

'You sent us a Gandhi, we sent back a Mahatma'

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THANKS to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, we all relived a short part of that journey. A train ride that altered the course of a man and then the destiny of a nation. The steam engine was of 1947 vintage; just like it was then.

Boarding at Penrith Station (on June 7, 1893, Mahatma Gandhi boarded it from Durban), it took us about 15 minutes to reach here, through mountains and streams. No one knows the exact spot where that life-altering incident occurred. So, based on the length of the train he was travelling in and gauging where the First Class compartment might have been, a granite column has been erected: "In the vicinity of this place, M.K. Gandhi was evicted from a First Class coupe on the night of June 7, 1893. This incident changed the course of his

life. He took up the fight against racial oppression. His active non-violence started from this date."

Welcome to South Africa where Nelson Mandela is spoken of in the same breath as the Mahatma. Both legends are alive in a new South Africa that makes it a point not to forget. Keeping this in mind, the provincial KwaZulu Natal government and the Government of South Africa are going all out to celebrate the centenary year of the Phoenix Settlement, a community the Mahatma founded in 1904.

For those who know, all this is a tribute to a chequered past. For those who don't, South Africa has managed to brand its freedom. The concept behind the Constitutional Court, the highest court of the land, is fascinating. As is the way it is being publicised for all. Opened to the public in March 2004, the Constitutional Hill is the new home of the highest court of

generation of free South Africans.

Steeped in symbolism, when Charles Correa put his seal of approval on the final design (he was chairman of the selection panel) even he may not have imagined it would turn out to be one of the funkiest courts on the planet. Animal hide for judges' backrest, carpets designed to reflect the colourful African custom of weaving cloth between branches of trees, and a foyer that is naturally lit with slanting columns—yet another metaphor for trees under which villagers traditionally congregated to discuss matters.

For working professionals there is a packaged night tour and come October 2, plans are afoot to light up the entire court in such a way that it can be seen from all over, in fact, from the moment you fly into Johannesburg.

Purists may frown at the idea of a Brand Gandhi. The souvenir shop at Robben Island had some-

one squeak: "It's popcorn history—like having a gift shop at Auschwitz." While others rush to pick up that logo printed T-shirt and wrapping paper, at least the South African Department of Tourism isn't complaining. For as global tourism shrank 1.3 per cent, 2003 saw visitors to SA increase by 4.2 per cent. And among its 6,300 tourist sites there are five new world heritage sites.

Meanwhile, at Phoenix Settlement, President Kalam has just made two announcements. India will help set up a cultural centre at Pietermaritzburg and an entrepreneurial centre at the Phoenix Settlement. With that, it's time for India's First Citizen to wrap up his Africa sojourn. Volunteers get cracking to clear the way. Their Gandhi T-shirts say it all: OUR GIFT TO THE WORLD. Just so that you don't get confused, both the South African and Indian flags are printed on them.



Brand Gandhi: SA Tourism doesn't flinch

the land. It is also the site of Number Four, Johannesburg's notorious Old Fort Prison Complex, where thousands were brutalised, as were many political activists, including Gandhi (four times from 1908 to 1913) and Mandela. what democracy means to the first

A President and a friend for challenged children

Shrijoy Chowdhury in Dar-es-Salaam

Sept. 14. — Ramadanani Kisenge, a 16-year old teenager, came to meet the President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, yesterday but couldn't see him. There is no way he could have, being visually challenged. He is only in Class V and complained that there aren't enough books or other aids for blind children in his school. If there are few aids, there are fewer teachers to help him, he says.

Hamida Alfian, 14, and disabled and a student at the same school — the Uhuru Mchanganyiko Primary School — is unhappy with her lot. What is the solution? Both want to be politicians or leaders like Dr Kalam. "As a politician, I will fight for the rights of the disabled people," said Kisenge. "Dr Kalam has come to visit us. He wants to help disabled people," he said.

Alfan has a similar story. "If I am a minister. I can do something for the society and the disabled people," she said.

Later, at the Julius Nyerere Foundation, the President said that the greatest moment of his visit to Tanzania was watching a handicapped child smile. "He was in a wheelchair, but he was smiling. He was so cheerful." He spoke of another boy who had said that he had no legs but his mind told him not to weep.

In a dusty square in the outer sections of this capital, Rajesh Mistry, a man of Indian origin, is working for disabled children on behalf of Shree Satya Sai Society. The society ensures bedding,

A poet's tribute to Mandela

CAPE TOWN, Sept. 14. — After writing a poem for Tanzania, President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam is working on another one for South Africa: on Robben Island, the jail where Mr Nelson Mandela, the father of the South African nation, was for nearly three decades. The President arrived here today. "He is working on the poem. It isn't ready as yet," a Rashtrapati Bhavan official said. He could be giving it to Mr Mandela when they meet later this week.

His earlier poem, *I am the Indian Ocean*, spoke of how the ocean touched both India and Tanzania and referred to Mahatma Gandhi and Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's father of the nation. During his visit to South Africa, Dr Kalam will visit Pietermaritzburg, where the Mahatma was thrown off a first class carriage of a train early in the 20th century. — SNS

food and help in the dormitory for the disabled children. There is a large number of them here and they need help. About 40 of them are mentally retarded and 20 are deaf and dumb.

There are other Indians also helping disabled children here. There are Sisters Violet Jose and Rose Clair, from the Missionaries of Charity, two of the dozens of sisters working here. Mother Teresa's successors run a house for the disabled and abandoned children. Some of them are mentally challenged. Appropriately, the home is called Amani Nafuraha or Peace and Happiness.



FRIENDS BEYOND FRONTIERS: President Kalam shakes hands with a physically-challenged boy during his visit to a school on Tuesday as Tanzania's foreign minister Ms Jakaya Kikwete looks on. — AFP

15 SEP 2004

THE HINDU

U.N. should 'represent a just world order': Kalam

By Vinay Kumar

DAR ES SALAAM (TANZANIA), SEPT. 13. Away from banquets and formal engagements, the President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, had a stimulating 50-minute interaction with intellectuals here last night. And, it was his opinion on strengthening and restructuring the United Nations that got everyone talking about it.

In Mr. Kalam's opinion, a world body like the U.N. should be "equitable" and "represent a just world order." There should not be any country in the U.N. with veto power. "A world body

like U.N. should not be dependent upon financially on one or a group of nations for its functioning," he told a group of about 30 intellectuals in the conference room of his Royal Palm hotel. However, he was quick to point out that these were his "personal views and not of my government."

The President was responding to a query by a former Tanzanian Prime Minister, Salim Ahmed Salim, on how the U.N. could be restructured and strengthened. Mr. Kalam answered a volley of questions during his free-wheeling inter-

action, ranging from the menace of terrorism to the ways of shaping up Tanzania's economy, agriculture and small scale industries. He told the Indian High Commissioner, Dinesh Jain, to let the intellectuals shoot queries freely and it was left to the President to conduct the proceedings himself.

Major global problem

Admitting that terrorism was a major global problem, Mr. Kalam said that India was facing cross-border terrorism as well. However, the Government had taken measures to check it

and these included border fencing and the utmost vigil. "In addition to these, we are also talking to Pakistan. There is progress in our talks and Pakistan is on negotiating table with us," he told the gathering.

Elaborating on the steps to eliminate terrorism from the world, Mr. Kalam favoured the formation of a new world body which would help create enlightened human beings. "This can be done by devising systems which can provide education with values. Value-based education should be imparted to the youth till they are of 17

years," he said. On religion, Mr. Kalam said it should transform into spirituality connecting people together by love and compassion.

His suggestion for improving Tanzanian economy — shift your focus to agriculture and that too dry-land farming and multi-crop system. Create job opportunities and tie up with universities in other countries with exchange programmes.

But what took the cake was a question on how many women were involved in the decision-making process in India.

The President said that wom-

en occupied a lot of powerful positions in India.

"They are pilots, doctors and engineers. There is a woman Minister, Meira Kumar, in my delegation and another woman Member of Parliament, Meh-

booba Mufti, who hails from the beautiful land of Kashmir is also in the delegation," he said and pointed to another "powerful woman" seated next to him — Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, Shashi Tripathi.

At home with children: Page 20

শিক্ষার অধিকারকে বাস্তব রূপ দিতে হবে, মন্তব্য কালামের

নয়াদিল্লি, ১৪ অগস্ট: সমাজের অনুন্নত শ্রেণির কোটি কোটি শিশুকে শিক্ষার আওতায় আনা যে নতুন সরকারের অন্যতম প্রধান লক্ষ্য, তার ইঙ্গিত মিলল রাষ্ট্রপতির বক্তৃতায়। আটমতম স্বাধীনতা দিবসের প্রাক্কালে আজ জাতির উদ্দেশে বক্তৃতায় রাষ্ট্রপতি এ পি জে আব্দুল কালামের মন্তব্য, শুধু সংবিধানে থাকলেই চলবে না, শিক্ষা যে বস্তুতই তাঁদের মৌলিক অধিকার সে বিষয়ে মানুষকে সচেতন করতে হবে। এই অধিকারকে বাস্তবে রূপ দিতে হবে। এ মুহূর্তে দেশে নিরক্ষর মানুষের সংখ্যা ৩৫ কোটি। রাষ্ট্রপতি বলেন, এখনও অসংখ্য শিশু শিক্ষার সুযোগ থেকে বঞ্চিত। কিন্তু তাদের জীবনভর দারিদ্র্যের শিকার হতে দেওয়া চলবে না। শিক্ষায় বৈষম্য দূর করতে শহরের দরিদ্র মানুষ ও গ্রামের মানুষকে সচেতন করার দায়িত্ব তিনি তুলে দিতে চান গণমাধ্যম, বেসরকারি স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থা ও মানব উন্নয়নে সক্রিয় বিভিন্ন সংগঠনের উপরে। এই লক্ষ্যপূরণে প্রযুক্তির ব্যবহারও প্রয়োজন বলে মনে করেন এই খ্যাতনামা প্রযুক্তিবিদ। তা ছাড়া আজকের বক্তৃতায় কালাম জাতীয় শিক্ষায় সরকারের সঙ্গে দায়িত্ব ভাগ করে নিতে শিল্পমহলকেও আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন। একটি সুসংহত জাতীয় শিক্ষা নীতির অঙ্গ হিসাবে দেশের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে শিল্পমহল তার দায়িত্ব পালন করতে পারে বলে রাষ্ট্রপতি মনে করেন।

২০০২ সালে ছিয়াশিতম সংবিধান সংশোধনে ছয় থেকে চোদ্দো বছর বয়সী শিশুদের শিক্ষার অধিকার স্বীকৃত হয়েছে। কিন্তু রাষ্ট্রপতির বক্তব্য, খাতাকলমে স্বীকৃতি দিলেই চলবে না।

কাজেও করে দেখাতে হবে। প্রথমত, রাষ্ট্রপতির বক্তৃতায় কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার অনুমোদন রয়েছে। কাজেই ধরে নেওয়া চলে, মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার এ বিষয়টিকে যথেষ্ট গুরুত্ব দিতে চায়। বস্তুত জোট সরকারের অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতেও শিক্ষা যথেষ্ট গুরুত্ব পেয়েছে। তা ছাড়া সনিয়া গান্ধীর নেতৃত্বে জাতীয় উপদেষ্টা পর্ষদও আজই অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচি নিয়ে



বৈঠকে বসেছে। আর কাল স্বাধীনতা দিবসে লালকেল্লা থেকে জাতির উদ্দেশে বক্তৃতা দিতে চলেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ।

আপাতত দেশে জাতীয় আয়ের চার শতাংশের কিছু বেশি শিক্ষায় ব্যয় করা হয়। কালাম চান, তা অন্তত দুই থেকে তিন শতাংশ বাড়িয়ে ছয় থেকে সাত শতাংশ করা হোক। কেন্দ্রের সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল জোট সরকার ক্ষমতায় আসার পরে তাদের অভিন্ন ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতে শিক্ষায় জাতীয় আয়ের অন্তত ছয় শতাংশ বরাদ্দ করা হবে বলে ঘোষণা করেছিল। তা ছাড়াও কেন্দ্রীয় করে সেস বসিয়ে বাড়তি অর্থ

আদায় করে তা প্রাথমিক শিক্ষায় বরাদ্দ করা হবে বলেও জানিয়েছিল সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল জোট। কেন্দ্রীয় অর্থমন্ত্রী পি চিদম্বরমের এ বারের বাজেটে দ্বিতীয় প্রতিশ্রুতিটির প্রতিফলনও ছিল। ২ শতাংশ হারে সেস বসিয়ে চার থেকে পাঁচ হাজার কোটি টাকা বাড়তি সংগ্রহ করে তা 'মিড-ডে মিল'-সহ প্রাথমিক শিক্ষায় পরিকাঠামোর উন্নতিতে ব্যয় করা হবে বলে অর্থমন্ত্রী জানিয়েছিলেন। প্রথম প্রতিশ্রুতিটি আজ ফের উঠে এল রাষ্ট্রপতির কথায়। তিনি বলেন, "আমরা যদি সবাইকে সাক্ষর করতে চাই তবে শিক্ষায় জাতীয় ব্যয় অন্তত দুই থেকে তিন শতাংশ বাড়তে হবে। কয়েক বছর বাড়তি বরাদ্দ করতে পারলেই আমরা লক্ষ্যে পৌঁছতে পারব।"

কালাম বলেন, পঞ্চম শ্রেণির পরে স্কুল ছেড়ে দেয় ৩৯ শতাংশ ছাত্রছাত্রী। আর অষ্টম শ্রেণির পরে ৫৫ শতাংশ। এই বেহাল শিক্ষা ক্ষেত্রের উন্নতির জন্য কয়েক দফা নীতিও প্রস্তাব করেছেন কালাম। তাঁর মতে, শিক্ষাব্যবস্থার লক্ষ্য হওয়া উচিত আরও বেশি কর্মসংস্থান। কলেজে কলা, বিজ্ঞান বা বাণিজ্য সব শাখার পাঠ্যক্রমকেই কর্মসংস্থানের উপযোগী করে তুলতে বলেন কালাম। গ্রাম থেকে শহরে সর্বত্র নতুন ব্যবসা স্থাপনে সম্ভাবনাময় যুবক-যুবতীদের ঋণ দিতে ব্যাঙ্কগুলির এগিয়ে আসা উচিত বলে তিনি মনে করেন। এ ক্ষেত্রে তাদের 'প্রো-অ্যাকটিভ' ভূমিকা পালন করতে হবে বলে তাঁর মন্তব্য। গ্রামীণ সংযোগ, বিদ্যুৎ, পর্যটন প্রভৃতির উন্নতির মাধ্যমে এক দিকে মানুষের ক্রয়ক্ষমতা বাড়ানো ও অন্য দিকে বাজারে নতুন পণ্য আনা সরকার বলে কালামের বক্তব্য। —পি টি আই

Kalam favours linking of rivers, justifies rise in defence spending

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JULY 14. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, has strongly defended India going nuclear and the increasing defence spending, saying "we need to have strength to repulse if somebody attacks."

Interacting with the members of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly after addressing the House, Mr. Kalam said India spent much less compared to many other countries and subscribed to the philosophy of "no first use of nuclear weapon systems."

It was for the second time in the history of the State that a President had addressed the Assembly. He fielded questions on a variety of subjects.

Mr. Kalam, who was responding to a question by a Telugu Desam member, P. Keshav, spoke of India's vulnerability

A ticklish poser

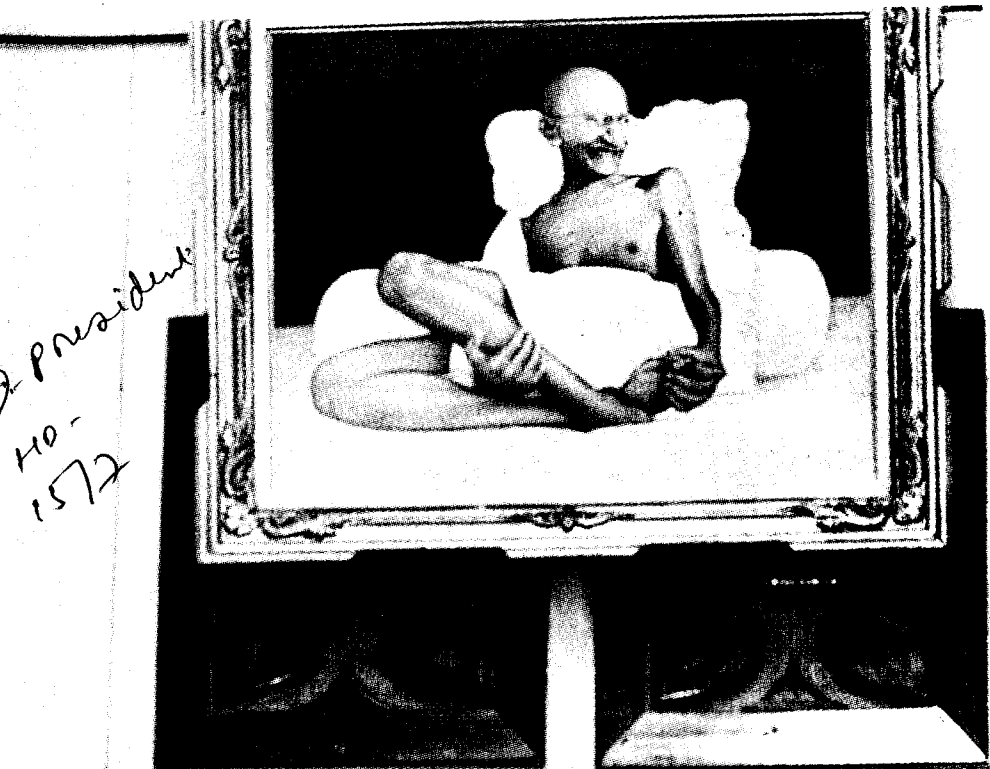
HYDERABAD, JULY 14. Creating a flutter during an interaction with the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, K. Ramulu, a Janata Party legislator, posed a ticklish question to him whether he would confer "Bharat Ratna" on the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, for "renouncing" Prime Ministership.

The President, apparently taken aback by the delicate political question, quickly gathered his wits, and said: "Normally, the people whom you recommend the highest award for are not interested [in accepting it]. I am also one among them." — PTI

down the ages. "Countries after countries and kings after kings kept invading India. The British, the French and the Dutch turned several parts into their colonies. Why were we ruled by others? Did we not have kings and warriors? What we lacked was strength. Ponder over, you will get the answer."

The President also favoured the interlinking of rivers, pointing to the paradox of simultaneous floods and severe drought conditions. "We need connectivity from the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and the Cauvery to overcome such problems," he said, responding to a question by J. Krishna Rao (Independent). He said he would pursue it with the Central Government.

On the issue of the agrarian crisis and farmers committing suicides raised by N. Narsim-



HISTORIC ADDRESS: The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, speaking at the Andhra Pradesh Assembly in Hyderabad on Wednesday. — AP

haiah (CPI- M) Mr. Kalam said he was sad that the farmers were overtaken by such tragedy. They needed help and the courage to face problems. They needed the right type of quality inputs, water and power and the effort should be to link the budgetary allocations to the problems they were facing.

On 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament, he supported it and said: "My Government is looking forward to it." On the minority communities' contribution to his develop-

ment vision, he said he would not make any "people-to-people" distinction.

At the same time, some regions and people belonging to certain denominations required help. But those who cried for development of the minorities should strive for vocational education and training for girl children and women.

Earlier in his address, the President said the country faced the major challenge of uplifting 260 million people below the poverty line. For achieving the

objective, economists suggested that the economy should grow at the rate of 10 per cent a year consistently for over a decade, from the present GDP rate of five per cent.

He came up with a "Rural Prosperity Through Connectivity" plan for rural development and a 10-mission approach focussing on agriculture, energy, drinking water, healthcare, weather-monitoring and education.

President's address on Page 6

Democracy doesn't keep faith with reservations

The Andhra government's move to provide five per cent job reservations for Muslims will harm rather than serve them

■ PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE Andhra Pradesh government's announcement of a five per cent job reservation for Muslims is treading down a dangerous legal and political path. The full integration of Muslims into India's public life, and the expansion of opportunities for them ought to be the endeavour of public policy. But reservations of the kind just announced are not an effective means of achieving the desired objective. It could be potentially counterproductive.

Anyone concerned with the future of Indian democracy ought to concede that the alienation of Muslims from India's public institutions and their economic marginalisation should be matters of grave concern. Targeting Muslims for simply being who they are has become commonly legitimised. The state on many occasions has openly condoned discriminatory treatment towards them in matters of securing justice.

The space for an autonomous Muslim politics has been almost non-existent, caught between political parties that ominously target them, and political parties that cynically use them. And Muslim politics has not been well served by its leaders, who have been reluctant to democratise institutions relevant to Muslims. All of these forces have combined to ensure that Muslims, rather than being integrated as equal citizens, unencumbered by the weight of their identities, are constantly put in the position of being a supplicant minority. Millions of ordinary Muslims have paid the price for this myopia.

This context has to serve as a background for any discussion of the issue of Muslim reservations. The majority has to recognise that integrating Muslims and expanding opportunities for them is an important political task. It would be height of folly to ignore it. On the other hand, we ought to be careful not to enact policies that are either empty political gestures, or have

the potential for producing harm.

The case for reservations for Muslims is however weak on many grounds. They are economically more marginalised and under-represented in public services. But the most effective solution to this is not reservations. It is their inclusion in all schemes that are aimed at expanding opportunities for citizens: education and so forth. On this front the state

its failures to address their needs. Second, it is often argued that Muslims were being discriminated against under current reservation provisions. Muslims from oppressed castes, whose status did not really alter on account of being Muslim, were being arbitrarily denied the benefits of reservation. Was this not a form of religious discrimination?

This argument is also disingenu-

sions. What it had objected to was declaring Muslims as a whole a backward community, enjoying the same status as Scheduled Castes or Tribes.

What is insidious about the Andhra legislation is that is going down the path of reifying a single Muslim interest, irrespective of caste, class and regional differences. Many prominent Muslims have been arguing, with considerable merit, that an understanding of Muslim society should involve an acknowledgment of its complex and various sociology and history. Classifying the Muslims qua community as backward is another step in abridging this complexity. It is giving succour to those who deploy "Muslim" as a reified category to target them. Finally, great poverty and economic deprivation amongst the Muslims

that have made them more vulnerable over the last decade or so. Hindutva was, in part, made possible by Congress' footloose interpretation of secularism. On this view secularism meant generating a political dynamic whereby religious groups would jostle with state for benefits qua religious communities.

This was a secularism of political expediency, not a secularism of principle. It created an ugly politics, where different religious groups would measure their standing by how many concessions they had managed to wrest from the state qua religious groups. Rather than making religious identities irrelevant for politics and public policies, it opened up space for them even more insistently. Anybody familiar with our recent history ought to understand that this reification of religious identities and their intrusion into public policy is a recipe for disaster. It is wishful thinking to suppose that enacting reservations for Muslims qua Muslims, will not unleash a politics of that kind again. We will all start measuring what a government does, not by the general provisions it makes for the common good, but by the benefits it targets towards particular communities. Anyone familiar with recent Indian history ought to be disturbed by this scenario, for its biggest beneficiaries are going to be the votaries of Hindutva.

It could be argued that the fear of Hindutva cannot be allowed to hold desirable policies to ransom. There is some truth to this, but risking a politics of religious competition of the kind Congress subject us to for two decades, better have a compelling moral and political justification. Reservations for Muslims have no such justification. It will not help them economically. It might marginally increase their representation in the state, but unleash a process that alienates them from politics further. It is against the rather wise consensus of our founding fathers that the history of Muslims and Dalits cannot be equated. And it is against norms of fairness, for it will only underscore the deprivation of those who are poor but don't fall under any category of reservations. The Congress is once again playing politics on a delicate matter and will put in jeopardy the interests of those it is pretending to help.

The author is Visiting Professor of Government at Harvard University



Muslims, rather than being integrated as free and equal citizens, unencumbered by the weight of their identities, are constantly put in the position of being a supplicant minority. Millions of ordinary Muslims have paid the price for this myopia

needs to give a credible commitment.

There is a real opportunity cost to a public discourse obsessed by reservation. We have become attuned to thinking of the well being of marginalised communities only on one dimension. But we know that is downright false to claim that reservations are genuine anti-poverty programmes. Reservations is not an act of commitment by the state to the cause of Muslims, it is a cover up for

ous in two respects. First, it is a reductio ad absurdum of our reservations policy, not an argument in its favour. The same argument could be applied on behalf of poor Brahmins or Rajputs. Are they not being excluded simply on account of their caste? Second, the Mandal commission had made provisions for some reservations for backward Muslim castes. Various states have been directed to implement these provi-

needs to be addressed. But the rationale for reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes was entirely different. It was based on a particular experience of oppression and discrimination. It would make a mockery of our history, if we put the two forms of marginalisation in roughly the same category, and suggested the same remedies for both.

What the Muslims need most of all is defeating the ideologies of hate

Fresh spotlight on Godhra burning

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Dr. Felicitas...

New Delhi, July 14: Laloo Prasad Yadav today announced in Parliament that he has ordered a high-level departmental inquiry into the Godhra carnage.

Wrapping up a discussion on the railway budget, the minister alleged that there was a conspiracy in the incident of February 27, 2002, when 59 people in a Sabarmati Express compartment were burnt alive near Godhra.

Most of them were said to be *kar sevaks* mobilised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for its *shila puja* in Ayodhya. The train burning set off the Gujarat riots. Led by Narendra Modi, the BJP swept the Assembly elections that followed the violence.

Laloo Prasad based his allegation on a report submitted by the Forensic Science Laboratory of Gujarat on May 17, 2002. He said there was evidence that the fire was caused by inflammable material used within the compartment. So far, the official version has been that the coach was set on fire from outside by a group of Muslims, including some clerics.

The railway minister said the report's findings were kept under wraps by the then National Democratic Alliance government at the Centre and Modi's ministry in Gujarat. There would be no cover-up now and those found guilty would be punished, Laloo Prasad added.

In a brief intervention, science and

15/7

technology minister Kapil Sibal said the fact that the report was not disclosed pointed to the connivance of Modi, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his deputy, L.K. Advani.

If the report's findings are conclusively established, it would compound Modi's troubles. The chief minister has been ticked off by the Supreme Court for "misleading" it on information related to the Gujarat riots. The Godhra burning and the violence that followed, which was allegedly justified by Modi in an "action-reaction" comment, formed the theme of the BJP's successful campaign in the Assembly polls.

The BJP chose not to respond to Laloo Prasad's announcement today, leaving it to his predecessor Nitish Kumar to face the media.

The former minister tried to appear unfazed. Washing his hands of the incident, he shifted the blame onto the commissioner, railway safety, and dismissed Laloo Prasad's announcement of a probe as a "political statement to address a particular constituency at the cost of the railways".

Quoting the rule book to defend his role, he said the Railway Act specifies that matters relating to safety, mishaps and disasters would be investigated by the commissioner, independent of the ministry. The commissioner alone was "accountable" for what was done, stressed Nitish.

1

'Let a billion smiles bloom'

Kalam unveils govt's pro-poor agenda with swipe at saffron

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 7

PRESIDENT A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on Monday unveiled the first broad policy statement of the new government, vowing to repeal Pota and enact a model law to check communal forces and fight all "obscurantist and fundamentalist elements". He also promised to bring "a smile on a billion faces" by addressing the concerns of the farmers, workers, unemployed youth, SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities and women.

The lengthening queues of the jobless and the rising graph of suicide by farmers seemed to weigh on the government as it promised to pass a national Employment Guarantee Act, grant subsidies to the poor and open a dialogue with political parties, industry and other bodies for job reservations in the private sector.

The BJP-NDA Opposition watched grimly while UPA partners thumped their desks as the President — in his address to a joint sitting of Parliament — announced a rollback of the Vajpayee government's "controversial" decisions. Other than the repeal of Pota, they included the restoration of autonomy to academic institutions and removal of the communal content in school syllabuses.

"It is a matter of serious concern that forces of communalism have been able to vitiate the atmosphere in the country leading to outbreak of riots, the most gruesome face of which was witnessed recently in Gujarat," Kalam told the 14th Lok Sabha. "The outcome of these elections is indicative of people's yearning for inclusiveness and their rejection of the forces of divisiveness and intolerance."

The stringent criticism of the BJP's communal agenda raised speculation on why Vice-President B.S. Shekhawat, after reading only two paragraphs from the Hindi translation of Kalam's address, said the entire text be considered "read".

"The verdict is for establishing the rule of law and repairing our secular fabric... and providing the right ambience for fulfilling the aspirations implicit in the people's mandate," the President summed up. The Left and Congress benches cheered through the speech, but there seemed some unease about the silence on poverty-alleviation programmes or reviving sick units.

■ Related reports on Page 4



Blueprint for the job ahead

EMPLOYMENT



Employment Guarantee Act coming. Talks with industry for quota in private sector

WORKERS' WELFARE



Compensation for the workers of chronically loss-making PSUs before sell-off

FARMERS



Govt to step up public investments in agriculture, ensure good prices for farmers

MODEL LAW



To fight sectarian forces and deal with communal violence, like the pogrom in Gujarat

HEALTH



2-3% of GDP to be spent on health. National health insurance scheme for poor families

SOUTHERN COMFORT



Telangana demand to be considered. Tamil to get status of classical language

POTA Will be repealed. Existing laws are enough, feels govt
AYODHYA Govt will await court's verdict while encouraging negotiated settlement backed by legal sanction

KASHMIR Article 370 to be observed in letter and spirit. Special status for J&K; talks with various groups in the state
WOMEN'S BILL Govt talks of introducing Bill, mum on passing it

Agenda may cramp FM's style

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 7

THE PRESIDENTIAL address gives a hint of what to expect from the budget to be presented in the first week of July by Finance Minister P. Chidambaram.

For instance, no flexibility has been given to the Finance Minister on the imposition of 2 per cent education and health cess. While Chidambaram is on record that a 'doctrine of proportionality' will be applied, the President says the cess will be across the board — on all central taxes that include personal income tax, corporate tax, customs, excise and services.

In effect, Chidambaram's plan to limit the cess to those who can bear it may have to be shelved. If the 2 per cent cess is applied on all central taxes, an estimated Rs 6,000 crore

will accrue to the Centre.

The short-term economic agenda is also indicated in Kalam's address.

Chidambaram may also come up with a package to boost private investment and revive industrial growth for the domestic industry.

The minister may announce a major package for small-scale industries to support investments, marketing and induction of technology. This is at variance with the NDA policy of de-reserving sectors in the exclusive domain of SSIs.

While there has been talk of bringing more services under the tax net, a policy direction and tax incentive package may be announced in the budget.

On infrastructure development, the Centre has promised to involve private and public sector companies in ports, airports, railways, power, road, water supply and sanitation.

On the plate

Growth rate: GDP growth of 7-8 per cent promised

Social infrastructure: Cess of 2 per cent for health and education

Assistance to states to eliminate deficits; fund for backward states

Small-scale industries to get technological, investment support

Private investment in power production, distribution to be encouraged

Do it right, Mr President

5/16 Call the single largest party/alliance 19/5

Today, the nation may return a verdict that doesn't give any alliance a clear majority. The President, aware of this possibility, has already consulted legal experts. Abdul Kalam himself, unlike many recent occupants of Rashtrapati Bhavan, possesses a fine mind and an intrinsically fair disposition. There should therefore be little doubt that President Kalam would do the right thing, which, as this newspaper has argued some time back, is also a simple choice — call the single largest party or pre-poll alliance first and ask them to prove their majority on the floor of the House. This has been the convention for some time and it should continue to be the path Presidents follow in case of split verdicts. There have been suggestions that the President should assess the government formation "capacity" of rival political alliances and then decide who to call. That is disingenuous and dangerous. Disingenuous because it makes the President, however indirectly, a party to political manoeuvres by making his decision normative instead of a simple numerical choice. Allegations are bound to arise in any such decision and experience with KR Narayanan showed partisanship is a label hard to peel off once it gets stuck. Kalam is a far better President than Narayanan, whose old "political loyalties" surfaced a little too obviously, and so he doesn't deserve to get tagged. The President must ignore all suggestions that he feels the political pulse by saying that his job in this context is that of a constitutional facilitator, not a quasi-political analyst.

Asking the President not to go by the single largest party/pre-poll alliance rule is dangerous because it creates enormous uncertainties for the future. Given India's fractured society, split verdicts are always on the cards. If the President plays political assessor, governors may be tempted to do so too. Everyone knows governors are not above reading signals from politicians who appointed them — remember the ludicrous stalemate Romesh Bhandari as Governor, UP created when he refused to give Kalyan Singh an opportunity to prove his majority. If President Kalam steps off the straight and the narrow today, governors may swerve wildly away from the right path tomorrow. Those grinding their political axe now by advising the President that he ignores a simple, correct, safe and democratically proper course are obviously oblivious to larger implications. But this President, undoubtedly one of the finest, if not the finest, head of state we have ever had, is known for his passionate commitment to the country. That commitment allows him only one choice, and this newspaper is confident he will make it.

রাষ্ট্রপতির ভোটাধিকার

রাষ্ট্রপতি এ.পি.জে. আবদুল কালাম সোমবার ভোট দিয়া বুথের বাহিরে আসিয়া টেলিভিশন মারফত তাঁহার আঙুলে লাগিয়া থাকা ভোটের কালির ছাপ দেশবাসীর উদ্দেশে দেখাইয়া ঘোষণা করিয়াছেন যে তাঁহার খুব সুন্দর লাগিতেছে, সকলেই যেন তাঁহার মতো আপন গণতান্ত্রিক অধিকার প্রয়োগ করিয়া তাঁহার মতোই আনন্দ পান। ভারতীয় গণতন্ত্রের বর্ণময় ইতিহাসে কোনও রাষ্ট্রপতির এমত আচরণ দেখা যায় নাই। এই চমকপ্রদ প্রথাভঙ্গের ঘটনাটি সম্ভবত বর্তমান রাষ্ট্রপতির স্বাভাবিক চাঞ্চল্য ও অতিসক্রিয়তার লক্ষণ। তিনি যেন সর্বদাই একটা কিছু করিতে চাহেন, একটা ছটফটানি তাঁহার মধ্যে সতত লক্ষ করা যায়। সেটা তাঁহার ব্যক্তিগত চারিত্রিক বৈশিষ্ট্য হইতে পারে। কিন্তু আবদুল কালাম তো সাধারণ মানুষ নহেন, তিনি রাষ্ট্রপ্রধান। সুতরাং তাঁহার আচরণে কিঞ্চিৎ সংযম প্রত্যাশিত। কিন্তু ইহা গৌণ প্রশ্ন। এই ঘটনাটির সূত্রে একটা মৌলিক প্রশ্ন উঠিয়া আসিয়াছে। তাহা এই যে, রাষ্ট্রপতির কি ভোট দেওয়া বিধেয়? আর এক পা আগাইয়া বলিলে, রাষ্ট্রপতির কি ভোটাধিকার থাকা উচিত? আপাতদৃষ্টিতে প্রশ্নটিকে বিস্ময়কর মনে হইতে পারে। রাষ্ট্রপতি দেশের একজন নাগরিক। বস্তুত, তাঁহাকে সমাদর করিয়া 'প্রথম নাগরিক' বলিয়াও ডাকা হয়। দেশের অপরাপর নাগরিকের যে গণতান্ত্রিক অধিকার রহিয়াছে, রাষ্ট্রপতিরই বা তাহা থাকিবে না কেন? তিনি সংবিধানের রক্ষক আর ভোটদানের সাংবিধানিক অধিকার তাঁহারই থাকিবে না?

কিন্তু ঈশৎ ভাবিলে প্রশ্নটির অর্থ বোঝা কঠিন নয়। প্রথমেই স্পষ্ট করিয়া বলা দরকার, প্রশ্নটি আদিতে আইনের নহে, নৈতিকতার। অন্য ভাবে বলিলে, এ ক্ষেত্রে 'অধিকার' অর্থে নৈতিক অধিকার। এক বার রাষ্ট্রপতি পদে অভিষিক্ত হইবার পর এই সাংবিধানিক প্রধানের আর কোনও নিজস্ব রাজনৈতিক পছন্দ থাকিতে পারে না, তিনি তখন আর কোনও দলের প্রতি আপন পক্ষপাত দেখাইতে পারেন না,

কেননা তখন তিনি গোটা দেশের, সমগ্র জাতির রাষ্ট্রপতি, কোনও দলের সমর্থক নন। অথচ তাঁহার যদি ভোটাধিকার থাকে, তবে নিশ্চিত ভাবেই তিনি কোনও বিশেষ একটি দল বা তাহার প্রার্থীকে তাঁহার ভোটটি দিয়া আসিবেন। ভোট দেওয়া মানেই তো বাছিয়া লওয়া, সুতরাং একই সঙ্গে, খারিজ করা। একটি দেশের রাষ্ট্রপ্রধানের কি কাহাকেও, কোনও দল বা প্রার্থীকে বাছিয়া লওয়া বা খারিজ করা উচিত? তিনি ব্যক্তিগতভাবে কোনও দল বা নেতার অনুরাগী হইতে পারেন। কিন্তু তাহা নিতান্তই তাঁহার ব্যক্তিগত বিশ্বাসের গণ্ডিতে সীমিত থাকা বাঞ্ছনীয়। বস্তুত, কেবল রাষ্ট্রপতি নয়, প্রাদেশিক স্তরে তাঁহার সমান্তরাল সাংবিধানিক প্রধান রাজ্যপালদেরও একই যুক্তিতে ভোট দেওয়া বিধেয় নয়। কেননা রাষ্ট্রপতির মতোই রাজ্যপালরাও সমগ্র রাজ্যবাসীর প্রধান, কোনও একটি দলের সমর্থক নন।

ভারতের মতো দেশে প্রশ্নটি দ্বিগুণ জরুরি, কারণ এ দেশে জাতীয় বা রাজ্য স্তরের শীর্ষ আসনে অধিষ্ঠিত ব্যক্তিদের আচরণেও দলীয় পক্ষপাতিত্বের অব্যাহতি, অসুস্থ ও বিপজ্জনক প্রবণতা দেখা গিয়াছে। দেশের রাষ্ট্রপতি প্রকাশ্যে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর প্রতি আপন নিরঙ্কুশ আনুগত্য ব্যক্ত করিতেছেন, এমন দৃশ্যও ভারতবাসী দেখিয়াছে। রাজ্যপালদের ক্ষেত্রে এমন অব্যাহতি আচরণের নমুনা তো ভূরি ভূরি। অতি সম্প্রতি হরিয়ানার রাজ্যপাল সরকারি অনুষ্ঠানে ভাষণ দিতে গিয়া প্রকাশ্যে বাজপেয়ী সরকারের প্রতি সমর্থন জানাইয়া তাহাকে পুনর্নির্বাচিত করার ডাক দিয়া যে বিতর্ক তোলেন, তাহা দেখাইয়া দেয়, নিরপেক্ষতা কতটা জরুরি। ভোটাধিকার থাকিলে এমন পক্ষপাতিত্বের আশঙ্কা বাড়ে অথবা সেই অধিকার না থাকিলেই নাযকরা নিরপেক্ষ হইয়া পড়েন— এমন যুক্তি নিশ্চয়ই হাস্যকর। কিন্তু এ ক্ষেত্রে কথ্যটি প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক নিরপেক্ষতার। সেই নিরপেক্ষতা কেবল অন্তরে থাকিলে চলে না, তাহা সতত স্পষ্ট এবং নির্ভুল ভাবে জনসমক্ষে প্রদর্শন করিতে হয়। ইহা মূল আচরণবিধির প্রশ্ন।

Vote without fear: President

19/4
4001

● 'A sacred right and an onerous responsibility'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 18. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, today asked voters to "exercise their franchise without fear" and turn out in large numbers to become the "proud" contributors to the "success of the spirit of democracy" in India — the "largest" and the most "dynamic" of all democracies in the world.

True to his style of communicating directly with the people, Mr. Kalam, whose address was broadcast tonight on All India Radio and Doordarshan, asked the people to "vote positively" and make this the "priority activity." By casting their vote, they would be using this "great opportunity" to elect members of the 14th Lok Sabha and members of Legislative Assemblies in four States.

Mr. Kalam is the first President to address the nation on the eve of polls. Here is what the President said:

"Dear citizens,

"Good Evening. You might recall during my address to the nation on the eve of the 55th Republic Day 2004, I had appealed to you that all eligible voters must

exercise their franchise without fear. As you are aware, India, the largest democracy in the world, is going to elect the

members of her 14th Lok Sabha and members of Legislative Assemblies in four States. Dear citizens, it is a great opportunity provided to you to elect members who will be guiding the destiny of the nation for the next five years. The right to vote is a sacred right and an onerous responsibility that you owe to the motherland. Hence, exercising your franchise must become a priority activity for you and you should cast your vote positively.

"By casting your vote for a candidate who in your opinion can represent you in the Lok Sabha, you are sowing the seeds for the creation of a prosperous India, a happy India, a safe India, a secure India and above all an India with nobility. May I remind you, that by casting your vote, you will be fulfilling the aspirations of the children and the youth of our nation and creating a powerful system that will make their dreams a reality.

"In a democracy, an important principle is the equality of every citizen. Elections are an occasion when this can be demonstrated visibly. This is an oppor-

tunity for all of you, who are eligible to vote, to go to the booths and exercise your franchise. Therefore, I would request all eligible voters both in urban and rural areas to give a pleasant surprise to the nation by going and voting in large numbers with your eligible family members.

"I have been assured by the Election Commission that all polling officers and professionals responsible for the conduct of the polls will provide easy-to-follow clarifications and guidance to voters about their doubts, help them with a smile in exercising their franchise and be people-friendly.

"Dear voters, the dawn of a beautiful India is in your mind and then in your deeds. The deed for the day of the election for you is to cast your vote and be a proud contributor to the success of the spirit of democracy of the largest and dynamic democracy of all democracies.

"Dear citizens, I appeal to all of you to go ahead and exercise your fundamental right to vote.

"May God bless you."



Kalam on top of the world



The President at Siachen on Friday. — AFP

Press Trust of India

SIACHEN BASE CAMP, April 2. — Making the first-ever presidential visit to the world's highest battlefield, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam today said the 75-km-long Siachen glacier was of "extreme geo-strategic importance" to India and assured the troops there that the government had a comprehensive security plan while pursuing a diplomatic approach to peace.

Visiting troops at the Kumar Adv-

ance Post, Siachen Base Camp and the IAF personnel posted in areas adjoining the Thoise airbase, the President said the troops in Siachen had to be always alert.

"I can assure you that the nation is fully conscious of its responsibility in enhancing the troops' survivability, sustainability, efficiency and motivation," he said. Dr Kalam spoke of the government's emphasis on equipping troops battling heavy odds in inhospitable terrain "like here".

He said thermally-heated shoes and maps drawn from ground penetration

radars to indicate possible avalanche-prone areas would soon be made available to troops serving in extreme high-altitude areas.

Dr Kalam told the troops to get trained in using handheld GPS, which would help them in patrolling the snowy heights. Ground penetration radars fitted on helicopters and used in tandem with GPS system could enable accurate mapping of crevasses.

Dr Kalam also urged the soldiers to maintain ecological balance in the area.

Encourage entrepreneurship: Kalam

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 7. The President, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, today called upon industry to encourage entrepreneurship to achieve an economic growth of 10 per cent and help the country in eliminating poverty.

"We have to graduate to 10 per cent GDP (gross domestic product) growth only then the number of people living below the poverty line will reduce to zero from 260 million now," Mr. Kalam said in his inaugural address at the 76th Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

Spelling out what he called "Integrated action plan for developed India by 2020," the President said the syllabus at the school level would need to be changed with a view to creating entrepreneurs and industry must step in to nurture and encourage entrepreneurship.

In order to transform India into a developed nation by 2020, Mr. Kalam said that industry would have to become competitive globally by achieving cost effectiveness, brand performance and "just in time" delivery.

In plain terms, he declared that whoever was competitive would be the winner. The law of development States that whoever was competitive would win whether developing or developed.



The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, flanked by A.C. Muthiah, outgoing FICCI president (right), and Yogendra Kumar Modi, president-elect of FICCI, at the annual general meeting of FICCI in New Delhi on Wednesday. — Photo: V. Sudershan.

Voicing his concern over lack of amenities in rural areas, he said the programme for "providing urban amenities in rural areas" (PURA) had to be run in a business-like fashion and the industry would have to play a key role in implementing it.

Further talking about what he called "Evolution of PURA enterprise," he said the SSI sector with its wide presence across the country could take the lead in this area. With the support of FICCI and other bodies, the SSIs could play a key role in paving the way for provision of physical, electron-

ic, knowledge and economic connectivity for prosperity of clusters of villages in rural areas.

The economic connectivity would generate a market and the production establishments to service the market. The PURA entrepreneur had to have the skill for evolving a business plan with banks and also create infrastructural support such as educational institutions, health centres and small scale industries, transportation services, tele-education, tele-medicine, e-governance services in the region and integrate them with

the governmental rural development schemes such as road, communication and transport, he said.

Mr. Kalam said that time had come for the second Green Revolution in the country to meet the food requirement of 400 million tonnes by 2020. This could be achieved through a mix of technology and innovation.

Earlier, addressing the AGM, the FICCI's outgoing President, A. C. Muthiah, asked for changes in labour law besides allowing the entrepreneurs free entry and exit option.

Peace is essential for prosperity: Kalam

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 5. Even as the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was meeting the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, in Islamabad this morning, the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, expressed the hope that it would bring peace to the region and with it the consequent dividends to development.

Addressing a function at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here today after presenting the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2003 to the former President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, Mr. Kalam said: "Now the time has come to realise that peace is essential for an individual and a nation's prosperity, and also for the world to prosper. In this direction, our Prime Minister has put forth in the SAARC summit that integrated development of the SAARC region is essential to remove poverty and bring about peace."

Prior to him, Mr. Advani — who was stepping in for the Prime Minister — said millions across the country were praying that Mr. Vajpayee's visit to Islamabad would provide a major breakthrough for the establishment of peace.

While Mr. Kalam described Mr. Havel as "the present-day torch-bearer of all those principles, particularly peace movement, which Mahatma Gandhi held close to his heart," Mr. Advani recalled the Czech statesman's record in fighting for democracy and civil liberties; thereby making his public life quite similar to that of Mr. Vajpayee's.

In his speech, Mr. Havel dwelt at length on the flip side of globalisation, how humankind was unable to cope responsibly with its own



The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, presenting the Gandhi Peace Prize to the former President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

products, and identified the "reckless, unbridled course of civilisation today" as one of the causes of terrorism.

"While the rapid tendency of civilisation towards uniformity attracts both individuals and entire human communities it is

at the same time a source of deep, and often unconscious, frustration."

Mr. Havel was selected for the award — which carries a cash component of Rs. 1 crore, a plaque and a citation — for his contribution towards world

peace and upholding human rights. No stranger to India and awarded the Indira Gandhi Prize in 1994, this award puts Mr. Havel in the league of the former South African President, Nelson Mandela, and John Hume of Ireland, among others.

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