

MESSAGE FOR TODAY

How do you defeat terrorism? Don't be terrorized.

— SALMAN RUSHDIE

The Assam Tribune

Unabated terrorism

At this precise moment the glass seems half empty for mankind. In the final decades of the twentieth century, with the end of the Cold War, the prospect of peace had brightened and a new and welcome world order was in sight. But soon it grew obvious that such optimism was misplaced, for a global schism, pitting segments of the Islamic world against the West, has occurred, giving rise to terrorist entities such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State. With the signs that another phase of Cold War is in the offing between the US-led West and Russia, mankind seems to be in "double trouble" and far deeper waters than before. The Global Terrorism Index, 2014, a report prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, forecasts increased terrorist activity across the world, India in general and the Northeast in particular being a part of the pattern. Such expectations as far as India is concerned are borne out by the figures cited by the Index for the year 2012-2013. Acts of terrorism increased in India by a whopping 70 per cent from 2012 to 2013, with the number of deaths rising from 238 to 404, and the number of attacks increasing by 55 more incidents in 2013 than in 2012. This is an ominous trend and the fact that 70 per cent of attacks carried out by 43 terror groups were non-lethal is cold comfort indeed.

The report has cited three categories of terrorism in India – Islamist, communist terrorist groups (Naxals or Maoists) and separatists. While home-grown Islamist terror groups are increasingly making their presence felt, India is primarily saddled with terrorism inspired by Pakistan, and there is little sign that such a phenomenon would cease. An even greater threat is posed by Maoists, who were responsible for the maximum number of deaths in India last year. Significantly, a State like Assam is afflicted with all three categories, an ominous foreboding of things to come. While separatist groups have been active throughout the post-independence period, the Maoist penetration into the area is a relatively recent phenomenon and is looming to be equally potent. For quite a while Islamist terror cells have also been operating in the area, though political shielding has ensured that these are being exposed only now. The greatest danger lies in the reality that all three categories are forming a nexus, which leaves the region more vulnerable than the rest of the country. Contradictions at the political level are primarily responsible for such a dangerous development and any panacea entails that political entities shed their differences and work together to combat the menace. No matter that law and order is a State subject, exigencies of the moment require unfettered cooperation between national and regional security agencies if the trend towards unabated terrorism is to be stemmed.

Traffic solutions

With Guwahati's traffic woes mounting, the need for a streamlined traffic management plan can hardly be reiterated. While the general tendency is to blame the spurt in the number of vehicles for the worsening situation, the fact stands that had there been the required interventions in traffic management, the situation would have been far better than the prevailing chaos. Absence of planning and implementation, together with the authorities' inertia over rampant violations of traffic and related norms is at the root of today's almost unmanageable situation. What we need is a long-term, futuristic approach taking into account a host of factors with thrust on strict enforcement. As things stand today, covering a short distance of five-six kilometres may take as long as an hour during peak traffic hours. This is causing a serious wastage of time, energy, money, and precious fossil fuel and consequently environmental degradation.

Of late the administration seems to be waking up to the hazards posed by the chaos and lawlessness prevailing on the city roads. Some steps such as banning of parking along certain stretches, introduction of new city buses, construction of parking lots, etc., are being initiated. The decision to reduce the number of designated city bus stops is a welcome move. No other city in the world has bus stops every 200 metres as does Guwahati. Add to this the general habit on the part of the city bus drivers to stop wherever they please is complicating traffic congestions. Then, the presence of bus stops right on the busy intersections as in Chandmari and Ganeshguri is severely adding to the traffic chaos. Rash driving by city buses and trekkers, too, remains a pervasive and insidious indulgence under the very nose of the traffic authorities. For easing traffic congestion, it is highly imperative that city buses and other modes of public transport adhere strictly to traffic norms. Buses should be made to stop only at the designated bays and not beyond the stipulated time. The existing public transport, in fact, is in urgent need of an overhaul, as it is not only inadequate to cater to the needs of an expanding metropolis but is also unreliable and often dangerous – something that operates as per whims of the operators. Parking remains another pressing concern with the existing parking spaces simply not enough to meet the mounting demand. Some more multi-storey parking lots, therefore, are a dire need. Along with parking space, another critical need is to have a reliable mode of mass rapid transport – a sine qua non for a metropolis. The feasibility of introducing circular trains and underground metro trains should be explored for reducing the burden on the city roads. Widening of roads should be done wherever possible. Another practical step could be to facilitate cycle paths for encouraging people to go for this non-polluting mode of transport.

Racism in our Republic

The **BeatenTRACK**
DN Bezbaruah

The word *apartheid* meaning 'separateness' is derived from the Dutch word *apart* meaning 'separate' + *-heid* (equivalent of *-hood*). However, more than the word itself, it is the despicable racial policy followed by South Africa and enforced through legislation by the National Party for nearly half-a-century from 1948 to 1994 that most people are familiar with. Apartheid in South Africa was a state policy under which the rights, associations and movements of the majority Black inhabitants were curtailed and the Afrikaner minority rule was maintained. After 27 years in prison fighting apartheid, Nelson Mandela was freed in 1990 and negotiated the end of racist rule in South Africa bringing peace to a racially divided country and leading the fight for human rights around the world.

By practising apartheid South Africa virtually turned itself into a pariah country. The whole world ostracised South Africa to the extent that no country would play matches against South Africa and no musician from the rest of the world would visit that country. Despite South Africa having a strong cricket team, it had no country to play against because the Commonwealth as a whole had completely boycotted the country. This was the way the international community chose to let South Africa know in very categorical terms that there was no room for racial discrimination (based on the accident of people's births) in the 20th century world when most countries had

accepted democratic rule.

What brings apartheid close to jihadi aspirations is that both are rooted in hatred and total intolerance of any diverse ways of life. Perhaps the only difference is that apartheid tolerated the existence of other races but segregated them, whereas jihad is committed to the elimination of all other religions but one. There can be no room either for jihad or for apartheid in today's world. What is surprising, therefore, is that one form of apartheid is growing unchecked even in our own Republic. It is racism against the people of the Northeast who live in the metropolitan cities of India for studies or work. This brand of racism was initially bred in the capital of the Republic and later spread to other cities like Bangalore, Pune, and Gurgaon et al, and is beginning to take vicious forms like gang-rape, murder, brutal assaults and intimidation by vigilante groups. In certain localities of Delhi, meetings of citizens have appealed to people not to rent out accommodation to anyone from the Northeast. Last Friday, Delhi added one more to its tally of murders of innocent people from the Northeast with the killing of 27-year-old Juliet Zonunmawi from Mizoram. Last Thursday, a group of seven beat up two youths from Nagaland in Gurgaon. The attackers also shaved the head of one of the victims and asked both of them to tell their friends from the Northeast to leave Gurgaon. "If you guys from Manipur and Nagaland come and stay

here, we will kill you," one of the attackers is reported to have told the victims. Around midnight last Tuesday, a Manipuri engineering student and two of his friends were assaulted in Bangalore by three taxi drivers after they were told to "learn to speak in Kannada or get out" and "this is India, not China." The three taxi drivers were arrested on Wednesday on the charge of assaulting the three youths.

What is distressing is that nothing seems to be happening to change the attitude of people to make them re-

invariably come late to office suddenly acquired the virtue of punctuality. All over the world, people are more likely to abide by the law when the law is firmly and swiftly enforced.

In all cases of racist violence against people from the Northeast the major problem has been the inability to react fast enough and in many cases even an unwillingness to do so in the face of the prevailing sentiment of belligerence against people from the Northeast. There have even been a few cases of the police refusing to record cases against such racist elements. If anything, there is now evidence of even State governments and ministries of the Union government adopting an apathetic attitude to such issues. This should be evident from the fact that the Centre and the States have remained silent on the report submitted by the MP Bezbaruah Committee on containing discrimination against people of the Northeast

In all cases of racist violence against people from the Northeast the major problem has been the inability to react fast enough and in many cases even an unwillingness to do so...

while they continue to suffer from renewed attacks in Delhi and other parts of the country. It is surprising that although the report was submitted on June 11, 2014, it was sent for comments only in September. It will be recalled that the Bezbaruah panel was set up in February after civil society groups forced the government to act in the wake of the lynching of Arunachal Pradesh student Nido Tania in Lajpat Nagar market in New Delhi in January. Tania's death resulted in widespread protests against racial discrimination, an expression that the Union government finds too strong. Around the same time, a number of special police cells were set up in New

Delhi and in some of the metropolitan cities to receive complaints of discrimination against people from the Northeast. It will take time for such cells to acquire the momentum for the swift and effective handling of acts of racist violence. But efforts to eradicate such racist discrimination must be carried on relentlessly and the punishment for such crimes should be stringent and unsparing. The proposed new law against racist violence should be legislated as expeditiously as possible.

Having said this, people from the Northeast also have a responsibility to identifying with the people of the States where they study or work. One of the surest ways of doing this is to learn the language of the State. Even shaky attempts to do so go a long way to build the kind of assimilation that makes for acceptance. I have worked in Karnataka for about a decade, and my entire family found ready acceptance by the people there largely because we started speaking Kannada right from the beginning with the inevitable mistakes of the learner. People studying or working in north India should start speaking in Hindi, a language they learnt in school. It is the constant use of English and no other Indian language that tends to isolate people from the Northeast in the mainland States of India. And for their own safety, students from the Northeast should start moving in groups in the early stages. With a little effort on both sides, it should be possible to root out the kind of apartheid that is growing in India, considering that we had boycotted South Africa for decades when its government practised apartheid.

Health and education needs of tea community

■ Sanjoy Ray

Ever since India attained its independence, the tea garden community of Assam remained a crucial proposition for those who wanted to make big in Indian politics. Official entry to the corridors of power for those representing the community, irrespective of their political affiliation, has been a consistent affair and the trend ceases to take break as the Indian population continues to vote on caste and community lines.

However, even after nearly 50 representatives of the Adivasi community from Assam had registered their foothold in both Delhi and Dispur from time to time, it is nothing but a tragedy that change in even the basic health and education indexes of the tea garden population continues to be a distant dream. It is even more shocking that although issues related to health and education scenario of the tea garden population had been in the forefront of poll-planks, the assurances given remained on the election manifestos only. It can therefore be said that it is more about intent than about ignorance.

Today, the tea garden population of Assam stands at the darkest corner of evolution, thanks to the consistently unresponsive attitude of those who were voted to power at

regular intervals by this deprived section of India. It is an irony for a democratic set-up that the community, which is seen as the most crucial vote bank in the State by poll pundits, has not yet realized the value of their votes and thus there does not arise the question of setting accountability for the law makers emerging from this community, which has been pushed to the wall. It still does not worry anybody that nearly 95 per cent of the adolescent population of the tea gardens in Assam is anaemic. They still do not care if you tell them that there is hardly any tea garden in the State where children need to travel at least four to five kilometres to reach the nearest high school. Hence, the percentage of school dropouts is also high in the community. The ongoing interventions, both in the education and health sectors, is far from being effective as records available with various agencies would suggest.

Stories of one classroom, one blackboard and two teachers for 200 students of different standards are common. Unlike any other kid in urban areas, there is virtually zero incentives for the tea community young ones in the form of teaching and learning materials. The teacher-student ratio is also poor to have

an impact. The community that deserves maximum benefits remains at the rock bottom of the policy-makers' priority list and the results are there to be seen for everybody.

It is also difficult to understand as to what is stopping the policy-makers from introducing Satri (local dialect) language as one of the modes of teaching along with Assamese to make the young ones relate to the classroom teaching. Even psychologists feel that the beginners tend to grasp things easily in their mother tongue than any other language in schools. Recruiting teachers from Satri background could be one of the steps to reach out to the population and make them reap the benefits of education. With enrolment in the middle English and high school stage still continuing to yield lukewarm response, introduction of Satri language could be one way out. The demand for upgrading of lower primary schools to middle English and high schools and their provincialisation is also yet to find takers among the law enforcers. And if it is about getting the children involved and fascinated about schools, fighting the rampant prevalence of anaemia along with malnutrition is a prerequisite. Anaemia, which is a state of haemoglobin deficiency in human body, continues

to cripple the tea garden population making them the most vulnerable to deadly diseases besides complementing other negative factors in human body. This apart from compounding health hazards like high-risk pregnancies leaves a deterring effect on the education scenario.

It is a proven fact that children with anaemia lack concentration, which directly affects the overall growth of the society at a very tender stage. Till the time, the problem of anaemia is not addressed, drawing kids towards education would be a tough ask. There is no exception to the fact that health and education benefits must work hand in hand to fetch a better tomorrow for the children of tea gardens. It is ironical that the government till date does not have a tea garden specific health report even as the rate of mortality continues to be alarming, to say the least. This despite the fact that tea gardens of Assam have the highest infant and maternal mortality rate in the entire country.

There are certain other crucial factors that tend to affect the high dropout rate in tea garden schools. But, with poor health index, especially among the mother and child, the fight against high dropout and poor literacy rates will be lost even before it gains momentum in the real sense. A study on the reading habits done a few years brought to

fore that erratic electricity supply in the lines (colony for tea garden labourers) which necessitates children studying under locally designed oil lamps for a longer period of time too leaves a telling effect on the health index of the students.

Those working on these issues believe that need-specific policies should be drafted for the tea gardens and in spite of imposing things on them, it would be ideal to root for their participation. This might not be easy to start with but things would fetch lasting results once the community's involvement is ensured. To make things worse for the tea garden population, today even trend diseases like hypertension are fast creeping in the lives of tea garden population, especially the elderly ones irrespective of their gender quotient.

Not many are aware that there are now tea gardens which have been forced to set up hypertension clinics to deal with the disease, which we tend to associate with urban population only. While the indifferent attitude of the State machinery stands guilty, the tea garden population too cannot shy away from the responsibility. It is time to emerge out of the darkness of ignorance which they had inherited and make themselves count in the bigger milieu. Once the health and education indexes improve, everything else will follow.

Letters to the EDITOR

Sir, – On November 9, I went to Bonda Charitable Dispensary, a unit of PD Pasari Foundation, for an eye check-up since I reside in the vicinity of the dispensary. When I approached the employee at the desk to register my name, he asked me to produce either the ration card or the electricity bill. Due to ignorance of the dispensary's procedure, I did not carry any one of them. However, instantly, I produced my senior citizenship certificate issued by the Kamrup (Metro) district administration for preference/concession, and requested him to register my name. The employee was seemingly annoyed at my request and told me that the dispensary is only for the people who are below the poverty line.

In the context of senior citizenship certificate it may not be irrelevant to assert here that the UN General Assembly on December 16, 1991 adopted the UN Principle for Older Persons,

Uncharitable ethics

wherein among others one of the principles is that older persons should have access to healthcare to prevent or delay the onset of illness. Further, the word 'charitable' used before the dispensary has sufficient magnitude to rely my request since the word itself implies – generous in giving to those in need. Yours etc., DILIP KR DUTTA, Surjya Nagar, Birkuchi, Guwahati.

Kamrup bifurcation

Sir, – On February 3, 2003, the Tarun Gogoi-led Government bifurcated the Kamrup district into Kamrup (Metro) and Kamrup (Rural) having its permanent headquarters in greater Guwahati up to 19-11-09 which was not only prejudicial, but also detrimental to the interest of the public of Rangia and Boko. But the demand for a North Kamrup district with Rangia as headquarters was turned down umpteen times due to the lacklustre attitude of our political leaders. The former AGP Government created three new districts – Dhemaji, Bongaigaon and Morigaon on political

considerations although those subdivisions were much small in size than the Rangia subdivision. This is really a case of callousness and disparity towards the local populace of Rangia subdivision. The present situation calls for the Chief Minister to shift the site of the district headquarters of Kamrup (Rural) from Amingaon to Rangia soon where there are sufficient infrastructure. Further, there is so far no jail in Kamrup district and the undertrial prisoners are transported by the prosecuting inspectors to Nalbari or Kamrup (Metro). Moreover, regular traffic jam between Guwahati and Rangia has become a daily feature because of heavy vehicles used in four-laning of the highway and it is becoming unbearable for the commuters. In view of the above, Rangia should be made into a district headquarters soon. Your etc., SARIFUDDIN AHMED, Rangia.

Electricity tariff

Sir, – The Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) has decided to increase the electricity tariff by more than

13.5 per cent. The reason cited is the gap between revenue and operational cost amounting Rs 333 crore as deficit. I understand that the Electricity Regulatory Commission approved the increase. The following facts may not be known to the general consumer. The APDCL revenue earning stands at more than Rs 250 crore daily. That amounts to more than Rs 7,000 crore every month. The transmission loss and theft comes to 35 per cent against the national average of little over 20 per cent. Unpaid due from the government agencies always remain more than Rs 200 crore. The company buys 400 to 500 MW of power daily to meet the shortfall at the rate higher than the tariff rate. These are the main reasons of the operational loss. In fact, the loss not only could be minimized, but profit be made by sincere and stringent efforts to cut the transmission loss and theft, thus bringing down the figure to national average at least. The government should make an all out efforts to complete the 100 MW Phase 2 project at Namrup,

which was supposed to be completed two years ago. What is happening on the commissioning of the 700 MW power plant at Salakati? The increase in power generation within the State will minimize the loss. There are several other projects undergoing renovation and upgradation.

My request to the government as well as to the Electricity Regulatory Commission that further increase in tariff should be frozen at least for one year till the power authorities make an honest effort to minimise the transmission and theft loss to an acceptable level and augment the generation to another 300 MW to 400 MW in a time-bound target within one year. The power authorities must also realize their dues from the government. There is no justification to charge the general public and tax payer to pay for the loss. Yours etc., NASIM AHMED, Lachitnagar, 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.