

Editorial

Imphal Friday, November 25, 2016

Does Sangai festival have no room for the physically challenged people?

They too deserve a chance to witness the spectacle Mr Tourism Minister

Well when talks about lifting the physically challenged people is the byline of the politicians particularly Ministers who were/are in charge of Social Welfare Department, nothing seems to be done so far to make the differently abled people to avail the facilities in par with the normal people here in the state of Manipur.

Promises to treat them under special category turned out to be cruel jokes of those in power. Even in recruitments to the government posts except for the name sake reservation of 3%, nothing has been arranged to make them feel free or cared for. Discrimination and the stigmatization haunted the life of the disabled people when it comes to every aspects of life here in the state of Manipur. Viva voce for recruitment in government jobs are conducted late in the evening which is the most inconvenient time for the disabled persons. Moreover, when filling up application forms for application of jobs they are left to fend for themselves and on their own to struggle with the common ordinary people.

The latest example seen is the way the disabled people are being treated in the ongoing Sangai Tourism festival. Of course, some stalls are reserved for them that too after much pleading and begging here and there. There are no special facilities for the disabled people to visit the Sangai festival. Seems like the department of Tourism has forgotten that the disabled people are human beings too, able and wanting to enjoy and appreciate the pleasures and good things in life enjoyed by a common person.

In our yesterday's issue we have highlighted the inconveniences faced by disabled people who come to witness the Sangai Tourism festival which is underway at Hapta Kangjibung Palace compound. For a disabled person it is hard and most of the times impossible to visit the festival on their own. Lack of arrangements for 'barrier-free' entry and exit as well as ramps and support rails drives home the glaring disregard of the organizers for the physically challenged citizens.

Then the distance from the parking space provided for visitors at Sangai festival is a bit far even though it is walking distance for common people. No arrangement is made to make the disabled people convenient in visiting the Sangai festival venue from the parking. Besides, there are no separate entry gates for the disabled people. They have to join the queue along with the normal people, which appeared as harassment to them.

Besides, no ramp is seen constructed at the temporary toilet at the festival site. This attitude of the tourism department is nothing but the worst form of discrimination to the disabled people.

Authorities in the Tourism department should remember that disabled people too have the right to enjoy the Sangai Tourism festival as should be with every public facilities and utilities as provided for the persons with disabilities under the constitution of India.

At least think of the disabled, Mr. Commissioner or Director or whoever is there in the department of the state tourism department. They are no lesser human beings, they too have equal rights with the common people to enjoy and witness the grand Sangai Tourism festival. In acknowledging and providing for their special needs, those responsible for the festival should have displayed their humility, commitment and could have vindicated their oft-repeated promises of caring for the differently-abled persons. For now all the smart-talks of alleviation of the physically challenged persons remains mere wishful thinking for the people of the state.

The Strange Effects of Demonetisation in the Northeast

By Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the demonetisation of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes on the evening of November 8, the northeast has seen an impact similar to the rest of the country. There have been long queues in front of banks, ATM machines running dry of Rs 100 notes and busloads of people arriving in towns from villages to queue up for cash without success. Many have questioned the government for "not having a plan" on how to go about executing the unusual decision without inconveniencing common people. Other than these nation-wide impacts, there have also been some occurrences triggered by the Centre's move that are specific to the region. *The Wire* brings you a summary of those impacts.

Assam: Demonetisation affects wages of tea garden labourers, government steps in

Unlike in other states, the BJP government in Assam took a step, reportedly through "the direct intervention of the prime minister's office", to help tea garden owners to immediately access cash worth lakhs of rupees through the local deputy commissioners' offices, in order to pay their labourers their weekly dues.

About ten lakh tea garden labourers working in over 900 tea gardens of the state survive on payments made in cash every weekend. According to Tea Board of India sources in Guwahati, even a medium-range garden needs liquidity of about Rs 20 lakh for this purpose every Friday or Saturday. According to informal data, the industry needs about Rs 90 crore every week to pay wages. Local news reports said the prime minister's announcement came as a bolt from the blue to the garden

owners who, through various associations, shot off letters to the Reserve Bank of India and the state government pointing out "a possible unrest" among the labourers due to the non-disbursement of wages. In the past, there have been several incidents of violence by labourers when wages were not paid on time.

Aware of such incidents, chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal stepped in on November 10 to direct deputy commissioners in every district to ask tea garden owners how much cash they required. On November 12, state finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told newspapers that the PMO made "special arrangements" for the tea garden management.

As per the arrangement, the management needed to hand over the cheque of the required amount for weekly payments to the commissioners, who would then withdraw the amount from the bank on behalf of the owners.

In the last assembly polls, the BJP mobilised the votes of the tea garden community (mostly labourers attached to different gardens) in order to wrest Assam from the Congress. The community has long been considered the traditional vote base for the Congress, particularly in upper Assam. On November 19, the state will see by-elections in two constituencies. The parliamentary constituency of Lakhimpur, vacated by Sonowal, is particularly crucial in terms of votes from the tea garden community. As per state BJP sources, "The party is also looking with caution on whether the demonetisation decision would have any effect on its prospects in the by-election to the Baithalangso (Scheduled Tribe) assembly seat in Karbi Anglong district." The

election was necessitated in the constituency after sitting MLA Mansing Rongpi left Congress to join the BJP. Rongpi is contesting from the constituency as a BJP candidate.

On November 17, participating in the demonetisation debate in Rajya Sabha, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said, "In Assam, there is a by-election day after tomorrow. So for Assam tea gardens, the central government is giving an exemption. But not to Bengal, why? This should be investigated. In Maharashtra, they have said you can use old notes to buy cinema tickets. You can't buy food but cinema tickets? How are these exemptions being decided?"

Manipur: No newspapers from Friday as owners refuse to accept high denomination notes from hawkers and distributors

In yet another unusual development, newspaper offices have been shut from November 17 onwards in Manipur, leaving the public with no papers to wake up to this Friday. The All Manipur Newspaper Sales and Distribution Association, Newspaper Publishers' Association and the Editors' Guild, in a meeting, took the decision to stop the publication of newspapers in the state, since demonetisation had dried up the availability of lower-denomination notes with the hawkers and distributors. Since they are no longer legal tender, newspaper owners are no longer accepting Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes from the distributors.

Local news reports quoting distributors said, "What has affected their business is also non-availability of the news notes in the banks and the ATMs across the state." A joint statement issued on November 17 by the associations said, "We apologise for the public inconvenience in this regard."

The publishers' association, speaking to media persons in Imphal after the meeting, urged the central government to include media organisations in the list of those exempted from the move for now, who are allowed to transact in the old notes till November 24. Over 12 newspapers are published in Manipur, in both English and vernacular languages.

On Friday, a large number of local reporters attached to various journalists' associations joined the publishers, hawkers and distributors in a day-long protest held in Imphal. A local journalist told *The Wire*, "It reminded us of 2013 when newspapers didn't hit the stands for some days." Distributors refused to pick up newspapers from the publishers then due to a threat from "some unwanted elements", leading the government and the publishers to urge them not to do so.

Besides newspapers and the severe cash crunch, the people of the state, since November 1, have also been reeling under severe shortage of fuel and other necessities of daily use due to an economic blockade called by the United Naga Council (UNC). Many

trucks carrying essential commodities are stuck on the highway.

As per local reports, fuel prices have risen to Rs 500 per litre and cooking gas is now at Rs 3,000 per cylinder. The organisation has been opposing the state government's decision to make Sadar Hills and Jiribam into full-fledged districts, which will re-demarcate the Naga inhabited districts of the state. On November 14, the representatives of UNC met home ministry officials in New Delhi, urging the Centre to intervene. The meeting failed to break the blockade.

Mizoram: Paper replaces money in a village

In a state which flaunts the culture of *Nghahloh Dawr* (unmanned street shops), a novel idea has come out of the demonitisation move.

In Mizoram's Khawbung village bordering Myanmar, a shopkeeper came up with the idea of handing over 'I owe you' chits quoting the amount with a person's signature, to be used for financial transactions to tide over the sudden cash crunch among the villagers.

P.C. Lalmachhuana, who owns a hardware shop in the village market, shared his idea of using paper as promissory notes with other shopkeepers and vegetable sellers, who liked it and gave this option to customers without liquid cash. As per an Aizawl-based reporter, "Being a closed community where everyone knows everyone, the idea is really helping both the villagers and the shopkeepers there. Because of it, there was the usual business on the weekly market day on November 12."

Meanwhile, currency supply continues to be scarce in the capital city of Aizawl, with no ATMs giving out money and banks running out of cash too often.

Assam: Bhutanese currency coming to the rescue of border residents

To overcome the continuing cash crunch, villagers along the Indo-Bhutan border in Assam have resorted to using Bhutanese currency. As per local media reports, the value of these currency notes has risen by over 20% in the last few days, to match that of Indian rupees.

Local residents of Dadguri, Hatisor and other villages in the state's Kokrajhar district said these currencies became "the natural choice" of financial exchange for them "as they are easily available due to the open border". These areas neither have any banks nor ATM machines.

"The nearest bank is 50 km away. Once a week, a van from the State Bank of India comes with money, which has not come this week," a local person was heard telling an Assamese news channel.

According to reports, a Bhutanese note of Rs 500 usually fetches Rs 400 in Indian money in these areas. However, due to the demonitisation move, the trend has reversed, leading people "to lose Rs 100 Indian rupee exchanged for Rs 500 Bhutanese money." (Courtesy *The Wire*)

National & International News

1 soldier and 2 militants killed in encounter in Bandipora

Srinagar, Nov. 25: A soldier and two militants were killed in Kashmir on Friday in a brief firefight, police said.

The police said troops of the 13 Rashtriya Rifles and special operations group surrounded Manzpora village in Bandipora district, following an information about the militant presence.

"With the break of dawn, the flushing out operation was started when the hiding militants opened indiscriminate fire causing critical

injuries to a soldier, who later succumbed," a senior police officer said.

Exchange of fire was stopped in the area, but a combing operation was on.

In a separate operation in Tujjar village of Baramulla district, security forces surrounded a house where a local militant was in.

"After persuasion, the militant surrendered before the security forces. A pistol has been recovered from him," the police said.

Noted journalist Dileep Padgaonkar passes away

Pune, Nov 25: Noted journalist Dileep Padgaonkar, who was a member of the three-member interlocutors group for Jammu and Kashmir, passed away today after brief illness here.

72-year-old Padgaonkar, a former editor of *The Times of India*, was unwell for past several weeks and died at a hospital in Pune, family sources said.

Padgaonkar began his career in journalism at an early age and joined the *Times of India* as its Paris

correspondent after receiving a doctorate in humanities in 1968. He served the paper in various capacities before he was appointed its editor in 1988, a post he held for six years.

In between, from 1978 to 1986, he also worked with UNESCO in Bangkok and Paris.

Padgaonkar was appointed as one of the members of the three-member Interlocutors Group on Jammu and Kashmir, set up by the government after continuous unrest in the Valley in 2008.

Death toll in Iraq bomb claimed by IS rises to 73

Baghdad, Nov. 25: Iraqi hospital and police officials say the death toll from a car bombing south of Baghdad claimed by the Islamic State group has risen to 73, including about 40 Iranian pilgrims.

The officials said Friday that 65 people were wounded in the attack. Earlier, they had put the death toll from the Thursday night bombing at 56. The attack took

place at a gas station on a major highway near the city of Hilla. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

IS claimed the attack in a statement, saying it was a suicide truck bomb. The bombing appears to have targeted a bus with Iranian pilgrims heading home after a major Shiite religious observance in the holy city of Karbala.

MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT NOTIFICATION

Imphal the 24th November, 2016

No.1/13(6)/2014-LA(E)/Rectt.: It is hereby informed to all the candidates who have applied for direct recruitment to the post of Translator in the Manipur Legislative Assembly Secretariat that the viva-voce/interview will be held on 26-11-2016 at 11:00am in the office room of Secretary, Manipur Legislative Assembly Secretariat.

All the candidates are, therefore, informed to appear in the viva-voce/interview on the dates mentioned above along with their original certificate & testimonials etc. without fail.

Time of reporting : 10:30 AM
Time of interview : 11:00 AM onwards
Venue : Assembly Secretariat.

Sd/-
G Tapankumar Sharma
Deputy Secretary (Admn),
Manipur Legislative Assembly

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