

Editorial

Imphal Thursday, December 1, 2016

New hope in fight against HIV/AIDS

The world over, this day has been designated the World Aids Day and is celebrated since 1988 to raise the public awareness about AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome), a pandemic disease caused due to the infection of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). World AIDS Day is important because it reminds the public and Government that HIV has not gone away - there is still a vital need to raise money, increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education. The day is celebrated by the government organizations, NGOs, civil society and other health officials by organizing the speeches or forums discussion related to the AIDS.

According to a 2012 UNAIDS report, globally there are an estimated 34.4 million people living with HIV/AIDS and out of this 2.1 million are children while the rest are adults: males and females, and 2.5 million are newly infected with HIV as of December 2012. Despite the virus only being identified in 1984, more than 35 million people have died of HIV or AIDS, making it one of the most destructive pandemics in history. Today, scientific advances have been made in HIV treatment, there are laws to protect people living with HIV and we understand so much more about the condition. Despite this, people do not know the facts about how to protect themselves and others, and stigma and discrimination remain a reality for many people living with the condition.

Manipur is one of the six high prevalence states in India with HIV prevalence rate among pregnant women attending ANC being 1.4% (Sentinel Surveillance 2006). Manipur with hardly 0.2% of India's population is contributing nearly 8% of India's total HIV positive cases. More and more interior and hill areas are affected and are yet to be covered. Interestingly, while the State AIDS Policy was adopted by the State Government on 3rd October, 1996 and became the first state in India to have a State AIDS Policy, a slogan on the webpage of Manipur Aids Control Society (MACS) reads "Let's aids each other to combat AIDS". It is also evidently clear from the figures given on the website that it has been a few years since any significant update or studies have been made regarding the current status of the state vis-à-vis the dreaded affliction.

While the picture on the state front is not satisfactory or inspiring to say the least, there are positive developments elsewhere which indicate that there might very well be a new hope in the fight against AIDS. A new clinical trial has been launched in South Africa Wednesday on an experimental vaccine that could prevent HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The latest trial is only the seventh full-scale human trial for a virus that infects more than 2 million people and kills over 1 million every year worldwide. According to a statement from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), HVTN 702 is the largest and most advanced HIV vaccine clinical trial to be undertaken in South Africa, where more than 1,000 people are infected with HIV in a day. The first participant of the new trial was enrolled on Oct. 26, and the results of the clinical trial are expected in 2020. The new study is based on an earlier trial - RV 144 - conducted in Thailand in 2009 which showed 31 percent drop in infections which, while not significant, paved the way for further investigations and improvements.

While the world is pressing forwards in the search for a cure to the dreaded disease, the best possible means for the public to stay safe is to be aware of HIV/AIDS, and to treat those living with the condition with understanding and empathy, for nothing works against the efforts to contain and control the spread of HIV/AIDS than to stigmatise and show them contempt. The state government and its implementing agency needs to monitor and update information and data regarding HIV/AIDS on a regular basis so that concerned public can get a better picture of the situation in the state.

16 feared killed as fire breaks out in explosive unit in Trichy

Trichy, Dec. 01: Sixteen people are feared dead when a fire broke out on Thursday at an explosives factory near Tiruchirappalli gutting two floors of the building in Trichy, officials said here. The fire was noticed in one of the manufacturing

wings of the factory and it soon spread to other areas. The noise triggered panic among people in the surrounding area and waves of the blast were felt even two km away from the site, forcing officials to stop traffic on Athur road, police said.

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Kashmir and India: parallel universes

Rescind the NDTV ban but continue the six-week ban on Kashmir Reader. This discrepancy is just a small part of the differential treatment Kashmir journalists face.

Before I express myself on why the government, propelled by nationalistic fervour so strong as to drown out every form of dissent and protest, did not execute the proposed daylong ban on NDTV India in the face of widespread outrage and yet continues the one-and-a-half-month-old ban on *Kashmir Reader*, it is necessary to state some facts. On Gandhi Jayanti, five policemen delivered the Srinagar district magistrate's order asking us and a few printing presses to stop publication of *Kashmir Reader* immediately. The ban order rides on a colonial law and states that the publication of the newspaper might incite people to violence. It invoked section 144 CrPc, Section 3 of the Incitement of Offences Act and Section 10 of the Press and Publication Act.

To back the order, various departments have prepared a thick dossier of what appear to be the charges against us. We were not given a copy of the dossier but *Kashmir Reader* owner and editor-in-chief, Haji Hayat, has been offered a glimpse into the five-page summary of the dossier. In an interview with a Srinagar-based weekly, *Kashmir Life*, Hayat said the dossier included the publication of an article by Palestinian columnist Ramzy Baroud, the headlines of some of our editorials and reports, a few news stories and columns, and a generalized displeasure at the perceived anti-state policy of the newspaper.

Now, none of these charges match the charge against NDTV India, which is that of "revealing strategically-sensitive details" of the Pathankot air base when it was attacked on January 2. Yet, we have been banned for six weeks while NDTV India has been rightly spared a 24-hour blackout.

"The charges against the two media outlets cast them in two entirely different frameworks: *Kashmir Reader* becomes the evil, anti-national newspaper while NDTV India is being careless."

Why the different treatment? Because the charges against the two media outlets cast them in two entirely different frameworks: *Kashmir Reader* becomes the evil,

anti-national newspaper while NDTV India is being careless. That is probably why the Editors' Guild of India, while asking Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, to "reconsider the ban on *Kashmir Reader*" patronizingly put the onus on 'editors to uphold the best journalistic standards of fairness and balance while publishing news'. The Guild's statement on the NDTV India ban, however, explicitly asked the government to rescind the decision and did not dish out any side lesson on journalism either. In an atmosphere where Arnab Goswami appears on TV screen like a sonic boom and accuses some journalists, especially those who annually sit with soldiers at borders as a mandatory patriotic ritual, of being sympathetic to "anti-nationals and splittists", it is perfectly natural that *Kashmir Reader* only can only expect the guillotine, not solidarity. While almost all Indian media organisations share a common vision about Kashmir, ie., it is an integral part of India and Pakistan is the troublemaker, competition drives them to outdo each other in subverting the ground reality in the Valley. So, none of them want to be seen as siding with a newspaper that has been dubbed a troublemaker. The facts do not matter.

Early this year, a controversy arose over a proposal to build residential apartments in the Valley for retired soldiers. *Kashmir Reader* had carried the story last year and, following a similar story by the *Indian Express*, we did a follow-up story. The reporter is still in possession of the minutes of the meeting, chaired by the governor, where the proposal was mooted. The state government first termed the *Kashmir Reader* report baseless and then, bizarrely, told a press conference how the previous government had forwarded the proposal. When the entire edifice of governance and democracy rests on farce, impulse trumps facts.

Similarly, if only the Editors' Guild of India had visited the Valley during the initial days of the uprising, it would have noticed how Kashmiri journalists were being beaten up by angry protesters for the lies and concoctions that were being

broadcast from news studios in New Delhi.

"Kashmiri local media and majority of the media in India report two entirely different worlds when they report Kashmir."

One news channel ran the preposterous claim that protesters were being paid Rs 500 for snatching a rifle from policemen and soldiers, Rs 1000 for snatching a grenade and Rs 5000 for organizing a protest. Common sense tells you that it is easier to organize a protest than to snatch a rifle, the riskiest act. The reward for snatching a rifle should therefore be the highest.

Such reportage was actually inciting people to violence in Kashmir. But no media watchdog or organization in India took note because such lies score the highest on the patriotic scale.

Kashmiri local media and majority of the media in India report two entirely different worlds when they report Kashmir. It won't be an exaggeration to say that a consensus emerged rapidly among Indian media outlets, especially the broadcast media, that the uprising in Kashmir was the handiwork of people sitting in Pakistan.

Even those who saw it for what it was - a massive, spontaneous, rural uprising against the killing of a popular militant commander - tried to slip state propaganda into their watered down reportage of the ground situation. The Indian media is at a safe distance from the daily gaze of the people in Kashmir. It can afford distortions. While some distinguished Indian journalists can openly voice their views on Kashmir and make recommendations to the security agencies from TV studios, Kashmiri journalists can be gagged and tagged seditious for their political beliefs.

A study, *Media Propaganda and the Kashmir Dispute: A Case Study of the Kashmir Floods (Reuters Institute)* by journalist Wasim Khalid, based on content analysis of reports published in the *Times of India* and broadcast on NDTV in the week immediately after the floods, revealed that "New Delhi-based media coverage was overwhelmingly in favour of the Indian government and armed forces."

It said: "The *Times of India* devoted more than half (57%) of its coverage specifically to the army's relief efforts and NDTV focused almost entirely (97%) on the role played by the army and the government in the crisis.

Both outlets appear to have ignored the contribution made by local Kashmiri volunteer rescuers. Indian media coverage was also notably security-centric, possibly to create sympathy for the Indian army, typically viewed as an occupying force in the region."

If a natural disaster can become a security-centric spectacle, imagine that kind of reportage a massive anti-state uprising would evoke? Both outlets have carried the widespread denunciation by the Kashmiri business community and civil society of the government's theory that black money and fake notes has sustained the uprising? With demonetization ending it overnight? Countless examples can be cited to show that the subversion of reality in Kashmir by the majority of Indian media outlets has rendered an interface - and hence solidarities - very difficult, if not impossible. However, it must be noted that a large number of journalists in India, in their individual capacities, still resist the nationalistic hype and take a nuanced view of the situation. This is especially true of the print media. The *Indian Express*, Firstpost, and Southline were kind enough to carry my pieces on the ban.

Kashmir Reader, therefore, was constrained to place its reliance entirely on the local media for support. The newspaper still believes that better sense will prevail on the state government, especially in the wake of a recent statement by Ms Mufti that the current situation can best be addressed by following her late father, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's, vision. She has told a group of editors who met her over the *Kashmir Reader* ban that she will look into it and that her father would not have liked the gag on the newspaper. She did not specify a date by when it would be lifted.

Lifting the ban would certainly be a small but significant step in the implementation of her father's vision for the state. (Courtesy *The Hoot*)

National & International News

Colombia crash pilot reported he was out of fuel: Recording

Medellin, Dec. 01: The pilot of the chartered plane carrying a Brazilian soccer team + told air traffic controllers he had run out of fuel and desperately pleaded for permission to land before crashing into the Andes, according to a leaked recording of the final minutes of the doomed flight.

In the sometimes chaotic exchange with the air traffic tower, the pilot of the British-built jet requests permission to land because of "fuel problems" without making a formal distress call. A female controller explained another plane that had been diverted with mechanical problems was already approaching the runway and had priority, instructing the pilot to wait seven minutes. As the jetliner circled in a holding pattern, the pilot grew more desperate. "Complete electrical failure, without fuel," he said in the tense final moments before the plane set off on a four-minute death spiral that ended with it slamming into a mountainside Monday night.

By then the controller had gauged the seriousness of the situation and told the other plane to abandon its approach to make way for the charter jet. It was too late. Just before going silent, the pilot said he was flying at an altitude of 9,000 feet and made a final plea to land: "Vectors, seniorita. Landing vectors."

The recording, obtained Wednesday by Colombian media, appeared to confirm the accounts of a surviving flight attendant and a pilot flying

nearby who overheard the frantic exchange. These, along with the lack of an explosion upon impact, point to a rare case of fuel running out as a cause of the crash of the jetliner, which experts said was flying at its maximum range. For now, authorities are avoiding singling out any one cause of the crash, which killed all but six of the 77 people on board, including members of Brazil's Chapecoense soccer team traveling to Medellin for the Copa Sudamericana finals — the culmination of a fairly tale season that had electrified soccer-crazed Brazil.

A full investigation is expected to take months and will review everything from the 17-year-old aircraft's flight and maintenance history to the voice and instruments data in the black boxes recovered Tuesday at the crash site on a muddy hillside. The US National Transportation Safety Board was taking part in the investigation because the plane's engines were made by an American manufacturer.

As the probe continued, mourning soccer fans in Medellin and the southern Brazilian town of Chapeco, where the team is from, held simultaneous stadium tributes to the victims. The six survivors were recovering in hospitals, with three in critical but stable condition, while forensic specialists worked to identify the victims so they could be transferred to a waiting cargo plane sent by the Brazilian air force to repatriate the bodies.

Alfredo Bocanegra, head of

Colombia's aviation agency, said that while evidence initially pointed to an electrical problem, the possibility the crash was caused by lack of fuel has not been ruled out. Planes need to have enough extra fuel on board to fly at least 30 to 45 minutes to another airport in the case of an emergency, and rarely fly in a straight line because of turbulence or other reasons.

Before being taken offline, the website of LaMia, the Bolivian-based charter company, said the British Aerospace 146Avro RJ85 jetliner's maximum range was 2,965 kilometers (1,600 nautical miles) — just under the distance between Medellin and Santa Cruz, Bolivia, where the flight originated carrying close to its full passenger capacity.

"If this is confirmed by the investigators it would be very painful because it stems from negligence," Bocanegra told Caracol Radio on Wednesday when asked whether the plane should not have attempted such a long haul.

One key piece to unlocking the mystery could come from Ximena Sanchez, a Bolivian flight attendant who survived the crash and told rescuers the plane had run out of fuel moments before the crash. Investigators were expected to interview her Wednesday at the clinic near Medellin where she is recovering. "We ran out of fuel. The airplane turned off," rescuer Arquimedes Mejia quoted Sanchez as saying as he pulled her from the wreckage. "That was the

only thing she told me," he told The Associated Press.

Investigators also want to speak to Juan Sebastian Upegui, the co-pilot of an Avianca commercial flight who was in contact with air traffic controllers near Medellin's Jose Maria Cordova airport at the time the chartered plane went down.

Assam: Govt to raise five new Indian Reserve Battalions

Dispur, Dec 01 : The Assam government is to raise five new Indian Reserve Battalions. Assam DGP Mukesh Sahay said, each battalion will consist of around 1,000 personnel.

He said, new battalions, which will be partly funded by the Centre, will help in maintaining law and order situation as well as generating employment. The DGP said, women and youth from deprived class will be given due representation in the battalions as per law.

DGP also said, banned ULFA is trying to recruit new cadres from bordering areas at Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. He said, the law and order situation in the state is by and large peaceful. He, however, said, anti-insurgency operation will continue against terror groups.