

Thinking should become your capital asset, no matter whatever ups and downs you come across in your life. Dr. APJ Kalam

INDIA, BANGLADESH AND RUSSIA SIGNS AGREEMENT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF WORKS IN ROOPPUR NUCLEAR PLANT

India, Bangladesh and Russia sign an agreement providing for participation of Indian companies in construction of non-critical works in Rooppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.

Russian atomic energy agency Rosatom has said that Indian companies can now participate in construction and installation works in the “non-critical” category for the Rooppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.

The Rooppur project is the first initiative under an Indo-Russian deal to undertake atomic energy projects in third countries.

This will also be the first time Indian companies will be able to participate in a nuclear power project abroad.

India, Bangladesh and Russia signed an agreement to this effect.

A MoU signed in Moscow, sets a framework for interaction of Russian contractor, and Indian and Bangladeshi experts in the implementation of works related to the project.

GLOBAL STATUS REPORT 2017

The ‘Global Status Report 2017: Towards a zero-emission, efficient, and resilient buildings and construction sector,’ published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has listed the Energy Management Centre (EMC), an autonomous institution under the Kerala government campus, as one of the recent achievements in the deployment of key technologies for energy-efficiency in buildings.

The EMC campus uses **day lighting controls, CFC-free heating, ventilation and cooling systems, along with a halogen-free fire-fighting system.** Solar reflectance index coating, combined with high-albedo painting and turbo-vents for passive cooling, has been used, and tropical rainforest trees help create cool surroundings. Only certified green

construction materials, recycled wood boards, low-emitting paints and adhesives, and green-plus certified carpets have been used.

EMC is the only one from India to figure in the list, along with five other projects worldwide. The other five projects recognized by the UNEP include the Sierra Crest development in Fontana, California, the Association of Nubian Vaults in Sub-Saharan Africa, a construction and demolition waste recycling project in Paris, the Palm Tree eco-development project in Hanoi, Vietnam, and the Higashi-Matsushima Smart eco-town in northern Japan.

Need for energy efficiency in buildings:

Building-related carbon emissions have been rising by around 1% per year since 2010, and more than four million deaths are attributable to illness from household air pollution.

The EMC campus is the only LEED Gold certified building in the government sector in Kerala and is built with assistance from the Global Environment Fund

Global Environment Fund:

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet’s most pressing environmental problems

GEF is an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues

The GEF is a unique partnership of 18 agencies — including United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, national entities and international NGOs

It is the financial mechanism for 5 major international environmental conventions: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

(UNCCD), and the Minamata Convention on Mercury

PRESIDENT OF VIETNAM, TRAN DAI QUANG VISITS INDIA

President of Vietnam, Tran Dai Quang arrived in India on a three-day visit.

The visit aims to further deepen comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

India is now among the top ten trading partners of Vietnam. Bilateral trade between the two countries has seen continuous growth over the past many years.

Indian investments in Vietnam have remained constant at around 1 billion dollars but are expected to rise in the coming years.

Defence Cooperation has emerged as a significant pillar of India's strategic partnership with Vietnam.

Science and Technology is also an important area of cooperation. It is expected that the visit of President of Vietnam will give further boost to the bilateral ties.

Vietnam is an important pillar in India's Act East Policy and the two countries share civilization relationship spanning over 2000 years.

Vietnam is also an important partner in Southeast Asia and is currently the country coordinator for India with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional bloc.

Apart from ASEAN, India and Vietnam closely cooperate in other regional forums such as the East Asia Summit, Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Asia Europe Meeting besides the UN and WTO.

India-Vietnam trade stood at 6.24 billion dollar in fiscal 2016-17 and the two sides have agreed to raise this to 15 billion dollar by 2020.

KERALA STATE COMMISSION FILED CASE AGAINST VIOLATION OF PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS IN KUTHIYOTTAM RITUAL

The Kerala State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has registered a suo

motu case in connection with the Kuthiyottam ritual

The commission would examine if the ritual, reportedly involving piercing children's sides with a hook, violated child rights in any manner

Pongal festival:

The Kuthiyottam ritual is usually performed every year during the Pongala festival at the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Pongal, which means 'to boil over', is a ritual in which women prepare a pudding made from rice, jaggery, coconut and plantains cooked together, and offer it to the goddess

The ritual can only be performed by women

The Attukal Pongala festival is the largest congregation of women for a festival in the world

The Kuthiyottam Ritual:

Nearly 1,000 young boys undertake a seven-day penance before Pongala day

These boys are said to represent the wounded soldiers of the goddess. The boys have to observe strict discipline and stay inside the temple for seven days. The rigors include sleeping on the floor, strict diet restrictions, and bathing three times a day

They also have to prostrate 1,008 times before the deity

The ritual reportedly involves piercing the child's side with a small hook and knotting a thread through it to symbolize their bond with the Goddess.

BOMB CYCLONE

A winter storm – also known as a “bomb cyclone” –has slammed into the northeast United States. The storm has roughly 80 million people along its path, with 22 million of those affected by a coastal flood warning.

Bomb cyclone:

The term is used by meteorologists to **indicate a mid-latitude cyclone that intensifies rapidly.**

A bomb cyclone happens when atmospheric pressure in the middle of the storm drops at least 24 millibars over 24 hours, quickly increasing in intensity. Lower the pressure, the stronger the storm.

Deep drops in barometric pressure occur when a region of warm air meets one of cold air. The air starts to move and the rotation of the earth creates a cyclonic effect. The direction is counterclockwise in the Northern hemisphere leading to winds that come out of the northeast.

What's the difference between hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons?

Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms. They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear. When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.

Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific. **Cyclones** are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. **Typhoons** are formed over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

BOMBAY HIGH COURT RECENT RULING

A full bench of the Bombay High Court has held that the courts in India can take notice of the conviction of an Indian by a foreign Court for the offence committed overseas while exercising their judicial and/or quasi judicial powers

However, the court said that a conviction abroad will not ipso facto be binding on the Indian courts adjudicating matters against the same person

The bench considered two questions

(1) whether the conviction of an Indian by a foreign Court for the offence committed in that country can be taken notice of by the Courts or authorities in India while exercising their judicial or quasi judicial powers and

(2) whether such a conviction would be binding on the Courts and authorities in India while exercising these powers.

ROAD MAP FOR CONSOLIDATION OF THE OVERSEAS OPERATIONS OF STATE-RUN BANKS

The finance ministry has released a road map for consolidation of the overseas operations of state-run banks.

All existing 216 operations of state-run banks in other countries will be examined to check for possible consolidation.

The rationalization of overseas branches is aimed towards "cost efficiencies and synergies in overseas markets".

The rationalization in foreign operations will be through a mixture of closure of overseas branches, subsidiaries, representative offices and remittance centers.

And through consolidation of joint ventures where more than one bank is a shareholder

Banks have been asked to close non-viable operations for cost efficiencies

Banks have also been asked to consolidate equity holdings in joint ventures where more than one state-run bank is a stakeholder

The government is examining lapses in systems followed by overseas branches while giving loans to group firms of Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi against letters of undertaking (LoUs) fraudulently issued by some PNB officials

What is Letter of Undertakings (LoU)?

An LoU is an assurance given by one bank to another to meet a liability on behalf of a customer. The LoU is akin to a letter of credit or a guarantee

LoUs are used in international banking transactions. An LoU is issued for overseas import remittances and involves four parties — an issuing bank, a receiving bank, an importer and a beneficiary entity overseas

According to norms, the term of a LoU is 180 days, and can be rolled over once for six months. Since LoUs are a form of lending, they are typically backed by security.

TO FIX THE ROT IN PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS, GOVT HAVE TO START WITH THE BOARDS

The recent fraud in the PNB has reopened the debate on privatization of public sector banks. That debate will take years to resolve as multiple stakeholders are involved but this debate should not distract from the more immediate problem.

Immediate steps that can be taken:

The discussion should be around the separation of ownership and professional management.

It should be about ways to strengthen the board and management of public sector banks and build capacity to address risks (related to frauds).

Apart from supporting financial inclusion projects and government bond-buying mandate, PSU bankers often have to extend loans (against their wish) because of pressure from bureaucrats and ministers. That is a credit risk, and the first thing that needs to be addressed

Appointment issues: Public Sector Banks and Private Banks

- I. State-owned banks are regulated in a different way from private banks. The roles of their boards also are different.
- II. Key executive appointments in PSU banks are recommended by the Bank Board Bureau and then approved by the appointment committee of the cabinet
- III. The board of a public sector bank doesn't have the power to fire the CEO for poor performance or failure in oversight
- IV. If such a fraud had occurred in a private sector bank, the central bank would be well within its powers to remove the board but in a PSU bank, the power rests with the government itself
- V. While the board may ensure the government's bidding is done, it is powerless to give directions to management and hold it accountable

The way forward:

Boards should be free to set their own vision and mission.

They should be free to hire and fire top executives, and roll out human resource management, governance and compensation strategies as they see fit.

The PNB fraud is a call to action for the government to do the right thing and ensure that the scope for such frauds is minimized forever.

This is also about the government having to resolve the conflicts between its role as a owner versus the entity responsible for financial stability.
