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KUKIS TO BOYCOTT PEACE PANEL OVER CM'S PRESENCE

A day after the Union government constituted a peace committee in Manipur, most Kuki representatives said on Sunday that they would boycott the panel as it included Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and his supporters. Pointing out that their consent was not taken for including them on the panel, they demanded that the Centre make the situation conducive for talks.

On Saturday, the Union Home Ministry constituted a committee in Manipur to facilitate a peace-making process among various ethnic groups. Governor Anusuiya Uikey will chair the 51-member committee.

Several people who were made members of the panel revealed that they had been added without their consent. One such member, Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) president Ajang Khongsai, said he would not be able to sit with the Manipur government for peace talks.

"The panel includes COCOMI (Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity, a civil society group in Imphal) that has declared war against the Kukis. We want peace but at this critical junction, when violence continues, we cannot hold talks with the Manipur government," Mr. Khongsai told The Hindu.

J. Lhungdim, a retired Indian Defence Accounts Service (IDAS) officer, said his name was included on the panel without his consent.

"In 2016, I was sent to Russia to finalise an arms deal. After serving the government for 37 years, we are being referred to as foreigners by the Chief Minister. The panel should be led by Central government officials, else it is not going to be fruitful. It is a shame this issue has lingered on for more than a month," Mr. Lhungdim, who retired in 2020, said.

Nemcha Kipgen, a tribal Minister in Manipur, is a member of the panel. She could not be reached for comments.

The panel included former Manipur Director General of Police P. Doungel, who was transferred as Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Home — a post created overnight on June 1. Mr. Doungel, a Kuki set to retire this month, has been sidelined since the ethnic violence erupted in the State on May 3.

All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO) president Nando Luwang, who is based in Imphal, said he was unaware of his name being included in the panel but saw it as a positive step. "Will take a final decision on attending the meeting after discussing it with other members of the group," he said.

Eminent theatre artiste Ratan Thiyam, who staged a protest in Imphal on June 10 questioning the Centre's initiatives, was another name on the peace panel. At the protest organised by Coordinating Committee on Cultural



Road to recovery: Army jawans repair a damaged bridge at Leitanpokpi in violence-hit Manipur. PTI

Representatives demand that the Centre make the situation conducive for talks, even as several members on the panel say their consent was not sought before their names were added to the list

Fraternity, Mr. Thiyam questioned why the Prime Minister was silent when there was complete disorder in the State.

Over 100 people have been killed in the ethnic violence between the Kuki and Meitei communities since May 3. Around 50,000 people have been displaced and more than 4,000 weapons from police armouries have been looted and snatched.

MHA said the mandate of the committee will be to facilitate the peace-making process among various ethnic groups of the State, including peaceful dialogue and negotiations between conflicting parties/groups.

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) said it strongly reiterated the need for normalcy to prevail before the constitution of any such peace committee in the region. "Reiterating the urgent need for peace, ITLF strongly condemns the inclusion of CM N. Biren Singh, the very perpetrator of the current violence, in the Peace Committee," it said.

CYCLONE BIPARJOY SET TO HIT KUTCH; GUJARAT GEARS UP



Red alert: Fishermen move boats to safety in Porbandar as coastal areas start witnessing strong sea currents and high waves. PTI

With the "extremely severe cyclonic storm" Biparjoy expected to make landfall on Gujarat's Kutch coast on Thursday, the State government has started preparations by deploying teams from both national and State disaster response forces in coastal areas. It will set up shelters in six coastal districts in the Saurashtra and Kutch regions.

There is yet no clarity about the exact location of its landing, but the India Meteorological Department said that Biparjoy is very likely to make landfall between Mandvi in Gujarat and Karachi in Pakistan around noon on June 15, with a maximum sustained wind speed of 125 kmph to 135 kmph, gusting to 150 kmph.

On Sunday, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel held a review meeting with district officials. He directed the administration to deploy the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams, and take other precautionary measures in the Kutch, Jamnagar, Morbi, Gir Somnath, Porbandar, and Devbhumi Dwarka districts, which are likely to be impacted by the cyclone. Between June 13 and June 15, they are likely to face heavy rainfall and very high wind speeds that may go up to 150 kmph.

Representatives of the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and Indian Army were also present during the meeting. The Coast Guard has asked fishermen not to venture into the sea for the next five days. Coastal areas have already started

witnessing strong currents in the sea with high waves.

Shelter houses

The government will set up shelter houses in the six vulnerable districts to house those residing within 5 to 10 km from the coastline, who will need to be evacuated to safety.

The IMD has also issued heavy rainfall warnings for Kutch, Devbhumi Dwarka, Porbandar, Jamnagar, Rajkot, Junagadh and Morbi districts on June 14 and 15. On June 14, the intensity of rainfall is likely to increase to "heavy to very heavy" in a few places and to "extremely heavy" at isolated places in the affected districts on June 15.

MILES TO GO

With Donald Trump's indictment, the U.S. polity will see further polarisation

India's economy is firmly out of the throes of the pandemic blues, the higher-than-expected 7.2% GDP growth last year could actually be an 'underestimate', and the country is now poised for a decade, if not more, of uninterrupted 6.5%-7% growth, even if no further reforms are undertaken. This was the key message from Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) V. Anantha Nageswaran's prognosis of the state of the economy, conveyed to industry leaders last week. India, he asserted, could now grow for a longer period of seven to 15 years as China did between 1979 and 2008 without "running into overheating problems" as it did after three-four years of strong growth in recent decades. Among the reasons for his optimism — strong momentum, better macro fundamentals with inflation and trade deficits easing in recent months, and cleaner bank and corporate balance sheets, bolstered by reforms such as Goods and Services Tax (GST) and digitisation that are spurring formalisation. The CEA's elaborate elucidation on the economy's bright prospects can well be seen as a fresh official nudge to the private sector to stop worrying and restart investing. At the same time, his comment that the economy could be on 'auto-pilot' mode, may be a hint that the appetite for important pending reforms such as rationalising the GST structure or fixing archaic factor market laws is low, at least till the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

With sectors such as steel and cement seeing higher capacities in action, sections of industry may well start loosening the purse strings soon but a broad-based revival may take longer and needs more actions to buttress the confidence-building. That India has now recovered from the COVID-19 hit on the economy, marked by a 5.8% GDP contraction in 2020-21, is good. But returning to the pre-pandemic trajectory is not enough — remember that growth had slid for seven successive quarters even before the pandemic lockdowns. The economy grew just 3.9% in 2019-20 from 6.5% in the year before, and the quality of the recovery thus far remains uneven. Unless private investment recovers firmly and revs up job creation for millions of youth, demand growth shall not sustain enough to create the virtuous cycle the government is betting on. If India wants to encash the world's China-plus-one supply chain quest, that intent is not often matched by actions. Misadventures such as high import tariffs and the complex 'angel tax' on inbound investments apart, even failing to fix an online service to register a new company does not engender investor confidence. Before the economic engine can be truly on 'auto pilot' mode, the government must desist from unnecessary tinkering with its calibrations and create conducive conditions for a smooth and swift, hurdle-free passage for value and job creators.

MANIPUR, A RUDE REMINDER OF NORTHEAST TENSIONS

M.K. Narayanan is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

Violence in Manipur, which has gone on for over a month now, claimed well over a 100 lives and displaced thousands more, and has opened many raw wounds that most people had hoped belonged to a bygone era. The spectre of an unbridgeable divide between the Meiteis on the one hand and the Kuki-Chin-Mizo-Zomi-Naga tribes on the other is now all too evident, and any resolution will demand utmost sensitive handling. The ethnic divide and violence seems to suggest that little has changed in the northeast, notwithstanding the many developments in place. Thus the healing process is likely to be a long-drawn-out one.

There is still a divide

Most people across the country had reason to believe that the northeast had over time become well and truly integrated. Also, that there were now more commonalities rather than differences amongst the various tribes and communities. The ethnic violence in Manipur, consequently, has come as a rude reminder. Notwithstanding improved communications, better transit facilities, and support for the special needs of the region, there does still exist a divide between the tribes and plains people within the region.

It is easy to pontificate whenever an outbreak of violence of this magnitude takes place, and to harp on certain aspects such as the existence of an excess of region-centric calculus, lack of internal cohesion, and ethnic/caste rivalries as the causes for internal tensions and violence. Such aspects, fortunately, had become lesser in number in recent times, but it is possible that the fraying of our composite culture in recent times — which has also effected other parts of India — is casting a shadow over the northeast.

An additional dimension in the northeast is the presence of ethnic sub-nationalism and identity politics in an aggravated form. Ethnic allegiance had oftentimes been in conflict with mainstream nationalism or vice-versa previously, but it was hoped that such tensions had subsided. The Manipur developments imply that in much of the northeast, ethnic identities still overshadow and overwhelm all other considerations. What is also disturbing is that according to some reports from the region, consolidation efforts by different tribal entities were resulting in subterranean pressures, and the result is that many issues which were deemed settled seem to have been reopened. This applies specially to Manipur where, of late, there have been incipient signs of a resurgence of ultra-nationalistic tendencies. The confrontation between Meitei versus Kuki-Naga ultra-radicalism, as evidenced in Manipur these past weeks, needs to be viewed in the larger context of the conflict between the plains Meiteis and the Kuki-Mizo-Chin-Zomi-Naga hill tribes. What we witness in

Manipur today is a conflict between charged up Meitei chauvinism seeking to consolidate their position within Manipur and across the region, in opposition to the Kukis, Mizos and other tribes. The Meiteis may lack a significant militaristic profile, but the Meiteis had earlier on developed a strategy of networking with other northeastern resurgent outfits and militant groups at one level, and with Maoist groups in the hinterland States of the country, at another. This is a matter of record.

Currently, the polarisation between the majority Meitei, and the other tribal communities, in Manipur appears total and irreconcilable. Notwithstanding the peace moves by the central authorities, fresh outbreaks of violence continue. Relocation of the two communities is taking place vigorously with parts of the State being designated as Meitei and Kuki, respectively. The demand for a separate administration as a prelude to the division of the State along these lines is currently gaining momentum.

The State Government — more specifically, the Chief Minister — has come under severe attack by the Kuki tribals for the ongoing violence. This is accompanied by accusations that the police are siding with the Meitei attackers. Meitei elements, in turn, have threatened to form a 'civilian defence force' to protect their people against attacks by Kuki militants. Old issues are being resurrected, such as the burning of the historic Centenary Gate in Leisang village by Meitei miscreants, thus sharpening the divide. Demands for the dismissal of the State government and the imposition of President's rule under Article 356 of the Constitution, alongside a demand by tribal groups such as the Kukis-Chins-Mizos-Zomis, urging the Centre to give the region inhabited by them a separate administration, are being vociferously raised.

Weighing in on the solutions

The Home Minister, Amit Shah's recent visit to Manipur promised much, but it is highly uncertain whether the solutions that he has proposed — which is the standard prescription in all such situations — are the right ones at this time. His announcement of a judicial probe into the ethnic violence and of a three-member committee headed by a judge has been well received. His proposal for the creation of a unified command to oversee security in the State, however, appears draconian in the prevailing circumstances. The announcement of a Central Bureau of Investigation inquiry into specific incidents of violence is a welcome measure. However, changing the Director General of Police, who belongs to the Kuki tribe, on grounds of ineffectiveness may only serve to heighten the gap between the warring Meitei and Kuki communities. Saner voices must take the lead

What is needed at this time is for saner voices to play a leading role. Notwithstanding the fact that the northeast has been spared serious violence for some years now, the reality is that it is still a volatile region. It is in the process of changing and adapting to newer circumstances. What the Centre needs to achieve is an 'optimal positioning' even if it may seem like giving far too many concessions. Delhi is on test as to how it would adjust or react to the new situation that has presented itself — this demands innovative thinking. Even as States in the region crave greater autonomy, the process of achieving a proper equilibrium requires both sensitivity and 'out of the box' thinking.

Understanding cultural factors are critical, specially in times of conflict. The Meitei versus Tribal divide is both a cultural and sociological phenomenon. A solution demands a combination of adjusting to realities, coupled with an understanding of the moral imperatives of the numerous tribal communities that dot the northeastern landscape. The art is to come up with an agreement in which both or more parties to the dispute think it is the best from their point of view. A solution to the Manipur imbroglio in quick time is important — if a satisfactory solution is not found early, it could aggravate centrifugal tendencies that have not

entirely been dissipated, despite the best efforts of successive governments in Delhi and in the region over the past 75 years. The region is beset with people belonging to different cultures often confronting each other. Delhi has consistently tried to avoid an adversarial policy, and, instead, has sought dialogue. This is still the best remedy available, while avoiding any impression of weakness on the part of Delhi.

Delhi needs to acknowledge to itself that the situation in Manipur poses a 'problem' of no mean magnitude. An answer has to be found sooner rather than later before it ignites similar conflicts elsewhere in the region where such tensions also lurk. All communities across the region crave 'security'. The impression that Delhi is neutral in any conflict, and is only on the side of justice has to be properly communicated. The key task for Delhi would be to be seen to act on the basis of overreaching moral principles without, however, making a virtue of such principles. Today, there is enough common purpose and principles across the partisan divide; what is often absent is a weak democratic resolve and an ability to act in the shared national interest.

AMPLIFY THE SUBJECT OF ADOLESCENT GIRL NUTRITION

Gaurav Gogoi is Member of Parliament (Congress), Kaliabor, Assam

To unlock the full potential of India's future, we have to prioritise the health and nutrition of its adolescent girls. Adolescence is a pivotal period of cognitive development and, therefore, improving access to nutrition during this "second window of opportunity of growth" compensates for any nutrient deficiencies acquired during early developmental stages in the girl child. Furthermore, adolescent health is a significant indicator of women's labour force participation in India in the long term, as better nutrition improves every young girl's prospect to participate in productive activities. Thus, the country beholds a colossal opportunity to add to its nation's demographic dividend by investing in nutrition interventions in adolescent girls.

Ever-growing nutritional concern

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to undernutrition and anaemia due to the onset of menstruation. The findings of the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) confirm these concerns, as a staggering 59.1% of adolescent girls were found to be anaemic. With the NFHS-4 numbers also having reported over 41.9% of school-going girls as underweight, the numbers showcase a worrying trend. What makes the situation more complex is the fact that a range of factors, from environmental conditions to cultural norms that lack a gender-neutral environment within a household, affects the nutrition uptake in adolescent girls.

While progress has been made in improving crucial health indicators in the form of various government initiatives that have successfully achieved optimum coverage, it is however essential to acknowledge that current health interventions do not specifically focus on the nutritional statuses of adolescent girls.

We are, as a nation, far from realising the long-term consequences of overlooking the nutritional needs of young girls. Poorly balanced and insufficient diets can lead to cognitive impairments that affect one's academic performance. This can result in lower educational attainment, which can limit opportunities for employment and economic self-sufficiency later in life. Undernourished adolescent girls are also at a higher risk of chronic diseases and pregnancy complications, which can lead to a higher health-care burden on both families and communities, potentially leading to financial instability and increased poverty. If our girls are less healthy and less educated, they are less likely to participate fully in society, whether through work, politics, or community involvement.

Redefine the interventions

Therefore, it is imperative that we redefine interventions such that we not only centre it around good nutrition but also adopt a life-cycle approach, ensuring that no girl gets left behind. This investment can also help break the

intergenerational cycle of poverty, as well-nourished girls are more likely to have healthy babies and provide better care for their families. Thus, investing in girls' nutrition is not only the moral obligation of the state but also an economic one, with potential returns in the form of greater and more sustainable economic growth of the nation.

Additionally, a few strategic modifications to existing interventions can significantly expand the scope of its outcomes. The convergence of various government initiatives such as the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) within the umbrella of the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition programme (POSHAN) 2.0 is a step in the right direction, provided it is implemented effectively. Targeted adolescent-oriented schemes such as the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) could include even stronger awareness and nutrition education programmes that would help sustain beneficiary compliance. Targeted and regionally contextualised Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) efforts around adolescent girls' nutrition are sure to generate greater demand and the adoption of good practices. For improved outcomes, it is very imperative for effective convergence and collaborations among all the relevant departments, in a way that fosters a collective endeavour. Routine training of health workers for effective implementation and monitoring of various schemes, and to adapt with an evolving landscape, is also a crucial step in this process.

Use evidence and data

A holistic narrative on adolescent girls' nutrition, explaining its linkages with overall mental and physical well-being, individual productivity and overall economic growth of the country is needed. This must be packed with evidence/data that effectively appeals to all, to those outside the technical community, and must be framed to make it actionable. This also immediately brings about the need for disaggregated data that allows for effective interpretation.

As an elected representative, it is my duty to amplify this vital discourse on nutrition, to work towards protecting and improving the nutritional status of adolescent girls in our country. It is crucial to acknowledge that tackling the complex issue of nutrition among adolescent girls is not just a health concern, but is an investment in the future of the nation. We have an enormous responsibility, as well as a tremendous opportunity, to ensure the welfare and the upliftment of the nation by prioritising the nutritional needs of India's girls. The strength of a nation is measured by its ability to nurture its future generations; hence, let us work collectively to sow the seeds of a healthier, stronger India, where every girl can reach her full potential.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THAILAND ELECTIONS

Thailand's progressive Move Forward Party (MFP) and the populist Pheu Thai Party claimed victory in an election that gave a thumbs-down to the military-backed parties which ruled on and off for a decade. The alliance on May 22 signed an ambitious deal aiming to draft a new constitution, end mandatory military conscription and monopolies, and allow same-sex marriage, among other things. However, a government has not been formed yet and the possibility of any legislative reform will boil down to who gets to form Thailand's government — a power which in Thailand, is not automatically given to the majority election winners owing to a constitutional tweak by the military government in 2017.

What did the 2023 Thailand election look like?

The MFP emerged as the single-largest party in the May 14 polls, garnering 151 seats in the 500-seat House of Representatives. Its 42-year-old leader Pita Limjaroenrat capitalised on his popularity among disillusioned young voters awaiting change after eight years of a military-backed government. MFP is the only party promising to reform the strict *lèse-majesté* laws. Mr. Limjaroenrat is seen as the Prime Ministerial candidate if the coalition led by his party forms the government.

MFP's main ally Pheu Thai, the populist party led by the billionaire family of the self-exiled former Premier Thaksin Shinawatra, emerged as the second biggest winner with 141 seats. Pheu Thai drew its support from the rural and urban working class, mainly in the north and northeast regions of Thailand. Other smaller parties in the pro-democracy alliance also managed to secure a significant share of votes.

This election dealt a historic blow to Thailand's military-backed parties. The United Thai Nation Party, a recently formed party of the 69-year-old former military chief and incumbent Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha only managed 36 seats. Mr. Prayuth's previous party, the Palang Pracharat, the biggest in the incumbent ruling coalition, also bagged just 40 seats under current leader and Mr. Prayuth's deputy and military mentor Prawit Wongsuwan. Another party, the Bhumjaithai (proud to be Thai), which had consistently won enough seats to be kingmaker, secured 71 seats.

What is Thailand's political history?

The Siamese revolution marked the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. Since then, Thailand's military has staged 13 coups. The confrontation between military generals and civilian politicians and activists has been at the root of continuing instability in the country.

In 2001, Thailand got its first elected government which completed a four-year term, under policeman-turned-telecom giant Mr. Thaksin, who rode a populist wave to victory with his Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party. However, the ensuing two decades were one of the most turbulent times in Thai politics. Mr. Thaksin's controversial 'war on drugs' killed more than 2,500 people. Additionally, scores of lives were lost through security force crackdowns in the Muslim-dominated south region of the country, igniting a new round of insurgency. While Mr. Thaksin did sweep the 2005 polls, his premiership was soon engulfed by a financial scandal and with subsequent protests, he was forced to call for fresh elections. However, the leader got booted out months later in a bloodless coup.

The period post 2006 is often described as Thailand's "lost decade". Bangkok descended into a cycle of rallies and riots in 2008. With Mr. Thaksin in self-exile and his successors deposed by the courts, the government of leader Abhisit Vejjajiva struggled for legitimacy after being installed without a public mandate. In 2010, Thailand saw its most brutal crackdown on protestors, with more than 90 people— supporters of Mr. Thaksin, called the Red Shirts — killed by army firing in Bangkok. Notably, the crackdown was led by the current incumbent Premier and the then-general Prayut Chan-O-Cha. The protest years brought to the fore the deep social cleavage between the rural poor and the wealthier middle and upper classes mostly in Bangkok.

In 2011, Mr. Thaksin's younger sister Yingluck became the country's first female Prime Minister but her administration too faced protests as she sought amnesty for her brother, still in self-exile. This led to the army carrying out a coup and declaring martial law in 2014 under the guise of bringing stability to a country in paralysis. The coup brought Mr. Prayuth to power. In 2017, the military introduced a new Constitution, allowing it to appoint a 250-member Senate which would play a role in selecting the Prime Minister. The military delayed a Parliamentary election, which was then held in 2019 and initially seen as an exercise to transfer power from the military junta to an elected government. However, Mr. Prayuth retained power after the election, resulting in renewed resentment.

What is the role of the monarchy?

Even after the end of absolute monarchy, the Thai King retained

god-like status in society and enormous influence in the government. Criticising or even talking about the state of the monarchy has long been a taboo in the Southeast Asian country.

The institution has historically been shielded from public criticism by strict *lèse-majesté* laws. It has wielded strong political influence, putting its seal of approval on every military coup since the 1990s. The current monarch, Maha Vajiralongkorn, assumed the throne in 2016 after the death of his father, the revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who was the world's longest-reigning monarch at the time of his death. The junta gave the new King full control of the Crown Property Bureau, which manages the palace's roughly \$30 billion worth of assets (Thailand is the richest existing monarchy). Last year, the King assumed direct control of two Army units.

In 2020, in an unprecedented expression of discontent with the monarchy, widespread protests, led mainly by students spread through the country, asked for a separation of the King's assets and the Crown Property Bureau. They also wanted to cut the Palace's share in the national budget and ban the King from expressing his political views. The protestors also rejected the



A new beginning: MFP leader and Prime Ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat and Pheu Thai Party leader Cholanan Srikaew hold a MOU signed by eight political parties in agreement to form a new government, in Bangkok on May 22.AFP

*Who has gained the popular vote in the recently conducted Thai elections? Why has a government not been formed yet? What has been the relationship between the ruling military junta and the monarchy? Is there a call to reform the strict *lèse-majesté* laws?*

military's outsized influence in Mr. Prayuth's government.

These protests were a long-simmering reaction against Thailand's economic and political system, seen for decades as serving mainly three privileged groups — the one per cent of the population owning two-thirds of all Thai assets, the financially-privileged military which is intertwined with state enterprises, and the world's richest monarchy.

What does the recent victory signify?

The current election is the first election since the major pro-democracy protests of 2020 and the second since the 2014 coup. The fact that Thai people came out in record numbers (a 75% voter turnout) to vote for a young party promising historic reforms, rejecting influential military-backed parties is being considered as a tectonic shift in the country's politics. The overwhelming support for the MFP, the only party pledging to change *lèse-majesté* laws, also showed how the anti-monarchy sentiment of 2020 translated into an electoral mandate. The support for the populist Pheu Thai party also indicated conservative working-class fatigue, and a population seeking an end to corruption and army influence.

Will the election winners get to form the government?

The winner of the May 14 vote is not assured the right to form the new government. A joint session of the 500-seat House of Representatives and the 250-member Senate will be held in July to select the new prime minister. This process is widely seen as undemocratic because the senators, appointed by the

military rather than elected, vote along with Sunday's winning lawmakers.

While Mr. Limjaoenrat now claims that his alliance led by the MFP comprises 313 seats, he will need the backing of 376 legislators in the House to be voted in. Besides, the alliance will need to win over some of the 250 members of the conservative-leaning Senate, which is usually inclined to support military-backed parties. However, such an alliance, even if it forms a government, might face the threat of military intervention due to MFP's radical pledge to change the monarchy laws.

There is also another alliance scenario, interestingly, without the largest

IAF AND ARMY CARRY OUT JOINT EXERCISE IN THE CENTRAL SECTOR

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has carried out a joint exercise with the Indian Army in the central sector with deployment of multiple combat assets to check the operational readiness of the two forces.

The exercise follows the IAF's two strategic missions over the Indian Ocean region that involved Rafale and Su-30MKI jets.

The IAF did not divulge the details of the date and venue of the operations.

Earlier missions

A few days ago, a fleet of Su-30MKI jets of the IAF carried out a strategic mission over the Indian Ocean region for eight hours, days after a similar

vote-getting party. While the populist Pheu Thai party is making strong calls for a government led by MFP, analysts say it could also tie up with Bhumjaithai as well as the current ruling party, Palang Pracharat. In yet another potentially contentious scenario, the military-backed parties could form a minority government with the Senate's support, going against the will of the electorate. Meanwhile, if no compromise is reached, Thailand could also witness months of deadlock without a working government, since there is no constitutional deadline to form one.

operation was carried out by four Rafale aircraft.

The Su-30MKI jets flew over the south-western region of the Indian Ocean on Thursday, demonstrating their operational prowess and capability to carry out long-range missions. The mission involving the Rafale fighter aircraft last month covered the eastern region of the ocean.

The IAF carried out the two missions at a time China has been ramping up its presence in the region.

The Rafale jets were India's first major acquisition of fighter planes in 23 years after the Sukhoi jets were imported from Russia. The Rafale jets are capable of carrying a range of potent weapons.

TELLTALE SIGNS

Maharashtra's low-intensity communal violence could take a dangerous turn

The clashes in Kolhapur over the last few days are part of a disturbing trend in Maharashtra. Several incidents across the State in recent months reveal signs of a premeditated plan for communal polarisation and to keep the pot boiling. Most of these incidents have seemingly silly origins but have derailed normal life for several days. The latest eruption was over random social media messages that apparently glorified Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and 18th century Mysore king Tipu Sultan. Forty people have been arrested and prohibitory orders are in place till June 19. Similar protests had taken place in Kolhapur on March 17. In Beed, on June 9, comparable events unfolded. The renaming of Aurangabad to Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar by the State government in February was the trigger for the latest incidents; clashes in the town led to one death on March 30. But there is never a dearth of reasons for a clash. On March 30, during a Ramnavami procession in Malad in Mumbai, there were clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities over the playing of loud music. On April 4, in Jalgaon, loud music being played before a mosque was cited as the reason.

In Akola on May 13, violence erupted over a provocative post on social media about the Prophet, leading to the death of one person. The confrontation

escalated as both groups engaged in extensive vandalism, including arson, even setting vehicles ablaze. Many, including two policemen, were injured. Over 300 people were booked. On the same day, in Trimbakeshwar in Nashik, a syncretic practice of Muslims paying obeisance at a temple turned into a flashpoint. On May 14, Shevgaon in Ahmednagar district witnessed communal violence during a procession organised to commemorate Chhatrapati Sambhaji. Several people were injured and also arrested, and normal life was disrupted following the imposition of prohibitory orders and a ban on Internet services. The familiar pattern of sustained polarisation often escapes the attention that comes with massive violence. In the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha and the 2017 Assembly elections, a similar pattern of low intensity violence was visible in Uttar Pradesh. In Maharashtra, the ruling alliance of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena Shinde faction is facing a strong challenge from the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party-Sena Uddhav faction alliance. Polarisation is easy to create but extremely difficult to mitigate. The ruling alliance in Maharashtra must act decisively and impartially against troublemakers.

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