

An Open Letter to Prime Minister Rao

Mudrarakshas

It is estimated that this open letter to the Prime Minister was read by as many as ten million people. Adnan Khagoshi is an arms dealer, and his name was linked with the Bofors affair. Karim Lala is reputed to be high in the Indian mafia. A seer is a measure of weight a little less than a kilogram. This translation © 2020 by Robert A. Hueckstedt.

Mudrarakshasa
C-1200 Indira Nagar
Lucknow 226 016

27 January 1992

Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao
Prime Minister
Government of India
New Delhi

Dear Mr. Rao:

Writers usually do not write political leaders the kind of letter I am writing to you now, so you may be taken aback. I do not expect a reply, so I am also having this letter printed.

The action your government has recently taken in the name of improving the country's economy is a cause for sorrow. You will not believe this because the foreigners who have convinced you to take this action have also convinced you that whatever happens because of this advice will be for the best.

There was a time when the kings of Delhi turned the reins of government over to the East India Company and then lived happily on their pensions. While you don't have a pension, you, too, have handed over

the reins of government. Your only shortcoming is this. A bold foreigner came to you and said, “Your Majesty, your kingdom has had enough of poor administration. The Company’s Government respectfully suggests you be sent to Rangoon.”

And you, too, leased them some islands! Bravo! I just have to ask you: When are you going to turn Parliament House over to Mr. Ford Foundation? And clean out the Presidential Mansion! Lease it out, too! I am certain a multinational corporation’s hotel would do nicely there. Of course, don’t ask then what will happen to the President or the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or where the Members of Parliament will sit.

First, though, the IMF people are the ones who will answer those questions, and if they do not, then clearly those positions will not be relevant anymore anyway. Or you could ask Adnan Khagoshi. Our President’s annual expense account runs to one-and-a-half or two crore rupees. Khagoshi could lease out that position and easily make one hundred times that!

If there’s no one else, then confer with Karim Lala. You could just have him pay to have all the work done that Parliament does now.

You probably do not realize it, but your name will go down in history for repeating the very same thing now that had happened one-and-a-half centuries ago. Here is what happened then.

Around 1840 the East India Company made it known how necessary it was to import new technology into India. These days the World Bank and the IMF are saying the same thing. Nor should you be amazed that just as the new technology for the production of cotton was imported by the East India Company from the US in 1840, so today’s new technology also comes from there. And a decade or two before then the East India Company bruted about the motto of Free Trade, just as the IMF is today, and which you are repeating.

Today, however, you are doing something that did not happen even in 1840. After working in India for a while in 1840 the American specialists said to the Company: “This new technology won’t be profitable in India, as it is in America and Brazil, because there we have a supply of slaves to do the work.” The new technology that was coming in those days needed slaves to be successful. Therefore, it is not difficult, by comparison, to see why you have accepted the necessity for a change in labour policy to go along with the New Economic Policy.

The English learned a lesson in 1840. In those days there were about

7,500,000 landless labourers in India. Half a century later that number had increased fivefold. The English had succeeded. While the workers were not exactly slaves, they worked in conditions that were nearly the same. With your help foreigners will succeed again.

In this same context I must raise another point. Within a hundred days after you assumed power you deceived the country into thinking that inflation had lessened, and from then until now you have not raised the slogan of AWAY WITH POVERTY even in a hypocritical fashion. Doing away with poverty has already become irrelevant for you. I wonder why.

One more thing you must listen to, although it, too, is unpleasant. Premchand has a story called "A seer and a quarter of wheat". Those who know India's economic history know that that story is not unrealistic. Because of borrowing just that much wheat, about 1100 grams, a farmer becomes indebted to the moneylender for five and a half mans (about 200 kilos), and even after paying him Rs. 65, he remains the moneylender's bonded labourer for twenty years and dies in that state. For the sake of the IMF you are doing exactly the same thing to this country. The process you have started of taking on an even greater foreign debt in order to pay down our previous debt is pushing us in the direction of the fate of Shankar, the farmer of Premchand's story.

I have seen some ominous portents, Mr. Rao. Last century, in the midst of a terrifying period for the country's farmers and workers the English imported cotton, against which the cotton sellers protested. At the end of last year you raised the price of cotton; the traders protested again. Last century, during that same period, the English imported wheat. You have done the same. Perhaps it was absolutely necessary to make those decisions, and from the political economic point of view, it may have been something quite ordinary. Nevertheless, it is an ominous sign.

The importing of foreign cotton into India was not in itself so wrong. Worse was the motive behind it, due to which, up until 1815, India was importing massive amounts of textiles from those very places where we had been exporting. To see how that happened, just check the history. In a manner exactly parallel to that, this country is heading for disaster.

Your logic is frightening. Since public sector companies are operating at a loss, you allow foreigners to take them over. Your Party has been running the Government at a loss for a number of decades now. I am not certain, but perhaps you have applied the same logic here and have already placed the Government, too, in the hands of foreigners. I should

have realized, however, that that was the case the day you took power and then immediately devalued the rupee.

In the eighteenth century the first thing the English did was to tie the Indian currencies with the Pound Sterling in order to determine their value. Before then a group of businessmen called Shraf used to determine the standard value of all the currencies then in use in the various kingdoms. The English made the Shraf superfluous. Now it was the English who determined the value of every Indian currency. Isn't the IMF doing the same thing?

The place you have arrived at, Mr. Rao, is the same place that Gorbachev has already vacated. No one can return from there, and neither will you. You should turn over our news media to foreigners, too.

I cannot be the Gandhi of Champaran, nor do I have the ability to be the adroit heroine of the *Blue Mirror*, a play protesting the actions of the Nilha Whites. I can, however, try to scream, a scream that may go right through your ears but may reach the people.

Circumstances do not allow me to end with "Best Wishes".

Sincerely,
Mudrarakshasa

(Friends have insisted that they help in the distribution of at least ten million copies of this letter, not by sending money, but by making more copies of it.)