

Many faces of India

Bihar is a reminder that if our leaders want, Nepal can develop in a matter of years, not decades



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Finally, the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu last week did what he was primarily supposed to do: promote his country rather than poking his nose into internal affairs of the hosts. "Some people talk about possible Biharisisation of Nepal," Rakesh Sood reportedly said at a programme organised to mark his country's Republic Day in the Nepali capital on Jan. 26. "But look at Bihar, the economic growth there has crossed 11 percent." The ambassador blamed Nepal for its growing trade deficit with India, arguing that market was of no use if there's no production. He might be correct in his assessment. But I wondered how Prachanda and his company took the statement that came as a response to the Maoists' 'we don't need Bihari-style republic [that rest of the parties and India want to impose] in Nepal' rhetoric.

Why blame only the Maoists? For many in South Asia, the Indian state of Bihar is synonymous with lawlessness, poverty and underdevelopment. Not only in Nepal but in India too, I have found, the word Bihar(i) is taken as a mark of insult and humiliation. I have met many Biharis who hesitate to identify themselves as Biharis, including those who are highly educated. The problem is with the image of Bihar that was largely shaped by the politicians who ruled the state until 2004. Since, with Nitish Kumar assuming Chief Minister-ship, that rusty image has slowly been changing.

The growth figure of 11 percent that Sood so proudly stated has been contradicted by some well informed economic columnists in India itself though one thing is for sure: Bihar is progressing. "Is it true that Bihar is doing good these days?" I always ask whenever I meet a Bihari. "Yes," I get the response, "the biggest change I have felt is an improvement in security situation." The fear of extortionists and kidnapers may have evaporated now, observed an Economic Times commentator recently, citing figures of decreasing incidents of kidnappings in Bihar. Only 317 kidnappings for ransom were reported during the last four years as against 1,393 during the previous four, according to ET report earlier this month.

Most of Bihar's infamous dons are behind bars. Speedy trials have ensured a total of 38,824 convictions between 2006 and September 2009, according to ET. The convicts included dons with political connections and their henchmen. Those include M. Shahabuddin, the former Rastriya Janata Dal MP who had once gone live on TV during the state police chief to arrest him. Gun-toting strongmen are no longer a common sight on the streets of Bihar. Policemen patrol them now. Isn't that a great leap forward, particularly from our perspective? Next time Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his comrades make any statements like 'Bihari-style republic' I wish they would check first the latest coming out of Bihar. How many kilometres of roads have they built in Nepal? Did they even inaugurate a highway project when they were leading the government? In Bihar, on the other hand, thanks to improved security situation, investors have been encouraged and private business is booming. The infrastructure has expanded impressively. More than 6,800 km of roads have been re-laid and 1,600 bridges and culverts constructed in the last four years. Automobile sales in the state grew 45 percent in 2009.

If the Maoists continue with their gundardi politics in Nepal, the day will surely come when people will say: We don't want Nepali-style revolution. That day Nepalis will be ashamed of themselves. The Maoists are

already creating problems for poor Nepalis living in India. It is okay to ask Indians not to intervene in our affairs but to publicly disrespect their flag is not the way to go about it. That's plain stupidity. The Maoists might not know the importance of national flag because they are hell bent on changing the national flag of Nepal but for many people around the world that national symbol holds great importance. Because Maoists disrespected the Indian flag, that too on the Indian Republic Day, many Indians are rightly agitated. There are already reports coming out about general Nepalis being harassed by Indian security men at the border crossing points in an apparent revenge against the Maoist act.

Funds provided by the central Indian government has played significant role in the resurrection of Bihar. Its success story tells us that if Nepali political leadership concentrates in development issues rather than hitting the streets all the time on trivial matters, Nepal too can progress in a couple of years, not decades. Money will not be a problem as there will be donors ready to help. The problem with us is that our politicians are busy in street fighting while the economic developmental issues have been put on the backburner. For them, sacking an Army officer is more important than building a road.

Jaipur jamboree

I was in Jaipur a week ago to take part in the Jaipur Literature Festival. It was good. Very few books were to be seen as it wasn't a book festival but one on literature, where writers talked not just about their books but issues that books in general address. There were several other sessions that were not directly related to literature but when writers were discussing topics like "In a tough neigh-



borhood" they also became somewhat sahitik.

In the same session, which was moderated by Indian journalist Siddharth Varadarajan of The Hindu, the panellists offered unique perspectives. Pakistani human rights activist Asma Jahangir more than made up for the absence of a Nepali representative in the panel. She correctly pointed out that — even as another panellist, Shyam Saran, smiled embarrassingly — that during the 2006 People's Movement India sided with the autocratic monarch and later changed its stand because "writing was on the wall". Saran, who was India's foreign secretary (and before that ambassador to Nepal) during the king's rule defended himself saying India was not always right.

The problem with many Indians is that they blame their neighbours for everything that go wrong in the region while completely ignoring their contribution to those problems and, more importantly, to the strife within India itself — from Manipur and Assam to Kashmir and Telengana. As it happened, Saran, and particularly Siddharth, were talking as if India was the most peaceful country in the world and only Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were going through unimaginable problems. Although the session had nothing to do with literature except that some of the participants were writers, it talked about the 'real' issue and I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the conversations. Be it a Bangladeshi or a Sri Lankan or a Nepali, the views regarding India and its perceived hegemony are the same.

SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN

India is unique in combining a parliamentary system with the institution of a National Security Adviser who has wide-ranging executive responsibilities in the areas of foreign policy, intelligence, nuclear command and control as well as long-term strategic planning.

Created in 1998 following a series of high-level committees that studied the management of national security and intelligence, the NSA was intended to be the prime mover of a multi-tiered planning structure with the National Security Council (NSC) headed by the Prime Minister at the apex. An NSC Secretariat (NSCS) was created to service the Council, which subsumed the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and its staff within it. Finally, a National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) of outside experts was set up to generate independent inputs to the NSC.

A decade later, it is logical that the functioning of these structures be reviewed to see how effective the system has been.

In a series of on-the-record and background interviews with key participants in the NSC system over the past decade — including Brajesh Mishra, who was NSA from 1998 to 2004, and half-a-dozen former chiefs of India's internal and external intelligence agencies — the picture that emerges is one of a system that has delivered mixed results and is in need of refinement, enhanced staffing and a clearer delineation of tasks.

If the institution of the NSA proved to be an unqualified success in dealing with complex foreign policy issues with national security implications such as the Indo-US nuclear deal, the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008 highlighted the absence of focussed intelligence coordination. As for long-term national security assessment and planning — the original raison d'être of the NSCS — most of the former officials interviewed by The Hindu believe this is the weakest link in the system, a view disputed by those who are currently on the inside.

As matters stand, the NSA today formally wears three broad hats. First, as coordinator of complex foreign policy initiatives and interlocutor with the big powers on strategic matters, he is diplomatic adviser to the prime minister. Second, as head of the NSCS, he is a long-term planner, anticipating new threats and challenges to national security. Third, as chair of the Executive Council of the Nuclear Command Authority, he is the overseer of India's nuclear weapons programme and doctrine. Due to the legacy of weak leadership in the Ministry of Home Affairs during Shivraj Patil's years, the NSA's job under M.K. Narayanan slowly expanded to take on a fourth role — internal security issues like Kashmir, the North-East and Naxalism. Intelligence coordination and tasking, particularly in counter-terrorism, also became part of his turf, mainly because of his own background.

This was not how things were meant to be. The NSA, whether in presidential systems like the US or Russia or parliamentary systems like Britain, where he is a diplomatic adviser, only deals with international issues, said Mishra.

While the main turf battle his predecessors waged was with the External Affairs Minister, Narayanan's role as the country's de facto internal security czar opened a second potential front of conflict. Intelligence chiefs reported to him, and his office became the clearing house for the collation, processing and tasking of intelligence. As long as the power vacuum created by a weak Ministry of Home Affairs remained, this front would remain dormant. But when P. Chidambaram moved into the Home Ministry in the wake of the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, things changed. Soon after that, Narayanan found himself joining the intelligence chiefs in a daily meeting chaired by the Home Minister in North Block. But he remained in charge of other bits of the intelligence set-up.

As was to be expected of an institution that was not only new but also alien to the existing patterns of bureaucracy, the NSC structure has evolved in a way that closely mirrors the priorities and focus of the NSA. Under Brajesh Mishra, who held the post from 1998 to 2004 concurrent with his job as Principal Secretary to Prime Minister



New National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon (Left) with the outgoing NSA M.K. Narayanan

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the NSCS was run by the Deputy to the NSA (DNSA), Satish Chandra, at the time a serving Secretary-level Foreign Service officer. Intelligence tasking was carried out by the Intelligence Coordination Group (ICG), which brought the consumers of intelligence products together with the producers under the chairmanship of the NSA, and the NSCS staff conducted research and produced papers on the long-term challenges to India's security. "The NSCS had anticipated many of the threats we see now," said Mr. Chandra in an interview. "For example, awareness about pandemics and their implications was discussed by us in 2000-2002 and pushed into the system". As for the NSA himself, Mishra devoted most of his energy to foreign policy and did not involve himself too closely in intelligence matters

With the record of 11 years and three incumbents before us, a review of the National Security Adviser's role as an institution is needed to see what improvements are possible

Though Mishra was considered effective and influential, he was not without his critics at the time. K. Subrahmanyam, doyen of India's strategic thinkers and in many ways the prime mover of the NSA/NSC concept within the country, repeatedly argued in favour of a full-time NSA unencumbered by the task of running the PMO. But in an interview to The Hindu, Subrahmanyam now acknowledges that Mishra's political proximity to Prime Minister Vajpayee was an effective diplomatic instrument that allowed India to emerge as a global player. "By combining the jobs of Principal Secretary and NSA, Brajesh was able to interact with the big powers and very effectively projected India's image as a major power," he said. "Even though I was a critic, I don't think he would have been able to play that role without combining the two jobs."

When the United Progressive Alliance government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came to power in 2004, J.N. Dixit, another former diplomat, was appointed NSA. At the same time, a new post of Special Advisor for Internal Security was created and Mr. Narayanan, a former Director of the IB, named to the job. Contrary to public impression, however, the new post was not intended to dilute the NSA's mandate in any way. "An order was issued in June 2004 that the NSA will be responsible for intelligence and coordination and that the Internal Security Advisor 'may also be marked' on intelligence matters," C.D. Sahay, who was head of RAW at the time, said in an interview. Other officials

familiar with internal deliberations within the PMO said Narayanan was, in fact, Dr. Singh's first choice for NSA but was unable to accept the position because of an illness. Upon Dixit's sudden demise in January 2005, however, the job landed on his plate after the Prime Minister first considered naming either Ronen Sen or S.K. Lambah, both former diplomats, to the job.

As NSA, Mr. Narayanan's biggest achievement was managing the inter-agency process that fed into the Indo-US nuclear deal. In January 2005, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, then the French President's Diplomatic Adviser, arrived in New Delhi with a non-paper spelling out a broad proposal on behalf of the US, France and Britain for the resumption of nuclear commerce with India. The July 2005 Indo-US agreement grew out of that visit, with both Narayanan and the MEA playing key roles in framing the nature of the bargain. Negotiations with the US over the separation of civil and military nuclear facilities, the nature of safeguards and fuel assurances, reprocessing and other issues were difficult and often saw the MEA, the Indian Embassy in Washington and the Department of Atomic Energy at loggerheads with each other. As head of the 'apex group' overseeing the negotiations, the NSA had to reconcile these positions. Later, he had to directly step in at the highest levels to get the US to stick to its commitments.

Speaking of American NSAs, on whom the Indian equivalent was modelled, Ivo Daalder and I.M. Destler wrote: "They must provide confidential advice to the President yet establish a reputation as an honest broker between the conflicting officials and interests across the government." The nuclear deal was, in many ways, tailor-made for the Indian NSA's office because at an institutional level there was nobody else who could play that kind of co-ordinating role. The prime minister was committed to the nuclear deal but his officials were divided on its details. Forging a common position, mostly, as it turned out, on the basis of the DAE's arguments, was Narayanan's big contribution.

Narayanan also emerged as a key player in India's renewed engagement with other big powers, especially Russia, France, China and Japan. Most of this never made the headlines. The NSA's is by definition a plodding job in which he has to put lots of small things together, especially in order to cover for the inadequacies of the Indian bureaucratic system. Even the diplomatic adviser part is not just about having bright ideas but about installing the machinery to make things happen. And his importance internationally stems from the authority he carries as the prime minister's representative.

When it came to Pakistan, however, the NSA's multiple roles came into conflict with each other, especially in recent months. As diplomatic adviser, Narayanan should have found ways of pressing ahead with the kind of engagement the prime minister repeatedly said he favoured. But as an internal security czar who had fought off calls for his resignation after 26/11, he knew another terrorist strike would cost him his job — especially if he was seen as backing the idea of dialogue with Islamabad. Slowly but surely, the adviser had fallen out of step with the agenda of his principal.

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letters to the editor

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Foreign investment

It is hard to envision Nepal's development without foreign investments but, at present, it is as hard to envision any money coming into the country at all ("Instability, electricity investment hurdles," Jan. 29, Page 1). Without peace, there can be no concrete achievement in terms of GDP growth. Tourism, which has been a major source of revenue for the country, has been a victim of political turmoil and so have other industries which have either been forced to close down owing to labour disputes or are operating well below their capacity with no electricity to run them at full tilt. It should be a matter of serious concern to all those working to lift Nepal out of the mire of poverty to note that only four percent of Nepali firms export as opposed to the South Asian average of 20 percent. Unless something concrete is done to root out the entrenched corruption, nepotism and politici-

sation of virtually every sector, poor Nepalis are unlikely to see better days anytime soon.

Naresh Shrestha
Patan

Gender discrimination

That women are still being burnt alive for dowry is a measure of how little has been done to empower women in real sense of the term ("Husband kills wife for Rs. 5,000," Jan. 29, Page 3). The latest incident of a husband killing his 19-year-old wife after the girl's family failed to produce Rs. 5,000 which had been promised in dowry is indicative of the cheap lives of Nepali women. Not long ago, there was a story in the Post about a young woman who froze to death after being forced out of the house during her menstrual period. Whatever is being done for the betterment of women in Nepal — and I am sure quite a bit — it is reaching those who need it the most.



The urban-centric development priorities and the myopia of city-based foreign donors must urgently change to accommodate women all across the country.

Kamala Gurung
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True martyr

Those killed in road accidents, those who have lost their lives through stray bullets and shrapnel, those who have passed away while involved in purely partisan causes — they all have been declared martyrs, but those who were killed in the process of serving the country still await the honour ("Declare martyr appeal," Jan. 27, Page 4). As the news report points out, late chief of Armed Police Force Krishna Mohan Shrestha was the highest-ranking official deliberately targeted by the insurgents. The only reason Shrestha has not yet been declared martyr is that he was not affiliated with any political party, and hence had no political leader pressing his case for martyrdom. Nepal must be only country in the world where even the martyrs have political affiliations.

Ravi Sharma
Gongabu

Civil servant's killing

How can civil servants work when they have to live under constant threat to their very lives ("Employees protest VDC secy's murder," Jan. 28, Page 1)? I fully support the demand of the civil servant organisations in Banke and Bardiya districts that the killers of Indra Bahadur Shrestha, secretary of Sitapur Villagedevelopment Committee in Banke, be arrested and the bereaved family provided with proper compensations without further ado. Even though shutting down public offices might seem like the wrong way to make one's voice heard at a time when every other group is resorting to strikes and bandas to press their cases, what cannot be denied is that it is impossible for civil servants to work in a climate of fear and under constant threats coming from outlawed groups.

Jyoti Bhusal
Birtamod, Jhapa