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CRISIS OF CREDIBILITY

Our beleaguered polity is beset by another crisis. The latest problem has been caused not by the vagaries of a midterm poll or pulls and pressures of coalition politics that have surfaced in the last five years or more but by exposures of corrupt practices at the highest level. At a time when political stability seemed to have been achieved a stunning blow to the system has been struck by shady deals involving members of the ruling coalition. Attempt at damage control with the help of semantic smokescreens and counter charges can only be an exercise in futility. It is a crisis of credibility for the government and the confidence of the people has hit the rock bottom.

That almost all parties and political leaders manipulate the levers of power to their own advantage is common knowledge. That Indian politicians cannot be both honest and powerful has entered political scripture and that does not need any special mention now. But what is causing grave concern is not only growing corruption in high places but the increasing probability that corruption can take people to high positions. That is why the entire system has become rotten with no signs of recovery in the foreseeable future. Earlier our leaders and civil servants were described as 'honest' or 'less honest'. Today the epithets used are 'corrupt' and 'very corrupt.'

Contempt and cynicism dominate public debate in such situations. Sweeping generalizations are made and examples from history are quoted in making a point. Adam Smith was not less blunt than Samuel Johnson when he called the politician 'a vulgar or insidious animal.' An eighteenth century doggerel was more devastating: "What this rogue loses, that rogue wins, All are birds of a feather! Let's damn the Outs and damn the Ins, And damn them all together..." That even advanced nations are also corrupt gives us neither comfort nor hope. That such corrupt practices occurred in the past, even in Nehru's time, is another fallacious argument. The sins of the past cannot be invoked to justify those of the present. No purpose is served by trading charges and by political skulduggery.

Not just the all pervasive corruption that causes deep

concern and agony to the people of India. Most institutions, the arteries of the democratic system, have lost their vitality. Parliament and state legislatures have little time for cool deliberation and constructive debate. Judiciary has not been able to render justice in time. Bureaucracy continues to be inward looking, incapable of being either civil in approach or service-minded in functioning. Those in power and those seeking it are oblivious to the alarming growth of multinationals and external forces that pose a serious threat to India's political and economic sovereignty. (In this issue an item on the role of WTO and multinationals in choking India's pharmaceutical industry makes disturbing reading). Our industries are facing recession and in some cases closure. Thousands of workers are being laid off. Chinese goods flooding the small sector pose a serious threat to indigenous trade and business. About the security threat emanating from across the border everyone knows the intensity of the menace.

This is a moral and political challenge confronting the entire nation. It concerns everyone of us. The consequences of apathy and indifference could be costly. It is time we realised the value of our hard-earned freedom and time of course, we instilled in the minds of our children the importance of those values by both precept and practice. The need of the hour is to replace despair and cynicism with a renewal of faith in our democratic system. The media, to some extent the judiciary, and civil society institutions are vibrant enough to help in the task of national rejuvenation. Let us all in our own humble way and at our own level start the repair and reconstruction work, leaving the petty-minded politicians and self-serving establishments to fend for themselves. India has survived many crises in the past and she has strength enough to overcome the present turmoil. That requires a total and massive effort.

- The Editor

"The true joy in life is to ally yourself to a great purpose, to throw yourself into it heart and soul, to forget your little self, your little complaints and whimpers and to work the hardest for the realization of that purpose."

Jawaharlal Nehru

REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

The need for a public debate on the philosophy underlying the Constitution and the type of review of some of its parts were underscored by participants in a seminar organised by the Centre for Policy Studies on March 19.

While opinion was divided on the review of the Constitution, there was total unanimity on the need for a healthy national debate on the challenges confronting Indian polity.

The President, Mr.K.R.Narayanan's recent observation that "We should examine whether the Constitution has failed us or we have failed in our duty by the Constitution" came in for special mention.

Prof. R. Venkata Rao of the Andhra University Law College pinpointed certain areas that needed review though he was doubtful of achieving a consensus in the current fractious political atmosphere. He also wondered whether a review could be effected in short time notwithstanding the eminence of the members of the review panel.

"The Ninth Schedule has outlived its utility, while Sec. 77 of the Representation of the People's Act and Art. 105 need to be altered," he said and favoured a restructuring of Centre-State relations and codification of the privileges of legislators.

Prof. Y. Satyanarayana regretted the absence of any effort to generate public opinion on the subject and the failure to take into account the pulse of the nation. "Most people do not know the value of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the State Policy. Equally unfortunate is the utter disregard for conventions in politics," he said.

Disagreeing with the plea for a review of the Constitution, he suggested a national debate on crucial issues and a constant effort to promote an awareness of the Constitution and its philosophy.

Mr. D.V.S.S. Somayaji, advocate, supported review of the Constitution especially of the Tenth Schedule, Articles 74, 164 and 356. He argued that no amendment could harm "the wonderful document our founding fathers had drafted".

Reposing faith in the judiciary especially the Supreme Court, for evolving a balance in polity, he said that the role of the apex court since 1978 was laudable and that the same was now being emulated in many foreign countries.

Dr. D.S.Prakasa Rao, Associate Professor of Law, Andhra University, cautioned against encroachments on the rights of the people by the executive. He recalled how during the 1975-77 emergency civil liberties were suppressed and how a leader claimed the right for the executive to 'amend, mend or even end' the Constitution. Public vigilance and adherence to rule of law are vital for the survival of democracy, he felt.

Dr. A. Prasanna Kumar introduced the speakers and the theme of the seminar. The fact that members of Parliament represent hardly 30% of India's population and that winners in elections generally get, not majority of votes polled, but only plurality of votes has to be borne in mind when electoral reforms are contemplated, Parliament, state legislatures, ministries and civil service function at an enormous cost to the public exchequer. Their credibility has over the years suffered severe erosion and the need is to strengthen democracy at the grassroot level by first respecting the 73rd and 74th amendments and by nurturing civil society institutions, said the Director of CPS.

(Summary of the Proceedings of the Seminar held on March 19, 2001 on Review of the Constitution, at CPS) Courtesy - The Hindu and the New Indian Express.

HEALING POWERS OF WATER

- Dr. Savithri Ramaiah, Editor,

Health Update & Consultant, World Bank

Water is the essential ingredient of human life. No part of the society - living or non-living can exist without the use of water and the deprivation of water to any part results in the breakdown of the system. Geographically, the utility of water is quite evident - for drinking, washing and cleaning, gardening, agriculture, industry, etc. This being the general importance of water, let us consider the importance of water to human body. Deprivation of water is the most important factor responsible for all diseases, in other words, all diseases have its roots in the deprivation of water to human body, and this deprivation have lasting effects.

Every human body requires lots and lots of water, at the same time every one of us also is not sure how much this 'lots of water' really is! This lots of water concept varies from person to person, depending on several factors like type of food one takes (spicy/non-spicy), quantity of food one takes, environmental aspects (summer, winter), biological aspects (age, sex), genetic aspects (hormones), social habits, etc. Hence it is difficult to say how much is the requirement of this 'lots of water' to human body. There is in fact no specific limit. However, the simple test to know whether the human body has the required 'lots of water' is the examination of urine. If the colour of the urine is as clear as water, it implies that the human body has sufficient water. The only exception for this test is that the takers of certain capsules like B-complex or other, the colour of the urine may not be that clear and there is no panic for the same. Otherwise, one should increase the intake of water.

Thirst is the first symptom through which human body sends signals for the intake of water. For quenching this thirst, there is no substitute to water, Cool drinks like Pepsi, Cola or hot drinks like Coffee, Tea, etc., would do more harm than quenching the thirst, even though all these

drinks contain lots of water. Instead, the plentifully available tender coconuts fulfil the water requirement of the human body, without any negative effect.

Not only the intake of 'lots of water' help the human body in several ways, but also the external use of water is also very useful. Everyone knows the importance of daily bath, periodic face wash, etc. Salt bath (sea bath) helps in curing many dermatological diseases. The healing powers of water hence are manifold and as such the intake of water as well as the external use of water for the human body is of vital significance.

(The lecture evoked good response from the audience and Dr. Savithri Ramaiah answered many queries put forth by the audience. To a question she pointed out that the use of acquaguards in general is good, however she said that care needs to be taken in the maintenance of acquaguards, specially of the inlet and outlet pipes of the acquaguard. Similarly, people should make sure that the mineral water they take is genuine. To another question she said that it does not matter much whether one takes water in between the meals or after the meals. One should take water in the manner one is used to and also the important point is the suitability of the method adopted. As long as one is comfortable, one can continue any method for intake of water. To another question she said that breast-fed children do not require any water as mother's milk contains all the necessary water to the infants. There is no cause for worry even though water is not given to the infants up to the age of six months, provided they are breast-fed).

(Summary of the lecture delivered at Hotel Meghalaya on 22-02-01 organised by Sri Raja Lakshmi Foundation and Centre for Policy Studies).

HPCL IN RETROSPECT & PROSPECT

- Shri K. Murali, Chief General Manager, HPCL, Visakhapatnam.

M/s. HPCL was formed in the year 1975, after nationalisation of ESSO Oil Company and later in the year 1976 the Caltex Oil Refinery Co. was nationalised, and amalgamated with HPCL. The Silver Jubilee of the Corporation was celebrated last year.

During these 25 years of existence, HPCL has contributed tremendously to the economic activities of the country. With an initial turn over of Rs.250 crores, the company has grown up as Rs. 35,000 crores turnover company. The profits which were Rs. 2.5 crores at the time of nationalisation have grown upto Rs.1050 crores. Similarly, in terms of addition of assets and generating value for shareholders, the company has performed remarkably well. The combined Refining capacity of Bombay and Visakh Refineries has increased, from 5.5 MMTPA to

13.0 MMTPA. The compounded average net profits of HPCL are growing at the rate of 27.23% from the year 1974 onwards. Similarly, compounded average turnover and market sales are increasing at the rate of 19.2% and 7.70% respectively from the year 1974 onwards.

In contrast, the period prior to nationalisation has seen a phase of stagnation, in the growth of Refining and marketing activities, of the Caltex Oil Company and in fact there was contriction/curtailment of business activities and services. It has been a challenging period for HPCL, in transforming from a multi-national oil Company with its unique management philosophy and economic objectives, into a public sector oil major with a totally different set of objectives.

So, in retrospect, we had a very good Corporate image for the Refinery amongst the local population. But, however, due to the unfortunate blast in the Refinery, which occurred in September, 1997, the image of the corporation has suffered extensively. This is one of the challenges of the current Refinery management, and its employees, to refurbish this image, and to cultivate proper perception, among the local population, that as a public sector company, HPCL strives not only to meet the goals of generating reasonable profits on public money, which is again ploughed by the Government revenues, but also encourages various societal developmental endeavours, in line with the value systems enshrined in the Constitution.

Thus the challenge, is to build credibility with the local population, that the Company is a caring company for its employees, and the society at large, and safety and health of all its employees, contract workers, people in the surroundings is of paramount importance.

Another challenge to the management, would be to bring about awareness amongst its employees, about what the present corporation stands for, in terms of business ethics, and that our policies and practices followed, in conducting business activities, and transactions in various dealings with the public are comparable, to the best corporate practices prevailing anywhere in the World. Surely, this is a challenge before the management to foster such a pride amongst the employees.

Though this could be a difficult task, in view of the prevailing social modes and the caliber of the people, who now a days do not stick to any particular industry, to build for themselves a longer stake in the industry, but venture out, for better career prospects or salary package in other Refineries elsewhere. This has become possible, due to more opportunities, in view of the growing refining capacity, in line with the economic prosperity all over.

In the coming years, Visakh Refinery will be required to make more investments, to meet the future quality specifications, and these investments have to be funded, from the internal sources generated from the refinery operations, where as in the Administered Price Mechanism (APM), all the investments were under written by the pool account, it is no longer so when refinery has to earn for itself.

In the recent past, we have seen instances, when the crude prices start rising, and product prices do not rise commensurately, which had adverse impact on the Refinery profitability. This is going to be another area of challenge, where in, we will have to optimise crude sourcing, through long term contracts, and optimum spot purchases, to maximise revenue generation for the Refinery. Currently, all the freight including the product tankage operations, are handled by the Shipping Corporation of India. Even the crude purchases are canalised, through Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), for all public sector oil companies.

Another area of challenge, we have come across in the recent past, by the responses of various statutory authorities. In my assessment, the Statutory authorities are also very sensitive to media coverage, and many a time they did not have the time, and probably necessary data, to correct the mis-informations, generated by non-governmental organisations or trade unions.

A scientific study to determine the cause of pollution, and appropriate feed back to the public will go a long way in having proper debate and directing public expenditure, with proper prioritisation for combating pollution.

Unless and until the wrong impressions on "Safety of the Refinery, and its surrounding public", and misapprehensions on "Environmental Pollution" are corrected, the chances of closure of the refinery are also there. Indirectly these rumours may adversely effect the peaceful living of all the employees of the refinery and others who are indirectly earning their livelihood by the presence of the refinery and may be another challenge to the management.

Those who were born and brought up in the city, and interested in the well being of the city and its population, should take initiative about the industrial activity and its impact on safety and environment, in an impartial manner.

I hope that you all share my concerns in building up public opinion for eliminating some of the disturbing trends which have emerged of late, try to initiate the public life, pressing their own interest of the echos of the city.

(From a lecture delivered at CPS on February 14, 2001)

THE GENERATION GAP

- Shri T. Hanumantha Rao, Retd. Lecturer
AMAL College, Anakapalli

Cliches and oft-repeated statements are taken so much for granted that after a time they get sanctified as eternal truths. The most widely heard cliché today is the one on the "Generation Gap".

Always around puberty and adolescence, youngsters and old people had to struggle. But this normal generation tension has grown into a generation conflict now. The usage 'generation gap' refers basically to inter-generational differences in the values and attitudes between the adolescent and adult members belonging to consecutive generations.

In recent times, these differences have become more conspicuous because society in developing as well as developed countries is moving at a much faster pace than in the past. In this kind of fast changing social order, the youth is reared in a milieu very much different from that of the parents and does not share the same values.

At any rate, in our country, with globalisation getting accelerated, transformation of society on to the Western mould with its openness, permissiveness and liberal sexual mores is taking place at an alarming speed and the widespread observation of St. Valentine's Day bears an ample testimony to it. There has been a growing concern over the erosion of our traditional values and national identity with the situation changing quite rapidly and changing for the worse.

The various Opinion Surveys conducted by different educational institutes in the country reveal that the attitudes and values of the two generations are alike on impersonal matters such as purpose of higher education, national goals etc., but where personal matters regarding family, love and relationship with the opposite sex, marriage etc., are concerned, both generations drift apart. This observation is further reinforced by the statistical analysis which indicates that the maximum difference in the attitude of the two generations is found in the areas of the style of living.

It is indeed a sad commentary on the state of affairs in our society that the younger generation went to the extent of describing the old generation, rather uncharitably, as dead-wood and considering all their acquisitions as absurdities, little realising that they would also become the older generation of the near future. Perhaps nothing is easier than to find fault with others and this is certainly not the way to honour the older people who have contributed their mite to the nation-building and have become the incidental incubators for family values, rectitude and a sense of patriotism to their offspring. Digging into the past will be a rewarding exercise for youngsters though

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Omar Khayyam would like them not to bother about the dead yesterday.

At the same time, the parents must accept the fact that their children are growing up in a totally metamorphosed society which is exerting a greater influence on their minds than the family. A sympathetic understanding of youth's psychology is necessary and the older should adopt a flexible attitude and try to bridge the communication gap with a change towards a more tolerant attitude. After all, adaptability comes with flexibility when changes cannot be reversed.

The youngsters too, as future citizens of this great land of spirituality, must know that they have a terrific responsibility in preserving its cultural traditions and realise that any indiscriminate aping of the West would only lead them to a blind alley. In their craze for Western mode of living they must not snap the moral fabric of our society and should not be oblivious of the fact that caring and sharing are important parts of Indian tradition. What after all the older people expect from them is respect for their age, a feeling of sensitivity to their needs and requirements, compassion, and not their marginalisation.

It is time our educationists, social scientists and political and economic reformers put their heads together and evolved an acceptable method to resolve the conflict and preserve our culture, values, ethics and heritage before they die a natural death. Only time will tell the outcome.

SRI VIGNESWARA-THE DEITY WITH NO RIVAL-IV

-Shri C. Sivasankaram

Sri Vighneswara's most popular and widely used name is Vinayaka. Vinayaka literally means a born leader. He is without a parallel in prowess, intellectual eminence and philosophical prudence and attainment of Buddhist ascetic perfection and acquirement of supernatural powers-in other words beatitude, Buddhi and Siddhi are wedded to Him. They are his consorts as Chaya and Usha are consorts of Surya. They are not fleshy wives (mortal wives meeting the lustful fancies of their husbands bringing forth earthlings liable to die). They are even supra-mental, superhuman forms that stand eternally like the devoted wife fulfilling the three roles of a wife in utter perfection. Vinayaka bestows on the worshipper, provided the latter means no evil for others every mortal and immortal benefit. He is God of beatitude. His worshipper, begets from this ever awake, ever sublime consorts, Buddhi and Siddhi boons that conduce to mental, spiritual and physical well-being as they are from sources which are celestial, which are not composed of trigunas. They are body-less divine bodies meant for the benefit of humanity. Like Nirguna

Parabrahma. Achala and Sanatana, He remains. His Buddhi and Siddhi are there to shower their grace on devotees that invoke Him in full-throated praise and whole-hearted yearning. His name is mentioned in Rigveda which calls Him as Kavi Seer, seer of seers, Brahmanaspathi. He seems as ancient as Sun, older than Maruts. He is immaculate in conception. Even gods fail to find foibles in His character. He is not vulnerable to the amours of woman as every other God seemed to be. Siddhi and Buddhi, success and wisdom are saviors of world from the perils of ill-thought out plans of the men in command. A war can be averted by invocation to Vighneswara through the media of Siddhi and Buddhi. They are man's friends and well-wishers for ever interested in the sreyas of man in all walks of his life-on the battle field, on the platform and in the higher quest of self-realization. Vighneswara's frame was so designed that he can redeem the world. He can fashion a world of purity and piety. He can remake man to be comprehensive, to be above-board, to be a guardian of himself in the untoward circumstances and in the midst of coquettish women and jealous men. He provides ground for men to attain beatitude while alive. Dasyamu is one of the nine paths of worship or devotion. By dasyamu or samarpna to Vighneswara the devotees acquire the consideration and help of Siddhi and Buddhi. They are helpless if Vighneswara withholds His support and power. We get profit or fruit of our prayer from Buddhi one of the two partners of Him. We get kshemam or complete safety by the grace of Siddhi. Their offsprings are profit and safety respectively. Vighneswara is the legitimate father of these two merits that man cherishes fondly.

The role of Vighneswara in the annals of mythological realm is distinct, indispensable and non-controversial. He is true to the epithet Ganapathi who is the deity of people. His existence is for the people and of the people.

He is plutocrat to votaries of plutocracy. He is democrat to the advocates of democracy, a capitalist to the industrialist tycoon, a proletarian dictator to the communist. Thus He is all for all. All may look upon Him as their own God. He can be made contented by offer of Modaks a preparation of rice flour the cheapest of food grains and available everywhere. To worship Him we need not go for scarcely available lotus flower and other distinguished fragrant flowers. We can appease him by sincere and honest offer of leaves, stems, raw-fruits, largely and widely and easily available things of nature. His worship is not beyond the ken of the poor. His grace is not beyond the reach of the downtrodden. The icon made of Vinayaka on chaturthi for puja is made of earth that costs nothing. From the material point of view earth is costless. It is

priceless if we know it as Aditi the mother of all Avatars. It is the sustainer of all living beings and plant life. Sri Vighneswara is verily the God of common man, the underdog, the godforsaken, the outlaw and the outcaste.

I conclude this essay on the Deity who feels intensely for the welfare of all, with the narration of a tale of very absorbing interest, prevalent in Tamilnadu, the Nadu of gigantic temples, the Nadu which had to its credit of sending enterprising people outside the boundaries of Indian sub-continent to pitch pockets there as a mark of supreme culture which encouraged the local nationals to live a life of godliness, a life of live and let live.

Once there were two poet-seers called Sundara Murti Nayanar and Cheralaman Perumal Nayanar. Both of them distinguished themselves as poets who could compose on the spur of the moment (Asukavita). On one fine auspicious day when stars are well set, when the time was free from varjam and durmuhurtam the two set sail to go to Kailash where their ishta devata and father of Vighneswara (Pillaiyar) Lord Siva enthroned Himself. On their way they happened to see Avvaiyar a sacred lady whose heart was replete with the honey of unalloyed devotion to Siva's first son Sri Vighneswara. She was a poetess of matchless eminence. Her heart was considered as the seat of Vinayaka. The two poets asked her to join them on their pilgrimage to Kailasa as they knew her as an unflinching devotee of Vighneswara. At that particular moment she was profoundly immersed in the worship of Vinayaka. For her it was a sacrilege to stop abrupt the performance of a ritual whatever might be the consequences thereof. She stubbornly declined to join them before the pooja saw its completion. The two poet-saints did not pause. They went ahead without looking at her composing and singing songs in praise of Siva. Avvaiyar an accomplished lady of deep conviction and profound awareness was convinced that her sankalpa would bear fruit as she did not compromise on her will to complete the puja. She was confident. She did not regret her decision. Aware as she had been of Vighneswara as Asuprasanna or the Lord who carries out immediately the prayer of His devotees lost no time to express her wish to go to Kailasa at the conclusion of the puja. Soon Sri Vighneswara extended His elephant trunk so as to enable Avvaiyar to sit securely on it and transported her to Kailasa. There Sundaramurty Nayanar and Cheralaman Prumal Nayanar arrived at Kailasa. This is a story narrated by no less a person than the Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. The Paramacharya attained Sivapadam He lived a few months short of a century (1894 March 2, to January 1st, 1994). World's greatest men of the century belonging to secular and spiritual world met him and enriched themselves by His darsan and message.

(Concluded)

SANKAR FOUNDATION VISAKHAPATNAM

- Shri D. Kishore, Manager, Resources

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS/MAJOR EVENTS OF SANKAR FOUNDATION, VISAKHAPATNAM FOR THE PERIOD FROM 05-02-2001 TO 20-03-2001.

05-02-2001 : Visit of former M.P. Shri P. Appalanarasimham: Shri P. Appalanarasimham, Former MP and the father of Shri P.G.V.R. Naidu (Ganababu) MLA visited the Foundation's Hospitals. Dr. Ajay Sharma, M.S., FIVRS., Retina Specialist welcomed him and explained in detail about the functioning of the State-of-the-art Equipments installed at Sankar Foundation's Eye Hospital and the services being rendered by the Foundation to the poor and needy. Shri Appalanarasimham expressed his happiness about the noble work being taken up by the Managing Trustee, Shri A. Sankar Rao whom he knows for a long time.

06-02-2001 : CME PROGRAMME : A CME Programme has been conducted by Dr. N.V. Ramana Murthy, M.D., D.Ch., Consultant Paediatrician of Sankar Foundation's Woman & Child Hospital. The Topic was about "ASTHMA AND CONGENITAL HEART DISEASES".

DONATION OF CARL ZEISS SLIT LAMP : M/S Carl Zeiss, Germany were very kind enough to donate 1 No. Slit Lamp Biomicroscope SL 115 Model. The Equipment was installed at our Sankar Foundation's Eye Hospital on 6th February 2001.

19-02-2001 : EYE CAMP AT NTPC : A Free Eye Camp was conducted at Pittavanipalem with the financial assistance of National Thermal Power Corporation Ltd (Simhadri Thermal Power Project). Joint Collector Shri M.T. Krishna Babu, IAS was the Chief Guest of the function. Our Mobile ophthalmic Unit of Sankar Foundation Eye Hospital headed by Dr. Ajay Sharma participated in the camp.

01-03-2001 : Rotary International District 3020 given "District Service Above Self Award" to Shri A. Sankar Rao our Managing Trustee.

10-03-2001 : LIONS Club International presented a Memento to Shri A. Sankar Rao, Managing Trustee in recognition of free services rendered at our Eye Hospital and Woman and Child Hospital.

13-03-2001 : CME Programme: A CME Programme was organised by Dr. N.V. Ramana Murthy, M.D.D.Ch., Consultant Paediatrician of Sankar Foundation Hospital For Woman and Child on the topic of "INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF CHILDHOOD ILLNESS (IMCI).

14-03-2001 : Inauguration of Ultrasound Scan-

ner at Sankar Foundation Hospital For Woman and Child. Shri Ranaji Gupta, Sr. Regional Manager has inaugurated the Equipment. Shri K.S. Shetty, Senior HR officer, H.P.C.L. attended. Shri Challa Sivasankaram, Trustee honoured Shri Ranaji Gupta with shawl and Bouquet, Shri A. Sankar Rao, Managing Trustee received the guests and explained the activities of Sankar Foundation.

17-03-2001 : Mr. Brain Van Farowe and Mr. Melvan Farowe from USA visited the Foundation's Hospitals.

20-03-2001 : Mrs. Elizabeth Kurian, Programme officer, Sight Savers International visited the Hospitals of Sankar Foundation on 20th March 2001.

WELCOME:

Sankar Foundation Welcomes into its fold the new member Dr. T. Raveendra, M.S., F.I.A.S., Ophthalmic Surgeon.

FAREWELL:

Shri T. Srirama Murthy, Senior Manager (Resources), left our organization for personal reasons.

WTO & MULTINATIONALS vs POOR NATIONS' FIGHT AGAINST DISEASE

(The following three items by well known columnists published in the recent issues of the Guardian Weekly reveal the plight of poor nations in their fight against disease.)

"EVIL TRIUMPHS IN A DISEASE-RIDDEN WORLD"

Larry Elliott

This year 11m people in poor countries will die from infectious diseases. Nearly a quarter - 2.6m - will die from HIV/Aids. By the time you finish reading this column 100 people will have died. Half of them will be children aged under five.

Poverty breeds ill-health and encourages the spread of infection, and the world is awash with poor countries. Just as a starving man knows there is food at the Ritz, governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America know there are medicines to treat these illnesses if only they could afford them.

But the bigger developing countries have found a way round this problem by making cheap copies of Western drugs. India makes 70% of its own drugs, while Egypt, Thailand, Argentina and Brazil have also taken steps to become more self-reliant in pharmaceuticals. Poorer countries also benefit, because they can import cheap generic drugs even if they cannot manufacture them.

This should mean our story has a happy ending. It means more people get treated, because the health budgets of poor countries go further. It means developing countries have a chance to move into industries that have a higher technological component. And it means increased competition, putting downward pressure on prices. This final point - that the freer markets are the better - is usually the clincher when it comes to the economics of globalisation. But not this time.

Enter the other characters in our story: the world's

largest pharmaceutical companies and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Four companies dominate the pharmaceutical industry - GlaxoSmithKline, Merck, Pfizer and Eli Lilly - and they wield enormous financial clout. The Big Four operate like a cartel, and like all cartels they seek to wield monopoly power. It is basic economics that monopolies lead to higher prices, which is why many governments use anti-trust legislation to break them up. The Big Four do not like the idea of cheap drugs coming on to the market from developing countries: more competition equals lower share price.

The financial muscle of the pharmaceutical companies also gives them enormous political leverage. So during the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade they lobbied hard for tougher rules protecting intellectual property, which provided patent protection for a minimum of 20 years for "new and inventive" products.

Brazil and India have been warned that they could face sanctions under the US's bilateral Super 301 legislation.

The WTO is not a law unto itself. Governments should write the rules, not multinational corporations. And if they fail to back Brazil, India and Egypt they will have blood on their hands. It was once said that all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. And what is happening here is evil. I have tried to think of another word for it. But there isn't one. (Guardian weekly Feb, 15-21, 2001.)

"WTO RULES COULD FORCE GOVERNMENTS TO PRIVATISE THEIR BASIC FUNCTIONS"

- Barry Coates

Negotiations begin this month on the extension of Gats. If powerful industry lobbies have their way, Gats would undermine the ability of governments to act in the interests of the poor, workers, consumers and vulnerable groups in society. These powers are being replaced by new rights for multinational companies.

Government rules on the provision of services are at the heart of the way societies treat their citizens. In 1994 Gats was signed as part of the agreements that set up the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It includes basic services such as health care, education, water supply; infrastructure such as communications, post and public transport; cultural services, including films, broadcasting, museums and libraries; as well as finance, retail, professional services and tourism. The commonly used definition of services is "anything you can't drop on your foot". The 160 sectors included under Gats account for most of the world's economy.

The multinationals that stand to benefit were deeply involved in the negotiations to establish Gats. Lobbying by groups such as the US Coalition of Service Industries and the European Services Forum has kept up the pressure.

Governments claim that public services are safe because Gats excludes services provided "under the exercise of government authority". But Gats does apply if services are supplied commercially or in competition with the private sector. There are few service sectors in most

countries that do not include some element of service provision by companies, such as in broadcasting, private medicine and education.

Yet there is increasing evidence of the social costs of gung-ho privatisation and liberalisation. Many developing countries have had these policies imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as a price for receiving debt write-off or new loans. In many cases private monopolies have replaced the public sector, resulting in higher prices and poorer service.

Campaigners round the world are waking up to the threat of Gats. An international statement is calling for a halt to negotiations, and for reform of the core of the agreement. The debate is not between those who want more rules and those who want none, but over whose rules will be applied, and for whose benefit. Corporate rights must not be allowed to take precedence over all other aims. (Guardian weekly Mar,15-21, 2001.)

"MULTINATIONALS GO TO COURT OVER A LAW AIMED AT CUTTING THE COST OF MEDICINES"

- Chris McGreal.

The world's largest pharmaceutical companies opened their lawsuit against the South African government's attempt to import cheaper anti-Aids drugs and other medicines on Monday by claiming that property rights were the central issue of the case.

The pharmaceutical companies want the high court to strike down a law that permits the South African government to buy patented drugs from suppliers other than the manufacturer, or generic drugs from factories in India or Brazil, when patented medicines are "unaffordable" or there is a "health emergency" such as Aids. The legislation also bans the practice of paying incentives to doctors to prescribe expensive brand name medicines.

The government has pointed out that drugs such as the antibiotic Ciprofloxacin, considered an "essential medicine", cost South Africa's public health sector 75 cents for each pill; and the country's private health care providers more than \$4.50 a tablet. If the new law is implemented, a generic of the drug could be imported from India for just 6c a pill.

If the legislation comes into force, it will have a big impact on the treatment of South Africa's 4m people with HIV - about 10% of the population - and other serious diseases. (Guardian weekly Mar,8-14, 2001.)

OBITUARY

Centre for Policy Studies records with deep regret and profound sorrow the passing away of Shri D.Ch. Tirupathi Raju on March 27, and of Prof S. Ambirajan on February 4. Shri Tirupathi Raju was a Member of the Advisory Board of the Centre for Policy Studies and an active participant in all its activities. A member of several social and cultural bodies, Shri Tirupathi Raju was a tower of strength to many organisations. Industry, trade and sports associations benefited from his constructive role and tireless work. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Visakha Kendra, Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association and the Cricket Stadium Committee were among the numerous bodies that received his able guidance and support. Rising from a small position in the revenue department he became Secretary of the Visakhapatnam Port Trust. After superannuation, he joined the East India Petroleum company as a vice-president. The city of Visakhapatnam has lost in Shri Tirupathi Raju's demise one of its eminent elders, loved and admired by all sections of the society.

Prof. S. Ambirajan, well known economist and writer, had his education in Visakhapatnam. While his equally well known sister Smt Prema Nandakumar, studied English at the feet of her father, Prof. K.R. Srinivas lyengar, Ambirajan studied economics, at the Andhra University. Taking his Masters and doctorate degrees from the Andhra University, Ambirajan taught in Sydney, Australia and at IIT, Madras, as Professor of Economics. Prof. Ambirajan addressed the Centre for Policy Studies in July 1996 on the Indian Economic Scenario. His lucid style of lecturing and writing and innate simplicity-- a family trait-- won for him many admirers in India and abroad.

"Death is nothing to us, since when we are, death has not come, and when death has come, we are not."
- Epicurus

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