

Editorial

Friday, November 2, 2018

A suggestion for a strong democracy

Media plays vital roles in the running of proper effective governance. Be it in the dictatorial form of government or democracy, media has been always considered as a tool to run their respective government. The only differences of treating media in the above two case is that - in dictatorial form of government media is put under full control of the regime while in democracy media is free to criticize the government or is left to the wisdom of those running the media houses. Saying so, those in the media never left aside on what has been going on in the country where media is kept under their full control. When military junta ruled Burma now Myanmar, there was no free media in the country. Those existed are government controlled and had been published/broadcast for strengthening the military regime. But then, people working in the field of media business penetrated the country and let the people across the country aware of what actually has been happening in the country. The restoration of democracy in neighbouring Myanmar is perhaps because of the journalists across the globe who had been highlighting the issue of the country through various channels of Mass Media.

In a two days interaction programme with the journalists from Myanmar who had visited this region of India, on the invitation of the government of India, with journalist from the state as well as some few from the Capital city of India, it is learnt that, the change of regime in the Myanmar country from dictatorship to democracy, has also brought tremendous changes in the field of journalism and mass media. Now the media are let free to make their own decision of what to write and what not. As per what the delegates from the neighbouring Myanmar said, it was only in the year 2011 that the concept of free media has been understood and the government of Myanmar has let free the scribe work without the control of the authority. Yet the country is yet to go more journeys to make sure that the journalists of the country are protected at any cost.

Now coming to India, those in the field of media and mass communication are somewhat lucky comparing to the neighbouring counterpart. Before Independent, there were writers who highlighted the conditions of the Indians during British rule. The mass mobilization for struggling against the British colonial regime was done through various mode of media channels - print, public meeting and others etc. Had there been a internet, British would not have been able to ruled the country for over 200 years.

In Manipur the concept of print medium mass communication came late. It was only after Hijam Irabot started circulating a newspaper written by hand to spread his struggled, the importance of media was slowly understood. Since the launching of "Meitei Chanu" the hand written newspapers by Hijam Irabot, the happening in the society of that time have been spread among the people of the state.

It cannot be denied that Mass media and other forms of communication technology have an enormous influence in helping to shape public opinion and underlying sentiment. But then the irony is that in India particularly in Manipur, those running the government are trying everything to keep the media houses under their control.

But it should be remembered that keeping the media under control in a democratic form of government will never do any good. It's better to let this fourth estate to perform their duty under their own wisdom. Democracy can only be successful when media is let free and guarantee full freedom of speech.

Pass Book lost

I have lost my Bank Pass Book bearing A/C no. 10929387535 issued by SBI MG Avenue on the way between my residence and Thangal Bazar MG Avenue Road on 25/10/2018. Finders are requested to handover the same to the undersigned.

Sd/-
Thoudam Imo Singh
Nagamapal Khwai Bramahpur,
Imphal, A/P Langol Aying Leikai, Type - II
#9383279205

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to 'Imphal Times' can be sent to our e-mail : imphaltimes@gmail.com. For advertisement kindly contact: - 0385-2452159 (O). For time being readers can reach the office at Cell Phone No. 9862860745 for any purpose.

PPFA asks authority for stringent actions, appeals people for maintaining communal harmony

By Our Correspondent
T Navajyoti
Guwahati, Nov. 2

Patriotic People's Front Assam (PPFA), expressing utter dismay over the killing of five common people in eastern Assam last evening, has asked the authority to take stringent actions against the culprits. The forum of nationalists also appeals the residents of both Brahmaputra and Barak valleys to maintain communal harmony in the time of crisis.

It may be noted that five people belonging to a particular linguistic community, were targeted by suspected militants in Dhola locality of Tinsukia district on Thursday evening. A group of armed militants, understandably belonged to United Liberation Front of Assam (Independent),

had abducted six youths from a Dhaba and later gunned down near Brahmaputra river. Five of them died on the spot and one is in the hospital with injuries.

Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal as usual condemned the killing of innocent people and conveyed his sympathy to the bereaved families. He also stated that strong actions would be taken against the perpetrators of this dastardly act. Union home minister Rajnath Singh also expressed deep anguish over the civilian casualties. Terming it a reprehensible act of mindless violence, Singh had asked the State chief minister, also in charge of home portfolio, to take strict possible action against the perpetrators.

PPFA, which had earlier expressed serious concern over the 'government inactions against

fabricated and unruly comment & activities by some individuals', demanded the authority to take swift & proper actions against the culprits.

"What was shocking that, the State government and concerned authorities remained mute spectators to such unruly comments & activities by some individuals in the public domain. Assam chief minister should have treated it as his call," asserted the forum. The forum, in its earlier statement said that on the issue of citizenship amendment exercises (by the Union government in New Delhi), a section of individuals in Assam started making illogical and unruly comments. "We agree that the voice of dissidents should be raised in need, but that must not encourage indulging in illegal activities," stated the PPFA. Needs to be mentioned that,

following the Assam Bandh called by many organizations and Asom Gana Parishad sponsored rally against the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 on 23 October, various individuals representing different organizations of the State had made outrageous comments against a particular community.

"Some of them even did not hesitate to declare that they would attack the opponents to impose their point of views," said the PPFA statement.

Finally it appealed to everyone including the politicians, former rebel leaders, social activists etc to exercise restraints over comments on various socio-political issues and respect the opponent views. It also requested the social media users to be judicious while putting their views in alternate media maintaining due decencies.

Contd. from yesterday Issue

Governance, State Capability and Public Services: Power reforms in Manipur

Dr. Sylvia Yambem,
ICSSR-Post Doctoral Fellow,
Department of Political Science, Manipur University.

Saxena also notes that the Indian state's capacity to deliver public services have declined considerably as a result of the "rising indiscipline and a growing belief widely shared among the political and bureaucratic elite that state is an arena where public office is to be used for private ends" (2005, 1). The Indian civil service today is deeply engaged in partisan politics to the extent that the virtues of integrity, neutrality, morale are declining, while in the political domain accountability has shifted from the people who are the electorates to vested interests behind the respective MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) such as the contractors, corrupt bureaucrats etc. This unfortunately however has given rise to a situation of weak governance particularly manifested in the poor capability of the state to deliver public services. Consequently the public service delivery system in India according to Saxena is: mired in a system where the incentives for effective service delivery are weak, and political patronage is a way of life. Highly trained doctors seldom wish to serve in remote rural areas. Since those who do serve are rarely monitored, the penalties for not being at work are low. Even when present, they treat poor people badly (2005, 2).

State capability to deliver public services in India is thus challenged most importantly by problems of weak administrative machinery that has failed to institutionalize an effective accountable transparent public service delivery system. The Indian state has also failed to institutionalize an inclusive model encouraging institutional or organizational capability of the Indian states. Rather, what has happened is that while some states have been able to improve state capability, some have not. This is true in the case of Manipur too.

Weak capability of the state in Manipur

The administrative capability of state institutions in Manipur is characterized as lacking effective planning and co-ordination between line departments, low

utilization of funds, bribery, absence of monitoring and grievance redressal systems, lack of personnel, distortion in financial management, absence of social audit, corruption and violation of official guidelines, political interference, inability to complete projects on time, general apathy, poor citizens participation, absence of citizen charters etc., (The White Paper on Manipur State Finance 2002, TISS 2012). Moreover numerous social groups, and organizations continue to challenge the capability of the state to maintain law and order, create an environment conducive to economic growth and development, and ensure citizens equitable access to basic services (The White Paper on Manipur State Finance 2002, TISS 2012). Manipur has the largest number of insurgent groups currently engaged in active combat, as well as those with whom ceasefire agreements have been signed (Institute of Conflict Management 2015).¹ However while the prolonged violence and unsustainable peace has created uncertainty in the political, economic, and social environment, it is the poor capability of the state that has influenced governance most profoundly.

The weak administrative capability has affected state ability to institutionalize an effective planning and coordination mechanism for efficient public service delivery. For instance the CMOs of the hill district of Ukhrul and valley district of Bishnupur were "unaware of project components and plans of the implementing agency to finish work within the targeted date" (Government of Manipur 2011) with regard to the construction of the 50 bedded hospitals.² Even the Superintendent of Directorate Health in the hill district of Churachandpur, was unaware of the project components and progress of the construction of a 100-bedded hospital. The Deputy Commissioner, Ukhrul and other concerned authorities were also unaware of the construction of the District Sports Complex (Government of Manipur 2011).

The lack of citizen's participation and monitoring mechanisms has also affected the implementation of PDS. In Tamenglong 100% of the respondents were unaware of the purpose of village vigilance committee while in Bishnupur it was at 99% (TISS 2012, 57). State institutions in Manipur suffer from repeated failure to implement programmes and policies (The White Paper on Manipur State Finance 2002, TISS 2012). Commenting on the prevailing state of public services, the TISS report notes that:

§ PDS (Public Distribution System) is in shambles as complaints about political interference in the award of Fair Price Shops and siphoning of food grains are routine.

§ IAY (Indira Awaas Yojana) face serious political interference and mismanagement.

§ ICDS and MDM (Integrated Child Development Scheme, Mid Day meal) suffer from wilful neglect, corruption, and violation of official guidelines about monitoring and supervision.

§ NRDWP, TSC, NRHM, PMGSY (National Rural Drinking Water Program, Total Sanitation Campaign, National Rural Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) suffer from low utilization of funds and bureaucratic delays in implementation (2012, x-xi).

This declining administrative capability has most deeply affected the ability of the institutions of government to ensure citizens access to public services. In Imphal the capital according to the City Development Plan of the 26% of population living below the poverty line: 23% did not have access to safe drinking water and were largely dependent upon stand-posts water, 3% rely on tank supply water, 59% do not have access to proper toilets, and 66% live in kucha houses. Field survey in the Imphal urban area also reveal that 93% of the respondent households did not receive electricity regularly, while 78% complained of irregular water services (Yambem 2013b). The lack of supervision and monitoring has contributed to increasing deterioration of public

schools. In Bishnupur, primary schools were functioning without Head Masters, while teacher absenteeism is as high as 95% in Tausem, 70% in Tamenglong, 20% in Bishnupur and 58% in Moirang (TISS 2012). Consequently, public school enrolment in Manipur has declined considerably. In fact Manipur with 71.7% students has the highest private school enrolment in the country (ASER-Rural 2016). The nature and poor quality of public services whether roads, or the issues of underdeveloped infrastructure, frequent transfers and non-availability of teachers or health workers doctors in public schools, health centers and the overall lack of accessibility to public services have also been widely reported by the local media. Recently the local Sangai English daily highlighted the absolute lack of basic services in Khengjoy in the Chandel subdivision. The news report item wrote:

Even though the State Government often makes tall claims of successfully addressing grievances of the people through introduction of certain programmes aimed at reaching out to the hills and far flung areas of the State like "Hill Leaders Day", "Meeyami Nimit" and "Go to Village" etc, many villagers residing along Khengjoy subdivision of Chandel district still remain deprived of even the most basic amenities. (The people living in villages such as Toitung, Phoin, Gelmol, New Somtal, Old Somtal, Kovang are yet to see any of the developmental progress of the State Government.)

The standard of life in many of these villages is still very primitive as there are no proper roads, health care system, educational institutions and other basic amenities. The condition of the approach roads to these villages are so pathetic that no vehicles, except Shakti-tan trucks and Kenbo (a kind of moped imported from Myanmar) can access these villages. (While travelling by foot, one has to walk on the muddy road (the mud sometimes almost reaching the knees) to reach the villages. (To be contd....)