

Editorial

Imphal, Tuesday, September 6, 2016

Reality talk : the truth in Manipur's politics

"LIES" no matter how big or small always crack the foundation of "TRUST". There were times when the candidates made false promises during election time and fooled the people to woe the voter. The moment they were elected they often forgot what they had promised to the people often led a live thinking that the general public who elected them are bunch of ignorant fools who can be driven at any direction. There are also times when MLAs talk something to the public and talk another in the session. The sinister concept become phenomenon and now people (almost all) now started thinking that there is no true leader who deserve victory in any of the election. But as the hangover system still has to be followed and continue there cannot be a full stop to the ongoing process. Election is mandatory for a democratic country. And for that candidates are required. In-order to form government there again need political party and those candidates need to be attached to any of the political party to render their service with effective power.

We are not sure if God frequently surfaces in the form of man, as is commonly believed. But what we can be dead certain is the fact that his arch enemy Satan often manifests himself, especially in Manipur, in the form of politicians. These incarnations of Satan, who are now running amok with the people's sensibilities, have cast such a nasty spell on the state that it is well nigh impossible for the people who elected them in the first place, to retain even a semblance of sanity.

There could be no other logical explanation to the goings on in the political arena than taking refuge in the unnatural and the irrational. And for the teeming millions who had inflicted this handful of pests on themselves, there could be no other option but to bemoan their fate. The curse, call it the millenium curse, is well and truly upon us.

It would be an understatement to say that there is something very basically wrong with our polity. Things have now come to such a pass that our state of Manipur can neither move forward nor backward but remain painfully suspended in a maze of anarchy and disorder.

The scourge of politicians have indeed taken a heavy toll, not only of the riches but also of its psyche. The epidemic is now all pervading and has invaded the very roots of the country's integrity and well being thereby impeding its prosperity and peace. Whatever the party, whatever their ideology and hue, when it comes to pursuit of power and pelf, our politicians are at their wily best and very united too in their mission.

If only these characters demonstrate the same solidarity and zeal in nation building, things would have been much different. But alas, their penchant for self-preservation has always won over patriotism, their quest for wealth has always been at the nation's expense and above all their instinct for survival has always prevailed over the nation's.

They have always prospered even as the state disintegrated, and they are always in a position of strength, be it 'secularism or communalism' that is at play. But what about the 25 lakhs people who elected them? They are never in the reckoning. Time to act now.

Manipur in the Backdrop of AFSPA and Irom Sharmila

This write up was presented by Yumnam Rupachandra, Editor-in-Chief, Impact News (Manipur), Secretary General, Editors' Guild Manipur in the late Harendra Nath Barua Memorial Lecture, in Guwahati August 31, 2016

I am humbled to be invited to speak on the 29th Harendra Nath Barua Memorial Lecture, whose legacy as a true nationalist, a freedom fighter, fearless journalist, social crusader, and noted intellectual is something we all crave to follow yet find extremely difficult. Today's generation has a lot to learn from the values that leaders like Harendra Nath espoused, fought and died for. In our small ways we all try to be a fraction of what this great man had been, but distracted as we are by the lures of the present life we fall short-woefully short. But at the same time we are lucky that man like him walked this planet and have left us a hope. He may be long gone but as we gathered here to remember him and his works, I am sure each one of us will find a ray of hope and hopefully walk away inspired by the life of this man lovingly called Asam-Pran. I am indeed proud, I walk the land he once called Home and talked to people he once called His. In comparison my thought and feelings, I express in connection with my home land, Manipur, which I love no less - are insignificant. Bear with me if I fail your expectation. I thank you for your indulgence as I place before this august gathering an issue which impacts the lives of average Manipuri people on daily basis. The implication of the issue, however, goes far beyond the boundaries of my State and hence my choice.

On 9th August 2016 Irom Sharmila, the iconic Human Right activist whose lonely fight against the Armed Forces special Powers act 1958, (AFSPA) an act that has been called "black" and "draconian" took a dramatic turn. After 16 year of nose feeding under judicial custody she finally decided to leave her self inflicting struggle and decided to change strategy, dejected as she was with both with the central and state government that has failed to listen to a non-violent struggle.

She has decided to join politics and hopes to become a Chief Minister in her quest to remove the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. She plans to take on Chief Minister Okram Ibobi in his own turf at Thoubal constituency. She also plans to head the call of her heart and get married to man who flew in from the west to win her heart even as she remain isolated from the entire world.

These are two decision that has drawn a mixed reaction from the people for whose right she had dedicated 16 years of her prime youth. The initial reaction from a section of people opposing both her decisions have pained her even though many other have stood by her to endorse her right to exercise personal freedom.

Her decision to stop her marathon fast had attracted not only the national media but also the International media who landed in a hoard on the day she was to break her fast. After 16 years, the Iron lady enjoyed a brief media attention unparalleled in Manipur in recent times. Signs now indicate she is slowly fading away from the focus of being the Iron Lady who took on the mighty nation whose generals ruled over the civilian government and judiciary recommendations on AFSPA 1958.

Inside the pro AFSPA war rooms there must a collective sigh of relief as it must have become increasingly difficult to defend the Nations Human Rights record of incarcerating a little woman who refused to eat a morsel of food for 16 years and who had to be put under judicial custody every time she is released by a court and she continues her fast. The state Government and its Home

department must also have released a collective sigh as for last 16 years, most of which has been under the regime of Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh who is into his last few month of 3rd consecutive terms, this little woman have kept them all on their toes. Any untoward incident happening to Sharmila while in custody would have burnt the state like the "18 June Uprising" of 2001 which claimed the lives of 18 person and reduced to ash the State Assembly. It would also send all the politicians scurrying like rates to their holes as they know they would be the target of the public's fury. But this is now a passé and game has now shifted to an arena which they are more comfortable with-politics, that is if Sharmila is serious about contesting election.

But all these series of event that unfolded from early part of November 2000, when troops of Assam Rifles massacred 10 innocent civilians in Malom on the second day of the month, in what has been claimed as retaliatory fire, and Sharmila going into indefinite fast is hinged around an archaic act that new independent India adopted from the British and renamed it Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958. It was initially promulgated as Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance 1942 by the British to suppress the Quit India movement. This is an act, that is of no interest or concern to 90 % of India's 1.2 Billion. Except for some parts of the North East Indian states and J & K, this act has no application. It was briefly applied in Punjab and Chandigarh. To an average Indian, any act that empowers the Indian army to fight the enemies of India is a good act. But the fact of the matter is this is an Act that no less than a Prime Minister of India has called it "draconian". Now out of power, former Home Minister P Chidambaram of Congress has termed the act as an "obnoxious law".

The United Nation has asked India to revoke this act as far back as 2012 (31 March) saying it has no place in Indian Democracy. UN Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay has termed the Act as dated and colonial-era act and asked India to repeal it. Assam has seen facets of this act when Assam Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance was invoked by the central government to deal with internal security situation arising out of partition of India in 1947. The rise of Naga National Council (NNC) in what was than far east Assam finally help morph the ordinance into Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act 1958. Later as the act got extended to the rest of north east states, the words Assam and Manipur was dropped to give it its current acronym of AFSPA, 1958. As I understand, entire Assam except for the Guwahati Municipal area is under the Act. ULFA despite its break up remains a challenge to law keepers. Assamese people are no alien to atrocities under the act which had to be used in 1990 to crush the ULFA. Between 1990-1996 there have been reports of disappearance of youths from various villages of Assam. You had your Manipur moments of Thangjam Manorama and the 1500 plus alleged fake encounter cases. Thangjam Manorama was picked up from her house by a team of Security forces in Imphal East area and later found shot dead with multiple bullet wounds, some of it in parts of her body to cover up possible rape. By whatever name the act may be known, the central idea of the act was to give the armed forces a power that enables it to operate with a power beyond the reach of civil courts. It was also enacted in the first place to primarily tackle the

Naga insurgency when the present Nagaland State was part of Assam. The immunity the armed forces enjoyed and power it got from the Act was to enable it to operate in civilian domain to curb secessionism and insurgency. It was this immunity and power that empowered the troops of Assam rifles on that fateful day of 2nd November 2000, to herd 10 civilians including students in a bus stand and mow them down in what it called retaliatory fire. Retaliation to an alleged ambush on the troops, of which there was no signs. This same power has enabled them also to stage over 1500 encounters which is in process of being proved to be fakes. At least 6 cases picked by the Supreme Court and entrusted to a

Commission has been proved fake. It was 5 days of ridiculous explanations from the keepers of the law at Imphal sitting of the Justice Hegde SC appointed Commission. The commission did not have to try hard to pick any holes in the stories of our brave and highly decorated law enforcing officers. The report is out and recommendation made but the wall put up by the army is as ever strong. There has been a regime change in the centre. The NDA has replaced the Congress. But the change that Sharmila was looking for has not come. AFSPA remains as entrenched as ever. The centre has not even considered making it more "Humane" as recommended by Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission on AFSPA. (To be cont.....)

National & International News

Explosions in Afghan capital Kabul kill at least 24

Kabul, Sept. 6: A car bomb hit the centre of Kabul late on Monday, just hours after a Taliban suicide attack near the Defence Ministry killed at least 24 people including a number of senior security officials, and wounded 91 others, officials said.

Gunmen who followed the initial attack appeared to have barricaded themselves into a building and security forces blocked off a large area in the city centre.

After several hours of quiet overnight, sporadic gunfire and explosions could be heard as day broke but there was no immediate comment on the operation from police and no claim of responsibility. Just a month before a conference in Brussels where international donors are expected to pledge continued financial support to Afghanistan, the attacks highlighted the precarious security climate in the capital.

Earlier on Monday, twin blasts in quick succession tore through an afternoon crowd in a bustling area of the city close to the Defence Ministry.

The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility for that attack, in which a suicide bomber caught security forces personnel and civilians who rushed to help victims of the first explosion.

"When the first explosion happened people crowded to the site and then the second blast occurred, which was really powerful and killed lots

of people," said Samiullah Safi, who witnessed the attack. An army general and two senior police commanders were among the dead, a Defence Ministry official said. Another official said the deputy head of President Ashraf Ghani's personal protection force had also been killed.

The double bombing came less than two weeks after gunmen attacked the American University+ in Kabul, killing 13 people.

It was the deadliest attack in Kabul since at least 80 people were killed by a suicide bomber who targeted a demonstration on July 23. That assault was claimed by Islamic State. The Taliban's ability to conduct coordinated high profile attacks in the capital Kabul has piled pressure on the Western-backed government, which has struggled to reassure a war-weary population that it can guarantee security.

Afghanistan's foreign partners, concerned about the ability of the security forces to withstand Taliban violence, are expected to pledge support over coming years at the Brussels conference, three months after NATO members reaffirmed their commitment at a meeting in Warsaw.

Outside Kabul, the insurgents have stepped up their military campaign, threatening Laskar Gah, capital of the strategic southern province of Helmand as well as Kunduz, the northern city they briefly took last year.

Curfew lifted from Srinagar, death toll climbs to 72

PTI Srinagar, Sep 6: Curfew was today lifted from entire Srinagar city following improvement in the situation even as the death toll in the clashes between security forces and protestors climbed to 72 with a youth succumbing to injuries. Musaib Nagoo, who was injured during clashes between protestors and security forces on Sunday in Sopore town of Baramulla district, succumbed to injuries at a hospital here last night, a police official said. With this death, the toll in the ongoing unrest has reached to 72 while more than 10,000 others have been injured. Although authorities lifted curfew from the seven police station areas of the city after two days, normal activities remained suspended due to a separatist sponsored strike. Curfew has been lifted from entire Srinagar city and so no area in Kashmir is under curfew today, a police spokesman said. He said curfew was lifted following improvement in the situation. The spokesman, however, said

restrictions on the assembly of people would remain in forces across the Valley to maintain law and order.

Shops, business establishments and petrol pumps continued to remain shut during day time. They only open in the evening when the separatists have announced relaxation in the strike for some days of the week.

Schools, colleges and other educational institutions also continued to remain closed.

However, the attendance in government offices and banks has showed signs of improvement since the past few days, officials said. Public transport continued to be off the roads.

The separatists, who are spearheading the ongoing agitation, have extended the shutdown programme till September 8. As part of their weekly protest programme, they have called for peaceful protests by women today, while announcing a 12-hour relaxation in the strike from 6 PM today.

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