

PM Narendra Modi visits Nepal's iconic Muktinath temple; offers special prayer

Agency
New Delhi, May 12

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today visited Nepal's iconic Muktinath temple and offered special prayer there. Situated at 3710 metres above the sea level in Mustang district, Muktinath temple is regarded sacred by Hindus and Buddhists. Mr Modi wore a Buddhist traditional red dress and carried out rituals both according to the Hindu and Buddhist tradition. After praying, he also greeted and interacted with people waiting at the temple premises. Mr Modi has become the first world leader to pay homage at the main sanctum of Muktinath temple. In a short while from now, Prime Minister will visit world famous Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu and worship Lord Shiva. Mr Modi will also meet leaders of various political parties of Nepal. He will also



attend a reception to be hosted by the Indian Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri. Prime Minister Modi will also attend a civic reception to be hosted in his honour by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Mr Modi arrived in Nepal yesterday on a two-day visit to the Himalayan nation.

19 dead in fighting between Myanmar army, rebels: military

Agency
Yangon, May 12

At least 19 people have been killed in clashes between Myanmar's military and an ethnic armed group on Saturday in northern Shan State, Myanmar army and local sources told AFP, the most deadly flare-up in recent years as fighting in the borderlands intensifies. Rights defenders say clashes in northern Myanmar near the China border have ramped up since January as the international community focuses on the Rohingya crisis in the west of the country. The military stands accused of carrying out an ethnic cleansing campaign against the stateless minority in Rakhine. Saturday's violence was between the military and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), one of several insurgent groups fighting for more autonomy in the north. **Two dozens injured** "Nineteen [people] were killed in fighting," the Myanmar

military source said, adding that two dozen had been injured. Thauung Tun, a local NGO leader who helped carry the injured to the hospital, said the dead included one police officer, one rebel fighter, four members of a state-backed militia, and two women civilians. Pictures of burned-out vehicles and armed men running for cover spread quickly on social media. TNLA spokesman Major Mai Aik Kyaw told AFP that the group attacked joint military and militia posts in the Shan state town of Muse and on a road to Lashio. "We fight because of thorough fighting in our region and the serious offensive in Kachin State," he said, referring to fresh confrontations in Myanmar's northernmost state between the army and the TNLA-aligned Kachin Independence Army. **90,000 people in IDP camps** Upwards of 90,000 people reside in IDP camps in Kachin and Shan states since a ceasefire between the powerful Kachin

Independence Army and the military broke down in 2011. Those fleeing violence have been sheltered in tents and even churches in Kachin, which is mainly Christian, as rights groups accuse the military of blocking aid. Myanmar's patchwork of ethnic groups make up round a third of the population, but the Bamar or Burmese have filled the Buddhist-majority country's power structures since independence in 1948. Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi said ending Myanmar's long-running conflicts was her main priority after she took

power in 2016, but she shares power with the military that fought the insurgencies for decades. Ms. Suu Kyi managed to bring two ethnic groups into a ceasefire accord in February, adding to eight others who had inked the deal before she took office.

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Assam: Bus skidded off, injuring eight in Boko

Lampara, May 12

A Night Super bus (AS 01 HC 9036) tumbled into a ditch early in the morning at Lampara under Boko Police Station. It is reported that the bus was heading to Shillong from Siliguri, ferrying 21 passengers including the driver. The mishap led to the injury of three children who were rushed to the nearby Bamunigaon Model Hospital, Boko Hospital. While five found in critical conditions were referred to Guwahati Medical College. According to Officer In Charge of Boko Police Station Jogendra Barman, the bus was fell into the ditch due to over speed.

Most of the passengers are reported to be Nepali.

3 killed in landslide in Mizoram

Agency
Aizawl, May 12

At least three people, including a minor girl, were killed when a landslide hit Mizoram's Zembawak area, police said. Aizawl District SP C Lalzahngova told PTI that three persons were confirmed dead in the incident and efforts were on to recover the bodies. The number of casualties could rise as people are still feared trapped in the landslide, police said.

Rahul asks people to participate in 'festival of democracy' by voting

Agency
Bengaluru, May 12

Congress president Rahul Gandhi today urged the people of Karnataka to participate in the "festival of democracy" by voting in large numbers. Gandhi also welcomed first-time voters to take part in the electoral process.

"Voter exercising his right without fail is the sign of functional democracy. I welcome all my young friends who are casting their vote for first time in Karnataka," Gandhi said in a tweet in Kannada. "I request people of Karnataka to celebrate this biggest festival of democracy in large numbers

with fervour, and make it successful," he said. The Congress chief had extensively campaigned across the state with an aim to bring the party back to power in Karnataka, which is the only large state ruled by it after Punjab. Gandhi had made nine visits, each one spanning about three days, to the

state as part of his 'Janashirvada Yatre'. He had addressed roadside meetings and rallies and taken part in road shows across the state in a customised bus. The Congress has not announced any chief ministerial candidate but maintains that incumbent Siddaramaiah will be the

party's face during the campaign. Siddaramaiah tweeted, "Today people of Karnataka are standing in queues to create history and show the nation the way to liberal, progressive, peaceful and compassionate politics and governance. I thank them for their support and wish them well.

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Sovereignty Struggles in Northeast India: Where are They Going?

Ideas Do Not Die, Ever I return in this section to two points made in the previous section where I have tried to deal with some events and developments of contemporary history (that many in my audience would know more about) to amplify some other features of what I call varieties of separatism. The first is that separatist sentiments, real or opportunistically manipulated, are sometimes used as a bargaining tactic in areas where the objective reality provides no rationale for such separatism. In such areas separatism dies away sooner or later. The second point, that the primary cause for the unravelling of the Yugoslav state was the overweening Serb chauvinism that led inescapably to the barely dormant chauvinisms of individual little nationalisms. This happened despite the fact that the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia formally comprised six Socialist republics and two autonomous provinces, a clear recognition that the Yugoslav state at least in its constitutional provisions was truly federal in letter and spirit, had recognised the reality of the complex ethnic mix of its population and had mandated the required constitutional provisions. However, this constitutional recognition of the uniqueness of the identities of the various constituent autonomous republics and autonomous provinces meant less than nothing in practice when confronted by the national chauvinism of the largest and

most powerful of the nationalities, the Serbs. One may see some corresponding similarities in the way Centre-State relations have worked, or have not worked, in India. Interestingly, and to the extent I remember, the Chapter on Centre-State relations in the Indian Constitution does not even use the term, federal and derivatives thereof, in any of its articles, though commentators and judicial pronouncements on its provisions use the term freely. In other words, the decisive contribution to the unravelling and disintegration of the Federal Republic came from within Yugoslavia, from the dominant Serbian nationalism that, like other great nationalisms, degenerated to Serb chauvinism. The process did not stop in 1991; it went on and eventually forced Montenegro which had not seceded in 1991 but had remained as the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro to walk away in 2006. One wonders if these seemingly obscure developments in an area so removed from India have some relevance for process of nationality formations in India, and the problems that this is encountering as much in Assam as in other parts of this region. Separatist sentiments or aspirations in most parts of India whose people – always meaning by the term 'people' about half the population or less many of whom, even while suffering from denial and

oppression, have developed some stakes in the system – have little objective cause for feeling alienated or even diminished in terms of their individual or collective identities may be dead, or may only be dormant. This is certainly not a live issue. However, they came into the public domain and stayed there for awhile before dying out – or staying dormant. The reason why Tamil nationalism and separatism are not live issues is not because such sentiments are fully dead – my own reading is that ideas do not die, ever – but that they cannot be an issue to be pursued by whatever Means Necessary (to use that cliché), because the objective situation in the land of the Tamils does not admit such extreme manifestations of non-existent grievances. Put simply, it is not possible to rouse the Tamil people into discontent on the ground that they are a despised and diminished minority that just does not count. The numbers, not to speak of the reality, are simply against such arguments. This is the case in the rest of India which is well integrated into the path of capitalist development that India has made its own, this despite the reality that is also routinely reiterated in the very structures created by the same Indian state (like the NAC) that inequalities too are growing. This happy coexistence of a predatory class whose composition is too complex a subject to go into, but broadly comprising both the amoral and

the modestly well-heeled 'conscience-stricken', at least for form's sake, intellectuals, writers and artists, the NGOs briskly networking with international donor agencies and so on, maybe I should also add journalists and the media, had for long been able to contain discontent taking an explicitly political direction. The developments in recent years in what the glossies breathlessly describe as 'abujland' pose a challenge to this happy coexistence. It is not for nothing that the Prime Minister has been frequently speaking of LWE as 'the greatest threat' facing India. I am not sure this is the case. Poverty, inequalities of income and opportunities, structural discrimination against the vulnerable and defenceless, gender and caste oppression, alienation of the religious minorities, these pose the greatest challenge to even the kind of India that this alliance is trying to build even if the partners of this alliance carry different signboards. The recent setbacks to the organised left have emboldened this predatory class even further. Could it be, therefore, that a measure of economic development, even if it were to be very modest and benefit further the pitiful 'creamy layer', that one has to look hard to find in this region, and a reigning in of the tendencies I have mentioned in the preceding paragraph weaken what separatist sentiments that still persist in the region? I am reluctant to make any

suggestion, for I honestly do not know the ground reality even in Assam, my home for many years, let alone in Manipur where I have always been a visitor, not a resident. One is not sure of the reverse correlation between separatism and insurgency, and economic development. As that trite wisdom says, fair economic development touching the people is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to meet the situation. After all, Punjab, a restively prosperous state also was a fertile ground for separate insurgency. The problem is that one knows so little about the correlations between the Indian State and the complex network of security agencies it has created to defend itself against forces committed to subvert this State. However, this very Indian State has also sometimes been found complicit in the creation of factions of such subversive forces, manufacturing grievances when necessary. Examples abound in this very region, not to speak of the by now well-known origins of the Khalistan movement. Some friends have challenged such formulations, especially the one suggesting that separatism or insurgency is a bargaining counter, or that it is an instrumental agency cynically used (if not actually constructed) by those who have benefited from the Indian state, or that even the kind of development that this part of the country has seen would not have been possible without the

separatism and insurgency, that there are strongly entrenched and powerful forces in the region well integrated into the patronage alliance of the Indian state who have developed a vested interest in the continuance of separatism and insurgency, only which can explain their persistence, despite many grievous setbacks. Perhaps it is possible to draw such inferences from this or that rather superficially argued articles, for I am no theorist, much less a thinker, but that 'harmless hack, a mere journalist'. But certainly, some inference may be drawn from the very instructive trajectory of the Dravidian movement which in its origins had a strong separatist, if not secessionist component but whose two major political manifestations are now the two natural parties of government, vying with each other but shutting out all other players, including major players at the national level, from having any significant role in the politics of Tamilnadu. *Thou hast committed Fornication: but that was in another country; and besides, the wench is dead.* As a distant but friendly observer I have sometimes wondered about the persistence of the separatist mindset and sovereignty aspirations, even while bearing in mind the epigraph to the previous section. Yes, one admits the eternal durability of ideas, but one also wonders why ignoring the all too obvious objective

reality that stares one in the face, separatism not so much as an idea but as self-destructive insurgency persists. To take the situation in this very state which I now find is utterly, totally, different from what I vaguely three or four decades ago. During my first visit to Kolar during the Puja holidays in 1963 a little over a year after I moved to Guwahati to spend some time with my mother, I was asked the strangest of questions by friends. The family doctor, for instance, asked me if he had to put extra postage stamps on the envelope addressed to me in Guwahati. A person from Guwahati was in those days a bit of a novelty even in Bangalore. Now people from this region are setting up businesses not merely in Bangalore but in other cities and towns as well. There are scores of stories I can tell about the strangest of encounters from persons of this region in the most unlikely of places and circumstances in Bangalore and even small towns in Karnataka. This is only a small instance of a much larger process of integration of this region with the rest of the country, working both ways, though the influx of non-Manipuris into Manipur has been a process and enterprise going on over a much longer period, having ramifications going far beyond merely trade and investment, and having profound cultural implications. No need for me to spell these things out to this audience. **(To be contd. tomorrow)**