

Waiting for independence from populist agenda

ON THE 60th Independence Day, let's resolve that we would not let anybody from any party, organisation and of any affiliation hoodwink us into believing that the threat to India's sovereignty or its integrity and prosperity is of an external origin.

The real threat is internal and is the system's inability to meet the rising aspirations of our people for improving their life, and even more so the lives of their children.

It was particularly satisfying to hear the Prime Minister, sounding more self confident than before, emphasise the economic issues facing the nation.

His clear enunciation of the link between internal threats, security and lack of necessary economic progress at the grassroots should be a clear message to those who still continue to believe that either Nax-

alism or extremism is simply a law and order problem. Yes, these have to be tackled resolutely be-

cause, as Professor Bipin Chandra said, terrorism can only be subdued with state violence, but the breeding pools for these cadres have to be drained by providing far better delivery of public goods and services to the poorest.

This requires better governance and greater accountability. I would have been a happier person if the Prime Minister had also used the occasion to initiate much-needed action on these fronts for which he will have the widest support.

The Prime Minister's firm commitment to improve the agricultur-



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opment indicators in education and health and bringing the marginalised into the mainstream by affording them better access to education is welcome. Even more welcome is his stated resolve to reduce petty corruption in the system. Every society has some degree of corruption but this cannot be used as an excuse to let it run rampant and become systemic because then it becomes a real security threat.

I will encourage his government to focus more closely on what can be achieved in the given political climate than feel hopeless and give the

al prospects, tackling the unacceptable condition of low human devel-

struggle to take steps, howsoever marginal they may look, to improve the life of common man. The easy solution is of course to give up the fight after admitting that nothing worthwhile is possible. However, in the Prime Minister we have someone who knows very well both the economic argument that life is all about the second-best and the maxim that politics is finally the art of making happen what is possible.

Another easy way out, which finds favour with several of my friends in the government, is to simply legislate their way out of these weaknesses and pitfalls. The assumption continues to be, despite tonnes of real evidence from real experience, that put-

ting a statute on the book will ensure its application and implementation. The fact that should be clear is that the majority of these statutes is commonly ignored and ends up generating more rents by superimposing a formal requirement that the real underlying social and political institutions and systems are simply incapable of implementing. My hope is that the Prime Minister will find ungrudging support within his party and coalition to carry forward these ideas to implementation. This is the only real way forward for India.

Reverting to competitive populism and rhetoric will not take us anywhere.

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