

Editorial

Imphal Monday, March 27, 2017

Towards sustainable self-reliance

The unmitigated fixation of the public over the 'Framework Agreement' or rather its contents has been hogging the limelight as well as the collective imagination of the people of the state. While the resulting aura of secrecy and imagined indignation is understandable, it is time to move on and make pragmatic decisions that should influence and steer the future of the state towards positive development and tangible progress. Just a week after the 139-days long economic siege over the state by the UNC, things are back to square one and from the looks of it, the object difficulties and hardships which was forced upon have already begun to fade from the public memory. The undying optimism of the people can be applauded, but such an outlook, if not given a reality check, could very well overlook the ground reality and be made to repent later for opportunities missed and precautions ignored.

At the core of every struggle or confrontation, besides the issues of right versus wrong which by itself is relative and subject to arbitration, there always is an underlying economic aspect. When the ideological mask has been pulled off and all bets are off, the economics of any conflict will rear its ugly head with unfailing certainty, and it is for us to read the signs and weight the efforts and the outcome. There never has been an exception to the situations faced in the state thus far. If anything, the present condition of the state is more a manifestation of the failure to read the signs and take up corrective measures accordingly.

The latest 139-days of trials and tribulations should serve as the best reminder of the need to mobilize the people towards self-reliance and develop a work-oriented culture that could prove to be the difference between survival and doom for the state as a separate and distinct entity. Ignoring the fact will be to our own disadvantage, and seeking handouts from the centre for every minor governmental hiccup has reduced the state to a mere statistical entity. Till date, no public development schemes and projects have really taken off or are exactly benefitting the poor and the needy as intended. The abject lack of sustainability or practicality of such schemes and efforts has raised more questions than they endeavor to answer. The real truth? - accountability and integrity in implementation, or more precisely the lack thereof.

Having gone through the incessant turmoil and turbulence of social and communal tensions and conflicts, the people of the state have reason to believe that the new Biren-led regime would take away precious lessons from the failures and shortcomings from the previous government and use them to turn things around for the better. Until the state becomes economically developed and self-reliant with the various defunct production units and opportunities being utilized, we could not hope for real change. A radical approach towards inclusive development needs to be drawn up and implemented in right earnest to negate all and every disturbances both from within and without. The present calm may very well prove to be the one before the storm.

Thirteen arrested in Gujarat communal clash

PIT Ahmedabad, March 27: Thirteen persons have been arrested in connection with the communal violence at Vadavali village in Patan district which left one dead, police said today.

"We arrested 13 persons yesterday after a combing operation in villages neighbouring Vadavali from where the crowd came and attacked residents," said Inspector of Chanasma police station, CP Sadiya. "Those arrested so far belong to Sunsar and Dharpuri villages. More arrests are likely today," the officer said.

One person had died and six others sustained severe injuries after violence broke out following a minor

fight between two students of different communities on Saturday over a petty issue.

Some vehicles and a few houses were also set on fire by the clashing crowd.

Cross FIRs were filed at Chanasma police station against a total of 45 accused and a crowd comprising over 3,000 people under various sections of the Indian Penal Code including 302 (murder), 147, 148, 149 (rioting armed with deadly weapons, unlawful assembly), 395, 397 (robbery), 435 and 436 (mischievous fire).

Sadiya said over 100 police personnel and two companies of State Reserve Police were posted at the village.

National & International News

United Airlines bars teenage girls in leggings from flight

Reuters, March 27: Two teenage girls wearing leggings were barred from boarding a United Airlines flight on Sunday because they did not meet a dress code for special pass travelers, a company spokesman said amid a furor on social media.

The two girls, who were traveling with a companion, would not have been turned away for wearing leggings had they been paying customers. United spokesman Jonathan Guerin said as the airline responded to the backlash.

"(The two girls) were instructed that they couldn't board until they corrected their outfit. They were fine with it and completely understood," Guerin said, adding that all three passengers missed the flight. He did not know if they had boarded a later plane or made alternate travel arrangements.

Though the three passengers did not complain about their treatment, another traveler, Shannon Watts, who overheard the discussion touched off a firestorm on social media with a series of tweets describing a policy she suggested was unfairly targeting women and girls.

"This behavior is sexist and sexualizes young girls," Watts said on Twitter. "Not to mention that the families were mortified and inconvenienced."

United pass travelers are typically company employees or their friends or family members.

Watts' tweets and United's defense

of it touched a raw nerve for many women and girls who have made leggings a staple in their wardrobes. The popularity of leggings has sparked criticism that they are inappropriate attire under certain circumstances. Some schools have barred girls from wearing them to class.

Social media lit up with outrage against the policy and the airline for its response to the initial outcry. Celebrities chimed in with humorous protests.

"I have flown united before with literally no pants on. Just a top as a dress. Next time I will wear only jeans and a top," model Chrissy Teigen tweeted.

United later put out a statement titled: "To our customers ... Your

leggings are welcome!" that explained the policy for passholders in greater detail.

That policy also bars midriff-baring tops, attire that reveals undergarments or is designated as sleepwear or swimwear, mini-skirts, shorts that fall less than 3 inches above the knee or dirty or torn clothing.

Guerin conceded that the airline, in its initial response to the flap, could have done a better job of explaining the situation and countering apparently inaccurate information about the incident that appeared on Twitter.

"We'll definitely take something away from today, but we'll continue to engage with our customers (on social media)," he said.

Eight school pupils feared dead in Japan ski resort avalanche

AFP Tokyo, March 27: An avalanche killed eight high school students on a mountain-climbing trip in Japan on Monday, with more than 30 people reportedly injured. More than 100 troops have been deployed in a major rescue effort after the avalanche hit ski slopes in Tochigi prefecture, with television footage showing rescuers climbing mountains as ambulances stood by.

A group of 52 students and 11 teachers from seven high schools were on a three-day mountaineering outing when disaster struck, according to authorities.

A warning had been issued for heavy snow and possible avalanches from Sunday until Monday in the area north of Tokyo, with the local weather agency forecasting snowfall of some 30 centimetres (about 12 inches).

At least eight students, mostly from Otawara High School in Tochigi, were found with no vital signs, an official with a prefectural

disaster task force told AFP. In Japan, deaths in such circumstances are not announced officially until doctors can confirm them.

More than 30 people have been injured according to news agency Kyodo.

"We still don't know how many teachers are included among the victims," an official said.

The avalanche struck in the town of Nasu 120 kilometres (75 miles) north of Tokyo on the final day of the excursion, Tochigi authorities

said, adding that soldiers were sent for rescue operations at the request of the prefecture's governor.

"This is an annual event and we never had a major accident before," one of the teachers told Jiji Press. "I am really shocked."

The ski resort had been closed for the season, according to the operator's website, with the lift stopped and no skiers at the site.

But some of its facilities were made available for the high school mountaineering trip organised by local physical education authorities.

Aadhaar cannot be made mandatory for welfare schemes, SC says

New Delhi, March 27: In a petition filed against the government's move to make Aadhaar card compulsory for a spate of schemes, the Supreme Court Monday observed that the Aadhaar cannot be made mandatory for availing benefits under the government's welfare schemes.

The observation reiterates the stance taken by the Apex Court on an earlier plea in 2015, while maintaining it will not allow an urgent hearing in the matter.

The SC observation, however, did not rule out the possibility of Aadhaar being made mandatory for non-benefit schemes.

"Aadhaar can't be mandatory for social welfare schemes but can be used for non-benefit schemes. Our earlier order is very clear. You can't stop government from using Aadhaar for non-benefit schemes

like Income Tax."

In October 2015 the SC had allowed voluntary use of Aadhaar cards in welfare schemes including MGNREGA, pension and provident fund schemes.

A five-judge constitutional bench had back then put a caveat in its interim order for the government saying Aadhaar card scheme will be voluntary till such time as it is finally declared to be otherwise by the court.

The government's ambitious Aadhaar project has gained significant ground with nearly 112 crore people already on board. Close to 50 percent digitally able people having their Aadhaar linked to bank accounts.

The project, believed to be somewhat akin to the social security number in some developed countries, albeit not legally mandatory, now covers

nearly 50 government schemes.

Recently, the government linked the mid-day meal scheme with Aadhaar even as it said those without the card would continue to benefit from the scheme.

Among non-welfare schemes, obtaining a driver's licence, getting a mobile phone connection, availing the employee provident fund and tax filing have all been brought under the Aadhaar ambit.

However, multiple petitions have been filed with the Apex Court concerning privacy of citizens considering data collection for issue of Aadhaar is done by private agencies.

While the SC agreed data collection by private agencies is not a good idea it said a seven-judge bench has to be set up to hear the pleas challenging the Aadhaar but "right now it is not possible."

5.1-magnitude quake shakes China

PIT Beijing, Mar 27: An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale today jolted southwest China's Yangbi County.

The epicentre of the quake was located in the county's Ajia and Paping villages, where some houses were reportedly damaged, said Wang Caixun, a publicity official of Yangbi County in Yunnan Province.

Fire fighters and medical teams are heading to the villages, Wang said. The epicentre was monitored at a depth of about 12 kilometres, China Earthquake Networks Centre said.

Four tremors measuring 3 to 4.7 on the Richter scale hit the same region before and after the quake, the centre said. There were no reports of any casualties, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Thousands evacuated as cyclone bears down on Australia

Cairns, March 27: Thousands of people including tourists were being evacuated on Monday as northern Australia braced for a powerful cyclone packing destructive winds with warnings of major structural damage and surging tides.

Cyclone Debbie has been forming off the coast of Queensland state over recent days, the Bureau of Meteorology said, and is expected to hit land after daybreak Tuesday morning. Residents are being warned to prepare for the worst storm to pummel the state since Cyclone Yasi in 2011, which ripped homes

from their foundations and devastated crops.

"This is going to be a nasty cyclone," Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said, adding that structural damage and power outages were likely. "These wind gusts are going to be absolutely huge and my primary concern is making sure that families are safe."

So far more 3,500 people have been evacuated between the towns of Home Hill and Proserpine, around 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of Townsville, a popular tourist hotspot used to access the Great Barrier Reef.

Another 2,000 will be advised to leave throughout Monday, Palaszczuk said. More than 100 schools have been closed, along with local ports.

The premier urged residents to do as emergency service personnel asked, amid reports some people were refusing to leave.

"You may not think that this cyclone is going to be rough. But the winds that we are expecting in the Townsville region are going to be more severe than those that were experienced through Cyclone Yasi," she said.

"So there is no time for

complacency at all." Queensland Police Commissioner Ian Stewart said the storm already appeared to have claimed the life of a tourist, as many visitors flee areas in the firing line.

"There has been a fatal traffic accident near Proserpine and we believe it is associated with this weather event and it looks like a tourist has lost their life in that traffic accident," he said.

"The message is very, very clear at this stage. It is time to think very logically about your safety and the safety of your family."

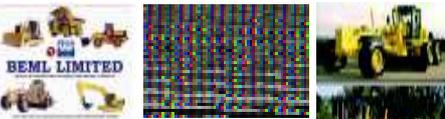
The meteorology bureau said Debbie was currently a category three cyclone on a scale of five but was expected to build to a four by the time it crosses land somewhere between Townsville and Proserpine, with wind gusts of up to 280 kmh near the centre.

"Storm surge is also a risk factor, and if the cyclone crosses the coast around high tide this will enhance these effects," it said.

"People living in coastal or low-lying areas prone to flooding should follow the advice of local emergency services and relocate while there is time."

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