



WE SHOULD FIX ACCOUNTABILITY ON SUPPORTERS OF TERRORISM, RAJNATH TELLS SCO MEMBERS

Calling upon Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states to root out terrorism collectively and fix accountability on its supporters, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said any kind of terrorist act or support to it is a major crime against humanity.

"Peace and prosperity cannot coexist with this menace," Mr. Singh added while chairing the Defence Ministers' meeting which India is hosting for the first time since it became a full SCO member in 2017.

Talks with China

Separately, in a statement on bilateral talks between Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu and Mr. Singh on Thursday, China said the two countries share far "more common interests than differences" and the two sides should take a "long-term view, place the border issue in an appropriate position in bilateral relations, and promote the transition of the border situation to normalized management".

"If a nation shelters terrorists, it not only poses a threat to others, but for itself too. Radicalisation of youth is a cause of concern not only from the point of view of security, but it is also a major obstacle in the path of socio-economic progress of society. If we want to make the SCO a stronger and more credible international organisation, our topmost priority should be to effectively deal with terrorism," Mr. Singh said.

India believes in maintaining peace and security based on UN Charter provisions, Mr. Singh stressed, while stating that India is committed towards defence capacity building of SCO member states for shared security interests. "A secure, stable, and prosperous region will improve the quality of life of people of each nation."

The meet was attended in person by Defence Ministers of China, Russia, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. From Pakistan, the Special advisor to Prime Minister on Defence, Malik Ahmed Khan, joined through video conference.

A Defence Ministry statement said that at the end of the deliberations, all the SCO member countries signed a protocol, expressing their "collective will



Joint fight: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

to make the region secure, peaceful, and prosperous".

Addressing the media after the meeting, Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane stated that all the member nations arrived at consensus on several areas of cooperation, including dealing with terrorism, security of vulnerable populations, as well as HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief).

On the sidelines of the meeting, Mr. Singh held bilaterals with counterparts from Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.

On the meeting with Russian Defence Minister General Sergei Shoigu, the Ministry said that the two Ministers discussed wide-ranging issues of bilateral defence cooperation, including military-to-military ties as well as industrial partnership.

OPERATION KAVERI: INDIA AIRLIFTS 754 MORE STRANDED CITIZENS FROM WAR-TORN SUDAN



Sigh of relief: Indian nationals arriving at Mumbai airport. ANI

India on Friday airlifted 754 of its citizens from Sudan. While 362 passengers reached Bengaluru, the rest arrived here on board a C-17 heavy-lift

aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan informed that the returnees included several members of the Hakki Pikki tribe of Karnataka who had earlier hit the headlines for being stuck in the conflict.

Mr. Muraleedharan, who is stationed at Jeddah to supervise Operation Kaveri, said on Friday evening that the 11th batch of 135 stranded Indians were flown into the Saudi city from Port Sudan by a C-130J of the IAF.

The Saudi port has emerged as the mid-point, where with the cooperation of the Saudi authorities, India has set up a coordination centre. As per official estimates, the total number of Indians in Sudan is around 3,400 with around 1,000 PIOs (Persons of Indian Origin) who have been residing in Sudan for generations.

Jawahar Mithani, a veteran Indian businessman who was evacuated on Thursday to Mumbai, said that after Saturday no member of the Gujarati community based in Sudan will remain in Khartoum as last of the buses carrying the Gujarati families will leave by Saturday.

Shift in focus

With Friday's evacuation, the focus of Operation Kaveri is now shifting to those groups of Indians who live in distant parts of Sudan away from Khartoum. This is likely to be a more challenging part of the operation as many citizens are caught up in places like El Fashir in Darfur, which is highly volatile at the moment.

CORE SECTORS' OUTPUT DIPPED TO 5-MONTH LOW OF 3.6% IN MARCH

Growth in India's eight core sectors' output fell to a five-month low of 3.6% in March, from 7.2% in February, with electricity and cement production slipping from a year ago, and crude oil output falling for the tenth successive month.

Coal production jumped 12.2% in March, while fertilizers and steel output grew 9.7% and 8.8% respectively — relatively slower than recent months — as per data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry on Friday.

For the full financial year 2022-23, core sectors saw a 7.6% growth compared to 10.4% in 2021-22, with all sectors reporting higher production except crude oil, which shrank 1.7% during the year.

In March, growth in natural gas production was down to 2.8%, the lowest in three months. Refinery products grew at a four-month low pace of 1.5%. Cement output contracted 0.8% in March, breaking the growth streak in the last four months.

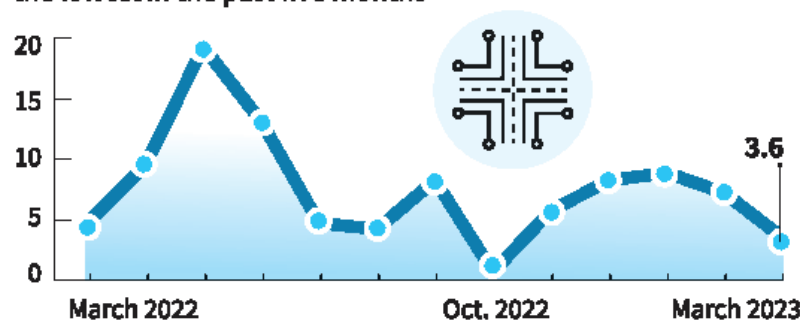
Electricity generation dropped for the first time in a year, shrinking 1.8% in March.

However, absolute output levels in both these sectors were significantly higher than February — with the cement production index at its highest point since April 2022 and electricity output at its highest since September 2022. "Output of some of the sectors like electricity and cement is likely to have been dampened by the unseasonal rainfall in March," reckoned Aditi Nayar, chief economist at rating firm ICRA.

With most available high frequency indicators weakening in March

Weaker core

Government data showed that the output of eight infrastructure sectors saw a growth of only 3.6% in March 2023, the lowest in the past five months



2023 on a year-on-year basis, relative to February 2023, Ms. Nayar expects growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) to slow to around 3% to 4% in the month from 5.6% in February. The eight core sectors constitute a little over 40% of the IIP.

GOVT. NAMES MOHANTY AS LIC CHAIRPERSON AND FIRST CEO



Taking charge: Mohanty will now take the helm at the insurer and be its first CEO from June 2024 till at least June 2025. Reuters

Company veteran will helm insurer at a time when it has to cope with intensified competition; LIC faces shareholder scrutiny after its IPO last May; SEBI barred an employee for front-running stock

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on Friday approved the appointment of Siddhartha Mohanty, Managing Director (MD) and interim chairperson, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) as Chairperson till June 29, 2024.

Thereafter, Mr. Mohanty has been named as Chief Executive Officer and MD till June 7, 2025, i.e. up to the date of his attaining the age of 62 years, or until further orders, whichever is earlier.

Mr. Mohanty, a veteran of the company, which listed in May, will lead LIC at a time when the country's largest insurer has to learn to conduct its business as a publicly owned company answerable to shareholders for its profitability. Competition from private insurers has also intensified and new chief will have to guard against any adverse fallout from controversies such as investments in the Adani group and ensure adequate oversight of its employees after SEBI this week barred an employee for front-running trades in LIC.

Total assets under management as on December 31 were ₹44.35 lakh crore.

NONE TOO SOON

Delay in conveying decision on assent to Bills is constitutionally impermissible

The Supreme Court has given a timely reminder to Governors that the Constitution expects that a decision to return a Bill to the State Assembly for reconsideration should be made "as soon as possible". It has drawn attention to the phrase found in the first proviso to Article 200, seeking to convey a sense of immediacy in the matter of returning a Bill. "The expression 'as soon as possible' contains significant constitutional content and must be borne in mind by constitutional authorities," the Court observed. This effectively means it would be constitutionally impermissible for Governors to hold on to Bills indefinitely without communicating their decision to the House. The Telangana Governor, Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan, against whose apparent inaction on several Bills the State had approached the Court, communicated to the Court that no Bills were pending with her, and that she had returned two Bills for reconsideration, while seeking further information from the government on a few others. Based on this, the Court disposed of the petition, but kept open questions that arose from the issue for consideration in an appropriate case. The Court's observation addresses the issue of delay, but it is only one aspect

of the controversy. The issue of granting assent is seen in most parliamentary democracies as a formality, but the peculiar discretionary powers with which Governors are clothed in India have given much scope for controversy.

The Governor's power to withhold assent or return a Bill, with a message, for reconsideration is seen as discretionary. In the Constituent Assembly, it was explicitly clarified that returning a Bill was to be done only on advice, and that it was an enabling provision for a government to recall a pending Bill in case it had second thoughts on its advisability. There are three clear problems associated with Article 200, which deals with assent to Bills: the absence of a time limit for acting on Bills, the scope for reserving a Bill for the President's consideration against the express advice of the Cabinet and the claim that the Governor can kill any Bill by declining assent. The mischief lies in Article 163, which hedges the primary rule that the Governors function on the 'aid and advice' of the Cabinet, with a clause that prohibits any inquiry into whether a particular matter fell within their discretion or not. These provisions give abundant scope for conflict between the government and Raj Bhavan.

There is no doubt that these ought to be changed, either by amending the Constitution or through an appropriate Supreme Court verdict, so that misuse of gubernatorial discretion can be kept in check.

TACKLING THE THREAT

Negotiation, not nuclear deterrence, is the way to peace in Korean Peninsula

On the 70th anniversary of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol not only sang "American Pie" at the White House but also sealed an important cooperation agreement with his American counterpart Joe Biden to protect the Korean Peninsula from a nuclear attack by the likes of North Korea. Under the new pact, labelled the "Washington Declaration", U.S. strategic assets will be deployed around the Korean Peninsula and a joint Nuclear Consultative Group will share tactical information, engage in joint training, and coordinate military responses to any potentially hostile actions by North Korea. While Washington will remain the sole authority deciding on whether or not to carry out a nuclear response in any such eventuality, the Biden administration will step up its contribution to symbolic deterrence against the North by sending, for the first time in 40 years, nuclear-armed submarines to the region, though they are unlikely to be a permanent deployment. U.S. tactical nuclear weapons stationed in South Korea were withdrawn from the region in 1991. Mr. Biden also used strong words to corroborate the strategic support that Washington has lent to Seoul, when he said, "A nuclear attack by North Korea against the U.S., its allies or... partners is unacceptable and will result in the end of whatever regime were to take such an action" — language that was similar to

what former U.S. President Donald Trump had used in a similar context.

The backdrop for this vote of nuclear confidence by the U.S. for its treaty ally is the steady growth of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, notwithstanding the short-lived hopes for a détente between Mr. Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un after their summit meeting in Singapore in 2018. While during the early years after the North first tested a nuclear bomb in 2006 there was less concern over Pyongyang launching a coordinated attack on South Korea or beyond, in recent years, including during the Trump and Biden administrations, North Korea has steadily added to its stock of ICBMs capable of reaching U.S. cities, most recently testing a solid-fuel ICBM and altering its nuclear doctrine to include the option to carry out pre-emptive strikes. While the "iron-clad" treaty between the U.S. and South Korea will strengthen the nuclear umbrella extended by Washington across the Korean Peninsula, the White House would be loath to risk any skirmish that could endanger U.S. citizens. However distant the prospect seems at the moment, the only way out of this dangerously unstable stalemate is for both sides to return to the negotiating table and find modalities to deescalate the situation on the ground and institutionalise peace-building initiatives in the longer term.

THE WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL CANNOT WAIT ANY LONGER

Even though women have been breaking the glass ceiling of patriarchy in every sector, politics is the arena where women find it the most challenging to find space. India may have achieved suffrage early, but women still face significant barriers to political participation and do not have the right to govern. It is disheartening to witness that even 75 years after Independence, Parliament lacks substantial representation from half the population, with women holding just 14% of the seats. It is time to acknowledge the systematic exclusion of women from politics and demand action to create a more equitable political landscape.

A regression after a promising start

Women played a crucial role in India's fight for independence, by organising demonstrations, leading rallies, and raising awareness. There were numerous female representatives in the Constituent Assembly as well. Just a decade ago, three of India's largest States, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh, were in the spotlight for being led by women Chief Ministers. While Sushma Swaraj led the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Sonia Gandhi served as both President of the Congress Party and Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance. Also, India had its first woman President, Pratibha Patil around the same time.

Despite the presence of influential women in Indian politics, we have regressed since the 1980s and patriarchal backlash has resulted in the status of women in India being far from ideal. Hence it will not be wrong to infer that the issue of political representation of women is a greater case, as opposed to having token representation.

The discourse on women's reservation in India originates from the pre-Independence era when several women's organisations demanded political representation for women. It can be traced back to 1955 when a government appointed committee recommended that 10% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies should be reserved for women. However, it was not until the 1980s that the demand for women's reservations gained momentum. The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) recommended that 30% of seats in all elected bodies should be reserved for women. This recommendation was reiterated in the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, which was adopted in 2001.

In 1993, the Panchayati Raj Act was amended to reserve 33% of all seats in local government bodies for women, which was a significant step

towards women's political empowerment. The success of this reservation led to demands for similar reservations in other elected bodies; in 1996, the Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Bill proposed to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative Assemblies for women. However, facing strong opposition from some political parties it lapsed but gained more momentum again in the early 2000s. On March 9, 2010, the Bill was approved in the Rajya Sabha. Sonia Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj, and Brinda Karat of the CPI(M) posed for photographs outside Parliament, smiling and holding hands, indicating that this was a fight much bigger than individual political affiliations.

Global examples

Around the world, women leaders are outperforming their male counterparts. The Scandinavian countries have implemented policies and governance structures that support gender equality and women's empowerment, which includes women's representation in political and leadership positions. Moreover, countries led by women have shown to have some of the best policies and governance practices. The deep scars in Rwanda, a central African nation, from the genocide, are being healed by predominantly a leadership that comprises women; this has also resulted in key social reforms.

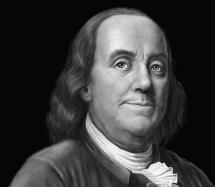
Norway implemented a quota system in 2003 that required 40% of seats on corporate boards to be occupied by women. Now, it is time for the women in India, the 'mother of democracy', to lead the nation.

A neta in 'Amrit Kaal'?

Babasaheb Ambedkar was of the opinion that the progress of a community can be measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved, but we are still far away from that benchmark. Equality cannot wait any longer and the time for change is now. Women have been waiting for too long for their right to govern — not just for themselves but for the greater common good. Women's leadership qualities are not hidden from anyone, so the denial of opportunity for political representation represents grave injustice.

A nation that still struggles to provide basic health care and education, necessary for the dignified life of citizens, must now let women take charge of the task of transforming India.

As India strives to become a Vishwa Guru, we must not overlook the pivotal role women can play in nation building and development. The women's reservation Bill cannot wait any longer. The Bill must be passed.



*I didn't fail the test,
I just found Hundred ways to do it wrong.*

- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



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