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CENTRAL SECURITY FORCES FLOOD CRISIS-HIT MANIPUR

The Centre has “taken over” control of security in violence-hit Manipur on Friday by deploying 12 companies, comprising around 1,000 personnel, of the Border Security Force (BSF) and airlifting anti-riot vehicles to the north-eastern State.

Around 3,200 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, as well as Army and Indian Air Force (IAF) teams have been deployed since Thursday. “Article 355 is there so that Centre takes more attention on the affairs of the State and that is why the adviser has been sent,” Manipur’s Director-General of Police P. Doungel told journalists in capital Imphal.

Article 355 empowers the Centre to take all necessary steps to protect a State against internal disturbances and external aggression.

However, the Ministry of Home Affairs has denied invoking Article 355.

Mr. Doungel was referring to former CRPF chief Kuldiep Singh, who has been appointed as the security adviser to the Manipur government.

In another major development, the State government appointed Additional Director-General of Police (Intelligence) Ashutosh Sinha as the overall operational commander “to control and bring normalcy in the State”. He will report to Mr. Singh.

Officials said that Home Minister Amit Shah had cancelled his Karnataka election campaign events in order to closely monitor the situation in Manipur and seek regular updates from the State and its north-eastern neighbours.

He chaired two video-conference meetings with Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and other State government officials to review the security situation.

“Situation is more or less under control in the State. Minor incidents were reported from a couple of police stations,” said the official of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Meanwhile, there was no gazette notification from the MHA declaring the imposition of Article 355, an emergency provision contained in Part XVIII of the Constitution.

At least 10 people are believed to have been killed by mobs, while several villages and community-specific urban localities were destroyed when clashes broke out during the course of a tribal solidarity march on Wednesday and then escalated the following day. The march was taken out in all 10 hill



At least 10 people are believed to have been killed by mobs, while many villages were destroyed in the past few days. ANI

Manipur DGP claims the Centre has invoked Article 355 to address the State’s security concerns; Ministry of Home Affairs denies doing so; defence forces say the situation is now under control

districts of the State to oppose the long-standing demand for Scheduled Tribe status to the non-tribal Meiteis, after a High Court directive to the State government to submit its recommendation on the issue to the Centre.

Authorities at the Centre and State are yet to release information on the number of persons killed or injured since May 3. According to a defence statement, the situation in Manipur has been brought under control as of Friday.

Curfew, imposed in eight affected districts on Wednesday, continued on Friday, while Internet services remained suspended.

FIVE SOLDIERS KILLED IN GUNFIGHT IN J&K’S RAJOURI



High alert: Security personnel stationed near the site of an encounter with militants in the Kandi forest area of Rajouri. PTI

Five soldiers were killed and another was injured in a gunfight with militants on Friday in the thick jungles of the Rajouri-Poonch sector of Jammu division.

The incident occurred during a combing operation by the security

forces to track down the attackers who killed five soldiers in an ambush on April 20.

The encounter took place on a day Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was in Goa to attend the conclave of Foreign Ministers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). India has strongly raised the issue of terrorism during the ongoing meetings of the SCO.

The People’s Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), which claimed responsibility for the April 20 attack, again purportedly posted messages online and claimed its role in the encounter. “You walk into our ambushes. We kill you, we win. The world knows we are here,” a reported PAFF claim online read.

Explosive device

The gunfight with the hiding militants broke out in the Kandi forest of the Rajouri sector in the Pir Panjal Valley around 7.30 a.m. on Friday. The Army said an explosive device was triggered when a search team established contact with a group of hiding terrorists “who were well-entrenched in a cave in the Kandi forests”. The Army said five soldiers were killed in the blast.

One critically injured soldier was shifted to the Command Hospital, Udhampur. Security agencies, informed sources said, will also be looking into the possible angles of militants floating a tip-off and laying a trap for security forces to inflict a major damage.

The Army said there was a likelihood of casualties in the militant group. However, no body has been retrieved so far. Initial assessments suggest two to four militants could be hiding in the area. “The operation is in progress. The area is thickly vegetated with rocky and steep cliffs,” the Army said.

'Relentless operations'

Multiple Army columns have been conducting "relentless intelligence-based operations" to flush out a group of militants involved in an

ambush on an Army truck in the Tota Gali area of Bhata Dhurian in the Jammu region on April 20, which left five soldiers dead and another injured, the Army said.

THE HORIZON FOR INDIA BEYOND THE G-20, SCO SUMMITS

India's year-long presidency of the G-20, and leadership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), should not blind us to the persisting challenges the nation faces, due to a concatenation of circumstances. It must, hence, tone down the high expectations that are being generated of reaping a rich dividend from helming the two summits. Global peace, on which India's Prime Minister had waxed eloquent at the last G-20 summit in Indonesia, is nowhere in sight with India holding the reins. Instead, everything points to a further deterioration in the geo-political climate, and to a distinct possibility of impending conflict. Priorities listed by India as signifying its presidency, viz., climate change, clean energy, sustainable developmental programmes and reform of multilateral institutions, are likely to take a back seat, given the deteriorating global situation. Consequently, hopes of reaping a rich dividend from the summitry may be misplaced.

India also needs to be aware that the importance of the G-20 appears to be declining in today's world. The SCO seems to have somewhat greater traction. During its presidency of the two institutions, India may well be called upon to chart a course that balances the contradictory demands of the G-20 and the SCO — and even more so that of the Global South. All this leaves little room for grandstanding, and India should proceed with caution.

Two camps and distrust

The world may not, as yet, be on the brink of a global conflict, but it is perilously close to it. Distrust between the two camps led by the United States and China/Russia, respectively, leaves little scope for countries such as India — that have not declared their allegiance to either camp — any room for manoeuvre. The U.S. and its allies are meanwhile making a virtue of the fact that they are in a position to provide Ukraine with an arsenal of the most sophisticated weaponry available, alongside provision for training Ukraine troops.

Today, Ukraine presents a spectacle of possessing substantial quantities of sophisticated modern weaponry. Less obvious is the fact that Russia is also clandestinely receiving equipment and material from its allies, China not excluded. The two sides are thus positioning themselves to demonstrate which set of modern weaponry is superior. A single misstep could well unleash an Armageddon.

The process of assembling the most advanced arsenal of weapons in modern history had begun quite some time ago, but it was April that witnessed an apogee of sorts. Apart from U.S. and European nations such as Germany, many nations elsewhere are participating in what is turning out to be Europe's war with a global impact. The list of potential suppliers of military equipment now includes even countries such as South Korea, risking the threat that supplying arms to Ukraine makes them a participant in the conflict.

The issues for India begin with China

For India, apart from the war clouds on the horizon in Europe and tensions in the East Pacific, there are several issues of deepening concern. Foremost is how to deal with a rampaging China, currently on a major diplomatic-cum-strategic offensive across Asia, especially West Asia. This is further accompanied by a display of its naval prowess in the seas around much of East and Southeast Asia, and a flexing of its military muscle in the Ladakh and Arunachal sectors of the Sino-Indian border. China is unlikely to be deterred by the 'vanilla' laced response proffered by India's Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, during his recent meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Gen. Li Shangfu, viz., that improvement in ties with China would depend on 'peace on the border'.

This is only likely to reduce room for manoeuvre on India's part, at a time when China is launching several other regional initiatives to checkmate

India in the Indian Ocean region, viz., the China-Indian Ocean Region Forum which has seen participation by an overwhelming majority of Indian Ocean states. Also, and unlike India (which seeks to limit the conflict with China to border issues),

China is seeking to widen the arc of conflict with India. Currently China is targeting India for going closer to the U.S. and the western bloc, for its partnership in the Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.), as well as its participation in maritime surveillance exercises with the U.S., Japan and Australia.

China is also actively engaged in seeking new friends in India's extended neighbourhood, in a bid to limit India's influence in this region. West Asia, once a region where India's influence was preponderant, appears to be fast yielding to China's muscular and diplomatic offensive. Notwithstanding India's attempts to reach out to erstwhile friends such as Egypt (the Egyptian President was the chief guest at the Republic Day parade this year) India seems to have been sidelined, given the major churn in West Asia, much of it on China's initiative. The new China brokered Iran-Saudi Arabia entente is setting the stage for major diplomatic shifts across the region, marginalising India and certain other nations.

India is not unaware of China's hostile intentions overall. It is well aware of China's ability to embark on hybrid warfare, including the adoption of cyber tactics, engage in the 'politics of water' by re-directing the Himalayan rivers, and adapting to modern conditions the tactics popularised by the Fifth Century BCE Chinese Strategist, Sun Tzu, of 'winning wars without fighting through avoiding the enemy's strength and attacking his weaknesses'. Caution has to be India's watchword.

The neighbourhood and Russia

Other turmoils in India's immediate neighbourhood in South Asia, compound India's problems. The situation in Afghanistan appears to be steadily worsening. Events in that country are now beginning to affect nations on its periphery. India has, meanwhile, lost all traction with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to different degrees, represent 'worst case' scenarios. India's relations with Russia also appear to be entering a prolonged phase of uncertainty. Russian ties are not necessarily anchored in defence cooperation, but this has been a key factor in cementing their relations. As India looks more to the West, specially the U.S., for state-of-the-art weaponry, the inevitability of the relationship can no longer be guaranteed. With the Russia-China strategic relationship getting stronger and both countries openly giving vent to their belief in the utility of such a relationship, strains are inevitable in India-Russia relations. Russia's unequivocal attack on the Quad during the SCO Defence Ministers meeting in New Delhi recently, is a pointer to the winds of change that are becoming evident. In the meantime, other pacts involving Russia, such as the Tripartite Russia-India-China platform and BRICS, have lost much of their dynamism. The economic content of the bilateral relationship is limited, and for the present linked to trading in oil, imparting little dynamism to the relationship. The moot point, hence, is that while India is one of the few countries in the world which has managed to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant economic crisis without much damage, and is widely seen as a prospective global power, it has much to do before it attains this pinnacle. There are many obstacles that have to be overcome before India can achieve its predetermined goal. Well before this, and notwithstanding its fortuitous position of helming both the G-20 and SCO simultaneously, India should not claim to have attained its goal.

SWITCHING ON INDIA'S SMART ELECTRICITY FUTURE

Imagine a future where your electricity meter becomes your adviser on all things electricity. It tells you about your electricity use during different times of the day, months and seasons. It notifies you about changes in power tariffs so that you plan your activities during low-tariff periods. It points you to appliances that are using more electricity than they should, and suggests options to replace them with new, efficient ones. It even allows you to trade solar power directly with your peers. All this on a mobile app.

India is witnessing the future unfold now. More than 5.5 million smart meters have been installed in India, and over 100 million sanctioned. The target

is to replace 250 million conventional electric meters with prepaid smart meters by 2025-26. India is supporting this initiative through a results-linked grant-cum-financing to help power distribution companies (discoms) become financially sound and efficient to deliver better services to consumers. However, there are also on-ground challenges.

Reaping technology benefits

A recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) found that the majority of smart meter users have already begun to experience some of the technology benefits. The study covered about 2,700

urban households that use prepaid or postpaid smart meters across six States. Half the users reported improvements in billing regularity, and two-thirds said paying bills had become easier. Around 40% of users alluded to multiple co-benefits such as a greater sense of control over their electricity expenses, a drop in instances of electricity theft, and improved power supply to the locality. In fact, 70% of prepaid smart meter users said they would recommend the technology to their friends and relatives. These findings give confidence that India's smart metering transition is heading in the right direction.

There are some road bumps, though. For instance, half the users were not using the smart meter mobile app, and many were unable to access detailed electricity bills, leaving them doubtful about their bill computation and deductions. Solving these will help bring a smart-meter revolution in India.

How actors can step up

As India marches towards its vision of a financially sound and digitalised power sector through smart metering interventions, it must pursue a user-centric design and deployment strategy. Here are four suggestions on how diverse actors can step up.

First, the Ministry of Power should drive a nationwide campaign to educate consumers about smart meter benefits and improve the uptake of smart meter apps. The apps should be accessible to users from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and provide actionable tips and information. This is important, as user satisfaction with smart meters is linked to their ability to access and decipher online bills and perceived technology benefits. High-user satisfaction in Assam and high uptake of the mobile app in Bihar indicate learning opportunities on how to scale smart meter usage for discoms in other States.

Second, discoms must co-own the programme and take the driving seat. The majority of smart meters in India are being deployed by the Advanced Metering Infrastructure Service Providers (AMISPs), responsible for installation and operation of the AMI system for the project lifetime (10 years).

Discoms must closely work with AMISPs to ensure a smooth installation and recharge experience for users, to leverage smart meter data for revenue protection and consumer engagement. For this, discoms will need to strengthen their internal capacity through suitable staffing and training interventions.

Third, discoms, system integrators and technology providers should collaborate to devise innovative and scalable data solutions. Effective use of smart meter data is fundamental to unlocking their true value proposition. This would require an ecosystem that fosters innovation in analytics, data hosting and sharing platforms, and enables key actors to collaboratively test and scale new solutions.

Fourth, policymakers and regulators must strengthen regulations to empower consumers to unlock new retail markets. Currently, important provisions concerning phase-out of paper bills, arrear adjustment, frequency of recharge alerts, buffer time, rebates, and data privacy are scattered across different regulatory orders or simply missing. Their incorporation within existing State frameworks will be crucial for a positive technology experience for end users. Regulators must also enable simplification and innovation in tariff design and open the retail market to new business models and prosumers (producers, consumers, and storage users). In a progressive step, last month, the Ministry of Power proposed amendments to the Electricity Rules to enable time-variable tariffs for all smart meter users.

India is on a unique journey of meeting its growing electricity demand while decarbonising its generation sources. Smart meters comprise a critical part of the transition toolbox, by way of enabling responsible consumption, efficient energy management, and cost-effective integration of distributed energy resources. A user-centric design and deployment philosophy will be crucial for the success of India's smart metering initiative.

REAL-TIME, OPERATIONAL PICTURE AMONG SEVERAL AUTOMATION INITIATIVES OF ARMY

Army formations at all levels — from the Commander on the ground to the Corps level — will soon have a real-time, common operating picture, with information and data from various sensors and inputs fused into one comprehensive image for quick decision-making, according to defence sources, who said that this is a result of one of several automation projects in the process of being rolled out.

A new Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS) under Project Sanjay is in the process of being deployed, after extensive validation carried out in the plains, deserts, and mountains.

"Under BSS, the aim is to have surveillance centres for all field formations by December 2025. It will integrate thousands of sensors which will enable provision of an integrated surveillance picture to commanders and staff at all levels, besides completing the sensor-shooter grid by integrating with the Artillery Combat Command and Control System (ACCCS)," a source said.

The system also integrates data on the movements of India's adversaries received from various sources across borders, including sensors, satellites, UAVs or unmanned aerial vehicles, and patrols.

This is among a series of automation projects being rolled out which are expected to cumulatively improve operational efficiency, enhance battlefield awareness for Commanders on the ground, and also provide functional efficiency for human resource management, logistics, inventory management, medical services and other administrative functions, sources said.

Bharat Electronics Ltd. (BEL), Ghaziabad, is the project's system integrator, and after hundreds of trials across terrains, it has shown a rate of success of more than 95%, meeting the army's aspirations and requirements. As part of the trials, a few surveillance centres were set up under two corps of the Army, and with the bulk production clearance now granted, the full project will be implemented by the end of 2025, the source said. The original cost was estimated to be around ₹2,700 crore, but has now been revised to ₹2,400 crore and is set to go down further.



'Project Sanjay' is in the process of being deployed after extensive validation carried out in plains, deserts and mountains. PTI

To enable these projects, the imminent operationalisation of the secure Network for Spectrum will provide an abundance of bandwidth to the services, the source stated. Further, the Army is setting up captive data centres across the country and these will be fully operational this year.

Complementing the BSS is the Army Information and Decision Support System, an upgraded and redesigned version of the erstwhile Combat Information Decision Support System, which will integrate inputs from all operational and managerial information systems.

A decision support system called the Situational Awareness Module for the Army (SAMA) has successfully integrated inputs from ACCCS, BSS, e-Sitrep, and the Management Information Systems Organisation.

CENTRE LOOKS INTO OPTIONS TO COUNTER EU'S CARBON TAX PLAN

The Commerce Ministry is exploring various options to cope with the European Union's decision to introduce a Carbon Tax, including retaliatory tariff measures, a challenge at the World Trade Organisation and measures to help smaller Indian exporters, a top trade official said.

The EU plans to introduce a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

(CBAM) that will entail a monitoring mechanism for imports from producers deploying non-green technologies starting this October and a tax levy from January 2026. This is likely to hit Indian metal and engineering products' exports to the EU.

Addressing this challenge is one of the top agenda items for the

Commerce Department and several options are being examined, Director-General of Foreign Trade Santosh Kumar Sarangi said at a meeting hosted by engineering goods exporters' body, EEPC India, on Thursday. "How do we create mechanism which will support micro, small and medium enterprises [MSMEs], our steel industry, our aluminium industry... is something on which the Department of Commerce, the Ministry of Steel and the MSME Ministry, all are trying to work together," he said.

EEPC India chairman Arun Kumar Garodia made a pitch for including the primary iron and steel sector into the Remissions of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme and raising the scheme's benefits for engineering products. "The rebate given by RoDTEP for engineering sector is in the range of 0.5% to 1%, which is lower than the incentives provided under the earlier merchandise exports from India scheme that offered incentives in the range of 2% to 5%," he stated.

BORDER SITUATION IS STABLE, SAYS CHINA FOREIGN MINISTER



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his Chinese counterpart, Qin Gang, at the SCO meeting in Goa on Friday. PTI

Qin says both sides should draw lessons from history and embark on a new path of harmonious coexistence; India has maintained that this is possible only after LAC disengagement is completed

The situation along the India-China border is "generally stable" and both sides should "draw lessons from history", visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in talks on Thursday.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry, in a statement on the talks released early on Friday, said Mr. Qin "pointed out that the current situation on the China-India border is generally stable" and "the two sides should continue to implement the important consensus between the leaders of the two countries, consolidate the achievements made, strictly abide by the relevant agreements and protocols, promote further cooling and easing of the border situation, and maintain sustainable peace and tranquillity in the border area".

Mr. Jaishankar on Thursday said he had "a detailed discussion with State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang of China on our bilateral

relationship" and the "focus remains on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquillity in the border areas," following their talks on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Banaulim, Goa.

Mr. Qin and other Chinese officials have described the border situation as being "stable" and moving to what they have called normalised management, and asked India to place the issue in an "appropriate" position in the relationship.

Indian officials have reiterated their view that relations with China still remained "abnormal" and have called for urgency in completing the disengagement process in the two remaining friction areas in Depsang and Demchok. China has dragged its feet in the slow-moving disengagement talks that have continued for three years.

'Lessons from history'

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of troops remain in forward areas. India has also called for de-induction of these troops and de-escalation to return to the April 2020 status quo, which China has rejected.

Mr. Qin described both countries as "as the two most populous developing countries in the world, and both are in a critical period of modernisation".

"We should draw lessons from history, approach our bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, respect, learn from and make achievements from each other, and embark on a new path of harmonious coexistence, peaceful development and common rejuvenation among major neighbours, so as to lend impetus to national rejuvenation and inject stability and positive energy into world peace and development," he said.

"China is willing to work with India to carry out bilateral consultations and exchanges, enhance dialogue and cooperation under the multilateral framework, deepen coordination and cooperation on international and regional issues," he added.

India has, however, maintained that this would only be possible if the Line of Actual Control (LAC) disengagement is completed and peace is restored on the borders.

SYMPTOMATIC STALL

The aviation industry needs policy changes and regulatory overhaul

Go Airlines, the Wadia Group's low-cost carrier, this week became India's first domestic airline since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to go into a mid-air stall and seek bankruptcy protection. For an airline that rebranded itself as Go First less than two years ago in a bid to make a fresh start, with CEO Kaushik Khona declaring at the time "our consumers come first" and "...our confidence in the brighter tomorrow", the carrier's abrupt announcement of a suspension of operations is rich in irony. While it has laid the blame squarely on "the ever-increasing number of failing engines" supplied by Pratt & Whitney, which it claimed had resulted in half its Airbus fleet being grounded, the engine problems could at best be termed the proximate cause. Go First's financial woes predate the fleet troubles and the pandemic and are largely symptomatic of the malaise afflicting the wider industry. Given the high capital and operational costs, the commercial air transport industry operates with wafer thin margins. Added to this, the swelling competitive intensity in India's budget airline sector a decade and a half ago saw rivals adopt aggressive pricing strategies to gain market share that stretched balance sheets and made companies more vulnerable to shocks.

If the lockdowns announced in India in March 2020 and the tight travel

curbs to combat the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus dealt a deeply bruising blow to all contact intensive sectors, last year's surge in crude prices in the wake of the Ukraine invasion combined with the rupee's depreciation against the dollar sent aviation turbine fuel (ATF) costs soaring for domestic carriers. And when air travel demand rebounded last year as the pandemic-linked restrictions were lifted, Go First found itself already hobbled with almost a third of its fleet having been grounded by December 2020, ostensibly due to engine issues. With the airline now moving the National Company Law Tribunal for initiation of insolvency proceedings and an accompanying moratorium on outstanding credit, aircraft lessors have opposed the carrier's resolution plea and instead sought aircraft deregistration and repossession. The outcome in the NCLT notwithstanding, the developments hold a mirror to the industry's systemic infirmities. Rival carrier SpiceJet is simultaneously facing an irate overseas lessor who has moved the insolvency tribunal over unpaid lease rentals. The government knows the issues dogging the industry including a tax structure that keeps ATF costs prohibitive and a regulatory apparatus that is outdated. The onus is on the Centre to find long-term policy solutions if it wants India's struggling airlines to reach cruising altitude.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

JAN.-MARCH GOLD DEMAND FALLS 17% ON HIGH PRICES: WGC

India's gold demand value during the quarter was 9% lower YoY; WGC official says record-high price of gold could have convinced buyers to defer their purchases anticipating a price correction

With high prices the demand for gold in India for Q1 2023 (January to March) shrank by 17% to 112.5 tonnes as compared with overall demand of 135.5 tonnes in the year-earlier period, the World Gold Council (WGC) said.

India's gold demand value during the quarter was ₹56,220 crore, down 9% from ₹61,540 crore in the year-earlier period.

Total jewellery demand in India for Q1 2023, as per WGC, declined by 17% to 78 tonnes from 94.2 tonnes a year earlier. Total investment demand for the quarter at 34.4 tonnes decreased by 17% year-over-year (YoY).

"Record high and volatile gold prices impacted sentiment and gold jewellery demand dropped," said Somasundaram P.R., Regional CEO, India, World Gold Council. On Thursday, the retail price of gold per 10 grams including taxes was ₹64,500, which was a lifetime high, he added.

"Sharp rise in gold prices combined with fewer auspicious days to trigger consumption, has led to many households deferring buying perhaps in anticipation of a price correction," he observed.

Dip in demand

Gold demand in January-March quarter dipped due to high prices and fewer festive days to spur retail consumption

■ Record-high prices could have led households to postpone purchases expecting a price correction

■ The retail price of gold per 10 grams (including taxes) on Thursday was at a lifetime high of ₹64,500

■ Both jewellery and investment demand in India dropped 17% YoY during the quarter



ETHNIC QUAGMIRE

Violence in Manipur could have been avoided had govt. stayed above the fray

The concept of "unity in diversity" is not an abstract one. In a multi-ethnic national or provincial setting, the accommodation of differences in a way that bestows socio-cultural recognition of identities while striving for constitutional unity and equality through governance is a must for progress. The conditions for a conflict arise when identities tighten up and become exclusivist, leading to grievances over perceived neglect of one group. But good governance that focuses on accommodation and dialogue helps stem the possibilities of a deterioration of such conditions into violence. The spurt of violence in Manipur that led to mass displacement, the loss of lives, vandalisation of houses, churches, temples besides arson across five districts, might have been a consequence of a long-standing hill-valley identity divide in the State, but it was also avoidable. The trigger was a rally called by the All Tribal Students' Union, Manipur, on Wednesday, protesting the move to concede a demand for ST status, following a High Court order, to the Meiteis, the majority group. The tribal groups are opposed to this demand which is not uniformly endorsed by all sections of the Meiteis. While the grievance that according ST status would eat into the reservation pie for the hill tribal communities seems to be somewhat valid, their raging concern that this will compromise traditional land ownership is

not entirely born out of reason and has been used by tribal leaders to whip up hysteric anti-valley sentiments. The conflagration was also the consequence of brewing discontent against what tribal groups perceived as the State government's biased actions.

If the State's Bharatiya Janata Party-led government had acted with alacrity and removed the perception that it was biased towards one dominant section, this situation would not have come to pass. In its over-zealousness in a "war against drugs", the government had indulged in eviction drives which included one that had affected a Kuki village in March and had prompted some of the BJP's tribal MLAs to raise this issue of a perceived bias in governance and seek a change in the party's State leadership. Evictions ostensibly done for forest protection and in the name of removing "outsiders" tend to cause passions to rile up among people dependent upon the hills for a livelihood; doing so without recourse to resettlement and compensation only heightens a sense of injustice among those affected. With the Union government taking charge of security, a tamping down of the violence should follow, but for the grievances to melt down, the faltering State government must convene an all-party mechanism to reach out to the people across ethnic divides.

INDIA SAID TO MULL FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN NUCLEAR POWER



India is considering overturning a ban on foreign investment in its nuclear power industry and allowing greater participation by domestic private firms, two government sources told Reuters, as part of a push for cleaner energy.

The measures have been recommended by a government panel, set up by think-tank NITI Aayog.

The aim is to reduce carbon emissions, and nuclear is in focus because it can supply energy 24/7, unlike solar energy, said the officials, who declined to be named as they were not authorised to talk to the media. India's current nuclear power capacity is 6,780 MW.

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