

Editorial

Imphal Monday, April 3, 2017

Nature's warning

When men starts disregarding the subtle balance of nature or neglect its inherent importance to the very existence of other life forms, she sometimes showed her wrath to make the humans refresh their fickle memories and reemphasise her importance.

For decades the people of the region have totally forgotten that it is mother nature that has been making the lives of every living creature enjoy the temperate and lush green atmosphere.

In a world where technology had reached its height, where leaders of the western nations talk about building modern cities under the sea or somewhere in the sky, we in this portion of the earth do not know how to make good use of what Mother Nature has so generously gifted us. It is a known fact that during dry season people of this region faced acute shortage of water and during rainy season the place is usually flooded. This phenomenon has been experiencing by the people for the past few decades. No people of this generation have ever heard our great great grandfathers facing such a disastrous phenomenon. This clearly shows that the present vicious circle of floods and droughts is the creation of this generation. One cannot simply blame on the mass deforestation as a result of the drastic situation being faced by the people. Politicians and those who are running the government cannot make their way out of this by blaming the citizens for not following the orders of the government. Droughts and floods which were once only learnt through geography books and newspapers have now become routine event of this little state since the last two three decades. As for the Imphalites from a small child who can read and write to those who hold top post in the government departments or those doing doctoral degree in any discipline, everyone knows that the kind of flood or draught that we the people of Manipur are facing every year is a man made one created by lack of proper planning and/or implementations on water management. Every time when the people faced such a situation there will be much hue and cry from the side of the general public demanding the government for a proper water policy for the state. Even at the state assembly, some of the MLAs had brought up the issue and drew the attention of the government for proper management of water by framing a water policy. Concerned Ministers in the government assured to look into the matter without fail but no visible action has been seen taken up. This is perhaps because those in power and are responsible for looking after this section of department - say, for example the Irrigation and Flood Control Department (IFCD) and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) seems to be deliberately waiting for occurrence of flood or draught. Everyone knows that when there is flood the Ministers or the authority of the government department looking after it are entitle to spend huge amount of money in the name of taking up relief measures. This fund so reportedly utilized, only benefited those who are actually assigned to utilize it. So, if there is no draught or flood then there are no special packages or huge relief funds to be utilized or rather managed to arrange in predetermined shares amongst themselves. Which means that those in the government never wanted a pragmatic solution to the floods or draughts in this state which have adequate amount of rainfall every year. Hopefully, the new government, continuing with its no-nonsense approach towards accelerating the pace of progress in the state brings about that much required change for the better.

Somali Pirates Hijack Indian Commercial Ship: Report

Reuters
Bosasso, April 3: Pirates have hijacked an Indian commercial ship off the coast of Somalia and the vessel is heading toward the shore, a former government anti-piracy official told Reuters on Monday. "We understand Somali pirates hijacked a commercial Indian ship and (it is heading) towards Somalia shores," Abdurizak Mohamed Dirir, a former director of the anti-piracy agency in Somalia's semi-autonomous Puntland region, said. Graeme Gibbons, Puntland UK-based Dryad Maritime

Security said industry sources had told him the vessel was en route to Bosasso from Dubai when it was hijacked on Saturday. The pirates were on board and were taking the ship and its 11 crew members to Eyl in Puntland, he said. Last month, Somali pirates hijacked an oil tanker, the first commanding of a vessel since 2012, but released it after a fight with Puntland's marine force. The hijacking followed an outpouring of anger by locals over foreign fishermen flooding into their waters, some of whom have licences to fish there.

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National & International News

Supreme Court liquor ban: States move to skirt 'none-for-the-road' order as pubs, bars bleed

Chandigarh, April 3: From re-designating highways to seeking legal redress, state and city authorities across India are hunting for ways to circumvent last week's Supreme Court order banning the sale of liquor within 500m of national and state highways.

The first weekend after the court order saw the hospitality industry lose tens of crores of rupees in lost business, prompting pub, bar and restaurant owners to plead with the authorities to bail them out.

Here's a quick lowdown on the impact of the ban on industry and how the states are dealing with it: **Chandigarh hoteliers claim Rs 3 crore loss in first weekend**

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Chandigarh claimed the hospitality industry will take a big hit. "This weekend, the hospitality industry in Chandigarh will have incurred a loss of more than Rs 3 crore. We will protest at the Sector 17 Plaza on Monday," said Arvinder Pal Singh, the president of the association.

He added that the association also planned to request the UT administration to declare the stretch from Sectors 35-43 — national highway 5 part of the route towards Ludhiana — as a 'major district road'.

"We will meet the deputy commissioner, the UT adviser and if required, we will approach the UT administrator as well and hand over a memorandum," he added.

"The order has hit nearly 150 restaurants, bars and other commercial establishments in the tricity. In Chandigarh, there are 88 such establishments, of which 63 are bars and 25 are beer bars," Singh added.

Kerala eyes options, including seeking 3-month exemption

With its major revenue share drying up, Kerala is weighing options such as de-notification of state highways to district highways to get around the Supreme Court order. The state is also considering approaching the apex court for a three-month exemption.

Out of the Rs 40,000 crore annual revenue of the state, Rs 10,000 crore is from the liquor trade. Kerala has one of the highest per capita consumption of liquor in the country — 10.2 litres annually against the national average of 5.6 litres.

The state's tourism industry also fears the liquor ban will hurt. Tourism insiders say the industry is already reeling under the effect of demonetisation, increase of service tax from 4.5% to 9%, and high premium for tourist vehicles.

Srinagar, April 3: An Indian Army Jawan was arrested today at Srinagar Airport for carrying two live grenades. The Jawan was identified as belonging to the 17 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles from Darjeeling.

During early questioning, the Jawan reportedly said he was unaware of the presence of grenades in his possession. Later, the Jawan revealed that he was carrying the grenades for "catching fish" by carrying blast in the river. He also informed that two more junior level officers were involved and he was being used as a "couriers", according to Army sources.

"He (the Jawan) was taken into custody after two hand grenades were recovered from his possession during the search at the main gate of the airport," an official of the anti-hijacking force said, adding, "the jawan is being questioned about the explosives."

The Jawan was arrested when he was on his way to Delhi. The Jawan is being interrogated further. He was posted at Uri. Security agencies are investigating the angle of "mischief" or an "oversight" that caused the development, reports ANI. "Necessary action will be taken against him. I am

"We are fast losing out to some of the neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka. Last year, the state lost many conferences and meetings due to liquor curbs. We fear the latest decision will lead to further slip in footfall," said EM Najeeb, president of the Confederation of Kerala Tourism Industry.

To add to the government's worries, the Kerala State Beverages Corporation, the government-run retail giant, is facing stiff resistance in densely-populated areas while relocating 159 closed outlets. With the SC order coming into force on April 1, 557 beer and wine outlets, 159 government-owned outlets, 1,008 toddy shops, 18 clubs and 11 bars in five-star hotels have downed shutters.

The Kerala Tourism Development Corporation too has been badly hit, closing down 29 of the 40 beer parlours in the state. About 40% of its revenue comes from these parlours. "Densely-populated state's situation is different from others. We have sought a legal opinion that whether the state will get three months exemption. We haven't thought of a short cut to duck the apex court order," said state PWD and excise minister G Sudhakaran.

The state excise department also fears that unavailability of quality liquor will force regular drinkers to hooch and narcotic substances. **Sunday no flow in 500 Mumbai restaurants and bars**

Approximately 500 restaurants and bars serving liquor within 500m of the Mumbai's highways remained shut on Sunday. Many regular visitors to the wine shops, bars and restaurants along the western express, eastern express and national highways passing through suburbs and Thane said they were shocked to learn that the joints refused to serve liquor.

Following the Supreme Court's clarification that its order applied to all establishments including bars — thus nullifying the state government's attempt to exempt these bars from the directive — the state excise department ensured that the order was fully enforced. The department swung into action on Saturday and sealed godowns in which liquor was stored. Hotels were given the option to serve only food and not liquor if they wished to operate.

However, few hoteliers opted to do this and many preferred to shut shop. Adarsh Shetty, president, Indian Hotels and Restaurant Association (AHAR), said, "Around 500 hotels in the suburbs fall within this restricted zone. They have all shut.

head to the airport now." Jammu and Kashmir DGP SP Vaid told reporters.

The arrest came on a day when terrorists attacked Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Jammu and Kashmir's Nowhatta with grenades, injuring as many as 15 security

personnel, reported ANI. A police jawan was also killed in the grenade attack, while the injured were taken to a nearby hospital for immediate treatment.

Sourabh Kulkarni, 33, went to Goregaon Social at Oberoi Mall on Sunday and was shocked to see a notice at the entrance stating liquor would not be served. "No other restaurant nearby was willing to serve alcohol."

Vilas Rao, an executive with a multinational company, was taken by surprise after he saw that all liquor joints near the Eastern Express Highway in Chembur were closed. The SC order will hit 15,699 establishments and cost the Maharashtra government Rs 7,000 crore every year.

UP state highways turn district roads to circumvent Supreme Court's liquor ban

The Uttar Pradesh government has taken a page from the Chandigarh model to circumvent the Supreme Court order. It has simply rebranded many of its major state highways as district roads.

"The internal roads of the city (currently notified as state highways) connected to a bypass are being declared as additional district roads while city bypasses are being declared as state highways," said a notification issued by Sadakant, additional chief secretary of the Uttar Pradesh public works department, on Saturday.

The Uttar Pradesh government finished renaming the roads barely a few hours before the apex court's order banning liquor vends on highways came into effect at March 31 midnight.

Uttar Pradesh makes Rs 6,000 crore from the proceeds of 8,000-odd outlets, including bars on the highways. Of these, around 203 outlets in Lucknow, 100 in Kanpur, and 221 in Varanasi faced imminent closure due to the court order.

While the notification is bound to legalise a large number of these liquor vends, it would take time to conduct a fresh survey of the ones it can't protect. And the government doesn't want to take any chances. "We will comply with the apex court's orders," a senior state excise department official told HT.

The Lucknow Sharab Association (LSA) said many shops in the state capital fell under the Supreme Court order's ambit due to ill-considered decisions made by the public works department. "Several areas were included under state and national highways hurriedly. This is why shops from Tile Wali Masjid to Koneshwar crossing, Thakurganj,

Balaganj and Dubagga have been forced to shut down," said LSA leader Kanhai Lal Maurya. "And we weren't told about this until we paid our licence fees!"

Liquor licences, which are given away every March, happen to be a major source of income for the government. LSA president SP Singh has already approached the high court, pleading that several shops have been wrongly shown to be a part of the state highway.

Rajasthan too redesignates roads
The Rajasthan government has declared state highways passing through habitated areas as urban roads or district roads to circumvent the Supreme Court order.

Like in most states, excise duty is one of the biggest revenue sources for Rajasthan. In 2015-16, the state earned Rs 6,700 crore from excise duty and it fixed a target of Rs 7,300 for 2016-17. In a bid to avoid the loss, the state's public works department (PWD) recently issued an order for de-notification of 190 km of 21 state highways passing through 16 districts and measuring 3,029 km as urban roads or other district roads. "This would mean that most liquor vends would continue," an official said.

3,000 liquor licences not renewed in Goa; Parrikar assures of solution

Goa's Excise Department on Saturday did not renew the licences of over 3,000 liquor vends dotting the national highways. Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar, however, assured that efforts would be made to ensure that the livelihood of affected traders is not compromised.

At a meeting chaired by Parrikar and attended by Chief Secretary Dharmendra Sharma and top excise and finance department officials, a possibility of relocating liquor businesses from the close proximity of national highways to the interior areas was also discussed.

"It is one of the alternatives. After discussions, a proper policy will be worked out for relocating affected businesses," sources said, adding that for now existing excise laws allow bar and liquor store owners to shift their unsold stock to new premises.

One of the most popular tourism destinations in the country, Goa is known for its liberal liquor regime, where alcohol is taxed less as compared to other states. There are over 11,000 licensed liquor vendors in the state, including bar and restaurant licence holders and more than 3,000 such outlets are facing the axe following the apex court order.

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terrorists attacked Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Jammu and Kashmir's Nowhatta with grenades, injuring as many as 15 security

personnel, reported ANI. A police jawan was also killed in the grenade attack, while the injured were taken to a nearby hospital for immediate treatment.

Singapore blocks visas for Indian IT professionals

TNN
New Delhi, April 3: While the focus has been on the US, visas for IT professionals to work in Singapore have dropped "to a trickle", prompting the government to put on hold the review of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) citing violation of the trade pact.

With Indian companies being advised to hire local talent, they are looking at relocating some of their operations to other countries in the region. From HCL and TCS, which were the early movers to Singapore, the list has expanded to include Infosys, Wipro, Cognizant and L&T Infotech.

"This (visa problem) has been lingering for a while but since early-2016, visas are down to a trickle. All Indian companies have received

communication on fair consideration, which basically means hiring local people," Nasscom president R Chandrasekhar told TOI. For all practical purposes, visas have stopped for our people, added another industry executive. Prompted by problems for IT and the banking sector — where there is lack of transparency on the capital requirement, the Indian government has now decided against expanding the scope of goods where import duties would be cut unless the concerns of domestic industry are addressed.

Sources told TOI that Singapore authorities were insisting on what is called "economic needs test" (ENT), which requires compliance with certain economic criteria, to deny access to Indian professionals. "They are doing it

despite the CECA clearly stating that there will be no ENT or quotas on agreed services. This is a violation of the agreement," said an Indian officer, who did not wish to be identified due to the ongoing negotiations.

The view in the government is that it is necessary to assess the benefits that Indian industry derives from the agreement before going ahead with agreeing to expand its scope. Services trade globally faces such barriers for professionals with countries insisting on fulfilling various conditions, including ensuring that a local professional is given the first chance if he or she possesses the same or similar talent. In recent years, Singapore has emerged as a key opponent of allowing foreign professionals into the island nation.