

impressive, particularly in urban areas. The CPI(M)'s choice of Mr Buddhadeb

able to swallow this contradiction. But the central leadership has been able to prevail.

joined hands to form the Janata Party. However, it could not last long. The dual membership of

purpose of sharing power and the NDA has been successful so far.

Pontificating beyond belief

Arundhati Roy should focus on her core competence, which is writing fiction, says Jayant Bhandari

Capitalists, especially foreign ones, are plunderers." This came not from an economist, but from Arundhati Roy, a great writer, capable of writing in ways that to a reader, is a powerful mechanism through which to connect with their psyche. A marvellous capability, and without a doubt, the most impressive in its effectiveness to add huge value to society. But, as usual, such an immense capability, if not supported by a strong element of character and honesty, can convince people of wrong things. One wishes she had analysed this before she went into making such sweeping statements.

In his book *Public Intellectuals*, Richard Posner talks about pontification by thinkers on subjects beyond their realm. Such efforts "...are likely to yield little more than mistaken prophecy and superficial policy advice." Pulella Gopichand, the new sporting star, turned down offers for advertising for aerated drinks. Despite the fact that doing this would not be illegal, it is an aspect of honesty not to endorse what one does not believe in, or does not know much about. The temptation to power and money, however, is not easy to avoid.

Two elements stand out. First, the great Indian capability for diversifi-



cation. If you are good in one thing you must be good in everything — the Hindi film hero syndrome. "Specialists" should understand that it is misuse of the power of their position to influence areas they are not necessarily competent in. After all it's so difficult not to listen to people who are respectable in some specific areas.

Today, it is hard to find a decent economist (and now even public sector employees) who would argue against Government not getting involved in business. Plunderers are plunderers — there is no difference between foreign and national. Although, it's sometimes easier to see capitalists as less of plunderers: Imagine the possibility of anyone

falling sick of eating at McDonald's and how it compares with what happens in restaurants run by ITDC; if you ever go to one, that is. What the public sector has done — in terms of quality of their products and corruption — is glaringly in front of all, except for those who for their own good — usually dishonest — reasons decide to turn a blind eye. Or if you find yourself for some reason treated as a VIP — a way of treatment that goes against the ethos of both capitalism and socialism.

Whether Roy is right or wrong, or that she has the thoroughness of analysis in her assertions, is for the readers to decide. If, however, they decide based on the lazy option that "if it's Arundhati's, it must be right", it is really their problem in the final analysis.

That takes us to the second — the more important — element: The fact that you should do what is your core competence really well. And no doubt Ms Roy does a good job of that. Here comes our own judiciary. A comment against is taken as its con-

tempt. Cases run for decades, if not forever. God knows who goes to the courts anyway? Even if you win, you lose your life chasing babus. Most prefer to accept injustice rather than go to the courts. Or use extra-legal channels. To a lay person, judiciary is completely non-existent.

The non-functioning judiciary, and therefore an absence of system to enforce contracts or laws, is the biggest barrier to India's growth. Some of our major problems — Ayodhya and Kashmir — would be a lot less serious if this were not the case. One wishes it had taken its failure to provide a viable judiciary as a real contempt of judiciary.

Now that Ms Roy has been at the receiving end of the problems with the Government, she might just become so pro-privatisation that we might just see her asking for "plunderers", the capitalists, to run the courts. After all, even hardcore capitalist countries keep social security, medical, law and order under Government's control.

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Time's 'unhealthy' journalism

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