

Editorial

Imphal, Wednesday, March 2, 2016

From solidarity to solitude

Is AFSPA in Manipur eternal? The very question that has been on the minds of every single individual in Manipur has been given a national voice by none other than the apex court in the country when it asked the Manipur government how long the Army should be deployed in the state and enjoy unaccountable power under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and whether 35 years of the Army's presence had improved the law and order situation. Back home, however, the relentless struggle to keep the issue in the limelight for more than one and half decade by Iron Chanu Sharmila, bestowed with the title of "Iron Lady of Manipur", by going on a hunger strike since the "Malom Massacre" on 2nd November 2000 when the Indian Army - specifically the Assam Rifles gunned down ten civilians in cold blood in broad daylight has evidently started to wane from public memory. That Iron Sharmila's unshakable determination has kept her going even amidst some of the most trying times and in the face of stiff resistance speaks volume of the sacrifice the lady has been making to get rid of the draconian and obsolete law. The hue and cry of support and solidarity for her endeavor by the teeming population has died down, and more trivial issues have come to occupy the imagination and indulgence of the public. Perhaps the perceivable improvement in the law and order situation in recent years have lulled the public into a false sense of security, or that the priorities of the people have changed from one of trying to stay alive to trying to build a better future by taking higher risks. Whatever may be the reason, the public and the once vociferously vocal social organizations need to take up the issue and support the campaign to repeal AFSPA by Sharmila without any let up because whatever may be the present social condition, the bitter truth is that the Indian Army will not hesitate to use the Act as an impregnable shield behind which to carry out their every whims and fancies in the state without even the need to try and justify their actions. There had been instances where various individuals and parties have obviously associated themselves with the relentless campaign of Sharmila at opportune times for their personal and political mileage - a folly that undermines the importance and relevancy of the struggle. Let us forget, Sharmila is not fighting a personal battle, nor is she so much as trying to right a wrong. What she is struggling for is much more than all of it. She is fighting for the future of this state - for its very continuity - for all of us. If we are unable to raise our voice or do our bit to show solidarity for the lady, perhaps we are not worthy of the privileges and sanctuary this land has been providing us in spite of the teeming pretenders and profiteers masquerading as our saviours. Instead of trying to gag the voice of reason and blot out the efforts of the Iron Lady - an exercise that will only end in futility, the state government should remove the Disturbed Area tag from the whole of the state and pave way for repealing the most tragic act ever to have conjured up. The lady is still up for every challenge until her demand - our demand is fulfilled. Let us show our sincere solidarity instead of leaving her in solitude.

Non-subsidised LPG price slashed by Rs 61.50 per cylinder

New Delhi, March 2: Price of non-subsidised cooking gas LPG was slashed by 61 rupees 50 paise per cylinder from yesterday. It will now cost 513 rupees 50 paise in Delhi as against 575 rupees previously. Subsidised LPG costs 419 rupees 13 paise per 14.2 kilogram cylinder in Delhi.

However, Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), or jet fuel, price was hiked by 12 per cent. The three fuel retailers Indian Oil Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum revise jet fuel and non-subsidised LPG prices on the first day of every month, based on the average international price in the preceding month.

2 killed as CISF jawan fires on colleagues

ANI Ratnagiri, March 2: A Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) jawan deployed at a power plant in Maharashtra's Dabhol region, killed two of his colleagues and injured himself and his wife. Thirty-six-year old Harish Kumar Gound, who was deployed at the Ratnagiri Gas and Power Pvt Ltd (RGPL), allegedly opened fire on two of his colleagues on Tuesday night. Gound, who hails from Madhya Pradesh, was apparently engaged in a verbal altercation with the victims earlier. Gound and his wife have been admitted to the hospital in Chiplun and their condition is said to be serious.

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You think this Budget was for farmers? Think again

By : Nihar Gokhale

Much has been said about the Union Budget being farmer-friendly. Indeed, the government has promised a lot of money to the farm sector.

This is one of the worst phases in the recorded history of Indian agriculture. Monsoon has been deficient for two consecutive years, while unseasonal rainfall has played havoc with farm output. And Arun Jaitley's Budget makes it seem like the Narendra Modi's government is all out to salvage the situation. That, however, would be misleading.

The funding push is limited to a handful of sectors, such as insurance and irrigation. Even for those, it seems, this will do little to mitigate distress as the situation is either already too bad or needs a solution at the structural level. For other sectors, the allocation hasn't really changed much from previous Budgets. In fact, in many areas, the Centre government has simply sought to shift more of the burden on the shoulder of the states.

Total budgeted expenditure
 - The Budget has allocated Rs 35,983 crore for the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare for 2016-17 - more than double the Rs 17,004 crore allocated in the previous Budget.

- But that allocation was about 11% lower than the year before.

- In fact, in 2015-16, a year when the country faced its second consecutive drought, the government actually revised down even that Rs 17,004 crore to Rs 15,809 crore.

- In the latest budget, Rs 15,000 crore is an interest subsidy to farmers. And that is nothing new - a modest 15% increase from Rs 13,000 crore the year earlier.

There are four main Yojanas (schemes) exclusively for agricultural development.

1. Krishonnati Yojana

Allocation for the next financial year

has been slashed 20% from this year's levels and 27% from the last. It clubs six missions:

National Mission on Horticulture
 It has been given Rs 1,629 crore this Budget - down 17% from the last and 16% from the one before that.

National Mission on Agriculture Extension and Technology

Includes sub-missions on seeds, plant protection, agricultural mechanisation and information technology. Allocations dipped in the previous Budget and has been increased this time to Rs 1,300 crore (18% more than the last allocation, but only 12% more than the one before that).

National Food Security Mission
 Under this, the government supports foodgrain production so that the country is self-sufficient. This year's allocation of Rs 1,705 crore looks impressive - 31% higher. But it is actually 9% lower than two years ago.

Integrated Scheme on Agricultural Marketing

While the budget mentions opening a platform for farmers to sell their produce online, funding to this marketing scheme hasn't picked up. Rs 883 crore given this year is about 9% higher than last year, but 9% lower than two years ago.

National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture

This scheme spent Rs 1,268 crore in 2014-15, but got just Rs 300 crore for the next year. The big drop was partially explained by the Centre giving more money to the states, and cutting down funds for several schemes like NMSA.

Even then, slashing allocation to a quarter seemed like a huge cut. Worse, the government expects to spend only Rs 207 crore.

This Budget, the mission has been given Rs 1,101 crore - 13% lower than the money spent two years ago.

National Mission on oilseed and oil palm

The only one to get more funds and also the one with the least allocation:

This Budget has allocated Rs 497 crore - 42% higher than Budget 2015-16 and 57% more than the one previous to that.

2. Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana
 Rs 8,443 crore was spent on this in 2014-15. But this year's allocation was nearly halved to Rs 4,500 crore (citing the Centre-state sharing). Again, the government thinks it will spend only Rs 3,900 crore of that. Allocation for the next year is Rs 5,400 crore.

The schemes with money:

Insurance and irrigation.

3. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchay Yojana (Prime Minister's Agriculture Irrigation Programme)

This was launched last year with much fanfare and an allocation of Rs 1,800 crore in the 2015-16 budget. That was the agriculture ministry's share for the scheme, which also gets funds from the Water Resources Ministry. All the same, the actual spending has been projected at Rs 1550 crore by the agriculture ministry. And the allocation has been raised to Rs 2,340 crore this Budget.

The government has also announced other measures, such as setting up a Rs 20,000-crore 'long-term' fund. That's welcome. Irrigation, by nature, needs a long-term plan. But all this will do little to solve the drought situation in 10 states.

"The realisation that rural areas are in distress has come a year too late. Had this been allocated last year, we would have mitigated a lot of distress," said Ajay Jakhhar of the Bharat Krishak Samaj said. "We don't expect any immediate reduction in farm suicides or rural distress."

4. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PM's Crop Insurance Programme)

This scheme was announced in January 2016 and has been given Rs 5,501 crore to be spent in 2016-17. The agriculture ministry already had a crop insurance scheme, on which it is expected to spend around Rs 3,000 crore in 2015-16.

But there are structural issues in crop insurance that the government does not appear to be interested in solving. The method used to calculate which farmer deserves insurance is controversial. On the one hand is a system where a local revenue official makes manual checks - a process riddled with corruption.

On the other is a weather-based system where the amount of rainfall in a district entitles its farmer to insurance. While this ignores local geographical differences, there have also been cases where the benchmark rainfall was defined as zero, a scientific rarity.

Activists like Yogendra Yadav have argued that insurance payouts are so rare that most farmers are unaware they are even insured.

"Now, more than ever, the farmer needed the government and the Budget. But where is the big announcement for the Indian farmer? This is a business-as-usual Budget for the farmer," he said.

An alternate Budget formulated by farmers' organisation Jai Kisan Andolan, with Yadav, demanded the government spend Rs 1 lakh crore over three years to complete all unfinished irrigation projects.

Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture, which campaigns for organic farming, welcomed the Rs 412 crore the government committed to organic farming. But it said the rest of the document was a "PR stunt" as despite promises of being focussed on farmers, it allocated only 1.9% of the budget to the sector.

"Traders are likely to benefit (from the Budget), if at all, not farmers," said Kiran Vissa of Rythu Swarajya Vedika. According to a statement from the farmers' organisation: "No measures have been announced for tenant farmers and sharecroppers, to ensure that bank loans and insurance reaches them, though they are bearing the brunt of the agrarian crisis and farm suicides."

National & International News

Jaitley says thrust of Union Budget is to fill gap in rural & agriculture sectors

New Delhi, March 2: Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today said the thrust of Union Budget is to fill the gap in rural and agriculture sectors. In his Post Budget Interactive Session with industry associations in New Delhi, Mr Jaitley said, government has made big provision for rural roads, social security programmes and health sector in the Budget and concentrated upon areas like irrigation programmes,

and Swachh Bharat campaign. He said government will take steps to keep public sector banks in good health. The Finance Minister also said, Direct Benefit Transfer, DBT has resulted in a lot of savings, which is partly being used to benefit the weaker sections. He informed that 75 lakh people have given up subsidies under Give It Up campaign. The Minister claimed that targeted disbursement of subsidies is

probably one of the most significant reform measures the government has announced.

He said listing of General Insurance Companies, pilot project for DBT in fertilisers, resolution of disputes in infrastructure projects were some significant structural reforms in the Budget. He said a reform measure that has gone relatively unnoticed is reform in state transport, which is one

of the most unreformed sectors. Mr Jaitley also said the budget allocated to MGNREGA scheme was fully spent last year unlike the previous years. He said if entire money allocated for MGNREGA is spent this year, it would be highest ever. Saying that Fiscal Deficit target was earlier met by spending less, Mr Jaitley said this time government collected more and spent more.

Pak to resume talks with India after Pathankot probe team's visit

ANI Lahore, March 2: Pakistan Prime Minister's Advisor on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said that talks with India are likely to resume after a team visits Pathankot in the upcoming days, to investigate into the deadly attack on the Indian Air Force Base. According to the Dawn, an official

transcript released on Tuesday quoted Aziz as saying that the foreign secretary-level talks between the two countries could be rescheduled soon after the visit. After a meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry on Monday, Aziz said expressed his disappointment over the current state between the two hostile neighbours,

saying that it was unfortunate that the Pathankot attack disrupted the resumption of secretary-level talks between India and Pakistan. He pointed out that since the attack, Pakistan had taken a number of "important steps" for resumption of these talks.

"Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called the Indian Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) immediately after the attack and assured him of Pakistan's support in the investigation. National security advisers are maintaining frequent contacts," he said during the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue he co-chaired with Secretary Kerry. "A case has been registered and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) is

likely to visit India in the next few days. We, therefore, hope that the foreign secretary-level talks will be scheduled very soon," he added.

Aziz also asserted that Pakistan decision to 'reach out' to India after the Pathankot attack was an important part of Islamabad's strategy to improve ties with all neighbouring states. "We believe that the resolution of all outstanding issues - including the Kashmir dispute - is possible through resumption of full-scale and uninterrupted dialogue with India," he said. Soon after the Pathankot attack, Pakistan set up a six-member Special Investigation Team to follow up on the leads India had provided.

Naidu asks Cong to come clean over Ishrat Jahan case

New Delhi, March 2: Parliamentary Affairs Minister Venkaiah Naidu has asked Congress to come clean over the recent revelations made by two former Home Ministry officers in Ishrat Jahan encounter case. Talking to reporters outside Parliament today, Mr. Naidu said the opposition party is simply denying the claims but not answering the questions why the affidavit was changed in the Supreme Court in which the reference to the LeT terror group naming Ishrat Jahan was dropped.

He said despite intelligence inputs that Ishrat was a terrorist, former Home Minister P Chidambaram changed the affidavit claiming that there was no conclusive proof. The Minister alleged this was done to defame the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, BJP leader Amit Shah and state government officials in 2004 case. Mr. Naidu said the government is ready for discussion on the issue in Parliament. Another Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi termed the alleged attempt by Mr. Chidambaram as criminal conspiracy against the BJP leaders. Mr. Naqvi said the revelations have uncovered the real face of the Congress. Yesterday, former Under Secretary in Home Ministry, RVS Mani had told a TV channel that he was pressurized to file the second affidavit in the Supreme Court in which the reference to the LeT terror group was deleted. Earlier, former Home Secretary GPK Pillai had also claimed that there was political interference in the case which led to the deletion of reference to LeT from the affidavit filed in 2009.

Bangladesh protests killing of its citizen by India's BSF near Johorpur frontier

ANI Dhaka, Mar. 2: Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the paramilitary force of Bangladesh has strongly protested the killing of a Bangladesh national near the Johorpur frontier in Chapainawabganj Sadar Upazila allegedly by India's Border Security Force (BSF). The victim was identified as Benjir Hossain, 22, from Shibganj upazila in the district. Benjir was allegedly fired upon by BSF

personnel of Chadni Chak camp after midnight, the Daily Times quoted Lt. Col. Ahmed Junaid Alam Khan, the commanding officer of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) 9 battalion in the district. Injured Banjir managed to reach his home where he succumbed around 3.30 am. The police have sent the body to the Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy. The BGB has sent a protest note to the BSF.