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The Politics of

Ecosensitivity

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Kerala has squandered the chance to be a role model for conserving biodiversity.

Politics usually trumps environmental concerns in India. This has

been the state of play for decades whether we speak of conserving

forests, rivers or other ecologically important resources. The latest

victim in this game of political football is the chain of the Western

Ghats that stretches over 1,500 km across six states. No politician has

dared question the science that informed the important report of the

Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), led by noted scientist

Madhav Gadgil, that was submitted last year to the government. But instead of understanding the arguments that lay behind the various recommendations made in the report to protect what *Science* magazine terms as the world's second-most "irreplaceable" site of threatened species, politicians of all persuasions have ensured that this report is first diluted, then misrepresented, and finally tied up in political knots. The latter will guarantee that what little could still be salvaged of the original report will now be firmly buried.

The course the WGEEP report has taken is instructive, and predictable. Gadgil and his team studied the biodiversity richness of the Western Ghats and then came up with a set of recommendations to ensure that these resources are properly managed and protected. There was no blanket advice to cordon off the entire region, given that it covers 44 districts and 142 talukas in the six states. What it suggested instead was to divide the Western Ghats into three "ecologically sensitive zones" (ESZ). Only ESZ 1 would be closed to any interference by way of mining, power generation (thermal or hydel) and industry. Zones 2 and 3 would be permitted these industrial activities on a graded basis and on condition that they conformed to environmentally benign

criteria.

The most significant aspect of the Gadgil report was its recommendation that the entire process be rooted in the gram sabhas that should be the ultimate authority to decide what kind of development, if any, should be permitted in an area considered ecologically sensitive. This recommendation conforms to similar criteria that exist in laws like the Forest Rights Act.

Yet, as we know from places like Goa and Odisha, it is this type of decentralised decision-making that is the biggest threat to those who care little about conservation and are more interested in exploiting natural resources for their version of so-called "development". Hence, whether it is mining, quarrying, sand mining, dams, thermal power plants or polluting industries, environmental concerns are seen as obstacles that must be removed for real "progress". Given such thinking, no one was surprised when the committee set up by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) headed by K Kasturirangan to study the Gadgil report chose to ignore this particular recommendation.

The violent protests against the Kasturirangan report in Kerala last month were the direct result of a notification by the MoEF identifying eco-sensitive areas where five categories of activities would

be prohibited. These are quarrying, mining, sand mining, thermal power plants, construction projects covering more than 20,000 sq km, township and area development projects of 50 acres or more, and polluting industries. Falling within areas notified as ecologically sensitive are 123 villages.

Instead of explaining what this notification would mean, and that it would not necessarily lead to displacement or loss of livelihood, local political considerations took over. Opposition politicians and some religious heads whipped up anger against the state government using a volatile mix of misrepresentation of facts and genuine fears. On its part, the state government failed to anticipate such a reaction. And the MoEF, which had provided the trigger for the protests, backed down claiming that its notification was only a "draft" which would be finalised after consultation with all affected states. Surely, the issue could have been handled more sensibly by sending this so-called "draft" to the state governments concerned, instead of posting it on the ministry website.

That said, the real tragedy of the recent stand-off in Kerala between

the state government and the opposition is the opportunity missed for the state to become a role model for other states. Kerala has a rich tradition of involvement of panchayats and gram sabhas in the developmental process. The consultative planning processes the state pioneered have been lauded around the world. Kerala has an educated and informed citizenry that could have been included in the implementation of the efforts to conserve the Western Ghats. In fact, Kerala could have demonstrated how the preservation of biodiversity can sit comfortably with people's livelihoods and survival needs and is not in opposition to them. The Gadgil report's emphasis on including gram sabhas in the planning and implementation process was premised on the belief that such a process will make efforts at conservation of biodiversity sustainable and strong. At this juncture, even the greatly diluted recommendations of the Kasturirangan Committee are unlikely to be implemented with any seriousness. The price for this will not be paid by politicians who plan only for the next elections, but by ordinary people who will suffer the very real consequences of the loss of irreplaceable natural resources.

Where Credit Is Due

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Acknowledging Babasaheb Ambedkar as a national leader would be the best memorial. No observer of the Indian political scene will be able to deny the power of symbolism or dare ask “what’s in a name?”. The entire gamut of agitations, protest campaigns and victory processions vis-à-vis the demand for memorials and statues, naming of airports, flyovers and streets, and of welfare schemes after a particular leader is a familiar part and parcel of Indian politics. On one single day last week, newspapers in Mumbai carried an advertisement by the Maharashtra government expressing “gratitude” to the centre for handing over land for a memorial for Babasaheb Ambedkar, a news story of how Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activists plan to popularise Narendra Modi in rural Maharashtra by collecting soil and iron for the 600-foot statue of Sardar Patel and of the Maharashtra government’s decision to lay the foundation for the 312-foot statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji. The cynical among us might link these feverish announcements and demands to the

forthcoming general elections; those jostling for credit claim that all they want is to commemorate their leaders. The announcement on handing over the land for the Ambedkar memorial led to a mutual congratulatory atmosphere between the Maharashtra and central governments; at both places the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) are allies. The different factions of the Republican Party of India (RPI) have agitated long for such a memorial. Many more voices joined them just before the municipal and local bodies' elections of 2011. In the competition to take credit for the memorial, a most unseemly spat between the state government's ruling partners has also broken out. When newspapers reported that the official announcement was in the offing, the race to take credit became keener. Different groups stepped up, marching to the site with the avowed aim of "taking it over" and one RPI leader even declared that he and his followers were prepared for police lathis and bullets! A NCP leader was quick to tell media persons that he was the first to raise the demand while "others have since joined in for credit". The centre's decision to hand over land belonging to the National Textile Corporation for the Ambedkar memorial comes 57 years after his death. Ambedkar's political differences with M K Gandhi over caste-based

electoral reservations and with the Congress in general are too well known to be repeated here. Ambedkar has never been among those commemorated and honoured by the Congress, or other ruling parties, in all these years. It took a 16-year long agitation to rename the Marathwada University in Aurangabad after him, and even so only through a “compromise” formula. A number of his intellectual followers have written and spoken out against the injustice of portraying him only as a leader of the dalits. Others point out that his followers are as guilty of the politics of “appropriation” and for the fact that he is popularly seen only as a dalit or neo-Buddhist icon. Ambedkar’s educational accomplishments along with his achievements as an author, journalist and as a leader and moulder of the emergent Indian nation, given the odds that he faced because of his caste, make for an inspirational legacy by any standards. He studied economics, law and politics, got his MA degree and PhD from Columbia University in the US, a DSc from London University, earned an entrance to the bar from Grey’s Inn and had enrolled in the London School of Economics. The attention paid to Ambedkar’s “politics” has overshadowed not only the story of his academic brilliance but also his forceful writings (scholarly and journalistic) on myriad other

issues.

Every year around 6 December – his death anniversary – the media takes token cognisance of his place in the hearts and minds of his followers (and political observers feel compelled to mention the lack of unity among the many factions of the RPI). In all media reports across languages, he is described as a “dalit leader” or “saviour”. Perhaps what the entire country ought to recall, especially in these times of thin-skinned intolerance to perceived insults and attempts to project individuals as formidable leaders, is what he said before the Constituent Assembly in 1949.

The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not ‘to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enable him to subvert their institutions’...Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.

[Lifting the Siege on Iran](#)

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The deal over Iran's nuclear programme may well indicate a historic shift in the power balance in west Asia. That such an agreement was reached despite the opposition from Israel and Saudi Arabia is significant. The positive implications of making this deal permanent are many but the coming months will tell us whether the United States really has turned the corner over its old shibboleth. Vijay Prashad (vp01@aub.edu.lb) is the Edward Said Chair at the American University of Beirut. The Palais des Nations in Geneva, where Iranian diplomats met with representatives of the P5 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) + 1 (Germany), has a 46 hectare park that is home to an ostentation of peacocks. The owners of the land bequeathed it to the League of Nations (now the United Nations) as long as the international organisation maintained peacocks on the land. The current group was donated by a Japanese zoo and by the Indian mission. They have been spectators to a flurry of activity in the past few years over the question of Iran's nuclear programme. *Mayura*, the killer of snakes, is certainly a hopeful mascot of the Geneva UN. On 24 November, the P5+1 signed an interim deal with Iran – the first in decades – which

could draw down the tensions not only around Iran but also in the entire region, from Afghanistan to Lebanon. A snake was certainly flayed, although it is not clear which snake was killed. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is not an expressive person, but his statement after the signing was even more cautious. He urged the governments involved "to do everything possible to build on this encouraging start, creating mutual confidence and allowing continued negotiations to extend the scope of this initial agreement". Ban Ki-moon was right to put his enthusiasm on mute. Israel had already signalled that this deal was a "historic mistake", while the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia warned that it would conduct its own adverse policy towards Iran. Pressure from Israel, from Saudi Arabia and from the right wing in the US Congress suggested that the United States (US) would not have an easy time keeping its own allies in line on this deal. The US government's fact sheet on the deal suggested that it "halts the progress of Iran's nuclear program and rolls it back in key respects", while the "overwhelming majority of the sanctions regime remains in place". In other words, the US claimed that Iran conceded on everything and got nothing – that Iran was the snake to be corralled. In Iran, on the other hand, its lead negotiator and Foreign Minister Javed Zarif was

received

as a hero, saying that his country now could fully exercise the right

to a full civilian nuclear programme that included the right to enrich

uranium. The snake, for Iran, was the US-led policy to garrotte Iran.

Differing interpretations are the stuff of diplomatic engagement. No

power wants to say that it has been overwhelmed in the negotiations by

another power – all those who leave the deal with their signatures on

the paper would like to make the most of what they signed. A factual

look at the deal indicates that Iran got what it had always wanted,

namely, an implicit right to enrich uranium for its civilian nuclear

programme, and that the West got what it always wanted, namely, a

guarantee that Iran would not move towards a military nuclear programme

(something Iran has always denied). In other words, and after all those

visits to Geneva, we are back to the 1990s when this dispute began to

escalate, and we are back to a discussion about the procedures of the

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) allowances for nuclear energy

and for surveillance against nuclear weaponisation. It tells you

something about the stand-off over Iran that it was never about the

substance of nuclear energy-weapons and always about geopolitical power

in and around Iran.

Dialogue of Civilisations

By 2003, the US government had overthrown two of Iran's historical enemies (the Taliban and the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein) and removed the pressure on Iran's two most tense borders (with Afghanistan and Iraq). Iran's reform-oriented government led by Mohammed Khatami opened a dialogue through a road map that came to Washington via the Swiss Interest Section in Tehran. Swiss Ambassador Tim Guldimann sent a note along with the road map pointing out that the Iranians were eager for a deal then but they feared that "a lack of trust in the US imposes on them to proceed very carefully and very confidentially". Guldimann said he "got the clear impression that there is a strong will of the regime to tackle the problem with the US now". Iran's UN ambassador at the time was Javid Zarif, whose draft road map from 2003 reads very much like the agreement of 2013, including the section on "full transparency for security that there are no Iranian endeavours to develop or possess Weapons of Mass Destruction, full cooperation with IAEA". The Bush administration tossed the note in the trash, set up a confrontation with Iran in the IAEA (assisted by India in its two votes of 2005), encouraged Iranian hard-liners to build up their nuclear capacity as an

insurance against an attack (as North Korea had done, whereas Iraq had not) and drew sustenance from the kind of Punch and Judy politics that followed with Ahmadinejad, Netanyahu and Bush – caricatures of testosterone politics. Iran's two other historic enemies – Saudi Arabia and Israel – have not changed their stance vis-à-vis Tehran. For them, the destruction of the Iranian regime is their policy, a goal that today recedes further into the horizon. Over the course of these four decades, Iran has become an important political actor in its region – not just through a politics of sectarianism (as a political centre of Shi'ism) but also through its energy diplomacy and its resolute posture against US (and other Western) intervention. As the US tries to extricate itself from its two failed wars (Afghanistan and Iraq), Iran has emerged as one of the main political forces that could provide the basis for stability. Any post-US Afghan political settlement will require Iranian involvement – not only because of the close ties between western Afghanistan and Iran but also because half of Afghanistan's oil comes from Iran and the pipeline agreements with Pakistan, India and central Asia would require Afghan participation. Iranian diplomacy and power will also be crucial to any policy in Syria, where the civil war has tilted in

large part to favour Iran's ally, the regime of Bashar al-Assad. There will be no possibility of any kind of political deal in Syria without Iran's diplomatic involvement, one that is far more influential in Damascus than that of Russia. Washington is aware of these factors.

Weakened West

In 2003, Bush assumed that the US military force would tilt the balance of forces in west Asia towards the US. Things unravelled very quickly. The Arab Spring, which has a much longer history of internal struggles in the various Arab countries, is nonetheless drawn from considerable popular anger against the undemocratic regimes that collaborated with the West. By the time Obama came to office in 2009, US power in the region had declined considerably – its inability to force the issue in Syria is not just a mark of the complexity of geopolitics but also of the weakened state of US influence. US allies in west Asia – Saudi Arabia and Israel – are of course more prone to create instability in the region than to bring peace. If anything it is Iran that will be able to manage some of the deep crises in the region. Out of weakness – political and economic – come the P5+1 to the table in Geneva. The bluster had worn off. The language of ultimatums and military force seemed anachronistic. The Iranians cleverly

have Zarif,
the former UN ambassador, as their foreign minister – and he
brought his
long-term memory of previous attempts to the table as well as
his
genial demeanour. It was hard to caricature Zarif as the
scowling
mullah, not with Zarif and his boss, Iran's President Hassan
Rouhani
conducting clever Twitter diplomacy for the world's press. The
advantage
was always with Iran.
A brief wrinkle came on the scene when France scuttled the
first
meeting with last-minute demands for the closure of some of
the Iranian
reactors. These were not serious objections, because Iran had
already
suspended work at its Arak reactor and it had abandoned its
project to
build more centrifuges as part of a process to build
confidence for the
Geneva meeting. When it was pointed out that Iran had already
conceded
on these points, France nonetheless objected and the meeting
had to be
put off for a week. France's President Francois Hollande went
off on a
tour of Israel where he pledged to hold the line against a
deal and
called for Palestinians to forgo their right to return to
their land.
But France's effort on Israel's behalf failed. The deal went
through
with the other European powers outflanking a tendency for
France to
revive its old colonial ambitions (bombing raids in Ivory

Coast, Libya
and Mali seem to whet this appetite).

Saudi Arabia's sulk did not last long. Its Gulf Arab allies – Kuwait, Qatar and Oman (which had hosted the secret Iran-US talks) – came out for the agreement. The Kingdom had to follow saying, "If there is goodwill, this agreement could represent a preliminary step toward a comprehensive solution to the Iranian nuclear program". This is indeed an interim agreement. Six months from now the powers will meet again.

But they will not be able to roll back Iran's civilian nuclear programme. Even Israel recognises that. Netanyahu told his Likud Party members that this accord "must bring about one outcome: the dismantling of Iran's military nuclear capability". The addition of the word "military" is crucial. It means that Israel accepts Iran's civilian nuclear programme – something that Tel Aviv had adamantly resisted.

Good news followed quite quickly after the embargo around Iran lifted. Oil prices dropped, influenced by the expectation of Iranian oil being allowed to more easily enter the world market (Indonesia hastily inked a deal to buy Iranian oil). India moved to settle payments for its purchases of Iranian oil over the past year, and hoped for deeper commercial ties through the port city (Charbahar) in Iran that India is

helping develop. But most importantly, the powers agreed to return to Geneva's peacock home on 22 January to reopen stuck talks around a Syrian peace. Exaggerated phrases crept into the media in west, central and south Asia – “world historical deal”, “world class deal”, “deal of the century” – all phrases to indicate the relief that war has been temporarily averted and that Iran – with its location as the geographical linchpin between west Asia and south as well as central Asia – can once more resume its natural role as a political player in the region.

Illegal Mining, Impatient Mafi a and Ill-treated Administrators

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As the construction sector grows, illegal sand and granite mining can only be expected to increase. From what can be seen until now, honest officers who have taken action against the sand mafi a in their respective districts in different states have either been transferred or suspended. The politician-sand mafi a nexus must be

broken in order to protect the environment and prevent huge revenue loss.

In popular cinema, the hooligans are always defeated by the end of the film and the heroes win thus demonstrating that truth will triumph.

But the recent action against upright administrators who cracked down on illegal sand mining calls for a different look at the mafia-administrators tangle. Durga Shakti Nagpal, a young Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, was suspended for her stringent action against the sand mafia smuggling sand from the banks of the Yamuna River in Gautam Buddh Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh (UP). She had registered 40 cases and seized more than 300 sand-laden tippers for illegal sand mining within six months of her posting. This irked the local sand mafia-political class. The ruling Samajwadi Party (SP) suspended her and justified the suspension.

Sand, clay and silt mining is common in the waterbodies and is growing phenomenally due to the increasing demand in the construction segment. The upright officials who take action against such illegal activity are victimised. There are cases wherein officials, civil society volunteers and common people are subjected to physical attacks and even murdered. Fearing such attacks the officials

especially the lower ranking ones do not even register cases against illegal sand mining.

One politician of the SP who enjoys cabinet rank in the UP government openly said that he was responsible for getting the IAS officer suspended in just 41 minutes. When the union government sought a report over the suspension of the officer, another UP minister sarcastically advised the central government to recall all IAS officers from the state since their job could be done by the state government officials. Subsequently, the union environment ministry appointed a three-member committee to study the illegal sand mining and the committee in its report noted that there is overexploitation of sand mining in the Gautam Buddh Nagar riverbed.

Punitive Response

Similarly, another IAS officer Ashish Kumar who ordered a detailed investigation into the coastal beach sand mining in Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu has been transferred allegedly at the behest of mining dons. He had ordered a raid on V V Minerals (VVM), which is number two globally and number one in India in exporting garnet sand. This company has beach sand business in Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and

Kanyakumari and allegedly exploits the sand unlawfully on *poramboke* lands.

A preliminary survey and inspection by a team of officials from revenue, excise, mining and police departments shows that in Vaipar and Vempar regions in Vilathikulam taluk, 2.40 lakh metric tonnes of beach sand, rich in garnet, and other minerals were illegally taken away by VVM and for which a fine of Rs 10.25 lakh was imposed on it. Apparently this company had permission to take beach sand from only four hectares (ha) but had illegally taken sand from 40 ha of land. Besides, the casuarina trees planted to prevent soil erosion and prevent another tsunami-like disaster were completely removed from these 40 ha to enable the sand mining. The survey also revealed that this company mined private land as well without permission. The mafia politician network did not spare the district collector, who initiated action against the illegal granite mining in Madurai district.

In June this year an IAS officer, Ansul Mishra, who unearthed a huge illegal granite business near Madurai district was not spared by the politician-granite mafia network. While citizens objected to these transfers, opposition parties shy away from doing so showing the strong

nexus between the mafia and the political class irrespective of party affiliation. In the case of the illegal beach sand mining, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa has constituted a committee and ordered a thorough investigation.

Environmental and Revenue Loss

It is an open secret that illegal sand mining and quarrying are carried on in common property resources like riverbeds, irrigation tanks, ponds, grazing lands, coastlines and hillocks. Recent flash floods and the disaster in the Uttarakhand region show what unmindful human intervention in the form of mismanaging natural resources leads to. Understandably, in many places the rule of law has been completely violated or is in the hands of the mafia. Illegal sand mining and quarrying not only cause environmental damage but also lead to revenue loss for the state exchequer.

Owing to overexploitation of sand, the groundwater table goes down drastically, the aquifers dry out and soil erosion alters the riverbed and affects downstream habitats in river zones. The natural flood path is affected and water flow is haphazardly diverted into many river zones.

In and around Melur, a small town 25 km east of Madurai, many waterbodies including ponds, tanks and *nallahs* have vanished due to illegal and excessive excavation of granite stones. Five villages which had granite both in poramboke and private patta lands have been reduced to rubble and the loss to the government exchequer is estimated at more than Rs 40,000 crore. The then district collector, U Sagayam, an upright IAS officer, collected details of the illegal mining and documented the same in 2009. The granite mafia influenced the government to get him transferred. The next collector, Ansul Mishra, also took serious measures to bring the culprits to book. Due to his initiative nearly 230 persons including some officials were arrested. It is alleged that this collector too was transferred due to the mafia's intervention. The subordinate officials are afraid to proceed further.

Sand mining without permission even on one's own farm is an offence.

On the complaint of the village administrative officer, two farmers were arrested and put behind bars in Nadur village of Orathanadu taluk in the Cauvery Mettur Project region for levelling their farm fields for cultivation purpose in 2012. It shows that while the less educated farmers who have no clout with the political class are

subjected to legal proceedings, the organised sand mafia gets off scot-free and the sincere officials are shown the door. It is hard to believe that officials who dare to check, prevent and seize illegally mined sand have been cruelly killed.

On 6 August the Tuticorin district collector ordered an enquiry into the beach sand mining and commissioned collective investigation by a group of government departments. The district collector sent a detailed report to the government for further action. Within 24 hours she was transferred. Now, owing to pressure, the state government has constituted a three-member committee to study the case under the chairmanship of the revenue secretary.

Break the Nexus

Sand mining and quarrying must be carried out in the designated places for a specified duration only after the clearance from departments like revenue, environment, agriculture, mining, public works and town and country planning. Nonetheless, in most of the cases, these are either flouted or not followed at all. The Supreme Court in February 2013 declined to ban sand mining but asked the state governments to regulate the extraction of sand based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Environment made in 2010. Conventionally, sand mining especially in riverbed has been permitted by

different agencies in various states. While the local panchayat can decide on the permission for sand mining in Kerala, the mining department is vested with the powers to permit sand mining in Tamil Nadu.

There has been a growing demand for sand in the construction and realty sector and illegal mining is expected to accelerate. Local civil societies with the active support of officials can alone bring the sand mafia to book. The respective state governments must take appropriate measures to prevent illegal sand mining to protect the environment and improve revenue collections. The political class must realise that good governance with transparent administration can benefit the community in the long run. The courageous officers must be recognised for their meritorious service. Meanwhile, the union government is contemplating curtailment of the powers of the state governments by making amendments in the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 1969 in dealing with IAS officers.

Between Tradition and Modernity Nizams, Colonialism and Modernity in Hyderabad State

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The British colonial state in India ensured that the princely states were pictured as backward enclaves that kept alive an older feudal polity characterised by autocracy and underdevelopment, while British India moved towards modernity and capitalist development. However, the reality was that while the princes appeared superficially to enshrine an exotic Oriental past in their courtly and private life, the general development was carried out on the line of the colonial model. The ideological boundaries between the princely states and British territories were fluid and there was visible cross-pollination between the sociocultural and political issues and movements of the two territories. In fact, the colonial state used a number of methods to produce the effect of colonial power in the princely states. The coastal Andhra ruling class has continued a similar strategy after the formation of Andhra Pradesh state in order to subordinate the people of Telangana.

Relevant News / Current Affair for UPSC Civil Service Exam 30-11-2013

Retail inflation for factory workers rises to 11.06 %

Retail inflation for industrial workers rose to 11.06 per cent in October compared to 10.7 per cent in the previous month mainly on account of rise in price of food items and higher electricity charges.

“The year-on- year inflation measured by monthly Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) stood at 11.06 per cent for October as compared to 10.7 per cent for the previous month and 9.6 per cent during the corresponding month of previous year,” a Labour Ministry statement said.

According to a press release, the food inflation stood at 15.02 per cent against 13.36 per cent of the previous month and 9.91 per cent during the corresponding month of 2012. The largest upward pressure to the change in the current index came from food group contributing 2.53 percentage point to the total change. – PTI

Hope still for Comet Ison

Scientists were studying spacecraft images on Friday to find out whether a small part of Comet Ison survived its close encounter with the sun.

The comet at first seemed to have fallen apart as it approached the sun’s sizzling surface, but new images showed a streak of light moving away from the sun that some said could indicate it wasn’t gone over just yet.

“It certainly appears as if there is an object there that is emitting material,” said Alan Fitzsimmons, an astronomer at Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The European Space Agency, which had declared Ison’s death on Twitter late on Thursday, was backtracking early on Friday, saying the comet “continues to surprise.”

Comet Ison, essentially a dirty snowball from the fringes of the solar system, was first spotted by a Russian telescope in September last year.

Some sky gazers speculated early on that it might become the comet

of the century because of its brightness, although expectations dimmed over time.

The comet was two-thirds of a mile wide as it got within one million miles (1.6 million kilometres) of the sun, which in space terms basically means grazing it.

Two years ago, a smaller comet, Lovejoy, grazed the sun and survived, but fell apart a couple of days later.

Ison's mysterious dance with the sun left astronomers puzzled and excited at the same time.

"This is what makes science interesting," said Prof. Fitzsimmons, who specialises in comets and asteroids. "If we knew what was going to happen, it wouldn't be interesting." – AP

Mobility matters

The global report on human settlements, recently published by UN-HABITAT, is a timely pointer to what is wrong with current transport planning in India. Despite investing heavily in infrastructure projects, the cities have not resolved traffic issues efficiently. After reviewing various policies across the world, this report, with a special focus on planning for sustainable urban mobility, has rightly concluded that unless transport projects and urban planning are integrated, congestion on roads, inefficient use of infrastructure, and sprawling cities would persist. The working group on urban transport for the Twelfth Five-Year Plan has cautioned that in another two decades the average journey speed of vehicles on the major city roads would come down drastically from 26 to 17 km an hour to 8 to 6 km an hour. Along with it, the trip lengths and number of trips made within cities would also double. This would lead to inefficient use of fuel, inordinate wastage of time and more pollution. To address this problem, the Ministry of Urban Development has proposed an investment of Rs.23 lakh crore to build more roads and rail networks by 2031. The hard reality is that even this colossal infrastructure would not guarantee better mobility.

The main problem with Indian cities is the disconnect between growth and transportation grids. Unlike cities such as Curitiba in Brazil, public transport does not guide their growth. Real estate forces shape them. As a result, the suburbs either lie scattered or grow linearly. The distances between them, the core-city and places where jobs are concentrated increases. Developing a fast lane road network alone cannot change the inefficient travel pattern. What are required are compact neighbourhoods built around mass transport links. To achieve this, the National Mission on Sustainable Habitat recommended that new developments should not be encouraged unless local-street grids are developed, and they must abut existing developed areas with a minimum density of 175 inhabitants a hectare. These recommendations have remained only on paper. Where public transport exists, lack of last mile connectivity between residential neighbourhoods and station points in the form of pedestrian pathways and bicycle tracks has impeded their use. Cities have not innovated institutionally too. Only a few have created the Unified Metropolitan Transport Authorities to integrate

different modes of transport and connect them with urban planning. Where present, UMTA is besieged with problems. For instance, in Chennai, the government is yet to notify the UMTA Act that gives it the legal backing. Comprehensive planning alone can relieve our choking cities.

From insurgency to electoral democracy

If grievance ever had legitimate reason to be translated into political rebellion, it was in Mizoram. The Mizo National Front (MNF) was an insurgent group that emerged from the Mizo National Famine Front in 1959 – a formation protesting the widespread famine caused by a regular failure of the bamboo crop due to *mautam*, and the failure of the Indian state to send adequate relief. Deprivation soon led to open rebellion. On February 28, 1966, the MNF launched Operation Jericho under which about 1,500 MNF cadres overran Lunglei, Aizawl and Champhai districts by beating back the Assam Rifles personnel stationed there. India's Home Minister at the time was Gulzarilal Nanda who recommended "stern action" against the rebels. This meant a two-column assault by the Indian army on Lunglei and Champhai on March 7, 1966. A week later, the Indian army recaptured these districts, albeit after the air force was called in to launch an aerial assault on Aizawl.

The turning point

Mizoram has just finished polling in its latest round of Assembly elections with a very high voter turnout of 81.19 per cent. How did a decidedly secessionist State turn from the insurgent path towards accepting a place in the Indian Union, and what form of politics developed after the end of the insurgency? Accommodative politics, knitted with political incentives for the insurgents, helped pave the way for the MNF to turn into an electoral force. After that turning point, the tussle between the regional force and the Centre has taken the form of an electoral competition between the Congress and the MNF. We argue that this successful channelling of insurgency into manageable electoral competition is a model that can be emulated in other States of the northeast.

The 20 years that followed Operation Jericho were interspersed with severe counterinsurgency battles that involved not only regular fighting with the rebels but also village resettlement schemes, which resulted in 80 per cent of Mizos being relocated and resettled by 1972 in 102 population centres. The aim of the resettlement was to drive the MNF into the jungles and cut off its recruitment base and supply lines.

Electoral experiment

Alongside, the Indian government also opened a dialogue with the rebels, keeping in mind that the region was remote and the MNF enjoyed immense popularity among various Mizo sub-tribes. Also, for a fledgling country it seemed imperative to address the northeast's insurgent threats through any means possible – war or diplomacy – so that the rebellions didn't become a model for other groups in the region. While the latter aim didn't work as well for the Indian state, what did emerge were negotiations and offers of peaceful elections with the MNF competing in them. When such an electoral

experiment was conducted in 1978, the MNF's Pu Laldenga lost to Brig. Sailo of the People's Conference. As the MNF stepped up its insurgent activities in response to an electoral loss, the government decided to end the matter more decisively. In 1986, the Union of India under Rajiv Gandhi and the MNF signed the Mizoram Peace Accord. Pu Lalthanhawla, the Congress Chief Minister, was made to step down and Pu Laldenga of the MNF was made Chief Minister. Rajiv Gandhi was clear about one thing – the MNF violence had to end and Mizoram had to stay in the Union. Practising accommodative politics seemed the right way forward even if it meant replacing the Chief Minister with Pu Laldenga, who had spent the better part of his adult life deep in the jungles of Myanmar raising two armed brigades to fight the Indian state.

Stabilisation

Today, Mizoram is a State that cradles several oddities. It is a Christian majority state where the Presbyterian Church has immense sway over everyday life and politics. It is one of the few States with Prohibition due to an intervention by the Presbyterian Church. It is also one of the few States with a remarkably high voter turnout. Further, electoral politics took a healthy competitive turn after two decades of violence, as we describe below.

After the peace accord, the MNF won the Assembly elections in 1987. However Laldenga's government survived for barely two years. Nine of the 24 MNF MLAs defected to the Congress, and President's Rule was imposed in the State in September 1988. The Congress under Lalthanhawla returned to power after the 1989 polls and continued its winning streak in the 1993 elections by forging an alliance with the Mizoram Janata Dal (MJD). The two Opposition parties, the MNF and the Mizoram People's Conference (MPC), formed a pre-poll alliance and won in the 1998 Assembly elections. The MNF won 22 seats, the MPC won one seat, and the Congress got only six of the 40 seats. The incumbent Congress Chief Minister, Lalthanhawla, also lost his seat in the election. MNF leader Zoramthanga (Laldenga's successor) was sworn in as the new Chief Minister.

In the 2003 Assembly elections, the MNF retained power after winning 21 seats while the Congress won 12 seats. The MPC and the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) combine got four seats. The biggest loser was the MPC – from 12 seats in the previous Assembly, its strength was reduced to two seats. During the last Assembly elections in 2008, the Congress stormed back to power with 32 seats, while the MNF was reduced to three seats. In a humiliating blow to the MNF, Pu Zoramthanga lost both his seats. The MPC and the ZNP contested as pre-poll allies but got only two seats each. For the 2013 Assembly elections, Mr. Zoramthanga formed a pre-poll alliance with the MPC and the Maraland Democratic Front (MDF). This was seen as essential by the MNF to wrest power from the Congress and reinstate itself as the guardian of the Mizo people's political and cultural rights. The other main party in the State, the ZNP, contested on its own.

New political front

On October 21, 2013, 10 regional political parties in the northeast formed a new political front – the North-East Regional Political Front (NERPF) – and adopted 17 resolutions, which include an end to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, a return to paper ballots and a fresh look at the Centre-State relations. The Front elected

former Assam Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, as the chief adviser and the Nagaland Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio, as the convener.

This development went unnoticed but the front will gain momentum after the counting of votes in Mizoram. The formation of NERPF is a signal that regional parties in the northeast are ready to take on bigger roles at the Centre, and have realised that it pays to band together to secure the region's interests. They have realised that during the government formation in New Delhi in May 2014, they may be in a position to bargain hard, as every seat may matter. In this way, the 10 parties as a bloc can offer more to any coalition and secure for themselves, perhaps, a more important place in the Lok Sabha.

The normalisation of electoral politics in Mizoram is important as an instance of accommodative politics in India. The reduction in violence brought about by the end of the insurgency and the crippling counterinsurgency campaigns can perhaps be replicated in other States of the northeast.

(Vasundhara Sirnate is the Chief Coordinator of Research at The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy. She and Rahul Verma are Ph.D candidates at the Travers Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley.)

Accommodative politics, combined with political incentives, helped pave the way for the Mizo National Front to turn into a mainstream political party

Angola accused of 'Islam ban' as mosques closed

Angola has been accused of "banning" Islam after shutting down most of the country's mosques amid reports of violence against women who wear the veil.

The Islamic Community of Angola (ICA) claims that eight mosques have been destroyed in the past two years and anyone who practises Islam risks being found guilty of disobeying Angola's penal code. Human rights activists have condemned the crackdown. "From what I have heard, Angola is the first country in the world that has decided to ban Islam," said Elias Isaac, country director of the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (Osis). "This is a crazy madness. The government is intolerant of any difference." Officials in the largely Catholic southern African nation insist that media reports of a "ban" on Islam are exaggerated and no places of worship are being targeted.

The U.K. has just named Angola as one of its five "high-level prosperity partners" in Africa and the two countries have a burgeoning trade relationship. The Angolan president, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, Africa's second-longest serving head of state at 34 years, has long been accused of corruption and human rights abuses. Religious organisations must seek legal recognition in Angola, which currently sanctions 83, all of them Christian. Last month the Justice Ministry rejected the applications of 194 organisations, including one from the Islamic community.

Under Angolan law, a religious group needs 100,000 members and to be present in 12 of the 18 provinces to gain legal status, giving them the right to construct schools and places of worship. There are only an estimated 90,000 Muslims among Angola's population of about 18 million.

David Ja, head of the ICA, said on Thursday: "We can say Islam has been banned in Angola. You need 100,000 to be recognised as a religion or officially you cannot pray." There are 78 mosques in the country, according to the ICA, and all have been closed except those in the capital, Luanda, because they are technically unlicensed. "The mosques in Luanda were supposed to be closed yesterday but because of an international furore about reports that Angola had banned Islam, the government decided not to," Ja said. He said the government began shutting mosques in 2010, including one that was burned down in Huambo province, "a day after authorities had warned us that we should have not built the mosque where we had and that it had to be built somewhere else. The government justified by saying that it was an invasion of Angolan culture and a threat to Christian values." Another mosque was destroyed in Luanda earlier this month, Ja said, and 120 copies of the Koran burned.

Muslims have been instructed to dismantle mosques themselves, he added. "They usually issue a legal request for us to destroy the building and give us 72 hours to do so. Failure to do so results in government authorities doing it themselves." Women who wear the veil are also being targeted, Ja said. "Most Muslim women are afraid to wear the veil. A woman was assaulted in hospital in Luanda for wearing a veil, and ... a young Muslim lady was beaten up and told to leave the country because she was wearing a veil. "Most recently, young girls were prohibited from wearing the veil in Catholic schools and, when we went there to confront the nuns, they simply said they couldn't allow it. Although there is not an explicit written law prohibiting the use of veil in Angola ... women are afraid to express their faith in that sense." The ICA's complaints were supported by Rafael Marques de Morais, a political activist and leading journalist in Angola. "I've seen an order that says Muslims must destroy the mosques themselves and clear away the debris, or they will be charged for the cost of the destruction." He suggested the government wanted a diversion from growing hostility towards Chinese and Portuguese workers in Angola. "The government need to deflect attention ... to find a scapegoat for economic pressures and saying Islam is not common to Angolan values and culture.

"They believe a blanket law against Islam will get the sympathy of Angolans and those in the international community who equate Islam with terrorism." Asked about the potential for Muslims to protest, Marques replied: "If the Muslims try to show any anger, they will be deported the following day."

But the Angolan government denies any attempt to ban Islam. "There is no war in Angola against Islam or any other religion,"

Manuel Fernando, director of religious affairs at the culture ministry, said. "There is no official position that targets the destruction or closure of places of worship, whichever they are." -

IAS officer held guilty of contempt of court

Justice L. Narsimha Reddy of the A.P. High Court on Friday held Principal Secretary Education, Rajesh Tiwari, guilty of contempt of court. The quantum of punishment to be imposed on the IAS officer would be decided next week. The judge was dealing with a contempt case filed against Mr. Tiwari by Aided Sanskrit Schools Managements Association of AP and another petitioner. The judge on December 4, 2012 had directed the School Education Department to take steps to fill half of the vacant posts of Sanskrit teachers in the aided institutions. With the authorities failing to implement the order, the petitioners moved the contempt petition.

Justice Reddy observed that there was negligence on the part of the authorities in protecting the educational institutions run with government aid. He lamented that the officers seemed to have a firm resolve to permit such institutions to die a natural death, even while thousands of crores of rupees were doled out for scholarships to the students studying professional courses in private and corporate institutions. The court was told by the government that staff from other institutions was being posted. The delay in issuing notification was attributed to the need for sanction. Justice Reddy did not appreciate such an explanation. The judge then proceeded to record the finding that contempt of court had been committed and adjourned the matter to hear the plea of the petitioner on the quantum of punishment.

“India must participate in global mega-science projects”

Emphasising the importance of critical research, eminent physicist and principal scientific adviser to Government of India R. Chidambaram said here on Friday that the country needs to participate in “global mega-science projects.”

“We need excellence in basic research... including directed basic research that is directed towards the needs of industry and society in the long term. As a civilised country we must also participate in global mega science projects aiming to find out for example the ultimate structure of matter or the origin of the universe,” he said, while addressing the annual convocation of the University of Calcutta.

Stressing that “the way we do science is changing,” Dr. Chidambaram referred to the setting up of a multi-billion dollar Large Hadron Collider (LHC) a particle accelerator at the Centre for European Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva which helped in the finding of Higgs Boson.

Referring to India’s role in the epoch-making discovery, he said

the nation, through the Department of Atomic Energy (RRCAT, Indore), “contributed 40-million dollar worth of high-tech equipment, numerous components and some advanced grid software.”

On “internationalisation of science,” Dr. Chidambaram said “both students and scientists are getting more and more mobile” and “universities involved in higher education must factor in these ground realities in planning their higher education programmes.”

Dr. Chidambaram, a noted nuclear scientist and metallurgist also associated with India’s nuclear energy programme, emphasised the need of nuclear energy for the country.

“India has to go for nuclear energy in a big way... All energy-based options are important for India. There must be a balance between environmental protection and imperatives of economic development,” he said.

Pointing out that the metrics of basic research is considered as the number of publications, Dr. Chidambaram said they also sometimes do not truly represent the “quality and originality of research.

Bharathapuzha richest among Kerala rivers in fish diversity



THE HINDU

The fish species endemic to the Bharathapuzha include Pambar Banded Loach (*Mesonoemacheilus remadevii*) and (below) Silent Valley stone loach (*Balitora jalpalli*).



THE HINDU

A comprehensive study on fish diversity of Bharathapuzha, the largest west-flowing river in Kerala, found it as the richest in fish species among the rivers in Kerala. It recorded the presence of 117 species, with three species endemic to the river.

The study, conducted jointly by Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, University of Kerala; Conservation Research Group, St. Albert's College, Kochi; and the Department of Zoology, NSS College, Ottappalam, shows that despite the ecological degradation across the river basin, "Bharathapuzha turned out to be one of the richest among the State's rivers in terms of fish diversity."

The fish species endemic to the river include Silent Valley stone loach (*Balitora jalpalli*); Pambar Banded Loach (*Mesonoemacheilus remadevii*); and the catfish *Pseudolaguvia austrina*.

Although the Kunthipuzha stream of the Thoothapuzha tributary flowing through the Silent Valley National Park had the lowest species richness (25 species), it has very high conservation value, as two endemic species – *Balitora jalpalli* and *Mesonemacheilus remadevii* – are restricted to this stream, highlighting the importance of protected areas such as Silent Valley in the conservation of endemic biodiversity, the study said.

It said 28 per cent of fish species (33) that occur in the Bharathapuzha are endemic to the Western Ghats. The catfish *Pseudolaguvia austrina* occurs as small fragmented populations in the Kanjirapuzha and Thoothapuzha rivers.

The Kunthipuzha stream of the Silent Valley National Park had been surveyed in

the past by several researchers and the results of this study shows 25 species, thereby increasing the number of freshwater fishes known from the national park. "However, this number cannot be considered as the actual diversity of the national park because several additional species are found in the east-flowing Bhavani river and the Kadalundy river (draining the western segment of the buffer zone), which is not mentioned here" said Dr. Rajeev Raghavan of Conservation Research Group.

A little more than one tenth of species (12 per cent; 14 species) that occur in the Bharathapuzha are listed as threatened in the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species. This includes one species listed as Critically Endangered (*Hemibagrus punctatus*), six each listed as Endangered and Vulnerable. Thoothapuzha tributary had the highest number of threatened species (10), the study found.

A. Biju Kumar, Head, Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, University of Kerala, said surveys were carried out in all the four tributaries viz., Gayathripuzha, Chitturpuzha, Kalpathipuzha, and Thoothapuzha of Bharathapuzha and the Kunthipuzha stream (of Thoothapuzha tributary) flowing through the Silent Valley National Park at multiple intervals from January 2004 to February 2013.

"Bharathapuzha comprise one of the sixteen catchments in the southern Western Ghats that has the highest species richness and endemism of freshwater taxa (a group of populations of organisms) including fish, mollusc, and odonates," the study said. According to Dr. Sanjay Molur, Executive Director of Zoo Outreach Organisation, it is also one of the five catchments along with Periyar, Pamba, Manimala, and Chaliyar that qualify as potential freshwater 'Key Biodiversity Areas' (KBAs).

Dr. Biju Kumar, who initiated the study in 2004, said that "several anthropogenic stressors including deforestation and loss of riparian cover, dams and other impoundments, pollution, sand-mining, non-native species, climate change, and destructive fishing practices are threatening the fish diversity of Bharathapuzha." Further, Bharathapuzha watershed experiences an average annual rainfall of 2,500 mm, which is about 17 per cent less than the State average. "Recent studies have observed changes in both rainfall and temperature in the river basin. These climate change phenomena in the Bharathapuzha watershed will have its serious repercussions on fish fauna, which remains to be investigated further," he said.

'Multiple remedies to file complaints against public servants'

HC dismisses Yeddyurappa's plea challenging registration of cases against him under PC Act, IPC, and Cr. PC

In a verdict that recognises the multiple legal remedies for people to lodge complaints related to corruption against public servants, the Karnataka High Court on Friday ruled that people in the State are not compelled to file complaints against public servants only under the provisions of the Karnataka Lokayukta (KL) Act.

Remedies available to a complainant under the provisions of the KL Act are in addition to those available under any other law, State or Central, including the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of

Criminal Procedure (Cr. PC). A Division Bench, comprising Chief Justice D.H. Waghela and Justice B.V. Nagarathna, delivered the verdict while dismissing two appeals filed by the former Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa. He had challenged the order of a single judge who had rejected his plea against two of the five complaints, filed by advocate Sirajin Basha, accusing him of indulging in corruption by misusing the office of the Chief Minister. It was contended on behalf of Mr. Yeddyurappa that provisions of the PC Act along with the provisions of Cr. PC or IPC cannot be invoked against a public servant on corruption charges after the enactment of KL Act in 1986 as it is a "special enactment" to deal with corruption charges in Karnataka. Writing judgment for the Bench, Justice Nagarathna said: "Though there may be an overlap in the object of KL and PC Acts, we find the scheme of the two Acts are quite distinct... The PC Act is an adjective statute dealing with both substantive and procedural law, which is penal in nature, whereas the KL Act cannot be considered as a penal statute." The jurisdiction of criminal courts or special court constituted under the PC Act is neither whittled down or fettered on account of provisions of the KL Act, and the Special Court does not act under KL Act, the Bench said. Analysing the provisions of both these Acts as well the Cr. PC, the court said these three enactments "operate in their respective fields and one enactment cannot substitute another enactment".

Snooping face-off with Australia may push Jakarta to India for beef

Trade Minister plans to exempt India from certification against foot-and-mouth

As Indonesia and Australia continue to face off over revelations that Canberra had tapped the phone of the Indonesian President, Jakarta is threatening to end Australia's monopoly in beef exports to Indonesia. Earlier this week, Indonesian Trade Minister Gita Wirjawan announced plans to diversify Indonesia's beef supply markets to India in an attempt to end an almost-exclusive dependence on Australia and New Zealand. Currently, Indonesia can legally import beef from countries certified as being free of foot-and-mouth, a viral infection that afflicts cattle. Mr. Wirjawan has asked Parliament to pass laws to exempt a country like India from this certification. Indonesian national news agency Antara quoted Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Hatta Rajasa as saying Indonesia would now revise the criterion for its beef imports from a country-based system to a zone-based one. "If a certain part of the country has a cattle disease, it does not mean all parts of India have the disease," Mr. Rajasa said, explaining how a zonal system would facilitate imports from India. Given the association of cow worship with Hinduism, India's dominant religion, it is not a country that is usually connected with beef sale in the popular imagination. However, beef exports from India, mostly buffalo meat, have been growing exponentially in recent years, and have catapulted the country, ahead of Brazil, to the world's number one position. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, Indian beef accounted for nine per cent of global exports in 2009, a figure that zoomed to four million tonnes or 20 per cent of the world beef trade by 2012.

Analysts attribute the rapid expansion of Indian beef shipments to the robust demand for cheap, halal beef from the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia. India has already edged Australia out of the beef market in Malaysia, where Indian imports comprise more than 80 per cent of the market share, against 13 per cent for Australia. Mr. Rajasa referred to Malaysia's successful imports of Indian beef, underscoring Indonesia's intention to explore sourcing beef from India.

Mr. Wirjawan confirmed that the request for changes to the import laws was made because of the sense of betrayal over Australia's eavesdropping on the private conversations in 2009 of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, his wife Ani, and other senior leaders. "I think you can attribute some of that or a lot of it to the unfortunate incident."

So far, Australia has a virtual monopoly in Indonesian beef trade, a lynchpin of the bilateral economic ties. Australia exports 40-65 per cent of its live cattle to Indonesia. This translates to 20-30 per cent of Indonesians' beef consumption. According to Meat and Livestock Australia, from July 2012 to June 2013, Australia's total live cattle exports to Indonesia were valued at A\$174 million (US\$157 million).

Funds through securities sale

The State government has announced the sale of 10-year securities in the form of stock to the public by auction for an aggregate amount of Rs.1,200 crore. The auction will be conducted by the Reserve Bank of India at its Mumbai Office, Fort, Mumbai, on December 3. Competitive bids that open between 10.30 a.m. and noon and non-competitive bids between 10.30 a.m. and 11.30 a.m. can be submitted electronically on the Reserve Bank of India Core Banking Solution (E-Kuber) System on December 3, a press note said. – Special Correspondent

India hopes for positive outcome at Bali meet

India is seriously and sincerely engaged in negotiations and continues to hope for positive and balanced outcome from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference at Bali next week that will be acceptable to the developing and least developed countries, Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma said here on Friday.

"India is spearheading the G33's proposal on agricultural subsidies which seeks from Bali outcome that will correct the WTO agriculture subsidy norms that are at present unfairly loaded in favour of some countries as they contains inherent imbalances," Mr. Sharma said addressing a press conference.

Minimum support price

The Cabinet unanimously agreed on Thursday, according to the Minister, that India will not agree to a deal at Bali without a reassurance that the proposed Peace Clause, an interim safeguard for India's minimum support price (MSP) in breach of the WTO caps, will expire only when permanent safeguards are found and agreed to. This will ensure that the MSPs will not be in breach. The G33 is arguing that a major factor for the sharp rise in MSP is the recent spurt in global food price inflation while the existing caps and formulas are calibrated to food prices in the 1980s.

"We are arguing either use a more recent base year for arriving at the caps or use an appropriate deflator for removing the impact of inflation on our administered support prices," Mr. Sharma said adding that MSPs in India had

risen manifold over the last few years and could rise further with the implementation of the recently enacted Food Security Law.

"The developing countries are persisting for a correction of the historical injustices and unfair outcomes of the Uruguay Round in 1994 where the developed countries ensured coverage and protection of very high subsidies for their agriculture producers," Mr. Sharma said.

"Still negotiating"

"India endorses the settled draft for Bali on two of the five themes for the package but is still negotiating on the proposals on the release of bank guarantees, expedited shipments of courier services and the provision on penalties. Indian law does not allow upfront duty calculations for plants, animals and gems and jewellery shipped in through air courier services," he said.

***We're spearheading the G33 proposal
on agricultural
subsidies: Sharma***

"Developing countries want a correction to the unfair outcomes of the Uruguay Round"

Farmer commits suicide in U.P.

Violence erupts between farmers and the mill staff in Lakhimpur Kheri district

The issue of sugarcane pricing escalated on Friday as clashes erupted between the sugar cane farmers and the security staff at Gularia Sugar Mill in Lakhimpur Kheri district, after a farmer from the district committed suicide on Thursday. Villagers from the district alleged that the farmer of Bastauli village committed suicide following non-payment of last year's cane price arrears by the sugar mill. The villagers resorted to heavy brick-battling and tried to break into the mill, but were deterred by the security guards.

The Inspector General (Establishment), Vitul Kumar said the security guard fired in the air when the villagers tried to forcibly enter the mill. Mr. Kumar said no one was injured in the firing. The situation was brought under control following the arrival of the Kheri district police chief, the IG told reporters. He added that the autopsy of the farmer had been performed.

The 45-year-old cane farmer Satpal Singh's body was found hanging from a tree, situated a short distance from his house, on Thursday.

The suicide note recovered from the spot mentioned his illness and failure to pay off debts as the reason for his death, the IG said. The suicide note was addressed to the station house officer of Bheera police station.

Mr. Kumar said the farmer had taken loans from three or four sources. Satpal is said to have taken loans amounting to around Rs. 2.5 lakh from the Land Development Bank, Allahabad Bank and the Cane Cooperative Society. He had also reportedly not been paid last year's cane price arrears of about Rs. 50,000.

But the official said it was a misconception that the failure on the part of the sugar mill management to pay cane price dues was the reason behind the farmer's suicide.

With the mill owners adamant that the crushing of the crop will not begin till the State Advised Price of sugarcane for the 2013-14 sugar season is scaled down

from Rs. 280 to Rs. 225 per quintal, and the government firm on its stand, the growers are in a catch-22 situation.

The crushing operations have already been delayed by a month, though the State government fixed a fresh deadline of December 4 for the mills in Western U.P. to start their operations and December 7 for the mills in Eastern U.P. The government has also made it clear that there will be no more talks with millers and no more deadlines.

Illness and failure to pay debts was the reason for suicide: suicide note

It's a misconception that the failure of the mill management to pay cane price dues was the reason for suicide: official

China's muted response

Beijing hopes New Delhi could meet halfway to safeguard overall interests of bilateral ties

China on Friday issued what observers described as an unexpectedly muted response to the visit by President Pranab Mukherjee to Arunachal Pradesh – parts of which China has territorial claims on – with Beijing calling on India “to meet halfway” and “work together” to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border.

In a marked contrast from Beijing's response to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in 2009, when the Chinese government said it voiced “grave concerns” and hit out at India for “creating problems,” the Foreign Ministry here issued a more measured reaction to the President's two-day visit, which began on Friday.

“China's position on the disputed area of the eastern section of the China-India boundary is consistent and clear-cut,” the Foreign Ministry said in a statement to *The Hindu* issued in response to questions.

“The China-India relationship maintains a sound momentum of growth,” the statement added, “with the two sides exploring ways to solve the boundary question through friendly consultations at the special representatives' meeting.”

“We hope that the Indian side could meet China halfway to safeguard the overall interests of bilateral relations, refrain from taking actions that complicate the boundary question, work together with us to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas and create conditions for boundary negotiations.”

Bilateral relations between both countries were strained in 2009, when an increasingly assertive China, under former President Hu Jintao, appeared to take a hard line on all territorial disputes.

Ten days after Dr. Singh visited Arunachal in October 2009, the Chinese government said it was “deeply upset” that “an Indian leader went to the disputed area despite our grave concerns.” The government said then it was “strongly dissatisfied” with the visit and demanded that India “address China's serious concerns and not trigger a disturbance” in relations. That year, China also attempted to block a \$60 million Asian Development Bank flood management programme for Arunachal.

The statement issued on Friday, however, did not directly express opposition to the visit, only saying it hoped India “could meet China halfway” and “refrain from taking actions that complicate the boundary question.”

Table HIV/AIDS Bill in winter session, urge activists

The Bill was finalised by the Health Ministry in July, 2006

Civil Society activists and members of networks of people living with HIV want the HIV/AIDS Bill tabled in the coming winter session of Parliament. The Bill has been hanging fire since 2006. It is now with the Health Ministry. People living with and associated with HIV faced stigma and discrimination on a regular basis.

They were often denied employment and refused treatment and there were repeated instances of their children being thrown out of schools, said Hari Shankar of Delhi Network of Positive People.

He was speaking at a press conference on the eve of World AIDS Day.

Need for the Bill

Explaining the need for this Bill, Pradeep Dutta from the Nai Umang Positive Welfare Society said: "Although the government is providing first line treatment, the second line is not reaching every HIV positive person who needs it. The third line treatment is not available through the government-run programme. Also, important diagnostics like viral load tests are not provided free of cost to everyone. The Bill is very important as it provides for complete HIV treatment by the state."

In July 2006, the Bill was finalised by the Health Ministry and was sent to the Law Ministry a year later. For the next six years, it shuttled between the Health Ministry and the Law Ministry.

Only recently, in October 2013, did the Law Ministry clear the Bill and send it back to the Health Ministry. Anand Grover of the Lawyers Collective said, "The delay in bringing this Bill to Parliament is totally unacceptable. This government has not shown the political will to take this Bill forward. The Bill should have been tabled in Parliament long back. Even the Standing Committee on Health, in its report tabled in the Rajya Sabha in April 2013, has mentioned that the delay in bringing the HIV Bill to Parliament is not justifiable."

Important diagnostics like viral load tests are not provided free of cost to everyone: Pradeep Dutta

For six years, the Bill was shuttled between the Health Ministry and the Law Ministry

Peace pact signed

The Centre on Friday signed a tripartite agreement for suspension of operation with the Ranjan Daimary faction of the National

Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

Ramnad tops in passport applications

The drought-prone economically backward Ramanathapuram district has emerged as the top district in south zone in seeking passports: More than 10,000 persons have applied for the third successive year.

Superintendent of Police N.M.Mylvahanan said as the number of people applying for fresh passports kept increasing, he had deputed Special Sub Inspectors, appointed as Panchayat Liaison Officers (PLOs), to gather intelligence directly from villagers.

Most of them preferred to visit Malaysia, Singapore and the Gulf countries for better prospects in the absence of industries and employment opportunities in the district. Many of them were unskilled workers.

More than 10,000 persons applied for third successive year

Panchayat Liaison Officers verifying applicants' background

Krishna water sharing: raw deal for A.P

Andhra Pradesh got a raw deal on Friday, with the Krishna Water Tribunal giving its final award allowing Karnataka to increase the storage in Alamatti dam to 524.256 metres from 519.6 metres.

The Tribunal headed by Justice Brajesh Kumar adjudicated the matter on sharing of surplus waters among AP, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The Brajesh Kumar Tribunal sought to maintain a balancing act by giving four tmc of Karnataka water to A.P. and at the same time recognising Karnataka's right to claim the remaining water.

In December 30, 2010, A.P. got 1,001 tmc of water, Karnataka 911 tmc and Maharashtra 666 tmc from the river. – PTI

GDP up, touches 4.8% in Q2

India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at the rate of 4.8 per cent during July-September 2013, according to official data released here on Friday. The rate of growth of the GDP in April-June 2013 was 4.4 per cent, a four-year low. The pick-up in the rate of growth has come from better performance of agriculture and industry.

"I don't think at the moment we have signs of strong revival yet but I do get a picture that people think that the economy has bottomed out," Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia was reported to have said on the sidelines of an event at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad.

Finance Minister P. Chidambaram had used in this year's Union budget a GDP growth estimate of 5 per cent for 2013-14 for pegging various targets.

This includes the target set for the fiscal deficit at 4.8 per cent of the GDP. Since the GDP growth rate for the six months April-September is 4.6 per cent, it will have to be at least 5.4 per cent during October-March if India is to achieve a growth of 5 per cent in 2013-14.

'Greater cuts needed'

"Jumping from a GDP growth of 4.6 per cent during the first half of the year to

5.4 per cent in the second at the moment seems to be more than what India is in a position to achieve," said highly-placed government sources. "This means the Finance Minister will probably have to press in even greater budget cuts to meet the fiscal deficit target he has set himself."

Rating agency Standard and Poor's (S&P) has warned that India's sovereign rating could be downgraded to junk status next year if, post-general election 2014, the next government fails to revive the stalled structural reforms, faltering economic growth and the stress of subsidies on state finances.

The rating agency maintained its "BBB minus" rating with a negative outlook on India, its lowest investment grade.

Earlier this month, Mr. Chidambaram expressed optimism over the emergence of "green shoots" in the economy.

However, the data released on Friday shows the manufacturing sector performance remains bleak with 3.2 per cent growth. For April-September, or the first half, it is -0.1 per cent. "How is a revival possible when the jobs-creating sector is flat," said the sources.

Speaking at an event, the Finance Minister exuded confidence that the growth rate would rise to 6 per cent next fiscal.

Economic Affairs Secretary Arvind Mayaram said the third and fourth quarters would see a pick up to help attain at least 5 per cent growth for the fiscal.