

Editorial

Imphal, Monday, March 21, 2016

Power of Information

The decision by the centre to conduct a study on the Right to Information Act (RTI Act) that was enacted in 2005 as a tool to further the objective of bringing more transparency and accountability to the public offices and the governance is indeed a timely and much needed step in the right direction. Various issues relating to the use of RTI has been in the news-main issues being their misuse and also the use of force to curb the activists from using the act to reveal public ills, influential persons and departments trying to shy away from being included in it's ambit. The purpose of the proposed study- to gauge the public perception and determine the level of satisfaction or otherwise, the extent of reduction in corruption as a result of it's functioning and to calculate cost to the government in providing information under the act- is a wakeup call to all and sundry to make use of perhaps one of the most liberating and powerful act specially brought in to make, rather force governance to work in a fair manner for the welfare of the public. Unfortunately the monitoring mechanism has been dismal and unexplained or incidental deaths and threats to those who used the act to unearth various discrepancies still practicing in the public offices have proved to be a deterrent for the common man, as also the slow and deliberate delays in responding to the queries. The recent incident of an RTI activist being manhandled and assaulted by security of the Agricultural Department of the State government which made news is a case in point. RTI activists- persons who sought to made information public about various irregularities, are often being targeted and harassed-the bitter truth in an otherwise welcome and useful set-up. What needs to be done from the perception of the general public is a more fair and expeditious handling of the requests and appeals with an increased awareness about the processes and formalities for filing of information- an overall improvement in the delivery system. The Public Information Officers handling such requests should be trained to be courteous and helpful to the applicants, be more informative and have a friendly attitude which will go a long way making the applicants and seekers of information feel positive and reassured of the efforts the government is making towards their end goal of better transparency and accountability that will, if not totally abolish, mitigate the scourge of corruption being faced by the general public in every walk of life and give them the power to claim their rights, for knowledge is power.

Congress MLAs stage walk out during budget session

ANI **Naharlagun (AP), Mar. 21:** The six-day budget session of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly began today, but witnessed a walkout by eight Congress legislators, including former ministers Tanga Bylaing and Tapang Taloh, Nyamar Karbak, Tachi Kaso, Dikto Yekar, Karya Bagang, Mama Natung, Nikh Kamini. Byaling, however, took part in the obituary reference for former Lok Sabha speaker P.A. Sangma, but termed the session illegal, as the Congress Party does not recognise it in the wake of it being sub-judice before the Supreme Court. The state has been witness to political upheaval that saw a clear division of 45 Congress MLAs and the toppling of a Government headed by former chief minister Nabam Tuki. Objecting to the walkout by the Congress Party, state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Wanglin Lowangdong said the Kalikho Pule government is legal and constitutionally enjoys an absolute majority. Speaker Wangki Lowang led members in paying rich tributes to former P.A. Sangma for his invaluable services to the nation as

Meghalaya chief minister, union minister and Lok Sabha speaker, and particularly strengthening parliamentary democracy. Lowang termed Sangma as a veteran leader who had entered the gallery of who's who of national politics. Chief Minister Kalikho Pule recalled Sangma's political career as a true nationalist and the first tribal, Christian and person from yje north east to rise to such coveted posts. The house stood in silence for a minute to pay its respect to the departed soul. Pule introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Tourism (Trade Registration and Regulation) Bill, 2016 and the Arunachal Pradesh Right to Public Services Bill, 2016 without any financial involvement. The Right to Public Services Bill reflects the commitment of the government of Arunachal Pradesh to serve the masses in a transparent manner and make public servants accountable, while the Tourism Bill would ensure the growth of the sector, providing jobs and enriching the state coffers. Besides transacting other business, Speaker Lowang announced that Tage Taki, Tumke Bagra, PD Sonu and Phoshum Khimhnu would be the panel of chairmen before adjourning the house for the day.

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National and International News

Congress dissolves all nine district units

ANI **Dehradun, Mar. 21:** In clear fallout over the rebellion by the nine MLAs, the Uttarakhand Congress has dissolved all nine district units of the party in the state. Later in the day, 35 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders from the state along with the nine rebel Congress leaders will meet Pranab

Mukherjee here today, asking him to dismiss the state government. "Will tell the President to dismiss the current government in Uttarakhand as they have lost majority. Harish Rawat is now trying to buy people in a fit of desperation to gain support, but he will not succeed. It is his streak of corruption that has led to this situation," BJP leader Kailash

Vijayvargiya told ANI. Meanwhile, rebel Congress MLA Harak Singh Rawat has written to Uttarakhand Governor KK Paul, urging him to call an Assembly Session tomorrow for the floor test. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat who was set to arrive in the national capital today to discuss the political

crisis in the state with the Congress leadership, has been asked by party vice president Rahul Gandhi to stay put and handle the situation there. The Congress government in Uttarakhand is facing a major crisis with 9 MLAs rebelling against Rawat and the BJP, which has 27 MLAs, staking claim to form the government.

Srinagar-Jammu NH reopens for traffic

PTI **Srinagar, March 21:** The Srinagar-Jammu National Highway was reopened for traffic today, four days after landslides following heavy rains and snowfall had led to its closure. "The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway has been thrown open for traffic this morning," a Traffic Department official said here. He said the highway was opened for one-way traffic from Jammu to Srinagar after the road was cleared

off the debris due to landslides following improvement in the weather. First those trucks and passengers vehicles were allowed which were stranded at different places along the highway, the official said. The 300-km arterial road - the only all-weather road-link connecting Kashmir Valley with the rest of the country was closed for traffic on Thursday following landslides at some places due to heavy rains. Kashmir Valley witnessed

intermittent rainfall, and fresh snowfall in higher reaches, since Wednesday leading to drop in temperatures. The higher areas of the Valley, including the famous ski-resort of Gulmarg, received fresh snowfall during the night, an official of the Meteorological Department said. He said about 11 inches of fresh snowfall has accumulated during the last 24 hours in the resort in north Kashmir - a star attraction for tourists visiting the Valley.

Meanwhile, Srinagar - the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir - recorded 6.2 mm of rainfall during the last 24 hours, the official said. He said many other areas in the plains of the Valley also received rainfall, but the weather is showing signs of improvement. The Meteorological Department has forecast mainly dry weather till Friday. It has predicted a fresh spell of wet weather for a few days from Saturday.

Death toll in military helicopter crash rises to 13

Jakarta, March 21: The death toll from an Indonesian military helicopter crash rose to 13 on Monday, the military said, with the discovery of the body of a missing soldier. The helicopter was on a mission on Sunday to capture the country's most wanted militant when it crashed and burst into flames. Twelve bodies were found on Sunday and military spokesman Major General Tatang Sulaiman said

the 13th victim, a first lieutenant, was found in the wreckage. The Bell 412-EP helicopter was carrying 13 soldiers and crew when it went down about 35 minutes after taking off from Poso district's Watutau village, said Major General Agus Surya Bakti, the regional military chief overseeing South and Central Sulawesi provinces. It was not yet known what caused the 3-year-old helicopter to crash though thunderstorms were

thought to have played a part, Agus said. More than 2,500 security forces, including elite army troops, have intensified their operations this year in Poso, a mountainous district of Central Sulawesi province considered an extremist hotbed, to try to capture Indonesia's most wanted militant, Abu Wardah Santoso. He leads the East Indonesia Mujahidin network, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group.

At least five members of the network were killed by security forces this past week. Members of the group are thought to be hiding in Poso, where more than 1,000 people died in 2001 and 2002 in violence between Christians and Muslims. Indonesia, a sprawling archipelago nation of about 250 million people, has been plagued by transportation accidents in recent years, including plane and train crashes and ferry sinkings.

Myanmar's Suu Kyi unlikely to take formal role in new government

Naypyitaw, March 21: Myanmar democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi is unlikely to take a formal position in the incoming government of her National League for Democracy (NLD), a senior official said, and will control the administration through her position as party leader. The Nobel peace prize laureate led the NLD to a landslide win in a historic election in November, but a constitution drafted by the former junta bars her from the presidency because her two sons are British citizens, as was her late husband. "Taking positions is not that important any more...In the United States there are many famous lawmakers in the parliament who are very influential, but they don't take any position in the cabinet," Zaw Myint Maung, the NLD's spokesman and one of its leaders, told Reuters late on Sunday. "It's the same here. She will lead the party, so she will lead the

government formed by that party," said Zaw Myint Maung, in the most detailed remarks from the NLD so far on how Suu Kyi plans to wield power. Other top-level NLD politicians, including Win Htein, her confidant, have likened Suu Kyi's role to that of Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. As leader of the Congress party, she dominated the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh before it fell from power in 2014, but held no ministerial position. NLD leaders have derided the constitution as "ridiculous", and Suu Kyi has pledged to run the country through a proxy president. Last week, the NLD-dominated parliament elected Htin Kyaw, a close friend and confidant of Suu Kyi, for that role, making him the first head of state since the 1960s who is not a serving or recently retired senior military officer. In the run-up to the November poll,

Suu Kyi had made clear she intended to lead the government regardless of whether she was president, but said the Sonia Gandhi comparison was "not quite" accurate. She has not elaborated since. On Monday, Htin Kyaw made his first public speech since being elected, pledging job security for public servants even as the parliament cut the number of ministries by about a third to 21. He said the reforms would save Myanmar more than \$4.1 million and those savings would be spent on healthcare, education and rural development. "There is no reason for causing unemployment if the government employees take jobs in accordance with existing laws, rules and regulations," he said. He did not go into the details. Most military MPs, who hold a quarter of seats in the parliament, also voted in favour of the changes, results showed.

"I think the military also understands that they (some ministries) are not necessary. Their collaboration is an improvement in the parliament," said Aung Hlaing Win, a lower house NLD lawmaker. Despite public messages of support and collaboration, behind the scenes tensions between the army and the NLD have simmered in the run-up to the handover of power. The military questioned the NLD's presidential and vice presidential picks and openly confronted its MPs over a controversial copper mine project last month. How the army, which sees itself as the guardian of the constitution, responds to Suu Kyi's bid to lead from "above the president" remains to be seen. The document states the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in Myanmar. The NLD government's term starts on April 1. A parliamentary agenda showed the speaker would unveil the make-up of the cabinet on Tuesday.

Air India flight to Delhi lands in capital after 12-hour delay

New Delhi, March 21: Air India's Kolkata - Delhi Sunday evening flight reached the capital on Monday morning after more than a 12-hour delay. Passengers who landed in Delhi complained that the national carrier did not take care of them on Sunday, and they were constantly told that engineers were working on the technical snag that had developed in the dreamliner aircraft. It all started on Sunday evening when a Delhi-bound Air India's Dreamliner aircraft was grounded at NSCBI airport in Kolkata on Sunday night after the pilot suspected and reported a technical snag. 238 passengers were on board. Pakistan high commissioner Abdul Basit was among them. According to an Air India spokesman, Basit along with 39 other passengers were shifted to another Air India's Delhi bound flight and flown back to Delhi on Sunday night. That flight was scheduled to leave for Delhi from Kolkata after 8.30pm and it operated as per schedule, said the airline's spokesperson. The dreamliner aircraft was scheduled to leave from

Kolkata around 5.45 pm but was pushed back for taxiing at 6.15pm. Then the pilot of the aircraft suspected and reported a technical snag while taxiing towards the runway, following which the aircraft came back to the parking bay. While the Pakistan high commissioner and 39 other passengers were accommodated in the airline's 8.30pm flight, other passengers were asked to be seated till engineers figured out what exactly went wrong. According to sources, this irked passengers. They were constantly told that engineers were working on the aircraft till 9pm. After that the passengers were asked to deplane, and were then told that the flight has been cancelled. The passengers were angry since the Pakistan high commissioner and a few others including other Pakistan officials were given special treatment. On Monday morning when the flight was ready to fly to Delhi, Air India officials reportedly gave special treatment to Sitaram Yechuri and this irked the stranded passengers even more since they did not get proper treatment during the ordeal. Sources said that elderly people, ladies and

children had suffered a lot because of the problem. Though an Air India spokesperson claimed that the airline is taking care of all passengers, the latter complained that nobody attended to them after deplaning. Passengers were reportedly served only refreshments and not dinner. However, the Air India spokesperson on Sunday night claimed that the airline took care of all stranded passengers and dinner was served to all.

6.6 magnitude earthquake hits

Washington, March 21: A 6.6-magnitude earthquake hit off the east coast of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula today but was not expected to cause damage or fatalities, US experts said. The quake, which struck at 3:50 am (22:50 GMT Sunday), was at a depth of 18 miles (29 kilometers) with its epicenter located 128 miles south of Ust'-Kamchatsk Staruy, according to the US Geological Survey. USGS said on its website that perceived shaking on the peninsula was light with no damage expected.

100 ISIS militants killed in Mosul airstrikes

ANI **New York, Mar. 21:** At least 100 ISIS militants have been killed in the two-day airstrikes in Iraq's Mosul city, according to the Iraqi Army. The Iraqi Army had yesterday tweeted that international airstrikes targeted key ISIS militants at various locations in the city, including Mosul University. According to them, there were no students inside the university and the army also claimed that the university's building is being used for training purposes. Meanwhile, CNN reports that it has confirmed the strikes, the first with someone inside the Mosul University and the other with the former governor Atila I. Nujaifi of Nineveh Province in which Mosul is located. Nujaifi said that 17 senior ISIS fighters and numerous locals were killed in the strikes.