

The reward of one duty done is the power to fulfil another.
_George Eliot

Central
Chronicle

Founder : Late Shri Ramgopal Maheshwari

Inspiration: Late Shri Prafulla Kumar Maheshwari

EDITORIAL

Rafale Audio

The Congress President Mr. Rahul Gandhi dropped a bombshell in the Lok Sabha on the Rafale deal by referring to an audio chip of former Defence Minister Mr. Manohar Parrikar now Chief Minister of Goa. It is said that Mr. Parrikar has stated in that audio that he had all the papers regarding Rafale with him. On Speaker Mrs. Sumitra Mahajan's direction he had not played the tape in the House. The Speaker said that such material should be verified first and asked Mr. Gandhi to give on undertaking about the authenticity of the audio clip.

The Congress is persisting in its demand of Joint Parliament Committee to go through deal and probe into it. The Government has flatly rejected the demand for JPC.

The issue is likewise the Bofors and the Spectrum which rocked the Parliament earlier. In Bofors it was charged by the Opposition including Bhartiya Janata Party that the Congress Government of the Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi had enhanced the cost of the Bofors Gun in shady deal. While the Government versions was that it had sought certain modifications in Bofors Gun to suit our military requirement.

The Congress is charging the Government that UPA Government had negotiated Rafale price on Rs.565 crore per plane and ordered 126 fighter planes to strengthen our Air Force. But subsequently the Modi Government enhanced the negotiated price Rs.565 crore to 1600 crores per plane and reduced the purchase from 126 to 36 planes, the Congress is also

charging the Modi Government pushed in Anil Ambani into the deal to provide him huge benefits.

The Congress got shot in arms, when the BJP Government coalition party the Shiv Sena Member of Parliament Mr. Arvind Sevani said when the Government said that everything was transparent in Rafale than why it was not agreeing to JPC demand. The Biju Janata Dal has also demanded while paper on the Rafale deal.

During the UPA regime the Opposition BJP stalled the Parliament on the issue of JPC in Spectrum and it was ultimately resolved when the Congress Prime Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh accepted the JPC demand.

Mr. Vishwajit Rane whose name referred in the audio clip has said that Audio was doctored. At the same time the BJP leaders Mr. Yashwant Sinha, Mr. Arun Shorie and Advocate Mr. Prashant Bhushan moved the Supreme Court seeking review of its December 14 verdict dismissing all the Public Interest litigation alleging irregularities in the purchase of 36 Rafale planes from France.

In the audio tape it is said that it contain voice of Mr. Manohar Parrikar and he hit back at Mr. Rahul Gandhi saying that it has desperate attempt to fabricate facts after his lies were exposed by the recent Supreme Court judgment in Rafale deal. The Supreme Court dismissing all the public interest petitions observed that there was nothing wrong in the Rafale deal. The Rafale issue is snowballing in the Parliament and the Supreme Court.

MISA Pension

The Kamal Nath Government has stopped the payment with immediate effect of the MISA pensions to those who suffered during the Emergency Rule of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975 to 1977.

He also stopped the practice of reciting of 'Vande Matram' at the secretarial lawn on first of every month. The Government has stated that before final decision it would review it.

During the Janata Party Rule in 1977 the MISA victims were given loan of Rs.25,0000 each of them. The subsequent Government of Bhar-

tiya Janata Party has started the Pension schemes for MISA victims on regular monthly basis. Obviously it is a political pension and it referred that it was much more than the pension paid freedom fighters that is Rs.4000 per month.

The Shivraj Singh Chouhan Government turned the MISA Pension Scheme into a law by an enactment. It is hinted that the Kamal Nath Government is likely to repeal the Act.

Mr. Chouhan has dubbed the move as insult of MISA victims. He would challenge the decision in the High Court. More than 2000 people are getting this pension.

Local actions are building blocks for #GlobalGoals

Shobha Shukla and Bobby Ramakant, CNS

International commitments are vital for a better tomorrow but no less important are local actions on the frontlines, for bringing in desired change. Most important and often unheard voices are of those who are striving hard to bring in a change on the frontlines. These voices from the grounds-up, need to be plugged in to those at national, regional and global levels who are driving bigger processes for a better tomorrow.

For instance, despite the World Health Organization (WHO) saying that the tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing more than seven million people a year, we need local actions to translate evidence-based tobacco control policies into public health impact. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) like heart disease and stroke, cancers, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, etc cause over 70% of deaths worldwide. While there are larger policy level changes and actions warranted, there is no excuse not to scale up well-coordinated responses on the ground to prevent NCDs.

With this intent, 3rd Summit of Asia Pacific Cities Alliance for Tobacco Control and NCDs prevention (AP-CAT) brought together over 100 local leaders from 30 cities in 12 countries of Asia Pacific region. Participants included Members of Parliaments (MPs), Mayors, Vice Mayors, Governor, Vice Governor, other local government officials, public health experts, among others.

TOBACCO EPIDEMIC IS PREVENTABLE
Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary, Member of Parliament from Bangladesh said to CNS (Citizen News Service) in video interview (youtube.com/c/citizennewsorgcns) that when

he attended the World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) in Mumbai, India (2009), the writing on the wall was clear: tobacco is the single largest preventable manmade epidemic. "Since it is preventable, then why are we not making every effort to prevent it?" he said.

"I have engaged in many litigations against tobacco companies" said Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary. He fought litigations against tobacco cultivation on the hill tracks, tobacco advertisement related issues, among others.

nation" rightly said Barrister Patwary.

Barrister Patwary has conducted couple of mobile courts for tobacco control and is also engaging farmers to encourage them for crop substitution. "We will give them subsidy if they abandon tobacco cultivation. Corn is very popular in Bangladesh so we are encouraging them to cultivate corn rather than tobacco" he said.

Local leaders are more in direct contact with the people. Whereas Members of Parliaments spend significant part of their time in the parliament and parlia-

as completely tobacco-free" said Barrister Patwary.

MPs can also support local leaders in amplifying their demands. "For example if local sabha member wants to promote NCDs prevention we can help promote that issue in the parliament or we can write to the ministry to help support the local leaders like Mayor who want to work on NCDs prevention, or make a park for people to do physical activity, or run awareness campaigns" said Patwary. He shared another way to help strengthen voices of local leaders: "Parliamentary Standing Committee is a very powerful committee on health or other issues. Parliamentary committee has parliamentarians as members and it can make recommendations. Good thing is that when a parliamentary committee makes a recommendation it is reviewed every three months, and it is almost binding for the ministry to follow these recommendations."

WHO has recognized tobacco industry interference as major obstacle in implementing global tobacco treaty (formally called the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control) as well as, tobacco use as a threat to sustainable development. That is why the global tobacco treaty has WHO FCTC Article 5.3 to empower governments of over 180 countries to stop tobacco industry interference in health policy.

Barrister Patwary shared that like in Japan, Bangladesh too, significant number of shares in tobacco company are owned by the government itself.

This is the biggest problem why we lag behind in implementing WHO FCTC Article 5.3, says Patwary. "This creates a serious question of bias, lobby, interference... and also government cannot decide against the interest of tobacco company when itself it is a part of tobacco company." **(To be Contd.)**

For good governance it is vital that MPs work closely in tandem with local leaders who are more rooted in the community they represent. "That is why we are working closely with Union Parishad chairman, Union Parishad members, local Sabha members, and other local leaders, as they play a key role in convincing people who elect them to lead healthier life, stop tobacco use, and reduce risk of NCDs. Without their collaboration no policy can be achieved. My ultimate aim is to declare some of the areas of my constituency as completely tobacco-free" said Barrister Patwary. MPs can also support local leaders in amplifying their demands. "For example if local sabha member wants to promote NCDs prevention we can help promote that issue in the parliament or we can write to the ministry to help support the local leaders like Mayor who want to work on NCDs prevention, or make a park for people to do physical activity, or run awareness campaigns" said Patwary.

"When I came to politics, I created my own manifesto to work against tobacco and tobacco companies as a politician. I came to know that large number of youth are getting addicted to tobacco. Youth are also the key targets of tobacco companies to make youth their future [business] and lifelong customers" said Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary.

"Bangladesh is a country of 160 million people with children and youth who will be our future tomorrow. If we can make this world tobacco-free and beat NCDs, today's youth will be tomorrow's citizens of a healthy

mentary processes and proceedings.

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Stop going off the rails

By Sujit De

"We were inside the third coach of the Dum Dum-bound train when we noticed a spark and a thick smoke billowing out. Then my mother began to cough severely after inhaling the smoke. I can't describe the horror we felt during the 40 minutes we were in the closed rake," said one of the commuters of Kolkata Metro Railway on December 26 after getting out of a crowded and closed Metro rake that caught fire. A Metro official said that there would be inquiry to ascertain the source of the fire.

However, it can easily be said that much more needs to be done in maintenance and disaster response in Kolkata Metro. The incident made the condition of fifteen commuters serious due to suffocation, one injured and many traumatized.

Interestingly, in a video that went viral on the same day, former Punjab Minister and BJP leader Laxmi Chawla requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Railway Minister Piyush Goyal to forget about the bullet train and to have mercy on the common man.

"I am on board the Saryu Yamuna Express for 24 plus 8 hours. The train is running nine hours behind schedule. For God's sake, forget

about bullet train, focus on the trains that are already running," she said in the video.

She rightly advised the Railway Minister to travel sometimes like a commoner in a train to see the hardships the travellers faces. "What if Shatabdi and Rajdhani trains are good? These are for rich people. What about trains like this one in which the labourers, farmers, soldiers and their families travel? Hundreds are sleeping in the open at railway stations in this bitter cold for want of waiting rooms," she said.

Addressing the Railway Minister, she said, "We have been dialling railway helplines 138 and 139 and sending you emails but there is no one out there to listen to our woes.

There is no food on this train, the seats are broken, toilet seats are dirty and doors have to be opened with a lot of difficulty."

The BJP leader has indeed aired the grievances of the common railway commuters. A few months ago, 13 school children had been killed by a speeding train that smashed a school van at an unmanned crossing at Kushinagar near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh.

When will all these unattended

railway crossings be upgraded either by employing permanent gate keepers or by building flyovers over the crossings? India has 9,340 unmanned crossings as recorded in 2016. A flyover at Kushinagar crossing must have saved the precious lives of so many school children.

It is also a matter of grave concern that railway tracks are not being properly maintained. Track fractures suspected to be the cause of a derailment massacre and old ICF coaches had added insult to injury.

The Kakodar Committee on Rail Safety as well as the Sam Pitroda Committee on Modernization of Indian Railways have recommended complete migration from ICF to LHB coaches as the latter can ensure enhanced passenger safety in case of derailment. Presently, LHB coaches are restricted only to Shatabdi, Rajdhani, Duronto premium trains. But it needs to be extended to all other trains immediately to ensure safety of the passengers.

The irony is that while the Ahmedabad - Mumbai, bullet train project will cost Rs. One lakh crore; financial constraints hinder track renewal, a total replacement of coaches from ICF to LHB, moderni-

sation of signalling systems and building flyovers over all important railway crossings. Then, why on earth must we give priority to bullet trains? Indian Railways cannot afford to undertake such a costly project while compromising on safety standards.

When we have a speedier alternative in air transport, there is no reason why Indian Railways must compete with airways. Railways cannot make their bullet ride a cheaper option than air travel. Bullet train is indeed a glaring example of misplaced priority.

Without spending more money on it, the government needs to make existing train journeys more punctual and safe. Moreover, there is an urgent need to expand and modernise railways and also to fill the vacancies on war footing not only to give more jobs to Indian youths but also to improve the safety standards. It will be dangerous if train drivers are made to do double duty as a result of personnel shortage.

It will be equally dangerous if there is a lack of man power in the field of track inspections and maintenance.

Opinion

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