

Editorial

Local body election matters

As local body election is knocking on the door, the long run for candidates contending for the coveted seats of power is on the home stretch now. And with it, major political parties are polarizing to winnable contestants to strengthen their respective political party. Even though candidates are not contesting from any political party, there is always affiliation to one party or the other. This is panchayat election and issues at the level of panchayat is different from those in the municipal areas. Development activities like road infrastructures, conditions of villagers are major concern for this election.

At some part of the villages, Roads are being laid with stones and soil which presents a frustrating experience for the public with harmful dust posing a threat to health and the rough surface causing accidents. Come rain and the damage is complete. Such incomprehensible efforts to hoodwink the public is nothing new, and is the preferred method to extract the most political mileage by every political party without exception for as long as one would care to remember. The irony though, is the public is not buying any of it, and therefore the whole futile exercise has come to represent the foolhardy misconceptions of those drunk with power and resources but are insulated from the real concerns and problems of the general public.

Why is the government and its implementing agencies so consistently stepping on its own toes when it comes to the actual delivery of developmental projects envisaged to benefit the people of the state? Why is it so apparently difficult to draw up plans which would remain functional for at least a decade, if not more? And why is there no visible mechanism in place to effectively monitor the activities and pull up erring parties when it comes to such development activities for betterment of the people? And why are those at the helm of affairs of the state still unable to deliver efficiently and with earnestness any single project without focusing their entire attention to retaining the biggest possible cut for themselves?

Development and progress is an ongoing process and the manner of implementing such projects and plans subsequently determine the pace of growth. It would not be too far off the mark to observe that the present turmoil and social unrest is a manifestation of the prolonged and systematic failure and deliberate attempts by those in authority to divert resources to their personal coffers at the risk of jeopardizing the projects. Siphoning of public resources has become so institutionalized that the question has shifted from 'why?' to 'how much?' It is the accumulation of the little niggling discontents and frustrations being made to endure over the years as those who are put to power indulges in looting the resources of the state, promotes nepotism and practices corruption with blatant disregard for the sentiments of the common people that has snowballed into an issue that has taken on a more sinister hue threatening the very existence of the state as we know today. It is the very system of governance and administration being practiced in the state at present which gives rise to elements feeding and prospering on the uncertainties and insecurities of the people. It is time for those in power to consider the general public as more than mere numbers they need to shore up to achieve the coveted positions. The very people are the ones who made them what they are, and disregarding their own source of power and influence will only spell their doom.

Five killed, four injured in Bihar mishap

PTI Muzaffarpur, Sep 11: Five persons, including four policemen, were killed and four others injured after a speeding truck ran over them in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, a police official said today.

The incident took place soon after midnight near Akurha village on NH-28, when the truck driver panicked on being asked to stop for checking on suspicion that it was carrying liquor. Senior Superintendent of police, Vivek Kumar said. The four policemen and a civilian were killed on the spot. The injured included DSP (West) Krishna Murari Prasad and Panapur

police outpost in-charge, B N Jha. The truck tried to flee after mowing down the policemen and civilians, but met with an accident, he said, adding, the vehicle has been impounded.

The driver and cleaner of the truck, however, escaped, the SSP said. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem at Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital here and the injured admitted to the same hospital for treatment, the SSP said. Three of the five victims have been identified as constables Munna Chaudhary, Vishwamohan Sharma and Farman Ansari, all bodyguards of Prasad.

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National & International News

2 militants killed, 1 arrested during encounter in Kulgam

PTI Srinagar, Sept 11: Security forces today killed two unidentified militants in an overnight encounter in Kulgam district of Kashmir while the third was caught alive, police said.

Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Khudwani area of Kulgam district following specific information about the presence of some militants there, a police spokesperson said.

During searches, the militants opened fire at the security forces who retaliated, leading to a gunfight.

Two militants were killed in the encounter, while the third one was captured alive, he said

adding their identity and group affiliation was being ascertained. In a similar case yesterday, two local Hizbul Mujahideen militants were killed while the third surrendered during an encounter with security forces in Shopian district.

Death toll now at 90 as aftershocks rattle southern Mexico

AP Juchitan, Sept 11: Life for many has moved outdoors in the quake-shocked city of Juchitan, where a third of the homes are reported uninhabitable and repeated aftershocks have scared people away from many structures still standing.

The city yesterday was littered with rubble from Thursday night's magnitude 8.1 earthquake, which killed at least 90 people across southern Mexico at least three dozen of them in Juchitan itself.

Officials in Oaxaca and Chiapas states said thousands of houses and hundreds of schools had been damaged or destroyed.

Hundreds of thousands of people were reported to be without water

service. Many people continued to sleep outside, fearful of more collapses, as strong aftershocks continued to rattle the town, including a magnitude 5.2 jolt yesterday.

Some Juchitecos seeking solace trekked through the destruction to find an open-air Mass on Sunday since many of the churches were either damaged or left vacant until they could be checked.

On Sunday evening, Bishop Oscar Campos Contreras conducted Mass for about 200 people at an open-air basketball court next to a collapsed school and in front of the heavily damaged St. Vicente Ferrer church, which lost one bell tower and very nearly the other.

Campos told those gathered that

Mass would continue to be held outdoors for the foreseeable future, "because here we feel safer."

Friends and family embraced and cried, overcome with emotion stored for days.

The bishop's homily was part lesson and part pep talk for a community stunned by the destruction.

"There is no one who can say: 'Nothing happened to me because of my money, because of my strength or my youth or my prestige or my fame nothing happened,'" Campos said. "We are all weak."

Yesenia Cruz Jimenez was relieved to hear Mass would be held outdoors. Her house broke apart

and her family is still sleeping in the yard, suffering rain and aftershocks. "There is nowhere safe in town," she said. "It is safer here and people can concentrate better in this place."

Local officials said they had counted nearly 800 aftershocks of all sizes since the big quake, and the US Geological Survey counted nearly 60 with a magnitude of 4.5 or greater.

Oaxaca Gov. Alejandro Murat said Sunday that the death toll in his state had risen to 71, while officials have reported 19 killed in Chiapas and Tabasco states.

Juchitan's downtown streets grew increasingly congested Sunday as dump trucks and heavy equipment hauled away debris and pushed smaller piles of debris into larger mountains of rubble.

Over 100 Army officers move Supreme Court claiming 'discrimination' in promotion

TNN New Delhi, Sept. 11: Defence minister Nirmla Sitharaman faces a new challenge as over 100 lieutenant colonels and majors of the Army have moved the Supreme Court over alleged "discrimination and injustice" in promotion of officers of the services corps.

"This act of Army and Union government (discrimination in promotion) has created tremendous injustice to the petitioners and others which is detrimental to the morale of the officers and, in turn, to the defence of the country," they said. What should worry the government is the petitioners' plea not to deploy services corps in operational areas along with the combat arms if parity in promotion is not granted.

In their joint petition, with Lt Col P K Choudhary in the lead, they

said services corps officers were deployed in operational areas and faced challenges similar to officers of combat arms corps. Why then were officers of services corps deprived of promotional avenues available to officers of combat arms, they asked through counsel Neela Gokhale.

"The action of the Army and the Union government in selectively treating officers of services corps as 'operational' for the purpose of deployment in operational areas but 'non-operational' for the purpose of being considered for promotion is violating the fundamental rights of the petitioners and other middle level Army officers," the petition said. The petitioners claimed that continued discrimination in promotion was telling upon the morale of services corps' officers who had discharged their duty in a dedicated manner for more than

10-15 years.

On February 15 last year, the SC had resolved an earlier petition by services corps officers complaining of meagre allocation of colonel posts for promotion. It was done with the help of a report by the Ajay Vikram Singh Committee, which was tasked post-Kargil war to reduce the age of commanders of battalions and brigades.

Without questioning the SC's February 15 decision, the petitioners said they were challenging the selective treatment of services corps officers as 'operational' when the need arose and relegating them to 'non-operational' when it concerned promotions.

"The petitioners also wish to draw attention of the Supreme Court that the sacrifices of officers of services corps are at par, if not more, with officers of combat arms

corps in the Indian Army," they said. "Officers from all other corps (like Signals) in the Indian Army, who are similarly placed as the petitioners, are being considered as 'operational' for all purposes while officers of services corps have been discriminated arbitrarily despite the fact that there is no difference in deployment and other duties which they are bound by the Army Act to discharge," they added.

The petitioners urged the SC to order the government and the Army "to uphold the law that the combat services are an integral and operational arm of the regular Indian Army and treat combat services at par with the other corps of regular Army".

"In the alternative, the government and Army may be restrained from routinely deploying services corps in any area of operation, save and except in circumstances of exigencies," they said.

SC to decide CBI's appeal against Karti on September 18

PTI New Delhi, Sept 11: The Supreme Court today fixed on September 18 the appeal of the CBI challenging the Madras High Court order staying government's look out circular against Karti Chidambaram, son of former Union Minister P Chidambaram, in a graft case. The FIR lodged by the CBI on May 15 had alleged irregularities in Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) clearance to INX Media for receiving overseas funds to the tune of Rs 305 crore in 2007 when Karti's father was the Finance Minister.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A M

Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud, meanwhile, said that its direction staying the Madras High Court order on look out circular will remain in force in the meantime and as a result, Karti will not be able to leave India.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing Karti, alleged that all baseless allegations have been levelled against Karti and challenged the probe agency to being out the details of any property which the Chidambarams cannot account for. Additional Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, vehemently countered the submission and said that the probe

was at a very crucial stage and substantial information have been given to the court in a sealed cover.

The bench then fixed the matter for final disposal next Monday. On September 1, the CBI had told the apex court that there were "good, cogent" reasons for issuing look out circular against Karti.

On August 18, the court had asked Karti to appear before the investigating officer at the CBI headquarters here for questioning in the case.

The bench had given the probe agency the liberty to question Karti as many times it wanted.

Prior to this, the apex court had said that Karti would not be allowed to leave India without subjecting himself to investigation in the case. The court had then stayed the Madras High Court order putting on hold the LOC issued by the Centre against Karti.

The CBI had claimed that the FDI proposal of the media house, cleared by Chidambaram, was "fallacious".

The FIR was registered on May 15 before the special CBI judge here and the registration of the case was followed by searches at the residences and offices of Karti and his friends on May 16.

Taiwanese activist confesses to Chinese subversion charges

Taipei, Sept. 11: A Taiwanese democracy activist confessed Monday to charges of attempting to subvert Chinese government power during a trial in China that has been slammed by rights activists and further soured cross-strait relations.

Lee Ming-cheh appeared alongside a Chinese co-defendant named Peng Yuhua at Yueyang intermediate court in central Hunan province, according to video footage posted on the court's official social media account.

A shaven-headed Lee appeared nervous as he confessed to charges of "subverting state power", stating

that he had written and distributed online articles that criticised China's ruling Communist Party and promoted democracy among other topics.

"I know that my behaviour definitely violated Chinese law," said Lee, an NGO worker who was arrested during a trip to the Chinese mainland in March.

"The television news I watched in prison has made me understand China's development a little better. I know that my past thinking and the information I received was mistaken," he said.

"This mistaken thinking led me to violate the law. I express my guilt

and regrets."

The articles were written at the direction of Peng, who he had become acquainted with online and had met several times on the Chinese mainland. Lee said under questioning from a prosecutor. Lee's supporters gathered outside the courthouse in Yueyang city, according to photos on social media.

His wife and mother arrived in Hunan province Sunday to attend the trial. Both women were accompanied by several officials from Taiwan's semi-official Straits Exchange Foundation, which handles relations with the

mainland.

Lee has long supported civil society organisations and activists in China, according to Amnesty International. He had shared "Taiwan's democratic experiences" with his Chinese friends online for many years and often mailed books to them, said the Taiwan Association for Human Rights. After Lee went missing Chinese authorities confirmed he was being investigated for suspected activities "endangering national security".

The language the two co-defendants used to confess their crimes sounded rehearsed, according to Patrick Poon, a China researcher at Amnesty International.