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The New French President

Emile Chabal's article "Europe after Sarkozy" (EPW, 2 June 2012) on François Hollande and the French is a well-argued and well-balanced piece. However, I would like to focus on an aspect concerning President Hollande which Chabal has not discussed. This concerns Syria. To its credit the communist party's organ *L'humanité* underlined, at the beginning of this month, that "the France of Hollande is the only western country which publicly envisages a military intervention in Syria". At the same time the newspaper added that even the German government opposed military intervention. What a contrast between a "socialist" government and an avowed rightist government! Both in his press conference on 29 May and his speech at the French television channel 2 on 5 June, the new "socialist" president declared in favour of military intervention in Syria under the authorisation of the United Nations Security Council. What is particularly notable in this connection is that he approvingly referred to the "philosopher" Bernard-Henri Levy who in March 2011 had persuaded the former rightist president Nicolas Sarkozy to undertake military intervention in Libya. This philosopher, "well-known by his fame" (to use an expression of Heine cited by Engels), is now openly pushing for the same scenario in Syria.

On the question of war and peace (including attitude to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), it seems there is hardly any difference between the two administrations. Another point – though not immediately connected with the issue being discussed here, but not altogether irrelevant – should be mentioned here. This relates to the recent terrible massacre of civilians including women and children at Houla in Syria. Particularly, the government and mass media of the west, uncritically voicing the Syrian armed opposition, immediately began to assert that the whole massacre was perpetrated by the Syrian military and the government militia. This was also mentioned by Hollande in his discourse justifying military intervention. In this connection a particular

photo of dead children shrouded in white was repeatedly shown on television all over the globe, most widely by the British Broadcasting Corporation. From the Russian press, however, it is learnt that the particular photo of the dead children in question, in fact, dates from 2003 originating from a place called Al Musayyib in Iraq. The photographer who took the original picture, Marco Di Lauro, posted in his Facebook page: "Somebody is using my images as propaganda against the Syrian government to prove the massacre".

Paresh Chattopadhyay

MONTREAL

Irrigation and Efficient Use of Water

This is with reference to the excellent editorial "When the Water Runs Out" (EPW, 2 June 2012). In this regard there are two vital tasks for the government: one, capacity building of groundwater users with regard to groundwater resource extraction, utilisation, and recharge, and two, amendments to the existing laws on groundwater regulation and control (Acts passed by Karnataka and other states).

In India, the sector which has received the maximum budget outlay is the "supply side" of irrigation and that which received the least attention is the "demand side" of irrigation. Agriculture/irrigation has been the largest user of water (92%) and hence there are great gains in water-use efficiency in irrigation. The hypothesis that once water is made available farmers are aware of water-use efficiency is untenable. Agricultural extension has seldom emphasised "irrigation extension". Currently more than 80% of irrigated agriculture in India is supported by groundwater through 23 million pumps with an addition of a million pumps every year (http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Publications/Water_Issue_Briefs/PDF/Water_Issue_Brief_%2011.pdf).

Thus farmers have to be educated regarding irrigation scheduling for different crops, agro-climatic conditions, water-use efficiency, how to prevent waterlogging, salinity and alkalinity, and the economic value of water. In the case of

groundwater, farmers should be educated on the technical aspects of on-farm groundwater recharge efforts, availability and utilisation of groundwater such as the depth to which a well should be drilled, isolation distance among wells, appropriate pump capacity, pump placement depth, pump output and connectivity for micro-irrigation (drip or sprinkler). They should also be enlightened about appropriate crops to be cultivated in the area considering groundwater availability, agro-climatic conditions and market forces, need for on-farm groundwater recharge and conservation, and the sustainable path of groundwater extraction on the farm.

The Groundwater Act needs to impose a regulation cap on the number of successful wells a farmer can extract water from at any time. There should also be a requirement that the farmer should fix a water meter (not an electrical meter) to enable him/her to measure how much water is being pumped out periodically to help in water budgeting, and a restriction that paddy and sugar cane should avoid using groundwater resources. Similar to water users associations (WUAs), groundwater users associations should be developed with a provision for the role of agricultural/agricultural engineering graduates for technical work on irrigation. The WUAs should certify that the farmer is practising efficient methods of water-use on the farm in order to be eligible for benefit under any governmental programme.

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Uneven Development

This is with reference to the article on “Growth across States in the 2000s: Evidence of Convergence” (EPW, 9 June 2012). The author has given a comparative picture about the growth of state domestic product in special category and non-special category states. Among the latter, Goa, Karnataka, Rajasthan and West Bengal witnessed high growth during 1995-2000, but subsequently demonstrated slower growth during 2001-10. On the other

hand, some of the special category states like Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya and Jammu and Kashmir displayed lower growth during 2001-10. We would like to know the reasons behind the lower growth rates. Another question relates to sector-wise contribution to the overall growth rates. Such in-depth analysis will help in unravelling the real picture, and accordingly, our planners and the state governments can take appropriate action to attain balanced development.

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Sans Hostility

The commentary on “Rio+20: What Is at Stake” by T Jayaraman, Divya Singh Kohli and Shruti Mittal (EPW, 9 June 2012) misses one point, and that is, a country like India should think beyond its borders demarcated by land. Recently, I got an opportunity to travel around the world by ship on a study voyage from Florida to San Diego via Brazil, Ghana, South Africa, Mauritius, India, Singapore, Vietnam, China, Japan and Hawaii. During this voyage, what we witnessed was a busy and polluted ocean in Asia due to accelerated growth in global transport originating from there by sea. The emerging market economies should share the burden of the pollution of the ocean and take a proactive stand in the dialogue related to policies for keeping it clean. The increasing pollution of the ocean may be a greater threat to the earth than the pollution of land by the rich and poor alike. There are no poor or rich people in the ocean but the ocean provides sustenance to humankind as a whole. India should take a cooperative stand in Rio+20 in discussing the future of the oceans, rather than the usual hostile attitude towards developed countries.

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Towards Modernity

I read some of the articles EPW made available on Nepal from its archives. Thank you for that. I think the Maoists

are the part of the problem and also the solution. When the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) took the line of “democratic republic” in 2005, the seed for the rift in the party was sown. The now known Baidhya faction (Mohan Baidhya “Kiran” is party vice-chairman) has been annoyed by the Dahal-Bhattarai line (Pushpa Kamal Dahal “Prachanda” is party chairman and Baburam Bhattarai “Laldhwaj” is vice-chairman) of democratic republic, despite Dahal’s effort to convince the former faction that “democratic republic” is just a tactical step towards the goal of a “people’s federal republic”. For many years Dahal tried to cajole both Baidhya and Bhattarai – each sticking to his particular formulation of people’s federal republic and democratic republic respectively – not to continue this double dance any more. To me, going for a democratic republic is a vital tool to craft a civic nation.

Given the fact that Nepal is standing at a very crucial juncture of its history, the question of our political leaders’ vision of nation-building becomes crucial as this will shape the future of Nepal. The history of nation-building in Asia may show several forms but at the base there are two main approaches; first, nation-building on the basis of ethnicity or religious affiliation (as in Iran) and second, on the basis of citizenship, equality and commitment to a political creed. Asian history offers enough evidence on the ill effects of nation-building on the basis of ethno-nationalism leading to polarisation, internal conflict and international isolation. Nation-building on the basis of religion and ethnicity results in the consolidation of power in the hands of the core ethnic group which, in turn, develops and deploys state power to promote its own interests. If this trend continues, Nepal will not be able to realise its full potential. Hence the best way to heal the wounds of years of conflict and regime oppression in Nepal is to build it as a modern civic nation. All international actors should lend their voice to this cause.

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