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Eclecticism tuned his gharana

For all the weighty, profound and nuanced compositions he sang to the appreciation of connoisseurs, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi came to be known among the masses more for the opening lines of a breezy patriotic number we first heard on television almost a quarter century ago. No surprise that it was the notes of *Mile sur mera tumhara* that wafted in the solemn air of the epoch-defining Hindustani vocalist's funeral procession in Pune on Monday. The mourners who converged at the Maratha city were not just huge; the art-lovers among them ranged from popular-music buffs to scholars of hardcore North Indian classical. Winning the hearts of people with varied tastes was always a key feature of Pt Joshi. It is a faculty that only an eclectic mind can generate. Little Bhimsen owned a passionate and unbiased heart even as a child, when both bhajans and azaan mesmerized the boy living off Gadag in northern Karnataka. The gurgling notes from the neighbourhood temple and the long-drawn call to prayer from the mosque would equally prompt him to step out of the house and listen to them intently.

It was against such a backdrop that Pt Joshi left home and started what was to be a meaningful musical journey. His principal guru was the legendary Sawai Gandharva, but that did not mean the pupil confined himself only to the norms of Kirana Gharana in which he was groomed. Such was Pt Joshi's genius he emerged a school of rendition in himself. He had a deep voice that sounded robust in the base registers, but never checked him from taking steep elevations to the top. The *taans* came with a kaleidoscopic effect — the quick roll of the notes bore a graceful rustle that would the next second gear up to produce a nasal crooning at the top. The level of imagination revelled in unending fecundity. Confidence bordered on apparent arrogance. It manifested as a visual treat, as the tall and well-built maestro would sing drooping his head sideways, and then suddenly surge upwards with a risen hand. Added to these were a few ragas he gifted to his idiom.

For aesthetes down south, Panditji's jugalbandis with the equally maverick M Balamuralikrishna made Bhimsen Joshi an endearing figure and big-time hit. The more introspective and dense stuff, though, emerged from him at solo concerts. Each bit was like gem, typical of the Bharat Ratna awardee. That sparkle will be tough for succeeding generations to recreate.

Power & Politics | Prabhu Chawla

The hypocrisy of outrage

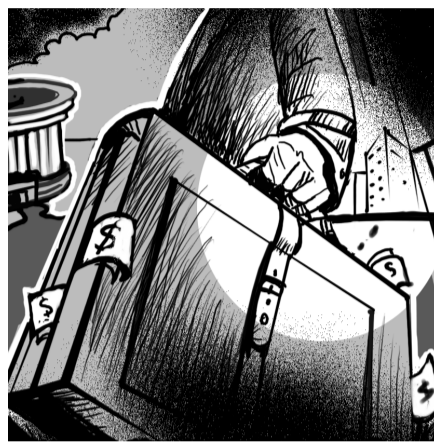
If industry means business, all its members must declare that no illegal foreign accounts are held in their names and offer unconditional authority to investigate any suspicious deposits

The pot is calling the kettle black. As the UPA-II makes uncouth attempts to bring black money back home, it is being targeted by multiple pressure groups — the majority of which are perhaps the most fecund sources of capital flight. Sensing the apparent weakness in its will to govern, some prominent corporate leaders recently launched a scathing attack on the government for its failure to handle corruption. For the first time in independent India, a cabal of the high and mighty has taken advantage of a polity reeling under multicore scams to project the institution of Corporate India as the only hope for cleansing the system. I admire their intent but not their intention. The nation — quite rightly — believes that the corporate sector is as responsible as the politicians for the current corruption epidemic. History has shown that illicit political wealth arises from partisan decisions made to benefit big business. So, it is only right to expect our holier-than-thou corporate leaders to voluntarily offer the scrutiny of their foreign accounts and investments, as well as FII's contributions in the various companies owned by their fraternity members.

There is a latent irony in the open letter written by a group of prominent business personalities — Azim Premji, Keshub Mahindra, Deepak Parekh, Jamshyd Godrej, Prof M Narasimham, Yezdi Malegam, Anu Aga, Dr A Vaidyanathan, Bimal Jalan, N Vaghul, Nachiket Mor, and Dr Ashok Ganguly — demanding that the government curb the misuse of its discretionary powers by "dealing determinedly with governance and aggressively against corruption, while openly debating these issues by elected legislators is the only means left to reassure our citizens".

Great sermon for a scandal-ridden government, indeed. But can any one of these leading lights of industry or their representatives vouch that they have never been beneficiaries of the government's discretionary powers? Can they proclaim in all honesty that they have never bribed pliant politicians and civil servants? I doubt it.

Many signatories to the letter have been prominent members of various policy-making bodies in various governments. Some even ran the nation's banking system and must have been privy to the flight of Indian money abroad as well as its infiltration back in other guises. Why didn't they make a fuss then, and suggest remedial measures to



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plug the loopholes? Instead, many luminaries of India Inc have been tirelessly campaigning for liberalising rules in order to attract Foreign Direct Investment from unknown sources. While there is no denying that some of the epistolaries have done the country proud by contributing significantly to India's growth story, most have been keeping a cryptic silence over India Inc's failure to distance itself from political and bureaucratic corruption.

Most new business ventures today are started with funds from tax havens arriving through circuitous routes, noticeable examples being some Indian Premier League teams, green field power and other infrastructure projects. It would be naive to assume political lethargy as the reason for the delay of decades in signing tax evasion treaties with other countries. Even BJP's stand on this issue is suspect — the NDA government dragged its feet on enforcing transparency in foreign funding; even now the party is unwilling to take on the government on this matter. After all, the pursuit of power is expensive; political parties spend more than ₹10,000 crore in each Lok Sabha election. Party accounts submitted annually to the Election Commission doesn't reflect even a fraction of the actual spend. It is a tragedy that conviction has become a matter of convenience for both political parties and IndiaCorp.

A direct and obvious connection exists between the vast amounts of money stashed abroad and India's superlative economic growth since 1994. The figures tell the story. In 20 years — 1988 to 2008 — India's trade

India's exports between 1988 and 2008 have grown 15 fold and imports, 13 fold. Corporate India is bemoaning a mess of its own creation. India is the only country in which the market cap of a couple of corporates is almost one fourth of the nation's GDP — no other developed nation has acquired such a distinction

balance has soared from \$8.6 billion to \$69.5 billion. Creative accounting is the conjurer here, enabling illicit fortunes to be concealed in trade balance figures — an eight-fold rise in black money generation. Contradicting conventional wisdom that economic reform lowers corruption, the load of "dirty money" on the economy has been increasing since the liberalisation process was begun by Dr Manmohan Singh in 1991. India's exports between 1988 and 2008 have grown 15 fold and imports, 13 fold. Correspondingly, illicit foreign deposits also multiplied around 15 fold, as estimated by US think-tanks. Today, corporate India is only bemoaning a mess of its own creation. India is the only country in which the market cap of a couple of corporates is almost one fourth of the nation's GDP — no other developed nation on earth has acquired such a distinction.

India is also, perhaps the only country in the world which does not tax capital gains. This generous fiscal concession allows investors to make gargantuan amounts of money by playing the markets. According to unofficial estimates, over 500 individuals and corporate entities earned between ₹10 crore and over ₹1,000 crore by offloading their shares in their own companies or trading these on the stock market. Taking advantage of liberal government policy, most successful and indigenously promoted banks like HDFC and ICICI have quietly become foreign-owned Indian banks. How and when this happened remains a mystery. Though rules say foreign banks cannot even open new branches without the RBI's prior

approval, Indian shareholders of both HDFC and ICICI were allowed to encash their blue chip shares after their banks were acquired by nameless foreign owners. Did those who sold shares to foreign investors pay tax on the fortunes they made? No. The beauty of the deal is that technically, nothing illegal happened. Instead, wealthy corporates were able to pressure the government to liberalise rules in order to own dream houses and assets abroad quite legally.

Of course, Indians should be allowed to take over big companies abroad, build mansions and own mega yachts while establishing economic supremacy over the world. But let the nation be assured that its citizens are getting goods and services which haven't been imported through over-invoicing. Ask any agent dealing in the import of foreign goods, and he will tell you how Indian companies including PSUs import various commodities at inflated prices; on an average, each deal has a 10 to 15 per cent mark-up. If that be the case, about ₹40,000 crore is deposited in foreign banks annually by Indians. If industry means business, all its members must make an unconditional declaration that no illegal foreign accounts are held in their names. They should offer unconditional authority to investigate any seemingly suspicious deposits as well. Such charitable honesty doesn't seem forthcoming; both the government and our corporate leaders are deafeningly silent on the issue of making public, the names of individuals who own undisclosed foreign accounts. The nation expects visible deeds and not just self-righteous letters. As the number of Indians living below the poverty line grows, our neo-capitalists will not be justified in blaming the common man for taking socialist cudgels on behalf of have-nots waging war for social control over wealth and assets all over again ■



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Judiciary makes the right move

The Chhattisgarh high court's decision to allow a team of European Union observers to be present during the trial of the suspected Maoist sympathiser, Binayak Sen, is a first of its kind. It is difficult to remember any other instance where a foreign delegation had witnessed a court case in India not as sight-seers, but to scrutinise the fairness of the proceedings. However, the black flags shown to them in Raipur by BJP activists and the criticism of the centre by the BJP's Ravi Shankar Prasad for showing lack of trust in the judicial system are suggestive of excessive touchiness. The obverse side of Prasad's objections is that only an open society with faith in its democratic functioning can afford to allow outsiders to see how the system works.

In any event, since a trial is not held in camera unless this is specifically decided, it would have seemed rather churlish if permission had not been granted to the EU team. It is also worth noting that Sen's defence lawyer is the BJP's Ram Jethmalani, which underlines the absence of constraints of any nature within the system. Besides, this particular case is already an international event, since luminaries from Noam Chomsky to Amartya Sen have evinced keen interest in it. A decision to keep the EU delegation out, therefore, would have led to even greater attention being focussed on the trial with the attendant risk of excessive histrionics by the litigants. It is also undeniable that the dubious nature of the verdict against Sen by a lower court, which is now being heard by the high court, is responsible for the curiosity.

Since the Maoist insurgency has become associated with human rights issues, as may be expected where the security forces are engaged in battling a group with bases in the inaccessible hinterland, the widespread interest is understandable even if it is sometimes maliciously ascribed to publicity-seekers. It is necessary in such a context for the judiciary to be as open as possible, not least because of the usual heavy-handedness of the administration when dealing with what can seem to be elusive adversaries. Sen's case is typical of such insensitivity because of his earlier prolonged incarceration in 2007-08, including a spell of solitary confinement, and the latest sentence for life imprisonment. One can only hope that the trial will prove as erroneous as Sen's wife Iliana's contention that she has lost faith in the Indian judiciary.

Ravi Shankar Prasad:

BJP chief spokesperson

"Earlier, it was the confrontation between the separatists and the patriots, but now, the government has converted it into a confrontation between the Congress and the BJP."

M Karunanidhi:

Triggering a fresh bout of speculation on his quitting office

"I wish to know whether you are keen on seeing me as the DMK president or as the chief minister... I know you would be more keen on calling me as the *thalaivar* (leader of the party)...very soon, I will arrive at the same decision."

M S Dhoni:

Indian cricket team skipper

"The learning before the World Cup is to keep wickets in hand for the last 10 overs, the powerplay. Two warm-up games before the World Cup will be ideal... It was a good learning before the experience, a good preparation..."

Letters to the editor

Put Palk Strait under satellite surveillance

Sir, The trigger-happy killings of innocent Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy in Palk Strait calls for immediate action by the Centre. The repeated denials by Colombo have worsened the situation. The Indian government must bring Palk Strait under satellite surveillance to identify and put the culprits behind bars — **Shashi Shekher Thakur, e-mail**

A stunt by Karunanidhi

Sir, This refers to the report 'Is MK stepping down as CM — finally?' (TNIE, January 25). Karunanidhi wants to feel the pulse of the people and the partymen. Given the misunderstanding between his two sons, M K Alagiri and M K Stalin, and the common perception that there is infighting among his family members in sharing power at the Centre and the state, one feels, Karunanidhi would lose the authority/command he wields over the party once he is not CM. Of course, all confusion would come to an end in a few days' time when he will announce that he would continue as the chief minister.

S Ramakrishnasayee, Ranipet

Patriotism vs separatism

Sir, This refers to 'BJP refuses to back down on yatra' (TNIE, January 24). One is astonished why there is so much hoo-ha about the hoisting by the BJP of the national flag in J&K which is an integral part of the country. The Congress looked the other way when Syed Gilani, a rank separatist, gave a clarion call for *azaadi* in Kashmir in Delhi. Regrettably, the grand old party is unable to distinguish between patriotism and plain separatism. Why should it block a peaceful hoisting of the national flag when the separatists are given a carte blanche to hoist Pakistan's flag in places of their choice? The Congress is hell bent on insulating Kashmir from the rest of

the country by condemning the flag-hoisting as divisive and provocative.

Kangayam R Narasimhan, Chennai

Flag hoisting in J&K

Sir, The comment of Omar Abdullah "Why should BJP prefer J&K, instead of any other part of India" to hoist the flag should be condemned strongly because J&K is the only state which is still under dispute over the ownership of the land between India and Pakistan. To reiterate to the world that it belongs to India, we must hoist our national flag in J&K too. The government must provide the highest security to the people of India to hoist our flag in the border state.

M V Mukundan, Chennai

Joshi's soulful music

Sir, Bhimsen Joshi was indeed the maestro who reached out to the Almighty through music, and today we sadly miss him. Verily this veteran musician has enriched human life and will live forever in the hearts of music lovers and connoisseurs.

V Gopalan, Chennai

Musician par excellence

Sir, A musician par excellence and by any standard the doyen of Hindustani music, the passing away of Bhimsen Joshi will create a void in Indian music. His mellifluous voice and

excellent rendition have always taken the audience to the sublime level of music and even where Hindustani music is not popular music lovers flocked to listen to him and heard him with rapt attention. A great loss indeed to Indian music, Hindustani music in particular and to the music lovers at large.

K Balarama Krishnan, Chennai

Remove Kalmadi from IOA

Sir, The sacking of Suresh Kalmadi and Lalit Bhanot from their respective posts from of CWG Organising Committee three months after the extravaganza is over is too late. Propriety demands he should also step up down from the presidentship of Indian Olympic Association, and in case he is not stepping down, the government should contemplate action to remove him from the post. This decision ought to have been taken immediately after completion of the Commonwealth Games. In order to send a message that the party is sincere in tackling corruption, Kalmadi should also be placed under suspension from the primary membership of the party.

E Krishnan, Palakkad

Kalmadi sacking too late

Sir, It is an irony that Suresh Kalmadi has been sacked as chief of the Organising Committee of CWG, more than three months after the completion of the games itself and all the loot associated with it. Having seen the track

record of this government against corruption, it will be naive to believe that sacking him from the Organising Committee would ensure a free and fair investigation of the multicore CWG scam.

M D Ravikanth, Chennai

Street fight in Karnataka

Sir, The rift between the Karnataka CM and the Governor is not a constitutional crisis. If it is so, it will be good for democracy since necessary amendments can be brought in to improve our system of governance. But the conduct and utterances of these higher-ups indicate nothing short of street fighting. Bhardwaj should be removed from the Congress party which would lead to his exit from Raj Bhavan, and the chief minister should be removed from his post.

J Venkat, Chennai

Party must sack Yeddy

Sir, Chief Minister B S Yeddyurappa has admitted that his actions were immoral but not illegal. Chanakya *neeti* says that for a clan's welfare an individual may be discarded, for a village's good a clan may be discarded and for a country's good a village may be sacrificed. If Yeddyurappa doesn't step down voluntarily, the party should sack him.

A Gajanana, Bangalore

Please send your letters to: letterschennai@expressbuzz.com