

THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESSAnna Hazare's Rivals
Do a Fake Job

What the appearance of a CD of doubtful authenticity pertaining to the co-chairman of the committee on the Lokpal Bill shows is that opponents of Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement became active to discredit it the moment it gained momentum. Even if their move can be said to have backfired because of the supposedly doctored nature of the disc, the need to guard against further such clandestine efforts to derail the committee cannot be overemphasised.

The fact that the CDs were sent to media houses, like the Niira Radia tapes, showed that those bent on scuttling the talks were well aware of the value of manipulating the airwaves. The limited time at their disposal is probably the reason why they have been unable to escape the charges about the fakery of the CDs.

Smearing the characters of the participants in the delicate negotiations on the controversial bill is, of course, a handy weapon in the hands of Anna Hazare's opponents. Since there is little doubt that those responsible are not short of resources, including access to private conversations, more such damaging leakages can be expected. Ways have to be found, therefore, to stop them lest they vitiate the atmosphere and divert attention from the committee's primary purpose of reaching an agreement.

Kashmir's Vote for
Grassroots Democracy

The massive turnout of voters in the on-going panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir is in defiance of separatists who have asked for a boycott. On the second day of polling on Sunday, 81.62 per cent voters exercised their franchise in the 16-phase elections which will conclude on June 18. This proves that the murder of Haseena Begum, a candidate, two days after the first round of polling on April 16, when 77 per cent voting was recorded, had no deterrent effect on the voters. The areas covered by the polling so far are representative of the regional characteristics of the state.

Equally important, people from all walks of life have come forward to contest the elections being held after 10 years. The people know that most of their local problems, like lack of roads, wells and public hydrants, can be solved locally by the civic bodies. They also know that funds for many centrally-sponsored programmes are now routed through such bodies. By not holding elections for the last five years, they realise that they have only lost and not gained. That is why they have defied the boycott call given by separatists like Syed Ali Shah Gilani. Whatever be the outcome of the polls, it will be a victory for grassroots democracy.

Cuba's Raul Castro Calls
for Change, Finally

The winds of change that are sweeping across West Asia and bringing about a revolution that has not been witnessed in the near past has crossed the Atlantic and has even forced the communist leaders in Cuba to take note.

Cuban President Raul Castro, in his speech opening the Sixth Communist Party Congress on Saturday, which can be described as his political epitaph, said that there should be term limits for Cuban leaders. He said, "We have arrived at the conclusion that it is advisable to limit the fundamental political and state offices to a maximum period of two consecutive periods of five years." This is a welcome change. This realisation from Raul Castro, who, along with his brother Fidel, has ruled the island nation for more than half a century, could not have come a day sooner.

But if good sense has dawned at this late hour it is not only because there is a growing call for 'true' democracy around the world, but also because the Cuban government is grappling with a host of problems, the most pressing being the economy, which is on a precipice. His two-and-a-half hour speech, which pales when compared to the four-and-a-half hour marathon speech his brother gave at the UN in 1960, highlights the need to introduce more private enterprise, do away with the ration books that is an "unsupportable load on the economy" and also asks his compatriots to "update" the Cuban model.

More than who will succeed Raul, the focus should be on giving Cubans their due.

Night of the Long Knives

POWER & POLITICS | PRABHU CHAWLA

HAZARE MAY NOT BE ANOTHER JP, BUT YOU CAN'T DENY THAT HE HAS DEMOLISHED THE ESTABLISHED SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORDER



him on his stage, he becomes communal. If he endorses Modi's Mantra for Development, under the illusion that it's their presence at Jantar Mantar that made Anna Hazare credible and acceptable.

But then, such reactions are expected from those who spend the morning sitting in dharna, their afternoon at a seminar, evening in a TV studio and weekends in salubrious surroundings. Over conversations with like-minded souls, they make and unmake prime ministers and chief ministers, decide the fate of the world and generally live in a world of their own.

But what is astonishing is the behaviour of the political class. Their grouse against Hazare seems to be that he has taken up a single point agenda. They have a point, but they should have been at the forefront of expanding that agenda. They paralysed Parliament on a JPC for the 2G scam but didn't stage even a walkout on the Lokpal Bill, which has been pending for 42 years. None of them has made an attempt to strengthen the Lokayukta in his own state. How many chief ministers, ministers or civil servants have been punished by Lokayuktas in this country? Hardly any. Instead, most of them have either been tamed or maimed and made ineffective.

Hazare may not be another Jayaprakash Narayan in the making. JP was a wily strat-

egist who took the political class into confidence and co-opted student leaders as active partners in his Sampoorana Kranti (Total Revolution). But you can't deny that Hazare has demolished the established social and political order. He is not a creation of Tweeter-atti or TVratti. In fact, those two entities got more followers because of him. Some of their members even camped at Jantar Mantar to be seen or to participate in live TV shows.

But now, they are the ones who feel threatened by Hazare. Because he is shaking the system which helped social and corporate oligarchies to make mountains of money and climb up the social, corporate and political ladder. The system ensured that being seen with each other would generate more business and many more opportunities. Debates in Parliament would be followed by cosy dinners at some lobbyist's residence, with stars from every sector on display. Decisions about who would get what and where would be taken at these rendezvous.

Mumbai may be the financial capital of the country but it's the drawing rooms of New Delhi which have become parallel South Blocks and North Blocks over the past decade of massive economic growth. A social audit of the membership of elitist dinner clubs will reveal the beneficiaries of the government's munificence. Millionaires have turned billionaires, directing and dictating the pace and face of economic policies along the way. How else can one explain the frequent changes in policies relating to national highways, telecommunications, civil aviation, car manufacturing and real estate development? And what about the zero tax on the billions made through manipulative trading at stock exchanges? The revenue lost due to tax concessions to the corporate sector amounts to ₹5 lakh crore.

Hazare has just won a minor battle. The frequency and fire power of the attacks to come will strongly test his survival skills. Unless, he targets the origin of corruption, the establishment might just get the better of him.

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Even though the battlelines have not been publicly defined, the knives are clearly out for Hazare's Hunters. There is nothing unusual about the venomous diatribe being levelled against the man who's perceived as an outsider, with a mind and mannerisms of his own. Success, of any kind, tends to attract detractors. And this is success of stupendous scale. But what is baffling is the behaviour of the detractors. They have not been able to find any fault in his message. So they've chosen to attack Hazare's fellow messengers. What they seem to have forgotten is that these are not people of his choosing. These are the people who have credible record of taking on the establishment irrespective of its colour.

But the overall objective of their adversaries seems to be to demoralise, defame, tame and eventually main Team Hazare. Though the first meeting of the joint government-civil society meeting on the Lokpal Bill ended on a happy note, suspicious smirks were all too visible on the faces of the pro-establishment forces. They seemed to be openly gloating about their (so-called) success in defaming some prominent members of the panel.

You don't need a telescope to spot the elitist vandals who've begun mining Hazare's mandates for dirt. If one goes by both the intensity of the attacks and the instruments used for weakening the anti-corruption campaign, the establishment would seem to be playing an invisible hand. Old and mischievous reports are being dug out, illegally-tapped-and-acquired telephone conversations are being circulated, and a communal angle is being touted to discredit Hazare.

Funnily enough, the tirade is being led by leaders of the most fashionable NGOs, their sponsors based in India and abroad and individuals who have been recipients of liberal government patronage and/or funds from either the government or in known entities operating from other countries. They have never subjected themselves or their incomes to public scrutiny. But they are ever willing to hold up the magnifying glass for others. So if Hazare puts up a painting of Bharat Mata behind

Iran Showed the Way to Neighbours to Protest

by Frida Ghitis

If pro-democracy activists in the Middle East have someone to thank for showing them how to challenge their oppressors, they should look to Iran. Young Iranians, who took to the streets after a stolen election in 2009, showed their neighbours how to launch a peaceful democratic uprising. Unfortunately, the regime that smashed the Iranian quest for democracy also had a lesson to teach its neighbours. The Islamic Republic's brutality against its own people is now being replicated in much of the Arab world.

While the people of Iran have not given up hope that they will ultimately succeed in toppling a repressive regime dominated by the Republican Guard and the Shiite clerical establishment, the reality so far is quite the opposite. On balance, the seizures of instability convulsing Arab countries have strengthened the Iranian regime. So far, Iran is winning.

Instability in the heart of the oil-producing region has sent oil prices soaring, bringing money gushing into Tehran's coffers. A few days ago, Iran confirmed work on a new generation of centrifuges to enrich uranium, the key ingredient in nuclear weapons. A new nuclear reactor is slated to start up next month.



Despite setbacks from the Stuxnet computer virus, scientists in many countries believe Tehran is back on track to develop all the elements needed for "breakout" capability, the power to quickly build a nuclear weapon.

The West seems to have forgotten about Iran, at precisely the time when Tehran is in a position to become even more of a threat.

Stopping Iran's development of nuclear weapons and its growing influence in the region is not a priority in the New Egypt.

Unrest in Bahrain, where Shites are rising up against a Sunni-dominated government, and that government's bloody response, also strengthen Iran's regional standing. The turmoil makes it much easier for Iran to spread its anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Israel ideology to places like Bahrain and Yemen and gradually the entire region. Iran remains a threat even without nuclear weapons. Watching the Libyan experience, it will now work more relentlessly to acquire them.

The Saudis, nevertheless, still despise and mistrust Iran. Most of America's friends in the Arab world are now either out of power or under siege. Any weakening of America brings a corresponding strengthening of the Iranian regime. It's not all good news for Tehran. The brutal crackdown in Syria constitutes a real threat to Iran. If Syria's Assad were to fall, Iran would lose its most important ally. Without Assad, Hamas in Gaza also would lose a key backer. Assad's Damascus is home to a number of wanted men.

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Dress that Identified the Profession

by J S Raghavan

There was a time when one could reasonably guess the profession of the person from his habitual sartorial addictions. To illustrate a few cases, many of the teachers in the schools were only dhotis into which the full sleeved shirt's tail was tucked in, a leather belt around the hip holding the apparel in position. A chalk-smelling open coat, invariably brown or dull grey, frayed at the seams covered the upper frame. The nether coat pocket was used by some to keep a snuff box from which a pinch could be drawn to aid invigilation before starting the class or caning the posterior of an errant student.

Married, orthodox, tufted teachers wore the dhoti in panchakacham style and hid their neatly tied springy tufts under a more neatly tied white turban. A few headmasters wore an authoritarian full-suit and a tie, especially on special occasions like the dreaded annual visit of the District Education Officer. The female teachers wore crisp cotton saris, their oiled hair parted in the middle and gathered up grimly and tied in a neat bun at the back, to give a prim look to caution that they allowed no nonsense in the name of modernity.

Waiters in hotels, known as servers

donned a four cubit dhoti, splattered with kitchen grease, folded and tucked to remain firmly at half-mast revealing the legs from the knees down. A half-sleeve shirt not buttoned up around the neck and a blunt pencil stick parked on the right ear lobe to scribble the bill amount formed the rest of their ensemble. A few romantic ones with an Error! Flynn moustache had a scented, rolled handkerchief under their collar.

With the Rapid Transit System unheard of, intra-city transportation was mainly by the slow but steady electric trams. The tram drivers wore an upper dress which was a cross between a safari and a bush shirt. Their creaseless pants, perhaps due to an economy drive, invariably did not reach up to their ankles. Off-duty, many of them walked at a sedate pace as if the lethargic movement of the transport they operated had crept into their locomotion.

A stout gentleman, though unaccompa-

DOWN THE YEARS A SOCIALISTIC PATTERN IN DRESS CODE HAS TAKEN OVER

nied by his hefty buffalo or cow, could be identified as the milkman. He moved shirtless with a rope on his shoulder used to tie the animal's hind legs to prevent it from kicking in anger and a cylindrical brass vessel into which he drew the milk noisily from the animal.

It was de rigueur for teenaged girls to get music lessons so they can sing a song or two to prove that their sound boxes were intact when boys came to 'see' them. Such tutelage was imparted by music teachers, mainly males, who invariably moved around in creaky ladies' cycles taming their flying zari angavastars. A thick line of red vermilion bridged the inner ends of their eyebrows, the colour going well with the lips reddened with betel chewing.

The men who shinned up trees to pluck coconuts, who changed bed stuffing and others had their distinct dresses and accoutrements. But times have changed. A socialistic pattern in dress code has taken over as men of all professions appear in uniform pants and shirts. Our milkman wears faded jeans and drives a two-wheeler to deliver the sachets. There is a lack of grist to the artistic mill of many of the cartoonists due to the absence of variety in sartorial exclusiveness.

MAILBAG

Looks Match the Superior Content
Congratulations on 'the new' *The New Indian Express*. I can bet that today's edition looks the classiest among the four mainline English publications from Chennai. Content was always good and now even the looks match with it.

VJAY SHEKHAR
Chennai

The New Look is Bold, Attractive

I was pleasantly surprised when I opened the *Express* which presented a good and improved look with an attractive and brilliant masthead. Earlier the readers had to strain their eyes. That is not the case now. It is really a welcome change.

S B WATHSALAN
Chennai

The Old Style was Better

As an old reader of the *Express* I am unhappy with your claim of improved look. I prefer the old style. In the new style there is no better scope for the readers' participation.

K BALASUBRAMANIAM
Dharmapuri

MP Govt Should Not Cave In

What is controversial about the circular profiling Christians, especially when the church is targeting the poor for conversion? The circular protects the indigenous faith of locals who might be lured to convert. The circular's withdrawal is unfortunate.

S C PANDE
Bangalore

Scrap Jaitapur N-project

It is shocking to note that the Maharashtra government has learnt nothing even after witnessing the Fukushima tragedy. All nuclear reactors across India should be stopped on a war footing.

HANSRAJ BHAT
Mumbai

Modi Bashing is Now in Vogue

There is a perception that to be secular means to be anti-Hindu. Now 'secular' leaders and 'activists' have created a trend that to be secular means, to bash Narendra Modi. No wonder, Anna Hazare is at the receiving end for praising Modi's administration in Gujarat.

M HARISH
E-mail



TWEETS OF THE DAY

@samraj: SC bans employment of children in circuses. And what about reality shows? r they any less than circus?

@KiranK: Hazare writing to Sonia regarding "smear campaign" is not much different than Mammohan's dossiers to #Pakistan regarding 26/11

@padmapurashah Residential pilots are instantly conferred on WC Warriors; but Souls of KARGIL martyrs are still lingering around ADARSH scam