

1950 - 2010: The Indian Republic Has Much To Be Proud Of

BY AMULYA GANGULI

Soon after the Indian National Congress, at the forefront of the country's independence movement, adopted the 'purna swaraj' or complete independence resolution at its Lahore convention on New Year's Day in 1930, Mahatma Gandhi called for a day of celebration on Jan 26, which till 1947 came to be observed as Independence Day.

A public pledge, drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru, who became India's first prime minister after independence on Aug 15, 1947 - used to be taken on Jan 26 to assert the "inalienable right of

the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom". To achieve this end, "India must sever the British connection" since "we hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused disaster to our country".

In 1950, the day was chosen to declare India as a republic and announce the adoption of the constitution, which has been described as the country's new 'dharma shastra' (value system) by Granville Austin, an expert on the Indian Constitution. When it came into force, the constitution marked the beginning of "perhaps the greatest political venture that originated in Philadelphia in 1787", to quote Austin again.

As Anthony Eden also said at the time, the



"Indian political venture is not a pale imitation of our practice at home, but a magnified and multiplied reproduction on a scale we have never dreamt of. If it succeeds, its influence on Asia is incalculable for good".

None of these accolades have proved wrong.

The Indian republic has proved to be a great success story, in all senses of the term. Not only has it stood the test of time by defying the doomsayers, it has built on its durability to act as an example of a thriving multireligious, multicultural democracy, especially to those countries which attained freedom in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

If the republic had seemed fragile and vulnerable when it

came into being six decades ago, the reason was that few believed at the time that democracy would work in a country as poor and diverse as India. While poverty was expected to strengthen the Communists within the country with surreptitious help from Moscow and Beijing, the plurality of language, religion and culture was seen as a fillip to fissiparous tendencies.

Such negative perceptions might have been the result of the fact that experiments in democracy had not succeeded in India's neighbourhood. While Pakistan went under a military dictatorship along with Burma (now Myanmar); China passed from the right-wing autocracy of Chiang Kai-shek to one-party Communist rule.

Although Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) maintained a formal democracy, the insistence of its rulers on imposing the Sinhalese language and Buddhism on the Tamil-speaking, Hindu minorities from India laid the roots of a civil strife which has subsided only recently.

India, on the other hand, overcame its problems of internal rifts by adopting accommodative policies, which can still provide guidelines to others grappling with divisive trends. One of the policies was to assure the non-Hindi-speaking people of the south, mainly the Tamils, that Hindi would never be the sole official language without their consent and that English would continue as the link language as long as they wanted.

Similarly, the minority Muslims and Christians were assured that India would never follow the path of theocracies like Pakistan and Iran with their national identification with Islam and the consequent reduction of minorities to the status of second-class citizens.

The young Indian republic was fortunate, of course, in having at its helm a leader like Nehru, with his faith in democracy and secularism, and the glorious heritage of Gandhi. It was a legacy of which no other country in the region could boast.

Unlike some its neighbours, the lifeblood of Indian democracy was the state and parliamentary elections held at regular intervals. They un-

dermined the claims of the Communists as well as the northeastern and Kashmiri insurgents that no change was possible without the gun by disposing of via the ballot even such a powerful politician like Indira Gandhi - India's first and only woman prime minister.



Although poverty remains the only major blot on the Indian scene, there are expectations that the consistently high growth rates, which have followed the liberalisation of the economy from 1991, will gradually eradicate this problem. Except for this blemish, Indians can be proud of their achievements against what seemed insuperable odds at one time.

The pride is reflected in the impressive military parade and cultural pageantry that is held in the national capital - and on a smaller scale in the provincial capitals - every year on Jan 26.

It is not only the display of military might, including supersonic aircraft flying overhead, that is the highlight of the show, but also the presentations on a moving stage of the distinctive features of life and progress of every state of the Indian union.

A thousand years ago, the Persian scholar, Al-beruni, said, "Hindus believe that there is no country like theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs". If the boastful trait has survived through the vicissitudes of history, there is justification for it.

Cyberwar? Why Google Finally Saw Red In China

BY PRASANTO K. ROY

There's no polite way to put this. China is a rogue nation, a military dictatorship masquerading as a people's government. It's an apparent economic success in the short term, but its aspiration to become an economic superpower is not compatible with its political model.

That's a system backed not by the people's will, but by raw military power. Its guiding principles are control and paranoia. All media, all information, is censored. If you politely disagree with the system, you are locked up for 11 years, if you're lucky. If

you were in China writing what I am writing here in India, you would simply disappear.

So when the world's most influential tech company from the world's most influential nation bowed to this political system and launched a self-censored Google.cn search in January 2006, it wasn't sustainable. It was also incompatible with Google's corporate motto: "Don't Be Evil". Even with Google's justification that "increased access to information for people in China and a more open Internet outweighed our discomfort in agreeing to censor some results".



Most famously, if you simply search for Tiananmen Square on Google.com, you get tanks and bloodshed, but on Google.cn you get flowers and sunshine.

So even if David Drummond's Jan 12 blog post, "A new approach to China" shocked some people, it wasn't completely unexpected. Google's top lawyer's words were careful: "In mid-December, we detected a highly sophisticated attack on our corporate infrastructure originating from China... what at first appeared to be solely a security incident — albeit a significant one — was something quite different."

But the meaning was clear: The Chinese government was targeting mail accounts of Chinese human rights activists in China. And that it had "routinely accessed" the Gmail accounts of dozens of human rights activists around the world.

Google, with 31 percent of the China Internet search market, isn't number one: That's Baidu, the home-grown web portal (58 percent share), and Baidu will be the biggest gainer if Google pulls out. China is an enormous online market, which claims to have jumped 28 percent in a year to 384 million Internet users, powered mainly by a 120 million jump in mobile Internet users, who reached 233 million. And the Chinese government will get

rid of a potential thorn in its side, albeit one that is self-blunted.

But that's not all. Time was when Russia wore the mantle of the world's top rogue hacker nation, but China has overtaken it. The US, with its National Security Agency, the Central Security Service, the Central Intelligence Agency and others, is more subtle and sophisticated and maybe even more effective as a hacker nation. Israel is more focused.

Like the low-intensity conflict on India's borders, China has been waging a low-intensity cyberwar against India and other nations, against businesses even as it plays host to them, and against all those that it views as enemies, including human rights activists, and dissidents on its own soil.

Multinationals have chosen to ignore this,

trading some discomfort for economic gain. China continues to bet that as long as it stays below a certain threshold, it will get away with it. It's a dangerous game that can backfire, and they may have just crossed that line with Google.

But they have pushed the envelope way more with India. M.K. Narayanan, who till a couple of days ago was the country's national security adviser, has admitted only to Chinese attacks on the Prime Minister's Office: There is no way our military agencies would admit to falling prey to cyber attacks.

The next war will be fought not with conventional or nuclear weapons, but in cyberspace. Despite our business technology prowess, India is the Athens to China's Sparta. We are ill equipped to fight that war.

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