

## MESSAGE FOR TODAY

The best index to a person's character is how he treats people who can't do him any good.

— ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

## The Assam Tribune

## Post-election USA

On January 20, 2017, Barack Obama will leave the White House, making way for Donald J Trump, who will guide the destiny of the USA for the next four years. Despite all the misgivings about Trump, especially among the 'left-liberal' sections of intelligentsia, activists and media, both within the US and across the world, the die has now been cast. America, and the world as a whole, will have to deal with a Trump administration. Majorities secured by the Republican party, to which he himself belongs, in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, will further strengthen his hands, who was and continues to be a deeply divisive figure. Already protests have happened in many parts of the US, following the victory of Trump in the November 8 presidential polls. A big chunk of women, along with minorities like the Hispanics and African American community, not to mention Muslims, are apprehensive about their future. Reports that Trump has promised to deport up to three million immigrants who have committed crimes have not made things easier. While doubts and concerns about a Trump administration was expected, especially after the kind of language he used and the policies he espoused during the long-drawn election campaign, the best thing to do now would be to at least give him, and the team he will bring along, a chance. Even outgoing President Obama, who would have loved nothing better than to see Trump humbled at the hands of Hillary Clinton in the polls, has called upon Americans to give the President-elect a chance. Obama has said he is certain that his successor was "sincere" about being President for all Americans and has also urged Trump to reach out to the sections like women and minorities who are anxious after the explosive rhetoric witnessed during the campaign.

The leaders of other countries have also expressed similar opinions and shown their willingness to do business with a Trump-led White House. It is now incumbent upon Trump to prove that he is a pragmatist and not a die-hard ideologue. Candidates tend to say many things during campaigns. The ideal leader is he or she who, once elected, can heal the wounds and reach across to all sections of the society. In his acceptance speech after the Presidential election results were declared, Trump had promised to represent all Americans and rebuild the "American dream". Now he must prove that with action. Already, some encouraging signs have come, like Trump calling upon his supporters to stop harassing minorities. Now the President-elect should get down to the business of forming his team. And once he takes over on January 20 next, he must try his best to not only unite all Americans but also work closely with the international community to advance peace and development across the globe.

## A credible media

The media has come a long way since its nascent period when its role was more or less restricted to that of an information provider. Today, the media has transformed itself into a vibrant entity and a watchdog of society, questioning in particular various acts of omission and commission of the Government and its machinery that may not be in the best interest of the masses. It is precisely because of its influence that the media has come to be considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. Indeed, a democratic order is unthinkable without the existence of a free press. Unfortunately, the rise and proliferation of the media has also brought with it its pitfalls. The media is increasingly found to be indulging in corrupt practices such as distortion and disinformation — often for monetary considerations. This is extremely disquieting and should serve as a wake-up call for the entire media fraternity. While the media once used to be synonymous with integrity and selfless service, the changing times have seen the media succumbing to the vice of malpractices and corruption, with the result that serious compromises are being made on the avowed objectives of the fourth estate. While the media is a potent tool for effecting development and moulding public opinion, the need to check the unhealthy trends afflicting this powerful institution is urgent. The media has a sacred responsibility of keeping the people informed but regrettably, distortion in news for serving vested interests has come in the way of dispassionate dissemination of information. Sensationalization, preoccupation with trivia, and obsession with violence and sleaze now dominate the media. Then, more often than not, we get to see the media at the judge's chair, as the media is fast discarding its role of a detached observer. The tone and tenor of presenting news, especially in the electronic media, is far from being measured. All this is perhaps an undesirable side effect of the media's proliferation and commercialization in recent times, leading market forces to dictate the media in an unprecedented manner. This is seriously eroding the media's credibility both as news provider and an engine for growth.

Since our media enjoys a reasonable level of independence, it is equally duty-bound to behave in a responsible manner, especially when dealing with violence or other sensitive issues. Sensationalization often leads to dangerous consequences by arousing public passion. The growing trend of sensationalism and biased reporting has already done much harm to society. Given the complex and sensitive issues plaguing the North-east, it is all the more imperative for the media act sensibly. The mindless obsession with violence and trivia has effectively relegated the larger issues of public interest to the back-stage. It is time the media did some serious introspection and mended its ways. The way forward will depend largely on the manner the media conducts itself. The media must fulfil its responsibility of engineering socio-economic progress and creating an enlightened audience. Business interests and work pressure cannot be an excuse to stray from the cardinal principles of journalism.

Jailbreak, money mess, Trump and *bideshis*

By the Brahmaputra  
SANJOY HAZARIKA

The last weeks have gone in a whirl. There was a jailbreak at a central prison in Bhopal where high security prisoners, all SIMI activists — not convicts but undertrials, opened their cells, allegedly killed a guard, tied many sheets to each other, tossed it over a wall, climbed up and walked out. Just like a Bollywood film — but one with a bloody ending.

Within a few hours, the eight were shot dead in an encounter that saw no bullets fired at the police, no hand to hand combat but death at close if not point blank range. It's still a mystery and the Madhya Pradesh Government has made it more unclear with its various statements.

It should be the duty of every citizen to demand the facts for otherwise, governments at the State and Central levels always try to evade key issues.

Add to all this the near chaos across banks and homes, markets and streets caused by a well-intentioned move, the demonetization of notes in India, in the past days. Then, there's another unsettling factor — Donald Trump's upsetting victory in the US Presidential elections.

We are living in strange and uncertain times, especially when a man with no political experience has been propelled into the White House, without winning a majority of the popular vote.

Trump's arms are locked around the world's largest economy and its vast military arsenal; he wants to build a great wall on the southern US border to stop illegal migration

(sound familiar?). His finger will be on the nuclear button. I cannot think of a scarier scenario. I would like to be proved wrong, of course, but I'm not betting on it.

While all this is happening in India and across the world, back home in Assam, one major issue has remained a constant for nearly 40 years. No prizes for guessing — the *bideshi* or Bangladeshi issue as much of our media and political leaders see it and which student agitators and politicians of one hue or other have used and abused with devastating results.

Mind you, it really doesn't seem to matter to many that Bangladesh itself has been saying all this time that not only there are no Bangladeshis in Assam or India but that it will not take back anyone who is pushed across the border unless the deporting agency can prove their Bangladeshi identity.

Bangladesh says it bears no responsibility for what happened or whoever migrated before 1971 — it did not exist as an independent country and was part of East Pakistan. Those who came pre-1971 are not its responsibility.

The BJP's Vision Document for Assam has a significant focus on the immigration issue. It talks about freeing land from illegal encroachers and identifying the illegal immigrants. But not a word about deportation!

Sarbananda Sonowal, just six months into his toughest assignment, visited the National Register of Citizens office after taking charge in May. Public euphoria was high and expectations were great. This is what he said: "It is a complex issue, but it is possible to find a permanent solu-

tion provided everybody cooperated. After all it is about protecting our land, our people, our rights." He went on to add: "I have exchanged views with the officials and told them that no person should feel threatened during the NRC update process. It is after all a national responsibility, and we have to take everybody into confidence."

These are sound words and it is significant that the Chief Minister has clarified that the NRC data will be

Indian citizenship cannot be given as a grant-in-aid; it has to be earned for it is a privilege. Grant of citizenship therefore must be given after credible proof that the person had fled to India for fear of or as a result of persecution.

ready by March 2017.

Everyone agrees that it is unacceptable that 69 years after India was born, we are still trying to negotiate if not discover who is an Indian in Assam or who are the Indians and non-Indians in our State. One can hope that the NRC exercise and its emphasis on legacy and parental data till 1951 will conclusively end this debate. But will it? I am not sure.

There are several factors which buttress this concern. One is the effort by the Centre, through the Citizenship Amendment Bill of 2016 (which is before a Joint Parliamentary Committee) which seeks to confer citizenship on any person who is Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsee or Christian from Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan — but not a Muslim — to become a citizen

without the mandatory waiting period. This is not a Bill that is only applicable to Assam; it applies to the whole of India. The Committee must take into account that many Hindus who migrate from Bangladesh are not refugees fleeing persecution but also, like Muslims, have come for economic reasons.

Hindu families in western Bangladesh have told me of family members being in West Bengal for precisely this reason. Indian citizenship cannot be given as a grant-in-aid; it has to be earned for it is a privilege. Grant of citizenship therefore must be given after credible proof that the person had fled to India for fear of or as a result of persecution.

However, we are confused by differing voices on the citizenship issue: the All Assam Students' Union, the procreator of the

Assom Gana Parishad, which is a coalition partner with the BJP in Assam, has led rallies against the Bill. The AGP has been silent for long despite scathing criticism from public intellectuals who challenged it, "... the Assam Accord that determined March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date for determination of citizenship for the troubled State of Assam was the very basis for formation of the AGP as a political party. That political party may not have any rational basis for its existence if it does not clearly reiterate its commitment to this date".

As influential a figure as Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam's Health and Education Minister and the BJP's key strategist for the entire region, has made statements which have sparked controversy and deep concern. I refer to two statements by

Sarma, which were widely reported.

In *The Indian Express*, he is quoted as saying that the BJP made a clear distinction between Hindu and Muslim migrants: "After all, the country was divided in the name of religion. Thus, it is not a new thing". Indeed, it may not be a new thing but what happened during Partition was unacceptable: millions were butchered and raped, displaced and driven out of their homes as penniless, homeless refugees.

In another, he is said to have declared that Assamese would have to choose between "1.5 lakh" (a reference to the Hindu Bengalis who may be provided citizenship) or "55 lakh" as their "enemy" (this is probably a reference to a majority of the State's Muslim population of Bengali origin). This remark is fraught with many dangers and legal implications and could have repercussions in other States with Muslim populations in the NER which are going to the polls next year.

We cannot and must not go back to 1983 or 1947; the ghosts of Nellie and Partition cannot be revived. If there is an Idea of India, there too is an Idea of Assam of which Bhupen Hazarika sang, spoke and fought for all his life. And it resonates most powerfully in *Manuhe manuhor baabe*: "If humans don't think for each other, who will, comrade?"

We need to remind ourselves that our true enemies are within: not by name or faith, caste or language, face or descent. They are the many companions which nourish each other — hatred and fear, suspicion and rage, intolerance and self-righteousness. Only when we recognize them for what they are will we be able to see how to make Assam secure for all her people. Choosing otherwise will be digging our own graves.

## Assamese: Do we have any choice?

■ Bhaskar Phukan

The Assamese population took equal part in the Independence movement of the country like the ones belonging to the mainland India. The sentiments against the alien rule had its roots in Assam down to the days when Maniram Dewan and Piyali Baruah were sent to the gallows for alleged conspiracy against the East India Company. In each phase of the Independence movement, Assam had its participation. There are many names of martyrs that will remain etched in the history of freedom movement in Assam with bold indelible letters.

In spite of this bravery, the injustice that was meted out to the region by the unjust method of grouping that was very casually suggested by the national leadership of the Congress party is still remembered by many. History has the name of Gopinath Bordoloi written as the one who with the cooperation of party colleagues in the State Congress and with the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi managed to save a part of present Assam from getting merged into erstwhile East Pakistan at the time of Partition of the country.

It was just the beginning of a se-

ries of loosely thought out actions on the part of the central leaders. Post-Independence, to begin with, a portion of Assam was taken away and added to West Bengal — Cooch Behar was the seat of Vaishnavite culture propagated by Srimanta Sankaradeva. The attitude of the leaders at the national level of the late 40s and onward is reflected in the manner in which the region known today as the North-east was allowed to cling on to the mainland with a chicken neck link of 36 km land passage.

We had a six-year-long agitation against foreigners staying illegally in Assam. Between 1979 and 1985, thousands of hours of manpower, human lives, money and resources were lost. Thousands of students lost valuable academic time due to bandhs, boycotts and non-cooperation programmes. The signing of the Assam Accord made the leaders of the movement ministers for two separate terms. That was in 1985. Today, more than three decades later, a similar movement is brewing. Politics has undone whatever results the movement had borne three decades ago. The detection of illegal citizens did not even touch a four-digit mark and their

deportation has proved to be a far cry. The Congress vote bank was allowed to get a boost with the government turning a blind eye to the unethical practice of granting voting rights to the infiltrators, and a new party AIUDF vied with the Congress in sharing the votes of the Muslim immigrants in the State.

Now the new ruling party wants to counter the Congress vote bank with Hindu ones by offering a red carpet to the Hindu refugees. The situation is comic. Bangladesh is trying to prove hard that their country is safe for Hindus and has even invited the leaders and public persons to see it for themselves while here is Assam, some apprentice leaders who were chanting regionalism till few days ago have called the opponents of the move to bring Hindus of Bangladesh anti-nationals! The Centre is trying to dump a huge number of Hindu refugees by amending the Citizenship Act 1955. For any political design and agenda, Assam is chosen as the target, with the State leadership always 'most obedient' to the Central authorities.

We had to agitate for the Assamese language to be declared as the official language of Assam. It was a movement where people came to demand that they be allowed to use their lingua franca for official pur-

pose as well. Rather strange and absurd it would appear, but a student going through his college textbooks sitting in his study table was killed in police firing at a hostel of the most prestigious college of Assam. It was in 1960. It is an irony that in a State where the majority of the population spoke and wrote Assamese, a movement of such kind was necessary where the issue was granting of permission to write official notes and correspondences in Assamese.

A State where a reckonable volume of the country's crude is produced was denied a refinery by the Centre which had decided to pump out the oil to another State and commission a newly-built refinery there. And we had to take to the streets then too demanding a refinery here in Assam.

Due to communal violence in East Pakistan while the country was witnessing Partition, a large number of people belonging to a minority community entered Assam. They were forced into Assam by Jawaharlal Nehru after the States where the people spoke the language of those displaced people denied shelter to the refugees. With a note written to the then Chief Minister of Assam, the first Prime Minister of independent India threatened the

Government in the State that all Central funds would be discontinued in case Assam refused them shelter.

It happened in 1971 when the border was opened for the refugees from the newly-born Bangladesh. There was no stopping of influx of Bangladeshi nationals into Assam since then. Not just in search of safe shelter, the infiltration of immigrants, mostly Muslims, continued unabated. This phenomenon of illegal immigrants getting voting rights and enjoying all privileges of citizenship overnight equal to those who lived in the State for generations together only because they turn into assured voters of a particular party is not just unethical but disgraceful to any civilized country.

Today, the Centre and the State Government appear to be in a hurry to undo the vote bank equation that favours the Congress and AIUDF by an equalizing game — by giving shelter to the Hindu refugees and ensuring their votes for the present ruling party.

And in keeping with the reputation gained as a population that is always agitating for something or the other, we the Assamese now have no choice but to come out to the streets, again. Do we have any future? Least asked the better.

## Letters to the EDITOR

Sir, — Immediately after the demonetization of the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes, the higher authorities of State Bank of India had assured the people, especially their customers, that there was nothing to worry as the bank concerned was taking all measures to keep the bank transactions smooth and make banknotes available in all their ATMs ('SBI to open 2,000 counters to help people', AT, Nov 10). The Chief General Manager of SBI, North East Circle, PVS LN Murty, said in the report that the bank would set up 2,000 extra counters in their 800 branches across the North-east. Further, he said that the SBI ATM service would reopen on Friday (November 11), with each ATM having at least Rs 25 lakh cash.

Ironically, it is the SBI ATMs which have utterly failed to provide service to the customers in the following days. Almost all their ATMs remained closed on November 12 and 13, on which

## The SBI flop show

days the ATMs of some other banks worked and dispensed cash to the customers. It was only on November 14 and 15 evenings that the customers could withdraw money from the SBI ATMs, that too in selective places, waiting for long hours in serpentine queues. The SBI higher authority later put the blame for the difficulties on the lack of cash. For a bank that boasts of having the largest network of branches and ATMs in the country, such poor service *vis-à-vis* the sudden demonetization move taken by the Government speaks volume of its inherent weaknesses. At a time when the common people, most of whom are SBI customers, are suffering a lot due to lack of cash in hand, the SBI should have led from the front. What it has ultimately been able to showcase is simply a flop show. Yours etc., NC BORDOLOI, New Guwahati.

(II) Sir, — The decision to demonetize the high value currencies is a landmark one that will have a tremendous impact on the Indian economy. The Government has

taken a wise decision to wipe out black money which is eroding the base of our economy. The surprise move must have startled the hoarders of black money since the high value currencies became junks overnight. We had witnessed the Green Revolution in the 60s and the White Revolution in the 70s. Now, we are witnessing a financial revolution. Over the past few days, bankers are doing a commendable job by catering to their customers in huge numbers even working on holidays. Yours etc., PRAGYAN KAKATI, Guwahati.

## Road accidents

Sir, — There is an increasing load of motor vehicles on the roadways which has resulted in the growth in road traffic accidents (RTAs) in Assam. In some other States, scientific studies have been taken up on RTA by the Union Ministry of Home. It has been found that the RTAs affected mainly the people of productive age group which were predominantly male. The majority of the RTAs were single vehicle accidents and half of the victims

were passengers. RTAs are one of the major public health problems in Assam. There is a need for proper scientific study on this issue in Assam. Yours etc., LABANYA SHARMA, Gauhati University.

## HC recruitment

Sir, — A recruitment notification has been issued by the Gauhati High Court on November 10, 2016 in the newspapers for recruitment to the posts of LDA/typist/copyist. For the payment of exam fees, one needs to download the payment challan from the court website and deposit in the designated SBI branches. Presently, the people are facing tremendous hardships to withdraw money from the banks for their regular needs. Now if the candidates of the said exam (not less than one lakh) visit the bank branches to pay the exam fees, the situation may turn worse. Through your esteemed daily, I would like to request the High Court authorities to change the system of depositing the exam fees for the greater interest of the people. Yours etc., RAJU ROY, Bongaigaon.

## Jio SIM cards

Sir, — The recent welcome offer made by the mobile service provider Reliance Jio has attracted thousands of citizens across the country and everyone is going gaga over it. In fact, many people stood in long queues to get their Jio SIM cards. The offer has created many controversies also. Initially, the Jio SIM cards were available in the Reliance Stores free of cost, but of late the SIM cards have been made available through different retail outlets. There, instead of giving the SIM cards free of cost, the retailers are charging at least Rs 100 for the connection. Some retailers have even charged as high as Rs 400 for a single connection. The money which is being charged is illegal. While the Jio SIM cards are now unavailable in the Reliance Stores, these are easily available with the local retailers in lieu of money. Yours etc., NEELKAMAL KUMAR, Guwahati.

Articles (within 1000-1100 words) and Letters to the Editor for publication in the editorial page may be sent to the email ID: [editor@assamtribune.com](mailto:editor@assamtribune.com).