

Editorial

Imphal Monday, December 5, 2016

Appeal to the better sense

After more than a month of bearing up with self-imposed toleration and calmness the extreme measures and relentless efforts of the UNC to bring the state to its knees and to put the lives of the public to a grinding halt by the series of 'total shutdowns' and 'indefinite economic blockades', United Committee Manipur (UCM), a leading CSO have thrown down the gauntlet by serving a 72-hour ultimatum beginning from Sunday midnight on the United Naga Council (UNC) to end its indefinite economic blockade on National Highways No.2 and No.53. This time around, the public have had to endure not only the effects of the economic blockades but also the adverse and unfortunate consequence of the demonetization move by the central government. That the people in the state endured indescribable hardship would be an understatement, and the growing resentment have started spilling out onto the streets with increasing number of the public staging 'counter-blockades' along roads leading to the hill districts. Earlier, UCM have appealed to the public to refrain from reacting to the frequent disruptions to the lifelines of the state while requesting the government to chalk out a sustainable and amicable solution for the convoluted problems which have the very distinct possibility of being tainted with communal hues the longer such problems persist.

The state government, albeit a tad late, have started the process of arranging for security escorts to make sure the main two highways which serves as the lifelines of the land-locked state remains free of disturbances and disruptions by any group or party. Thanks to the groundwork by the armed security personnel both from the central and state security forces, the pressure on essential commodities are easing up, and the tension is slowly yet surely going down. However, the state government should consider the present situation as a precursor to a very crucial and bold step of coming out with its decision on the current social imbroglio, and most importantly, the 'why' of it must be laid in front of the public without any ambiguity or reservations. Stoppag measures have proven to be more harmful than good in more instances in the past than those in power would care to hark back on, and the present measures should not prove to be just another unfortunate instance.

The UNC have proven its point of making sure the state government takes its concerns and apprehensions over certain decisions or rather preparations seriously. Prolonging the present impositions along the national highways and effectively trying to gag the public will bring nothing but chaos and uncertainty in the society. There should certainly be a way to air one's views other than burning up vehicles with nonchalance, vandalizing and robbing the vehicles plying along the national highways in the guise of protesting. Time for better senses to prevail. Manipur is a democratic state and the public invests their mandate on the representatives who takes their aspirations and dreams into the process of policy making. It would bode well for the society and the future as a whole if we focus on strengthening the political system through judicious use of our universal suffrage rather than indulge in arm-twisting tactics to enforce our views, even if such views happen to be one-sided and biased.

Restrictions in Srinagar to foil separatist protest march

Srinagar, Dec. 5: Authorities imposed restrictions in parts of Srinagar city in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday to prevent a separatist-called protest march. "Restrictions will remain in force today (Monday) in and around Lal Chowk area to maintain law and order in the valley," a police official told IANS here. According to the official, section 144 of the CrPc (Criminal Procedure Code) that deems an assembly of five or more persons as unlawful is already in force in Srinagar. Monday's restriction is intended to prevent any clash between the law forcing agencies and the protesters, the official added. Senior separatist leaders — Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Mirwaiz Umer Farooq

and Muhammad Yasin Malik — are scheduled to lead a protest march to Lal Chowk on Monday, according to the weekly protest calendar the separatists have been issuing in the valley to continue the five-month long protest shutdown here. While Geelani continues to remain under house arrest in his uptown Hyderabad residence here, authorities on Monday placed Mirwaiz Umer and Yasin Malik under house arrest in their Nigeen and uptown Maisuma residences respectively. The intensity of the separatist campaign has gradually been decreasing since it started here on July 9, a day after Hizbul commander Burhan Wani was killed in a gunfight with the security forces.

The links between Soil Fertility and Poverty alleviation

Soil Health Card will help rebuild the soil fertility

By : Pandurang Hegde

According to Central Soil Water Conservation Research and Training Institute, Dehradun, India is losing 5,334 million tonnes of soil every year due to soil erosion because of indiscreet and excess use of fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides over the years. On an average 16.4 tonnes of fertile soil is lost every year per hectare. The non-judicious use of fertilizers has led to deterioration of soil fertility causing loss of micro and macronutrients leading to poor soils and low yields causing low agricultural yields.

Realising the severity of the problem Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi called for focusing the attention of improving the health of the soils across the country to boost the productivity and increased prosperity. Referring to the song "Vande Mataram" he said that in order to achieve true meaning of 'Sujalam and Suphalam' it is necessary to nurture the soil and improve the soil health.

In order to implement the concept of improving the soil health he launched the Soil Health Card Scheme (SHC). The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation, Government of India has the target of issuing 14 crore SHC across the country. An estimated budget of Rs 568 crore is assigned towards realising this scheme. This is being implemented in collaboration with the state governments from the year 2015-16 under which 253 lakh soil

samples will be tested every three years to generate approximately 14 crore SHC.

The large area of operation and the enormity of collecting data at ground level is herculean task. Nevertheless the Ministry of Agriculture is committed to assess the soil samples and issue SHC. As on 15 November this year, 34.47 lakh soil health cards have been distributed to farmers across the country.

In order to expedite the process of soil testing, 460 new soil-testing labs have been sanctioned under Soil Health Management Scheme. Apart from the mobile soil testing labs, the Ministry of Agriculture has also sanctioned the functioning of 2296 mini soil-testing labs in 2016-17. This will accelerate the process of soil testing in remote areas. It has created employment opportunities for rural youth with technical and educational skills.

How will these soil health cards help to improve the soil fertility?

In the first stage these tests will reveal the status of the farmer's soil with respect to macro nutrients like N, P and K, micro nutrients and show the precise of pH value. Using this basic information the farmer can progress to the second stage of how to improve his soil fertility by using specific dosage required realizing the optimal yields. These cards will contain the advisory based on the status of the soil nutrient on the farmers land. It will also suggest what kind of soil management he

needs to undertake to stop the soil deterioration and improve the soil fertility.

These cards will be issued for three cropping cycles, showing the soil status at the end of every cropping season. Thus, the SHC are not a one shot solution, but a continuous process that provides the basic information on the health of soil for the farmer.

The unscientific farming practices and overuse of fertilisers and pesticides is rendering the agricultural soil useless by destroying the soil fertility. With the impact of climate change, the availability of water for irrigation will be greatly reduced. The low availability of soil organic matter and constant soil erosion due to high temperatures will lead to desertification.

In order to address this problem it is essential to create a sound data base for addressing the crisis. The collection of soil samples and analysis of soils across the country will provide the scientific information about the conditions of soils across diverse ecological zones in the country. Based on this, it becomes feasible to implement the measures to rebuild the soil fertility. It will not only reduce the costs of inputs, but will help the farmer to improve his yields and eventually to alleviate poverty.

There is close link between healthy soils and healthy food. With the indiscriminate use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides, the soils

in our country have been heavily poisoned. Poisoned soils will produce foods that will cause health problems. We may produce more yields by applying more chemical inputs, but the final produce is devoid of micronutrients that are essential for building the healthy body.

With 17 per cent of world's population and just 2 per cent of geographical area, and with high level of poverty, it becomes essential to improve the condition of soil in order to provide food security and employment to 55 per cent of the population engaged in agriculture. The SHC initiative has been lauded by the UN food body, FAO (Food and Agricultural Organisation). On the occasion of International Year of Soils in 2015 the FAO Director Jose Graziano told Agricultural Minister Radha Mohan Singh that the SHC could be model for other countries, to secure food security through healthy soils.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given the slogan of "Swastha Dhara, Khet Hara", which means 'healthy earth and green farms'. In order to create healthy earth, we need to create healthy soils. The Union Agriculture Ministry is working closely with state governments to create conditions for evolving healthy soils and green farms that will pave the road map to achieve the targets of doubling the farmers' incomes and address the issue of poverty of soil and farmers. (Courtesy PIB Feature)

National & International News

Opposition protests over demonetisation disrupts

Rajya Sabha proceedings

PII New Delhi, Dec. 5: Opposition parties today continued their tirade against government in Rajya Sabha over the woes of employees and the pensioners due to the cash crunch following demonetisation, as vociferous protests forced the wash out of the first half of the day's proceedings. Congress, BSP, SP and TMC members trooped into the Well of the House raising slogans demanding the government's reply on the problems faced by employees and pensioners, forcing Deputy Chairman P J Kurien to adjourn the proceedings till noon and again till 1400 hours as similar scenes continued.

Soon after the Upper House mourned the death of two of its former members and the listed papers were laid, Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad said: "The government employees and pensioners are not getting their salaries. I want to know from the government if there is a financial emergency."

He said there is no cash in ATMs located even in the Parliament complex. "When we are not getting money from ATMs in Parliament, how do we expect it outside? It seems there is a financial emergency." Stating that it is a serious issue, Deputy Chairman P J Kurien called members to resume the discussion on demonetisation that had began on November 16.

"I am agreeing that you are raising a important and serious issue. It is for the government to reply. You start discussion. If all of you shout, what is the benefit? The only remedy is discussion," he said.

But unrelenting Opposition members trooped into the Well raising slogans — "Logon ka paisa, logon ko do (give the money that belongs to people)", "Hosh mein aao, Hosh mein aao, Pradhan Mantri Hosh mein aao (Come to your senses, PM come to the House)". As protesting members started shouting at high pitch, Kurien said: "You want a solution to the problem,

then go back and raise the issue. Then the government will reply. This is not the way. There is anarchy in the House. I am not going to adjourn. Slogan shouting is no solution. You will get certain headlines in newspapers and nothing more. I will not adjourn."

The Treasury benches countered the Opposition shouting "We want discussion. We want discussion." As the Opposition members refused to heed to the Chair's repeated pleas to return to their seat, Information and Broadcasting Minister M Venkaiah Naidu suggested the Chair to take up the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2014. Opposition members did not heed

to this, even as Naresh Agarwal (SP) said that the entire nation has been crippled due to demonetisation. As the protests continued, the House was adjourned till 1200 hours.

When the House met at noon, members were on their feet raising uproar.

While Chairman Hamid Ansari called for taking up the Question Hour, his pleas did not evoke any response as members kept speaking out of turn.

"It is your Question Hour," he said as Opposition members shouted "No".

With Anand Sharma (Cong), Naresh Agrawal (SP), Derek O'Brien (TMC), Satish Misra (BSP) and Tapan

Kumar Sen (CPI-M) speaking at the same time, no one could be heard. Incidentally, the microphones of Opposition leaders speaking were put off and only that of the Chairman and the member raising the question were working.

As pandemonium prevailed in the House, Ansari said, "Nobody is being heard."

Meanwhile, Congress, TMC members and those of some other Opposition parties were standing in the aisles raising slogans and demanding the presence of the Prime Minister in the House for the demonetisation debate to resume.

As uproar continued, the Chairman adjourned the House till 1400 hours.

11 killed, 30 injured in hotel fire in Pakistan

Karachi, Dec. 5: At least 11 people, including three women, were killed and 30 others injured today in Pakistan when a huge fire erupted at a four-star hotel here, rescue officials said.

The blaze broke out in the kitchen located at the ground floor of the Regent Plaza hotel at the city's Shahr-i-Faisal and spread across the six-floor building, trapping nearly 100 hotel guests in their rooms.

Three fire tenders of the fire brigade reached the site and started an operation to rescue the guests. The firefighters were able to contain the fire after three hours, with 11 people having been killed, said Faisal Edhi of the Edhi Foundation.

Mayor of Karachi Waseem Akhtar visited the site of the incident and while talking to media, he said the fire has been contained but the cause of the fire could not be determined as of yet. He said rescue work was hampered due to absence of an emergency exit and spread of heavy smoke.

At least 65 people affected by the fire were brought to the emergency department, Dr Seemin Jamali, head of the emergency services at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre was quoted as saying by Dawn. Amongst those were people who

had fractured bones after jumping from hotel windows to escape, others had been hurt by shattered glass and many were treated for smoke inhalation, she said.

She said 10 bodies had been brought into the hospital. Six men including four women are among killed. Three foreigners affected by the fire are in a stable condition, said Jamali.

The rescue operation has not

ended, and some people are still reportedly trapped inside the hotel. The cause of fire is yet to be ascertained.

Pakistan cricketer Sohaib Maqsood was present in the hotel at the time of the incident.

Another cricketer Yasin Murtaza jumped from the second floor to the ground and fractured his ankle. Karamat Ali was injured by broken glass, according to sources.

74 Trains Delayed As Delhi Wakes Up To Cold Morning, Poor Visibility

PII New Delhi, Dec. 5: Delhi citizens woke up to a cold morning today with the minimum temperature settling at 8.8 degrees Celsius, even as poor visibility conditions affected rail traffic leading to cancellation of three trains.

The relative humidity level oscillated between 31 and 90 per cent. There was a nip in the air as the minimum temperature was recorded at 8.8 degrees Celsius while the maximum temperature settled at 26.6 degrees Celsius. "There was mist in the morning that affected visibility. Shallow fog and mist is forecast for

tomorrow morning as well," a Meteorological Department official said.

"74 Delhi-bound trains were delayed and three trains including Licchavi Express were cancelled," a senior railway official said.

However, flight operations at Delhi airport were normal and as per schedule, according to Delhi Airport website.

The maximum and minimum temperature for tomorrow is expected to settle at 26 and 10 degrees Celsius respectively. Yesterday, the maximum and minimum were recorded at 26.6 and 8.4 degrees Celsius respectively.

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