

Govt. must act tough: President

By Harish Khare 15/8

NEW DELHI, AUG. 14. Rather than allow the atmosphere of the Kashmir-centric gloom to cloud the August 15 celebrations, the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, has used the occasion of his on-the-eve-of-Independence Day message to the nation, to salute the vibrancy of Indian democracy. In fact, in his customary broadcast the President totally ignored the Pakistani-instigated guns in Jammu and Kashmir, and, instead, focussed on the positive and creative potential of democracy at home, bringing out in sharp contrast the Pakistani rulers' preoccupation with the idiom of violence.

As the President tells the countrymen, at home and abroad, India's "second struggle (for economic independence and social transformation)" will be arduous and prolonged, and while there have been many achievements, the country still has a long way to go towards achieving the egalitarian objectives it had set for itself in 1947. He notes how "new affluence of the privileged classes has given rise to certain evil fruits", but ends up with renewing his faith in the people's commitment to democracy. "In fact, the silver linings in the dark clouds of backwardness and deprivation are the people's initiatives which have served as crucible of new ideas and methodologies for nation building."

ple enhanced through decentralised democracy, it would be possible for India to be an effective player in the globalised world that is emerging."

However, the President is not unmindful of the creeping aberrations, especially the growth of violence, and he deplores the "unholy alliance" between criminals, politicians and important people in society. Without referring to the current image-building among sections of the media for the smuggler, Veerappan, Mr. Narayanan laments that "criminals are being glamorised by the media and are treated as if they are the new heroes of our society. It is time that civil society and the lawful Government asserted their authority and primacy over the dare-devil heroes of crime and banditry."

education movements, popular involvement to "face the crisis of water shortage and environment degradation in our country", as decentralisation at the district level.

All this, according to the President, points to "the significance of the movements which are arising at the grassroots of Indian democracy. With the initiative and the innovative capabilities of our grassroots institutions and of our ordinary peo-



Narayanan: Stand up against violence

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 14

PRESIDENT K.R. Narayanan today exhorted the people to speak out against crimes and violence of all kinds at every social and political level in the face of an "unholy alliance between criminals, politicians and important people in society."

Calling upon the civil society and the lawful government to assert their authority and primacy over the "dare-devil heroes of crime and banditry", the President in his address to the nation on the eve of the 53rd anniversary of Independence, bemoaned the prevailing tendency to romanticise these "criminals".

Taking a dig at the media, the President said that criminals were being glamourised and treated as if they were the new heroes of our society.

Without naming Pakistan, the President reiterated India's commitment to be friends and live in peaceful co-existence with all nations of the world, more especially with our neighbours. He, however, hastened to add that the country will have to be prepared to defend the unity and integrity of the nation and the safety and prosperity of its people.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Rewrite laws to pave way for deterrent punishment for crimes against women.
- Decentralise financial and administrative powers to panchayats to strengthen democracy at the grassroots.
- Assert authority and primacy over dare-devil heroes of crime and banditry.
- Initiate literacy campaigns for the emancipation of women, especially through NGOs and other voluntary groups.
- Speak against crimes and violence at every social and political level.
- Avoid publicity to criminals and others involved in crimes such as child marriages.
- Give a serious thought to problems such as poverty, ignorance, disease and superstition notwithstanding an impressive catalogue of national achievements.



As regards India's time-tested policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence, he asserted that as formulated by our wise leaders, it had performed a historic role by showing the world a way out of the nightmare of the cold war. "Basically, we have adhered to that approach and to that policy," he said.

Dwelling at length on India's impressive achievements in spite of many shortcomings, Mr

Narayanan, however, expressed concern at the growing crimes against women and resurgence of old superstitions and out-

moded social practices such as child marriage.

"There are dark clouds of prejudice and callous unconcern hanging over our society with regard to the problems of rape and atrocities on women," the President noted while calling upon the law-makers to rewrite laws to pave a way for deterrent punishment for such crimes. Applauding India's enviable industrial growth as one the fast growing economies of the world, Mr Narayanan simultaneously made a pointed reference to the lingering feeling nursed by the common man and woman that they had "yet to taste the fruits of Independence".

Prez upbeat on future of Indo-China ties

Devidas Gupta

KUNING (China) 2 JUNE

PRESIDENT K.R. Narayanan, on Friday, said Indo-China co-operation had reached a stage of "criticality" and from now on, it was bound to increase in its intensity and speed.

The President made the remark while responding to suggestions at an interaction with the scholars of the Institute for South Asian Studies on issues ranging from regional co-operation among China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh to the opening of a road linking India and China.

Expressing happiness that the scholars had made valuable suggestions, President Narayanan said their implementation would depend on how the bilateral co-operation between the two nations progressed in coming days.

Sharing their views that regional co-operation among the four countries was a necessity, the President said eventually it was for central and provincial governments to work on the proposal for their execution. "That is why my visit to China has become important," he said.

Stating that so far India and China had been concentrating on the development of lesser devel-

oped regions such as the north-east, he said the government could go in a big way to induce private investment.

This will not only ensure economic growth but bring peace in the region, he remarked.

Stating that India and China needed to put "techno-economic content into our age-old ties", President Narayanan expressed hope that Kuning, capital of the Yunnan province, where the scholars are based, will provide a push forward to the process.

Now that the two countries understand each other, this can alter the course of co-operation between them, he said.

As regards the growth of the region involving the four countries, he suggested that China and India provide the required money and persuade the other two governments as well as the private sector to come forward with investments.

Recalling that former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou en Lai had discussed the question of a direct flight between India and China and a road link between Lhasa and Calcutta, Mr Narayanan said these could not materialise because of certain conditions.



TOUCHING SCENES: President K.R. Narayanan embraces young Chinese dancers after a cultural show in Dalian recently

PTI

Narayanan asks China for help to combat terrorism

D. D. Gupta
BEIJING 30 MAY

PRESIDENT K.R. Narayanan on Tuesday invited China to work with India to eliminate the threat of international terrorism.

"We believe that it is in the interests of all nations, including India and China, to work together to eliminate the delivering of address to a select gathering of leading Chinese academics and students at the prestigious Peking University in Beijing.

"There are new threats that the international community face today. The scourge of narco-terrorism is casting a dark shadow across many parts of Asia and the world," he said on the second day of his week-long state visit to China. The President informed the audience that India has taken initiative at the United Nations for an international convention to counter this threat.

Narayanan's reference to terrorism comes a day after he sought China's support in fighting the menace of terrorism during his wide-ranging talks with

Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Mr Narayanan suggested that an appropriate code of conduct for a globalised world would be the five principles of peaceful co-existence suggested by China and India, and not overlordship by any one nation or group of nations.

"The United Nations will be at the core of this new world order," he said, while calling for reforms of the world body to represent the interests of developing countries.

"There is a pressing need for the UN to be democratised and reformed, reflecting the contemporary realities of the world. For this purpose, we believe the Security Council should be expanded and made more representative so that the aspirations of all humanity can be accommodated and realised," he said.

"I believe that India and China could closely work together to bring about such a democratic transformation of the world body to serve the interests and aspirations of mankind as a whole," he said, calling cooperation between New Delhi and Beijing a "historical necessity."

— PTI



POETIC JUSTICE: President K.R. Narayanan unveils Rabindranath Tagore's bust in Peking University in Beijing on Tuesday PTI

Sino-Indian ties on development path, says China

Anil K Joseph
BEIJING 30 MAY

A DAY after the India-China presidential summit on Tuesday, Beijing said bilateral ties had started "improving and developing," while the vexed border dispute needed proper handling.

"Under the joint efforts of the two sides, relations between China and India had started improving and developing," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said while commenting on the ongoing week-long state visit of President K.R. Narayanan.

China pays great attention to developing good neighbourly and cooperative relations with India, Mr Zhang said while commenting that Mr Narayanan's visit would further strengthen bilateral ties.

— PTI

Dalai trying to use Karmapa Lama: China

Anil K Joseph
BEIJING 30 MAY

CHINA, ON Wednesday, accused Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, of colluding with foreign forces to use the 14-year-old Karmapa Lama to split Tibet from China.

"The Dalai clique and some foreign forces have always tried to use him to achieve their own goals" Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said while briefing reporters on President K.R. Narayanan's ongoing visit to China.

She said China was strongly opposed to anybody using the 17th Karmapa Lama in such a way. The Karmapa had fled Tibet and arrived in India early this year.

"We are strongly opposed to any efforts to use the Karmapa in splitting China," she said. — PTI

MAY 2000

Narayanan

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, MAY 27. The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, will leave for Beijing tomorrow morning to resume political dialogue with the Chinese leadership at the highest level.

The Presidential visit to China comes amidst the high season in foreign policy that has witnessed a big movement in India's relations with the major powers, including the United States, Europe, Russia and the Islamic world.

But India's ties with China remain uncertain and need a big political push. And that is where Mr. Narayanan steps in.

The President, who had served as India's Ambassador to Beijing, is expected to deliver a touch of calm to Sino-Indian relations long marked by deep anxieties about each other's intentions. The President's professional experience as a "China hand" and his commitment to building bridges with Beijing are expected to help the two Asian giants put behind the recent acrimony over India's nuclear tests and look ahead for a more vibrant relationship.

Beijing was angry when India cited the threat from China as one of its reasons for

conducting nuclear tests in May 1998 and a chill descended on bilateral ties. Deeply disappointed with the BJP-led Government, China came close to concluding that ties with India were unlikely to improve without a change in the political dispensation in New Delhi.

As Sino-Indian relations headed South after Pokhran-II, Mr. Narayanan played a quiet but significant role in communicating to Beijing the enduring Indian faith in a long-term engagement with its important neighbour.

The visit by the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, to Beijing last June, helped unfreeze the relations and begin the normalisation of bilateral relations.

The Government is attaching great importance to Mr. Narayanan's week-long trip to China and hopes his interaction with top Chinese leaders in Beijing would reduce the mutual mistrust accumulated over the years.

Mr. Narayanan will meet his Chinese counterpart, Mr. Jiang Zemin, the Prime Minister, Mr. Zhu Rongji, and the Chairman of the National People's Congress (the Chinese Parliament), Mr. Li Peng.

Mr. Narayanan's talks with these leaders are expected to cover a broad range of bilateral,

Narayanan leaves for China today

regional and international issues. He will also interact with Chinese scholars and address the academic community at the historic Beijing University.

After a hectic schedule in Beijing, Mr. Narayanan travels to Dalian, a thriving sea-side resort town in north-east China, and then to Kunming in the Yunnan province of south-west China before returning home on Saturday. Mr. Narayanan's sojourn in China corrects the accumulated imbalance in the high level visits between the two countries. While many top guns from the Chinese political establishment came to India in the mid to late 1990s, there has been no equivalent trips from the Indian side.

The last significant visit to China was in 1994. It was undertaken by none other than Mr. K. R. Narayanan, then the Vice-President.

The President will be accompanied by his wife, Ms. Usha Narayanan, and a large delegation that includes the Minister for Heavy Industry, Mr. Manohar Joshi, and the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Lalit Mansingh.

Mr. Narayanan will also have in tow a delegation of MPs including Ms. Sushma Swaraj (BJP), Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde (Congress-I) and Mr. Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI(M).

The President and the press

By K. K. Katyal

It is hard to avoid the impression that the media writings abroad on India, at times, tend to focus on the stereotypes.

JARRING note was introduced in the otherwise excellent atmosphere during the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan's recent visit to France. But, happily, the special relationship which has been in the making of late has not derailed. The headings and despatches in some French dailies were undoubtedly offensive and the reaction in India could not but be sharp. Which Indian's blood would not boil on reading the *Le Figaro* headline, "An Untouchable at the Elysee Palace"? This case should however be treated as closed after the apology tendered by its Editor-in-Chief over the "blunder". In any case, the episode needs to be seen in its entirety and in the correct perspective and with the aim of learning appropriate lessons. Any hysterical reaction in India, by the media or politicians, would expose them to a charge somewhat similar to that sought to be levelled against the French dailies.

Some points to be kept in mind are: (1) The objectionable material emanated from the French newspapers, not from the Government or any official or semi-official agency. (2) There was nothing to suggest that the stories were inspired by the Government or were in the nature of planted stuff, often seen in the media here. (3) The French Government respects freedom of the press and, on its part, the non-official media does not brook interference by the Government. Also, one has to examine the motives of the writers of the objectionable despatches or of those responsible for giving the headlines. Were they vicious or was it a case of ignorance?

True, the angry reactions in India did not put the blame on the French Government but the tenor, though not the substance, of the comments tended to ignore the distinction between it and the press. In the process, a case was sought to be made against "Paris" in a manner that did not seem to take into account the many positive (from the standpoint of both the countries) bilateral developments, of which a clear confirmation was provided by the hosts in their discussions with Mr. Narayanan. There was a case for focussing on the dividing line between the objectionable press despatches, on

the one hand, and the Government's policy, on the other, and for not letting the French media's conduct cast a shadow over the tangible results of a conscious policy decision by the French Government to forge special ties with India.

Had the importance of press freedom in France and the respect shown for it by the Government been kept in mind, the tone of the comments in India would have been different. Suggestions that the French officials should have dissociated themselves from the press coverage were not quite in tune with the objective reality, especially of the roles of the Government and the media. It would not be a happy precedent for, in that case, the Government would have to distance itself from the writings, not to its liking, every time such a situation arose. How would the Indian media react if the Government were to develop the practice of disowning its writings, considered damaging by other countries (Pakistan, China, the United Kingdom or the United States, for instance)?

Three French papers, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and *France Soir*, carried the despatches describing the President as an "untouchable" and dealing with his humble beginnings. The writings lacked grace and, in some ways, were factually incorrect. Here is a sample of a story by *Le Figaro* on the day Mr. Narayanan was to meet his French counterpart: "A rare event today in the Elysee protocol: Chirac will shake hands with an untouchable, the President of India." Some balancing words followed, but did not quite mitigate the damage — "However Kocheil Narayanan can feel at ease: another famous untouchable, a prophet of the emancipation of the 'lower castes', had the same motto, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'." Unwittingly, the writer proved the point made by the Indian critics of the French press writings when he said: "There is no doubt that today the guest of the French is better informed of

world affairs than the world is about his country. After having taught English literature, he studied at the London School of Economics. Then went on to choose diplomacy." Another para: "Son of a poor family of Kerala on the southwestern coast, he had to walk miles to go to school. He thus moved up from the fisherman caste, the Pravans, to rise to the top of the largest democracy."

There are no two opinions — there cannot be — on the offensive nature of these references. The journalists concerned, obviously, have been ignorant of what the use of the word "untouchable" signifies. Untouchability is an offence in India and, as such, it is appalling to find the first citizen being given this description. This is, thus, an unpardonable ignorance. However, it was clear that the writers did not intend to be vicious. Their descriptions, according to them, were intended to project the magnitude of the social change and to portray the social mobility of the less privileged sections. The *Le Figaro* Editor-in-Chief, however, did not go by such niceties and promptly sent a letter of apology to the President. Strangely enough, the apology was not carried in the paper, with the result that its readers were not informed of the sentiments expressed by the Editor-in-Chief in the communication which remained private in France.

Even while accepting the explanations or clarifications of the journalist, it is hard to avoid the impression that the media writings abroad on India, at times, tend to focus on stereotypes with an eye to their marketability. This is not the first case of its type. Most of the foreign journalists based in New Delhi were known for their professional competence: they took great pains to discover India and sift the truth from the mass of extraneous stuff. At the same time, in some cases, what stood out was the obsession with the quaint, the weird, in the hope that it would sell. The foreign correspondents could, however,

turn round and say such a tendency was not altogether absent in the Indian media.

The President's reaction was at two levels. On one occasion, it was clear that he was pained and felt that the Indian Embassy could have provided proper guidance to the media, in advance of his visit. On another occasion, he thought that the comments abroad were but a reflection of what had been carried by the press in India in the last three years (since he assumed office). In his opinion, such writings abroad would end if the Indian press stopped describing him as an untouchable. Mr. Narayanan's point that the Indian Embassy in France could have provided proper guidance to the press there needs to be seen not in the narrow context of the performance in Paris but of the state of publicity by the Indian missions abroad. With very few exceptions, the conduct of press relations had been far from satisfactory, what with the failure of the diplomats in establishing personal equations with senior journalists. That was because there was not always sufficient awareness of the specialised nature of the media contacts. If, for instance, someone dealing with economic affairs is asked to take care of media relations, the results will not be hard to imagine. The Paris episode would serve a useful purpose, if it sensitises the foreign office to the need for a close look at the state of press relations abroad and to undertake an overhaul. This job in foreign capitals is not to be left to a counsellor or first secretary alone: it warrants the involvement of the heads of mission as well. The sooner this point is grasped the better.

Indian officials derived satisfaction from the content and the timing of the statement by the French Foreign Office while Mr. Narayanan was still in the country. The President and the Prime Minister "received the Head of State, who is the heir to one of the oldest living civilisations, with esteem and affection" — in these words of the statement, they saw a conscious bid to neutralise the effect of the objectionable press despatches. Let not this sense of satisfaction come in the way of the urgent task of correcting perceptions of India abroad.

7-Pradesh
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Narayanan, Chirac to work for multi-faceted ties

1874^W

By K. K. Katyal

PARIS, APRIL 17. The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan's 70-minute meeting today with his French counterpart, Mr. Jacques Chirac — highlight of the visit here — climaxed, as was expected, the positive signals that had emanated in the bilateral field in the last two years. They resolved to work for multi-faceted relationship, particularly favouring high priority to cooperation in economic matters like trade and investment, as also to the task of building on the commonalities, evident from the on-going strategic dialogue, and contacts at other levels. The two Presidents took a highly optimistic view of the future of bilateral ties.

Their discussions followed the normal format, covering bilateral regional and global matters. But the identity of views in most cases and the understanding shown of each other's positions distinguished it from similar exercises elsewhere in the past.

The Foreign Secretary, Mr. Lalit Man Singh, described the discussions as "very friendly, warm and intensive." Mr Chirac, according to him, reiterated the special nature of bilateral relations, of which 1999 was the high point. The discussions of the two Presidents reflected identity of views on the importance of multipolarity and steps to counter terrorism. India commended the French stand at G-8 meetings, with Mr Chirac emphasising his disapproval of the sanctions. He, however, called for India's adherence to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The President's visit stirred interest in India — and in his person — though a headline here or



The French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac, receiving the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Monday. — PTI

a despatch there had an element of cheesiness. "An untouchable at the Elysee Palace" said the headline of *Le Figaro*, though the story contained only a brief reference to this point. A despatch by the paper's New Delhi correspondent — "by our special envoy to Delhi," began thus "A rare event today in the Elysee protocol: Jacques Chirac will shake hands with an untouchable, the President of India". The following sentence balanced it — "However Kocheril Narayanan can feel at ease: another famous untouchable, a prophet of the emancipation of the "lower classes had the same motto: 'liberty, equality and fraternity.'" The writer did not want Mr. Narayanan's rise to leave any illusions as "the 150 million Indian untouchables are as far from

power as ever, in spite of marked successes by the parties fighting for them and the presence of one of them in the Government."

Some among the Indian delegation tended to get disproportionately excited, while others were for ignoring it.

The accounts of the meeting between the two Presidents showed that press accounts, at times, could not be anywhere near the actual development or its spirit. The tenor of the discussions was totally different — purposive, and of course, marked by warmth and cordiality — in the same way as was the case two years ago when the "untouchable" President talked to Mr. Chirac in New Delhi and hosted a banquet in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Banquet speech: Page 14

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NARAYANAN'S LAPSE

519 The President's Speeches 2/4

THE Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, adroitly and sensibly denied, on 24 March, that President KR Narayanan's speech, on 21 March at the banquet in honour of President Bill Clinton, reflected differences of opinion on India's foreign policy. The considerations which moved the PM to deny the obvious are sound and equally obvious. But, the admitted difference in articulation and style raises a vital constitutional question which brooks no evasion. Is it open to the President of India to speak as he did on issues of foreign policy on his own, not only without the advice of the Council of Ministers but in tone and terms contrary to the policies it has pursued and publicly projected? In doing so, he has disregarded the established, incontestable practice and conventions on the subject that have bound heads of State in parliamentary democracies for at least a century, if not longer.

The issue is not whether the policy of the government of India towards the United States is sound or whether President Narayanan's words were sagacious. The sole issue is the President's right, under our Constitution, to speak publicly, or even in private, to the representative of a foreign government without the "aid and advice" of his Council of Ministers.

MINISTRY

It is offered in such cases by the PM or the Minister for External Affairs; generally through the Ministry which used to vet such speeches.

That the Prime Minister himself had, in his own manner, responded to President Clinton's characterisation of the sub-continent as being "the most dangerous place in the world today" only aggravates President Narayanan's lapse as do his use of intemperate language. He said reproachfully: "These alarmist descriptions will only encourage those who want to break the peace and indulge in terrorism and violence." He did not stop at that. Narayanan revived the jargon of the Cold War and the United States' failures "in appreciating India's policy of non-alignment. The mindset of the Cold War has perhaps not entirely disappeared. Vestiges of the Cold War strategies still return to haunt the world". On 21 February 1999 the PM made a point of going to the Minar-e-Pakistan in Lahore, where the Pakistan Resolution was adopted on 23 March 1940, to reassure Pakistan of India's acceptance of the partition in 1947. On 21 March 2000, President

By AG NOORANI

Narayanan wantonly described Pakistan as having been "carved out of our body-politic". Krishna Menon would not have

The author is a lawyer and commentator on current affairs.

There can be no minimising the gravity of the incident. If the President can indulge himself thus on what was essentially a goodwill visit by a President whose shelf-life had diminished, if not expired, what is there to prevent him or a successor from delivering a diatribe to a foreign dignitary who comes here for serious, sensitive business; e.g. to negotiate an accord on a long-festering dispute?

This is a constitutional issue of prime importance which must be faced and resolved decisively now, quite irrespective of one's considerable respect and admiration for

President Narayanan. He has rendered the nation high service. But even those, like this writer, who saw nothing wrong in his speech on 27 January 2000, on the moves to review the Constitution, find his remarks on 21 March to be grossly improper. That speech was in the same vein and spirit as President Rajendra Prasad's famous speech on the President's powers, at the Indian Law Institute on 28 November 1960. Transgressions will only undermine his capacity to exert himself as constitutional head to check transgressions to the government.

PRACTICE

According to a responsible correspondent, it was during President Shankar Dayal Sharma's tenure in office that the old practice of the Ministry of External Affairs vetting the President's banquet speeches was abandoned. It was a grave mistake which invites correction, speedily and decisively; if need be, by a formal resolution of the Council of Ministers. For, the innovation is subversive of the fundamentals of parliamentary democracy. Such transgression can spread to pronouncements on domestic policy. Where is the line to be drawn?

Authorities on constitutional law of high eminence have pronounced on those fundamentals in the clearest terms. One of the greatest constitutional lawyers ever — and a Sanskrit scholar as well — Sir Arthur Berriedale Keith's observations are so cogent and clear as to merit quotation *in extenso*. "The rule that the Crown shall not comment on public affairs contrary to the views of the ministry applies strictly to pub-

lic comments, and clearly demands prudence and caution in regard to private observations. The Queen (Victoria) was early reminded by Sir R Peel that comments on official matters, such as issues affecting the government of India, should be made not in her private correspondence with the Governor-General but through her servants; but she naturally did not discontinue her habit of correspondence. At times she decidedly ran serious risks through lack of discretion and received a distinct rebuke from Lord Palmerston regarding her views on Denmark and Germany in 1864, which had leaked out, no doubt through her entourage."

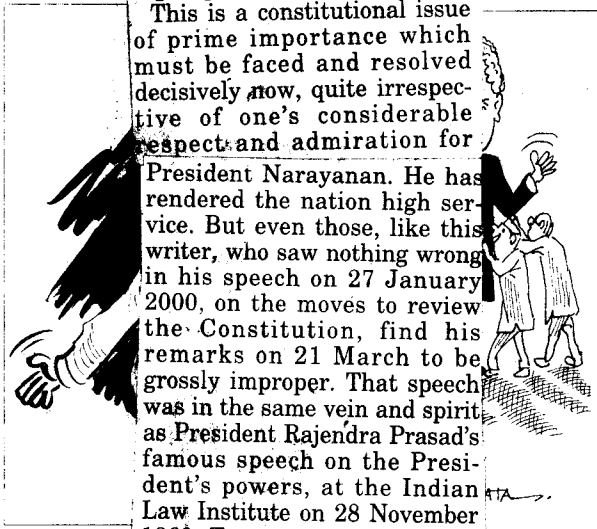
Citing other such "indiscretions", Keith remarked: "The essential thing, however, which Queen Victoria failed to recognise is the necessity for the sovereign to cooperate with ministers so long as they remain in office. The reason for the duty is simple; but the Queen never appreciated it. The objection arises simply because ministers are the chosen representatives of the people and, so long as they remain such, in thwarting them the sovereign is fighting, not the ministers as individuals, but the public will, to which as a constitutional monarch she is bound to give effect."

INDISCRETIONS

This was written in 1936 in his classic *The King and the Imperial Crown*. Queen Victoria limited her pronouncements to indiscretions in private. She did not speak in the same manner at banquets. The speech to Parliament stands on the same footing. As Sir Ivor Jennings wrote: "it has been universally accepted since 1841 as the statement of ministerial policy, for which the Sovereign accepts no personal responsibility".

Indian practice has permitted successive Presidents to express personal concerns in Republic Day broadcasts to the nation; and rightly so. However, President S Radhakrishnan's speech on Republic Day 1967 was resented by the government because his censures of its policies were delivered on the eve of the fourth General Elections.

If abused, even this practice will undermine the sound equilibrium between the President, as the constitutional head of state, and the government which is responsible to the popularly elected Lok Sabha. Keith's statement of the law shows that a President who speaks on foreign policy in public in effect thwarts "the public will". He puts forth his own alternative foreign policy. As Dean Acheson, one of the US's great secretaries of state pointed out: "Speech-writing is often where policy is made, regardless of where it is supposed to be made." On foreign policy the style reflects the substance.



THE STATESMAN

- 2 APR 2000

Drifting further apart

EXPRESS FOCUS GOVERNMENT

K.R. Narayanan's famous banquet speech reiterates not just the growing distance between the President and the PM but also the lack of communication between them, argues NEERJA CHOWDHURY

THROUGH its contradictory approach to President K.R. Narayanan's banquet speech in honour of Bill Clinton, the Government tried to put a lid on the controversy which threatened to blow in its face.

The informal media briefing that followed it was meant to convey a signal to White House — that South Block did not endorse what the Indian President had said. It was an attempt to distance the PMO from the "rebuff" administered by Narayanan to his American counterpart — which was how the *Washington Post* put it.

In an off-the-record chat with senior journalists, official sources had critically alluded to the President's shrill words, and pointed out that while the President had talked about non-alignment, it did not figure in the NDA's National Agenda for Governance.

A couple of days later, the Prime Minister's Information Advisor H.K. Dua took a diametrically opposite view and officially denied that there were any substantive differences between the President and the PM. His statement was aimed at placating Rashtrapati Bhavan next door.

The substance of what Narayanan said about the desirability of multi-polarity in a world which is becoming a global village struck a responsive chord in many Indians. In the past, too Presidents have reiterated the country's foreign policy in banquet speeches for visiting US dignitaries. When Richard Nixon was here, the then acting president M. Hidayatullah had defended "our determination to remain independent." N. Sanjiva Reddy had spoken similarly when Jimmy Carter came to India.

What made Narayanan's

The President insisted on articulating his views and the Government felt embarrassed about the lack of subtlety. Notwithstanding Dua's placatory words, the whole affair has highlighted the yawning gap that exists between the President and the Prime Minister.

The President's Republic Day speech cautioning the country on the fallout of the policies of globalisation and liberalisation, his strong words against the setting up of a Constitution Review Committee, and now his banquet references have raised hackles in South Block.

The PM-President relationship worsened last year when he called Vajpayee to face a vote of

other hand, may have changed tack at the last moment, because of the doubts expressed by some ministerial colleagues of Vajpayee that he may be short of the requisite number by a vote or two.

The President is not a rubber stamp, though every PM would wish this were the case. He represents the Indian state while governments come and go. He has the right to speak independently of the Government and express shades of opinion outside the Government. Over the years, he has come to draft his own address to the nation on the eve of Independence Day and Republic Day. Narayanan even deviated from the established practice of a customary address to the nation by

Even more than what Narayanan said, it was the occasion which raised eyebrows. Banquet speeches are normally considered occasions for toasts to the visiting dignitary, though there are those who believe that frankness in expressing one's beliefs is an act of courtesy

confidence, after Jayalalitha withdrew support to his government. He had reportedly given an indication to Vajpayee that he would not be required to face a motion of confidence in the Lok Sabha since Parliament was already in session. Vajpayee had conveyed this to his colleagues. He got a shock when the President called for a confidence vote. The President on the

giving an interview instead, in which he described himself as a "working president" as opposed to a "copybook" variety. For banquet speeches, the practice is for the MEA to send the President a draft, which it did. Past Presidents used either to improve the language or make minor changes. Narayanan went in for substantive changes. He was also

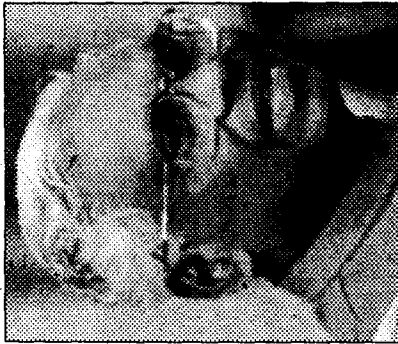
briefed fully on the Clinton visit by the PM, Foreign Minister and the Principal Secretary to the PM, Brajesh Mishra.

Differing with the Government openly on domestic issues is one thing. But should the President strike a note which is at variance with that of the Government on international relations? This was a major event in foreign policy, with the US President visiting the country after a gap of 22 years, and the end of Cold War.

Rajendra Prasad was the most activist of all Presidents that the country has had, and he shot off letters to Jawaharlal Nehru on almost every issue every few days, often to the chagrin of the first Prime Minister.

Prasad had even suggested changes in his address to the joint session of Parliament in which the President toes the Government line. He differed with Nehru on the Government's approach to Kashmir, corruption in Government, the Hindu Code Bill, and the President's powers under the Constitution. But when it came to relations with other countries, he consulted the PM about even small details, and Nehru responded promptly.

After Manilal Gandhi's death, his son had sought a message from the President to be used in the special number of the *Indian Opinion* which was to be brought out. Prasad wrote to Nehru, "I have got a message ready (copy enclosed)," he wrote, "but would like your advice about it before sending it because it will be published in a paper which will be read in



expression of one's beliefs is an act of courtesy. Nelson Mandela had called the US the world's sheriff but it did not affect the US relations with South Africa. In any case, Narayanan had had 45 minutes with Clinton (along with aides from both sides) before the banquet started and he had already expressed with force in private what he said later publicly.

There is nothing unusual about the PM emphasising one thing and the President quite another as part of a common design. After all, Clinton's press meet in New Delhi was interpreted as a shift in the US position on Kashmir and the LoC. But Madeleine Albright dispelled any hopes on this score the same night in a chat with American correspondents accompanying the presidential party.

speech unusual was the choice of his words — like the reference to the "village headman," which could have been put more diplomatically, particularly as Narayanan is a seasoned diplomat. Even though he was quoting the words of Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanajo in his banquet speech in New Delhi two months ago, who he was alluding to was clear.

Narayanan's words might not have created such a storm had he been speaking anywhere other than at a banquet which he was hosting for another head of state. Even more than what Narayanan said, it was the occasion which raised eyebrows. Banquet speeches are normally considered occasions for toasts to the visiting dignitary, though there are those who believe that frankness in the

South Africa and by the Government there.”

The first President had made no secret about his differences with Nehru on the treaty with China. But he sought his advice on whether he should accede to the request by Sanskrit scholar Rahul Sankrityayan, who was collecting valuable manuscripts from Tibet and China, and had requested Prasad for an introduction to Mao Tse Tung. Nehru advised against it. Prasad wrote back to Nehru, “I understand the situation and will write to him that it would not be right for me to give any introduction.”

No PM and President probably had such major differences as did Nehru and Rajendra Prasad (though Zail Singh had also threatened to dismiss Rajiv Gandhi). One was an avowed socialist, the other a conservative. But Nehru and Prasad also had immense warmth and respect for each other, nurtured through the freedom movement. If one was temperamentally gentle and accommodative, the other was a stickler for constitutional propriety.

The Prime Minister-President relationship is a unique one in democracy, requiring an understanding of institutional parameters, mutual respect, humility and a habit of working together in the midst of differences which are bound to be there.

The problem dogging Narayanan and Vajpayee — both belong to the old school and both have a respect for institutions — is not their different approaches to issues. It is the lack of communication between them.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 2 APR 2000

National interest, not pressure, guides economic decisions: PM

By Alok Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, MARCH 13. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today reserved comment on the reported criticism by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of the Government's economic policies, saying "I will make the final comment only after going through the full statement." Talking to newsmen on board his aircraft last night on return from Mauritius, Mr. Vajpayee said there seemed to be a difference between what the new RSS chief, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, had said and what had been reported. "So I don't think what has been reported is entirely correct," he added.

Addressing what he called a "mid-night, mid-air" press conference, Mr. Vajpayee said his relationship with the new RSS chief would be "very good." Asked for comments that the RSS wanted his economic advisers replaced with those more tuned to the Swadeshi concept and the charge that the Government had abandoned Gandhian concepts in its pursuit of economic liberalisation, the Prime Minister said the economic agenda had incorporated many of Gandhiji's ideas of development. However, India could not stand isolated from what was happening in the world and would have to take note of those factors too. "Whatever we do will be done keeping the national interests paramount and without succumbing to any pressure," he said.

Asked why he had hit out against the process of globalisation during his Mauritius visit, Mr. Vajpayee clarified that he had not opposed globalisation per se. All he had done was to draw attention to some aspects of globalisation which would adversely impact on the people of the country. "Globalisation has many positive aspects also and we will try to



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, talking to presspersons on board the Air India flight while returning to India from Mauritius on Sunday. — PTI

take advantage of them," he said.

Evading a direct response to the question on whether the Government would give in to the pressure from allies on the food and fertilizer price hikes announced in the Budget, Mr. Vajpayee just said "wait till the Finance Bill is taken up."

Commenting for the first time on the recent developments in Bihar, Mr. Vajpayee said the failure on the part of Mr. Nitish Kumar to prove his majority in the Assembly was not a set-back for the National Democratic Alliance. "Where is the set-back. The Governor called us based on his wisdom and conscience but we could not prove our strength in the House. Now another Government has been sworn in. In a sense, democracy has triumphed in Bihar," he said.

He also declined comment on

the Governor's decision to invite Mr. Nitish Kumar first, but added that when the former President, Shankar Dayal Sharma, had called the BJP to form the Government in 1996, similar comments had been made. "The situation in Bihar is not too clear," he said. Asked whether Ms. Rabri Devi would be able to provide a stable Government, the Prime Minister said "that the Rabri Devi Government will be a stable one is difficult to say."

On the withdrawal of the controversial order in Gujarat, permitting Government employees to participate in RSS activities, Mr. Vajpayee felt it was not a set-back for the Centre. "It is a matter of perception. We do not see it as a set-back to the NDA. On the question of voting in the Lok Sabha on this issue, the allies were categorical that they would vote

with the Government," he added. Asked why the Gujarat Government had withdrawn the order subsequently, he said it had been done so as not to destabilise the country.

On the issue of a possible Cabinet expansion, the Prime Minister said some vacancies had arisen and these would be filled up soon. The vacancies resulted from the resignation of Mr. Nitish Kumar as the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Navin Patnaik as the Minister for Mines and Ms. Uma Bharti as the Minister of State for Tourism.

Denying any difference of opinion in the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit over the selection of candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections, he said the recent Assembly by-elections there had shown that the party had improved its strength as well as its vote share. "The Government there is trying to improve the administration," he added in response to a question about his perception of the functioning of the State Government.

On the coming visit of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, the Prime Minister said "all issues would be discussed with the specific objective of improving bilateral relations." Asked whether the U. S. position on Kashmir had changed, he said, "The U.S. position is well known. They term Kashmir as a disputed territory. We don't agree. There is no change in their position as yet," he added.

The Prime Minister reiterated that when Mr. Clinton had called up to inform about intended halt in Pakistan, he told him "your decision is a sovereign decision. But the Pakistan military will use it to try and legitimise the military regime there. That would not be good."

Will PM withstand RSS pressure?: Page 14

The President's concerns-II

By Muchkund Dubey

10-12 ✓

THE PROGNOSIS for India soon rising to the status of a major economic power in the world, in spite of the large scale poverty and various forms of social deprivation prevailing in the country, comes largely from those who stand to gain from the present inequitable and exploitative development process. They regard liberalisation as a magic wand which, through the trickle-down effect, will solve all social problems. According to them, even the problem of governance can be solved by taking privatisation to its logical conclusion and giving free play to market forces. In this, they conveniently ignore the fact that corruption and misgovernance in India have deeper roots which cover both the public and private sectors. They also unrealistically believe that the Indian economy will be pulled up by the purchasing power of the middle class in the country whose strength is estimated to be close to 300 millions. Even if this estimate is correct, it is forgotten that the demands of the remaining 700 million people most of whom are below the poverty line, would have first claim on the resources of the economy, making it very difficult to sustain or expand production to meet the demands of the middle class. In a democracy, beyond a point it would be impossible to ignore these 700 million people.

Another group of people who are predicting India's position in the big league are policy makers and intellectuals of advanced countries and international financial institutions controlled by them. Their motive is to nudge India towards greater liberalisation — including of the kind which they themselves never practice at home — in order to create expanding space in our economy for their multinationals. However, their prognosis is only for public consumption. Privately, they sneer at us for our all-round social degradation and for the mockery we have made of governance in our country. They would prefer India to remain a divided society — one part prosperous and open to co-optation, and the other, by far the larger part, mired in poverty and social decay and subject to exploitation. Such a divided India is the surest guarantee of its never

offering a challenge to their economic supremacy.

We should be all the more grateful to the President for raising these social and moral issues, because they do not figure on the agenda of any of the major political parties. The BJP-led Government has put all its eggs in the liberalisation basket. The former socialists and followers of JP, participating in this Government, are busy serving their interest of personal profit and political aggrandisement. These issues are also not on the agenda of the Left parties because their political platform is

interacting with the various branches and levels of Government." Civil society institutions are not all perfect and without blemish. Several of them exist only on paper. Most of them rely heavily on foreign funds. To that extent, they inevitably come under the influence of foreign sponsors. Many of them do not follow strict auditing and accounting procedures. There is considerable scope for improvement and reorientation in the functioning of the civil society institutions in India. At the same time there is no denying the fact that they have several achievements to their credit. And there

are many functions in the economic and social fields which are not being performed by any agency except the civil society institutions and movements. Voluntary organisations and social movements played a crucial role in spreading literacy in Kerala, particularly among the Dalits. There are many tribal areas where Government functionaries seldom go and which have been served only by civil society institutions functioning against very heavy odds. Most of the experiments in sustainable development have been carried out not by the Government, but by civil society institutions.

Unfortunately, with a few creditable exceptions, the focus of political leaders and bureaucrats is not the people, but the elitist circle in the country and foreign investors. It is corporate India that is trusted by them and not the India of the teeming millions, the India of the poor, the deprived and the neglected which inspired Mahatma Gandhi. Bureaucrats generally view the civil society with distrust and are often able to convince their Ministers to do the same.

We are at a turning point in the evolution of our society and polity. At this crucial juncture, the nation must heed the President's admonition. If we apply the correctives suggested by him, there is still a chance of stemming the present social and political rot, and thereby ensuring India's economic future. If, on the other hand, we ignore his advice, there is no future for us except bungling along the way we have done so far.

(Concluded)

because its loud proclamation from public platforms that it would elevate education to the status of a fundamental right and devote 6 per cent of the GDP for outlays in education, has not so far been matched by concrete action.

The President has not only drawn our attention to issues which should be at the centre of national concern today, but also made some extremely valuable and constructive suggestions. He has asked us to organise a mass movement for literacy. He has suggested the launching of people's movement for stopping the pollu-

The present Government shows no real concern for social issues. There is no vision, no planned and sustained effort to provide minimum social services to the deprived.

tion of our rivers and groundwater reserves. He has highlighted the multipurpose potential of mass movements. This is borne out by empirical studies which have found that a mass movement launched for a particular purpose has, in the process, acquired its own agenda and served other purposes also. For example, the National Literacy Campaign led to the anti-arrack movement launched by women in Andhra Pradesh and to a very successful thrift movement, again among women, in one of the most backward regions of Bihar.

But the mobilisation of people for social and environmental purposes is not on the agenda of any major political party. Their occasional displays of mass support are only for the purpose of retaining or grabbing power. The Government has no plan to organise on any systematic basis mass movements to solve social problems.

Several parts of the President's address are devoted to the role of the people in dealing with social and environmental problems. In this connection, he has noted with satisfaction the multiplication of civic action in India during recent years and has suggested "a comprehensive policy to promote the growth of civil society

now reduced to grand posturings on risk-free macro global and national issues, such as opposing American neo-colonialism, the Washington Consensus of the World Bank and the IMF, the WTO regimes, and India's nuclear deterrence and disinvestment policies.

The present Government shows no real concern for social issues. There is no vision, no planned and sustained effort to provide minimum social services to the deprived people in the foreseeable future. As the President has gently hinted, there seems to be a vested interest in keeping the large masses of the people illiterate and marginalised. Since the Narasimha Rao Government, there has been no major increase in the Budget allocation for anti-poverty programmes. Pro-liberalisation economists have even suggested the scrapping of these programmes and replacing them with safety nets, to catch only those who are cast aside by the process of liberalisation. The deterioration that took place in the health and education infrastructures and services because of the retrenchment during the first two years after the introduction of economic reforms in 1991 is yet to be reversed. The Government has lost its credibility both nationally and in international forums

The President's concerns — I

By Muchkund Dubey

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157 ✓

THE NATION owes a profound gratitude to the President for his Republic Day address this year. He has drawn attention to the deplorable social situation the nation is facing today and served a timely warning against ignoring social and moral aspects of development. It is the first Republic Day address which focusses almost entirely on social and governance problems. An increasing number of social scientists and activists have long come to believe that these problems constitute the most serious constraint to development and that their solution is the precondition for India emerging as a major economic power. The issues raised by the President deserve the most serious attention of all sections.

Some people have made a deliberate effort to belittle the significance of the address by portraying it in a controversial light. A section of the media has depicted it as yet another example of growing differences between the President and the Prime Minister. The zealots of liberalisation and globalisation have taken the address as a veiled attack on these processes. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The President has acknowledged the higher rate of growth achieved after the introduction of economic reforms. However, he has asked us not to be carried away and to ponder over the deeper social and moral malaise besetting our society, which can frustrate all our efforts on the economic front.

The President has reminded us that India harbours the largest number of illiterates, poor people and children suffering from malnutrition in the world, and that more than half of the population has no access to clean drinking water. He has drawn our attention to "great regional and social inequalities," "violence in society," particularly against women, children and the under-privileged, and development-induced displacement and "ecological and environmental devastation." He has warned us against "unabashed vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption of the nouveau riche" and lack of accountability in the delivery of public services. He has talked

about our "stony-hearted society" in which individuals and groups pursue self-interest in callous disregard of the hurt it causes to fellow citizens and to the nation as a whole. By far the most poignant part of the address depicts the pitiable and inhuman plight of women, Dalits and tribals whose security is imperilled at every step and whose dignity is outraged every now and then. In this connection, the President has significantly stated that

There is often talk about India emerging as one of the four major economic powers. This will remain a fantasy until the social and moral issues raised by the President are addressed.

India's privileged classes are spearheading a "counter-revolution" against the "affirmative action provided by Constitutional provisions."

Everything he has said is in conformity with the average citizen's daily experience and is borne out by statistical data as well as numerous empirical studies. In 1991, nearly half of the population above the age of seven was illiterate. Illiteracy among women was about 60 per cent and among rural women nearly 70 per cent. It is now widely recognised that literacy has not only the intrinsic value of being a fundamental right and basic need but also the instrumental value as a major contributor to the process of development and improvement in the quality of life. Illiteracy, on the other hand, is degrading and a perpetual source of exploitation. Our recent phenomenal march towards a position of leadership in the information technology industry will soon reach a dead-end in the absence of a wide educational base.

The Dalits and the tribals have a lower per capita income than other classes. Around 50 per cent of them are below the poverty line as against the figure of 33 per cent for others. Moreover, the intensity of poverty is severer among them than among others. In 1991, only 40.8 per cent of them were literate as against the na-

tralisation, the Government has been increasingly acting as an ally of the companies rather than as the protector of the people.

Development is being pursued in wanton disregard of its consequences for environment. In this also, the Government has become an ally of the profit-seekers. As the President has very rightly pointed out, conspicuous consumption and rampant violation of every norm of social behaviour have played no small part in causing environmental degradation.

Environmental clearance for projects has often been given on the condition that prescribed environmental conditions will be applied during implementation. However, partly due to corruption and partly in the absence of an effective monitoring system, enterprises have got away without fulfilling these conditions. There is hardly any example of the project-affected people being associated with the arrangement for monitoring.

There is often talk about India emerging as one of the four major economic powers in the next 20 years or so. This will remain a fantasy until the social and moral issues raised by the President are addressed urgently and adequately. For, no country has made the grade on the economic front without providing the minimum must in the social field and without good governance. The Western countries have one of the most elaborate social security systems in the world, which constitutes the hallmark of their civilisation. Germany spends nearly 15 per cent of its national budget on public health and education there is free up to the university level. The East and South Asian countries which, till the June 1997 melt-down, were often cited as examples of economic miracle, went through the painstaking process of human capital formation, including the provision of almost universal literacy and access to public health services, before embarking upon liberalisation. In China, another example of success, the economy was opened up long after the completion of thoroughgoing land reforms and after ensuring the provision of basic educational and health services.

President defends statute review

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE ^{SP1}

NEW DELHI, Feb. 23. — In a surprising turnaround, the President today defended the government's decision to have the Constitution reviewed, saying it had become necessary to examine the experience of the past 50 years to better achieve the ideals enshrined in it, without touching its basic features.

Four weeks ago, Mr KR Narayanan had expressed reservation over the move. It'd be better to examine whether the Constitution had failed the people or they had failed it, Mr Narayanan had said.

However, what Mr Narayanan read out in the Central Hall of Parliament today was a text prepared and approved by the Cabinet. At the function on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Republic, the speech had been prepared under his own supervision.

Launching the Budget

REVIEW PANEL

NEW DELHI, Feb. 23. — The Centre notified the Constitution Review Commission late last night, scrambling to beat the deadline of the President's address. Former Supreme Court Chief Justice, Mr MN Venkatachaliah, has been appointed chairman of the 11-member review panel. The panel will have its headquarters in Delhi and have a term of one year. — SNS
(Details on page 5)

Session with the traditional address to a joint sitting of both Houses, Mr Narayanan, said the recommendations of the "broad-based" review panel would be presented before Parliament "which is the supreme decision-making body in Indian democracy."

As is customary, the President covered the entire

gamut of national issues: economic affairs, security, the social sector, foreign relations, nuclear policy, law and order, and developmental efforts in the North East.

The manner in which India has "zealously preserved democracy against all odds" had made the world look to it with hope and expectation, the President said. "Our founding fathers did their duty by giving us a great Republican Constitution. It is now our responsibility to transform our democracy into an effective instrument for the economic, social and cultural development of every Indian.

He hailed the virtues of the Constitution, saying it "has served us well". Mr Narayanan assured its basic structures and salient features would be kept inviolate.

Turning to other issues, the

■ See PRESIDENT: page 8

PRESIDENT:

(Continued from page 1)

President said wiping out mass poverty, illiteracy and assuring basic minimum service to the poor should be the nations' priority. And for that, the economic reforms set rolling a decade ago would have to be accelerated. They would be comprehensive, with special emphasis on infrastructure development.

Moving on to some specifics, he said employment schemes would be vigorously implemented in rural areas. The government will soon set up a National Commission on Children to coordinate official and non-governmental action, and start a scheme to ensure that every child in the age group 6-14 years went to school.

A national policy on empowerment of women and another on older persons were also on the cards, Mr Narayanan said.

The only jarring moments during the President's address came when Shiv Sena members displayed saffron banners and cried themselves hoarse demanding restoration of Mr Bal Thackeray's voting rights.

BJP takes on President

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 16. — After the RSS mouthpiece, *Organiser*, it is the BJP's turn to take on the President, Mr KR Narayanan, on the issue of review of the Constitution.

The party's mouthpiece, *BJP Today*, has come down heavily on the President and virtually accused him of working on behalf of the Congress. The article authored by "Vidur," referred to the President's speech on the eve of Republic Day.

The article stated: "The Rashtrapati implicitly condemned the Congress, especially when he said the Constitution has not failed us but we have failed the Constitution."

It then takes a dig at the President. "It so happens that of the 52 years since Independence, the Congress has ruled India for 45 years. The word 'We' would be mainly Congressmen. He (Mr Narayanan) himself was one of them. For many years, he was also a

minister. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that the Rashtrapati would admonish the Congress so harshly. More so when one finds that led by its spokesman, Ajit Jogi, the grand old party confirmed that its views are the same as those of the President."

It then talked about the President's role before and after the collapse of the 13-month BJP rule.

On giving the Congress chief, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, time to form an alternative government the article asked: "Most people were surprised as to why the Rashtrapati gave her more time, as it were, to cajole more MPs."

The article said: "Little wonder that he was widely perceived as partial. The lamp of Congress was evidently burning in his heart."

The article then added: "May we remind the President that the election manifesto of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance promised a review of the Constitution. People of India gave a clear majority to the NDA."

THE STATESMAN

17 FEB 2000

Gujarat order: RSS questions President's role

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, February 9

EVEN BEFORE Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's reply to President K R Narayanan's query on Gujarat's order allowing Government employees to join the RSS has reached the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Sangh leadership has decided to question the President's role in the controversy.

With the Prime Minister defending the RSS and Home Minister L K Advani saying that the Centre would review the ban on its employees joining the Sangh, the RSS leaders appear to be pleased as Punch.

Consequently, for the first time since the Vajpayee Government returned to power last year, a bonhomie between the Sangh and BJP leaders appears to be on the cards, even though the stir over Deepa Mehta's *Water* had sent conflicting signals.

The RSS mouth-piece, *Organiser*, has said in its editorial that President Narayanan should not have joined a political issue concerning the lifting of

the ban on Government employees' participation in the Sangh, especially on a memorandum from the Opposition.

It said in its issue to hit the stands on February 13 that the President's missive to the Prime Minister was intriguing.

However, it described the Congress and Left campaign against the Gujarat Government's move as understandable in view of the Assembly polls.

The *Organiser* said the President had bypassed the usual practice by seeking certain clarifications from the Government while forwarding to the Prime Minister's Office a memorandum from the Congress.

By making queries on the Congress memoranda, the

President was again betraying a "soft corner" for the party to which he once belonged, the RSS mouth-piece said. Last year too, it said, the President had sought clarifications from a Minister about the telecom policy. "Then too it was the Congress that was leading the campaign against the telecom policy." According to the RSS journal, this was the second time in less than a month that the President had acted in a manner which showed him in a role opposed to the Government of the day.

"The President is a learned man. Nobody accuses him of being ignorant of the law of the land or of partisan behaviour. Yet, there is a strong opinion that the President should not have joined a political issue," it said.

DMK's U-turn

CAUGHT ON the wrong foot on Tuesday on the issue of government servants being members of the RSS, Chief Minister Karunanidhi today quickly backtracked and urged the PM to dissuade Gujarat and UP governments from allowing government servants to join the RSS.

Detailed report on page 11

The *Organiser* also said the Government seemed to have taken a clear stand on the validity of the Gujarat Government's order. "The Prime Minister himself has said that the RSS is not a political party and that the ban on the participation of Government employees in its activities is not sus-

tainable."

Water: On the controversy over the making of Deepa Mehta's film *Water*, the *Organiser* attempted to show that the RSS leadership was a disinterested party.

It said, "Certain persons with vested interests have incited a section of locals, causing damage to a portion of the film unit. To compound the confusion, the archaic rules of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, the shoddy manner of the authorities in dealing with the local situation and the insensitivity of everyone concerned have aggravated the situation resulting in a bad all round."

It said the filmmaker had even revised the controversial script to avoid any ambiguity.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 FEB 2000

President seeks advice on religious Bill

SANJAY BASAK
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 5. — The President has sought legal opinion on the Uttar Pradesh Regulation of Public Religious Buildings and Places Bill, 2000, officials said.

The Bill was sent to him for assent by the Governor, Mr Suraj Bhan, as its legislation involves four Central Acts — CrPC, Religious Endowment Act, Waqf Act and the Transfer of Property Act.

The Bill, which intends to regulate religious institutions, has become controversial after the Opposition and some minority leaders charged that "provisions in it violated fundamental rights".

They fear that once it becomes law the government would target "minority religious institutions, particularly Madrasas, in the garb of measures against subversive activities".

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The BJP, however, claims there is "no hidden agenda in bringing in this legislation".

A BJP leader said the Bill was modelled on Acts prevailing in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. "Since the President had no objection in giving consent to those Bills, he should not sit over this legislation only because it is being brought in by the BJP-led government," he asserted.

Party leaders charged the President with "harassing the government". A senior leader said: "Not that we don't respect the President and the institution, but at times Mr Narayanan acts like a Congress President."

A Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesman, meanwhile, said the President had forwarded to the government a memoranda on the Gujarat government's order lifting a ban on employees joining the RSS. The memo-

randa was submitted by the Congress and other Opposition parties.

In his covering letter, the President is reported to have posed some specific queries on the Centre's role in the Gujarat government's decision. The Central Civil Service (conduct) Rules, 1964, prohibit government servants from joining any political party or organisation which takes part in politics, subscribes in aid of or assists in any other manner any political movement or activity.

Trouble over review of the Constitution also doesn't seem to be over for the government as the Congress thinktank is planning to approach Mr KR Narayanan over the "question of (the Constitution's) basic structure".

Cong hails Narayanan: The Congress has "welcomed" the President's decision to seek clarification on the Gujarat government's order.

THE STATESMAN

6 FEB 2000

Presidential warnings

By C. Rammanohar Reddy

In the haste to make up for lost time it is suicidal to make "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation" goals in their own right or the preserve of a minority.

10-10-572

IT WAS a remarkable speech that the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, delivered on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Republic. Yet, the "honest self-analysis and self-questioning about where we, as a people and a society, have headed" that the President offered us has not received the attention it deserves. But in a way this is not surprising. It is easy to react to a tussle between the President and the Government about a review of the Constitution or to a critical Presidential comment about the failure of the judicial process. It is much more difficult to accept critical analysis.

The contrast between the President's speech in 1997 on the 50th anniversary of Independence and the one on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Republic could not be more striking. Where the speech marking the end of colonialism was celebratory, the one marking the true commencement of nation-building has a sombre mood of introspection and self-criticism. The issues that Mr. Narayanan has highlighted — the persistence of poverty, the continued assault on Dalits and women, the perpetuation of social and regional inequalities, the 'counter-revolution' against reservation and the growing callousness of Indian society — we can ignore only at the peril of a social explosion.

The President has reserved the most evocative language for a description of the inequalities in Indian society. Images of the "sullen resentment among the masses" and "the unabashed, vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption by the *nouveau-riche*" immediately bring to mind the continuing public debates about the reform process, which, notwithstanding what the leaders of the mainstream political class say, remains as divisive and outside a consensus as it was when it began nearly a decade ago. But both the opponents and the votaries of reform would be wrong if they were to read into the President's address a blanket criticism of the reform process. When Mr. Narayanan contrasts one-half of the population guzzling aerated beverages with the other drinking muddied water, he has captured the most striking images of liberalisation. However, when the President commends the economy for becoming "one of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world" during

the 1990s, what is it other than praise for the growth results of liberalisation?

The argument is not about the pros and cons of reform, but how to make economic growth more inclusive than it has been in the past decade. The core message of the President is that "the three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation" cannot be placed above everything else and cannot be an end in itself. The Presidential warning goes to the heart of the reform programme as has been practiced by all Governments since 1991.

It is now pretty clear that though the 1990s have witnessed the fastest rate of economic growth since Independence, large swathes of the country have been left untouched by this transformation. A number of populous States in the North and the East have not benefited in any tangible manner from the reform programme. This blight appears to have also afflicted large tracts of the rural hinterland in other States. Of course, there are many who would say that if the majority has not benefited from liberalisation it is because there has been too little of it.

An additional argument is that if Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam etc., have been left by the wayside that is because these State Governments have moved haltingly towards reform. And that more rapid reform will generate more Government resources for the social sector. (The situation in Orissa, one of the early liberalisers which also attracted innumerable foreign investment proposals and yet where by all accounts the standard of living was worsening even before the November 1999 cyclone, is often forgotten.)

Only the blind and the self-serving will hark back to the decades before 1991 as being better for the general well-being of Indians. Yet, what has replaced a certain hypocrisy of the past is an all-round lopsidedness in economic policy-making, whose defining feature seems to be an ex-

has also been complete silence on the part of the NDA Government in the social sector (other than to pack semi-official organisations with members sympathetic to Hindutva). Where there has been discussion of social sector programmes it has been essentially about how to reduce the Government's financial burden. It has not been about reversing the deterioration in the quality of health and education services that took place during the Nineties.

Reform should not be only about releasing the Indian entrepreneurial spirit, which for decades was being channelled towards the underground economy. It should also be about how to harness the results of liberalisation for the benefit of the larger majority. It is a trite observation that a more rapid economic growth is not an end in itself. Yet, the language of policymaking and the debate in the media has become such that there is a confusion between the means and the ends. The citizenry can make no other interpretation than that the pickings from reform are not for everyone. Another outcome of chanting only the mantra of "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation" is that the process is carried out without preparation, without transparency and without regulatory mechanisms. The outcome in many cases is nowhere near what was expected and a pillage of state assets for private profit is not uncommon.

The second half of the 20th century has shown that international trade has shown enormous benefits on those developing countries which have chosen to engage with the world economy. Of course, there are certain domestic preconditions to be met for such engagement to be beneficial. But we cannot turn away from the fact that the success of South Korea since 1970 and of China since 1980 (among others) shows how much India has missed out from turning her back on certain aspects of globalisation. Yet, in the haste to make up for lost time it is suicidal to make "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation" goals in their own right or the preserve of a minority.

Years later we should not be ruing the fact that we did not listen to the President on January 25, 2000, when he warned us: "Beware of the fury of the patient and long-suffering people."

clusion of the majority. The central focus of the discourse in the think tanks, in the financial media and in the Government is always about how India should move faster on the "three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation". The impact of this process on the mundane matters of more employment, higher incomes and better social services is seen only as a by-product, as something that will happen of its own accord. The years of liberalisation have never seen any serious effort at how to make economic well-being central to the process of reform. The inequity in the agenda of economic policy seems to reflect the inequity in society.

It may be unfair to single out the BJP-led Government in this regard, for, a Government led by a party that earlier spoke about "swadeshi" is now merely wanting to move faster than all those that came before it in the 1990s. Yet, it is instructive to look at the record of the National Democratic Alliance Government after it assumed office last October. It has enacted a slew of "reform" legislation, including some major ones relating to the financial sector. It has further opened up the economy in a number of areas. It has announced many initiatives for corporate ventures in information technology. And it has embarked on an ambitious programme of privatisation.

However, amidst the welter of reform it has not taken a single major initiative that would have a direct and positive impact on people's welfare. Yes, the State should not be involved in providing employment or giving hand-outs. But it will always be a telling comment on the NDA Government's record that it let 32 million tonnes of Government stocks of cereals rot while it went about its mission of economic reform. The Government has done nothing to reverse the trend of declining capital formation in agriculture, though this sector's role in poverty alleviation and employment generation is well-known. There

Review can decide statute 'failure': Party

BJP finds ace in President sleeve

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 29: The BJP-led government today turned the President's argument on statute review to its advantage, saying that only a fresh look could answer his question whether it was the "Constitution that has failed us or it is we who have failed the Constitution".

Taking up the cudgels for the government, Union minister Shanta Kumar argued that a review was the "best way" to address this "very important issue".

At a news conference in Jalandhar, he said: "The query posed by President K.R. Narayanan is a very important issue and no single individual can answer it. Only a panel set up to study the Constitution, its functioning etc, as proposed in the agenda of national governance, can clinch the issue."

Strongly advocating the presidential form of government, Kumar said he believed it was the best bet for India. "I have been chief minister of Himachal Pradesh twice and my experience is that the political system has failed in parliamentary democracy. We badly need a presidential system of government," he said.

The ruling BJP worded its defence of the review decision in "patriotic" idiom.

In a reference to Narayanan's comment, BJP spokesman Venkiah Naidu said the "we" in the President's question did not mean the common people but the rulers of the country.

Naidu said: "It ought to be a matter of deep concern for every

patriotic Indian that even after 53 years of freedom and 50 years of the Republic, the fruits of development have still not reached a majority of our countrymen. Political democracy rings hollow without economic freedom and social justice. Power is still concentrated at the Centre, and there has been insufficient decentralisation at the grassroots."

In a bid to allay suspicion that the review would conceal a Hindutva agenda, the BJP leader claimed the main purpose was to make the Constitution an "effective instrument for speeding up socio-economic development", increasing stability of governments and giving greater powers to states and local bodies.

Targeting the biggest Opposition party, Naidu said if anyone had failed the Constitution it was the Congress, as the BJP had been in power for less than two years. "It is the Congress party that has failed the Constitution with its inability to translate the noble ideals in the Preamble into reality," he said.

He also attacked the Left for its anti-review stand, saying it "reeks of hypocrisy".

Panel search

New Delhi, Jan. 29 (PTI): former Chief Justice of India M.N. Venkatchaliah is among the select few sounded to head the Constitution review panel, law ministry sources said tonight.

Venkatchaliah, whose term as NHRC chairman expired recently, and the others approached are yet to give their consent to head the committee.

"The communists have always dubbed the Constitution as the Constitution of the bourgeoisie. Their pompous talk of bringing about a people's democratic revolution (in the case of the CPM) or a national democratic revolution (in the case of the CPI) is premised on the belief that the present 'bourgeois Constitution' needs to be overturned," said Naidu.

He sought refuge in the Constitution itself to justify the need to review it. Quoting Ambedkar, he said those who had drafted the statute had "refrained from putting a seal of finality and infallibility upon the Constitution" but had provided a "most facile procedure for amending it".

He reminded the Congress that the Constitution had been amended 79 times mostly by its own governments. But, he added, there was no need to be apprehensive since there could be no change without a review.

"All that the NDA government is proposing is a comprehensive review, without in any way seeking to change the basic structure and the core ideals," he asserted.

What was mooted was a "mere study and review, based on the widest possible debate in Parliament and the country as a whole".

"Democracy functions through the will of the people. Debates and discussions are an inseparable part of this function. Parliament has the power to reject any amendment," he said.

Hazy agenda

Even as it mounts a vocal defence of the statute review, the BJP itself is clueless on how specifically it would want the Constitution changed.

THE TELEGRAPH

30 JAN 2000

Justice must be affordable, says President

By Our Special Correspondent
NEW DELHI, JAN. 28. While lauding the judiciary for its progressive and humanitarian role, the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, lamented that justice was still not affordable to the people.

Mr. Narayanan expressed the hope that the Supreme Court would pave the way for an "accountable judiciary for dispensing quick, affordable and incorruptible justice to the people". The President was speaking at Vigyan Bhavan here at a function to mark the golden jubilee of the Supreme Court.

Mr. Narayanan said it was heartening that under the Chief Justice, Dr. A.S. Anand, the conference of Chief Justices had adopted a statement on "Values

of judicial life' as a step towards self-reform. In a veiled reference to the Priyadarshini Matoo case, he said the judge had let a person accused of murder go free on the ground that clinching evidence was lacking, though the judge was convinced that the person was guilty. "Mysterious are the ways of justice," he said, adding, "That is why it has been said that a law court is not a cathedral but a casino where much depends on the throw of the dice."

Commending the Supreme Court, he said it had interpreted the Constitution "not only with liberality but also creatively, responding to the challenges of the times in what has been called judicial activism. This activism consisted not of creating new laws but in bringing out explicitly what

is implicit in the Constitution."

Observing that the success of the judiciary depended to a great extent on the bar, he said, "India has a bar that scintillates with brilliance. But justice is not affordable to the people. That is why Mahatma Gandhi had lamented long ago that the law had become the luxury of the rich and the joy of the gambler."

In his welcome address, Dr. Anand said the contribution of the Supreme Court was significant in upholding the Constitution, rule of law, personal liberty and human rights, secularism, gender justice and democratic values. "However, in spite of its expanding role, this Court has stood firm and aloof from party politics and political theories and responded to the hopes and aspi-

rations of the people." The Attorney-General of India, Mr. Soli J. Sorabjee, said though the people were disgusted with the delay in dispensation of justice, they still looked upon the Supreme Court as one of the brightest stars in an otherwise dark firmament.

The Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, released a pictorial volume and a compilation of essays by eminent academicians and personalities.

The Chief Justices of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Maldives, Mauritius, Namibia, Nepal, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe were among the distinguished gathering that included several Union Ministers, diplomats and judges of High Courts.

Yes, Mr President

Whether the President has the right to publicly offer views that are not quite in consonance with those of his government has long been a vexed issue and is likely to remain thus. On the current occasion, though, it does appear that Mr K R Narayanan is right in voicing apprehensions about the proposed review of the Constitution. It is true that the government is merely suggesting that the Constitution could do with a fresh look to see whether it needs to be updated to deal with contemporary realities. Nevertheless, the context in which the move is mooted and the absence of any other explicit agenda do indicate that such a review is to be essentially aimed at legislatively ensuring stability of governments. That, as we have said in the past, is not as good an idea as it may appear to be.

Clearly, merely discussing whether any changes are required in the Constitution cannot be exceptionable if it were no more than just that. However, it would be naive to see the current suggestion for a review in that light. As Prime Minister Vajpayee's speech to the special session of Parliament made clear, what the government of the day is really concerned about is the short-lived nature of the last few governments and Lok Sabhas. While this concern is likely to be shared by most if not all Indians, the solution being mooted may be counter-productive. The Indian Constitution has certainly proved a living document thus far, with 79 amendments testifying to its keeping pace with the times. This is not to suggest that no further amendments are, or will be needed. What is not clear is why the government is seeking an overall review. If stability is the issue, it must be admitted that Mr Narayanan is right in suggesting that it is the political leadership which has failed the Constitution rather than the other way around. Instability is obviously the result of a situation in which no single party is able to muster the faith of a majority of the electorate. That can only be changed through establishing a track record of performance. The bottom line in a democracy is the people's support and that cannot be won through changes in the statute.

The Economic Times
29 JAN 2000

President, PM differ on move to review statute

NEW DELHI: Even as a grateful nation paid homage to the founding fathers of the Indian constitution, President K.R. Naraynan and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee expressed divergent views on the proposed move to review the constitution.

Today, when there is so much talk about reviving the constitution, or even writing a new one, we have to consider whether it is the constitution that has failed us or whether it is we who have failed the constitution, Mr Narayanan said while addressing the function in the central hall of parliament.

Quoting the president of the constituent assembly Dr Rajendra Prasad, Mr Narayanan said the people who are elected are capable men of character and integrity, they should be able to make the best of a defective constitution. If they are lacking in these, the constitution cannot help the country. He added that I believe these are wise words.

Justifying the move to review the constitution, Mr Vajpayee said the people are impatient for faster socio-economic development. The country is also faced with the pressing challenge to quickly remove regional and social imbalances by re-orienting the development process —to benefit the poorest and the weakest.

He said that was the purpose for which the commission to review the constitution was proposed to be set up, adding that the basic structure and core ideals would remain inviolate.

Mr Vajpayee said our constitution has served the needs of both India's diversity and her innate unity and has strengthened India's democratic institutions.

He added that even in the

mightiest fort, one has to repair the parapet from time to time, one has to clean the moat and check the bannisters. The same is true about our constitution. He said five decades after the adoption of the constitution, India is faced with a new situation. The need for stability, both at the centre and in the states, has been felt acutely.

Speaking after the release of a special commemorative stamp which depicted cartoonist Ranga's drawing of Mahatma Gandhi wearing a shawl that depicted the map of the country, vice-president Krishan Kant referred to the various landmarks in the country's fight against British rule. After quoting from a poem by Nazir Banarasi calling Mahatma Gandhi 'the old gardener', Mr Kant said "let us take the pledge today that we will never allow this garland of flowers, strung together by Gandhiji, to be broken."

Earlier, Lok Sabha speaker G.M.C. Balayogi said the nation could not afford to be complacent and had to face serious challenges to achieve the kind of socio-economic progress that the founding fathers of the constitution had envisioned. He said much work remained to be done to wipe the tears from every eye although that the nation had successfully met the challenge of a viable system of government. He said there was a need to work for promoting a way of life which recognised liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life, and bring about emotional integration of the diverse people of the country. He said "striving towards the realisation of the vision of our founding fathers is our collective responsibility." (UNI)

► Different Drumbeats, Page 12

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 JAN 2000

President smells a time bomb in reforms

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 25. — “Unabashed, vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption”. That, the head of state believes, is one of the worst evils blighting the 50-year-old republic.

Mr KR Narayanan's Republic Day eve address — perhaps the strongest presidential criticism ever of the decade-old economic reforms — today contrasted the India which sips aerated water with the Bharat where people depend on muddy ponds and dirty rivers to quench their thirst.

Economic inequality is a ticking time bomb that might lead to social upheaval, the President — who usually drafts his Independence Day and Republic Day speeches himself — warned the nation.

“There is sullen resentment among the masses against their condition, often erupting in violent forms in several parts of the country... Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest tier of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence. Dalits and tribals are the worst affected by all this.”

The indicators of this yawning gap between the haves and have-nots are everywhere. “Our giant factories rise out of squalour; our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor.”

A decade of liberalisation has completely ignored the poor and needy, the President said. The “three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation” has neglected to provide “safe pedestrian crossings” for the poor.

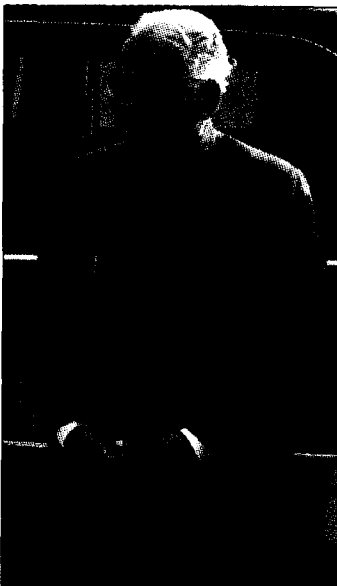
The President indicated another road, one which the nation must follow to achieve a more equitable society:

Economic equality can come only through uniform economic growth. So far, economic growth “has not been uniform”, he

said, mentioning the great regional and social inequalities.

“We have one of the world's largest reservoirs of technical personnel, but also the world's largest number of illiterates; the world's largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition.”

The President refused to pulled punches as he painted a grim picture of the future, and a present that liberalisation and free-market economy has failed to change.



Mr KR Narayanan

He dubbed the status of women as the greatest national drawback and the status of the Dalits as the greatest national shame.

He regretted that 170 years after the abolition of sati, the “infamous practice still manages to raise its head and, what is worse, even gets explained away as suicide or saintly sacrifice. The female half of Indian population continues to be regarded as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries.”

And though untouchability has been abolished, it survives as “ingrained attitudes are nurtured by the caste system”. The provisions of reservation are “unfulfilled through bureaucratic and administrative deformation”.

“In parts of rural India, forms of sadism seem to be earmarked for Dalit women... it has been extended as one of the methods of ragging in our elite colleges and universities.

In this situation, “the old adage ‘beware of the fury of the patient man’ could be read as ‘beware of the fury of the patient and long-suffering people’.”

The President's speech was, however, not a Luddite outpouring. Economic growth must continue, he said, but not at the expense of the poor and the tribals.

“We cannot and ought not to halt movement in the trajectories of our modern progress. Factories will and must rise, satellites must and will soar to the heavens, and dams over rivers will rise to prevent floods, generate electricity and irrigate dry lands for cultivation. But that should not cause ecological and environmental devastation, and the uprooting of human settlements, especially of tribals and the poor.”

He suggested older, wiser ways of protecting the underclass from the harmful side-effects of modern technology. He described ways of rainwater-harvesting of the last century and called for a national effort to improve literacy and tell the world about population control and environmental consciousness.

But our society has been moving in just the opposite direction and becoming increasingly insensitive and callous, he regretted.

He spoke of the garbage, including plastic bags, littering the streets and of polluting vehicle exhausts.

President cautions against social, economic disparities

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JAN. 25. On the eve of the Golden Jubilee of the Indian Republic, the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, has exhorted the nation to reinforce its democratic spirit, demanded a better deal for women, and warned against any attempt to roll back the reservation regime for the weaker sections of society.

Introducing an unconventional tone in his traditional address to the nation on the eve of the Republic Day, the President invited the citizens to undertake an "honest self-analysis and self-questioning about where we, as a people and a society, are headed?" The President then proceeded to produce a remarkable evaluation of India's success and failure in public life. Perhaps, never before has an occupant of the Rashtrapati Bhavan spoken with such candour and poignancy about the state of social and political affairs.

In what can be called a gentle rap on the knuckles for the Government, which has been clamouring for reviewing the Constitution, the President saluted the "far-sighted vision and arduous labours" of the Constitution's founding fathers. Reminding the nation that "Republic" means "supreme power is exercised not by some remote monarch, but by the people", Mr. Narayanan wanted the nation to use the occasion of the Golden Jubilee to "hail that proclamation and commitment". In two paragraphs the President subtly rebuffed all those who want to free the "Executive" from

the rigorous accountability. The President reserved his frankest observations for social and economic disparities. Drawing the country's attention towards the phenomenon of "sullen resentment among the masses against their condition, erupting often in violent forms in several parts of the country", Mr. Narayanan cautioned that these voices of resentment should not go unheard.

In a candid indictment of the dominant economic policies, the President noted: "Violence in society has bared a hundred fangs as advertisement-driven consumerism is unleashing frustrations and tensions in our society. The unabashed, vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption by the *nouveaux riches* has left the underclass seething in frustration. One half of our society guzzles aerated beverages while the other half has to make do with palmfuls of muddied water. Our three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation must provide safe pedestrian crossings for the unempowered India also."

While conceding that the current "trajectories of our modern progress" cannot be reversed, the President wanted the energies of civil society to be mobilised against ecological and environmental devastation. The burden has to be shared equally by the Government and the people; and, there is a need to "improve the tone of our social and economic life through an improved work ethic and environmental behaviour".

Continuing his "honest self-analysis", Mr.

Narayanan regretted that "we are becoming increasingly insensitive and callous". Cataloguing instances of insensitivity in our daily life, the President wondered whether we have become "a stony-hearted society, not a compassionate one that produced the Buddha, Mahavira, Nanak, Kabir and Gandhi".

According to the President, our "greatest national drawback" is the raw deal we give women and "our greatest national shame" remains the condition of the Dalits. The female half of the population "continues to be regarded as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries". More than this, the President found disconcerting "even the absence of political rhetoric on these social evils". He noted approvingly that "it is against this attitude of society and the habit of discrimination... that the demand for constitutional reservation for women in the Legislatures and Parliament has become a compelling necessity".

Coming down severely on the indifference towards the Dalits, the President noted that "it seems, in the social realm, some kind of a counter-revolution is taking place in India" and that "there are signs that our privileged classes are getting tired of the affirmative action provided by the Constitution provisions".

Throughout Mr. Narayanan's message one could discern a sense of presidential obligation to speak and work for all sections of society, and to remind the nation that the progress of the republic was a collective endeavor.

Clinton's message: Page 13