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CIVIL SERVICE

TELEGRAPH, APR 8, 2014

After Mamata thunder, the babu's letter: poll panel urged to reconsider transfers of 'biased' officials

Calcutta, Apr 8 (PTI): West Bengal has requested the Election Commission to reconsider its decision to transfer eight bureaucrats and police chiefs alleged to have been biased towards the ruling Trinamul Congress while on poll duty, a day after an enraged Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee threatened to defy the order.

“Yes, the Chief Secretary has written to the Commission urging it to reconsider its decision regarding removal of the officers,” a highly placed source told PTI.

He said the Chief Secretary has also pointed out that the transfers were made and their replacements in the vacancies were done without consulting the state government.

On Monday, the EC had ordered removal of five superintendents of police, a District Magistrate and two additional DMs following complaints against them.

Those shunted out for 'bias' towards the ruling party were North 24 Parganas DM Sanjay Bansal, Malda's police chief or SP Rajesh Yadav, West Midnapore's SP Bharati Ghosh, Murshidabad's SP Humayun Kabir, Burdwan's SP S.M.H. Meerza, ADM West Midnapore Arindam Dutta and ADM South 24 Parganas Alokesh Prasad Roy. One SP, Alok Rajoria of Birbhum, was transferred to fill a vacancy, and did not face any charge.

It had also named the officers who are to replace those transferred out.

On Monday, addressing an election rally, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had taken serious exception to the transfers and said she was not going to accept the order.

She had said, “I will not remove a single officer. Let the Commission do it. The transfers were made without consulting the state government. I heard that the five SPs have been given transfer orders. Without even asking the state, the (new) names have also been decided”.

Under the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, all government officials given a role in the conduct of elections are deemed to be on deputation to the Election Commission, and subject to its control and discipline till the results of the election are declared.

Sunil Gupta, the state's Chief Electoral Officer, told PTI “I heard that the Chief Secretary has written a letter to the CEC this morning. I don't know the content. Please ask the Chief Secretary about it.”

To a question if he had any communication from the CEC's office in this regard, Gupta said, "I don't have any communication as yet."

The state's advocate general, Bimal Chatterjee, refused to comment on whether he was consulted by the state government on a possible crisis over the Chief Minister statement that the EC directive would not be followed.

"I will not say anything on this," he said when contacted over phone.

TIMES OF INDIA, APR 12, 2014

Maharashtra tells bureaucrats to use amber beacon instead of red on cars

MUMBAI: The state transport department led by chief minister Prithviraj Chavan on Friday restrained all bureaucrats except the chief secretary from using a red light on their vehicles, asking them to use an amber light without flasher instead.

On August 17, the transport department had promulgated a notification on the use of the red light with and without flasher and the amber light with and without flasher.

Then, besides the chief secretary, bureaucrats of the rank of additional chief secretary, principal secretary and secretary were permitted to use the red light without flasher.

Now, a circular issued by the transport department says that while the chief secretary's vehicle will continue to have a red light without flasher, all other bureaucrats will have an amber light without flasher.

In view of the critical observations of the Supreme Court on the gross misuse of red and amber lights with flashers, the state government further trimmed the list of dignitaries entitled for use of red and amber beacons with and without flashers.

The apex court had come down heavily on the Centre and the state government for making a complete mess of the norms regarding the use of red and amber beacons.

Then, it was found that there was rampant misuse of red and amber beacons and there was absolutely no control on the sale of these lights.

According to a revised notification issued by principal secretary (transport) S K Sharma, vehicles entitled to use a beacon would have to place a black cover on the light if the dignitaries or officials it is meant for are not travelling in it.

The transport commission has been entrusted with the responsibility of issuing stickers for the vehicles which have been enlisted for the use of lights and these stickers shall be compulsorily pasted on the windscreen of the vehicle.

Also, to put a stop to the unauthorized sale of beacons used on top of vehicles, it was decided that henceforth the government transport service or motor transport of the police department would provide the lights.

DEFENCE, NATIONAL

TIMES OF INDIA, APR 10, 2014

UK open to Sikh as head of armed forces, judiciary: David Cameron

LONDON: British Prime Minister David Cameron has for the first time said that UK is open to having a Sikh as the head of its armed forces or as a chief justice in its judiciary. Hosting a Baisakhi celebration at 10 Downing Street, Cameron heaped high praise on "the hard working" Sikh community in UK and invited more from the community to enter British parliament.

Referring to the "hard work so many Sikhs now do in our parliament," Cameron said "Not enough - I'm proud that we have in Paul Uppal a British Sikh on Conservative benches, Paul is here working hard, but we shouldn't rest until we see more British Sikhs on green benches and red benches, until we see more British Sikhs at the top of every one of our organisations - whether that is our army, or our judiciary - not because we should believe in tokenism, but because we believe, I believe, that we won't access the talent of our country unless we demonstrate that everyone from every background and faith can get to the top of any organization that they choose and that is so important for our country".

According to Cameron, British Sikhs "have been an absolute model in terms of integrating into our communities and playing a role in our communities; whether it is in our armed forces, whether it is serving in government, whether it is working in business, whether it is representing us brilliantly on the cricket field, there's hardly an area of natural life where British Sikhs haven't made a huge impact".

Cameron hosting the fourth Baisakhi party in 10 Downing Street also recalled the recent floods that devastated parts of UK.

He said "We had people from across the country who had shown extraordinary public service in the floods earlier this year, and we had then Sikhs who had gone out of their way to travel across our country and help people, whether they were in Somerset, whether they were in the Thames Valley, whether they were in East Anglia, who needed help. "Serving the community, putting back into the community is something deep in the heart of all British Sikhs," he said.

The Sikh vote bank will be a major factor in the next general election in UK in 2015. Britain's 2011 census says UK is home to nearly 4.3 lakh Sikhs of which 4.2 lakh live in England alone. The community is also very politically active. Around 3 in 4 Sikhs have voted in different elections in the last 4 years. Around 2 in 3 voted in the 2010 general elections.

EDUCATION

HINDU, APR 8, 2014

[It is easy to hack into some varsity websites](#)

K.C. DEEPIKA

One would expect that university websites, which host expansive databases and crucial student information, would be tight on security. But it turns out that the official website of the State's only health university, the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS), gives easy access to enter and make modifications even to a student hacker.

There's enough proof online that the official message board of the university, which serves as an interactive forum, has been breached more than a dozen times by hackers, who have left behind embarrassing messages damning the poor security of a premier university portal.

An "ethical hacker", a student at a Bangalore college, demonstrated to *The Hindu* that the online teachers database management system and the online admission student management system are all easy to break in to.

For instance, this "ethical hacker" uses a simple SQL injection to log in to the teachers database management system, and while he's wary of tampering with too much around the online admissions system — to remain on the safe side of the law, he shows that he can log in as "admin" and freely use the master panel to set up a new user (as a constituent college) and has access to lists of theory and practical marks.

Where did he find the password that enables him to function as "admin"? He didn't have to look far: the log file, which is directly viewable, simply listed the password.

The student hacker demonstrates that it isn't just the RGUHS which is lax about its websites controls or security. Even the websites of the Rani Channamma University, Belgaum, and Kuvempu University are easy to enter because, once again, their technology teams haven't changed the default password.

Universities' response

Meanwhile, two of the three universities brushed aside the concerns. While B.R. Ananthan, Vice-Chancellor of Rani Channamma University, Belgaum, expressed surprise about the vulnerability of his university website, Sriprakash K.S., Vice-Chancellor of RGUHS, said that they had not come across any problems so far.

S.A. Bari, Vice-Chancellor, Kuvempu University, said that there was no sensitive data stored in the website. H.N. Ramesh, CEO, Logisys, an university automation company that provides services to these universities, admitted that laxity with password was a common problem. He suggested that there should be a dedicated team maintaining the website and the contents must be regularly updated.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, APR 13, 2014

B-schools use Mandarin mantra for global success

Apoorva Puranik

Indian management students have devised a unique strategy to take on their Chinese counterparts when the two face off on the global stage. The B-schools students are learning Mandarin, the official language of China, with several private MBA colleges and even some of the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) offering the language as part of their curriculum.

While IIM Calcutta, Bangalore and Shillong offer Mandarin as an elective in their post-graduate diploma courses, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai, has made the language a compulsory subject in all eight terms of its post-graduate course. At Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS) in Mumbai, students are required to learn either Mandarin or Spanish as a foreign language.

“China is a growing market and will soon become the most dominant global economy. For management students, knowing English and Mandarin means they can communicate with half the world’s population,” said Bala V Balachandran, founder of the Great Lakes Institute of Management. “Knowledge of Mandarin puts students at a great advantage.” The institute included Mandarin in its flagship programme in 2008, but made it a compulsory subject last year.

According to officials at the institute, the decision to introduce Mandarin in the curriculum was triggered by investment bank Goldman Sachs’ BRICs report, which forecasts that China along with Brazil, India and Russia will dominate the world economy by 2050. China is already the second biggest economy in the world, having bypassed Japan, and is on its way to replace the US as the biggest economy.

Professors at NMIMS feel it is essential for students to be familiar with trends and practices in international markets. “Knowledge of a foreign language prepares them for assignments in the international arena in their career. Along with foreign languages, subjects like Multi National Management, Strategic Alliances & International Marketing are included to facilitate exposure to global issues,” an NMIMS spokesperson said.

At IIM Bangalore, spoken Mandarin was introduced for the batch of 2011-2013 for second-year students. The scores of the course are added to the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the students at the end of the year. In fact, the course has gained popularity, with 45 out of 381 students in the batch opting for it.

IIM Calcutta has also seen its student base for foreign languages doubling from 40-45 last year to 80-85 for the 2012-2014 batch, out of which a majority of students chose Mandarin.

“China’s economy is rapidly rising and learning the language will not only benefit students, in terms of jobs, but also give them global exposure. A student placed with a

multinational firm will have an edge over the others with knowledge of Mandarin. Moreover, apart from the language, the Chinese model of economic growth is worth learning,” said Anindya Sen, dean of academics at IIM Calcutta.

Students at IIM Bangalore have opted for the Mandarin course because it’s an innovative learning experience. The language is part of the Chinese Business Course taught by professor S Swaminathan. “The language is difficult to learn and has around 500 characters. But, in this course, we are using the PINYIN method of teaching, which uses the Roman alphabet for teaching spoken Mandarin,” said Swaminathan.

However, not all B-schools are in favour of introduction foreign languages in the curriculum. “Instead of learning a difficult language, students would benefit more from add-on marketing or finance courses which complement their field of study,” said Vijay Karnik, faculty member at Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, adding that learning a language like Mandarin is very difficult and can’t be done in a matter of months.

At IIM Ahmedabad, although the response for the Mandarin course, which was introduced in 2010, was good and a new course ‘Doing Business with China’ was on the cards, the foreign language courses for the next batch have been put under review. “The institute can’t share any information before the new academic session begins,” said Ishita Solanki, IIM-A spokesperson.

Apart from B-schools, the study of Mandarin has also caught owing to increasing number of people travelling between India and China. “On an average, over 500 Indians apply for Chinese visas daily and most of them are going there for business. This trend has escalated in the recent past, indicating the surge in the importance of the language for Indians,” said an official at the Chinese embassy in Mumbai, on condition of anonymity.

Even family-run businesses have realised the importance of knowing Mandarin. Gurgaon-based Aniket Gidada, whose family runs a company dealing with water purification and sanitation equipment, started learning Mandarin two years ago as his company sells its products in China. “I can now converse in the language. Unfortunately, when I was in college, no B-school offered a course in the language. It would have been helpful,” said Gidada.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, APR 13, 2014

Hindu sacks two teachers for assaulting colleagues

Two teachers of Delhi University’s Hindu College, who had been accused of physically assaulting others during a staff association meeting, were dismissed by the governing body of the college.

The incident dates to August last year when around 20 teachers tried to walk out of a staff association meeting. According to those present, a scuffle broke out between four teachers.

Two teachers were suspended pending enquiry in October. A fact-finding committee set up by the college was set up. The teachers were issued show cause notices to explain their behaviour. After the enquiry, the two teachers were dismissed by the governing body of the college. The action now requires the approval of the vice chancellor of Delhi University to be made final.

The college governing body's decision was, however, not unanimous. The members from the university, which includes two nominees from the vice chancellor's office, two teacher representatives and the principal of the college, all expressed their dissent in the matter.

According to sources in the university, the two teachers were dismissed unfairly.

“They were not given a copy of the report submitted by the fact finding committee nor were they given the mandatory 15 days to respond to it. The decision was taken then and there, something that is against the university ordinances. The trustees of the governing body behaved in an autocratic manner, ignoring the dissent of the university representatives. The principles of natural justice were clearly flouted,” a university source said.

The Delhi University Teachers' Association also condemned the dismissal.

“Rules were not followed in reaching a decision. It was unanimously decided in an emergency meeting of DUTA that the action must be condemned by all teachers. We will make a sincere appeal to the vice chancellor to not approve the dismissal,” said DUTA president, Nandita Narain.

HINDU, APR 9, 2014

FYUP: The buzzword of DU campus politics

VIJETHA S.N.

AAP and BJP's manifesto promises to scrap the programme

Members of ABVP campaigning for their candidates in the last DUSU elections at Delhi University.- File Photo: Sushil Kumar Verma

Campus politics in the Capital has been one of the strongest indicators of future political success for its participants. Many senior politicians, including those who went on to become Cabinet Ministers, headed student and teacher unions in Delhi University before stepping into the Parliament. Therefore, it is not surprising that an academic programme in the university has been taken into account by two major political parties while preparing their manifestos.

The university's controversial four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP), which was unsuccessfully opposed by the Delhi University Teachers' Association last year, is now on the Lok Sabha election manifesto of the BJP and the AAP, with both promising to scrap it.

“We welcome both their decisions and they have our complete support,” said DUTA president Nandita Narain, adding that the university administration was believed to have been acting on the orders of the Congress for bringing in the programme. She added the DUTA has always been of the view that the the move was to slowly allow in foreign players in the education sector.

The general feeling on the campus is that the Congress had alienated the academic community. This was proved when the National Students’ Union of India, the party’s student wing, lost by a major margin in the last elections.

The upper hand was gained by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, which is affiliated to the BJP. Carrying out numerous protests and joining hands with the Left-affiliated All India Students’ Association as well as the mostly Left-titling DUTA, the ABVP made its anti-FYUP agenda clear.

“We are not directly associated with the BJP so we had to work quite hard, writing to major leaders and informing them about the course, asking for their support and finally we were validated when the BJP included getting rid of FYUP as part of the election manifesto,” said ABVP State secretary Saket Bahuguna.

Rock-shows, classroom visits and dharnas have all been part of the ABVP’s strategy to help the BJP this time. It managed to recruit 1,600 volunteers from classrooms across the city to help with the campaign.

The NSUI also had a key hand in preparing the Congress manifesto. “We carried out talks and discussions throughout the country’s educational institutions and prepared a list of things on education policy, which was included in the manifesto,” said NSUI vice-president Roji Jhon. The final draft includes things like better financial facilities for education and increasing the budget but it remains silent on the FYUP.

TIMES OF INDIA, APR 12, 2014

DU teachers seek action on attack on South Campus director

Del.icio.usApnaCircle

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of Delhi University teachers made a representation to the lieutenant governor, Najeeb Jung, seeking action against the students who smeared black polish on South Campus director Umesh Rai on Monday. Expressing their solidarity and stating that the act of former DUSU joint secretary, Raju Rawat, was an attack on the autonomy of teachers and the academic environment, the teachers gathered at the convention centre in North Campus before proceeding to Raj Niwas.

Though LG was not present at that time, a delegation of 10 teachers, led by professor Anand Prakash and Malay Neerav, submitted their letter to the LG office. "This attack has nothing to do with political ideologies, but was an attack on the academic atmosphere and freedom of teachers. We demand strict action against such acts," said Neerav.

Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA), while condemning the attack on Rai, also denounced the DU administration's move to seal the DUSU office. In a statement it said, "following the reprehensible attack on the director, South Campus by the DUSU joint secretary and his associates. Instead of instituting a proper disciplinary process against the individuals involved, the DU administration has used this unfortunate incident as a pretext to attack the institution of DUSU, the elected body of students."

The statement said the attack on Rai is condemnable, but the authorities must face the fact that they have sown and harvested a culture of violence in our university, both physical as well as the violence against independent thinking, articulation and debate. Last year, a law professor was slapped by the then DUSU president, but no action was taken against him even as the victim lodged a police complaint and demanded an inquiry.

In this case, the administration has chosen to depart from all accepted norms and summarily expel the DUSU joint secretary. This shameful inconsistency can only be explained by the fact that the former DUSU president had supported and publicly spoken in favour of FYUP, while the current DUSU leadership has demanded a roll back of the controversial programme, the statement added.

ELECTIONS

PIONEER, APR 8, 2014

Ensuring free and fair elections

The Election Commission of India deserves full credit for organising the world's biggest democratic exercise — the Lok Sabha poll, in which more than 800 million people will exercise their franchise

India is caught in the election fever, waiting to cast votes for the 16th Lok Sabha. The parliamentary poll is one of the most cyclopean phenomenon that any democracy in the modern world has ever witnessed. It is this routine, followed once every five years, that awakes the country as a whole, and the world equally, to the vision of geniuses who sketched and scribbled the Constitution of India.

The first Election Commissioner in 1950 provided for 176 million eligible citizens, mostly unlettered, to cast their votes. Today, the electorate is approximately 800 million. It is the Election Commission of India which enables India to win the unconceivable and prove the implausible in terms of democratic stability.

This general election is historic in more ways than one. While the dominance of the young voter is visible, the significance of this election, in terms of India's status in the community of nations, will largely depend on the type of Government the voters deliver to the nation.

The ECI deserves commendation for highlighting three goals — providing easier access to electors for service delivery, greater transparency and better election management. It has initiated the electoral process to enable the country of approximately a billion people to give shape to a new Government.

The ECI has issued guidelines for this general election under Article 324 of the Constitution, which has entrusted the Commission with the power of “superintendence, direction and control”. The present stretch of fluid polity has witnessed occasional fissures between the ECI and the political parties over the powers and functions of the commission and the exclusivity of policy matters in the hands of legislators and the Government.

The Supreme Court has sought to restore the status of the ECI and thwart attempts to deride the basic structure of the Constitution. Governments, present and past, have been reluctant to initiate electoral reform to boost the dignity and transparency of the electoral process in India. The enactment to disqualify candidates charged with heinous offences is nowhere on the horizon.

The new measures announced by the Chief Election Commissioner have perhaps gone unnoticed. In the age of information technology, the ECI has tried to increase transparency by uploading on its web portal the affidavits of

candidates and electoral roles in PDF form. It will also be webcasting from polling stations. Additionally, electronic voting machines will be tracked and there will be SMS-based poll monitoring.

Two momentous judgements of the Supreme Court deserve to be mentioned here. The first is the July 5, 2013, order directing the ECI to frame guidelines for regulating the contents of election manifesto particularly relating to freebies. The second is the September 13, 2013, verdict which held that if a candidate fails to furnish all the necessary details when filing his nomination paper, even after reminders from the Returning Officer, his nomination paper is fit to be rejected. Accordingly, the ECI has issued guidelines to Returning Officers for strict compliance.

The affidavits are to be displayed on notice boards and made freely available to the general public. While the filing of the affidavit is mandatory, the Commission has also given candidates the option of e-filing their affidavits. This e-filing will help candidates in providing information without any omission.

The most significant examples of the ECI's prudence are its clarification on affidavits of candidates and accounts of political parties. On February 22, the ECI intimated all recognised national and State political parties that the "details of Bank accounts, assets and liabilities furnished in the affidavit should invariably include the details of all deposits/investments in foreign banks and any other body/institution abroad, and details of all, assets and liabilities in foreign countries."

While the candidates contesting elections are required to maintain and furnish a separate account of his/her election expenditure, in accordance with Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the ECI has also required all political parties sponsoring candidates during elections "to maintain day to day account for all election campaign expenses and submit the accounts to the Commission within 90 days of Lok Sabha elections and 75 days of Assembly elections".

This should help further the spirit of free and fair elections. It is an exceptionally thoughtful requirement and indubitably reflective of the recent actions of political parties that have displayed a frightening sense of impudence and arrogance. This, in turn, has invited much public indignation.

(The writer is former Chairman of TRAI and Director, Public Interest Foundation. This article is co-authored by Karthika Annapurna)

PIONEER, APR 8, 2014

Cast vote, get 50% off on doc's fee

In a bid to encourage the people of the country to exercise their franchise in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has come up with a unique idea. All IMA members will give up to 50 per cent discount on their consultation fee to patients who cast their votes.

However, there is a catch! The doctors will not take your word for it. Patients will have to show doctors the mark of the indelible poll ink on their fingers as proof in order to avail the discount that will be available for a week after the elections.

The IMA has named this innovative initiative as “Swatantra Prajatantra hetu ek prayas.” This is a nationwide campaign in which all the doctors associated with the IMA have been given instructions to give up to 50 per cent discount on their consultation fee to patients who have cast their votes.

IMA national president, Jitendra Patel, who hails from Ahmedabad, told The Pioneer that this unique idea was initiated by the IMA head office to promote maximum voting in the General Elections.

The idea took root in Meerut, but soon all IMA branches across the country showed interest in offering the same benefits in their areas. The IMA then decided to make it a nation-wide incentive.

IMA Meerut president Sunil Gupta said that the association appealed to all doctors to join them in this campaign and got a positive response even from non-members. “So far, over 5 lakh doctors across the country have shown interest in this campaign. They are expected to give a discount ranging from a minimum 25 per cent to 50 per cent after inspecting the inked finger till a week after the Lok Sabha elections,” he said.

IMA Lucknow branch secretary, Vijay Kumar said they had initiated the campaign in order to promote record break voting in this Lok Sabha election. As per the IMA data over 2.47 lakh doctors are associated with it and circulars have been issued from over 1,100 branches.

Not only doctors, even the Election Commission has zeroed in on select polling booths in Lucknow to provide cold drinks, chilled water and even set up kiosks selling eatables like momos, wafers and other snacks. The State Capital has a total of 1,400 booths.

Chief Electoral Officer Umesh Sinha said that these special polling booths will be manned by four to five volunteers from the National Social Service and National Cadet Corps who will “ensure that the voters are not put to any inconvenience”.

TIMES OF INDIA, APR 10, 2014

TMC men attack EC officials in West Bengal

KOLKATA: Two Election Commission personnel were on Thursday beaten up while they were videographing a bike rally by Trinamool workers at Manikchak in Malda district, inviting the ire of the poll body which has directed authorities to initiate stern action against the accused and file a report on the incident.

Bike rallies are prohibited during the election campaign under EC rules.

District election office sources said that the video footage would be examined before filing of any official complaint.

EC director Dharendra Ojha said in Kolkata that the poll body had taken a serious note of the incident and asked the district administration to submit report of the incident by this evening.

It also asked the DM to submit a detailed report of the incident and the action-taken-report to the commission by this evening.

Eyewitnesses claimed that a four-member team of EC personnel were taking the video footage of the rally as it approached Khayertala of Manikchak when some people from the crowd objected and beat two of them.

The sources said that the Block Development Officer would be probing the incident.

The police, when contacted, said it was yet to get any report of the incident.

Top commission officials, who met in New Delhi, took serious view of the incident and gave directions to the district magistrate of Malda to take immediate stern action against the offenders.

In a recent meeting attended by Deputy EC Vinod Zutshi, poll officials from West Bengal had expressed fear of violence targeting them during the elections.

The EC had taken a serious note of their complaints and the issue had also come up during a meeting of Chief Election Commissioner V S Sampath and other top EC officials with the state authorities in Kolkata last week, according to the sources.

TRIBUNE, APR 11, 2014

None votes at two booths in Sirsa village
Sushil Manav

Not a single person came to vote at polling booths 101 and 102 in the government school of Sultanpuria village in Sirsa parliamentary constituency today. Around 1,900 villagers boycotted the elections in protest against the alleged indifference of successive governments towards their demand for a water channel from the Ghaggar.

Poll officials sat idle in the polling booths as no villager came to exercise franchise. "We came with all material and EVMs. We have been waiting for voters, but none has come so far," a poll official said this afternoon.

"We provided the officials meals, tea and drinking water, but the villagers had taken a collective decision not to vote this time," said sarpanch Raj Bala's husband Kalu Ram. Villagers assembled outside the school building where they had been sitting on a dharna for the last 31 days in support of their demand and raised slogans.

“Not a single government official or ruling party leader had approached us even though we had been sitting on a dharna for the last one month and the media had been highlighting our announcement prominently,” alleged Bhajan Lal Insan, president of the 11-member committee constituted by villagers for the agitation.

“It is ironical that on one hand, the government appoints brand ambassadors to promote voting, but on the other, no attempt has been made to convince us. It seems that the authorities are happy that we are not voting,” said a first-time voter. He did not want to be named for fear of retaliation in the form of poor college results.

Villagers had been demanding a water channel to supply floodwaters from the Ghaggar to irrigate their paddy fields.

They alleged that while the government had constructed a network of canals in adjoining villages, Sultanpuria had been left out for reasons not known.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, APR 10, 2014

EC must step up vigilance

The charged atmosphere during the Lok Sabha elections this year is acquiring a communal colour in a way not seen during several polls in the past 15 years or so.

The more worrisome part is that most of this is happening in Uttar Pradesh, a state that sends the highest number of MPs to the Lok Sabha and in which most prominent faces during these elections are contesting.

Sectarian utterances by public figures are marring the poll process, in which they are supposed to be the biggest stakeholders for now as well as in many elections in the future.

The revival of the Ram mandir issue, which the BJP had kept aside since 1998, and recurrent communal riots over the past eight months chime in with the prevailing mood. First there were the condemnable remarks by Imran Masood, the Saharanpur candidate of the Congress, that he would “chop BJP PM candidate Narendra Modi into pieces” if the latter tried to convert UP into another Gujarat.

Legal action was taken against Mr Masood but he is out on bail. But enough damage was done for a replay of ‘for every action there is a reaction’ to take place, when BJP stalwart Amit Shah, who is the party's campaign manager in Uttar Pradesh, told the Jats of Muzaffarnagar it was their turn to take revenge for their insult, albeit through the ballot. Though SP leader and UP minister Azam Khan wasn't sowing the seeds of hatred between communities, it was entirely a lapse of judgement on his part to say the war of Kargil was won by just Muslim soldiers.

It remains to be seen whether his party censures him in the way it took action against Kamaal Farooqui, who had said Indian Mujahideen operative Yaseen Bhatkal had been arrested because he was a “Muslim”.

And Mr Modi would do well to explain why Kerala is more a nursery of terror than any other state is.

It is important to remember in this context that Mr Modi contested Rahul Gandhi when the latter said agents from Pakistan had been to Muzaffarnagar after the riots to rope in impressionable young Muslims.

Like money and liquor, innuendoes and half-truths are being served up to stir up people whereas it should be the job of all to rouse people's consciousness.

In this the Aam Aadmi Party's campaigns have been more sober than those of the rest in the sense that it has stuck to its anti-corruption plank.

Then again, the party has erred in excessively targeting some personalities rather than their politics.

The Election Commission, on its part, has taken the necessary steps by issuing notice to some of the actors in the game. Perhaps more firmness is needed to check wayward behaviour. more from this section.

EMPLOYMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, APR 10, 2014

Employment: India's electorate's chief demand

Samar Halarnkar

Skill koi dukaan mein nahin milta, bina skill ke koi makaan nahin milta, aur agar skill hain to kaun kehta hai ki yahaan koi job nahin milta. ' ' You can't buy skill in a shop, without skill you can't get a house, and if you are skilled, who says you can't get a job here?'

Set to catchy music, the unusual ditty kicks off Hunnarbaaz (talented), a Sunday morning reality show on job skills, running now on Doordarshan, the national broadcaster. The show is not high on ratings, but its subject matter is now India's number one electoral concern.

Railing against cow slaughter and corruption makes for more compelling television, but in a poor country where working folk are increasingly bereft of hope, the primary appeal of the BJP's prime ministerial challenger, Narendra Modi, lies in his assertion of economic revival — and a promise to create 10 million jobs each year.

The Congress' Rahul Gandhi talks of double that figure — 100 million for 100 million new voters over five years (20 million a year) — but his credibility is hobbled by his party's decade in power, which fell dramatically short of India's basic employment expectations.

A slew of opinion polls have identified jobs as the chief demand of India's electorate; not the kind provided by digging ditches and road shoulders but meaningful work with some hope for advancement and a better quality of life.

The problem is India's economy is in no shape to deliver the figures promised by Modi or Gandhi. Shorn of election-eve rhetoric, nothing they say suggests a roadmap or gameplan for mass, meaningful employment.

Between 2005 and 2010, under the UPA, India added 2.76 million jobs, according to the government data. That's 552,000 annually, falling far short of the number of jobs the country needed for the 12 million people who sought employment every year.

Even if Modi revives the economy and India's moribund manufacturing sector — the so-called organised economy — the future of the bulk of these job seekers is dim. Employment per unit of output has been steadily falling in India's factories, as they use automation and learn to do more with less.

The future of employment lies, overwhelmingly, in what are called micro and small industries, the unorganised sector. These are the street vendors of manufacturing, millions of them, often in slums, turning out everything from bolts to shampoo.

Work conditions are dire, minimum wages and labour laws are fantasies, but this is India's great hope for mass employment.

That is, if the little factories are given enough orders by the big companies. This manufacturing and jobs pipeline appeared in good order during the five years to 2005, when 60 million jobs were added in the days of the NDA's stint in power, providing livelihoods to a large number of more than 90 million Indians who moved from rural areas to towns and cities.

With economic growth falling below 5% — thanks to a glum, global economy, stalled reform and rising prices — this trend, instead of accelerating, is devastating the job market. If it continues, about 12 million people will return to the farms (where 49% of the workforce is currently employed) between 2013 and 2019, predicts Crisil, a research agency.

It's unclear if that prediction will be realised, given that many large villages are becoming towns, and the demand for skilled employees continues to rise in the booming services sector.

That brings us to an unfolding conundrum: Despite the millions who swarm the cities for jobs, the services and construction sectors — and the stagnant manufacturing sector — cannot find what they call 'employable' men and women. Whether engineers or welders, millions of Indians lack the skills for the job they want.

A large part of the jobs puzzle begins with a decrepit education system, which emphasises quantity over quality.

If only 50.3% of Class 5 government-school students could read Class 2 texts, as Pratham, an NGO, found in 2009, there would be little hope of transcending the great divide from literacy to education; and if that figure dropped to 41% by 2013, the road ahead is foggy and formidable.

Unsurprisingly, 80 million children fail to complete basic schooling. Unless schools and vocational training linked to them improve, India will fall short by 100 million skilled construction workers, 30 million automobile workers and 13 million healthcare workers, chairman of the National Skill Development Agency (tasked with coordinating India's various skill development efforts), S Ramadorai, wrote in a column last month.

The government hopes to skill — or reskill — 500 million workers over the next decade or less, or as many people as the populations of the United States and Brazil combined. This is a challenge with no parallel in the world. About nine in 10 Indians joining the workforce are untrained for its demands, reveals a Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry study.

This means that the world's largest and youngest workforce, the so-called 'demographic dividend', is barely educated, of limited use to the economy and in danger of becoming a demographic disaster.

The political discourse around the question of jobs is either absent or meaningless. The Congress has its abysmal track record. The BJP's manifesto is vague, declaring that "we will take up skill development on a mission mode", which is the ongoing effort of the National Skill Development Corporation, a public-private partnership and Hunnarbaaz partner.

The Aam Aadmi Party devotes three sentences in a 26-page manifesto to employment, the main focus being on promoting "honest enterprise", which can create "decent employment and livelihood opportunities".

The party's other promise is to "afford greater opportunities for lifelong learning and skilling leveraging (sic) technology so as to encourage both continued and individual growth".

Don't look to India's leaders for answers. My recommendation: Tune in to Hunnarbaaz this Sunday.

Samar Halarnkar is a Bangalore-based journalist. The views expressed by the author are personal.

DECCAN HERALD, APR 9, 2014

The curse of technology

Bharat Jhunjhunwala,

Parties are vying with each other in promising that they will generate jobs for the unemployed. This will not be easy though.

Actually, workers are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the modern world. Machines are producing goods in large quantities with few workers.

Say, there is demand for 10,000 yards of cloth per day in a town.

Previously 1000 weavers were involved in producing this. Now, the same cloth is being produced by 10 workers on automatic looms.

Businessmen find it profitable to employ more machines and less labour because the cost of capital is declining.

It is cheaper to borrow money from banks and buy machines. On the other hand, the cost of labour is increasing by the day.

Economic development has become its own enemy. Development means prosperity which, in turn, means low interest rates.

Development also means high standards of living which, in turn, means high wages.

The final result is that economic development is leading to displacement of workers by machines.

Indeed a number of high-skill jobs are being created in the modern factories such as in designing, computerisation, etc.

But number of these jobs are small in relation to the population.

Moreover, these jobs are concentrated in big cities. Weavers are losing jobs in Varanasi while engineers are gaining them in Gurgaon.

It may appear that jobs are being created in cities but that is really a local phenomenon.

Nearly one-half of our youth are unemployed at the national level.

Such would not have happened if large number of jobs were being created in IT and other sunrise sectors.

The only way to create jobs in large numbers is to make it profitable for businesses to employ labour instead of machines to undertake production.

This requires that the cost of labour be brought down. Governments across the world are moving in this direction.

Labour reforms are designed to achieve this objective.

Allowing businesses to lay off workers when not required, to employ them through contractors and to give them right to hire and fire as per their choice—all such measures lead to a reduction in the cost of labour.

That is the natural direction to go. But we should not be under any illusion that this will lead to an increase in wages.

There is a trade-off between numbers of jobs and wage rates. Businessmen will employ less number of workers if wages are high.

Contrariwise they will employ larger numbers if wages are low. Labour reforms will lead to a reduction in wages and increase in the number of jobs.

Many scholars are of the view that imparting of better skills and better matching of applicants with available jobs can help solve the problem of unemployment.

Some positive impact will indeed take place but this may be like a drop in the ocean.

Better skills will enable the workers to produce more goods. This will lead to lower cost of production.

Job reduction

Improvement in infrastructure will have a small impact on job creation.

Better roads, banking and communications will lead to a reduction in the cost of transaction.

Once again it will lead to a reduction in the cost and an increase in demand.

But these improvements simultaneously lead to a reduction in employment.

Previously we would employ large number of workers in making paper, making envelopes and sorting the letters and making from the post office.

Now the same communication takes place with a click of the mouse.

The paper and envelope makers and sorters in the post office have lost their jobs.

The fact that infrastructure and good governance does not lead to creation of jobs is easily verified by comparing developing countries like India and developed countries like Japan.

Unemployment remains at high levels in these countries.

This is not to decry the benefits of modern technologies but only to point out that solution to the problem of unemployment will not come from this route.

The culprit is technology.

The modern production process simply does not require large number of workers.

Existence of the humankind is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the workings of the economy.

The solution will come from making employment generation the direct objective of the economy.

We cannot assume that economic growth will automatically lead to an increase in number of jobs.

It may be necessary to move towards lower rates of growth.

For example, say an 'unemployment tax' is imposed on modern textile mills.

This will lead to an increase in cost of cloth. It will lead to lower rate of economic growth.

High cost of cloth will lead to lesser demand and overall economy will slow down.

But it will also lead to restart of handloom industry. Large number of jobs will be created in weaving.

Hence there can exist an opposite relation between economic growth and employment.

High economic growth secured by the use of automatic machines will lead to less employment, not more as conventionally held.

The new government should take this reality on board.

Following the beaten track of infrastructure, good governance and skill development will lead to short term gains.

There will be a sense of euphoria in the first two or three years.

But this will not sustain.

India is today an unemployed developing country. Tomorrow, it may become an unemployed developed country.

Therefore, the new government should impose heavy taxes on select modern industries where there is a large employment potential.

The opposition to FDI in retail would be a correct step in this direction. There is a need to improve governance, infrastructure and skills.

But benefits of these will reach the common man only when combined with measures to explicitly and directly create jobs.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

FINANCIAL EXPRESS, APR 15, 2014

Public sector bank management should be held accountable for bad loans: Jalan

Former RBI governor Bimal Jalan on Monday said the managements of public sector banks, and not the finance ministry, should be held accountable for the wrong assessment of credit worthiness to check the rising number of bad loans.

“If you put public sector banks in one bracket and other banks in another bracket, you will find that NPAs in the first sector are higher. So that is a product of not political intervention per se, but that could also be a product of the credit worthiness analysis that the banks do....there is much less of a price to pay if you make the wrong assessment of credit worthiness in a public sector, where accountability is a problem,” Jalan said in an event organised by the MCC Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He said part of the reason for the piling up of NPAs was the slowdown, but that did not explain the whole problem. “The issue is important and the answer that we have to think about it is to how to make the management accountable, the management of the institution (banks) accountable rather than the ministry of the government,” he pointed out.

According to Jalan, managements of public sector lenders should be free to run the banks without government intervention, but at the same time they should be held accountable for their performance.

“Why government intervention in running the public sector banks? You can appoint, you can decide on rural priorities, small-scale priorities that are applicable to banks,” said the former chief of the central bank. Worried over a further rise in bad loans, finance minister P. Chidambaram recently exhorted the state-run banks to effectively deal with NPAs.

“The biggest challenge facing the public sector banks is NPAs and asset quality,” Chidambaram said.

“We have told them (banks) to focus on recovery and banks are focusing on recovery,” he said.

Without providing NPA data of the public sector lenders for the last financial year, the finance minister said it was ‘likely to be a little higher’ over 2012-13, when NPAs stood at 3.84%.

BUSINESS STANDARD, APR 15, 2014

Jalan bats for better govt-central bank ties and flexible policy-making

Former Reserve Bank of India ([RBI](#)) governor [Bimal Jalan](#) said on Monday the priority of a central bank should not be fixated on either growth or [inflation](#). He said central banks need to consider national priorities in their policy decisions.

"I will not comment on RBI but I will make a general point on central banks. The whole perception about the role of central banks across the world is changing. If you go back to history, in the 90s there was a predominant view that central banks' responsibility was inflation (control), while the government would decide on fiscal policies, development, growth, etc," Jalan said at the sidelines of an event.

"Today, if you look around the world, you will find that central banks are very active in promoting growth. For example, what is the US doing?"

RBI had formed a committee headed by one of its deputy governors, Urijit Patel, to review the monetary policy structure.

The Patel committee advised explicit focus on an inflation target, with the retail price inflation figure seen as appropriate in this regard. It suggested RBI try to keep annual inflation around four per cent.

FINANCIAL MARKETS

BUSINESS LINE, APR 8, 2014

Corporate Affairs Ministry move may lead to governance gap

Being private seems to have its advantages.

Private companies have got an unexpected gift from the Corporate Affairs Ministry.

The Ministry has now given private companies a 'free run' with little to worry about any professional supervision as regards compliance with the new company law.

There won't now be any need for private companies to appoint a company secretary, subject themselves to mandatory secretarial audit or go through any pre-certification of e-forms.

The new legislative framework has sought to reduce substantially the professional presence or supervision in such companies.

Governance issues

This may only exacerbate the governance problem, given that most of the active companies in India are private and do not possess sound governance systems and structures.

This approach may also run counter to the central theme of the new company law – good governance by self-regulation or minimum regulation.

Some professional supervision may be necessary given that many private companies undertake large borrowings from banks and financial institutions.

There is now empirical evidence to show that compliance levels had improved substantially with professional presence and supervision.

Between some professional supervision and no oversight, the Ministry seems to have now opted for the latter as regards private companies' compliance with the new company law.

This could have several unintended consequences, say corporate observers.

For instance, due to absence of pre-certification of e-forms, the chances of documents filed with the Registrar of Companies or other companies being incorrect or incomplete are higher in the absence of prior scrutiny by a company secretary.

It is a fact that many big companies both in terms of turnover and capital are registered as private limited companies, said Lalit Kumar, Partner, J Sagar Associates, a law firm.

Expert view

So now with the Company Secretary not being compulsorily required in these big private companies it will become critical to see who will ensure the compliance of all these provisions, he said.

There must be some threshold level to trigger the mandatory appointment of a company secretary in case of large private companies and not total exemption.

This would have ensured services and supervision of a professional person to comply with the new company law framework, he added.

There won't now be any need for private companies to appoint a company secretary, subject themselves to mandatory secretarial audit or go through any pre-certification of e-forms.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

DECCAN HERALD, APR 15, 2014

Grand design

China's proposal to build a maritime silk route linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans and touching all countries on their rim from eastern China to West Asia and Africa is being widely discussed now.

The proposal seeks to revive an ancient sea route of trade that had existed side by side with the famed silk route on land from China through central Asia to Europe. The importance China attaches to the idea is clear from the fact that it was first mooted by President Xi Jinping himself, followed up by Premier Li Keqiang and taken up by other senior Chinese leaders with governments of other countries in the region. India has also been invited to be a part of the initiative. China has set up a large maritime co-operation fund to support the plan.

The maritime silk route is presented as an economic life line which will boost trade and investment of all countries on the route. It involves development of ports, access from land to these ports, development of sea lanes and creation of financial bodies and arrangements to support infrastructure facilities and trade needs.

China is ready to play a major role in this. While the economic benefits of a busy maritime silk route are obvious, its strategic implications are also equally obvious. The proposed route starts from and goes through parts of the Pacific where China has major territorial disputes with Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam.

There is a view that China is serving its own strategic needs by building ports in Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. This network, called the string of pearls, has even been seen as a counter to the perceived US pivot to Asia and as a potential military threat to India. The area through which the maritime silk route passes is the world's busiest sea trade route. Most of China's oil and raw material needs are met by trade on this route.

So it is natural that China would like to ensure the protection of its trade interests by multilateral involvement in the development of a sea route in the region. It is felt that it would give China the opportunity to invest in regional maritime security infrastructure for seemingly economic reasons. But its strategic import cannot be underestimated. India and other countries will have to consider this aspect, while responding to the Chinese proposal.

LIBRARIES

TIMES OF INDIA, APR 12, 2014

'Public libraries to be made community learning centres'

PATNA: Principal secretary (education) Amarjeet Sinha on Friday said the state's public libraries would soon be developed as community learning centres where people would not only read books and journals but also get self-employment training.

Releasing a book 'Growth and development of libraries in India with special reference to Bihar', written by Sri Arvind Mahila College librarian Preeta Jha, Sinha underlined the need to revive library movement in the state and said the state's primary schools would be linked with the library movement. The public library movement would not only improve the community health but also ensure growth with social justice, he said. NOU vice-chancellor Ras Bihari Prasad Singh presided.

Sinha pointed out there were more than 6,000 public libraries in the state in 1934, but the number declined to around 400 by 1991. He said efforts were being made to upgrade and modernise all the libraries in the state.

Speaking as the chief guest, Chanakya National Law University vice-chancellor A Lakshminath said libraries are the real centres of knowledge in the 21st century and urged people to make the best use of books preserved in different libraries.

Magadh University pro-VC Kriteshwar Prasad said all the colleges of the university would soon be upgraded as e-learning centres and would be kept open even during nights for the benefit of scholars. Patna University pro-VC R K Verma said those states progressed fast where people frequently used libraries. NOU pro-VC R P Upadhaya, Aryabhata Knowledge University's former VC S N Guha, Magadh University's former VC Shamshad Hussain, Magadh Mahila College principal Dolly Sinha, Patna College principal N K Chaudhary, PU students' welfare dean K N Paswan and 'Dolphin Man' R K Sinha were also present on the occasion.

PARAMILITARY FORCES

HINDUSTAN TIMES, APR 13, 2014

Women to be inducted as officers in border force

Breaking the male bastion in the five decade-old Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), the government has approved recruitment of young women as 'combat officers' in the second largest border guarding force.

The women officers, after induction, will have an opportunity to serve in far-flung border locations of the force which secures 'open' and important Indian frontiers with Nepal and Bhutan.

Young women under and up to the age of 25 years will be recruited as direct entry officers in the rank of Assistant Commandants (ACs) and according to sources in the Union Home Ministry, the force will have the trained women officers on ground by late 2015.

Till now, women could only don the combat uniform in the officer cadre in three other central security forces, the Central Reserve Police Force, Central Industrial Security Force and the Border Security Force.

However, women will still not be inducted as officers in the third border guarding force of the country-- the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force-- deployed along the China border.

The SSB, in 2007, was the first to recruit women in junior ranks of Constables but since then, the contingents were being commanded by male officers and hence a desire was felt to have women officers in the paramilitary which has close to 1,400 women personnel in 'khaki' at present.

POLITICAL PARTIES

DECCAN HERALD, APR 9, 2014

Lacks clarity

Election manifestos are not often taken seriously by people. Parties once used to be judged by the policies and promises offered in their manifestos.

But the gap between promises and practice has increased so much in the past that people are now cynical about them.

However, they still give an idea of the thinking in parties on many issues and serve as statements of intent.

The intent may depend on the electoral demands on the parties and related compulsions, which may change once they come to power.

No one will consider the BJP's manifesto also as containing commandments which will be followed religiously if the party comes to power.

It is doubtful if the entire party itself was agreed on all the ideas in the manifesto and on the way they were put forward.

That is clear from the delay in finalising and releasing the document, which saw the light of day only on the first day of polling in the country.

Many of the promises made in the manifesto are not new.

Increasing the growth rate, containing price rise and boosting employment, improving infrastructure, strengthening national security and restoring the country's position in the international community are all expected promises from the main national opposition party, especially because the ruling government failed on most of these counts.

But the details of policies which will help accomplish these objectives are not very clear in the document.

There are contradictions also.

While the BJP is agreeable to foreign direct investment in all sectors, it is against FDI in retail.

There is no reason why FDI is bad only in retail, except that the BJP has a following among small traders in the north.

That should not influence national policy priorities.

It will also send a message of policy inconsistency about the country to investors and others.

Accepted national policies, backed by parliament sanction, should not be thrown out on the basis of narrow considerations.

There is a greater emphasis on issues related to governance than on policies as such because the UPA government's biggest failure was in this area.

Some of the BJP's core concerns like the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, uniform civil code and abrogation of Article 370 have been moved to the background or presented in different terms.

But the fact remains that the party cannot disavow them too.

In many ways, there is more of Modi's mind than the party's heart in the manifesto.

DECCAN HERALD, APR 11, 2014

AAP unveils Mumbai manifesto, vows to decriminalise gay sex

Decriminalisation of gay sex by repealing section 377 of IPC, bringing more women officers in police force and "zero tolerance" towards crimes against women are some of the promises made by Aam Aadmi Party which today unveiled its Mumbai-centric "sankalp patra".

"Mumbai is special(in itself),"activist-turned-politician and AAP's candidate from Mumbai North East seat Medha Patkar said.

The "sankalp patra" was released at a press conference in presence of the AAP candidates who are contesting from all six Lok Sabha seats in Mumbai.

Laying emphasis on eradication of corruption, the Arvind Kejriwal-led party, which is contesting all 48 seats in Maharashtra, also promised repealing of section 377 of IPC if voted to power.

"What we are doing in bedroom that should not be the concern of government," said AAP leader Mayank Gandhi who is contesting from Mumbai North West constituency on the party ticket.

The AAP manifesto also promised "enacting and implementing the Jan Lokpal Bill in Maharashtra and implementation of all recommendations made by the Justice Verma Committee".

The committee was formed after the 2012 gangrape-cum-murder of a paramedic student in Delhi.

Other points mentioned in the manifesto include: introduction of more women officers at all levels in police force; ensuring collaboration in citizens to form neighbourhood watch

groups so as to facilitate effective policing, and zero tolerance to violence against women.

STATESMAN, APR 8, 2014

Ram temple, governance pledge in BJP manifesto

Triggering a major controversy, the BJP manifesto has reaffirmed its commitment to contentious issues like Ram Temple in Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 that provides Jammu and Kashmir with a special Constitutional status and enactment of Uniform Civil Code. Yet, at the same time, it puts stress on growth and development on the economic front aside from pledging a few Muslim-friendly gestures like Madrasa modernisation.

The three contentious issues had been put on back-burner in 1999 when the BJP-led NDA under the stewardship of Atal Behari Vajpayee seemingly turned over a new leaf, emerging with a 'national agenda for governance'.

While the Left parties and Congress attacked BJP for reviving Ram Temple issue NDA ally Lok Janshakti Party was guarded in its reaction. "Nobody takes manifestos seriously," is what LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan said, adding a "wave" keeps blowing across the country for BJP's PM pick Narendra Modi. The BJP's 42-page election document pledged to provide good governance and inclusive development. While favouring foreign investment to boost growth, the party said it would continue to oppose FDI in the retail sector.

"BJP reiterates its stand to explore all possibilities within the framework of the Constitution to facilitate construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya," it said. M M Joshi, chairman of the manifesto panel, however, said including Ram Temple has "nothing to do with Hindutva".

"This is only a promise of development programmeOur stand remains unchanged. We have put Ram Temple in the section on cultural heritage". Mr Joshi also denied there are differences between him and Mr Modi on the temple issue.

Describing the UPA's 10-year rule as "decade of decay", the BJP promised to restore investors' confidence by promoting growth, checking inflation, pushing tax reforms and encouraging foreign investment.

"Barring the multi-brand retail sector, FDI will be allowed in sectors wherever needed for job and asset creation," the manifesto said, evoking mixed reactions. The BJP manifesto also proposed greater push to infrastructure, high speed trains, 100 modern cities and thrust on job creation along with skill development. "Decade under the UPA can rightly be summed in one line, the 'Decade of Decay', in which India had a free fall on all fronts - be it governance, economy, diplomacy, foreign policy, border safety," it said.

“The collapse of the Indian economy has contributed to the sorry state of foreign affairs in no small measure,” the BJP said.

Accusing the Congress-led government of dragging the country through 10 years of jobless growth, BJP said it will accord high priority to job creation and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

The BJP vowed to fight UPA's “tax terrorism” and promised a “non-adversarial and conducive tax environment” by rationalising and simplifying the tax structure.

The party said it will work with all the state governments to introduce Goods and Services Tax (GST).

“We will bring back credibility and trust in government, re-sowing confidence in India domestically as well as internationally,” it said.

The party, in an attempt to reach out to Muslims, vowed to modernise Madrassa education under a new national programme and empower the Waqf Boards in consultation with the religious leaders.

“Minorities say that they only hear about the programmes on radio and TV under UPA but they see nothing on the ground,” Mr Joshi said.

On Uniform Civil Code, the manifesto said BJP believes that there cannot be gender equality till such time when India adopts a UCC which protects the rights of all the women across the country.

On foreign relations, BJP pledged to strengthen regional forums like SAARC and ASEAN, adding that the vision is to “fundamentally reboot and reorient foreign policy goals”.

POVERTY

DECCAN HERALD, APR 11, 2014

India, China among world's poorest countries

With close to one-third of the world's extreme poor concentrated in India and another one-third in four more countries, a sharp focus on them will be central to ending extreme poverty, says a new World Bank paper.

The top five poorest countries - India (with 33 percent of the world's poor), China (13 percent), Nigeria (7 percent), Bangladesh (6 percent) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (5 percent) - together are home to nearly 760 million of the world's poor.

Adding another five countries -- Indonesia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Kenya -- would encompass almost 80 percent of the extreme poor.

Tackling poverty requires understanding where the greatest number of poor live, while at the same time also concentrating on where hardship is most pervasive, according to the World Bank paper "Prosperity for All", released here Thursday.

This entails concerted efforts in countries where large numbers of the world's 1.2 billion poor live, it says.

While economic growth remains vital for reducing poverty, growth has its limits, the paper said suggesting that countries need to complement efforts to enhance growth with policies that allocate more resources to the extreme poor.

"These resources can be distributed through the growth process itself, by promoting more inclusive growth, or through government programmes, such as conditional and direct cash transfers," it said.

In addition, the paper notes, it is imperative not just to lift people out of extreme poverty; it is also important to make sure that, in the long run, they do not get stuck just above the extreme poverty line due to a lack of opportunities that might impede progress toward better livelihood.

Citing the example of India, the report notes that in recent years, new Information Communications Technologies (ICT) applications have created opportunities to re-engineer and upgrade traditional systems and to empower beneficiaries.

"India's ambitious new programme" to provide its citizens and residents a unique, official identity, the UID (Universal Identity) "aims to improve the delivery of government services, reduce fraud and corruption, facilitate robust voting processes, and improve security", it noted.

"Indeed, ICT has the potential to be a powerful tool in the fight against global poverty and in boosting shared prosperity," the report said.

"However, the benefits are not automatic and our understanding of its impact is yet incomplete."

"Economic growth has been vital for reducing extreme poverty and improving the lives of many poor people," said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim.

"Yet, even if all countries grow at the same rates as over the past 20 years, and if the income distribution remains unchanged, world poverty will only fall by 10 percent by 2030, from 17.7 percent in 2010."

"This is simply not enough, and we need a laser like focus on making growth more inclusive and targeting more programmes to assist the poor directly if we're going to end extreme poverty," he said.

"It is a sad commentary on our prosperous world that over one billion people live in extreme poverty," said Kaushik Basu, senior vice president and chief economist at the World Bank.

"It is a welcome call from the World Bank Group to not just mitigate poverty but bring it to closure and also to strive for a more equitable world," he said.

"To achieve these ends we will need determination, but also ideas and innovation, for the ways of the economy can be strange."

RAILWAYS

FINANCIAL EXPRESS, APR 8, 2014

Itanagar welcomes its first passenger train

SummaryThe Arunachal capital was on Monday put on the country's railway map with the first passenger train of about 400 commuters arriving at Naharlagun near here.

The Arunachal capital was on Monday put on the country's railway map with the first passenger train of about 400 commuters arriving at Naharlagun near here.

The train with 10 passengers and two goods compartments, towed by a diesel engine, left Dekargaon at 7 AM and arrived here at 12.30 PM, covering a distance of 181 km.

“It is a great day for Arunachal Pradesh,” CD Sharma, who had bought the first ticket for Naharlagun at Dekargaon railway station for R 35 said.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had announced introducing train service in his package for the state on January 31, 2008.

Informing about the arrival of the train, chief minister Nabam Tuki during an election rally here announced that Rajdhani and Shatabdi Express would be introduced soon to link Arunachal to national capital Delhi. The ambitious 20-km railway line project had missed its target of December, 2011.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

HINDU, APR 15, 2014

UNESCO to scrutinise Delhi's bid for Heritage City tag

MADHUR TANKHA

Before Delhi is accorded the tag of a World Heritage City, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation will be sending a team of archaeological experts here in June to examine the heritage sites in New Delhi and Shahjahanabad that had been included in the dossier submitted by the Union Culture Ministry.

“These experts will be from South-East Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore and Hong Kong who are more familiar with the Indian monuments than archaeological experts from Europe and the United States. To ensure unbiased scrutiny of these sites, none of the experts will be from India,” said a senior official of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, which had submitted the dossier to UNESCO in January this year.

After examining the sites, the experts will prepare a report. “Based on the report, UNESCO will eventually decide whether to accord Delhi the status of a World Heritage City or not. The announcement would be made in June 2015.”

Interestingly, INTACH has compartmentalised New Delhi, which includes landmarks like Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House and other iconic places like Connaught Place and Shahjahanabad built by Emperor Shah Jahan in the 17th Century. “In the dossier, we have highlighted the fact that New Delhi and Shahjahanabad are two imperial cities. While British architect Edward Lutyens was instrumental in designing New Delhi, which is now known as Lutyens’ Delhi, Mughal emperor Shah Jahan played a pivotal role in outlining the contours of Shahjahanabad. Since Shahjahanabad is dotted with some aesthetically constructed havelis, we are in the process of talking to their owners and restoring them. The dossier has been prepared in a way that Delhi is accorded the title of World Heritage City. India’s nominations have been rejected in the past because the presentations were not comprehensive. This time, we have even included colourful pictures of the sights with their names in the dossier,” said the INTACH official.

For India it is important that Delhi bags this title because it would give tourism a boost. “There would be more footfalls to Delhi from various countries to see the hundreds of havelis in Shahjahanabad. We are planning to convert them into tourist lodges. More than tourism, we want to instil pride among the inhabitants of Delhi,” the official added.