

Editorial

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Not so hard verdict, but perhaps a blow to the state executive

Manipur High Court verdict which declared UNC's economic blockade as 'illegal' has put a million dollar questions to the citizen of the state. Learned justice of the Manipur High Court may have every reason for declaring activities of the UNC which has been enforcing prolonged economic blockade as illegal even as every newspaper readers knows that there is already a Supreme Court ruling which said that any form of blockade is illegal.

The economic blockade has entered 127 days today. Two leaders of the UNC Mr. Gaidon Kamei and S Stephen Lamkang are in judicial custody. Other office bearers of the UNC were also summoned by the respected High Court in its proceeding to the PIL filed by RK Joysana expressing concern over the situation arising out of the economic blockade. Yet, there is no turning back to the economic blockade.

Well, even as the verdict fails to satisfy the expectation of many people, the High Court verdict is timely and it does carries multiple interpretations. Not only that it remains the law enforcers about this blockade being illegal but also it did indirectly hinted the executives on their failure to deal with the issue that has been putting the people of the state at stake. To many people, declaring the activities of UNC is equal to declaration of the organization as illegal. But law is law and it cannot be so until exact words has been stated, it is only the economic blockade that is illegal and not the UNC which is enforcing the economic blockade.

As according to the views of the noted scholar Prof. Bimol Akojiam of JNU - if an organization/body indulges in an illegal act does not necessarily mean that the organization/body is an "illegal" organization/body (insofar as "illegal" here means "unlawful" organization/body as some organizations have been announced (e.g., UNLF/RPF/KYKL etc). Well in that case UNC is still legal.

Leaving aside the legal interpretation of organizations or individuals, what actually needed to ponder upon is whether organization can't be treated as individual. Organisation is a body form by a group of people with similar ideology having agreed to work on similar aims. It is more like an individual as the individual to think and act with his or her body organ. One question wanted to put here is that if some Mr. X vandalise a vehicle and if supposed he was caught, do we have to say that Mr. X is still innocent as it is the act of vandalising the vehicle which is illegal.

Until and unless a law expert give interpretation of the verdict it will be still early to assume whether UNC is illegal as its activities is declared illegal.

The verdict is also no difference from what the state government had played days back. A legislature party meeting adopted resolution to urge the center for declaring UNC as unlawful body. However, there were evidences that state government announced an organization as unlawful in its own.

It is known that Section 16 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908 enables the state government to declare an association to be 'unlawful'. Such a declaration can be made if the state government is of the opinion that the association interferes with the administration of law, maintenance of law and order or constitutes a danger to public peace.

Acting under Section 16 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908, Orissa, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu have declared the CPI (Maoist) an unlawful association. Bihar has declared the MCC and the CPI (ML)-PW as unlawful associations. Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have declared CPI (Maoist) as an unlawful association under their respective state Acts"

The court says UNC's economic blockade illegal, the government says it is the center that can announced the UNC as "unlawful". Something very serious politics seems to be going here.

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Invigorating debate session held....

It was one of the endeavors undertaken by the Assamese Student Association to create awareness and make the youngsters know about the immense contribution made by such a great litterateur of Assam - Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami. The event was graced by Professor Dilip Baruah, former principal of Cotton College and an alumnus of Delhi University, as the speaker of the motion.

He also enlightened the youngsters with his motivational words and encouraged the youth in their great future endeavors.

"I must congratulate the ASA for organizing such an event. It is a great tribute to the litterateur and I am sure they will keep it going for the years to come. This will bring together students from Delhi, Punjab and other parts of the country and they will get to know

more about the northeast. This will breach the information deficit about the region", said Dilip Baruah, former principal of Cotton College, Guwahati

The judges' panel included some of the eminent individuals from Assam, like Dr. Sunitalima Duarah, associate professor, Handique Girls College, Guwahati, Prof. Shaswati Goswami, associate professor, IIMC, New Delhi and Rakhee Kalita, associate professor, Cotton College.

It was a fair judgment by the panel of judges. After a grueling competition among the youngsters, Kuldeep Bhattacharjya and Vivek Lohia grabbed the best speaker's award as well as the best team, representing Delhi College of Arts and Commerce.

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By : Barnali Das

Take any project from the Mars Orbiter Mission to the simultaneous launch of 104 Satellites, the contribution of Indian women scientists in their success is being hailed and celebrated not only by India but also across the globe. Scientists like Dr. Tessy Thomas, N. Valarmathi, Minal Sampath, Anuradha TK, Ritu Karidhal, Mousmita Dutta, Nandini Harinath have made every Indian feel extremely proud.

Just like these scientists there are a lot of women who are trendsetters and are glowing examples of excellence and knowledge in diverse domains. This, however, is only one end of the spectrum wherein educated, successful and empowered Indian women are positioned. A vast majority of women at the other end of the spectrum still face enormous amount of sexism, discrimination and oppression. They are still far removed from demanding their rightful place in life and society and thereby, exercise their fundamental rights including the Right to Equality (article 14), enshrined in the Constitution of India. The only way forward, therefore, is to reduce that gap and balance both ends of the spectrum.

Fortunately, we are on the right path, working on the principles of gender equity. The contribution and participation of women in the work force and in the political arena at the grass roots level has enabled India to climb 21 spots in the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum in 2016. It has climbed to 87th rank in 2016, which is a vast improvement from being ranked at 108th in 2015. It has substantially improved due to attainment of education, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival and political empowerment. (Source: <https://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=IND>) It

Marching Towards Equity

ranks 9th on political empowerment in the world, which is a major achievement and also underline the inherent strength of the democratic model our country has adopted. However, there are no two opinions that there is a long way to go as far as gender equity is concerned and one of the major stumbling blocks is how women are perceived by our society. While the legal and constitutional framework protecting rights of cross sections of women is extremely empowering; liberal and progressive awareness about these provisions is abysmally low. Even if legal awareness is there, accessing justice, navigating through the long winding legal tangle, is no mean task for any common man or woman.

Similarly, gender imbalance and gender discriminations, leading to a steady decline in the female population of the country since 1961, is a well-known stigma in the growth story of India. The multi-sectoral *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* Scheme was launched in 2015 by the Prime Minister to address precisely this issue and reverse the decline. The declining numbers, however, reflect only part of the story. It is merely a symptom, albeit a grave one, of the low social status of women and girls. It amply reflects how the deep rooted patriarchal social structure in India governs the entire life cycle continuum of neglect, abuse, inequality and discriminations in a woman's life. Such discriminations and violation of basic human rights of women cut across class and demographics and manifest in minor to grave instances of sexism, experienced on a day to day basis.

Even today, it is quite common to come across such instances of women being prevented from watching TV or listening to the radio so that they do not get "spoiled" being compelled to drop out of school, forced to marry early etc. These discriminations might be serious or minor, outrageously

offensive or so nagging and normalized that one doesn't even feel the need to protest. Misogyny and violence against women and girls are increasing at an alarming rate.

WeAreEqual Campaign of WCD Given such a context, awareness, mindset change along with social and behavioral change towards creating an enabling environment for women and girls to achieve equality, becomes a constant necessity. It also becomes a necessity to engage with men and boys who are equal stakeholders in the process. It is imperative that men and boys show the mirror to our society and become equal partners in the war against sexism, inequality and gender discriminations.

Targeted at raising awareness, Ministry of Women and Child Development initiated a social media campaign #WeAreEqual recently on 13th February, to highlight the need for equal opportunity to women in the fields of education, health, nutrition, safety and dignity. The Campaign is part of a series of initiatives to mark International Women's Day on 8th March including the Nari Shakti Awards ceremony. It appeals to all to participate in the campaign saying, "YOU and I, WE are one. This International Women's Day, share your slogan of equality and join the change."

The campaign is getting a lot of traction on social media as more and more celebrities, sports stars and everyday heroes have joined in. Both men and women have been posting the #WeAreEqual messages on social media for positive affirmation of gender equality. They are also communicating their personal stories and efforts towards creation of a gender just society. Additionally, it indicates ownership of common people of not only the importance and necessity of gender equality but also their willingness to take responsibility towards

invigorating change. Popular actor Aliya Bhatt and Indian Skipper Virat Kohli will also lend their support to the Campaign as indicated by the Ministry of Women & Child Development earlier. Superstar Amitabh Bachchan, Wrestler Sangram Singh, Olympian Boxer Mary Kom, Dia Mirza and ISRO scientists K Themmozhi Selvi, Subha Varier and Minal Rohit etc. have already lent their support to the campaign. Social influencers like them can not only boost traction but also inspire change.

For the Campaign, Mary Kom has posted as follows, "I want every girl to have the liberty to pursue her dreams. Give them more recognition in sports."

Amitabh Bachchan has delivered the #WeAreEqual message in a very emphatic manner by making this declaration for the campaign: "When I die, the assets that I shall leave behind, shall be shared equally between my daughter and my son! #genderequality #WeAreEqual." Needless to say, this message very effectively advocates for equal property rights of men and women.

Common people are also sharing their personal stories and messages with this hash tag, reiterating its necessity, application in daily life, acknowledging the world of sexism faced by women every day and that it is a valid message to send out. There is absolutely no doubt that India needs to maintain its tempo in the march towards achieving gender equity and a gender just society where men and women have equal access to all resources and opportunities. Every little effort, every campaign, every initiative counts! And every stakeholder has to believe in it.

(Author is a freelance writer and a development communication professional, currently serving as Head, Communication at SOS Children's Villages of India. Views are personal.)

National & International News

Government expresses concern to Sri Lanka over Tamil Nadu fisherman's killing

New Delhi, March 7: The Centre on Tuesday expressed its concern to the Sri Lankan government over the killing of an Indian fisherman, allegedly by the Sri Lankan Navy on Monday.

"Government of India is deeply concerned at the killing of an Indian fisherman. Our High Commissioner to Sri Lanka has taken up the matter with the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka," highly placed sources in the government told TOI.

The source added that Sri Lankan Navy has promised a full and thorough investigation into the incident.

Meanwhile, protests erupted in Tamil Nadu's Rameswaram after 22-year-old Britso, a fisherman from Thangachimadam, was shot dead on Monday, allegedly by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel while he was fishing in a mechanised boat at a short distance off Katchatheevu islet. Two more fishermen reportedly suffered injuries in the firing.

Hundreds of fishermen staged a demonstration at Thangachimadam, demanding the arrest of the of the Lankan navy men involved in the incident.

The protesting fishermen also refused to accept Britso's body

unless foreign minister Sushma Swaraj visits the island and gives them assurance that such incidents will not happen in the future.

Tamil Nadu chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami announced Rs 5 lakh ex gratia for the victim's family and Rs 1 lakh for the fishermen injured in the shooting.

In a statement, the chief minister said the fishermen set out for fishing on Monday in a mechanised boat from Rameswaram fishing base. The Lankan Navy opened fire on the innocent fishermen, without any warning or provocation, at 9.30 PM.

"I am deeply saddened by the

death of Britso of Thangachimadam, who died on the spot. Saron is getting treatment at Ramanathapuram government hospital. I have ordered the district administration to offer high class treatment to him," Palaniswami said in a statement.

DMK president MK Stalin also condemned the killing of the fisherman and urged Centre to take strong action.

"It's high time the Central Government reacts strongly to this problem. The Central Government cannot be a mute spectator. It should take up this issue with Indian ambassador in Sri Lanka or the High Commission of Sri Lanka in India," Stalin said.

Nine injured in blast in Bhopal-Ujjain passenger train

Indore, March 7: At least nine persons were injured in a blast that took place in Bhopal-Ujjain passenger train at Jabari station near Shujalpur town of Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday morning.

The nature of the blast is yet to be ascertained.

The explosion took place at around 9.50AM in the last compartment, adjacent to the guard coach, railway officials said.

The blast occurred in a general coach of the train between 9.30 AM and 10 AM when it was on its way to Ujjain from Bhopal, Railway PRO, Indore, Jitendra Kumar Jayant said.

Railways has released helpline numbers: 0731-1072, 07312521046, 07342560906.

The glass panes of the windows in the general coach were damaged because of the blast, which occurred when the train was about to reach Jabdi Station. Following the blast, the train came to a halt.

Smoke engulfed the general coach, causing panic among the passengers who rushed out to save themselves.

A relief train with rescue officials and doctors from Bhopal has been dispatched to the spot. The train was taken to Kalapipal station, where probe was on.

"Our team has reached the spot and the reason behind the blast can be confirmed only after investigation," said a spokesman of Ratlam Division of the Western Railways.

7 minor girls in Kerala orphanage raped for 2 months

Kerala, March 7: Seven minor girls at an orphanage in Kerala have alleged being raped over a period of two months, police said on Monday.

Cops have registered a case and detained five people as well.

The girls, all in the age group of 14-15 years, were staying at the orphanage at Muttill in Kalpetta in Wayanad district.

The incident came to light after. One of the girls was seen coming out from a nearby shop in suspicious circumstances and was questioned by the orphanage staff, following which a complaint was lodged with the police, they said.

A probe has been launched into the

case and some persons have been questioned, a top police official said, adding no arrests have been made so far.

Any other information about the incident was not known immediately and police said more details would be shared as the probe progresses.

The incident comes close on the heels of a 16-year-old girl being allegedly raped by a church vicar at Kottiyoor in neighbouring Kannur district.

The girl gave birth to a baby boy on February 7 after which the priest was arrested. Seven other accused in the case, five of them nuns and a doctor, are still absconding.