

Editorial

Imphal, Monday, January 11, 2016

The call against corruption

Corruption is worse than prostitution. The latter might endanger the morals of an individual, the former invariably endangers the morals of the entire country: Karl Kraus- Austrian satirist, essayist, aphorist, playwright and poet.

The 9th of January 2016 marked another milestone in the short journey of Imphal Times as on this day, the daily evening turned 3. What started as an experimental effort by a few like-minded friends who share the same concerns and the urge to contribute to the endeavor of the public to address the social ills and help achieve its full potential have today survived and surpassed every conceivable obstacles, and with the passage of time, have started to realize the inherent power vested in the public that has upto this point been used sparingly and reluctantly. It is this collective and unstoppable force that Imphal Times would hope to ignite to fight one of the most complex and enduring social malaise that has pervaded every social aspect of our lives, and consequently is holding us down. Thus the need and the decision to launch the campaign 'Fight against corruption' came to being. Off all the social ills afflicting the society, perhaps the one that has been around since the dawn of civilization would very well be the scourge of corruption. Broadly speaking, corruption may be described as the misuse or abuse of entrusted power or authority for private and undesired gain.

We are keenly aware of the enormity of the task at hand and is also clear on the risks such an initiative entails both to the moral and physical being, for there are bound to be detractors and powerful entities trying to scuttle our efforts. Fact of the matter is, the desire and the efforts to fight corruption is nothing new. The way we see it, however, is that these attempts were in fits and starts, and if we ever are to gain some ground against this ubiquitous social malaise, it has to be the fight for every single one of us in the society. And it has to be relentless and continuous. As Raghuram Rajan, the current and the 23rd Governor of the Reserve Bank of India observed, India could start looking like an oligarchy along the lines seen in Russia: "too many people have got too rich based on their proximity to the government." In a recent poll 96% of Indians said corruption was holding their country back, and 92% thought it has got worse in the past five years. The voices are clearly starting to get louder.

We are embarking on this mission for we felt that the people needs to be offered a platform to raise their voice against corruption, we are banking on the support and cooperation from everyone in our society to make a positive change so that the future is a little more cleaner and safer for the next generation and the ones after that. Enough has been discussed, dissected and written about the scourge that has become institutionalized in our social system. It is time to stand up and speak out. We owe this much to ourselves and to our future.

"The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything": Albert Einstein.

Wanted Sub-Editor

Imphal Times is looking for an experience sub editor with excellent writing skill in English who can read Bengali written script. Working hour is 12 noon till 3 pm. Honorarium is Rs. 3000 p/m. Preference will be given to candidate who had already work in English daily as desk editor. Age no bar, and Imphal Times have no problem with those candidates working in other newspaper at night shift.

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Will media now pursue names of big defaulters?

A Supreme Court ruling will finally force banks to reveal who is defaulting on loans. Public interest will trump secrecy if reporters persist with RTIs, says Pranati B Mehra

For years reporters came up against a legal wall – the names of bank loan defaulters could not be revealed under the various banking laws. Banking secrecy was virtually equated with national security. Applications made under the Right to Information Act by ordinary people were routinely frustrated by invoking the bogey of security. In the absence of information, newspapers continued to write inadequate reports on the Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) of banks (the official term for loans which are not returned) which work under the watchful eye of the regulator, the Reserve Bank of India.

Journalists who worked harder and cultivated sources got the occasional big breaking story. At times, news trickled out when the Finance Ministry or banks wanted to shame a company or two. On other occasions, political rivalries would result in the leaking of names, though it has to be said that virtually the entire political class, except perhaps the Left parties, is behind powerful corporates who raise debt and then arm-twist bank managements into restructuring sticky loans. On the eve of the New Year, The Supreme Court has, in a sparkling order, done its bit for transparency

in this country. It has upheld several orders of a Central Information Commissioner, Shailesh Gandhi, in RTI appeals against the information officers of banks or of the RBI who had refused to divulge information on scandals, inspection reports, the plain bald levels of NPAs, or of what action, if any, had been taken against defaulters. The Reserve Bank of India had appealed to the Supreme Court against those orders.

All the cases heard by the Supreme Court were originally filed by ordinary people, except perhaps one which was filed by the well-known RTI activist, S. C. Agarwal. The Court weighed the arguments in favour of secrecy against the arguments in favour of the public interest and called the RBI's bluff on what is called the 'fiduciary relationship' between the RBI and the banks. In paragraph 60 of the judgment, the Supreme Court says: "The RBI is supposed to uphold the public interest and not the interest of individual banks. The RBI is clearly not in any fiduciary relationship with any bank. It has no legal duty to maximize the benefit of any public sector or private sector bank, and thus there is no relationship of 'trust' between them. The RBI has

a statutory duty to uphold the interest of the public at large, the depositors, the country's economy and the banking sector." And further, in paragraph 62: "The exemption contained in Section 8(1)(c) (of the RTI Act) applies to exceptional cases and only with regard to certain pieces of information, for which disclosure is unwarranted or undesirable. If information is available with a regulatory agency not in a fiduciary relationship, there is no reason to withhold the disclosure of the same. However, where information is required by mandate of law to be provided to an authority, it cannot be said that such information is being provided in a fiduciary relationship."

Is this going to be the proverbial Pandora's Box? The Supreme Court order is a shot in the arm for the RTI community but more so for the media. Journalists now need to get cracking, and some of them sure will. Quoting old figures from a Credit Suisse report will not do. The RBI will not volunteer information. RTI applications will have to be filed and uncomfortable questions will have to be asked of the RBI itself because there are complicit bank directors and officers who have either been

brbied or browbeaten into giving these jaw-dropping loans.

The shock is not in the figures but the manner in which the loans are processed and revived over and over again even though there is little hope of recovery. One time exceptional cases and only with waivers of interest and even part of the capital amount. One source in the industry says that the Central Bureau of Investigation should keep an eye on retiring senior officers, including managing directors of banks. And if they get into private consultancies, the CBI must watch the bank from which they retired even more closely.

Reporters who have been denied information on even Foreign Direct Investment when they sought it under the RTI, now have the tools to pin responsibility. It could be a Pandora's Box for the sector. Bankers are saying off the record that the scene is as bleak as it can possibly get. How much good money has been thrown after bad? Nobody seems to know. Though the total level of NPAs in the system is around three trillion rupees, other phenomena like the one described in this Firstpost.com story by Dinesh Unnikrishnan makes one even more worried.

Courtesy The Hoot
(To be contd.....)

International and National News

Pathankot attack: Did former IAF official help Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists?

Agency
Pathankot, Jan. 11: After a week-long probe, National Investigation Agency (NIA) officials are now zeroing in on the role of India-based Pak spies in the Pathankot terror attack. Sources said Air Force official Ranjith KK, who was arrested on December 28 from Bathinda by Delhi Police may have helped the Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists masterminding the terror attack. Sources said Bathinda Air Force official Ranjith KK, who was arrested on December 28 from Bhatinda by Delhi Police, may have helped Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists to mastermind the terror that shook the nation.

Ranjith - who had joined the Air Force as an Airman five years ago - was allegedly honey-trapped into spying for ISI. He was court martialled and dismissed from service a day before he was arrested by the police from

Bathinda. Ranjith was under surveillance for the last three months and was allegedly caught passing sensitive information about the air force base to woman Damini McNaught, who had introduced herself as a UK-based media firm representative. Sources said the and Pathankot Military Engineering Services (MES) lineman to find out whether both were in touch with each other. The agencies - in order to establish the role of guides who may have helped the terrorists strike the air force base - are scanning the phone calls made by Ranjith and the lineman. The NIA officials have seized lineman's mobile phone sim card. The MES official was taken into custody for questioning last week when three flood lights of the area used by the terrorists to scale the station's boundary wall were found turned upward. Some

of the floodlights were not functioning. All this is believed to have been done to facilitate the terrorists scale the wall which was thrown into darkness when the terrorists struck the air base. The arrested lineman was responsible for maintaining the lights which make the 11-foot wall visible throughout the night. NIA officials, besides the lineman, have also questioned another air base official in connection with the flood light mischief. Unconfirmed sources even said the lineman and Ranjith had exchanged phone calls before the attack.

The NIA officials - who are scanning the phone records of both - are, however, yet to confirm the allegations. NIA sleuths are also questioning another Air Force employee-turned-spy Sunil Kumar who was arrested on spying charges on

August 30, 2014. Sunil Kumar was accused of selling strategic information about the Air Force Station to a woman who is believed to be a Pak spy. Seduced by the Pak spy, Sunil Kumar became the victim of his carnal desires and greed for money. The pak woman spy had introduced herself as Meena Raina via a social media website. He was told that she lives in Sweden and is a researcher who conducts research on accident cases. Both became friends and were regular on the website. She also occasionally called him on his mobile phone.

The unidentified woman had later told Sunil that she is doing research on the Air Force Station and asked him to supply the information which he agreed in lieu of money. The court had granted bail to Sunil as the police failed to put up the challan.

North Korea's Kim boosts propaganda in praise of nuke test

AP
Seoul, Jan 11: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un looked today to milk his country's recent nuclear test as a propaganda victory, praising his scientists and vowing more nuclear bombs a day after the US flew a powerful nuclear-capable warplane close to the North in a show of force. A standoff between the rival Koreas has deepened since last week's test, the North's fourth. Seoul on Monday continued anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts across the border and announced that it will further limit the entry of South Koreans to a jointly run factory park in North Korea.

Outside North Korea, Kim faces widespread condemnation and threats of heavy sanctions over the North's disputed claim of a

hydrogen bomb test. Internally, however, Kim's massive propaganda apparatus has looked to link the test to Kim's leadership so as to glorify him and portray the test as necessary to combat a US-led attempt to topple the North's authoritarian system. Today, Kim took photos with nuclear scientists and

technicians involved in the test and praised them for "having glorified" his two predecessors, his late father, Kim Jong Il, and his grandfather, state founder Kim Il Sung, according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency. Kim earlier called the explosion "a self-defensive step" meant to protect the region "from the

danger of nuclear war caused by the US-led imperialists," a separate KCNA dispatch said. The comments provide insight into North Korea's long-running argument that it is the presence of tens of thousands of US troops in South Korea and Japan and a "hostile" US policy that justify its pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles.

David Bowie dies after 18-month battle with cancer

Reuters
London, Jan. 11: Singer David Bowie has died after an 18-month battle with cancer, his publicist company said. "David Bowie died peacefully today surrounded by his family after a courageous 18-month battle with cancer. While many of you will share

in this loss, we ask that you respect the family's privacy during their time of grief," read a statement on Bowie's Facebook page dated Sunday. Stars, politicians and fans rushed online to pay their respects. British Prime Minister David Cameron tweeted: "I grew up listening

to and watching the pop genius David Bowie. He was a master of re-invention, who kept getting it right. A huge loss."

Steve Martin from Bowie's publicity company Nastyle Little Man confirmed the Facebook report was accurate. "It's not a hoax," he told Reuters.