

Gateway to Central Asia

The painful cry of the people of Gilgit and Baltistan region, living under oppression of Pakistani rulers for past six decades is now ringing in political circles in the US. This is evident from the deliberations of a conference jointly organized by the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies; US India Political Action Committee and American Foreign Policy Council. BJP President Rajnath Singh, now on a four-day visit of the US and Senge Sering, president of the Institute of Gilgit Baltistan Studies, a Washington-based think tank, were among prominent speakers at the conference. The speakers focused on two vital themes, (a) violation of human rights of the people of the region, and (b) strategic importance of the region to regional and international security.

As regards massive violation of human rights of the people of Gilgit and Baltistan, one needs to recount the military rulers of Pakistan brazenly thrusting demographic change on the region. During his tenure as the Corps Commander of Northern Areas, General Musharraf engineered movement of large groups of Chitral, Swat, Kafiristan and adjoining areas to Gilgit with the purpose of reducing the traditional majority of local population. It also led to recurrent factional discord and disturbance thus paving the path for Pakistan military's massive presence and interference in civilian administration. On political plane, the status of Gilgit and Baltistan has always remained murky. The attempt of Islamabad to integrate former Northern Areas into the State of Pakistan was foiled through a court injunction, which declared the areas as part of the original State of Jammu and Kashmir. Administration of the area is in the hands of Islamabad-based bureaucracy, and on local plane, the Punjabis of civilian cadres head administrative units. The locals even if qualified are denied the opportunity. The entire area is discriminated against in respect to higher education, health services, civilian amenities, and development of infrastructure, tourism and social integration. Political persecution is rampant and the chances of local population enjoying political freedom, freedom of expression and movement are stonewalled. Brute force is unleashed if the people of the region stage public protest against suppression of their rights. Leaders of various political groups are languishing in the jails.

Of late, Pakistan has been pursuing a policy of encouraging massive Chinese presence in the area facilitated by the building of Karakorum Highway. China intends to reach the enormous mineral resources in Afghanistan especially its copper mines by establishing overland contact through Wakhan for which her massive presence in Gilgit and Baltistan is a precursor. Reports are that China will be investing billions of dollars in connectivity projects that allow her access not only to Afghanistan but to Central Asia also. Pakistan has already illegally ceded five thousand square kilometers of Aksaichin of the original state of Jammu and Kashmir to China. China's investment in the region is to connect Pakistani seaport of Gawadar on Makran coast with its eastern province of Xinjiang

In his speech Rajnath Singh has raised very important issue of India's right to access to Afghanistan and Central Asia through Kargil - Askardu route in Gilgit - Baltistan region. This was an important artery of the historic Silk Route and India had been conducting trade with Central Asian region through this connectivity for thousands of years. In real terms it is India's gateway to Central Asia. Pakistan illegally occupied Gilgit-Baltistan as a result of its incursion in 1947 and has not vacated ever since despite resolutions of the UN Security Council.

The US-led NATO troops will be withdrawing from Afghanistan. Stakeholders are contemplating a truce and an agreement of sorts that would ensure peace in the region and law and order in Afghanistan. India has justification to be a party to these negotiations because she has historical and factual interests in Afghanistan. She has invested billions of dollars in the development of infrastructure in Afghanistan. She has had historical links with that country and above all she has to have overland connectivity with Central Asia. The scenario that is developing in Gilgit-Baltistan region is going to usher in a drastic change in regional strategy. India cannot close her eyes to this change, which will put her at disadvantage.

It is good that various academic, intellectual and human rights organizations and personalities are raising the issue of regional security. International community needs to be sensitized to the issues of this crucial region and the activities of two countries namely China and Pakistan cannot be overlooked because these have wider implications on regional security, peace, law and order. The two countries seem to be engaged in re-interpreting the Great Game concept to suit their political, strategic and commercial interests at the cost of disrupting critical balance of power in the Asian Continent.

Boosting cross-LoC trade

Cross-LoC trade, considered a positive confidence building initiative had been taken way back in 2008 when Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh flagged off the first bus at Srinagar bound for Muzaffarabad across the Uri-Chakothi route. That occasion raised many hopes of improving bilateral relations. But subsequent history disproved it. A number of obstructions and difficulties arose and the traders began to lose interest. The number of items dwindled from 22 to 3 or 4. So did the number of trucks carrying the goods. No facilities were provided to the traders and thus the whole affair began to appear a farce.

But it appears that the Government of Nawaz Sharif is interested in reviving the trade relations. It has accorded permission to forty Indian traders to visit PoK and enter into mutual dialogue with their counterparts in Muzaffarabad, Kotli and Rawlakot. The meeting of the Joint Chamber of J&K and PoK is expected to discuss and suggest resolution of all obstructions in the flow of border trade.

We have always considered that facilitating interaction between the two sides through trade and commerce across the LoC as a strong confidence building initiative. The Government of India has allowed three delegations from PoK to visit Kashmir but it is for the first time that Pakistan has given permission to the Indian delegation to proceed to PoK. We hope that the two sides will be able to jointly move the two Governments to accord various facilities to the trading community. There have to be facilities like banking/telecommunication and single widow system as promised by Governments time to time, coordination between the agencies deployed at LoC point and traders have not to be harassed. More items have to be included into the list of traded articles and visa or transit permits have to be eased. Both sides have to ensure that cross LoC terrorists and other anti-social groups do not misuse trade.

The Day of Judgement

M.J. Akbar

Human nature, when in a good mood, takes pride in saving a fellow being from impending tragedy. A good case can now be made for saving a person — including one with an inhuman record — from continuing farce. It is time we organised a mass petition to end the presumed trial of Sajjan Kumar for inciting murder and mayhem during the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi 28 years ago. For nearly three decades he has escaped justice through one legal feint after another, abetted by authorities. This happened again last week. Why pretend? Send a simple message to the victims of 1984: Abandon hope, all ye who enter the Indian judicial maze.

As politics buzzes towards another general election; as conversation and opinion polls chase each other along an entertaining circumference; as reasons advance and propositions retreat; as issues climb on the graph of voter-impact, and reasons get dissected with a surgeon's scalpel, one gut cause for popular anger seems to have eluded the attention of pundits and their hangers on: justice.

The wide spectrum of justice can breed paradox. Take the tragedy of mid-day meal deaths in Bihar. The rage of the poor is obviously legitimate. The principal and cohorts who poisoned impoverished children with insecticide are not mere criminals driven by greed; they have, at some sub-conscious level, a pathological hatred for the dispossessed, as if the poor do not deserve more than a dustbin. But at least one consequence seems bizarre. Bihar's teachers have gone on strike after the

episode, arguing that serving meals is not part of their duties. They too claim to be victims of injustice.

Is there a rational connect between both grievances? Yes, collapse of government. The Supreme Court orders governments to provide meals in schools. The state government has neither the infrastructure, nor the will to create one. It makes no effort to match intention with ability. This is not a question of money. The cost of a

Corruption is another synonym for injustice, for it is robbery of people's resources. Corruption is not exchange of wealth between the rich; it is the people's money accumulating in limited pockets. The teachers in Bihar were not paying for meals from their salaries; they were siphoning off money collected from taxes. Those mobile companies who bought spectrum at deflated prices were also stealing from the national purse.

meal is only a small percentage of resources needed to finance administrations that have bloated across the land.

No state government can afford to accept this truth, for that would be political suicide in a democracy. So it does what it has learnt to do, encourage a practice built on compromise and theft. A meal scheme for children needs a professional process that can be held accountable. Instead, government throws some money at

teachers who are allowed to do what they want. There are cuts along the way as money travels from capital city to district headquarters, and then to the principal. Everyone is not as brutally dishonest as those in charge of the Chhapra school, or there would have been such calamities more frequently. But the system is wont to treat the poor as sub-human. The poor, they believe, eat dirt in their homes; why should they get any better in school?

A horrifying tragedy has exposed death by poisoning. There is a greater horror that has not hit the headlines: the slow poisoning of hundreds of thousands of children who are getting rotten food, just short of visible worms and insecticide. Slow death does not make news.

Injustice is not new in India. What is new, and long overdue, is demand for redress. Tribals have been marginalised for centuries, ever since they lost political control over their natural

habitat in the green belt of forests along the midriff of India. Feudal India had no time for them, except occasionally as security slaves. Colonial India had no time for anyone except compradors. But even democratic India was indifferent or exploitative. The tribal demand for justice is being heard through guns.

Others have not turned to violence — yet. The poor still have some faith in democracy, and express their anger in elections. But a ruling class tends to treat time as an endless resource. Within the folds of time is an ignition box, which must be defused or it will explode.

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Justice is neither expected nor offered in a dictatorship, which is why it becomes such an intense demand when a dictator falls. But justice is intrinsic to democracy. An ordinary crime is punished through law; political culpability meets its fate in elections. When justice is denied, it lingers in the mind; you can dull its edges, as in the Sajjan Kumar case, but it will haunt you from some corner of the national conscience. Every election is a judgement on justice. The verdict may not be perfect, but it works.

In the era of TV debate.....

Long many years ago, Television or TV debates were unheard of but there still were occasions when bitterest of the bitter foes did get to confront each other in full public view. On one such occasion, Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee had, irked by Jawaharlal Nehru's remark that Jan Sangh was an evil on India's political scene, retorted back “Mr Nehru, the problem with you is that you see an evil in everything except yourself”! And, imagine, what was the sequel to this ! No more rejoinders or refrains but a simple apology next day from Nehru with a humble confession that he should not have lost his temper and made that remark which had provoked Mookerjee.

We have come a long way since then. Much water has flown down the Indian capital's river Yamuna in the last 60 years. Wisdom has yielded place to arrogance, intellect to conceit, humility to pride, positivity to prejudice. Would anyone today so easily believe that while introducing the Members of Parliament to visiting Soviet Prime Minister Khrushchev, the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had introduced opposition Jan Sangh's young MP Atal Behari Vajpayee as a potential Prime Minister material. Or, would

TALES OF TRAVESTY DR. JITENDRA SINGH

anyone believe that years later, Opposition leader Atal Behari Vajpayee had described the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as incarnation of Goddess Durga while hailing India's victory in Bangladesh war.

A visible change in the level and phrase of public debate could perhaps be explained in the context of contemporary era of TRP when loud-mouth

invective and spicy abuse are known to get the better of logic or reason. And, maximum attention as well media coverage is received by a newly emerging style inspired by what can be described as “Digvijay Singh school of debate”.

Thanks to TV ! Most of the politicians today are constant-

ly at pains to appear younger and attractively decked up....something which would have never occurred to them while granting a print interview to a newspaper twenty years ago. But, there are side-effects too...to put it precisely, side effects of regular daily basis TV debate on instant issues. Cosmetics sometimes get the better of content.

Graphics sometimes get the better of grammar. And finally, the urge to score a point gets the better of civility. In the high TRP melee that follows, sometimes encouraged by the anchor himself, the issue under discussion gets inadvertently pushed aside for another debate, another day, hogging another TRP.

Francis Bacon once said, the greatest harm to the cause of literature is done by the teachers of literature. The cue is to guard against the possibility of the cause of public debate suffering harm from the debator himself with the common man, in disgust, turning off from the debate itself and Umapathy lamenting the sight of repulsion resulting not from what was said but what was unsaid, a La Faiz, “Woh Baat Saare Fasaane Mein Jiska Zikr Na Tha, Woh Baat Unpe Barhi Na-gavaar Guzri Hai!”

We, the Indian middle class

Karanvir Gupta

It has been a long woven thought in my subconscious mind but it was only when government of India recently came up with this advertisement flaunting 7 new IITs, 8 new IIMs, etc on the television that my thoughts got instigated once again. The angst in me infuriated again at the very thought of it. Yes the very thought of how Indian middle class is subjugated and relegated every now and then sometimes because of the convenience caused to bigwigs and sometimes in the name of sacrifice for downtrodden. Seems like Indian middle class is the case of second child in series of three where elder one is given all the ears and everything done is in the favour of younger one thus leaving the second alias middle child stranded and to get going on its own.

In fact I would like to start with the ad they are broadcasting. I ask, in total how many such premier institutes are available in proportion to the students aspiring for the same. Even if I accept the fact that it is fierce competition then what about the reservations you have made eating a chunk of seats that otherwise can be given to well deserving candidates. I would have no problem if genuine people were getting the benefits of the reservation! Even Dr. B R Ambedkar himself had provided that clause in the constitution for reservation to be revised every few years. However what I see and realise is the number of backward classes is ever increasing while India on the whole is progressing. Strange, isn't it that the nation is developing and it's people not?

This is just the tip of the iceberg. From the time election manifestos are prepared to the point the parties come in power, the center of attraction always keep changing but clearly

than happy to welcome that all. If you frame the laws that promote industrial production, bring in lot of foreign exchange, usher the era of technology and advancement, I will again have no problem accepting it. But bending and twisting things in favour of few will never be accepted. The point I want to raise is give me examples of actions or steps that you take to cause convenience to the Indian Middle Class. Or you have taken us for guaranteed as the rugged child who is born out of nowhere and has the capacity to bear anything and everything whatever may come.

Tell me, what has been done to improve the performance and load bearing capacity of irctc.gov.in the major user of

of students studying? There is not even miniscule of standardisation in the whole system across the country. The ratio of good quality high educational institutions to the aspirants is grotesquely disturbing. The tale of travesty doesn't ends here. From under facilitated public transport system to half cooked modernised shopping centres, the section which bears the brunt of all this is the Indian Middle Class.

Please let us know what substantial has been done for the Indian Middle Class to live a healthy standard life. When was the last time your election manifestos or your words or actions really did something for Middle class? Luxury and convenience you provide to the rich, subsidies

you provide to the poor, and what for the Indian Middle Class: "babaji ki booty!"

Indian middle Class is that section of society which is full of hope. Despite all the pandemonium across state or centre, it never sheds the trust in the system and believes in its ultimate supremacy. We are those people who inspite of being betrayed times and again come forward fighting for all the issues, hold constitution high in its regard. We chisel ourselves into tough souls and always make ourselves ready for healthy competition be it obtaining a birth certificate, queues at the passport office, phone billing departments, entering into choicest institution, marriage bureau or a morgue. We patiently accept the fallacy of our systems with the kindle of hope that things will change for good one day. We toil ourselves for we see in Gandhi and Nehru our true selves. We keep going undefeated and indefatigably. We are the Indian Middle Class who is ever increasing in the distribution of the pyramid but the injustice done to it remains persistent.

And what you do to us is for bandhs to be formulated, you choose us; for agitations and riots, you target us; for raising up voice for issues, you instigate us but when it comes to distribute the fruits you choose others. Probably the reason is clear, we are not the hard core cash that flows into your coffers and we are not even the vote bank that gives you the power. Hence neglected and ignored! This is my personal request to the up surging Middle Class families to make a point that you cast your vote in the forthcoming elections and give the government a glimpse of might of the Indian middle class which is thought to be laid back and easy-go section of the society!

(The writer is a student at IIM Shillong)

Declining sex ratio

Shreya Bakshi

The high masculine sex ratios of the Indian population had been a matter of concern for many decades. Considerable attention has been paid to different dimensions of female deficits in India and persisting regional variations, since the numerical imbalances between the male and female sexes were pointed out in the seventies. Indicating a continuing preference for boys in society, the child sex ratio in India has dropped to 914 females against 1000 males- the lowest since independence. Despite a slew of laws to prevent female foeticide and schemes to encourage families to have girl child, the ratio has declined from 927 females against 1000 males in 2001 to 914 in 2011, which is a matter of grave concern. The sex ratio imbalances are more severe in the north western region of the country, and in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the situation is rather more pitiable where the sex ratio has dropped alarmingly to 883 females per 1000 males in 2011 from 892:1000 in 2001. After a decade from 2001-2011, J&K presented a negative growth in sex ratio where Leh is a district which presents a dismal scenario of sex ratio ie, 823 to 583, lowest among all the districts in India. In addition to Leh, other districts showing decline in sex ratio are like: Kargil 837 to 775, Poonch 919 to 890, Rajouri 878 to 863, Kathua 898 to 877, Jammu 871 to 865 and also decline in six districts of Kashmir like: Pulwama 1046 to 836, Badgam 1004 to 832, Kupwara 1021 to 854, Ganderbal 1014 to 863.

Owing to the special status, Politicians in J&K has a special power to frame laws for the state and its people. Unlike in the other parts of the country, efforts are being made since last few years by the political parties and their leaders to pass the Bill known as 'Permanent Resident Disqualification Bill' (PRC Bill). The PRC Bill clearly states that women of the state if married to non-state subjects would be denied of their legal and fundamental rights of their identity, property and livelihood. In clear words, women of the state if married to non state subjects have to leave their jobs in state, have to leave the property of their parents, they do not have right to vote or they would not be considered as the daughters of the state any more. But as far as men of the state are concerned, there is no such rule applicable to them, therefore, they can marry not only outside J&K rather they can marry outside the country and their rights will remain intact.

In this decade, 2001-2011, this issue of PRC was raised 3-4 times in the State Assembly and Council, therefore, it shows a kind of hurriedness in the minds of policy makers of the state to frame such a discriminatory policy which directly or indirectly degrades the status of girls. Thus, PRC Bill is one of the major reasons of declining sex rate in the state of J&K where state itself is indulged in making anti-women policies. All parents want their children to inherit their property which they have made from hard earned money and if the state itself is taking away the rights of girls, parents will surely prefer boys over girls. This PRC Bill introduced in 2004 and further introduced in 2010 intends to do the same, ie, deprivation of women from Legal, Fundamental Rights as well as of Human Rights. So the repeated discussions and framing policies further increases son preference in the state. Therefore, in addition to the already existing factors responsible for the decline in the child sex ratio like: sex-selective abortion, infanticide and neglect /discrimination of girl child , PRC Bill is highly responsible for declining sex ratio in the state of J&K.

In 1927 many western educated men still held key positions within state administration. So Maharaja Hari Singh, the fourth Dogra ruler, attempted to soothe the ruffled feelings of his subjects by reasserting the rights of his subjects over outsiders. State legislation seems to be designed to keep non-residents out. But following a 1927 notification the legal notion of "state subject" has been modified in a way that has produced extremely discriminatory effect by enforcing the 'resident' status or 'domicile' of a husband upon a woman. And later on, the political parties for their own vested interests kept on changing the definition of state subject and also used it against the women community of the state.

In 2002, October, a landmark judgment was given by the State High Court in the favour of daughters of the state that they will not lose their identity if they marry non-state subjects and then only this controversy started in 2002. And then in 2004, the PRC Bill was moved by a member of National Conference (NC) which again stressed that if a girl marries outside the state, she should not be considered as a citizen of the state. And unfortunately this Bill was passed in just ten minutes by the state legislature on March 5, 2004 in the Lower House but did not get 2/3 majority in Upper House and now awaits only the state Governor's assent before becoming a Law. It certainly seems improbable that in such a short period of time the state legislature would have had time to consider all the implications of withdrawing state-subject rights from women on marrying non state subject, as envisaged in the Bill. However, as it created a lot of controversy, it was stalled thereafter and could not be made in to a Law because of the interference of Centre. In March 2010, the same Bill was moved by members of People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the Legislative Assembly and by its member of Legislative Council (MLC) in the Legislative Council with certain more clauses. But On April 5 2010, this Bill was dropped due to a "technical flaw".

It was noticed that the two regional political parties of the state: PDP and NC who generally remain in opposition joined hands over this issue of PRC. They have constantly and continuously supported and introduced this Bill in the State Legislative Assembly and Council. Time and again these two parties have tried to make this Bill a 'Law'.

The views of the people of civil society were collected regarding the probable reasons for making such Laws for women and not for men of the state and few among them are: Male dominating society, many high profile men are married to non-state subjects, policy makers are male, and no sensitivity towards women. The academicians, intellectuals, businessmen, Government employees, student of youth organizations, women of the state were interviewed, they all argued that although in the present era of advancement and modernity, there is no difference between girl and a boy but in our state (J&K), if government itself is creating a difference between the two by giving permanent citizenship to boys and denying citizenship to a girl after marrying non state subject, then the thought of having a boy child is inevitable as it will strengthen their relationship with the state. Thus, automatically then ratio of male population will increase in the state.

The insensitivity of the politicians of the state towards women folk is so high that they are using statements like "women going out of the state are equal to in-coming women hence, situation is balanced". They are not realizing that uttering such statements in public is derogatory for women. This Bill is unjust on the part of the women because if we talk of equality of sexes, we also impress economic parity. The right to inherit the property of parents should be equal for both the sexes. The people who are arguing that woman of the state if married to non-state subject can sell the property of their parents to any of the state subject are ignoring the fact that property is not associated with money only rather there are certain emotional bindings and ties with the land, houses, fields, areas, localities etc which one inherits from her/ his parents or ancestors. The views of the respondents, who opposed the Bill, were collected regarding the probable reasons for the political parties to support this Bill. Their views are given as like: to appease the voters/ vote politics, to maintain the present demography of the state, to propagate patriarchy, to keep Article 370 intact, to check the inflow of the outsiders.

This Bill demands by implication, an unquestioning surrender to a state injunction to make marriage a carefully calculated act to be determined primarily by location rather than consideration of mutual likes or congeniality. The Majority of total respondents interviewed considered PRC Bill as an 'Open Gender Discrimination.' They argued that this Bill not only violates many Rights of women in a single stroke but also hits the identity, status and dignity of the women of the state as an individual, as a human being. They also considered this Bill as 'Anti-women'.

Under the shade of Article 370 - Special Status, the state should try to formulate such policies which are beneficial for the people and the state too. And the policies framed should be inclusive in nature which may lead to overall development of the state and not of particular section of society. By taking away citizenship from the girls and not transferring property to the girl child, state itself is trying to institutionalize son preference because such laws are making parents to think that they must have a male child- a son, who whether marries within the state or outside the state, by virtue of being a son, can take care of the property of his parents and can keep their link with the state alive whether he lives in the state or not , whether he marries a state subject or not. Therefore, this is discriminatory policy which enhances the preference for male child, and therefore, adversely affects the sex ratio as is seen the last ten years in J&K. Therefore, such discriminatory policies of Government are leading to decline in sex ratio and are institutionalizing patriarchy.

But here certain questions arise that if in 2002, a judgment is given by High Court of the state in favour of the daughters then why the politicians of few regional political parties again and again highlight this issue and why they want to pass this Bill which is discriminatory in nature, why cant they treat women as equal human beings? When on the one hand, Government of India is making policies to mainstream the women of the country, why the Government of J&K is making unjust policies for the daughters of the state under the shade of its special status (Article 370). Are they unaware about the implications of such Bills and their impact on society and women? No, they are not. Therefore, it becomes very clear that it is planned strategy of the government of the state which is leading to decline in the sex ratio in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. And it is easily assessed that it will further go down if the policy makers will remain so in sensitive towards women community of the state.

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