

Editorial

Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2018

Technology to the rescue

Our state, though nestled on the far fringe of the country with unfriendly hilly terrain to welcome visitors, does not lag much behind in terms of awareness and utilization of available technological developments, and one thing which the people of the state has taken to with gusto, more out of necessity rather than convenience is the information technology or, simply put- IT.

The advent of this amazing technology has indeed changed the way the public view things. People can now understand a broader perspective of all issues and hence, can form their own informed judgement. The curiosity and inquisitiveness of the people has also been aroused, leading to a more scientific temper of mind that questions various beliefs.

It has also undoubtedly brought the world closer, thereby easing the frustrations of having to deal with the difficulties of communication and transport, or that inextricable feeling of being sidelined. While IT is not the panacea to the shortcomings of the society, it is indeed a game-changing aspect, and can be utilized to even effect in our state.

Take for instance the protracted problem of distributing, and more importantly, that of collecting bills for various public facilities being provided by the Government. How many of us have really seen a water bill in the last decade or so? And who should we inquire about any matter relating to any Government Department in the state. The obvious solution in this time and age is to Google, which is possible only if and when the information and details are made available by the Government. And when online stores are successfully functioning despite the initial concerns regarding the safety of the payment methods, such fears has been proven unfounded.

The whole concept of implementing IT in Governance, as envisaged in the NeGP (National eGovernance Project) Vision, to "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man" should be made functional, with additional services included as required to facilitate generation of revenue for the state. A fully functional Common Service Centre (CSC) implemented under the NeGP formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) are Information and Communication Technology enabled front end service delivery points at the village level for delivery of Government, Financial, Social and Private Sector services in the areas of Agriculture, health, education, entertainment, FMCG products, banking, insurance, pension, utility payments etc.

The big question is: are these centers functioning as required, or are they just formalities to make up the numbers in the report sheet of the Government? What steps have the Government taken up to create awareness amongst the public so as to educate them, and ultimately enable them to access the services provided at these centers? It is clearly evident that there need a lot to be done before such supposedly beneficial services reach the public and make their lives that little more convenient.

A concerted proactive approach to create awareness and to educate the mass on the development activities and services should be carried out to ensure that such beneficial and positive steps are not wasted.

Youth succumbs to injuries, toll in Shopian firing climbs to 3

PTI Srinagar, Jan 31: The death toll in the alleged Army firing on a mob in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir today rose to three after a critically injured youth succumbed to injuries.

Rayees Ahmad, who was among the nine persons injured in the Army firing last week, succumbed to injuries at a hospital here this morning, police said.

With this, death toll in the firing

incident at Ganovpora area of Shopian has risen to three.

The Army opened fire on a stone-pelting mob on January 27. The Army claimed it had opened fire in self defence after seven of its personnel were injured.

The state government has ordered a magisterial probe into the incident. Police filed an FIR under sections 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder) against Army personnel, including a Major, involved in the incident.

2 labourers buried in landslide in Samba; rescued

PTI Jammu, Jan 31: Two labourers were trapped when a landslide took place during digging to lay cables along the Mansar road in the mountainous belt of Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district and were rescued later, police said today. The labourers, of a private company, were digging a 5- foot deep canal to lay cables, suddenly there was a landslide in the

mountainous belt on the Samba-Mansar road at village Satah in the district yesterday, they said.

The two labourers were trapped, they said, adding the Mountaineering Rescue Team of Police came to the spot and undertook rescue operation and brought them out.

One was safely rescued, while the other received minor injuries and was hospitalised, the police said.

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National & International News

On campaign trail in Meghalaya, Rahul Gandhi promises to protect traditions

HT Guwahati, Jan. 31: Congress president Rahul Gandhi said on Tuesday that the party would safeguard cultures, traditions and way of thinking of people in Meghalaya where elections are due on February 27. "We are going to work with you, defend your languages and tribal customs because we are proud of them and we are convinced that without customs, cultures and languages, India will be weakened," he told party workers in Jowai, 66 km east from state capital Shillong. Gandhi, who began a two-day visit to the state on Tuesday, repeated the same promise in his interactions later in the evening in Shillong where the party organised a Celebration of

Peace concert showcasing the state's diverse cultures.

His statement comes against the backdrop of the Centre's proposed ban on sale and purchase of cattle from animal markets for slaughter that led to a big debate in Meghalaya last year. Two district presidents of BJP had resigned over the issue.

Despite assurances from the BJP's top brass that it would not impose any restrictions on food habits of people in Meghalaya, a section of voters is still suspicious of the saffron party imposing ban on beef consumption if it comes to power. According to the 2011 census, 86% of Meghalaya's total population comprises scheduled tribes. Beef is an important part of

the diet in the state where nearly 75% people are Christians.

The Congress chief also took on the BJP for its pre-poll sop of offering Rs 70 crore to churches and religious institutions in the state. The BJP is making a serious bid to capture power in the 60-member assembly, but Gandhi insisted that the people of Meghalaya can't be bought.

"I was very sad to hear that BJP offered money to our churches in what I consider to be a huge sum to the people of Meghalaya and the churches. There is no price, there is no amount of money that can buy the people of Meghalaya," Gandhi said.

Meghalaya is one of the four states in the country where Congress is in

power. Mizoram, another Christian majority state which goes to polls later this year, is the second state in the region where the party is ruling. In recent weeks, Congress has lost seven of its MLAs — five of them to National People's Party, one to BJP and another to a regional outfit — severely hurting its prospects of retaining power.

But Gandhi told party workers that while BJP and NPP might be able to lure away a few leaders, it won't affect the ruling party's chances of winning.

An ally of the NDA government at Centre and coalition partner of BJP-led government in Manipur, NPP has decided to contest Meghalaya polls alone — keeping doors open for a post poll alliance with the saffron party.

Earthquake of magnitude 6.1 hits Hindukush region in Afghanistan, tremors felt in Delhi-NCR

ET Online Afghanistan, Jan. 31: A massive 6.1-magnitude earthquake with epicentre in the Hindukush region of Afghanistan shook several parts of Delhi and NCR on Wednesday. Tremors were felt in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Eastern Uzbekistan. In India, tremors were also felt in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi-NCR and other parts of north India. The quake struck 270

km (167 miles) northeast of Kabul in the Hindu Kush mountains, at a deep 180 km, the European Mediterranean Seismological Centre said.

The quake, which was felt in the Delhi-NCR region as well as the Kashmir Valley, led to panic in some parts with people rushing outdoors for safety.

There were no reports of any damage due to the earthquake,

officials said.

"The epicentre of the quake was near the Afghanistan- Tajikistan border and occurred at a depth of around 190 kilometres," an official said in Srinagar.

In New Delhi, Delhi Metro trains were halted briefly but services were not disrupted, said a Delhi Metro official.

The tremors were felt strongly in the Jammu and Kashmir summer

capital and other parts of the Valley, with people rushing out of buildings and vehicles.

Officials snapped electricity supply briefly as a precautionary measure.

For many people in Kashmir, the tremors recalled the nightmare of the October 2005 earthquake that flattened wide parts of Jammu and Kashmir on either side of the Line of Control.

Trump signs order to keep Guantanamo military prison open

Agence France-Presse Washington, Jan. 31: US President Donald Trump announced Tuesday he would keep Guantanamo Bay open, breaking from his predecessor Barack Obama's lengthy and ultimately failed efforts to shutter the maligned detention facility.

"I just signed an order directing Secretary Mattis to re-examine our military detention policy and to keep open the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay," Trump said, in his State of the Union address to Congress, in keeping with a campaign promise.

Under president George W Bush, the US military hastily constructed a prison camp on Guantanamo Bay, located on the US naval base on the eastern tip of Cuba, in the months following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

At first, inmates were held in cages and fenced in with razor wire, and conditions for the orange jumpsuit-clad detainees provoked a global outcry in 2002.

That early facility, known as Camp X-Ray, was soon replaced with more permanent structures and today, Guantanamo Bay consists of numerous high-security prison buildings.

At the height of its operations after 9/11, the facility held 780 people, detained mostly for their alleged ties to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Since then, hundreds have been transferred back to their home countries or other places.

Some of the most notorious inmates, including several alleged 9/11 co-conspirators, among them accused mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, are still awaiting trial. Their cases have been beset by legal woes at Guantanamo, where a bespoke criminal justice system grants detainees — who are considered "unprivileged enemy belligerents" — only some of the legal rights that US federal courts guarantee.

Of the 41 inmates remaining at Guantanamo, about 26 are trapped in legal purgatory.

These so-called "forever prisoners" have never been charged — yet they have been deemed too dangerous to release. Some were cleared for release under Obama, but have been stranded at Guantanamo under the Trump administration.

'Bad dudes'
On the campaign trail, Trump famously vowed he would load Guantanamo with "bad dudes," and said it would be "fine" if US terror suspects were sent there for trial. In 2009, soon after he was sworn in, Obama ordered the prison to be closed within a year, and no new inmate has been sent there since early 2008.

Political bickering, vehement Republican opposition and foreign allies' reluctance to take in the prisoners meant Obama could not close Guantanamo, though the population dropped from 242 to 41 under his watch.

Since becoming president, Trump has toyed with the idea of sending Americans to Guantanamo, though federal judges would likely bar any such attempt.

In October, he suggested that the man accused of carrying out a deadly truck attack along a bike path in New York could be sent to Guantanamo, but he later backed off

the idea.

Another case that could potentially bring Guantanamo into legal focus is that of a US citizen who was captured in Syria and had allegedly been fighting for the Islamic State group.

The man, whose name has not been released, is apparently being held in Iraq.

The American Civil Liberties Union has taken up his case and a federal judge has ruled that the US must give it advance notice before transferring the man overseas.

That would allow time for the ACLU to mount a legal challenge.

Gold worth Rs 13 lakh seized at Delhi airport

PTI New Delhi, Jan 31: The customs department today seized gold worth Rs 13 lakh from a man at Delhi international airport, officials said. The accused was intercepted after his arrival at the Indira Gandhi International Airport from Italian capital Rome.

A search resulted in the recovery of 585 grams of gold concealed in his hand baggage, the officials said. The gold seized is valued at Rs 13 lakh, the officials said, adding that the passenger was yet to be arrested.

Avalanche warning in Kashmir districts

PTI Srinagar, Jan 31: A government agency today issued an avalanche warning in several districts of Jammu and Kashmir for next 24 hours, shortly after a 6.2 magnitude earthquake on the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border region jolted parts of north India.

The Snow and Avalanche Study Establishment has "informed that medium danger avalanche warning of level-3 exists in higher reaches of Baramulla district and low danger warning of level-2 in Kupwara, Bandipore, Shopian and Kargil Districts," an official spokesman here said.

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