

Editorial

Imphal, Thursday, August 4, 2016

The best laid plans

*The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men,
Gang aft a'gley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!*

(The best laid schemes of Mice and Men often go awry, And leave us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!)— Thus wrote Robert Burns, a Scottish national poet in his poem 'To a Mouse'. The poem, although written more than two centuries ago (1786), has gained greater significance especially in the background of our present social and political imbroglios threatening to overshadow the precious little progress and development that have managed to creep in, more as a result of the unceasing pace of progress percolating down to our society rather than from any proactive or earnest efforts from any quarter. Even though the state is situated at a geopolitically disadvantaged coordinate, the aspirations and ambitions of its people are nothing short of the contemporaries from oceans across. The ever-hopeful and naïve public of Manipur has been fed lies, half-truths and cooked up stories, perhaps much more than is humanly bearable to the point that all we can ever be sure of is to continue to hope—hope for life and a better future. We have been hoping, and will undoubtedly continue to, for a life where allocated basic facilities are provided, for a life where one's faiths and beliefs can be practiced without hesitation, for a life when one can keep and enjoy one's own hard earned pleasures, for a life when those elected to administer listened and followed their conscience rather than their greed and ego, but most of all, for a Manipur when one's concerns are listened with empathy and understanding.

It is impossible to satisfy everyone all the time, but that should not be used to explain away the increasing voices of unrest, anger, anguish and exasperation in the state. For all practical purposes, for every step taken towards development, the state is collectively taking two steps backwards, one— from the ill-intents and opportunistic attitude from everyone connected with the projects or activities, and two— for the feeling of distrust, suspicion and alienation every single public activity stokes instead of the other way round.

For years now if not decades, we have been promised and assured everything under the sun, including the moon, and yet ground realities taught us to watch every step lest we end up getting drowned in the puddle during the monsoons or dried up in the searing summer heat. Every single developmental projects have become a mere opportunity for personal enrichment for everybody having a say, and emphasis have shifted from 'Development' to 'Distribution' with cronies of the high and mighty vying for the lion's share of every and any work, complicated in no small measure by the increasing hordes of self-proclaimed saviours of the people diving in the already confused fray.

The declining trust and confidence of the public towards the government, bureaucracy and the armed activists is but a natural and rational reaction of the people who have had enough of the promises, assurances and ideologies behind which each have their own tainted agenda. Now, the smoke of uncertainty is thinning up and the screen can no longer hold back the uncomfortable truth. The awakened public has started looking for examples not eloquence.

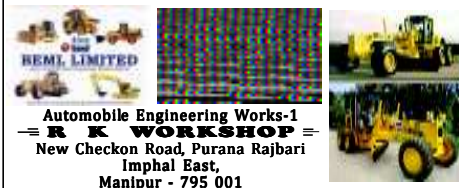
Gujarat HC quashes 10 % quota for economically backward classes

PTI Ahmedabad, Aug 4: The Gujarat High Court today quashed a state ordinance on 10 per cent quota for economically backward classes among the unreserved category, in a setback to BJP government which had taken the step to pacify the agitating Patel community. Terminating the ordinance issued on May 1 as "inappropriate and unconstitutional", a division bench of Chief Justice R Subhash Reddy and Justice V M Panchohi said that such quota is not a classification, as claimed by the government, but

it is indeed reservation. The court also observed that 10 per cent reservation for poor among the unreserved category takes the total quota beyond 50 percent, which is not permitted as per the Supreme Court's earlier decision. The high court also said that state government gave the reservation to EBCs without any study or scientific data. The state government pleader requested the court to stay its order so that they can approach Supreme Court, following which the HC issued a two-week stay on its order.

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National & International News

Rajnath Singh attends Saarc meet as Nawaz Sharif dubs Kashmir 'not India's internal matter'

FP Islamabad, Aug 4: Home Minister Rajnath Singh arrived in Islamabad on Wednesday for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) interior ministers' meet. The Union minister had earlier announced that he would be focusing on Dawood Ibrahim — designated a global terrorist — and cross-border terrorism.

Just ahead of the meeting, Union Home Secretary Rajiv Mehrihi announced that there would be no bilateral meeting between Rajnath and his Pakistani counterpart Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan. However, Rajnath along with his counterparts from Saarc countries will call on Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Speculation was rife ahead of his visit on how the countries would discuss the prevailing violence in the Kashmir Valley after the death of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani. The home minister had earlier blamed Pakistan for the unrest in Jammu and Kashmir and had said that terrorism in India is "Pakistan-sponsored."

"Kashmir is India's crown (mukut). It is heaven and the neighbouring country is keeping an evil eye on it. I am hopeful that the pride of Kashmir will be restored," he had said. Even a spokesman of the US State Department had described

Kashmir as an internal matter for India.

Ahead of Rajnath's visit Islamabad, Jamaat-ud-Dawah chief Hafiz Saeed had asked the Pakistani government not to allow Rajnath to visit Pakistan and has warned of a nationwide protest if Singh does visit the country. In fact, a group of All Parties Hurriyat Conference workers held a protest in Rawalpindi against Rajnath Singh's arrival in the country. Mishal Malik — the wife of Yasin Malik, chairman of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front — also led a token protest against Rajnath's visit in front of the National Press Club.

Although the Pakistani prime minister promised the highest security for the Indian minister, he made a provocative statement just ahead of the meet. Emphasising that Kashmir is "not an internal matter" of India, he said, "Today, Kashmir is witnessing a new wave of freedom movement."

"This movement is running into the bloods of third generation of Kashmiri people and the world has itself seen its intensity in the wake of 8 July," Sharif said, referring to the killing of Hizbul commander Burhan Wani in Kashmir.

"The Kashmiri youth are writing new chapters of sacrifices to get the right to self determination," he said. "They have lost eyesight due to bullets but the desire for freedom is guiding them to the destination," he

added.

He asked Pakistani envoys to apprise the world that "the Kashmir was not an internal matter of India". "The ambassador should make the world feel that Kashmir is not the internal problem of India, as India already accepted it as dispute territory and the UN also declared it as a dispute between India and Pakistan," he said.

"We cannot afford a conflict. If we became part of any conflict, then our progress in the social and economic fields would be affected," he said. He said Pakistan wants peace in the world on the basis of honour, dignity and equality. "But our desire for friendly ties should not be considered as weakness. We believe in mutual interests, respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of others," Sharif had said.

Before leaving for Islamabad to attend the day-long conference, Singh had said he was "looking forward to underscore the imperative of meaningful cooperation within the region against terrorism and organised crime."

"This conference provides a platform to discuss issues pertaining to security," Singh had said, who is also expected to tell Pakistan to stop sponsoring terror in India and rein in groups like Lashker-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Instability in Pakistan could impact safety of nuclear weapons: CRS

PTI Washington, Aug 4: Continued instability in Pakistan could impact safety of its nuclear weapons and materials, a latest US Congressional report has said as it described the sale of two nuclear reactors by China to Pakistan a violation of the NSG guidelines.

"While US and Pakistani officials continue to express confidence in controls over Pakistan's nuclear weapons, continued instability in the country could impact these safeguards. Furthermore, continued Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons development could jeopardise strategic stability between the two countries," the Congressional Research Service (CRS) said in its latest report on nuclear weapons of Pakistan.

CRS, which is an independent and bipartisan research body of the US Congress, prepares periodic reports on issues of importance for lawmakers for them to take informed decisions. It is not considered as an official view or report of the US Congress.

In its 30-page report dated August 1, the CRS said that the China selling nuclear reactors to Pakistan for Chasma-3 and Chasma-4 are in violation of the current Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines. "US officials and other NSG members have said that the Chasma-3 and -4 sales by China are inconsistent with current Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines," CRS said in its reports, days after another US-based think-tank Arms Control Association (ACA) made similar allegations. Contracts for Chasma-1 and -2 were concluded before China joined the NSG in 2004. At that time, other NSG members agreed "to grandfather construction of plants in Pakistan which China had initiated," Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Countryman said during a May 12, 2015 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing.

In 2008, China and Pakistan agreed to the Chasma-3 and -4 construction

"in response to the US-India Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreement", according to a 2015 Nuclear Proliferation Assessment Statement submitted by the Obama Administration to Congress, it said. China argues that the contracts for Chasma-3 and -4 are grandfathered, but Countryman stated that the NSG did not agree to grandfather any additional reactors.

The NSG changed its guidelines in 2008 to allow nuclear trade with India, but the group does not allow trade with Pakistan. "At present, China is apparently the only country planning to sell nuclear power reactors to Pakistan," CRS said.

According to CRS report, although Pakistan has made significant reforms in this area, many observers continue to be concerned that other states or terrorist organisations could obtain material or expertise related to nuclear weapons from elements in Pakistan.

CRS said, according to some observers, spent fuel from Pakistan's Karachi and Chasma nuclear power plants could be vulnerable to theft or attack. However, Pakistani officials have expressed confidence

in the security of its facilities and have said that Islamabad has no plans to transport spent fuel from either reactor, it said.

Furthermore, CRS said chronic political instability in Pakistan and Islamabad's military efforts against the Taliban and al-Qaeda have raised concerns about the security of the country's nuclear weapons.

"Some observers fear that Pakistan's strategic nuclear assets could be obtained by terrorists or used by elements in the Pakistani government. However, US officials have generally expressed confidence in the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons," it said.

"The collapse or near-collapse of the Pakistani government is probably the most likely scenario in which militants or terrorists could acquire Pakistani nuclear weapons," it said. Noting that the main security challenges for Pakistan's nuclear arsenal are keeping the integrity of the command structure, ensuring physical security, and preventing illicit proliferation from insiders, the report said some observers are also concerned about the risk of nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

Indian Foreign Services recruits' quality falling: Parliamentary panel

New Delhi, Aug 4: A parliamentary panel has expressed concern over "deterioration" in the quality of recruits to the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and said it is "imperative" that only the best are selected.

"The committee is concerned at the deterioration in quality of recruits to the IFS. This is happening at a time when the lure and appeal of the civil service examination has increased tremendously," the Standing Committee on External Affairs headed by Shashi Tharoor (Congress) said in its report tabled in parliament on Tuesday.

The panel said that unlike in the past when only those obtaining the highest ranks in civil services exam were taken into IFS, "it has come as

a matter of surprise" that even low-ranked candidates are able to enter the service.

"This development is both a symptom and a reason for the erosion of prestige in the IFS," said the committee, whose members include Sugata Bose (Trinamool Congress), Karan Singh and Rahul Gandhi (Congress), Mohammad Salim (CPI-M), Supriya Sule (NCP) and Swapna Dasgupta (Nominated). While the "relative charm" of the IFS has waned with more opportunities of foreign travel in recent years, the External Affairs Ministry "has acknowledged that people in the top 10 may not necessarily opt for the Indian Foreign Service", said the panel.

Prachanda's second innings as Nepal PM

PTI New Delhi, Aug 4: Puspa Kamal Dahal, 61, who was elected as Nepal's 24th prime minister in 26 years on Wednesday by the Nepalese parliament, is the former Maoist rebel chief, who still uses his nom de guerre "Prachanda" or the "fierce one."

He is known as the man who played a key role in a decade-long insurgency that toppled a Hindu monarchy and transformed the Himalayan nation from a kingdom to a socialist-communist people's republic.

Prachanda won 363 votes out of the 573 cast in the 595-member parliament on Wednesday setting him on the path to become the eighth prime minister of Nepal since the 239-year-old monarchy was abolished eight years ago.

Prachanda's confirmation was virtually assured thanks to the support of the centrist Nepali Congress, the biggest party in parliament, and an alliance of several small parties.

Under a widely reported power-sharing deal, Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba is expected to take over from Prachanda before Nepal holds a general election at the beginning of 2018.

The alliance between the two men would seem ironical given that Deuba as the prime minister in 2001 offered a bounty of 50 lakh Nepalese rupees (Rs.30.12 lakh) for Prachanda in 2001 at the peak of the Maoist insurgency that Prachanda led. The Maoists hit back in 2003, ambushing Deuba's convoy but he escaped unhurt, according to media reports.

This is Prachanda's second stint as prime minister since 2008—he headed the first Maoist-led government in Nepal but had to step down in 2009 after a run-in with the Nepalese army.

He takes office at a critical period in Nepalese history when there are deep divisions over the country's new Constitution that was approved last year. On Wednesday, he promised to unite a country hit by deadly protests over the constitutional changes. The Prime Minister's post had been left vacant since last week after Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) chairman K.P. Sharma Oli tendered his resignation following the Maoist's withdrawal of support to the coalition government.

Prachanda also has the task of overseeing the reconstruction of the country, large parts of which were devastated by a massive earthquake on 25 April last year.

Previously known to have a distinct anti-India stance, Prachanda seems to have softened his line on ties with India. In 2008, Prachanda visited China before India, breaking a tradition of new Nepali leaders making New Delhi their first foreign port of call. At present, New Delhi's assessment seems to be that Prachanda's elevation is good for Indo-Nepal ties which experienced turbulence under his predecessor Oli.

Oli's visit to China earlier this year (though after a visit to India) and his efforts to forge a closer economic partnership with Beijing had ruffled feathers in India. Born to Mukhtiram Dahal and Bhawani Dahal in 1954 in Kaski district in western Nepal, Prachanda earned a degree in agricultural science and worked as a school teacher for four years before turning to politics.

He entered active politics in 1979 by joining CPN-M. He became the general secretary of Communist Party Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist) in 1995, a year after the party lost all its seats in the polls.