

this week
KARNATAKA

HIDDEN WATERS, HIGH PLACES



THE WAY TO a Ministry in this case is reportedly through a temple pond. The buzz in political circles here is that former Karnataka minister Shobha Karandlaje has been told by astrologers that she would be re-inducted in the BJP cabinet when the hidden pond at the Someshwara Temple is restored. Hawkers and pavement shop owners beside the temple were at the receiving end when the city corporation rolled in with bulldozers and cranes to tear down their makeshift structures. Karandlaje, BSY's confidante, was removed from her post in the wake of the an attempt by the mining barons, the Reddy brothers, to dislodge the CM last year. Over the last few months she has demonstrated that she still has the CM's ear by getting him to visit the Someshwara temple and to issue directions to local authorities to bide her requests to clear the temple yard of encroachments.

THE WRONG CONNECTION

THE RULING BJP government in Karnataka is busy collecting information to be used against the Opposition in the coming days. While digging up dirt on the Opposition from the illegal iron ore mining business has become a long running project, the BJP now also believes it has hope on connections between some Janata Dal Secular leaders and Kerala politician Abdul Naser Madani — arrested by the Bangalore police for the July 25, 2008 blasts in Bangalore. The telephone number of at least one JDS leader from Bangalore, Zameer Ahmed, a close associate of former CM H D Kumaraswamy, has emerged in investigations of Madani's telephone numbers. Sources say Ahmed, a follower of Madani, contacted him regarding political rallies in Karnataka.

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER

NEW KARNATAKA CHIEF Justice J S Khehar recently spoke out on behalf of the judiciary in the illegal mining issue. He announced that judges are not swayed by size of the profit and losses of companies and that all companies are treated equal. The judge expressed the view during the course of hearing of a series of petitions filed by major mining companies against a ban on export of iron ore from Karnataka. "Over the years profit and loss do not matter to judges. A company making shoes is as important as a mineral units," he said. The High Court has been attempting to mediate between the government and the mining companies to resolve the issue of the ban on iron ore exports imposed by the Karnataka government in the face of allegations of illegal mining.

DRAWING THE LINE

THE BJP HAS over several days been engaged in protests around Karnataka over Governor H R Bhardwaj's decision to send a new bill prohibiting cow slaughter in Karnataka to the President for her assent. The Governor is vested with the power to reserve a Bill for consideration of the President. The protests have drawn an angry reaction from the Governor. "I am a Brahmin. I need not learn from anybody about cow protection," he said recently in the latest episode of the running feud between the Raj Bhavan and the BJP government. "If there is no problem, I give assent. If there is a problem it is referred to the President. There is no shortcut when it comes to Constitutional matters. If they want shortcuts, I will not allow it," he said. — JOHNSON T A

LOSING THE WAY

The largest infrastructure project proposed under the PPP model, the Ganga Expressway has been hanging fire for nearly three years

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, SEPTEMBER 15

WHILE the Yamuna Expressway is back on track after last month's farmer agitation near Aligarh, the fate of the more ambitious Ganga Expressway project of the UP government hangs in the balance. The Expressway, which envisages linking Balia in the east with Greater Noida on Delhi's doorstep in the west, remains stuck since Chief Minister Mayawati had unveiled it on January 15, 2008, her 52nd birthday.

Mayawati had then announced that the around 1,047-km, eight-lane access-controlled expressway, which would halve the travel time on the route, cutting it down to 10 hours, would be completed in four years. However, despite the grand announcements the only sign on the ground is a foundation stone standing amidst agricultural land in Maldevpur village of Balia. Let alone work on the project, even land acquisition for it is yet to begin.

Asked about the status of the project, an official said, "After the Allahabad High Court quashed the initial environmental clearance in May last year, the Jaypee group submitted a fresh application for obtaining the environmental clearance for the expressway on July 31, 2009, and for the attached land parcels on August 20, 2009. All we know is that the clearances have not yet been given by the Union Government."

The Ganga Expressway is the largest infrastructure project to be conceived under the public-private partnership model in the country; the Yamuna Expressway a mere 165 kilometre compared to this 1,047 km stretch. It was awarded to the Jaypee Ganga Infrastructure Corporation Limited by the UP Expressway Industrial Development Authority on March 23, 2008 after getting initial environmental clearance on August 23, 2007.

The State Level Environmental Impact Assessment Authority, which was headed by Mukesh Sharma, a professor of civil engineering at IIT, Kanpur, gave the clearance on the basis of a report submitted by the UP Pollution Control Board, which claimed to have held public hearings at several places.



In February 2008, a month after the project's foundation stone was laid, the UP gov't came out with a separate Relief and Rehabilitation policy meant exclusively for the families displaced by this project. On March 8, 2008, the Varanasi-based Ganga Mahasabha filed a petition in the Allahabad High Court, saying the project would "diminish the Ganga". On May 29, 2009, the High Court quashed the environmental clearance, saying that there had been violations of the prescribed procedure. Also, the land offered to the company was not taken into account in the environmental clearance.

The court ordered stoppage of work and directed the government not to proceed with the project until environmental clearance was obtained in accordance with the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

The Jaypee group was given 12,000 hectare land at Bulandshahr, Kanshiramnagar, Unnao, Rae Bareilly, Allahabad, Pratapgargh, Varanasi and Mirzapur which the Jaypee Group had been given on 90-years lease for development of residential colonies, entertainment



facilities, hospitals, colleges etc. By comparison, the group had got merely 2,500 hectares along the Yamuna Expressway. Incidentally, several petitions were filed against the Yamuna expressway also, but the High Court had rejected them all. "The cases of Ganga Expressway and the Yamuna Expressway are different. There, the farmers were ready to give land but wanted higher compensation. In the case of the Ganga Expressway, there are doubts over the feasibility of the project and the way it would im-

pact the Ganga, its natural flow and pollution level", said Jitendra Singh of the Ganga Mahasabha. Officials say that even if the environmental clearance comes soon, work is unlikely to begin under the present regime. In normal circumstances, acquiring about 20,000 hectare of land, most of which is fertile, will be a tough task. With Assembly elections due in 2012, this is bound to become a political hot potato. Besides, the cost of the project has gone up from the initial estimate of Rs 35,000 crore to over Rs 60,000 crore.

(Above) A hoarding advertising the Expressway project in Lucknow; A policeman guarding the project's foundation stone.

EXPRESS ARCHIVE

- 1,047 km
LENGTH OF EXPRESSWAY
- 19
NUMBER OF DISTRICTS COVERED
- 3
LINK ROADS AT FARRUKHABAD (19 KM), BILHAUR IN KANPUR AND LUCKNOW (88 KM) AND MIRZAPUR (13 KM)

ROUTE The Expressway is slated to pass through districts Gautam Budh Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Kanshiram Nagar, Badaun, Shahjahanpur, Farrukhabad, Hardoi, Unnao, Raibareilly, Pratapgargh, Allahabad, Sant Ravidas Nagar, Mirzapur, Varanasi, Chandauli, Ghazipur and will terminate at Ballia.

Maharashtra's premier medical panel in need of treatment

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, SEPTEMBER 15

MAHARASHTRA'S premier medical body, the Maharashtra Medical Council (MMC), in charge of regulating the burgeoning medical sector in the state, is battling a crisis of its own. Even after elections to the Council took place after a ten-year delay in May last year, the body is yet to start functioning. Meanwhile, the primary responsibility of the body — providing registration to MBBS doctors — is being carried out by a government-appointed administrator. The council that is expected to not only prescribe and maintain the standard of medical education but also regulate the functioning of the general practitioners has a backlog of complaints to deal with.

As if this wasn't enough, the appointment of five representatives from the government to the Council has acquired a political colour with the state's Medical Education Department getting bogged down with several lists of 'favoured doctors' being sent from the Congress-NCP combine. A few doctors aggrieved by the outcome of the election to the body have challenged the results. Some doctors have filed a writ petition being urging the Mumbai High Court to intervene in the delay in the convening of the Council.

Dr P Nikhade, the chief of the Nagpur unit of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has been authorised to file the writ petition at the Nagpur bench of the Mumbai High Court demanding an answer to the delay in the functioning of the body.

Mumbai-based Dr Suhas Pingale who was one of the nine doctors elected to the Council, says, "For ten years MMC was being run by the government-appointed administrator. Hence, the High Court judgment (necessitating the election) in 2008 was welcomed by a huge section of doctors who wanted a democratically elected body."

The previous elections to the Council had been scrapped as the postal ballot system used for it was challenged by several people. "This had led to several irregularities," points out Pune based Dr

Sanjay Gupte, President of the Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Society of India (FOGSI) and one of the elected members of the MMC. It was then that the government had stepped in and appointed an administrator.

However, the elections last year had spawned fresh hope among the nearly 70,000 doctors being represented by the MMC. The Council is authorised to entertain complaints by its members, by the public at large or through government channels and then investigate whether there was a lapse in professional conduct. If the concerned doctor is held guilty, then it can let the government off with a warning or even deregister him or her, says Dr Gupte.

Dr D Langewar, administrator at the MMC, admitted that there was a pendency of cases where pa-

ELECTIONS to the Council took place last May after a 10-year delay but the reconstituted body is yet to meet

tients have sought redressal of their grievances. "But these complaints need to be investigated and hence it takes time to be resolved," says Langewar.

However, not many in the government are convinced about the need for such a body. Highly-placed sources in the state Health Department pointed out that while it is a prestigious body, it is largely toothless.

Challenged now by doctors who have plans to call for a bandh, the action committee of the state unit of IMA has written to the Health Minister about the issue. MMC is a quasi judicial body which has the power to punish erring medical practitioners, says Dr Devendra Shirole, Chairman of the action committee of the state unit of Indian Medical Association.

When contacted Mahesh Mhaiskar, State Health Secretary said that the matter was sub-judice and hence the nomination of government representatives to the body would be done only after the court's decision.

Lighting up

Kiran, touted as the world's most affordable solar light, is part of a private initiative to deal with the power shortage plaguing rural India

V SHOBA
BANGALORE, SEPTEMBER 15

THE runaway success of a newly-designed solar lantern has come to spell new hope for the power-starved hinterland of the country. Launched in October last year, the Kiran, or S10, a kerosene lantern replacement for rural India and Africa, is priced at Rs 549 and lasts up to eight hours on a single day of solar charging.

When the Sikshana Foundation loaned these solar lanterns to over a hundred Class 10 students in Kanakapura, Karnataka for the duration of the board exams earlier this year, Kiran, touted as the

world's most affordable solar light scored a big hit with the students whose study time increased at an average of two-three hours per day. "None of the students wanted to return the lights. They offered to pay for them," says Mandeep Singh, COO and India operations in charge of D.light, a global design company whose eco-friendly lights have impacted over 1 million people in 37 countries.

The sturdy lantern — it withstood rainfall, a drop test of 2 metres and an adult's weight on it — comes with a powerful LED with a life of 50,000 hours, or eight-10 years and an eco-friendly nickel metal hydride battery that has a life of nearly two years. "If you com-



The Nova light (in picture), another flagship product from the D.Lite company stable, comes with four light modes and can charge a cellphone in two hours.

pare apples and apples," Singh says, "it is the cheapest, high-quality solar light in the world. A kerosene lantern costs about Rs 150 a

month, so Kiran pays for itself in just four months." And it's set to get cheaper. "The aim is to design a \$5-\$6 solar lamp.

About 88 million households in India don't have grid electricity. A lot of them have a daily income of \$5 or less. We want to bridge that

gap," he says.

D.light, the labour of love of Stanford Design School students and social entrepreneurs Sam Goldman and Ned Tozun, has its India office in New Delhi and has undertaken extensive field trials in the villages of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Maharashtra before releasing its end-user-specific products — Goldman attended high school in India and moved to East of Kailash, Delhi for two years to launch the India operations.

"India constitutes about a third of D.light's market. Our lights were recently picked up by WWF and other NGOs for post-flood relief work in Leh. We have partnered with Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC's e-Choupal, SKS Microfinance, Nexus India Capital and NGOs such as Dharmas; besides we are supported by the World Bank and the Shell Foundation," Singh says. D.light has offices in India and Tanzania, a manufacturing unit in China and a design team in Hong Kong.

Kiran, winner of several international design awards, including the

prestigious Ashden Award for Sustainable Energy in July this year, has been well-received by rural families with limited access to electricity, farmers, women, school-going children and urban vendors. Whole villages like New Keringa in southern Orissa have switched from kerosene lamps to Kiran. CEO Goldman writes in his blog that on a field trip to villages near Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, he was surprised to find D.light's products were "useful to and loved by customers who are quite rich by rural standards".

Singh remembers the owner of a fleet of buses in Pilibhit placing an order for two Kiran lights, and returning to buy four of D.light's other flagship product, Nova. The Nova, priced at Rs 1,699, comes with four light modes—ambient, bed-side, regular and intensive—and can charge a mobile phone in less than two hours. "It's heartening to see the products being put to good use. A samosa-seller outside our Delhi office reported a 30 per cent increase in sales after ditching her gas lamp for Nova," he says.