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comment

Far from being safe havens

Delhi must revamp its shelters for homeless women

The Delhi government-run home for girls in the Nir-mal Chhaya Complex is undeniably a 'house of horror'. On Monday, at least 10 girls of this home accused its staff of molestation, forcibly injecting them with drugs, and beating them if they tried to resist or complain. While what has happened at the shelter is deplorable, this is also an opportunity to focus on the issue of homeless women, who are vulnerable and suffer the worst kinds of violence. Other than security, the other challenge is ensuring access to proper healthcare and sanitation.

Last year, the Delhi government announced the construction of multi-storey shelters with separate rooms for families and floors for women. This is a good move, but the Delhi government must review the recommendations made in a report 'Shelters for Homeless Women in India' by the Housing and Land Rights Network and also in the report of a public hearing on violence against homeless women organised by Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon Ke Saath Shahri Adhikar Manch. Here are a few suggestions from the report: First, all shelters should have basic services, accessibility, habitability, location, security of tenure, affordability, cultural adequacy, freedom from dispossession, and protection from violence, especially for women. Second, Build recovery homes for women survivors of violence and abuse, working women's hostels, and special homes for women with mental illness. Third, the State must utilise empty/vacant government buildings and convert these into permanent homes for the homeless. It must build and/or upgrade all shelters with requisite infrastructure of sanitation, clean and potable water, heating and cooling arrangements, vector control, and first aid requirements.

Importantly, homeless residents must get their entitlements - voter cards, ration cards, labour cards, free bus passes, health insurance, and facilities to set up 'zero balance' bank accounts. Last but not the least, the State must initiate livelihood training in homeless shelters and in areas where homeless women live. This will help them reconstruct their lives and move ahead.

No Aadhaar, no fodder rule is inhuman, illegal

Karnataka's aim to check graft is good, but this isn't the right time for implementation

Villages across southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have been declared drought affected by the government, following the failure of the 2016 monsoon rains. A recent three-part series in HT on the drought focused on the plight of farmers and labourers and their economic asset: Livestock. In such a calamitous situation, one would expect the state governments to be sympathetic to the difficulties faced by the farming community. But not when in the hinterlands of Karnataka, that is battling a third successive drought year and increasingly parched lands, farmers have a new worry: Aadhaar. The state government has declared that only farmers who have a fodder ration booklet will be given subsidised fodder, a lifeline for tens of thousands of people in a region battling a crippling shortage in cattle food. But to be issued the booklet, where details of rationed fodder are entered, one needs to have the 12-digit biometric identity number that has run into a storm of criticism across the nation.

According to a report in HT, the local veterinary doctor certifies the number of cattle each farmer owns and then farmers are given a booklet that contains these details. On producing the booklets, farmers are eligible to buy 5kg of fodder per animal per day at Rs 2 per kg. But then in times such as these demand for fodder outstrips the supply. To check corruption in this pipeline, the government has made Aadhaar authentication mandatory.

While their aim - checking corruption - is good, this is not the right time to implement such rules. For farmers, livestock is an economic asset. By asking for Aadhaar for fodder, the government is only ruining their future. Other than being an inhuman demand, it is also illegal. The Supreme Court has repeatedly asked the government to not make Aadhaar mandatory for welfare schemes and this order has been violated in Karnataka by making the 12-digit number necessary for subsidised fodder.

Pakistan has closed the door on talks

Beheading soldiers reveals Rawalpindi's designs to exacerbate unrest in the Kashmir Valley

VINOD SHARMA

When a soldier is beheaded or his body mutilated, the concomitant public outrage forecloses the option of dialogue. Not that talks were about to open between India and Pakistan. It's just that the signal from across the border is that Islamabad, nay Rawalpindi, is mightily pleased with the way things are flaring up on our side of Kashmir.

The anatomy of the latest conflagration on the Line of Control is no different from past incidents: Pakistani troops fired on two Indian forward posts on the LoC while their Border Action Team comprising terrorists and army regulars assaulted our patrol between the posts. The bodies of our soldiers killed in action were mutilated by attackers from across the border.

India is capable of and will avenge the assault. But the dastardly adventure reveals the mind of Pakistan's army brass operating out of the Rawalpindi-based General Headquarters. They are the one who control Islamabad's India policy.

It was no coincidence, therefore, that a day before the May 1 mutilation episode,

Pakistan's chief of army staff (COAS) Qamar Javed Bajwa reaffirmed support for what he called the "political struggle of Kashmiris' right to self-determination."

The general made the statement while on a visit to the LoC. Simply deciphered, his message to elements in the Valley was: The Pakistan army is one with them in their fight against Indian security forces.

The brutal, headline-seeking treatment of our soldiers delivered on that resolve - serving also the other purpose of triggering in mainland India a clamour for tougher military action against Kashmiri protestors with inbuilt risks of accidental, unintended or provoked excesses.

That indeed is the external dimension of the internal security crisis in Kashmir. The ostensible Pakistani game is to exacerbate the ongoing unrest towards realising its delusional Mukti Bahini moment in the Valley. Or at least push things to where they were in the early 1990s.

That was a time when Islamabad would lecture New Delhi on building the right climate for bilateral engagement. "Propitious climate for talks" was the phrase it hurled at then Indian foreign secretary JN Dixit at the failed discussions in the first week of 1994.

So India needs to counter-strategise. For now, the Narendra Modi regime isn't inclined to open talks - internally or bilaterally - till terror remains the instrument of State policy of Rawalpindi-Islamabad. The same was unequivocally conveyed to Jammu and



When bilateralism fails or is abandoned, retaliation is the answer

Kashmir CM Mehbooba Mufti and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who saw a role for himself in the multilateral approach he advocated on Kashmir.

Television clips of schoolchildren including girls taking to streets against troops had lately prompted saner civil society voices to advocate dialogue to cool things down. Among them was former external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha, who led a Track-2 initiative in the restive State.

It's that element of sanity the Pakistani atrocity on the LoC sought to kill or discredit by mauling dead soldiers. The incident is another shot in the arm for the hawks and a blow for peaceniks. Waging peace never looked an idea so impossible in our

increasingly jingoistic milieu.

The 'appropriate' response our army has promised to avenge Pakistan's "un-soldierly act" might come sooner than later. Given that the talks between Directors General of Military Operation (DGMO) weren't to our satisfaction, the retributive strike will be par for the course.

When bilateralism fails or is abandoned, retaliation is the answer, not third party arbitration or intervention that Islamabad or the likes of Erdogan are prone to propose. The leader from Turkey is unaware perhaps that India doesn't even recognise the United Nations Military Observers' Group on India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) that could have played the referee.

The UMOGIP is allowed a "holiday posting" in India because the UNSC resolutions (39 and 47 of 1948) under which it was constituted haven't since been amended.

From the Indian standpoint, the military observers' mandate became fructuous post-1971 when the UN brokered ceasefire line became the bilaterally negotiated Line of Control (LoC). That position is strengthened by the letter and spirit of the 1972 Shimla Accord the sum of which is that all pending India-Pakistan disputes will be addressed bilaterally.

Be that as it may, Kashmir looks destined for a long summer of discontent - and cross-border attrition. Rawalpindi's aggressive posturing could be on the nudging of Beijing that has heightened its stakes in PoK with the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It's unhappy as much with the paradigm change in India's Balochistan policy and the Modi dispensation's refusal to keep the Dalai Lama from visiting Arunachal.

vinodsharma@hindustantimes.com

WARZONE



Jawans carry the coffin of HC Premdas Mendhe, who was killed in an ambush by Maoists in Sukma, Chhattisgarh, April 30

CRPF soldiers are the real Gandhians with guns

To support security forces on the field, a comprehensive strategy for solving the Maoist issue is necessary

AMIT KATARIA
SYED AREEB AHMAD

On April 24, 25 CRPF soldiers were killed by the Maoists in the Chintaga-fa-Burkapal area of Sukma district in Chhattisgarh. Their guns were looted, bodies were mutilated, and the Maoists tried to plant an IED inside one of the bodies. Bastar is an undeclared warzone with the term 'security forces' is used for the state police, the district reserve group (a force made of local youth and surrendered Naxals) and the CAPF (BSF, ITBP, CRPF), fighting side by side. But in the recent past, those killed in the conflict are almost always from the CRPF.

In Bastar, CRPF serves alongside the state police. They have little control over the location of their camps. Their deployment is irrational, making them easy targets. There is a failure of intelligence sharing between the forces. With severe shortage of equipment, they are facing the guerrillas of the fourth most deadly terrorist organization in the world, according to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. Still CRPF is giving them a tough fight, which they should be proud of.

Historically, CRPF has been the force that has held India together. They are deployed in

almost every challenging situation that India has faced. From Kashmir to Bastar, it is the CRPF, which receives bullets, grenades, IEDs, stones and abuses. There are several incidents where the CRPF men were hit and did not retaliate out of the concern for civilians.

The Maoists have, in their latest press note, appealed to the soldiers to leave the forces and join them, claiming soldiers are not their class enemies. If that is so, why do they spread fake propaganda stories of exploitation? They have replaced the earlier enemy figure of landlords and moneylenders with that of a CRPF soldier. In the past four or five years, the Maoists are only targeting the CRPF.

The reason for this is because the CRPF are the first ones to enter many villages in Bastar with the message of democracy. Thanks to the protection they provide, even the most interior areas in Bastar now have roads and bridges. The CRPF are the check against the inhuman atrocities of Maoists, who have now crossed all limits.

To support the forces, a comprehensive strategy for solving the Maoist issue is necessary. Formalisation of the unified command against the Maoists is required. Improving inter-agency coordination and access to integrated intelligence will help. They should also have better coordination with various development bodies in their area of operation.

The CRPF has the potential to free Bastar of Maoist violence. They are the real Gandhians with guns, and are the reason for India being a flourishing democracy.

Amit Kataria is Collector, Bastar. Syed Areeb Ahmad is PMRDF Fellow, Bastar. The views expressed are personal

Aizawl Football Club's win has lessons for India

Peace and political stability in Mizoram has given younger people opportunities to make their mark

SANJOY HAZARIKA

The Aizawl Football Club scripted history when they hoisted the national football championship trophy before thousands of cheering supporters on Sunday.

Not only were they the first club from the North-east to win the national award, but they came to it as extraordinary underdogs who had risen to the top in their very first outing.

On the way to the finals, they had humbled the giants of Indian football - Churchill Brothers and Mohun Bagan (once my favourite team) - demonstrating not just formidable talent but also the capacity to stay cool under pressure and keep plugging away, a characteristic of the stoic Mizos.

While the winners savoured the moment in Shillong, home to Lajong, the losing side, the celebrations at night in their own capital of Aizawl were muted, though much festivity was to follow when they returned.

I'm not surprised that a team from the North-east has won the national championship. I'm just surprised that it's taken them so long. Just take a look at the national team: 10 of the roster are from Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Nagaland. The dominance of players from the South, Bengal, and the North is perhaps finally ending.

At the same time, I know why it's taken so long. Some years ago, the teams didn't have the equipment, the sponsors and support or even the grounds although they had the passion, energy and raw talent.

That talent had to be honed; the energy and passion had to be channelised. Focus mattered: Nearly 60 players from the state play today in top clubs across the country; racist abuse in other parts of India has hurt but not deterred them or their fans.

AFTER THE VICTORY, THE AIZAWL FC FANS WON HEARTS AND MINDS BY CLEANING UP THEIR PATCH OF THE STADIUM. IT'S ALL PART OF A PROCESS OF DAILY, DISCIPLINED LIVING THAT MARKS THE STOIC MIZOS APART.

Local tournaments such as the Mizoram Premier League with night matches in this football and music-crazy state provided the space for the best to earn their spurs. Talent scouts from across the country fanned out to pick those who could win matches for top teams.

The team's owner came up with funds and a vision to win nationally. But best of all, the Aizawl Football Club found a good coach - and as anyone who knows even a little about the English Premier League or any international competition can tell, an inspiring, knowledgeable, tough coach is the key not just to doing well but winning consistently.

For Aizawl Football Club it was Yusuf Jamil, formerly with Mumbai FC, who came to a team that was on the verge of relegation last year and turned it around.

It is worth reflecting here on two interwoven parts of Mizoram's history, which have directly and indirectly played a role in this fairytale.

Thirty years back it was a desperate, devastated, poor border state that had just come out of 20 years of bloodshed, fear, tension and violence, thanks to a pro-independence insurgency that rocked India. More than two-thirds of the small population had been displaced between 1967 to 1970 by a relentless central policy that forced them from their homes and villages and tossed them into new settlements.

The second is the peace agreement of 1986 between the state government, the Mizo National Front and New Delhi, has held. Unlike many other parts of the North-east, peace in Mizoram has given younger people opportunities to make their mark. The Centre has pitched in with funds and support.

In Shillong, after the victory, the Aizawl Football Club fans surprised and won hearts and minds by cleaning up their patch of the stadium.

It's all part of a process of daily, disciplined living that marks the stoic Mizos apart. I know of university professors who regularly sweep the street in front of their homes.

Swachh Bharat promoters and others would do well to emulate them - for the AFC has shown that it's not what you eat or which god you worship, the quality of your clothes or the language you speak that matters. It's who you are and what you do with the chances that life offers you. And any Indian who after Sunday's match asks where Mizoram or Meghalaya is seriously qualifies as a moron.

Sanjoy Hazarika is director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. The views expressed are personal

innervoice

WHY WE MUST MASTER THE ART OF DISCARDING THINGS AS WELL AS PEOPLE

Himika Chaudhuri

I am reading a book, The Art of Discarding. It's a book that speaks about the importance of letting go of things. The Japanese believe that by not using something, we disrespect it. Unless you let the old go, there will never be space for the new.

But the book got me thinking about a parallel concept. While we may still be able to discard objects, although sometimes with difficulty because of the emotions attached to

them, we hardly ever manage to do it with people. We find it hard to let go of a lover who doesn't care for us anymore, a spouse who misbehaves or an overbearing friend who wants desperately to control our lives.

Sometimes the reluctance to let go is because they just become a habit. At other times we are scared of losing the stability of having someone around, no matter how terrible they make us feel when we are with them. But discarding is important. Think of it like this: You are at a restaurant and you

dislike the food you've been served. The owner offers to replace it with something better. But you insist that the distasteful dish, that's probably making you sick, ought to still be kept on the table. The table has limited space, as does your heart, mind and soul.

Unless you consciously agree to discard those who hurt you, those that can heal you may never find space in your life.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)

innervoice@hindustantimes.com