

Editorial

Imphal, Tuesday, August 2, 2016

Reclaiming the reins

The growing spurt in activities of the people's representatives with an apparent objective of preparing the groundwork for the upcoming general election and their increasingly accommodating demeanor brings to mind the statement by MP Dr. T Meina a couple of years back asking the bureaucrats in the state to not be intimidated by politicians which rings a loud bell, not so much for the undeniable truth the simple statement carries, but for the evident lack of initiative and tenacity that has come to identify the present day bureaucrats and their passive role in the administration and implementation of laws and other developmental activities. For as far as one would care to remember, the public has been under the impression that the development works and schemes are being handled and administered by the representatives of the people, and that their say is final. This perception is indeed unfortunate, yet totally understandable, however antagonistic one might feel towards the whole set-up, given the opportunistic politicians hogging the limelight without a pause, always on the hunt for ways to further their political mileage. But the most unfortunate of all is the apparent subjugation of the bureaucratic class to the whims and coersions of the politicians who, without the requisite knowledge or experience, holds sway over their functioning and even dictates their course of action. This is a serious malady that has eaten into the system and will need more than mere willpower and executive decisions to remedy it. Bureaucrats are supposed to be the agents of change in a democratic set up, a form of check against the ruling government from serving their own narrow interests and to oversee and implement various developmental works of public importance into fruitful completion given the unstable and volatile political unpredictability that has been the hallmark of the political system of our country. And while every once in a while we come across instances where a righteous and uncompromising bureaucrat stands up to defend his or her decisions and convictions on the face of overwhelming political pressures, more often than not, we are witnessing a feeble attempt, if one can term it such, by the bureaucrats to present a semblance of activity while in truth they are just falling in line to the dictates of their political masters without ever having the courage to muster up any sort of objection. For a nation to develop and to progress, this very system needs to be done away with. The efforts by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to decentralize authority and equip the bureaucrats with more freedom and responsibility should bring a positive impact on workings and efficiency of the much maligned and often misunderstood individuals, and more importantly on the pace of development of the society. It is time to stand up to assert their role and demand their place in the system which has so far treated them as the whipping boys of the government. The society needs their expertise, knowledge and wisdom more than they themselves would care to believe. For all their efforts and dedications in trying to be where they are now, they need to be more vocal and defiant of any irrational objections or impediments to their work. They should understand that the game had changed, that the real power is once again slowly being forced to be transferred to the people, and are much more vigilant, aware and assertive than ever before. Their good deeds and efforts will not go in vain anymore, nor will any underhand dealings, for that matter.

Bandh for special status affects normal life in Andhra

PTI Vijayawada, Aug 2: The state-wide bandh, called by main opposition YSR Congress demanding that the Centre grant special category status to Andhra Pradesh, affected normal life with business activity coming to a standstill and educational institutions remaining shut. The Congress and Left parties extended support to the day-long shutdown. Scores of opposition workers were taken into custody by police in several areas across the state as they tried to organise protests and prevent plying of state-run transport corporation buses. State Road Transport Corporation suspended its services as a precautionary measure to prevent

any damage. While educational institutions declared a holiday, banks and other commercial establishments did not open their shutters. In Vijayawada, YSRC workers were taken into custody when they staged a protest outside the bus station and prevented movement of buses. Meanwhile, Telugu Desam Party MLA from Ponnuru in Guntur district sat on a day-long "deeksha" at the statue of Acharya N G Ranga in the town demanding that the BJP government honour its promise and grant special status to AP. "It is the responsibility of the Centre to support the state by all means as it suffered heavily because of the irrational bifurcation," Narendra said.

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Sharmila, Sabotage and Us

(By : JN Lai)

I wish it would be wise to retain passive voice of my participation and experience in the course of Save Sharmila and demilitarization campaign in Manipur. Yet I feel like letting out some as relevant lines are in the limelight now. First, many of us are shocked and stunned to hear Sharmila's words especially her decision to contest election. I underwent one such shock long back in a similar nature though was not from her own lips but from two respected guys whom I associated with. That was somewhere in the February 2007 just before she returned from Delhi. From Chanu Sharmila began her hunger strike in the early November 2000. After two or three years, the voice of that girl was getting belittled at a level that looked none paid heed to her. I felt strongly about that silence and took the concern to keep raising her voice. In 2003 I got a small team and raised a little fund too. For the first time in Sharmila's 16 year history we produced multi colored pamphlet entitled "Save Her" and distributed in World Social Forum held in Bombay, January 2004. She was introduced to the world, handed out over thousand copies. Though not sure of a good impression created on the receivers at the occasion, at least I got impression and scar around my shoulder left by injury from hanging a bag carrying the pamphlets. Same year, the first website on "Save Her" was also launched.

As some of individuals in Apunba Lup saw me as an active concern on Sharmila, one evening a youth who was very dynamic activist of those days talked with me about taking Sharmila to Delhi. On 3

October 2006, the time court released Sharmila, the youth veered away her to a hospital and let her stay the night there. In the same evening somewhere at Keishampat three or four of us finalized the plan to help Chanu in continuing her hunger strike at the capital of the world biggest democracy. Amidst our thousand feelings of uncertainties and suspense, we made mission accomplished; she was flown to New Delhi all the way from Imphal airport. Thanked to the union cabinet minister who was reaching Imphal airport as if to distract security eyes from Sharmila to his VIP attention. Sharmila was carrying on her hunger strike in Delhi for five months. Sometimes I coordinated Apunba Lup and her protest in Delhi. Then somewhere in mid February, one of well known activist of Manipur whom I closely associated expressed his intention of Sharmila's return to Imphal. I did not respond affirmatively for many of us considered Delhi was strategically a better location to make her voice heard to the larger audience. For sure, Sharmila's presence in New Delhi got on the nerves of the then Congress government and the defense; they were stung in some ways. The government hated her presence in the capital, they might have tried their level best to send her back to Imphal and throw her into the old confinement. More importantly I asked that very activist repeatedly "Does Sharmila herself really intend to leave Delhi and come back to Imphal?" I never got a straight answer from him. He made up his mind, I believe, to happen it as soon as possible. I was wondering why he was ready to go congruent with government's desire. That evening somewhere in

February 2007, in an attempt to convince me of the good side of Sharmila's return to Imphal, he took me to a senior citizen. I suspect, he made the senior citizen persuade me. The latter said to me "You people have to properly understand the whole situation of the movement. You know, Sonia Gandhi came to Imphal and she did a good campaign for Congress, If Sharmila is brought back to Imphal, she can do campaign for (a party, named withheld here)". I was shocked and shattered! "Oh my god! Such immature idea from whom I regard as respectable mentor" I cried but in silence I knew they were being condescending, undermining my true concern. From that moment onwards I felt like inclining myself to silence and also an impression of distrust was imprinted on my mind. On 4 March 2007, Sharmila flying back home stealthily which supposed to be a big din; no Meira Paibis, no civil societies, no press, virtually none were there to greet our phenomenal anti AFSPA crusader. Being the timing was 5 day Yaosang holiday in Manipur, press media were sleeping. The move was so calculative and plan was carried out perfectly. Later, the questions were asked, answers were justified but only to deepen the polarization and distrust among ourselves ever. I gradually started withdrawing my engagement, and perhaps coincidentally money and awards too started flowing in to Sharmila. Second, maybe Sharmila's resentment towards her own peoples and civil society organizations (CSOs) is justifiable in some ways. Despite the good concern and solidarity with Sharmila from Ima Meira Paibis, there were lapses and poor

coordination. In the summer of 2004 following the rape and brutal killing of Ms. Thangjam Manorama by Indian Army, Apunba Lup was floated at a Sangoi (extension parlor of Meetei house) of Manorama's neighbors. I was there as one of the human rights activists. There were about 32 volunteer groups in the help. Many of these groups held Ningol Chakkouba, (the biggest luncheon festival meant for our sisters) every year at public domain. Considering the relevance of Ningol Chakkouba and Sharmila's hunger strike I put up a proposal to drop Chakkouba once organized by Lup's members and also to appeal the public to call off the festival as a symbolic protest in solidarity with her fasting. Nothing happened, went in vain. However my long standing proposal to Apunba Lup to embrace Sharmila as part of anti AFSPA campaign was realized two years later. Soon I came across plenty of in-house challenges caused by indigent organizational operation. Absence of commitment, active presence of group-ego and individualism brought up inefficiency and mismanagement in the campaign. Usually what I experienced was of wasting of our time and energy focusing on non-issues instead of burying ourselves in the issue based challenges. It might have killed some segments of the spirit of this "Defiant Lady", I believe. The rebuttal from two or three CSO leaders in front of media cameras will remain rather a rhetoric only disabling ourselves to see the reality and failing to address our own weakness. In fact, these have been strength we have given to external hands and state agents to sabotage Sharmila's phenomenal hunger strike.

National & International News

Jammu and Kashmir minister Naeem Akhtar's house attacked with petrol bomb

Srinagar, Aug. 2: A petrol bomb was hurled at the house of Jammu and Kashmir education minister Naeem Akhtar in Parraypora area of the city on Monday night, police said on Tuesday. No one was hurt in the attack that was carried out by unidentified persons. "A petrol bomb was hurled at the residence of the Education Minister at Parraypora late last night, causing damage to the main

gate of the house," a police official said. Akhtar and his wife were not present in the premises as they have shifted to high security Gupkar Road after the PDP-BJP government was sworn in March last year. A petrol bomb was also hurled at the office of Road and Buildings department at SDA colony in Bemina area of the city on Monday night, the official said.

He said no one was hurt in the incident. Naeem Akhtar had a narrow escape on Saturday when his cavalcade was attacked with stones in a north Kashmir village when he was returning from Bandipore district. Protesters hurled stones at Akhtar's cavalcade as they had blocked the road with tree trunks and large stones to enforce the separatist shutdown. The sources said that emergency police reinforcements

were rushed to rescue the minister from the protesters. None was hurt in the incident. Meanwhile, authorities continued curfew and restrictions on Tuesday as Kashmir remained shut for the 25th consecutive day. Police said the curfew would continue in some areas of south Kashmir while restrictions under section 144 of the CrPc (Criminal Procedure Code) will remain in force in Srinagar city and other districts.

Curfew remains in force in parts of Kashmir

PTI Srinagar, Aug 2: Kashmir, which came to life last evening following relaxation in strike by separatists, on Tuesday again witnessed as shutdown as curfew remained in force in some parts and restrictions were in effect in rest of the Valley to maintain law and order. Many shops and business establishments opened after sundown on Monday as the separatists had announced a relaxation in the agitation

programme to allow people to buy essentials in view of the prolonged shut down since July 9 in the Valley. However, all markets remained closed on Tuesday and public transport was off the roads in view of the strike call given by the separatists. Curfew remained in force in six police station areas of the city, Anantnag town, Kokernag and Khanpora in Baramulla district as restrictions on assembly of four or more people continued in entire Kashmir, a police official said.

"Curfew is in place only in six police station areas of Srinagar city — Nowhatta, Khanyar, Rainawari, Safakadal, Batamalo and Maharajgunj," he said. The separatist groups have been spearheading the agitation to protest the civilian killings during the protests following killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani in an encounter with security forces on July 8. Protests broke out across Kashmir Valley on July 9, leading to clashes with security forces in which 49

persons have been killed and over 5600 persons injured. Mobile internet services continued to remain snarled in the entire Valley where the postpaid mobile telephony services have been restored across all networks. The incoming facility on prepaid connections has also been restored, but the outgoing calls are barred on such numbers. The separatist camp has extended the shutdown call in Kashmir till August 5, calling for a march to Hazratbal shrine on Friday.

Airport chaos after typhoon Nida hits Hong Kong

Hong Kong, Aug. 2: Hordes of angry passengers stranded after Typhoon Nida pummeled the crowded Hong Kong airport on Tuesday, desperately seeking flights as the city emerges from lockdown while the storm swept across southern China. Hundreds of flights were cancelled, schools and shops shut and the stock market closed for the day as the storm brought violent winds and torrential showers. Gusts of 151 kilometres (93 miles) per hour whipped the city and rain lashed down during the night, leaving three people injured and a trail of fallen trees and torn-down scaffolding.

The storm triggered a Typhoon 8 signal — the third-strongest category — which was taken down a notch around midday Tuesday as winds eased and the typhoon passed onto mainland China. But as the city's deserted streets began to come to life as buses and train services resumed, Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok airport was inundated with stranded passengers. An airport authority spokesman told AFP only 500 flights would run between 6:00 am and midnight local time on Tuesday (2200 GMT on Monday to 1600 GMT). On a normal day, the airport would handle 1,100

flights. More than 150 flights were cancelled Monday as Nida approached, leaving stranded passengers to sleep on the floor in the departure hall. Hong Kong's flagship carrier Cathay Pacific and its subsidiary Dragonair cancelled all of their flights in and out of Hong Kong for 16 hours, from 10:00 pm Monday until 2:00 pm Tuesday. Security guards prevented passengers without flights from reaching check-in desks Tuesday, redirecting them to another part of the airport to seek help from staff.

Some complained that airline staff had not given them food vouchers or emergency accommodation despite lengthy waits. "The airline was giving inconsistent information. There was no announcement whatsoever about accommodation, food or the weather situation. It's chaotic," one passenger told local channel TVB. Another passenger from the Philippines told AFP he had not been provided with food or accommodation, despite being at the airport since 7:00 pm Monday. His flight has been rescheduled for 10:00 pm Tuesday.