

Editorial

Saturday, January 4, 2020

Corps production and Award for Manipur !

Manipur's Chief Minister received Krishi Karman Award, 2017-18 for the highest production of food grains amongst those states who produce less than ten lakh tonnes of food grain. The award should have made us feel that Manipur is doing better now in agriculture. However, the devil lies in the details of the latest economic survey report of Manipur. When we look closely at the details of food grain production and the crop production of the past years, we not only see an increase in production but also an increasing amount of suffering for the producers who actually toiled for this award.

The food grain production has increased by 3.14 percent, from 504.78 to 520.65 thousand tonnes. 98 percent of food grain that the state produced in 2017-18 is rice. If we go in the details of the matter, we see that the farm price, which the cultivator in the villages get for settling their paddy, has declined for both autumn and winter paddy between 2016-17 and 2017-18. For autumn paddy, it declined from Rs. 1593 to 1550 per quintal and from Rs. 1636 to Rs. 1612 per quintal for winter paddy. It reveals that the increase production of paddy coincides with a decline in farm prices. More production means more supply; therefore we should expect a decline in the retail prices. However, on the contrary the average retail price of local rice increased from Rs. 3200 per quintal in 2017 to Rs. 3300 per quintal in 2018, reaching up to Rs 3800 in the month of December 2018. We gain more clarity on the matter when we look at the wholesale prices of milled rice, it increased from Rs. 2875 in 2017 to Rs. 3117 to 2018 per quintal. This indicates that those who are trading in rice have benefited more than the consumers who are buying the rice from the retail shops, even with increased production. It shows that the increased production is not bringing the price of the milled rice down.

If we want to look at the situation of the farmers and cultivators, we should look at the gross state domestic product data and net state domestic product data at constant prices for crop production for 2016-17 and 2017-18 in the latest economic survey report. The principal crops which the economic survey mentions are paddy, maize, mustard seeds, chilies, ginger, potato, cabbage, cauliflower, banana, pineapple, papaya and sugarcane. Prices at which farmers sell only potato, cabbage, cauliflower and maize have increased for the respective years. For mustard seeds, ginger, banana, pineapple, papaya and sugarcane, the prices which farmers get for selling these crops have declined between 2016-17 and 2017-18. The prices which farmers get for selling banana between 2016-17 and 2017-18 have declined, from Rs. 3356 per quintal to Rs 2844. We see a sharp decline in mustard seed farm prices also, from Rs. 4200 to Rs 3000 per quintal. Given this, the gross state domestic product at constant prices, which saw a steady increase between 2011 and 2015, has declined from 144305 Lakhs in 2016-17 to 137804 Lakhs in 2017-18. The negative growth in GDP for crop production is more than 4.5 percent. And, the NSDP at constant prices declined more than 6 percent between 2016-17 to 2017-18. However, it was steadily increasing between 2011 to 2015.

These numbers clearly reveals that even though there is an increased production of food grains for which the state gets the Krishi Karman Award, there is negative growth in GDP and NSDP for crop production. Further, it does not make sense to attribute the decline in net and gross state domestic product for crops to either surging or declining armed conflict given the numbers. So, we must look for the answer in some other direction.

Krishi Karman Award should not cover the things which the recent Good Governance Index revealed. Manipur came last in the good governance index amongst the NE and Hill state. If we look at the methodology for preparing the index, performance in agriculture and allied sectors is one indicator. In agriculture and allied sectors performance, Manipur came last according to the Good Governance Index. The performance in agriculture and allied sector is prepared using the data of growth in the sector, food grain production, horticulture production, milk and meat production and crop insurance which the cultivators and farmers get from the government. The agriculture and allied sector has seen negative growth when we see the GDP and NSDP data at constant prices. On top of that, the national crop insurance scheme, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, does not cover Manipur at all along with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. We have more to worry about. As per report published by the Hindu on its May 17, 2019, it seems that the scheme has failed. The central government has only spent Rs. 8 crores out of Rs. 1400 crores earmarked for this scheme till the mid of 2019. The state is facing huge problems in agriculture and allied sectors given these issues. The people of Manipur should be intelligent enough to understand that we need to do a lot more in agriculture and allied sector so that we can appreciate ourselves. We need to produce more than 1 lakh tonnes of food grain in order to become self sufficient in food grain production, according to economic survey data. We should first cast away the devil in the details, then we should go for thabal chongba. Otherwise, it is not very intelligent.

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Science & Technology

Asia's largest technology festival gets underway

By Raju Vernekar
Mumbai, Jan 4

The 23rd edition of "Techfest 2020", the Asia's largest Science and Technology festival, organised by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, began at IIT's Powai Complex in North East Mumbai on Friday.

"Techfest International Exhibition" organised as part of the festival was inaugurated by Dr. V. R. Lalithambika, the Indian Space Research Organisation engineer and scientist. She is a specialist in advanced launcher technologies and is leading the "Gaganyaan" mission to send Indian astronauts to space by 2022.

The festival which will cover an International Robowars, lecture series and workshops will be on till 5 January. Over 2500 corporates and executives and 45 international exhibitors are participating and a footfall of nearly 60,000 visitors is expected in the festival. The festival will host the world's first actor and performer robot, "RoboThespian", who is all set to make his India debut in this three-day festival. "RoboThespian", designed by Engineered Arts Limited, will portray this year's "Techfest's" theme "DaVincian Spectacle: A Fusion of Art and Science". RoboThespian is the ultimate acting humanoid designed for human

interaction in a public environment.

"Techfest" will also present India's largest robot combat competition where global participants will view with each other for the coveted "Robowars Champion Title". In the competition, the sparks are expected to fly as metal will crush metal, in the battles interspersed with magnificent artist performances for non-stop entertainment. Techfest's international Robowars have witnessed foreign participation from countries such as Brazil, Russia, China, Mexico, Bangladesh, Iran and Nepal earlier. With prizes above Rs. one million at stake, the teams will battle in various weight categories like 120 lbs, 60 lbs and 30 lbs. The show will be anchored by Faruq Taheed, the official anchor for "Battlebots", the world-famous combat robotics television series.

The Techfest lecture series is another attraction of the festival. Eminent speakers including Dashed Tobogay, former PM of Bhutan, B. S. Dhanoa, Air Chief Marshal (Retired), Cricketer Zaheer Khan, Narayana Murthy VC (Co-founder of Infosys), Prof Eric Stark Maskin (Nobel Laureate in Economics 2007), Prof Richard John



Roberts (Nobel Laureate in Physiology 1993), actress Vidya Balan and others will participate in lecture series, this year.

The exhibition is showcasing cutting edge technologies and innovations from all around the world with the aim of helping bright minds broaden their vision and update them with the latest technologies. In the past years, it has grown into a major technological event, visited by students, academicians and corporates. Exhibits of the likes of Sophia (Hanson Robotics), NAO (Softbank Robotics), Furhat Robotics (Sweden), Android U (Hiroshi Ishiguro Lab), B-Human (Germany) and Team Puli (Hungary) were showcased in earlier Techfest Exhibitions. The various research

groups from eminent universities including NTU Singapore, ETH Zurich, MIT Media Labs and Arizona State University, had also participated in the exhibitions earlier. Started in 1998 with the motive of encouraging technology, scientific thinking and innovation, "Techfest" reaches out to 2500 plus Indian colleges and over 500 plus colleges abroad. IIT began organising international exhibition in 2004 and began hosting one of the largest Robowars in the country in 2009. It was upgraded and its scale increased multi-fold when the first International Robowars was hosted by in 2017.

It had hosted the first social humanoid "Sophia" first time in the country two years back. Embellished with resplendent artist performances from the likes of Abhis Mathew, glamorous ramp walks by models, a 6000-strong audience and 300 participants from all over the world, the 2018 edition of "Techfest's" International Robowars was unequivocally the largest event of combat robotics held in India.

"Two years ago, our festival had showcased 'Sophia', the world's first robot to receive citizenship, from Saudi Arabia. This time it's a step ahead. 'RoboThespian' will perform at intervals in the exhibition and might also entertain the audience at a dedicated one-hour session." Siddharth Maniar, the head of public relations of the festival said.

CAA-NRC-NPR Will Be a 'Self-Inflicted Goal', Says Former NSA Shivshankar Menon

Courtesy The wire
New Delhi Jan 4

In a strongly worded disapproval to the Centre's recent move to bring the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), the National Population Register (NPR) and possibly a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC), former National Security Advisor (NSA) Shivshankar Menon on Friday said that through such moves India has only achieved "a hyphenated relation with Pakistan as a religiously driven and intolerant state".

The former diplomat stated that by deciding to proceed with these exclusionary processes, "We have gifted our adversaries platforms to attack us".

"When we assisted the formation of Bangladesh, the global opinion was on our side. What is happening now is quite another scenario. We are increasingly being isolated, we have no international support apart from a section of Indian diaspora and some extreme right MEPs [Members of the European Parliament]."

Menon also criticised the Narendra Modi government's decision to cancel a meeting with a US Congressional delegation because it included the Indian-origin member Pramila Jayapal, who is opposed to India's clampdown on Kashmir after Article 370 was diluted. "We had a chance to rebutting (her charges) but we chose to duck it."

"Now what we see is Jayapal is getting 29 co-sponsors (to her resolution in the House seeking easing of restrictions on Kashmir). A Democrat, she is getting support even from the Republicans."

Menon was among several prominent members of civil society who assembled at New Delhi's Press Club of India on January 3 at the call of Karwan-e-Mohabbat and the Constitutional Conduct Group to conduct a public briefing on how "unconstitutional, nationally divisive and an

international disgrace" the CAA-NRC-NPR are.

To a pointed question from the media as to whether these moves would affect India's foreign policy, Menon replied, "In diplomacy, you don't have to tell the truth. So the calculation of the countries would be, how they can promote their interests (through it). They will not fight for your human rights. So, we have given them a platform to use, a lever, to pressure us to get what they want. This, I think, is unnecessary and a self-inflicted goal."

He said such a stand of the international community would, in turn, be presented within India to claim that "nobody is saying anything".

'No security concerns'

Joining him at the event to look at the possible international implications of these moves was another retired diplomat, Dev Mukarji.

Mukarji, who served as India's ambassador to Bangladesh, said it would be wrong to say that Hindus in that country have never been persecuted but added that it was not to the extent that has been presented by the government. He pointed out that certain prominent persons have also been suitably punished in that country for committing crimes against Hindus. "In 2015, a politically powerful man, an advisor to a former prime minister [Khaleda Zia], Sallahuddin Quader Chowdhury, was hanged for committing war crimes against the Hindus in 1971."

"And what can I say, when in India we look at our record for crimes committed in 1984, 2002," he added.

Mukarji, though, discounted any security concerns springing out of the CAA-NRC-NPR. "As long as this government (Awami League) is in Bangladesh, I don't see either our (Indian) security concerns compromised by (allowing) insurgents (from Northeast) to operate from there or allow the fundamentalist forces to have a free run within the country," he

stated in response to a query from the media.

Among others who held up for the assembled audience various nuances of the CAA-NRC-NPR, were academics Zoya Hasan, Mohsin Alam Bhat, Navsharan Singh, Niraja Jayal, and former United Nations undersecretary for economic and social affairs Nitin Desai, constitutional expert Faizan Mustafa, lawyer Gautam Bhatia and civil rights activist Harsh Mander.

Stating that the "NPR and NRC are closely connected", NALSAR vice chancellor Faizan Mustafa said the NPR itself would give the government digitised data on citizens and non-citizens, even before embarking on a nationwide NRC. "So it is basically getting a count of oranges and apples. Getting the count of oranges would just be a click away," he added. He urged the government to drop "those eight questions" as reportedly being part of the NPR questionnaire to be filled by the public, which also includes a question on the birthplace of his/her parents.

While the government has been saying that the NPR would be an extension of the decadal Census data, Mustafa countered, "They are two different processes and therefore the funds allocated for each is different. The NPR is not conducted under the Census Act." Academic Mohsin Alam Bhat pointed out, "While in Assam, there was a single set of rules (documents) for everyone and a court-appointed NRC coordinator to oversee them, it was a transparent process. But in the case of NPR, a local government official would be empowered to decide who is a doubtful citizen. In NPR, deciding one's citizenship would be a completely executive discretion, left to the government, not a judicial process."

While Niraja Jayal said Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan found mention in various previous orders of the government such as amendments to the Passport Act

and the Foreigners Act, before it went for the CAA, Navsharan Singh called for India to adopt a refugee policy "as a civilised member of the global community".

Zoya Hasan termed the ongoing protests against the CAA as "the biggest civil disobedience" in recent history. "It is not a fight for Muslim rights, but for democracy," Lawyer Gautam Bhatia said the CAA is not inclusive and pointed out, "Nowhere in the world have I seen religion as a basis for granting citizenship."

Nitin Desai elaborated the inclusive nature of India's universal adult suffrage. "The question then (in 1950) in front of the bureaucrats was, how do we include those sleeping on the streets. It was then decided that their address would be attributed to the nearest building. So inclusiveness is the foundational principle of our citizenship. It gives a sense of equality to our citizens at least once in five years. But what we are seeing now is a departure from where we started."

Former IPS officer K.S. Subramanian, who served in the Northeast, and present among the audience, though pointed out that the public briefing didn't include the concerns of Assam and the Northeast, even though the civil disobedience movement against the Act began in the region, before spilling over into other parts of India.

Mander wrapped up the public briefing by adding, "Assam's was not a communal project, but the NPR-CAA and a nationwide NRC are. The immediate challenge is, from January 1, the NPR process was rolled out in Karnataka. From April 1, it would be nationwide." He added, "We have to remind ourselves what Gandhi said when a government makes a law that we won't accept. He said disobey it publicly and performatively. That was the reason he made a fistful of salt in Dandi; it became a powerful image of civil disobedience, for which he was arrested and so were 60,000 other Indians."