

Political Reforms

—> **Re-organise states in to smaller states under directly elected Chief Ministers**

—> **Towards a two (plus left) party system for a stable and strong Indian polity**

—> **Younger India, greying politicians**

Business Reforms

—> **'Turbulence is a friend' - says Jim Collins, the famous management guru**

—> **Outsourcing: Villain of the piece?**

Bureaucratic Reforms

—> **The Front end approach to improve service delivery**

Management Section

—> **Decide on just one thing to succeed - by Ron White**

Quote of the Month

He who conquers others is strong; he who conquers himself is mighty.

- Lao-tzu

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Feedback and articles for 'IRRO News'

Dear Readers,

Don't be surprised if BJP, Congress and the Left together form the next government at the center

India's 15th general elections just around the corner, is throwing up weird political combinations and alliances in an attempt to 'grab power at any cost'. The surprising news of alliance between two old rivals Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Shiv Sena in Maharashtra does not now appear to be an exception. Samajwadi Party (SP), part of the present UPA Government at the center and which became the king maker at the time of vote of confidence in Parliament last year has also declared their intention to go with BJP, if the situation so demanded. Similarly, Jayalalitha, the AIADMK Supremo in Tamil Nadu has suddenly developed motherly love for Late Mrs. Indira Gandhi and hence would like to go with the Congress, notwithstanding the fact that her arch rival Karunanidhi of DMK is already part of UPA government and has enjoyed power and pelf in the last five years.

On the other hand, another ex Prime Minister Mr. H.D. Deva Gowda has been trying to gobble together a motley group of smaller parties into a respectable and viable combination, named as the third front, which can bid for power at the center. Mr. Deva Gowda is pushing the name of Mayawati of BSP to lead the country after the elections. But in this garb, he cannot hide his own intention of bidding for second tenure as Prime Minister.

A shuttle and cleaver battle for the prime ministership is on, with a number of smaller parties with the so called big leaders having Himalayan ambitions. In a democratic set up, there is nothing wrong for the leaders to have big ambitions. But alas, Indian political system is highly deficient in terms of smooth selection of a national leader. The way the Indian system has developed in six decades, the whole exercise of selecting the CEO of the nation seems to be worse than the system of loya zirga prevalent in Afghanistan before 1979. Further, in announcing alliances with their rivals in the states, these leaders just want to bargain for a larger number of seats from their existing alliance partners with the threat of walking out to the other side.

What is going on in the current scenario only reminds us of similar battles fought in Indian history since ancient times. Whenever the center became weak, it could be threatened by the regional 'khatraps' at their own sweet will. India stands to lose a great deal as we have failed to evolve a viable constitutional mechanism to rule the country.

For the leadership of the nation, the real battle will of course take place after the general elections are over. This is an 'undemocratic' feature of the chaotic Indian democracy. Whereas in major western democracies, the leadership issue among different parties (generally two major parties) is settled (through a mechanism of internal democracy within the parties), before the elections are announced and leaders nominated by their parties go to the hustings offering a clear choice to the electorate to elect them vis-à-vis the other candidate(s) as the CEO of the nation, in India thanks to the Himalayan blunder committed by our constitution makers, the country does not know, who will lead after the elections. It looks like Indian democracy may be slowly getting reduced to a farce.

The way political alliances are becoming an exercise in aggrandizement of personal power and grabbing the most out of a chaotic situation, we may not be surprised if the next government is formed ultimately by an alliance among the three national parties: BJP, Congress and the Left. Don't be surprised really by this peculiar combination, since in the past, the BJP and the Left together supported V P Singh's government. Communists also shared power with the then JanSangh in Bihar in mid-sixties. As for the BJP and Congress coming together, notwithstanding their rival public postures, they have more or less followed an identical policy for governing the country. General public does not seem to distinguish much between these two parties anyway.

For the long term, though, there is no choice but to reform Indian political apparatus by introducing a series of constitutional reforms to draw a clear architecture of India's political system based on mature models of U.K. /USA, which will provide stability to the system of political governance at the center and facilitate emergence of India into a strong nation in the coming century. The cost of prevarication could be very heavy as India is now faced with a series of challenges at the borders as well as within the country and therefore there is an urgent need for a strong center with a strong and independent leader at the helm.

Wishing all our readers **HAPPY HOLI**
Sincerely,
President, IRRO

Political Reforms

Re-organise states in to smaller states under directly elected Chief Ministers

The demand for a separate state of Telangana had earlier split the various political parties vertically. During the last general elections, Congress entered into an electoral arrangement with TRS with the promises of a separate Telangana State. Subsequently, however, it backtracked resulting in a divorce with the TRS. Poll time coming nearer, once again the issue has cropped up and now it appears all the concerned political parties, including the Congress are in near agreement for a separate Telangana state.

Separation of Telangana from the existing geographical boundaries of Andhra Pradesh sure enough is going to lead to demands for smaller states in different parts of the country. The case for a Royalseema is immediately being raised. Similarly demand for Vidharbha in Maharashtra, Harit Pradesh and Purvanchal in Uttar Pradesh are going to gain ground.

Since the last re-organisation of states on linguistic grounds in 1957, a number of small states came into existence through constitutional amendments. Experience of smaller states suggests that they have risen faster on the development food chain. Small states such as Haryana and Himachal Pradesh took the lead and possibly Uttarakhand may also fall in the same category. However, for smaller states, there are challenges of their viability, higher administrative cost and creation of a conducive political environment, in absence of which the advantages may be lost.

One of the greatest disadvantages of bigger states like Uttar Pradesh has been the political uncertainty and hung assemblies thrown up by the electorate. A state like Uttar Pradesh, which has proved difficult to administer, ranks sixth as a country internationally by way of its population size alone.

Our Constitution makers possibly failed to devote enough attention on the organisation of states within the union of India. Subsequent exercise of 1957 for carving out states on linguistic grounds also did not help. As long as Congress ruled in most of the bigger states, there were no political and administrative problems. However, evolution of the Congress party since 1970s ensured emergence of regional groups based on caste, creed and religion. The multi-party system meant unstable coalitions emerging and frequent switching of sides by the legislatures to bring down the governments. Article 356 had to be invoked fairly or unfairly on many occasions.

Now since political parties are slowly conceding demand for smaller states, there is a need for drawing a comprehensive architecture once for all for re-organising the states keeping in mind the long term goals and objectives, some of which could be: a stable and strong polity at the state level, direct election of the chief minister, recognition of state level parties with not less than 20% votes, two-term limit for the chief minister, term limits for the office bearers within the state (or national) parties participating in elections at the state level, creating a conducive atmosphere for drawing in the best and brightest people in to state polity and institution of a strong Lokpal to curb corruption.

Keeping in mind the various international democratic models for re-organising the states globally, US model appears to be more appropriate for re-organising the Indian states. United States which has three times the land area of India's, has 51 states with only 300 million population and never had any so-called national threat because of large number of states. Some of these states are in fact very small in geography. Surely India with a population of nearly 1.2 billion can afford to have 40 to 50 states that should settle the demand of various regions, communities and groups once for all. The second important lesson from the working of US democracy is that in order to have stable government in the states, chief ministers of states may be elected directly and the working of the legislatures could be cast on US model. Other features of US system could also be borrowed freely, if they could lead to an improvement over the existing system. Similarly, some good features of other democracies could also be borrowed liberally.

Re-organistaion of states will call for constitutional reforms for which major parties must agree. Surely, the reformed states on US model will provide stability to the states and the state polity will emerge in to a vibrant political system which could attract the best and brightest people.

It is high time our policy makers looked at a totally new, innovative and radical approach keeping in mind certain long term goals rather than dealing with such an issue in fits and starts.

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Political Reforms

Towards a two (plus left) party system for a stable and strong Indian polity

After nearly sixty years of India's republic came in to existence and as we are approaching towards the country's 15th general elections, the need for a two party system never seems to have been greater. From the working of different national and regional parties and the chaotic political atmosphere that the country is slowly plunging into, there is now an urgent need for re-organising the Indian political party system, so that in the shortest term possible, the country can have a two party system for governing the country at the center.

Our constitution makers designed the state apparatus based on Westminster's model of UK, which has two major political parties, whose leaders are elected beforehand to lead before the elections. There is a clear choice before the electorate. Leaders generally stay at the helm for no more than ten years. The party system is so strong that even the strongest leaders have to bow down before the party machinery. The iron lady Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair in fact were removed while they were in power.

As for the Indian political system, after sixty years, the whole scenario is reduced to a butt of joke. From the days of stable governments led by Congress, which ruled for nearly thirty years at a stretch, we moved to a coalition-era, and now we are reduced to small parties bidding for power in the strangest manner. We are clearly ignoring the dangers of such fractured political system for a large and diverse country like India, which is now faced with serious challenges from across the border. India is facing a number of serious problems and many of these can be attributed to political failures or lack of existence of strong national parties at the centre and lack of methodology which can throw up strong and independent leaders for running the country.

On several occasions in the past, we came very close to the cherished objective of two or three party system. In 1977, an omnibus combination called Janata Party had emerged to compete with Congress for power at the center. But alas, we could not hold on to it, as the personal ambitions of some of the leaders wrecked that combination. Again in 1989, the Janata Dal led by V P Singh along with other major parties like BJP, Congress and the Left parties offered a more organised political choice before the electorate. However, once again, the political process slipped in to political fission than fusion. With the current crop of a number of smaller parties competing for power at the center, the omens are not good. The country is bound to become weaker at the center, the prime minister's position will remain weak as the regional 'khataraps' dictate terms mostly for their own selfish ends and for personal power and wealth.

Survey after survey has projected people's craving for a strong leader at the center. However, our constitutional mechanism as of now will not allow strong leaders to emerge. There is thus an urgent need for constitutional reform. National parties should be recognized with at least 25% national vote share. This will force smaller parties to regroup themselves in to a viable combination. Imagine, not long ago, Lalu, Paswan, Nitish, Sharad Yadav, Naveen Patnaik, Chautala, and Deva Gowda were all part of one single party, Janata Dal. Why does then our constitution allow fragmentation of political parties? Most of these leaders are today virtually leading family based parties. Therefore a minimum benchmark requirement of 25% of national vote for fighting national elections will bring them together once again. This will also provide ample opportunity for many of these leaders to be the head of the nation.

One of the banes of Indian politics has been that leaders stay there for life, which results in to further fragmentation of parties and monopolization of power without any objective. Apart from the leaders of the family based parties, even within the national parties, these old leaders are wrecking havoc and not allowing younger leaders to emerge. The competitive politics at the national level cannot be left to the parties themselves in the manner they are conducting themselves now. It is not easily understood why our constitution makers designed a system for recognition of parties to compete at national level with such a narrow percentage of vote.

After six decades, we today stand at a cross road. Our fellow citizens have huge expectations for future. We as a nation feel that we can match with the best in the world in the coming decades. We have 21st and 22nd century aspirations. However, our systems seriously lag behind and it does not look like that our existing systems can lead us into the future that we as a nation visualize.

There is certainly an urgent need to reform all the governance institutions. But out of all, reforming the political institution should achieve the highest priority. In no country of the world, either the judiciary or the executive has taken such radical and innovative steps to put the country in the lead. It is only the political system and the political leaders, who have taken the lead in the onward march for a nation to become a developed country. We have seen how Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore transformed a third world city state within a very short span of time into a fully developed country. Many of us draw a wrong conclusion that it was because of the small size of Singapore that it could develop at a rapid pace. Nothing can be farther from the truth. It was clearly the vision and strategy of the senior leader that the country was transformed. From another perspective, it was Lee Kuan's bad luck that he was born in a small country. If he was born in India or China, possibly he could have achieved the same miracle which he achieved in a small island state. Many even attribute his success to an element of authoritarianism built into their political system. But the truth lies in the fact that such leaders had no more power than the great leaders like Pundit Nehru or Mrs. Indira Gandhi had in a democratic set up in India. But Indian leaders failed to draw a similar vision and strategize a plan of action to transform the underdeveloped India into the league of the first world nations.

At today's cross road, choice is ours. We have a dream, but we lag behind in the political governance mechanism. First step in transformation is to evolve a two party system through a constitutional reform. National parties must conduct genuine elections for their organisations; must have fixed terms for office bearers and law should force them to organise their

working like a running steam which will invite fresh blood to run the organisation. Re-organisation of our polity on the parent Westminster's model should be the foremost objective.

In order to become a first-world country, we must behave like a first world country and must put in place the first world institutions which will transform our dreams into realities.

'Younger India, greying politicians' (Hindu Business Line dated 6th February, 2009)

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2009/02/06/stories/2009020650150800.htm>

Business Reforms

'Turbulence is a friend'- says Jim Collins, the famous management guru

Management guru Jim Collins after conducting an in-depth research of a large number of companies has come out with several startling revelations on how great companies thrive in recession times.

Jim Collins, who wrote such business columns as 'Built to last' and 'Good to great', has come out with a new insight on the success achieved by companies in good and bad times. He is now fully engaged in researching on how great companies thrive in turbulent times like the one we are facing today. Some of the characteristics highlighted by him are discussed below.

One of the fundamental values that great companies have is that even in times of uncertainties they have deep moorings, a set of values or underlying ideals or principles that explain how and why they exist. Names like P&G, GE, and IBM, some of the world class companies have a deep sense of value. They practice what they preach in terms of the products and services they deliver. They build their reputation on quality. Even when under pressure to cut corners by using cheaper ingredients, these companies never compromised. The real principle is that they actually have core values – not what they are. Greater the challenge, greater is the faith in their core values which they preserve continuously overtime.

The second aspect about such companies is that they rely on their human resources and they recognise very well the caliber of their people. In difficult times, they would rather recruit to enhance their stock of talent than resort to layoffs. HP for example after world war-II hired engineers who got laid off, to use their brains.

The third dimension of long lasting companies is that those companies really think long term and they manage for a quarter century and not for just quarterly results, which the stock market fanatics look for.

The fourth dimension is the cultural environment these companies breed in house. As opposed to tight management controls, these companies having hired the best of the brains allow them complete freedom to manage themselves. The right kinds of people don't think that they have a job, rather they have responsibilities. In difficult times, results are their responsibilities and those people do not blame just the external forces for their not so good performance.

In an era when U.S. businesses continuously thrived from 1952 to 2000, there are Americans, who have never even seen any kind of challenges that we are witnessing today. However when the times are tough, the tough companies get going. A case in point is of the South West Airlines, which has managed itself in good times as if they were in bad times. Those companies have a sense of discipline to grow slowly, which means while the market forces may demand to grow at 50% and beyond, they decide actually to grow at 20% or less, as your focus is on a quarter century and not just the quarterly results.

Jim Collins advice is not to get panicky in a moment like this, otherwise those who panic will die on the mountain. One can go down and survive and yet come back another day. One has to have the combination of believing that you would prevail. The idea is to recognise that being in this for a long time, one just turns this into a defining event to make the enterprise much stronger.

Sure enough the tough times do not last for ever. Lesson is to accept what is in front of all of us, strategize now for a quarter century, develop management practices, for the corporations, governments or any other organisation accordingly for the long term, rather than focusing on one to three years time frame.

There are some great lessons for Indian corporates, which went on an expansion free, overseas buyouts and earned fat profits for a few years in boom times. Now they are crying out for government help. If Indian corporates practiced what Jim Collin has to say, or even defined just one strategy out of several pointed out by Jim Collins, the face of businesses will change and they can deal with the cycle of booms and busts much better.

Outsourcing: Villain of the piece?

(An article published in Economic Times dated 31st January, 2009)

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/Comments_Analysis/Outsourcing_Villain_of_the_piece/articleshow/4055561.cms

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Bureaucratic Reforms

The Front end approach to improve service delivery

Committees, seminars, conferences, reports and repeat of these several times in a decade, that is the story and tragedy of bureaucratic reforms in this country. Since independence, countless committees have been set up and volumes of reports are gathering dust to reform Indian bureaucracy or to deliver services to the people at world class standards.

We want transparency, accountability, quality service delivery from bureaucracy. But other than talking in a general way, Indians don't go beyond rhetoric and we rarely take any concrete measures for designing a bureaucratic system that will deliver the results in a manner that we seek.

Transparency and accountability are not buttons on the keyboard of a computer, that by pressing these buttons, we can see transparency appearing on the screen. These are end outputs of a well designed system which delivers the desired results.

As discussed in our February issue, there are several approaches to reforming bureaucracy. The simplest among them is the 'Goal approach' or "front end approach". Here without carrying out organisational and other reforms to begin with, focus has to be placed on the end results directly. For example, all the activities of an organisation that it is supposed to carry out must be listed exhaustively and service standards (like in an e-governance set up) must be developed for delivery of each of these services by the organisation. In the transformation process from manual to electronic governance in the virtual world of computers/ servers etc, service standards have to be evolved. For example in Kalyan Dombiveli Municipal Corporation (KDMC), services standards were developed in respect of all the services to be delivered to the citizens by the municipality: a birth/ death certificates must be delivered within thirty minutes, for example. Similarly all other activities were to be delivered in a time bound manner.

For turning the entire bureaucracy into e-bureaucracy in a developing country like India, we need huge resources, which are otherwise in short supply. However, we can achieve the same results by developing service standards in the manual domain itself, so that services can be delivered in a time bound manner and quality of services can be vigorously and assiduously checked. Again if we have to achieve time bound delivery of services with emphasis on quality, it will be most hazardous to leave it to the bureaucrats themselves and therefore there is a need for legislation on the subject.

First of all, we must enact a 'Right to Performance Act' (RPA) at the central level and each organisation or department within the government must be mandated to develop service standards for all the services it renders to citizens or other users. Under the central RPA, the specific act governing other organisations/departments will have similar legal provisions by way of rules or regulations, whereby service standards will have to be publicly notified. For example, in a tax department just as citizens have deadlines to submit tax return, pay taxes (in the case of advance taxes) TDS etc, citizens in turn must by legislation be guaranteed of refund to be made within a certain deadline. Through the RPA, each department can thus be made answerable, as it will have to ensure that what it does must be delivered within a law mandated deadline. Similarly, for example in Customs Department, different services are rendered in an adhoc manner and there is no timeline for completing those services. For example when goods are imported and provisional assessment is resorted to, years pass but no action is taken to close the provisional assessment. In fact as the cases pile up and become older, officials feel pressurized to indulge in deliberate act of injustice so as to justify their inaction of years. This loophole can be plugged, if the Customs Act itself provided for a deadline (six months/ one year) for closure of the provisional assessment.

The Right to Performance Act will guarantee the citizens delivery of certain activities within a deadline. However, this would not be enough. The next step should be to ensure that quality services are delivered and government organisations are not allowed to indulge in reckless injustice. For this purpose, right from the time the decisions are taken, further monitoring should be done to ensure that the officers who deliver services or pass orders are monitored in respect of their quality of delivery of those services for future. For example in tax related matters, the cases should be monitored right up to the stage of Supreme Court and officers passing the orders are held accountable.

Right to Information Act (RTI) merely provides information, but it can do nothing about the timely delivery of services and can not ensure about the quality of those services. But, the RPA can truly revolutionalise the citizen-government relationship and can usher in a new era of governance.

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Management

Decide on just one thing to succeed--by Ron White

What do people like A R Rahman, Sachin Tendulkar, and Abhinava Bindra have in common: their passion about just one thing they focus on.

"Everybody I know says that they need just one thing...what they really mean is that they need just one thing more.", says Rich Mullins (Singer/Songwriter). Elizabeth Taylor after her 7th marriage had this to say: "the trouble is not getting the man that you want, the trouble is wanting the man once you get him!".

Look at the success of the Interstate Department Store. Also take a look at Toy's R Us. The success of Toy's R Us occurred when they chose to focus on ONE THING - toys. How about 7UP? In the late 1970s, they had a 7.5% market share with one flavor of cola drink. Then they couldn't resist the lure of line extensions and before you knew it they had several flavors and a market share of 2.5%.

The lesson is - if you attempt to become everything to all people - you will surely only succeed in becoming nothing to everyone. In your personal life, you know the temptation. You know the temptation of always desiring what is on the other side or what you don't have. So you drop what is in your hand to grab something else - only to later wish you could have what you used to hold. This analogy could pertain to relationships, where you live or even a career.

The trick to life is not getting what you want. It is wanting it once you get it. The challenge is to focus on one thing. If a man has five or six great ideas to make money, no one knows what will succeed for him. But, in our heart we know that none of them will succeed because he can't select ONE THING and focus on it. Therefore, all his ventures may be doomed.

There is something to be said for the power of focus. In business, remember that IBM used to own the word computer. They no longer do and part of that is because they got into every business you can think of. Toys R Us owns 'toys'; FEDEX owns the word 'overnight'. It is about ONE THING when it comes to branding.

In life, you may not find contentment by bouncing from one situation to the next. That will only come when you are able to rest and focus on ONE THING. Decide what is important to you and focus on that ONE THING for a successful business or life. Yes, there will be rough roads - but be sure that the answer is not in the other hand.

Action Points

1. Examine your life and ask yourself if you are focused.
2. Ask yourself what you could eliminate in your life that is simply a distraction.
3. Question your desires to see if they are only a result of wanting what you don't have or a genuine issue that you are willing to make your long term focus.
4. Remember the lesson of Toys R Us - Line extensions don't ensure more success....focus does.

Quotes of the Month

Self-Limiting Beliefs

"He who conquers others is strong; he who conquers himself is mighty."
-- Lao-tzu

"There is nothing that can stop you from getting to the top of your field -- except yourself."
-- Brian Tracy

"Think 'impossible' and dreams get discarded, projects get abandoned, and hope for wellness is torpedoed. But let someone yell the words 'It's possible,' and resources we hadn't been aware of come rushing in to assist us in our quest. I believe we are all potentially brilliant and creative -- but only if we believe it, only if we have an attitude of positive expectancy toward our ideas, and only if we act on them."
-- Greg Anderson

"It is not what you are that holds you back; it is what you think you are not."
-- Denis Waitley

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