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Cast a shadow

There is a stable government after the Lok Sabha elections, which endorsed not only the UPA's political strength but also the Prime Minister's personal leadership.

Green shoots have started emerging in the economy, with many important indicators pointing in the positive direction. Some ministries have started implementing agendas for the short and longer terms. If there are the bright spots, there are also worries and uncertainties caused by the monsoon failure and consequent drought conditions in many parts of the country. The spreading swine flu and the failure of administrations in many places to tackle it have also cast a shadow. The Prime Minister acknowledged both but failed to go beyond them with an inspiring idea or vision that can move the government and the people in the coming months or years.

He presented hopes and plans, like the need for another Green Revolution, the promise to reschedule farm loans and the resolve to check price rise. He also underlined the importance of fighting terrorism, other forms of extremism and communalism. But there was nothing new, and many of the announcements that the Prime Minister made had already been made before, either by himself or ministers or others in the government. It is not that these are unimportant issues that do not deserve mention; but there are others that needed to be mentioned, though they were not. The issue of relations with Pakistan, especially in the context of India's demands on Islamabad, and the controversy over the Sharm-El-Sheikh joint statement, was glaringly missed. The absence of that reference could give rise to many interpretations, ranging from a diplomatic burial of the statement to a tactical ploy to push Pakistan to act more, since silence is also a mode of communication. But clarity pays better, in politics and in diplomacy. The Prime Minister limited himself mostly to the mundane and sometimes to the inane and did not rise above a bureaucratic view of the state of the nation and his government's responsibilities. Independence Days are days of political assertion of Prime Ministers and their governments. They should be used for substantive communication with the people and should go beyond the pomp and ritual that ceremonially attend them. The Prime Minister could have lifted it above the ordinary.

Drug trafficking

Coming on the heels of Vellupilai Prabhakaran's killing by the Lankan army, KP's neutralisation means that the LTTE has lost its sole surviving strategist who specialised in transnational gun running, drug trafficking and shipping activity so critical for terrorist operations. Considering he was the de facto successor to the slain LTTE chief, KP filled the vacuum at the apex of the terrorist organisation. But to what extent the Tamil diaspora around the globe backed KP in the manner that they supported Prabhakaran is not clear. Also, whether or not the LTTE's second line of leadership whole heartedly accepted KP's status as numero uno will remain a question mark. All the same, with KP's capture, the chances of the LTTE's resurgence becomes that much more difficult considering he laid a strong foundation of arms procurement and financial network.

From an Indian perspective, the LTTE posed a threat to regional security that spilled over beyond Sri Lanka. As Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksha recently highlighted, the LTTE's sophisticated arsenal went beyond the need to fight the Lankan army. This has security implications for the region in general and India in particular. KP's capture has relevance to India because he provided the logistics support for Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Whether or not New Delhi would seek his extradition is not known yet.

The fact that Colombo was able to clandestinely capture an LTTE leader from a Southeast Asian capital speaks volumes of the security co-operation between regional countries in the war against terrorism. Clearly, KP's capture is reminiscent of the Israeli intelligence operation to kidnap Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann from Buenos Aires in 1961. The only difference is that Israel did not have an extradition treaty with Argentina, whereas Sri Lanka appears to have done so with the host country's consent. KP's interrogation should yield a lot of information about the modalities of how trans-national terrorist organisations procure sophisticated arms and finance them.

Mountain railways of India — chugging and romancing the Hills

H.C. Kunwar*

The history of development of hill stations in India during the British rule is quite interesting. Mughals were the first settlers to develop hill-resorts in India. Shalimar and Nishat gardens in Kashmir are reminders of their love for the mountains. While Mughals learnt to appreciate the charm of hills in one generation, British took almost two hundred years to do that. For years, several important personalities advocated for the control over the Himalayas and other mountain ranges of India, for establishing thereon more sanitarium and even planting military colonies. In 1844, Sir Lawrence advocated partial colonization of hills especially for military settlers. Gazing on the charming landscape, (in fair Kashmir, or green Kangra, or the green slopes and downs of the Nilgiris, or at the tea growing bright spot Darjeeling), the idea also occurred that a happy Anglo-Saxon population may arise in this fair land, may cultivate their plot of land, rear a family and their robust sons growing up as the future defenders of the State.

The British modestly referred the mighty mountains as mere hills and 'Hill Railway' is a term often used, though not very clearly defined, which refers to rail-lines connecting 'hill stations' built for British settlers. Development of hill stations in India came up in the nineteenth century. Till 1920s, there were four such rail-lines built by different companies in four different parts of British India widely separated geographically and culturally. Darjeeling Himalayan Railway built in 1881 in West Bengal, Nilgiri Mountain Railway in 1899 in Tamil Nadu, Kalka Shimla Railway in 1903 in Himachal Pradesh and Matheran Light Railway built in 1907 in Maharashtra. Another line, namely, Kangra Valley Railway in Himachal Pradesh was built for connecting the Shanan Power House in the State, taking off from Pathankot. The line was opened in 1929. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was one of the first narrow-gauge railways of India. The other two lines are at Matheran (another hill railway) and the lengthy Gwalior system in the plains. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway has long been viewed with affection and enthusiasm by the travellers. The history of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway line commences in 1878 when Franklin Prestage of the then Eastern Bengal Railway proposed a hill tramway following the alignment of the Hill Cart Road to 2 Darjeeling. Construction commenced the year after and the line up to Darjeeling was opened in 1881.

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway
Declared a World Heritage Site in December, 1999

the second railway to have this honour bestowed upon it, the first being Semmering Railway of Austria in 1998 and the third Nilgiri Mountain Railway of India in 2000. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway links New Jalpaiguri in Siliguri to the hill station of Darjeeling in the Eastern Himalayas. The unique features of this line are a typically British climate beyond Kurseong, Z's and loops, the unique ways of gaining height in the hills and the cute B class steam locomotives, which are, revered the world over by steam enthusiasts. For almost 40 years from the beginning there were four complete loops and four 'Z' reversing stations. Something very interesting about 'Z' reversing: Tindharia, the first reversing station on the line, is a reminder of the success story of the genius who made this fairy-tale ride possible. It was here that the Engineer engaged received his first setback. Deeperosion in the hillside made it impossible to employ a gradient within the limits of railtransport. He was preparing himself to accept his failure when his wife saved the situation and suggested, "Darling if you can't go ahead, why don't you come back?" This brilliant scheme of climbing mountains, also known as 'Z' reversing stations, is as simple as it is clever. The train runs forward almost to the edge of the cliff, then backwards at an oblique angle up the hillside, then forward again, this time high enough above the original track to avoid the problem of land erosion. The line thus follows an elongated form of 'Z'. Nilgiri Mountain Railway is one of the oldest rack and pinion systems and has the steepest rack and pinion technology successfully being operated till date i.e. even after 100 years. Most of the stations buildings built during 1897 to 1899 are maintained in the same glorious look. Nilgiri Mountain Railway not only preserves the heritage of the people, culture and organisation of the social structure of the region but is also considered to be a cultural melting pot for the English and the local tribes. In recognition of these features, the Nilgiri Mountain Railway has been inscribed World Heritage status by UNESCO in July 2005.

flower without fragrance.
Udagmandalam (Ooty), nestling among the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu is the Queen of Indian Hill Stations and enjoys a cool, pleasant climate all around the year. Coonoor, a hill station enroute is situated 6000 feet above the sea level at the southeast corner of the Nilgiri Plateau and at the head of the principal pass from the plains. Up this high track a rack railway (27 km) from Mettupalayam to Coonoor since 15th June, 1899. Coonoor remained a terminus for the Nilgiri line for eight years. The Government constructed the extension from Coonoor to Udagmandalam and the line upto Fernhill was opened on 15th September, 1908 and upto Udagmandalam a month later (15th October, 1908). Kalka Shimla Railway mastered the art of tunnelling. As many as 107 tunnels, of several shapes and designs were built in three years from 1900 to 1903. At present, 102 tunnels are functional. Barog Tunnel (No. 33), 3752 feet long, is the longest tunnel on Kalka Shimla Railway. It is a straight tunnel and also the longest straight stretch of Kalka Shimla Railway has a ruling gradient of 1 in

25 with 919 curves, the sharpest being of 48 degrees. Climbing from 656 m at the line ends at 2076 m at Shimla. **Barog Tunnel**
Barog Tunnel: Generally trains take about 2.5 minutes to cross this tunnel. The name of the tunnel came after the engineer who was entrusted with the job of designing a tunnel near the railway station. He commenced digging the tunnel from both sides of the mountain. He however made a mistake in his calculation and ultimately found that the two ends of the tunnel did not meet. Barog was fined for this lapse. Unable to withstand the humiliation, he committed suicide and was buried near the incomplete tunnel. The arcaic name to be known as Barog after him. Thereafter, another tunnel was built by H. S. Harrington about 1 km away from the earlier point with the guidance of a local saint Bhalku from Jhaja near Chail. Bhalku possessed natural engineering skills and it is believed that he helped the British engineers to bore other tunnels also on the line. According to Shimla Gazette, the viceroy presented a medal and turban to Bhalku in recognition of his contribution. Kalka Shimla Railway is famous for its rail-motor-cars. The earliest 'Automobiles' or 'Rail Motor Cars' on Kalka Shimla Railway bore a marked resemblance to the char-abanc. They were petrol driven and

had white & poppe engines, supplied by Drewry Car co. Ltd. of London. The rail cars are now fitted with a trans-



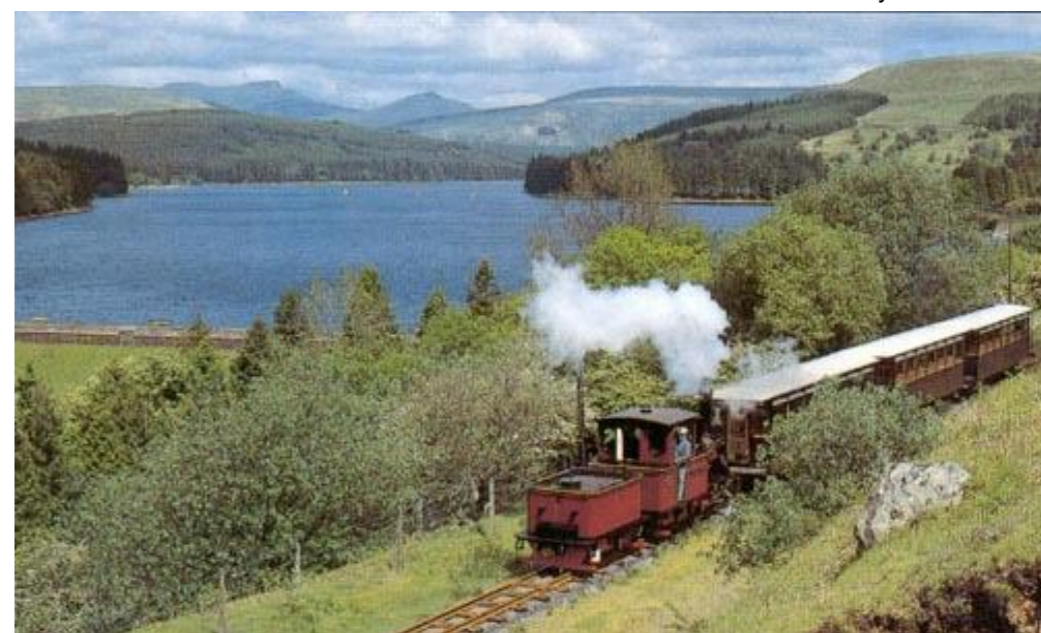
Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

'Blue Mountains' without Nilgiri Mountain Railway will be just a

flower without fragrance.

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Kangra Valley Railway

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tion and was a regular visitor to Matheran. After having obtained a reluctant consent from his father, young Abdul

parent fibreglass roof, thus affording a beautiful view to the travellers. The Kalka-Shimla Railway has been inscribed

World Heritage status by UNESCO in July 2008.

Kalka Shimla Railway

The train journey between Kalka to Shimla (about 5-6 hours) covers several picturesque stations like Dharampur, Taksal, Barog and Solan. It provides an unforgettable experience as one can take a breathtaking view of the Himalayan peaks, snow-capped mountains, inviting trails, several tunnels/bridges and the heady fragrance of

flowers. Elegantly designed and furnished coupe of 'Shivalik Express' tourist coaches provide exclusive privacy to couples and offer them a memorable journey. The line from Kalka to Shimla (96 km) was opened for traffic on November 9, 1903. Matheran Light Railway - Matheran is the tiniest hill station of India, located on the

Western Ghats range at an elevation of 800 m above sea level. 'Matheran' means 'forest on top' and also 'mother forest'. It is a continuous poem of shady and thickly wooded paths of red mud and velvet moss stretching endlessly. Abdul Hussein, son of the business tycoon Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy of Bombay (Mumbai), had fallen in love with the beauty of this hill sta-

Hussein camped at Neral in 1900 AD to plan for a narrow gauge railway line to Matheran. The construction of the line was authorized by Public Works Department, Bombay. Abdul Hussein floated "The Matheran Steam Light

5. Tramway Company" for the purpose. Government land was provided free and private land was acquired at the cost of the Company. The promoters were authorized construction, maintenance and working of the line and to fix the fares within the specified limits. The line was opened in March, 1907. There are 221 curves, however, there is complete absence of tunnels, save for a small tunnel on the section. The line follows the embankment for a mile in the north direction till it turns back through the only tunnel on the route, 'One Kiss Tunnel' which gives a couple, time just sufficient for a kiss.

Matheran Light Railway

In the olden days the tiny locomotive may have exhausted all its water, therefore a water pipe is available at this midway point and the station is conveniently named as

"water pipe". The name continues though the diesel locos now no more get exhausted and the water pipe has lost its importance, instead a tea staff on the platform serves the passengers on this mid-way point.

The line now lies under Mount Barry, and to negotiate the ascent here, the line zigzags sharply backwards and forwards twice, passing through two deep cuttings. The line pursues its way more decorously and reaches out more or less straight for Panorama point, after skirting it, returns by Simpson's Tank and terminates close to the Matheran Bazar.

Kangra Valley, famous for its natural beauty also had a number of ancient Hindu Shrines visited regularly by thousands of pilgrims. The European settlers converted it into a rich tea-growing district and established a large European colony at Dhamsala.

Dhamsala is described as an 'enchantingly pretty spot on the pine-clad slopes of Dhaula- Dhar range of the Himalayas'. Europeans also settled in large number at Dalhousie and Palampur.

6. Kangra Valley Railway

Proposals for a narrow gauge line on Kangra Valley Railway were put forth in 1900, when a scheme was mooted to link Shimla with Dalhousie. Later, Punjab Government revived the proposal for a metre gauge tramway from Kukerian to Shanan in 1925. The Railway Board, however, found it desirable to construct a narrow gauge (762 mm) line from Pathankot (instead of Mukerian) to Shanan and the alignment included easy connections to a number of pilgrim places as well as European settlements. The construction began in 1926 and the line was opened on 1st April, 1929. On Kangra Valley Railway, the curves are relatively easy.

For the greater portion of the journey, the traveller can gaze long at the ever present panorama of snow clad ranges and gold green fields without being swung round every minute on a narrow arc before his eyes can savour the scenery.

There are 971 bridges but only two tunnels, viz., Dhundi (250 feet) and Daulatpur (1070 feet). The alignment of Kangra Valley Railway is a clever one from the economic standpoint.

By following the lower contours for as great a distance as possible, the railway remains close to rich croplands.

schedule for bye-elections to fill the casual vacancies in the Legislative Assembly of Bihar

The Commission had announced bye - elections for 20 Assembly Constituencies in Andhra Pradesh (1 Assembly Constituency), Bihar (7 Assembly Constituencies), Gujarat (7 Assembly Constituencies), Madhya Pradesh (2 Assembly Constituencies), Sikkim (1 Assembly Constituency), Uttarakhand (1 Assembly Constituency), & NCT of Delhi (1 Assembly Constituency), vide its Press Note dated 12.08.2009. Subsequently, a delegation of four persons led by Sh. Sharad Yadav met the Commission on 14.08.2009. They, in the representation presented to the Commission, stated that

26 Districts out of 38 districts of Bihar have been declared draught affected and as such massive drought relief efforts are required to be taken on emergency basis. When a bye-election is announced, the Model Code of Conduct comes into effect and relief work may be affected. They have further stated that all political parties are involved in the fight against drought and if bye-elections are held in phases, then political parties and administration would remain involved with election management and as such campaigning and long term relief work may get affected. They, thus, requested to hold the pending bye-elections in

all the 18 Assembly Constituencies of Bihar instead of 7 already announced by the Commission on 12.08.2009. The matter relating to providing additional police forces was discussed with the Ministry of Home Affairs on 16.08.2009. After taking into consideration the aforesaid representation and various factors like requirement of police forces, festivities, position of electoral rolls, etc, the Commission has further decided to announce bye-elections to fill up the remaining 11 vacancies of Bihar, namely, 02-Bagaha (SC), 09-Nautan, 108-Begusarai, 113-Tribeniganj, 119-Simri-Bakhtiarpur, 130-Araia, 155-Dhuraiya (SC), 167-Munger, 193-Phulwari (SC), 228-Ghosi, 235-Bodh Gaya (SC). In addition another vacancy has arisen on 13th August 2009 in 54-Okhla Legislative Assembly Constituency in NCT of Delhi. The Commission has decided to hold this bye - election also. The Programme to hold the said bye-elections shall be as under:

1. Issue of Notification 21.08.09 (Friday)
2. Last date of making Nominations 28.08.09 (Friday)
3. Scrutiny of Nominations 29.08.09 (Saturday)
4. Last date for withdrawal of Candidatures 31.08.09 (Monday.)

5. Date of Poll 15.09.09 (Tuesday)

6. Counting of Votes 17.09.09 (afternoon Thursday)

7. Date before which election shall be completed 21.09.09 (Monday)

The Commission has further decided that the counting of votes for 7ACs in Bihar, earlier announced to be held on 14.09.2009 vide Press Note dated 12.08.2009 shall also be taken up on 17.09.2009 afternoon. The electoral rolls w.r.t. 01.01.2009 as the qualifying date as per pre - delimitation order in Bihar, have been revised and published and the bye - elections will be held on the basis of these electoral rolls. The General Elections to the Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi was held on the basis of electoral rolls revised w.r.t. 01.01.2009.