

**Terrorist hand?**

A report from Rajkot in Gujarat says that three teens were killed and 15 others injured after a massive fire erupted at the Rashtra Katha Shibir in Gujarat's Pransla village on Friday night. Was it a mere accident or a well-executed plan by ultras to create panic? After all, this is no ordinary camp. It has been functioning for the last 20 years. Did any fire take place earlier? On the surface of it many may consider this an idle guess. But if we scan through the details associated with this camp, we may not easily ignore the terrorist angle. This is because the camp was organized by spiritual leader Swami Dharmabandhuji, who has been conducting the shibir for the last two decades. Moreover, the tragedy struck on the last day of an important 10-day event which draws prominent personalities. This year, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani had already attended the camp.

Significantly enough, a team of National Disaster Response Force was rushed to the spot. Bigger fires have taken place elsewhere in the country. And more casualties have also occurred. Many would wonder whether the National Disaster Response Force was sent to these spots too. Several fire engines were pressed into service to douse the flames. But that happens in almost all fires. If National Disaster Response Force had to be rushed to this Gujarat 'shiber' it goes to show that the place was of paramount importance.

Suspiciously enough, "the blaze erupted in the camp's women section and spread rapidly, killing three persons." This information is coming from none else but the District Collector Vikrant Pandey himself. If the fire was a part of a well-planned strategy, then women's camp must have deliberately been chosen as the fair sex are usually a softer target. Moreover, the conspirators must have presumed that women would panic, shriek and scream instead of attending to the problem. This would lead to aggravation of the fire which may then spread its fatal flames to envelop its victims. A short-circuit has also been conjectured as a possibility. But, as clarified by the DM, 'investigations are on to ascertain the exact cause'. It need hardly be reiterated that Gujarat is the sworn target of the Pakistani terrorists. Hence the administration should show no laxity in protecting the places of worship. Angry Hafiz Saeed and frustrated Maulana Azhar Masood must be seething with anger against Modi, presuming that he is using the Trump Card to deprive them of US economic and defence aid.

**SNIPPETS**

Nitish Kumar's car was stoned in Buxar by angry villagers. Now, will he accuse Tejaswi of instigating the mob?

Window panes of Nitish's car were smashed and he had a narrow escape, says a report. Will he change over to a bullet-proof car now?

Pakistani terrorists are using Chinese bullets in their guns. These bullets are not copper tipped which cannot affect a bullet-proof jacket but are steel-tipped and can pierce through any bullet-proof jacket. What if some farmers in Bihar get hold of those bullets? Will the bullet-proof cars of Netas be safe?

But if China is indeed providing the bullets to Pak terrorists it should not overlook the danger of these bullets falling into Baluchi hands as the angry Baluchis will target the bullet-proof vehicles of the Chinese roving in that area in connection with the work on Economic Corridor to which the local population is deadly opposed.

Our Army chief Bipin Rawat says, 'China is powerful but we are no less powerful'. But why this unprovoked remark?

Modi has bagged the third place in global ranking of top leaders. He has left behind both Trump and Putin. Kejriwal may say: 'But he is Third (Class) nevertheless'.

India's former Chief Justice of Supreme Court, J.S.Kheher, says 'The politics of Hindutva is standing as a stumbling block in the path of India becoming a global power'. The saffronists may advise him: 'You please confine yourself to law books, law topics'

**Rapid Reconstruction of Post-war North Eastern Sri Lanka**  
*India is visible in country's development*

Passikudah Beach is one of the best beaches of the world. One can enjoy in the shallow waters of the sea and get distressed. It is a very near to Dambulla, where the historic citadel of Sigiriya rests atop the gigantic rock. One can experience the traditional Sri Lankan way of life. We witnessed the striking similarity in the way of living in the rural areas of this side of Sri Lanka and the Indian countryside. One could see many women wearing sarees like those of the Indian women in the villages. While moving towards Passikudah from Colombo one is bound to get enamoured with the expanse of tea gardens, rubber plantations and fruit-bearing trees. This is the time when mango fruits get ripen. Hindu temples all over Sri Lanka are always found to be squeaky clean. There is one Koneswaram temple of Trincomalee is worth mentioning for its antiquity and upkeep. It is one of the three major Hindu shrines on the promontory with a colossal gopuram tower, but it stands distinctly on the cape's highest eminence. Worldwide interest was renewed following the discovery of its underwater and land ruins, sculptures and bronze idols of Chola period.

Amaya Resorts, known for its hospitality, elegance and enchanting beauty throughout the world are very comfortable with all modern facilities. We were informed that many rich and influential people from India chose this exotic place go for solemnizing the marriages of their sons and daughters. In the office of the Provincial Council of the Eastern Province of the Trincomalee, it became clear that why this place has become one of the most sought-after places for the Naval exercises. It has become militarily very strategic. Recently, the Navy of India and Sri Lanka undertook a joint Naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal. And its main station was Trincomalee. Such Naval exercises were earlier done by Indian and U.S.A. Navy also. China is also eyeing for holding such exercise in the Bay of Bengal with the help of Sri Lanka. This is certainly a cause for concern for India.

Sri Lanka is a delightful place for non-vegetarian gourmets because delicious seafood is available everywhere, but vegetarians do not many choices. Therefore, one has to inform and instruct the hosts well in advance to make arrangements for the vegetarian foods. It may not be out of place to mention here that most of the Sri Lankans do not consider fish as a non-vegetarian food.

While returning from Passikudah we passed through Kandy, which is another scenic place in central Sri Lanka. It has the historical temple, which nestles tooth relic of Lord Buddha. This temple is UNESCO listed wonder. It is the spectacular architecture of Kandy and anybody cannot go away from here without admiring it. Another important place which is worth seeing is Sripada. It is also known as Sacred Mountain which is nearly 2,250-meter-tall and has the sacred footprint of the Lord Buddha at the summit. Hindus and Buddhists visit this place of pilgrimage. Hindus believe that Lord Shiva made his abode at Sripada for some time, but Buddhists believe it is the footprint of Lord Buddha. It is simply mesmerizing, soul lifting and soothing for the eyes to be at this place.

In Sri Lanka, Theravada and Mahayana sects of

Buddhism are practiced. During the reign of King Mahasen of Anuradhapura, a Stupa was started to be built in Kandy, which was completed by his son

**Parmanand Pandey**

Maghavanna-I. It is believed that some clothes were worn by Lord Buddha are also enshrined here. There is another significant temple which has been declared World Heritage Site by the UNESCO, which is known as Dambulla Cave Temple. It has more than 80 caves with 153 Buddha statues, three statues of Sri Lankan

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kings and four statues are of Gods and Goddesses. Inside the caves, one finds the murals depicting the stories (Jatak Kathas) of Lord Buddha. There is a bowl placed on the one side of the cave and the water drips from here day and night. It is said that water never dries even if it has been hit by the severe drought.

Sri Lanka is famous for spices, condiments and rubber. The group of Indian journalists was taken to the National Spice Garden of Matale. Its present Director is an Agricultural Scientist, who has got his



higher education in India's Punjab University. It was really pleasing to learn that many of the scientists working in this Spice Garden have had their higher education from the Indian Universities. In this Garden not only, the spices of the best quality are produced but the research work is also done for improving and increasing the production. It may be interesting to know that 80 percent of cinnamon demand of the world is met by Sri Lanka. Cinnamon is used as a condiment for bringing good flavour in the vegetables and also for medicinal purposes such as lowering of blood sugar and blood pressure.

The other important spice is black pepper which is produced in Sri Lanka in abundance. Apart from it, clove, nutmeg, ginger, turmeric, coffee, cardamom is produced in Sri Lanka and they are exported throughout the world. Sri Lanka is fast emerging as the place of Ayurveda, Yoga, Shiroadhara therapy. In

Ayurveda, the mix of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and stringent food is prescribed to keep oneself healthy and that is why the importance of spices and condiments has been underlined in this therapy. There are many places, where Buddhists and Hindus get solace and peace of mind. Both religions have their roots and antiquity in Sri Lanka. For Hindus, it is a holy place because Mother Sita lived in Ashoka Vatika after her abduction by the demon king Ravana. Buddhism was spread in Sri Lanka more than two thousand years ago by Indian prince Mahendra, the son of Emperor Ashoka and who was sent by his father for propagating the message of peace and nonviolence of Lord Buddha.

A joint seminar was organised by the SLPA and the IFWJ on the 'role of the journalists for increasing the regional cooperation'. The Indian side was represented by the well-known T.V. commentator and journalist Hemant Tiwari, who is also the Vice-President of the IFWJ. Shri Tiwari was so impressed with the

hospitality and the beauty of Sri Lanka that he announced that next year India would host a meeting in India where a big contingent of Sri Lankan journalists would be invited to participate, and they would be taken to important Buddhist places. The writer of this article emphasised that the regional cooperation can be increased only when there is regular contact between the people of the different regions. The journalists can certainly play a significant role in arousing the interests of the people for undertaking the visits to countries of the region. Others who spoke from India were Ish Madhu Talwar, Dinesh Pathak, Ram Kishor Trivedi, Kaushal Chaturvedi and Randeep Ghanghas. The keynote was delivered by Dr. Edward Ariyadasa, a nonagenarian journalist with a razor sharp intellect, who underlined for adopting the technology for the development of journalism for promoting regional cooperation.

India is playing a significant role in the reconstruction of Sri Lanka after the conflict that ravaged and devastated the country for more than 25 years. During his last visit, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi had dedicated five thousand pucca houses in northern Sri Lanka to those who were displaced during the war. The Government of India is also providing the assistance of billions of rupees for the reconstruction of roads, railways and ports etc. Agriculture and Dairy Farming is being promoted and assisted by the Indian Government. Chinese are making heavy investments in Sri Lanka to have their hegemony. During the periods of war Chinese wanted to drive a wedge between India and Sri Lanka but they simply do not understand that Indians and Sri Lankans have age old ties, which is inalienable. Many Indians are engaged in Sri Lanka in business and other commercial activities which are, without doubt, giving impetus to the good neighborly relationship between India and Sri Lanka.

**A perfect storm of uncertainty**

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and other officials of the Finance Ministry would be feeling the pressure right about now. After all, it's quite a nerve-racking thing to be flying blind. And make no mistake, that's precisely what the government is doing going into Budget 2018.

**The GST factor**

There are several reasons behind this lack of clarity in the run-up to the Budget. As with several of the problems plaguing the economy currently, the biggest issue is the goods and services tax (GST). However, there are other aspects, some unique to this year, and other more normal, that have meant that the uncertainty has been compounded.

The immediate aftermath of the complexity of complying with the fledgling GST meant that the government had to very early on extend the various return-filing deadlines, and even do away with the need to file some key forms, which skewed its ability to get a proper handle on the expected revenue from the GST.

The final set of deadlines for GST filing are such that, come Budget time, the government will only have preliminary data to estimate its revenue position. Companies with an annual turnover of less than ₹1.5 crore had to file their returns for July to September by January 10. Larger companies, with a turnover of more than ₹1.5 crore a year, had to file their returns for the July-November period by January 10.

Now, not only is this deadline uncomfortably close to the Budget presentation date for the revenue figures to be properly incorporated, but the data period itself is too small to estimate the trend for the year. How is the government expected to estimate how much it stands to earn for the year when the only data it has are for the very first few months of GST implementation?

After all, the GST Council made sweeping cuts

to the GST rates that came into effect on November 15 and which seemed to have sharply hit tax collections. But the final data for that period will not

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**

be available for the Budget.

Add to this the fact that January 10 saw a lot of confusion, since a fake notification started doing the rounds that the government had further extended the deadline to January 15, and the fact that the GST Network portal repeatedly crashed on the day. The GSTN hasn't released any data yet on the quantum of tax filers, but experts say a large proportion of them are likely to have missed their deadline.

**Form filing**

Further compounding this issue is the fact that, in order to ease the compliance burden, the government removed the need to file two key forms — GSTR-2 and GSTR-3 — while filing returns. The way these forms work is that a company files GSTR-1 for outward supplies to other companies, and GSTR-2 for inward supplies. It is only after matching the data in the two forms that the quantum of input tax credits to be refunded to the companies can be computed accurately. Doing away with the GSTR-2 form indefinitely means that there is substantial uncertainty surrounding the quantum of input tax credits to be paid, which again puts the government's revenue estimates on a shaky footing.

So, not only does the government have data for only the first three or four months of the GST regime, but even that data are unreliable because input tax credits can't be matched, rates were drastically changed following that period, and the data are

unlikely to reflect all the business activity since many likely missed their filing deadline. All of this makes estimating GST revenue for the next financial year that much tougher.

But the Budget, of course, has to do with more than simply estimating revenue. It also has to do with planning expenditure. It stands to reason that if a government is having trouble estimating its revenue for the coming year, then its expenditure projections are going to be shaky too. This year, 2017-18, was also the first when the Budget was presented on the earlier date of February 1, for the main purpose of smoothening expenditure across the year and not bunching it towards the end. It's only at the end of the financial year that we'll know how this has turned out. Previous years' trends will not work.

**The fiscal deficit**

Taken together, this has a bearing on the fiscal deficit as well. For this year, with GDP growth expected to be slower than what was estimated in the previous Budget, the absolute number for the fiscal deficit will also have to be proportionally smaller. This is a natural process. The fiscal deficit target for the year is 3.2% of GDP. So, if GDP is smaller than estimated, then that 3.2% will also work out to be smaller. This gives the government less room for manoeuvre, especially since it has repeatedly committed to the fiscal consolidation path. Chief Statistician of India T.C.A. Anant has also indicated that the GDP data stand to be revised significantly once final GST data come in.

Most of these issues aren't the government's fault, they simply have to do with the various reforms initiated this year. But the end result has been a perfect storm of uncertainty.

