

MESSAGE FOR TODAY

To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.

— JK ROWLING

The Assam Tribune

Myopic vision

Did the Centre consult the supposed beneficiaries, the people of the North-east, before beginning the construction of the mega dam projects in Assam or Arunachal Pradesh? Had they done so the narratives might have been different! And now again without even making a semblance of having a dialogue with the stakeholders the Centre has come out with a proposal grandiosely titled as 'Hydrocarbon Vision North-east 2030'. History testifies that since its annexation by the British the North-east's natural resources have been subjected to exploitation without the region receiving concomitant returns. Successive regimes in Delhi had merely continued the tradition of colonial exploitation, the infamous setting up of the Barauni Refinery by laying a pipeline to transport crude oil from Assam being an illustrative example. For years natural gas was flared away instead of being used to manufacture petroleum products thereby exposing Delhi's profligacy with the region's resources. Now, under the guise of making the North-east a petroleum hub for the neighbouring countries, the NDA Government is planning to exploit whatever remains of our fossil fuel resources and, when these are finally exhausted, import crude from elsewhere. Laying of colossal lengths of pipelines, exploitation of new oilfields, expansion of existing refining capacity – the Centre's "vision" is ambitious indeed. However, if a referendum were to be held amongst the people of the North-east, their response would have been a resounding no to the proposal.

Many of the new drilling sites are reportedly located in wildlife reserves such as Dibru-Saikhowa, Nambor, etc. One has merely to visit the Margherita area in Assam to see for oneself the environmental havoc wrought by mindless exploitation of fossil fuels. Drilling for oil in eco-sensitive zones would bring about disaster to the pristine environment for which the North-east is globally famous. The proposed "vision" is to be a public-private enterprise, which means private companies would be bidding for drilling rights to oilfields in the region. The rapacity of private players has been experienced by many parts of the world and the North-east is slated to become yet another victim! Rather than tout 'Hydrocarbon Vision North-east 2030' as a positive step, regional leaders would do better to explain to the people of North-east the specific benefits, if any, that would accrue to the region. It is well known that oil is a low employment-generating industry, so expansion would not do much to solve the unemployment problem. No doubt the North-east, which gets lesser oil-royalty than Gujarat, would receive some amount of revenue, but what would happen when the entire existent stock is exploited? Given the fact that the North-east's natural resources would be handed over to the corporate sector, there is something ominous about Delhi's exploitative game-plan. It is imperative that the people of the region make their voices heard and oppose such a "myopic vision" in its present form.

Illegal migrants

That an issue with disturbing and far-reaching socio-economic and political implications has continuously been left unaddressed by the State Government, the administration and the police is a telling comment on these authorities' commitment to discharging their fundamental constitutional obligations. It is an established fact how illegal migrants from Bangladesh enter Assam at will and manage to get themselves enrolled as voters precisely due to the laxity of the authorities. More shocking is the fact that despite repeated strictures from the Gauhati High Court, the authorities cannot even get their hands on declared (through the judicial process) illegal migrants, thereby allowing them to enjoy the privileges meant for bona fide citizens only. Often the court – while asking the administration and the police to arrest immediately the declared illegal migrants – has to remind the authorities that they are under a constitutional obligation to discharge their responsibilities in that regard.

The Assam Police is now creating a database of suspected and declared illegal migrants – a much-needed exercise given the ominous implications of cross-border infiltration. The exercise can go a long way in ensuring that the illegal migrants do not get to enjoy the rights meant for genuine citizens. But even for this measure to be meaningful, the police and the administration will have to be proactive on the ground, as merely keeping an account of illegal migrants in official computers will amount to little unless the data is extensively used to verify the credentials of each and every suspected foreigner – many have already managed to have their names enrolled in voter lists. The Assam Police also needs to answer a serious question. After a court pronounces a person as illegal migrant, the job of the police is to arrest the person immediately. It is shocking to say the least that thousands of declared foreigners have managed to evade arrest, thanks precisely to the inexplicable inertia of the police. The failure to arrest illegal migrants apart, the government authorities have been exhibiting the same callousness in deleting the names of illegal migrants from the voters list, resulting in casting of votes in elections by the infiltrators. Words are inadequate to deplore such irresponsible conduct on the part of the authorities. Indeed, this is tantamount to compromising with the nation's unity and integrity. Such an approach on the part of the authorities would only smack of a conspiracy aimed at protecting the interests of the illegal migrants rather than of the indigenous populace who are at risk of being rendered a minority in their own homeland. While the apathy of several major political parties towards the burning issue of Bangladeshi infiltration is an open secret as the migrants constitute a big vote bank, one would have expected the administrative and bureaucratic authorities to be guided by reason and the constitution instead of toeing the lines of their political masters.

Jehadis, Assam and Bangladesh

■ Dwaipayan

That Assam has long been the target of Islamist or jihadi outfit such as the Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) is something embarrassing. Last month as is reported, three more jehadis of the JMB were rounded up by Chirang police during a combing operation in Amguri and Daukhanagar areas. What is even far more alarming is some religious minority Muslim youths' close links with this terror outfit, a fact that has well resonated in the recent arrest of 11 persons in Chirang and Kokrajhar districts on the same ground. The arrested had been engaged in training and motivating youths in lower Assam to join the JMB.

It may be noted here that the involvement of some youths from Assam with Bangladeshi jihadi outfits is further confirmed by the arrest of one Shakil Alom along with his wife and few other persons after a series of investigations by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) resulting in the accidental bomb explosion incident at Khagragarh, in Burdwan (West Bengal) on October 2, 2013 leading to the death of two persons suspected to be the JMB members.

One positive aspect of the whole security scenario in Assam, however, is that the JMB cadres as divulged by police did not have as yet any major plan up their sleeves in the State other than recruiting boys from the lower Assam districts and trying to make Assam a base.

But then, the crucial questions are: Can we say for sure that they

have not harboured such thoughts in mind at present or that a section of them have not vanished from Assam for training in Bangladesh or West Bengal? The answer is no. Actually, wherein our fearful anxiety lies is our failure in preventing the disappearing acts by the cadres of the JMB or illegal immigrants or even Bangladeshis with valid documents, something which is indeed shocking. For this unpleasant development, it is the successive governments that are only to blame because they have hardly succeeded in either nabbing those JMB cadres, or, illegal immigrants or even Bangladeshis with valid documents who went traceless.

To exemplify, we have to refer to a recent news item. It stated that of the 27,262 infiltrators pushed back or deported till 1985 from Assam, 1,432 had re-entered the Indian territory. Few weeks ago, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Haribhai P Chaudhury, was of the view that Assam may be the target of the ISIS, and the JMB has already spread its tentacles in the State. If what he had observed as to the most dreaded global terror outfit, ISIS, is really a reliable piece of information, then there is certainly a genuine reason for us to feel worried about. Because if a major offensive is really carried out by the ISIS in league with such dread-

ed terror groups as the JMB, Harakat-ul-Mujahidin or oven with Harakat-ul-Jehad-al-Islami, say, in Assam, there is some element of doubt if the security forces will be in a position to stave it off.

One fundamental reason for our concern is about our State having been strategically nestled at the porous border with Bangladesh. Given its vulnerable geographical location, it is today facing a serious security threat from across the border. It is no secret now that the jihadi groups as revealed by an NIA probe in 2013 are recruiting youths for carrying forward their nefarious agenda in the region.

Second, the lack of much-need-

What is even far more frustrating is that some of them have even acquired Indian citizenship after entering from Bangladesh, evidently to get involved with anti-Indian activities.

ed close cooperation among different intelligence agencies about information to curb divisive or subversive activities of these groups. This mechanism ought to have been toned up soon after the al-Qaeda's open declaration of India as a target of its jihadi operations on September 4, 2014, or close on the heels of the bomb blast incident in Burdwan, or even after as many as 300 cadres of

sleeper-cell of al-Qaeda went traceless in the State when there was its open threat of jihad a month earlier that year.

It will possibly be not out of context to mention here that in India those who have entered Assam with even valid travel documents are not just from Bangladesh but from several other countries as well. What is shocking is that many of them have gone missing in the country in different years. For instance, over 80,000 Bangladeshi nationals who entered the country with valid documents have disappeared in the past three years in India, the highest number of 32,644 Bangladeshis gone missing in 2009 alone, as revealed on April 26 last by the Centre in Parliament.

The crucial questions are why have they disappeared, and how many of them have been nabbed till date? What is even far more frustrating is that some of them have even acquired Indian citizenship after entering from Bangladesh evidently, to get involved with anti-Indian activities. One such particular case came to light in 2013 when following the NIA probe into the accidental blast in Burdwan, it was demonstrated that one of the two suspects killed, Shakil Alom, a bomb-expert and trainer in the making of explosives and their use, acquired Indian citizenship by virtue of his marriage with an Indian.

However, at present the people of India's North-east including Assam, are perceptively concerned over the worsening law-and-order

situation in Bangladesh due to macabre killing by hardcore jihadists of many people there including secular writers, bloggers, minorities, etc., over the years with the latest victim being a 60-year-old Hindu ashram worker hacked to death by ISIS jihadists last week. Since the murder of a secular blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in 2013, quite a good number of people had been killed by violent attacks, more than 30 of them last year and about 12 this year alone. The international community slammed the Bangladesh Government for its inability to bring the culprits to book.

What is surprising is that the Bangladesh Government denies the presence of the ISIS and al-Qaeda in Bangladesh, but these groups have claimed responsibility for some of the murders. It, instead, attributes the murders to home-grown militant outfits such as the JMB, saying key opposition BNP led by Begum Khaleda Zia and its ally Jamaat-e-Uskanu were patronizing the attacks. However, the Sheikh Hasina Government has finally rounded up as many as 11,307 people within four days of an ongoing anti-militant drive. Under the circumstances, all New Delhi needs to do now is fencing the porous Assam-Bangladesh border along the riverine areas and tightening up the security as well as increasing coordination among various intelligence agencies in order to prevent possible efforts at sneaking by some fundamentalists into Assam to avert arrest or spread terror there since they are at present under mounting pressure in Bangladesh to surrender.

Can Assam be ahead of others in IT education?

■ Gautam Goswami

When it comes to the IT education scenario, no doubt Assam is also progressing along with the rest of the world but in a slow manner. The students of the State are yet to be groomed in a proper manner in IT education and given exposure to work in the State's own IT parks and SEZs, which is yet to be a reality.

Thousands of talented students from Assam migrate to other States to be trained in IT field. Many of them are working in different multinational companies outside the State. While working there these students have been contributing towards those States' and countries' development. Over the years, those students who have migrated from the State have become mature professionals and well settled. Sadly, they will never return to their own State and Assam will forever be deprived of the service of its own sons and daughters.

To promote IT education, whatever the Government has been doing, it has been seen only in the main cities like Guwahati, Dibrugarh and other few towns of the State. IT education is yet to penetrate at the grassroots level. For the students of the remote and far

off areas, IT education is still a distant dream.

Every year the engineering colleges here produce hundreds of IT engineers. But due to lack of proper exposure in the State, these students leave the State and are absorbed in other States of India and in abroad by the IT companies. While the Government spends crores of rupees here in their education, other States and countries are enjoying the benefits.

In this regards what the Manipur Government has been doing to boost the IT sector in the State should be an eye opener for the Assam Government also.

To boost the IT sector in the State, a new IT park has come up. This new IT park houses about 500 people. Already 200 local Manipuri and NE youths have got employment in this IT park. With the park, an IT SEZ is also coming up in the State that will provide space for at least 5000 people where IT entrepreneurs have started working. The Manipur Government observed Digital India Week last year in July so as to create awareness among the people. The Government is mobilizing the Manipuri NRIs to help in this effort.

To make IT education more pop-

ular, more engineering colleges are needed. The entire NE region is lagging far behind in this context. The number of engineering colleges in the NE States can be counted on one's finger tips, whereas the other States like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, etc., there are hundreds of engineering colleges, both government run as well as in the private sector. If we compare the number of all the engineering colleges in the eight north-eastern States, the number would not even cross 50. What could be more disappointing and disheartening for the people of this region?

The primary task of the Assam Government is to induce IT educational or Digital Education at the grassroots level, say, from the school level. Learning Digital Education as part of the computer education will definitely enhance the quality the students, make them more techno-savvy and prepare them for techno-world jobs. IT education should be encouraged in the rural areas by giving a better network of the internet and facilities and trained manpower to train the students.

In this globalized age, in the big metros like Delhi, Bangalore, Pune, etc., people are working for foreign-based companies while sitting in their offices in these cities.

Can't we materialize such a scenario in Assam?

Though the Assam Government has been encouraging IT education in the different universities and engineering colleges, most of these universities and colleges are crippled by several problems.

"Despite having facilities, most of these universities and engineering colleges are plagued by non-appointment of permanent faculties. Here teachers are working on an ad-hoc basis or as part-time teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching has gone down. Secondly, we produce good students here but due to lack of exposure of big multinational companies, they leave for Bangalore, Gurgaon or Ahmedabad. The Government should invite these IT companies and open IT parks in the State. These companies should be given concession in tax and space. They would definitely come to open their offices in Assam. The brain drain of students from the State must be stopped," said Anjana Mahanta, head of the Department of Computer Science, Gauhati University.

If the students from Assam and other north-eastern States are getting some exposure, it is due to their personal efforts. To train the students as per the requirement of the industry in IT skill, the Gov-

ernment should analyse the current demand in IT courses.

As per data, every year around Rs 180 to 200 crore go out of Assam as thousands of brilliant students prefer to go outside the State for higher education. Had the Government improved the higher education scenario in the State, the scenario would have been a lot different.

In most of the advanced countries like the USA, Japan and Germany, only 25% of the education sector is looked after by the government while the rest 75% is run by private institutions. The new Assam Government should come forward to encourage the private sector to provide quality higher education to the youth of the State, especially in the IT field.

All the NE States need a better educational environment. Frequent bandhs, strikes, etc., hamper education. Whatever effort the governments of these States make, until and unless these frequent disruptions are stopped, there will be no development of these States.

Now that a new government has taken charge in Assam, there is hope that it will take adequate steps to stop the brain drain while analysing the problems from the grassroots level and address the issues of IT education in a proper way.

Letters to the EDITOR

Sir, – Ranjit Borpujari, a young Assamese student of Cotton College, sacrificed his life on July 4, 1960 during the movement for the introduction of Assamese as the official language of the State of Assam. In fact, he was gunned down on the verandah of the Second Mess, now the Ranjit Borpujari Hostel of Cotton College by the police. Bimala Prasad Chaliha was the then Chief Minister. The first page of *The Assam Tribune* of July 5, 1960 carried the news of the killing prominently. Under the leadership of the AASU, the agitation was carried on. At that time also, the indigenous people of Assam felt the urgent need to fight for establishing domination in the affairs of their State. A need was felt to preserve the language and culture in their own land. The fear of being trespassed in the social and cultural fields by immigrants was very much there at that time too. The passing of the State Language Bill was the first step. The indigenous people of Assam wanted to be united to carry on the struggle. The ultimate sacrifice of Ranjit Borpujari did not go in vain

Remembering Ranjit Borpujari

and it made the indigenous people of Assam more united. The agitation was successful and Assamese was introduced as the official language of the State.

However, we have forgotten Ranjit Borpujari. No major function is held on July 4 to remember his sacrifice. In the Ranjit Borpujari Hostel of Cotton College, two photographs of Borpujari lying on the ground in a pool of blood after he was gunned down by police had been on display. One does not know if those are still on display. Below the photographs appeared these words in Assamese – *Eti nirbaak muhurtar duti sabaak pratishchabi* (Two vocal images of one standstill moment). But that is not enough. We must always remember and pay him respect. At least on July 4 every year we should hold function(s) in his memory. Yours etc., SAMAR MAJUMDAR, PD Chaliha Road, Guwahati.

Sovereignty issue

Sir, – Apropos the news item 'Sovereignty issue still relevant, says Anup Chetia' (AT, June 23), it is indeed a candid admission on the part of Anup Chetia, founder general secretary of the ULFA, the outfit that has been hogging the attention of the population of Assam

for nearly 40 years, about lack of an internal control mechanism within the cadres of the outfit and his admission about the fact that this lack of coordination led to many unfortunate incidents including killings in the past. It can be read from this admission – the kind that no other leader of the outfit has made so far – that many killings were done at the behest of whims and at times group or personal enmity of local cadres without the approval of the superior leadership of the outfit. Chetia has also conceded that in the present context where there have been drastic demographic and sociological changes within the State of Assam, the question of an independent sovereign Assam is at the crossroads. The people of Assam will eagerly wait for the outcome of the peace talks. It is in the interest of the region as a whole that an amicable solution to this issue of utmost importance is arrived at. Yours etc., BHASKAR PHUKAN, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati.

Discrimination?

Sir, – I would like to draw the attention of the State Government, especially the Education Minister, to the brilliant results of the students of the State in the CBSE

and ICSE board exams. It is seen that many students of Guwahati and other places of the State have come out with flying colours in the Class X and XII CBSE and ICSE exams. They have secured 10 CGPA points, which means 95% and above marks. I wonder why the State Government has not taken any initiative to felicitate these brilliant minds when the students of the local boards – SEBA and AHSEC – are feted, garlanded and given a lot of facilities and freebies. Yours etc., UTPALA SARMAH BARUAH, Jorhat.

Medical entrance

Sir, – Due to the Supreme Court's directive on the MBBS Entrance Test 2016, some of the students who had earlier filled in the CEE application forms for admission into the MBBS course 2016 by paying the required fees were under the impression that they were not required to fill in the MEE forms again since the fees they had earlier paid had not been refunded. Such candidates have lately come to learn that they were also required to fill in the application forms for MEE. By the time they came to know about it, the last date (June 17) for filling up of application forms was over. I request the State

Education Minister to direct the authorities concerned to extend the last date for application till June 30, 2016 and give the students a chance to apply for the admission test. Yours etc., BK SARMA, Survey, Guwahati.

PwD recruitment

Sir, – The Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Assam published an advertisement for a number of vacancies (AT, August 17, 2015). The recruitment process for some posts including junior assistant, computer operator and peon has already been conducted baring research assistant. If the other exams were conducted without any hassle, then why has the exam for the post of research assistant been left out? One fails to understand why most of the departmental recruitment processes take one or more years to complete. Through your esteemed daily, I would like to request the authority concerned to speed up the recruitment process for the greater interest of unemployed youths. Yours etc., AN APPLICANT, Guwahati.

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