

## Anti-conversion law must stay: tribal groups

Rahul Karmakar  
GUWAHATI, June 30, 2018

Followers of indigenous faiths in Arunachal Pradesh have resented Chief Minister Pema Khandu's move to repeal an anti-conversion law that they say is necessary to save traditional belief systems and local cultures.

Mr. Khandu, who heads the BJP government in the frontier State, had on Thursday said the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act framed in 1978 would be repealed in the next Assembly session.

The law undermines secularism and is probably targeted at Christians, Mr. Khandu said at a function organised by the Arunachal Pradesh Catholic Association (APCA).

In statements issued on Friday evening, the Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP) and the Nyishi Indigenous Faiths and Cultural Society (NIFCS) slammed the move as "minority appeasement and detrimental to the growth of indigenous people of the State".

They say repealing the legislation will threaten the indigenous culture and marginalise ethnic communities

### Fight for preservation

The Nyishi, belonging to the Tani group, is the largest ethnic community in Arunachal Pradesh. The IFCSAP and the NIFCS are major organisations that fight for preservation of indigenous faiths such as Donyi-Polo and Rangfra. These organisations believe the growth of Christianity in the State — from none in 1951 to being the largest religious group at 30.26% in 2011 — has been at the expense of the followers of indigenous faiths.

"We condemn the statement of the Chief Minister as the anti-conversion law, if repealed, would threaten the indigenous culture of the State. There is also the apprehension among the people that the Chief Minister is bringing the denizens of Arunachal Pradesh under the minority or general category and stripping the special

privileges which we have been enjoying as Scheduled Tribes," Bai Taba, IFCSAP general secretary, said.

Repealing the law that safeguards the indigenous people would open the floodgates of poaching and it would lead to marginalisation of the indigenous people, he said, urging Mr. Khandu to withdraw the move.

The NIFCS said scrapping the anti-conversion law would extensively damage the basic structure of indigenous faiths and cultures that are still languishing from the persistent and aggressive influence of foreign cultures. "The Chief Minister is undermining the sentiments and emotions of the indigenous faith believers of the State by making such a statement," Pai Dawe, president of NIFCS, said.

The Arunachal Christian Forum and APCA welcomed Mr. Khandu's announcement.

## 45 killed after bus falls in 700-ft gorge in Uttarakhand's Pauri Garhwal; rescue ops on

Ranchi, July 1,

At least 45 people were reportedly killed after a bus fell in a 700-ft deep gorge in Uttarakhand's Pauri Garhwal on Sunday morning. The bus, run by a private operator, broke into two pieces after falling into the gorge.

The rescue workers on the site recovered 44 bodies from the debris while another person succumbed to his injuries in the hospital. Eight injured have been admitted to a hospital in Dharmaghat. The rescue teams have reached the spot and have started removing the debris. The locals, who reached the

spot first, tried to topple the pieces of bus to rescue the injured.

The state government has dispatched a team of SDRF. The injured have been sent to a nearby hospital. Some people are still stuck under the debris.

The cause of the accident is still unknown.

## Thousands set to rally in Hong Kong over Beijing's tightening grip

Reuters  
HONG KONG, July 01,

Pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong were expecting tens of thousands of people to attend an annual protest rally on Sunday to mark the 21st anniversary of the city's return to Chinese rule as tensions simmer over Beijing's tightening grip. Turnout will be a key indicator of public sentiment at a time when the opposition in Hong Kong has seen activists jailed and others barred from running in a by-election. An organiser of the Sunday protest, Sammy Ip, said the rally would not target Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam but focus on a broad push against Beijing's perceived encroachment into the former British colony.

At a ceremony early on Sunday to mark the anniversary, Chief Executive Lam asserted that the "one, country, two systems" framework under which the financial hub is governed remains intact under her watch.

Ms. Lam took over as governor of the former British colony a year ago, pledging at a ceremony attended by Chinese President Xi Jinping to be accountable to both Beijing and Hong Kong.

"Without fear, we correctly deal with our relationship with the central government. And we promote a stronger understanding of the constitution, the Basic Law, and national security in all sectors," Ms. Lam said at a Sunday morning cocktail reception.

Also present at the ceremony were the three former Chief Executives - Tung Chee-wah, Donald Tsang and Leung Chun-ying, as well as senior mainland officials.

Under the mini-constitution, the Basic Law, Hong Kong is guaranteed wide-ranging autonomy for "at least 50 years" after 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula praised by Xi. It also specifies universal suffrage as an eventual goal.

Beijing's refusal to grant full democracy to Hong Kong triggered massive street protests in 2014 and deepened resentment toward China's perceived growing encroachment on the territory, where its influence in nearly every facet of life has increased.

While critics in Hong Kong have questioned Ms. Lam's commitment to the autonomy and freedoms under the "one country, two systems" formula, Beijing has praised her leadership.

"You have adopted a series of

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policies ... to promote Hong Kong's economic development and social harmony," China's Vice Premier Han Zheng said after meeting Lam in Beijing on Tuesday. "I congratulate you," he said. Ms. Lam was chosen by a largely pro-Beijing committee of some 1,200 people in the city of 7.3 million. Her approval ratings have dipped since then. A University of Hong Kong survey of 1,000 people put her approval rating at 54.3 points, down from 61.1 points a year ago.

## Mariam Longri from Arunachal Pradesh becomes 16<sup>th</sup> Sunsilk Mega Miss North East 2018

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Daughter of a retired government employee, and a homemaker mother, Tsurla is a 5<sup>th</sup> semester BA (Economics) student at Mt. Mary College, Chumukedima. The second runner's up at the event was Biswanath Chariali's Jyotismita Baruah. A 3<sup>rd</sup> semester student at B. Baroah College, Guwahati, Jyotismita's parents are government employees.

Sunsilk Mega Miss North East 2018, **Mariam Longri** has won a prize package worth nearly Rs. 7,00,000, including the crown and sash of Mega Miss North East, a cash prize of Rs. 1,00,000 and an opportunity to become the face of Sunsilk's print and outdoor campaigns across northeast India. She has also won gift hampers from Sunsilk, a round trip to Dubai, an international destination photoshoot with Rahul Biswas, fitness counselling and membership at Chisel Dighalipukhuri for a year, gift hamper from Rang De Basanti Urban Dhaba, portfolio shoot by leading fashion photographer Rahul Biswas, public relations and reputation management for the reigning term from Life's Purple and digital celebrity management from One & Zero - The Marketing Trend. Additionally, the winners will also get a scholarship for a 3-years bachelor's degree course in Media & Entertainment at ITFT, Chandigarh and a 6-months Aviation & Hospitality course from TRIG Empowering



Institute, Guwahati. The three winners will also be offered professional representation by Mega Entertainment, a specialized grooming session, which would guide them further on how to carry themselves forward in the professional sphere. Besides, the winners also get the opportunity to walk the ramp in various

regional and national shows. The organizers of the event, Mega Entertainment, had shortlisted 49 women, who vied for the coveted title of Sunsilk Mega Miss North East 2018. The gowns of the Top 10 round were designed by Akumaro Imsong, and the Top and the top-5 winners wore gowns designed by Dipika Devi.

The judges who sealed the fate of this year's winner included: leading Assamese actress **Barsha Rani Bishaya**; Director General of International Chamber for Service Industry (ICSI) **Dr. Gulshan Sharma**; hotelier and entrepreneur **Bobby Singh**; Mega Miss North East 2016 **Meriya Priyadarshini Subba**; Fashion & Lifestyle Promoter **Monika Devi**.

## Hindu Rohingya refugees also wait for a home

Vidya Krishnan  
Courtesy The Hindu

### Their camp is outside world's largest refugee settlement

Less than a kilometre from the gates of the world's largest refugee settlement, in southeast Bangladesh, 101 Hindu Rohingya families wait to be rescued from their status as the "minority" within the world's most persecuted minority community — the Muslim Rohingyas.

The Hindu Rohingya families — nearly 410 people, most of them children — live in a "Hindu Camp", located just outside Camp 1, the first of 27 refugee settlements that make up the Kutupalong-Balukhali camps, the largest in the world. Over 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims live here after being forced to flee Myanmar following the brutal campaign of violence by the Myanmar army that began on August 26, 2017.

**Visibly different**  
The Hindu Camp stands out from the rest of the sprawling refugee settlement.

It is the only camp with round-the-clock police presence. The women, wearing colourful saris and bangles, and sporting a vermilion *sindoor*, are visibly different. The camp is built around a small bamboo and tarpaulin temple to Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. The families have been segregated from the main camp, as a measure of "abundant caution", says Mohammad Reza, in-charge of the oldest refugee camps that came into existence after the first wave of violence against the Rohingyas in 1991-92.

"The Bangladesh government decided to place them outside the main camp because, inside the camps, if something went wrong, we wouldn't be able to provide them security," Mr. Reza explained. **Controversial law**  
Tensions between Rohingya Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar's Rakhine state have existed for decades. The inflection point came in 1982, when Myanmar passed the controversial Burmese Citizenship Law. It stripped eight ethnicities of citizenship. Even though the Rohingyas were not among them, almost overnight, the community lost its freedom and, over decades, has been violently persecuted.

In the 1991 violence, only six affected families were Hindu, among the 30,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled to the refugee camps. "Those families were integrated with the Rohingya Muslim community. They continue to have good relations but we do not want to take a chance with the refugees who have arrived since August 2017," said Mr. Reza, explaining that when everyone is fighting for resources — land, food and shelter — tensions can intensify.

The "majhi" or camp leader for the Hindu Rohingya families is 32-year-old Shishu Sheel, who was forced to flee from his home in the Maungdaw district in Rakhine on August 28 last year. "When neighbouring Hindu villages were attacked, my wife, two children and I decided to leave before the army attacked our village. My parents stayed back," Mr. Sheel says. His entire village, Chikanchari, decided to evacuate after

'clearance operations' by the Myanmar army in the neighbouring Hindu village of Fakirabazaar, where 86 persons were allegedly killed. The Hindu Camp has families belonging to the Pal and Sheel sub-sects, most of them third generation Myanmar citizens. The Myanmar government has given them National Verification Cards (NVC), which gives their 'Race' as 'Indian'. "My grandfather moved to Burma and our family has lived there ever since. But we are considered 'guests from India' [in Myanmar] and don't have citizenship status," Mr. Sheel said.

Officials in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in Dhaka and Yangon confirmed that their missions were in touch with the group of 101 Hindu families and had recorded their details, but denied that the ID cards, which gave their 'Race' as 'Indian', meant they were Indian citizens. When asked if India would be asked to accept the families, one senior official said, "It is understood that, in Myanmar, people who don't originate from there [Myanmar] are identified by their ethnic or national origins. It certainly doesn't mean that these people [the Hindu Rohingyas] will be deported to India." Indian officials maintain that the refugees they met were keen to return to Myanmar and that this had been conveyed to the Myanmar government. "The Government of Myanmar cleared their early repatriation to Myanmar and sent the necessary documents to the

Bangladesh government. We have been told that they [Bangladesh] have not yet worked their way around to facilitating the repatriation," the official, who did not wish to be identified, said. In December 2017, Myanmar's Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Win Myat Aye had visited the families, promising refugees will be allowed back across the border to Myanmar on January 22 as the first step in the repatriation process. This has not happened.

UN aid workers, however, disputed the contention that the Hindu Rohingya refugees were ready to return to Myanmar, given the conditions there. "Indian aid workers, however, disputed the contention that the Hindu Rohingya refugees were ready to return to Myanmar, given the conditions there. "Indian diplomats may have met with the leaders of the group and had that impression, but the bulk of the refugees are just too scared to go back to Rakhine," one refugee coordinator said.

When asked about the choices facing his community, Mr. Sheel says no one could guarantee their security if they returned to Myanmar, so they want to go to India, "*Khushi se*" (happily). "We want to go to India, if the Indian government will take us. We have repeatedly said that and we have never heard back from the Indian government on it," adds Mr. Sheel. Meanwhile, with restrictions on movement and limited integration within the camps, the refugee Hindu families are aware that repatriation, not settling long-term, is the aim. They continue to wait, starkly aware that they are the least wanted among the most unwanted people in the world