Build upon the success of Southern Zonal Council meeting

THE 31st meeting of the Southern Zonal Council in Mahabalipuram, under Union Home Minister Amit Shah, can be called successful to the extent that it has paved the way for further negotiations to thrash out interstate and federal issues. A major upshot was the assent of the two Telugu states to sort out the matters of the division. "Regarding issues concerning the division of assets and liabilities between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, both states agreed to resolve these matters in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs," a Central government release said. By and large, regional water disputes, parliamentary delimitation, and more devolution of federal funds dominated the meeting, which was attended by Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu C Joseph Vijay, N Chandrababu Naidu (Andhra Pradesh along with, Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu), Karnataka's D K Shivakumar and Keralam's V D Satheesan, Lieutenant Governors of Puducherry K Kailashnathan and Andaman & Nicobar Islands Admiral D K Joshi (Retd.), and Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Patel. There was near unanimity about delimitation and on retaining the current proportion of southern states in the Lok Sabha, albeit with shades of difference.

While Shivakumar urged the council to accept the 1971 census as the basis for delimitation and continue with the Lok Sabha's existing strength of 543 seats for the next 25 years, Vijay insisted on an unambiguous legislative assurance from the Union government for their continuation of their percentage of representation in Parliament. Unsurprisingly, the two other Congress-ruled states Karnataka and Keralam, supported Shivakumar's stand. Sharing of river waters, however, was a divisive issue among southern states. Shivakumar elaborated upon the benefits of the Mekedatu dam on the Cauvery not just for his own state but also for farmers in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. It may be recalled that last month Vijay had sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention to ensure that no statutory or administrative approval was granted to the Mekedatu project unless it was consistent with the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's 2007 award and the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment. Satheesan also spoke about the said Mullaperiyar dam, which is resisted by Tamil Nadu. Vijay didn't appear adamant on the delimitation and river matters, but the Opposition in his state, led by DMK, is not slamming him for not protecting the interests of the state. This is a problem not just with Tamil Nadu but other states as well. When regionalism and sentimentalism blend, the concoction is often toxic. Even reasonable agreements are dubbed as 'sellout.'

The Central government emphasised this very point. Shah said that protecting the interests of one's state is not wrong, but if this results in states being deprived of water for years while it simply flows into the sea, then no actual interest is being served. He also said that linking major rivers, from the Brahmaputra to the Kaveri and Godavari, could ensure that India faces no water shortage for the next 100 years. Besides, the proposed interlinking would create multiple waterways that can provide a cost-effective and fuel-saving transportation system. Such interstate and Centre-state interactions should increase in frequency. They will not just make our federal structure stronger and more resilient but also give a boost to economic development and national integration. Moreover, this will help keep toxic regionalism in check.

Gen Z needs mentors, not political manipulators

BOLD talk
V RAMU SARMA

FROM VOTE BANKS TO GEN Z: POLITICS WITHOUT PRINCIPLES

POLITICAL parties in India seem to believe that when you cannot convince the people, confuse them. That perhaps explains the contradictions in their positions on almost every issue. Whether it is Gen Z or Vande Mataram, their arguments often have neither head nor tail. To have a head or tail, however, you need a body—and that is precisely what appears to be missing from much of our political discourse.

Political parties seem to be in a hurry to chant the Gen Z mantra in the hope of attracting votes. It apparently does not matter to them whether Gen Z is moving in the right direction or heading down the wrong path. If we must hand over a country to Gen Z to rebuild, it means the generations before them have already destroyed it. The real responsibility should be to hand over a country ready to move forward, not one that needs to be rebuilt first.

It is shocking to see Gen Baby Boomers (61–80) and Gen X (45–61) constantly invoke Gen Z while forgetting that their real responsibility is to mentor, guide, and prepare the younger generation to take over the reins of the country. Instead, for the sake of a few votes, they support—or pretend to support—young people even when they violate the law. Worse, some of these older generations themselves violate the law and then shamelessly defend their actions.

For cheap publicity, some Gen X politicians and activists indulge in theatrics, claim to speak for Gen Z and even make objectionable remarks against the Army. They seem to believe that invoking "Gen Z" gives them a licence to justify anything and everything. What is more disturbing is the manner the opposition parties attempt to defend such behaviour by linking it to unrelated political issues.

Take the recent incident in Ladakh. A woman tourist, apparently from Gen X, objected to a road blockade by Army personnel at a check post, questioning the manner in which the security personnel were handling the situation. She was heard shouting, "We are Gen Z," and saying that such behaviour would not be tolerated. She also reminded the personnel that they were paid from taxpayers' money.

This is not the first time that irresponsible remarks have been made against the Army. Far more objectionable comments were reportedly made during the politically charged agitation against the NEET paper-leak issue at Jantar Mantar on July 20. Those making such statements need to remember one basic fact: they can protest freely because the Army and other security forces protect the country's borders.

The Ladakh woman later apologised, apparently fearing legal consequences, saying frustration had driven her to behave that way. But an apology after crossing the line does not erase the act. It raises a larger question about character-building, parenting, and respect for the law. Increasingly, there appears to be a belief among sections of the younger generation that wealth, influence, or the language of "freedom" can place them above accountability.

Political parties appear increasingly willing to chase Gen Z votes rather than guide the generation that will inherit India. From defending irresponsible behaviour to politicising Vande Mataram, contradictions abound. The larger question is whether young Indians are being taught to respect the law, democratic institutions and national values—or to follow political convenience.

Political parties, driven by electoral calculations, refuse to call a spade a spade. Instead, they try to defend the indefensible when the offender happens to belong to a constituency they hope to attract.

The same contradiction is visible in the opposition's stand on Vande Mataram. The Congress Working Committee's 1937 decision to restrict the song did not resolve the political issue then, yet some leaders continue to invoke that position today despite Parliament having taken a fresh position on the matter.

Having a difference of opinion with a law is perfectly legitimate. But declaring that one will not follow a law passed by Parliament raises a far more serious question. If lawmakers themselves refuse to follow the law, what message are they sending to Gen Z? Do laws need to be obeyed only when one agrees with them? Does Parliament have value only when it does what a particular political party wants?

It was particularly unfortunate to hear Rahul Gandhi speak of singing "hamara version" of Vande Mataram. Once Parliament has prescribed a particular form, there cannot be competing political versions of the national song simply to suit political convenience. The issue has also been unnecessarily communalised. I have interacted with several Muslims in both the Telugu states and Gujarat in recent times, and none expressed objection to singing the full version of Vande Mataram. The Congress and its allies, which have raised such a hue and cry, should explain whether their objection is genuinely about religious sentiment or about electoral calculations.

The Congress's position also raises questions about consistency. Karnataka's state song contains references to figures including Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Sage Kapila, Sage Patanjali, Sri Ramanuja, Guru Nanak, Swami Vivekananda and Gautama Buddha. Will the Congress, in keeping with its 1937 position, demand changes to that song? The River Krishna is mentioned in the state songs of both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Will those references also be removed?

It is time to stop selectively invoking the 1937 resolution. Congress leaders often point out that Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Jawaharlal Nehru accepted the decision to omit certain stanzas. But history is more complicated than that. Bose, for instance, was not initially in favour of the truncated version and accepted the decision under pressure. Several other prominent leaders like C Rajagopalachari, H V Kamath (1912–1982), a distinguished freedom fighter, journalist, parliamentarian and constitutionalist, and Ramananda Chatterjee expressed reservations.

Why, then, should one 1937 decision be treated as sacrosanct nearly nine decades later? During the freedom struggle, Vande Mataram was sung in its original form despite objections from the Muslim League. The Congress's later decision was essentially a political compromise of its time. Circumstances have changed. India has changed. Parliament has changed. Why should political parties remain trapped in a 90-year-old political calculation?

If opposition parties genuinely believe that a law passed by Parliament is unconstitutional or wrong, they have every right to challenge it before the Supreme Court. That is the democratic way. Acting as though they are above Parliament or the Constitution is not.

The larger irony is that parties that constantly claim to be defenders of the Constitution sometimes hesitate to support provisions or reforms that are also rooted in the constitutional framework. If constitutional principles are to be respected, they cannot be selectively invoked only when politically convenient.

Political parties must understand that before being members of a community, a political constituency, or a generation, every citizen is an Indian. If someone does not wish to sing Vande Mataram, that is a personal choice. But there should be no attempt to prevent others from singing the full version, nor should its rendering be disrupted, as was reportedly seen at the AICC office in New Delhi.

And this brings us back to Gen Z—the generation that supposedly wants reforms in everything.

Here is the question they should ask themselves: Do we want to inherit a politics that teaches us to respect the law, debate it, and change it democratically? Or do we want a politics that teaches us to reject every rule that we dislike?

Do we want to be progressive or regressive?

The answer will determine not merely how Gen Z votes, but what kind of India it eventually inherits—and what kind of India it chooses to build.

(The author is former Chief Editor of The Hans India)

Beginning of the end for archaic political psychosis

SATYAPAL MENON

PREDICTABLE are the ways that a dispensation under siege reacts to a backlash over its incapabilities, improprieties, incapabilities and insouciance. The Indian government - read as ruling political establishment at the Centre - has expectedly unleashed its proxy propaganda and vindictive blitzkrieg to transform the narrative related to Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) initiated upsurge against NEET scandal. Not unexpectedly, the fabrication division of the establishment is working overtime to manufacture disinformation against the non-violent and innovative agitation by the proactive youth of the country.

After succumbing to the demand of the youth and beating a hasty and clumsy retreat - consequent to the failure of supressing the agitation through coercion and intimidation- the ruling political establishment- the National Democratic Alliance, specifically the BJP - is now in a retaliation mode. The latest reports indicate investigations into the antecedents of youth leaders and their linkages to political parties. Inevitably, the target and objective of the propaganda machinery of the establishment, and its machinations, is to create a narrative against political parties that are inimical to its own agendas. News reports reflect that the besieged government is desperately attempting to portray the agitating youth as desperadoes sponsored and funded by political parties. To obfuscate the truth, stories are being planted to create the impression that the agitation was pre-planned and contrived and not a spontaneous response of anger and frustration.

Such interpretations and claims are convenient for the government, since the touted reason that it is politically sponsored - is more convenient than the latter cause and effect - that it is spontaneous and simultaneous outburst by the youth of the country. It is not difficult to fathom the psychology of archaic mindset and dogmatic politicians holding the country's reins. It is not in tune with the needs, aspirations and ambitions of the youth in the country. It also reveals an irrational mindset, which views youth as malcontents and attempts to decimate dissent and discontent. While the ruling party is on a denial mode - see no truth, hear no truth, avoid inconvenient truth -- underestimating and undermining the undercurrents could prove to be counterproductive.

It is not difficult to fathom the psychology of archaic mindset and dogmatic politicians holding the country's reins. It is not in tune with the needs, aspirations and ambitions of the youth in the country. It also reveals an irrational mindset, which views youth as malcontents and attempts to decimate dissent and discontent.

Threats by the government to investigate 'money trails', and imputation of political funding, will eventually prove to be ridiculous and superfluous, since there is nothing illegal in providing monetary support to an apolitical outfit for its' fight against the NEET deception. In the aftermath of the agitation that shook and activated the conscience of the nation - specifically the youth - there were also reports pointing to devious means to muzzle and muffle the heightening clamour through pressure tactics. Despite successive defeats and depletion of its arsenal to subdue and stifle the agitation, the truth seems to be too bitter and unpalatable for the ruling party. According to reports, those who had displayed banners displaying critical and satirical slogans against the government are being targetted and singled out for special treatment. Such vindictive actions are reflective of an incorrigible psychosis, impenetrable to reform. The perpetrators are perhaps nursing delusions that the uprising by the youth can be uprooted and ended through coercive tactics.

On the contrary, this could be the beginning of the end for oppressive and suppressive regimes. And, consequently, such an end will usher in the beginning and dawn of a new and reinvigorated era for the young generation and steered by the young generation.

(The writer is a senior journalist and media educator)

LETTERS

Sowcar Janaki personified acting

VETERAN South Indian actress Sowcar Janaki passed away in Chennai at the age of 94 on Friday. Debuting in the Telugu film 'Shavukaru', her remarkable career spanned over seven decades, featuring more than 400 films across Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam cinema. Her 'Kavia Thalaivi' with Gemini Ganesh in the lead brought her name, which was cemented further in 'Bama Vijayam' and 'Ethir Neechal'. Janaki remained a major star throughout her film glittering career. Her death is a great loss to the film industry.

Gemini K Maniam, Coimbatore

Janaki deserved Dada Saheb Phalke

THE oldest living Telugu actress Sowcar Janaki, who breathed her last in Chennai on Friday, was born as Sankaramanchi Janaki. After the success of Telugu film "Shavukaru" (1950), she starred in popular hits like "Rojulu Maarayi", "Kanya Sulkam", "Dr Chakravarthi" and "Allam Chellelu" to name a few. It is a pity that the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke was never conferred on her despite an extraordinary career.

Seshagiri Row Karry, Hyderabad-89

Corporal punishment has no place in society

THE tragic death of a six-year-old UKG student inside the classroom of a private school in Visakhapatnam after he was allegedly subjected to corporal punishment and harassment by the teacher deserves denunciation. It is a profound moral failure of our educational environment. Corporal punishment has no place in modern society. When the safety of a classroom is compromised, the trust of every parent is broken. The authorities must file a case against the culpable teacher and the complicit school management, ensuring that they are brought before the law swiftly.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai-210

Tragic death of UKG student

THE gruesome death of a six-year-old Upper Kindergarten student in a private school in Visakhapatnam sent shock waves across the state on Thursday. The boy was allegedly slapped and striped for not completing his homework. It has become a fad for private and corporate schools to give massive homework to even LKG and UKG kids. The victim belonged to a lower middle class family, and the father is a catering master. Many private schools engage the services of Anglo-Indian and Malayali teachers, who hardly have any professional training in child psychology. There is a compelling need to do away with burdening KG students with homework.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru (AP)

Tech must 'mentor' new investors

WITH reference to "Tech should empower retail investors to avoid risks", (THI, Aug 21), digital investing has brought many first-time participants into the market, including those with limited financial knowledge. Brokerage applications should provide plain-language explanations, regional-language support and easy access to human assistance for decisions. Fraud prevention also deserves attention, particularly when fake investment advice circulates through messaging platforms. Technology will empower retail investors when it makes good decisions easier, mistakes less costly and fraudulent practices harder to execute.

K Sakunthala, Coimbatore-641016

Investors need grievance mechanism

WITH reference to "Tech should empower retail investors to avoid risks", (THI, Aug 21). Investors need a grievance mechanism. Brokers should maintain transparent records of orders, system alerts and execution times so disputes can be examined independently. A time-bound compensation framework may be considered for proven technological failures. Investors remain responsible for decisions they knowingly make. As trading grows, accountability must keep pace, accordingly. Investor confidence will be stronger when every participant knows where the responsibility lies when something goes wrong.

Durga Arunkumar, The Nilgiris-643101

Come up with regulatory framework

THE editorial "Tech should empower retail investors to avoid risks" rightly highlights the growing reliance of retail investors on tech-driven trading platforms. Easy digital onboarding, demat accounts and mobile applications have widened market participation, but convenience should not come at the cost of informed decision-making. Losses from futures and options show the need for investor education and risk awareness. SEBI and brokerage firms should ensure that tools, artificial intelligence and automated trading do not encourage speculative behaviour or create information asymmetry. Technology must empower investors, not expose them to manipulation, which can be achieved with a regulatory framework.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

ADB to provide Rs 1,750 cr for 500 KPS schools

BENGALURU: The ADB and the Karnataka government on Friday signed an agreement under which the multilateral agency will provide Rs 1,750 crore assistance for developing 500 government schools across the state as KPS.

The agreement was signed at Vidhana Soudha in the presence of Chief Minister D K Shivakumar and School Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangarappa. Under the project, the state government plans to invest Rs 2,500 crore over the next four years, till 2029-30, for developing the 500 Karnataka Public Schools (KPS). While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide Rs 1,750 crore, the state government will contribute Rs 750 crore. Schools with the potential to attract a larger number of students are being selected for upgradation as KPS institutions, with the objective of enabling each school to cater to at least 1,200 students.

Read more at https://epaper.thehansindia.com

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