharat Ratna.

Yours etc....
Amit Kausal
Jammu