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The following is an interview with former Brazilian President, Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, which was recently published in the Indian daily newspaper The Hindu. The interview covered a range of topical and interesting issues.

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‘Obama must apologise for NSA snooping’

By Shobhan Saxena



AP LUIS INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA: ‘The independence and economic growth of countries such as India and Brazil seem to bother the U.S, which is now committing a crime against democracy.’



Luis Inácio Lula da Silva.

‘The problem is that the U.N. of 2013 does not represent the world of 2013.’

In his eight years as President of Brazil, **Luis Inacio Lula da Silva** transformed the country with a mix of sound economic policies and social welfare schemes. Lula, who put Brazil on the map as a global heavyweight, had 87% approval ratings when he left office in 2011. After winning a bout with cancer, he now runs Instituto Lula, a think-tank, and engages public forums as a South American statesman.

In an exclusive interview to The Hindu at his institute in Sao Paulo, Mr. Lula spoke to **Shobhan Saxena** about the NSA surveillance, role of BRICS countries and Brazil-India relations

A series of exposes about mass surveillance by the US National Security Agency (NSA) has revealed that America is spying on everyone, including the president of Brazil. How should the world respond to this challenge?

The U.S. president should apologise to the world for thinking that it can control global communications and ignore the sovereignty of other countries. The U.S. can't just capture the activities of India, Brazil, China and several other countries. This is very serious. We need to force the United Nations to make a decision on this. Where is the security in the world today, with the U.S. intelligence agency snooping on everything? Where is the confidence in mobile communication or emails? When the NSA revelations came out, the U.S. vice-president (Joe Biden) called Brazil to apologise. It's not the vice-president who has to apologise, it's the U.S. president who should apologise to us. What would happen if the U.S. was target of spying? Now, they can steal any information and industrial secrets; they have access to information of our scientists. It means the end of freedom within the territory of a nation state.

The U.S. has joined hand with Germany and UK in collecting information from other countries and even about their own citizens. All this is being done in the name of national security and the fight against global terrorism. What threat does this pose to democracy?

It's a grave moment. We can't allow a country to have supremacy over others. The impression I get is that the rich countries are not ready to accept the rise of emerging countries which are making a strong impact on the world economy. The creation of BRICS and IBSA and the fact that Brazil, India, China, Russia and South Africa have turned into global players seems to bother the U.S. and some European countries, particularly those who are part of the UN Security Council. The independence and economic growth of countries such as India and Brazil seem to bother the U.S., which is now committing a crime against democracy. The argument that they are doing this to take care of the security of other countries is absurd. Nobody asked them to do so. Nobody hired the American espionage system. Democracy is less democratic if one nation has the power to intervene in others.

Last month, David Miranda, a Brazilian and partner of Glenn Greenwald who has exposed the NSA's activities, was detained at London airport in the name of national security. What can the BRICS countries do to make sure that such incidents don't happen again?

What happened to the Brazilian in London was very serious. But look what happened to Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia. How can they stop a presidential plane and investigate it? How can they detain a Brazilian for nine hours just because he is related to a journalist who has released very important information? Why do the defenders of press freedom not want these things to be disclosed?

The BRICS group already has a substantial economic power. They also have large populations. What remains to be done is turn it into a group of political importance. We praise the great country that the U.S. is, but we have to have the same and equal rights. We must be respected on equal terms. The U.S. already has the privilege of having the default currency for world trade, and only they have the machine to produce it. Earlier, it was gold. They themselves decided and imposed the dollar on the whole world. Every time they try to make a fiscal adjustment in the U.S., they do not have any obligation to discuss it with the world. They make a decision, and the world is damned. So, it is necessary that the BRICS create a world currency which is not dependent on the currency of a country.

I think the BRICS need to achieve politically what they have in economics and commercial fields. To give you an example, at the Copenhagen meeting on environment in 2009, both Europe and the U.S. were trying to blame China for the lack of consensus. But when China, India, South Africa and Brazil came together, we changed the rules of the game. We didn't go to the U.S. and Europe. We stayed together and they came to us. So, I think, when we have the political will to face the situations, we can change the rules of the game.

Can these countries come together and create an alternative to the dollar?

You must have a world currency, and not a currency of a country dominating the global trade. In 2008, we proposed in BRICS that India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa and Brazil should trade in their own currencies, without buying more dollars. But economists who work in governments and the central banks do not want that. I think it's important to build a world currency that is not the domain of a country and that provides service to the humanity and meets the interest of fairer trade. As long as the world is globalised, we need common things between us. The currency is one of them. We also need multilateral institutions to make decisions that are above the interests of individual states.

With the U.S. and France all set to attack Syria, it seems there is going to be another war in the West Asia. Can anything be done to break this cycle of never-ending wars?

China and Russia, both permanent members of the UN Security Council, do not want this war. The British parliament has rejected it. Until today, there has been no explanation for what France and NATO did in Libya. Until today, there has been no explanation for the lies told by the Americans for the

invasion of Iraq. What threat did Gaddafi pose to the world? But suddenly NATO decided to invade the country and kill its president. Why? If the UN actually fulfilled the role for which it was created, we would not have had Iraq, Libya, Syria, and many other conflicts. The UN is watching. It has no power to intervene. The problem is that the UN of 2013 does not represent the world of 2013. The geopolitics of 2013 is not the same as that of 1945 when the UN was created. It's because India is not in the UN Security Council. Why is Brazil not in the Security Council? Why Egypt, South Africa, Germany, Nigeria, Japan or Indonesia not in the Security Council?

I do not support President Assad because I am a democrat by nature. When I was president of this country, I had 87 per cent approval rating and my party wanted me to be a candidate for a third term, but I refused a third term because democracy is a fundamental achievement of the people and I can't play with democracy. I do not wish to see Assad stay in power forever. You have to have democracy. But who are the rebels in Syria? I can see the rebels fighting the government with equal strength. Who sells guns and arms to these rebels? If the UN could intervene before the conflict began, there could have been some negotiations. But the Americans do not want peace. Their interest is in conflict and tension in the Middle East. These problems will continue if we do not have the ability to build a new political order, with stronger multilateral institutions and a UN Security Council that is more representative of the world today and with less hegemony of one nation. Otherwise, we are in serious danger.

But is the developed world ready to accept change?

The G-8 countries are not ready to accept a new global actor. They always treated me with great sympathy, but they can't accept the fact that there are new global players. When I went to Iran in 2010, I believed it was possible to make Ahmadinejad do what the world wanted. Then Obama became very upset. I was in Qatar when Hillary Clinton called me to convince me not to go to Iran, saying that I was naive. Then I was in Moscow and Obama called Medvedev to talk, saying that I was naive and that Ahmadinejad was not going to accept anything. But I went to Iran in May 2010. Ten days before arriving in Iran, I received a letter from Obama. He said he did not believe that Ahmadinejad was going to give in, but he sent some suggestions. I took the letter to Ahmadinejad and he signed on exactly what Obama had put in the letter. When we -- Brazil, Turkey and Iran -- concluded the agreement, I thought that the developed world would thank us, but Iran was punished with economic restrictions. It was apparent that they did not accept the idea of the presidents of Brazil and Turkey achieving what they thought was impossible.

Political relationship is based on trust, not fear. Here in South America, the U.S. government does not look kindly at the role Brazil has played in strengthening MERCOSUR (South American Common Market) and rejecting the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA). They did not accept the UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), the South Bank and the American Council of Defense. It seems to me that they only accept those who have the atomic bomb. No other region of the world is so peaceful as South America, and it seems to have no value for them. What is important for them is to bomb Afghanistan. It seems they have to justify the payment of salaries to their soldiers. That's why the war machine has to keep working.

As President, you worked hard to bring India and Brazil closer to each other. What do you think of the current state of relations between the two countries?

India has been a partner of Brazil, but unfortunately our volume of bilateral trade is still small. In 2003, it was just \$ 1 billion and we created a goal of reaching \$ 10 billion. But a country of 200 million inhabitants as Brazil, the sixth largest economy in the world, and a country with 1.2 billion people as India, should trade in the range of \$ 20-30 billion. We have created several instruments to ease the negotiations. But until we have a direct flight linking Brazil and India, everything will be difficult. I think

Brazil and India need to improve our relations more. President Dilma Rousseff has an extraordinary vision to strengthen IBSA, BRICS and Brazil's relations with India, but you need to involve entrepreneurs and politicians so that things can happen more easily. I have a deep friendship with India. I really like Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the Congress party.

You launched a social welfare programme Bolsa Familia some 10 years ago. What real impact has it made on Brazilian society?

Bolsa Familia is the largest cash transfer programme in Brazil. This is not a political palliative, but a state policy. There was also an effective gain in real wages of workers. For 10 years, workers have been receiving a real increase in wages above inflation. The minimum wage increased by 70 % above inflation. It also legalised the so-called individual entrepreneurs who sell things like hot-dogs and popcorn on streets. They can now pay for their pension. It also gave strong support to the small and big agriculture. We also created a programme "Light for All ", which benefited 14 million people. It was because of this set of public policies that 36 million people came out of absolute poverty and 40 million people moved into the middle class. At the same time, it generated some 20 million formal jobs. In 2007, 48 million people traveled by flights in Brazil. In 2012, this number was already 102 million.

Because of this programme, the poor began to study more and eat better. And it was these achievements that made the poor people more demanding with respect to public policy of the State. The demonstrations that happened in Brazil (in June and July) were a result of this achievement. The people want more healthcare and education. A hungry person does not fight; he becomes subservient. But if he learns to eat and someone tries to take his food, he will fight. The Brazilian people have changed their paradigm.

So you see the demonstrations as a positive development?

Today, we are a people who want more and this is a fantastic time to discuss democracy in Brazil. Also, we are discussing how the public services can be improved more. We are living in this extraordinary moment.

During the demonstrations, there was speculation about your return to active politics. Is that right?

I never got out of politics. I can't get out of politics because I do not believe there is no way out of politics. In Brazil, we had a movement which didn't challenge the government. But people wanted better education, transportation and less police violence. However, many people rejected politics and this is very serious issue. This rejection of politics is something done by the media in Brazil all the time. If you do not like me because you think I'm not a good politician, it's okay but do not reject politics. I'll keep doing politics. I will continue discussing politics because I believe that only through politics we can build a just world. I hope you succeed in doing the same in India.

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