

Editorial

Imphal, Thursday, May 19, 2016

Wasting opportunities

One of the most highly coveted and renowned plant with almost every therapeutic property imaginable has to be Panax Ginseng, or Ginseng as is more commonly known throughout the world. The medicinal plant which have gained almost magical reputation for being able to promote health, general body vigour, to prolong life and treat many ailments including depression, diabetes, fatigue, ageing, inflammations, internal degeneration, nausea, tumours, pulmonary problems, dyspepsia, vomiting, nervousness, stress, and ulcers for thousands of years have not yet ceased to amaze the world with its almost endless list of health benefits and properties, with more and newer discoveries being made with each passing day. Perhaps the genus Panax derived from the Greek word meaning Panacea or 'all healing' is a testimony to the proven efficacy of this wonder plant. Manipur is naturally endowed with an ecosystem which is conducive to the growth of this plant, and people in the hills have been foraging the forests and the hills for these wonder plants for ages which fetch them handsome prices even in the local market, while a kilo of this plant in the national market can earn more than 3000 rupees. The only catch is that these plants are categorized as forest products and are banned from commercial transactions without the approval of the forest department. Arrests of individuals trying to smuggle ginseng roots by the security forces are still frequently being reported.

The reluctant stand of the state government regarding the development of natural cultivation centers for these highly prized and high value plants is beyond anyone's comprehension. Instead of spending resources on trying to stem the smuggling of Ginseng and other such valuable medicinal plants, which will always be a futile exercise, it is time the state government take proactive steps to draw up a comprehensive and enduring plan of action so that the people of the state can benefit from the systematic cultivation of these plants under expert guidance. With the present demand for these plants, there will not be any dearth of buyers or markets, and the growers can be assisted by state agencies to fetch the best price. If the state government is eager and willing, a processing unit can even be set up which will provide value addition to the product enabling profit maximization and generating both employment and earnings. There have been reports of big processing firms expressing interests in procuring various medicinal plants and products from the state in large quantities, and if the state government can negotiate a favorable terms for the people of the state, there is a huge potential for the state to become the supplier of these coveted herbs and plants and bring in huge revenues. Such a situation will also positively affect the people and will definitely help in alleviating the numerous social disturbances arising out of the increasing lack of earning opportunities. But time is of the essence, and the state government should realize that despite its seemingly vigilant watch over the natural resources, there will be smugglers who are ready to take chances as long as the pickings are generous.

Chinese fighter jets intercept US spy plane over South China Sea: Pentagon

AN Washington, May 19: The Pentagon has said that two Chinese fighter jets have conducted an "unsafe" intercept of a U.S. spy plane in international air space over the South China Sea. "The Department of Defense is reviewing a May 17 intercept of a US maritime patrol reconnaissance aircraft by two tactical aircraft from the People's Republic of China," the Guardian quoted Major Jamie Davis, Pentagon spokesman as saying.

Without giving additional details, he added, "Initial reports characterized the incident as unsafe." Tensions between both nations have turned sour in the South China Sea, where Beijing has been building islets into military bases. China has also asserted sovereignty over large parts of the critical waterway. Washington along with Vietnam and the Philippines claims says Beijing's assertions have no basis in law.

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National & International News

Egypt Air flight MS804 went down into Mediterranean Sea

New York, May 19: Egypt Air Flight MS804 that went off radar screens early today while en route from Paris to Cairo went down into the Mediterranean Sea, the Al Mayadeen TV channel reports citing airline sources. According to Egypt Air, flight MS804, en route from Paris to Cairo, went off radar screens at 00:45 GMT today. Egypt Air said via Twitter that the plane was 10 miles into the Egyptian

airspace and at an altitude of 37,000 feet when radar contact with it was lost. According to Sky News Arabia, the aircraft's last appearance was above Greece.

Egypt Air says it received a distress signal before the plane disappeared from radar. According to the airline, there were a total of 66 people on board the plane, including 56 passengers. The passengers included 30 Egyptians, 15 French

citizens, one Briton, two Iraqis, as well as people from Canada, Belgium, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Sudan, Chad and Portugal including three children. Egypt Air is following the situation closely with the competent authorities through the integrated operations centre. Egypt Air said, special teams from the Egyptian Armed Forces were at site located for inspection and rescue.

The Greek authorities have also joined Egyptian armed forces in the search operation. The company also established a hotline for passengers' relatives. Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail has reached at the airport in Cairo, along with the families of those on board. Egypt Air Flight MS 804 departed from the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris at 23:09 GMT. The plane was headed for Cairo International Airport.

Tea processing unit setup in Tripura to benefit small tea growers

ANI Brahmakunda , May 19: Till a few years back people even did not dare to visit these area during the day time but with waning of insurgency from the state of Tripura, things have drastically changed here and developmental activities have again reactivated.

The worst sufferer of more than three decade tribal insurgency in Tripura has been the poor tribal people living especially in the remote areas, but not with peace people are getting benefit and actively participating in the developmental activities.

One of best instance of this is the setting up of a tea processing unit in remote bordering Brahmakunda village, around 50 km north of capital Agartala, and which was once considered den of militants.

Several tea gardens have been predominantly found in this area and it was the main source of employed of a larger section of people.

But during early nineties due to growing tension of insurgency most of the garden owners had either stopped visiting and caring for their tea estate as were facing loss in the tea business leading to a large section of tea labourers engaged in the gardens migrated from the area out of fear or in search of alternate job.

The worst sufferer of insurgency has been the tea labourers and their families who not only lost their livelihood and were living in misery but also their shelter.

Many of the tea gardens ceased their activities and in absence of production of tea leaves three estate factories had closed down in the area. However, things started changing from end of the last decade, insurgency started gradually waning out of Tripura and people started returning back to their original place and trade.

Thus the tea gardens in Brahmakunda also started rejuvenating by getting the attention of the owners and care of the workers, beside many locals started producing green leaf in their backyard tea gardens.

The situations finally transformed and at present the West Tripura district produces around 117.45 lakh kgs green leaf daily of which 33.87 percent comes

from the small tea growers. But the absence of tea processing unit within the periphery was the biggest hurdle for these growers as they had to pay big amount for transporting the green leaf to factories at long distance and which reduced the price leaf and was a loss for the producers.

To address the inadequate tea processing infrastructure, especially for the small tea growers and workers cooperative tea estate the Tripura Tea Development Corporation (TTDC) under the state government installed a modernized factory at Brahmakunda.

Setup at a cost of Rs 8.35 crores, with around half the amount as financial assistance from the North East Council (NEC), Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar on Tuesday inaugurated the modernized central tea processing factory.

Sarkar inspected the factory along with Industry and Commerce Minister Tapan Chakraborty and other dignitaries.

The Chief Minister appealed to the private tea garden owners of the state to invest in the sector by setting up processing factories and assured all help from the government.

"The private garden owners should also start factories. In our state there are owners who run few tea gardens, some of them have set up factory but there are others who are not interested in investing for setting up factory. To them our appeal will be that we are setting factories and in the similar manner you also setup factory and if required we shall help if there is any scope for that and we can discuss on it," said Sarkar.

The factory shall not only benefit the small tea grower of the area by reducing their transportation cost but also give better price for the green leaf. Beside the factory is also going to provide direct employment to at least fifty persons most of who will be engaged from that area.

The new factory leased to a local entrepreneur for four years has a production capacity of five lakh Kg of made tea annually and it has been estimated that TTDC will get revenue of around 20 lakh annually from it. This is the centenary year celebration

of tea plantation in Tripura that started during the royal times. The first tea plantation was done in the year 1916 at Hirachera in North Tripura.

At present there are 54 tea estates beside 4346 small tea growers in Tripura and the state earns revenue of Rs 88.33 lakh out of tea annually.

Major earthquake may hit Jammu and Kashmir: study

PTI Washington, May 19: A major earthquake, of magnitude 8 or greater, may strike Jammu and Kashmir, endangering the lives of as many as a million people, latest geologic mapping in the Himalayan mountains of the state suggests.

Scientists have known about the Riasi fault in Jammu and Kashmir, but it was not thought to be as much as a threat as other, more active fault systems. However, following a magnitude 7.6 earthquake in 2005 on the nearby Balakot-Bagh fault in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir - which was not considered particularly dangerous because it was not on the plate boundary - researchers began scrutinising other fault systems in the region.

They found that the Riasi fault has been building up pressure for some time, suggesting that when it does release or "slip," the resulting earthquake may be large - as much as magnitude 8.0 or greater. "What we set out to learn was how much the fault has moved in the last tens of thousands of years, when it moved, and how different segments of the fault move," said Yann Gavillot, lead author on the study who did much of the work as a doctoral student at Oregon State University in the US.

"What we found was that the Riasi fault is one of the main active faults in Kashmir, but there is a lack of earthquakes in the more recent geologic record." The fault hasn't slipped for a long time, which means the potential for a large earthquake is strong. It's not a question of if it's going to happen. It's a matter of when," said Gavillot.

There is direct evidence of some seismic activity on the fault, where the researchers could see displacement of the Earth where an

earthquake lifted one section of the fault five or more meters - possibly about 4,000 years ago.

Written records from local monasteries refer to strong ground-shaking over the past several thousand years, researchers said. However, they do not have much evidence as to how frequent major earthquakes occur on the fault, or when it may happen again.

"The Riasi fault is not prominent on hazard maps for earthquake activity, but those maps are usually based more on the history of seismic activity rather than the potential for future events," said Andrew Meigs, a geology professor in OSU's College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences and co-author on the study.

"In actuality, the lack of major earthquakes heightens the likelihood that seismic risk is high," said Meigs. The researchers said 50 per cent of the seismic "budget" for the fault can be accounted for with the new information. The budget is determined over geologic time by the movement of the tectonic plates. In that region, the India tectonic plate is being subducted beneath the Asia plate at a rate of 14 millimetres a year; the Riasi fault accounts for half of that but has no records of major earthquakes since about 4,000 years ago, indicating a major slip, and earthquake, is due.

"In the last 4,000 years, there has only been one major event on the Riasi fault, so there is considerable slip deficit," Meigs said. "When there is a long gap in earthquakes, they have the potential to be bigger unless earthquakes on other faults release the pressure valve. We haven't seen that. By comparison, there have been about 16 earthquakes in the past 4,000 years in the Cascadia Subduction Zone off the Northwest coast of the US," said Meigs.

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Are Manipur's 3 bills with Rashtrapati Bhavan or PMO?

Now, the next question is - whether the President's Secretariat has forwarded the bills to be studied to the Prime Minister's Office or not? If the President's Secretariat has done so, then whether the Prime Minister's Office has the official receipt of the bills forwarded from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to the PMO, and if that is confirmed officially from the PMO, then the question has to be raised on the Prime Minister Narendra Modi that how long will the Prime Minister keep the bills in PMO and how long will PMO study it? If the PMO replies stating that the bills are under consideration and sent for further examination and study to Union Home Ministry, then after confirming its acceptance by the Union Home Ministry, from its official receipt of the bills transferred from the PMO, the Union Home Ministry must share the status of the study of the bills with the Manipur Government's Chief Secretary at the least. If the bills are said to be in the Rashtrapati

Bhavan, then all political parties' delegation led by the Chief Minister of Manipur makes logically sensible and politically matured, but if the bills are confirmed to be in PMO, then the Chief Minister has every right to ask the Prime Minister why the PMO has delayed the process of studying the bills and how long will PMO keep them on its desk? If despite knowing the fact that the bills are in PMO or Union Home Ministry, then the all political parties' delegation is to be best led by one other than the state's Chief Minister because the Chief Minister is the authorised and elected Leader of the people of the state in a democracy.

The state Chief Minister could also deputate at least 2 (two) Principal Secretaries in Manipur Bhavan in New Delhi to only deal with different central ministries, PMO and the Rashtrapati Bhavan for a quick conversion of the bills into act. The state's Residential Commissioner in New Delhi's Manipur Bhavan could also facilitate the speeding up of the

bills to become an act. One Additional Chief Secretary of Manipur must be given an additional charge to oversee the entire communication over the bills with Imphal and New Delhi. Without getting the bureaucratic assessment of the ground realities in New Delhi's North Block and South Block along with the President's Secretariat and PMO over the status of the bills, merely going to New Delhi will prove to be futile and that failure will almost belittle the credibility of almost all the political parties in Manipur, at present. Politically, who will take the credit? The Congress - which has introduced the bills in Manipur Assembly or the BJP in Narendra Modi's control which will ensure the conversion of the bills into act or the JCILPS (Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit System)? Who can also be blamed if the bills do not become an act in 2016 - whether the BJP which is in power in New Delhi is to be blamed or the less assertiveness of the Iboi Singh's

Congress government in Manipur towards the Prime Minister Modi is to be blamed or the absence of the lobbying power or presence of JCILPS in New Delhi is to be questioned?

Leaving aside the politics of taking credit or hurling blame, the larger fundamental question is - where are the bills now? In whose office are the bills placed, at present? Are they in the Prime Minister's Office or the Rashtrapati Bhavan? This question has to be replied not by separate answers but by only a holistic answer from both the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the PMO.

The question of raising issues out of the bills is separate but to prove that the bills are unconstitutional and illegal, and therefore they need to be rejected and opposed has to be decided not on the streets or in New Delhi but only in the Supreme Court of India as the Apex Court only can decide whether any act, after the bills become an act, is constitutional or not. (Ningombam Bupenda Meitei is a poet, author and orator.)