

Editorial

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The uneasy wind

Fear leads to war; peace begins with trust. Much has been discussed, dissected and written about the way things are being handled by the state Government regarding various issues that has been proving to be more of an impediment to the growth and progress of the state. While it would not be too far from the truth to state that the state Government is indeed putting up efforts to usher in peace and progress, yet it seems, going by the varied issues and undesirable social developments and unrest, that for every step forward, the society is forced back two steps.

Just when the people in the state is starting to enjoy almost uninterrupted power supply for perhaps the first time ever, comes the ever present problem of panic buying, resulting in the stockists and suppliers in the state taking undue advantage of the unfortunate consumers and making a killing in profits. The most prominently visible example, and one which has been much talked and written about is the petrol pumps or filling stations the LPG service provider operating in the state. It must be said for them that their sense of timing is uncanny, so much so that people have started predicting the law and order situation judging from their uncanny ability to stay abreast of any development, especially the unwanted ones. One then cannot help but wonder the plans by the CAF & PD Minister of ensuring continuous supply of transport fuel to the public, even till late in the evening - a welcome and necessary decision which was even put into practice, albeit for a very brief period.

The reason for the discontinuation of such a novel step, however, is best known to the state Government itself. One another important issue which was lost amongst the rising din of social unrest is that of clean water supply. Without going further into the sorry state of affairs regarding the water supply and its management, or rather mismanagement, suffice to state that the rapidly increasing presence of private water supply carriers in the state bears testimony to the efficiency or otherwise of the water supply department in the state. That the people in the state have taken these glaring lacunae for granted perhaps speaks of the level of disillusionment and loss of belief placed by the public on the government. The progress for other aspects of developments which tends to have an impact on the society does not fare much better. Education, especially in Government run institutions, for instance, continues to flounder after a brief spell of positive promise despite what was billed as radical changes that would bring the desired changes, in short, instituting Model Schools for initiating changes, have proved to be a no show. While a few may put down the rapidly increasing unrest and agitations of the public on various issues to irrational restlessness or impatience, yet the hard fact remains that there is a very real and rapid decline in the socio-economic progress and governance with a correspondingly widening rift between the Government and the public. While it would be evidently unfair to put the blame for everything squarely on the state Government, it would augur well for those in power to trace and weed out any and all non-performing entities from its system. After all, trust needs to be earned, not demanded.

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When will West's romanticism with terror end?

By Vikas Khanna (ANI)

A series of recent terror attacks, the latest being the coordinated Mumbai-style attacks in Paris, should serve as a warning to the global community that terrorists can't be friends of anybody.

India, which has been a victim of terrorism for decades, has been pleading for a global action, but its pleas have fallen on deaf ears. As long as the West was not hit, it did not feel the agonizing pain of terrorism.

The 9/11 attacks on the United States shook Washington and its allies. But again, the world was found faltering in its response.

There are several countries whose obsession with terrorism refuses to die. They continue to flirt with terrorists to bleed their rivals. But they themselves do not realise that the monster of terrorism will also haunt them. In spite of taking severe hits from terrorists, threatening their own existence, the countries' love affair with terrorism continues.

Who is to blame if terrorist organizations like the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Islamic State, to name a few, have flourished? Did the West not lend its support to the Wahabhis in the 1980s to drive away Russian forces from Afghanistan? Sadly, the U.S. has not fully severed its ties with practitioners of the right-wing, ultra-conservative Wahabism.

Had the United States and its allies

not supported the Mujahedeen, who fought a bitter battle with the Soviet forces as well as the left-tilted government in Kabul, the situation would not have come to such a sorry pass today? Afghan Arabs and foreign fighters, who waged jihad against the atheist communists in Afghanistan, were encouraged and financed by the West and its allies.

According to archives of the US Department of State, "Notable among them was a young Saudi named Osama bin Laden, whose Arab group eventually evolved into al-Qaeda." The U.S. courted Pakistan's military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq. Billions of dollars were spent on recruiting and training Mujahedeen fighters and foreign mercenaries from other Islamic countries to create a formidable force which eventually succeeded in forcing Soviet forces to leave Afghanistan.

The Soviets might have left wounded and defeated, but did the U.S. gain anything? Now it has been at war with the same terrorist groups which it toppled. The Russian war has become the U.S. war now. Already the U.S. has lost 2,300 of its men. And it has cost the U.S. approximately 110 billion dollars since its forces first landed in Afghanistan in October 2001. And nobody knows where the situation is headed to? Desperate to pull out of Afghanistan, it is exploring the option of peace talks with Taliban and other terrorist

groups with the democratically-elected government of Afghanistan. Is it not an admission of defeat?

In a blatant display of double standards, the U.S. turned a blind eye to militants who were launching attacks on India from the soil of Pakistan. Pakistan, being its close ally in fighting its war in Afghanistan, on the other hand, was being showered with billions of dollars and military assistance. It took multiple and well-coordinated attacks on the U.S. to shake it from deep slumber to take note of Muslim militants enjoying Pakistan hospitality. But again the U.S. has been found dilly-dallying in its approach. It continues to praise Pakistan for its fight against terrorism while publicly nudging it to do more.

Afghanistan and the world will be much secure if militant sanctuaries in Pakistan are destroyed. The successive governments in Afghanistan have openly accused Pakistan of destabilising the country. Is the U.S. not aware of it? But, what has been its response? India has, for long, accused Pakistan of fomenting trouble, first in Punjab and then in Kashmir. Thousands of innocent people have died in myriad of attacks in India. The perpetrators of Mumbai attacks openly roam about and address rallies in Pakistan. But the world continues to pay lip service. General Zia's strategy to bleed India

through a thousand cuts through proxy war will remain a pipe dream. But the very militants, whom Pakistan patronised, have made life hell for its own people. Pakistan refuses to learn lessons despite the ghastly Peshawar attack last year, in which 132 people, mostly children, were killed.

The rise of Islamic State, which has been behind all the recent attacks across the world, is a matter of serious concern. This year alone, it has carried out attacks in Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, Libya, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Bangladesh, Lebanon and now France. ISIS is now seeking to extend its reach globally. In this week alone, an ISIS affiliate has claimed responsibility for the recent downing of a Russian plane over Egypt and a bombing in Lebanon in which at least 40 people were killed.

If the global community does not join hands against terrorism then it will be difficult to rein in ISIS as it has infiltrated into so many countries. There can't be good militants or bad militants. Militants are militants whose only religion is destruction. I am reminded of words of Sir Peter Ustinov. "Terrorism is the war of the poor, war is the terrorism of the rich." In both the situations, the outcome is same.

(Vikas Khanna is a senior journalist and views expressed by him are personal.)

National & International News

France bombs Islamic State HQ, hunts attacker who got away

AP Paris, Nov 16: France launched "massive" air strikes on the Islamic State group's de-facto capital in Syria on Sunday night, destroying a jihadi training camp and a munitions dump in the city of Raqqa, where Iraqi intelligence officials say the attacks on Paris were planned.

Twelve aircraft including 10 fighter jets dropped a total of 20 bombs in the biggest air strikes since France extended its bombing campaign against the extremist group to Syria in September, a defense ministry statement said. The jets launched from sites in Jordan and the Persian Gulf, in coordination with US forces.

On the sidelines of the G20 summit in Turkey on Sunday, France's foreign minister Laurent Fabius said his country was justified in taking action in Syria.

"It was normal to take the initiative and action and France had the legitimacy to do so. We did it already in the past, we have

conducted new airstrikes in Raqqa today, Fabius said. "One cannot be attacked harshly, and you know the drama that is happening in Paris, without being present and active."

Meanwhile, as police announced seven arrests and hunted for more members of the sleeper cell that carried out the Paris attacks that killed 129 people, French officials revealed to The Associated Press that several key suspects had been stopped and released by police after the attack.

The arrest warrant for Salah Abdeslam, a 26-year-old born in Brussels, calls him very dangerous and warns people not to intervene if they see him.

Yet police already had him in their grasp early Saturday, when they stopped a car carrying three men near the Belgian border. By then, hours had passed since authorities identified Abdeslam as the renter of a Volkswagen Polo that carried hostage takers to the Paris theater where so many died.

Three French police officials and a top French security official confirmed that officers let Abdeslam go after checking his ID. They spoke on condition of anonymity, lacking authorization to publicly disclose such details. Tantalizing clues about the extent of the plot have emerged from Baghdad, where senior Iraqi officials told the AP that France and other countries had been warned on Thursday of an imminent attack.

An Iraqi intelligence dispatch warned that Islamic State group leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had ordered his followers to immediately launch gun and bomb attacks and take hostages inside the countries of the coalition fighting them in Iraq and Syria.

The Iraqi dispatch, which was obtained by the AP, provided no details on when or where the attack would take place, and a senior French security official told the AP that French intelligence gets these kinds of warnings "all the time"

and "every day."

However, Iraqi intelligence officials told the AP that they also warned France about specific details: Among them, that the attackers were trained for this operation and sent back to France from Raqqa, the Islamic State's de-facto capital.

The officials also said that a sleeper cell in France then met with the attackers after their training and helped them to execute the plan. There were 24 people involved in the operation, they said: 19 attackers and five others in charge of logistics and planning.

None of these details have been corroborated by officials of France or other Western intelligence agencies.

All these French and Iraqi security and intelligence officials spoke with the AP on condition of anonymity, citing the ongoing investigation.

Abdeslam is one of three brothers believed to be involved; One who crossed with him into Belgium was later arrested, and another blew himself up inside the Bataclan theater after taking the audience hostage and firing on them repeatedly. It was the worst of Friday's synchronized attacks, leaving 89 fatalities and hundreds of people wounded inside.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility. Its statement mocked France's air attacks on suspected IS targets in Syria and Iraq, and called Paris "the capital of prostitution and obscenity." In all, three teams of attackers including seven suicide bombers attacked the national stadium, the concert hall and nearby nightspots. The attacks wounded 350 people, 99 of them seriously. Abdeslam rented the black Volkswagen Polo used by the hostage-takers, another French security official said. A Brussels parking ticket found inside led police to at least one of the arrests in Belgium, a French police official said.

Election winners, and losers, return to Myanmar parliament

AFP Naypyidaw, Nov 16: Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi returned to parliament today along with dozens of rivals freshly hammered by her pro-democracy party's landslide election victory as the legislature begins overseeing the country's delicate transition.

Suu Kyi is constitutionally barred from top political office but has vowed to rule "above" the next president, who she will select following her National League for Democracy's formidable win in the November 8 polls.

The NLD bulldozed the current army-backed ruling party in polls set to dramatically reshape the country's political landscape. But it will be the lawmakers from the military proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party — still

smarting from their election drubbing — who will continue to dominate parliament as the pre-election legislature returns for a final session that will last until at least the end of January.

Suu Kyi was mobbed by dozens of journalists as she arrived at the parliament on Monday, but declined to make any comment as she takes a low profile approach to victory.

She is banned from becoming president by the junta-era constitution because she married and had children with a foreigner. The Nobel laureate has nevertheless pledged to rule an NLD government through a puppet president, without revealing a candidate or setting out how the arrangement would work.

Suu Kyi has the power to select a president because of her party's parliamentary majority, with the candidate chosen in a vote of the new NLD-dominated legislature in February.

Observers predict a fevered period of political horse-trading, centred on the uncertainty over the presidency as the country creeps out of the shadow of the military. NLD spokesman Win Htein told AFP that the party was acutely conscious that the size of its victory mirrors its success in 1990 elections, which were ignored by the then ruling generals who clung to power for another two decades.

"This time, although we are quite glad that we won, we worry that history may repeat itself. We don't think the transition will be 100 percent perfect," he told AFP.