

Editorial

Imphal Saturday, December 31, 2016

Way of the civilized mind

The warning bell that has been sounded by the UNC with the declaration of the resolution to intensify the already crippling 'indefinite economic blockade' despite protests and appeals from every quarter could not have been any clearer. The persistent efforts of the UNC to force the hand of the majority community of the valley into a chaotic conflict so that their concocted claims of 'oppression and suppression' by the 'communal' state government can have some semblance of truth have been out in the open for a while, even though those who are behind the very divisive strategy might had the wrong notion that the gameplan is being hatched and implemented in secrecy. While the protracted efforts have managed to ruffle a few feathers and spontaneous unwanted and undesirable reactions have been witnessed, the majority of Manipuris who are bearing the brunt of the blockade have taken it all in stride as civilized individuals are expected to in the face of extreme and unwarranted provocation. We still believe and are betting on a more civilized form of settling disputes and grievances as the best way out although it does not mean that the rest of the public who are showing restraint will remain that way when things reached the tipping point. But the most pertinent question that the thinking public has been asking is: does the megalomaniacal idea of Nagalim been endorsed by every individual who deemed themselves Nagas either by ethnic affinity or due to overriding concerns of safety and survival? The hubristic display of misplaced ethnic superiority does not bode well and should be curtailed- and this goes both ways. Ethnic exclusivity is a concept which should have been left behind with the turn of the previous century, and it is indeed unfortunate that despite advances in almost every sphere of human endeavour, stakes are being claimed on the grounds of faith, culture and beliefs which are and should remain the most personal of preferences. Judging the world by looking through a one-way mirror can be more damaging than one would ever have expected. There cannot be any doubt that the present unfortunate social development have aroused emotions and the instinct to give a befitting reply cannot be wished away. Yet to give in to the provocations would be debasing ourselves and the values we are trying to uphold as Manipuris. Difficult as it might appear at the moment, we need to repose our faith in the government, and any form of grievance arising out of the present undesirable situation should be made towards the government since it is the one formed by the representatives of the public. A vindictive approach towards any other group on the pretext of drawing attention of the state government would only make matters worse, and made a fool of ourselves. It is only when we can really start turning disappointments and obstacles into opportunities, can we laugh off these thinly-veiled threats to the land we all have come to love and adore irrespective of our different and vibrant cultures, beliefs, faiths and customs.

Two blasts in central Baghdad kill at least 21

Baghdad, Dec. 31: Two bombs exploded at a busy market in central Baghdad on Saturday killing at least 21 people and wounding more than 40 others, police and medics said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks, but Islamic State regularly targets civilians in the Iraqi capital. Police said the blasts went off near car spare parts shops in Sinak

during the morning rush. One of them was triggered by a suicide bomber, the other was a planted explosive, an Interior Ministry official told Reuters.

Islamic State has lost much of the northern and western territory it seized in 2014 and is now resisting an Iraqi offensive on the northern city of Mosul, the ultra-hardline group's last major stronghold in the country.

60 injured in crowd crush at Australian music festival

Melbourne, Dec 31: Sixty people were injured at an Australian music festival in the crush of a crowd trying to leave a performance, police said today. None of the injuries at the Falls Music and Arts Festival in Victoria state were life-threatening, but 19 people were

taken to the hospital with serious injuries, Victoria police said in a statement.

The incident began last night when fans were trying to leave a performance by the Australian band DMA's. Several people at the front of the crowd then lost their footing and fell, police said.

As this paper is being written and updated in early December 2016, the US President-elect Donald Trump is selecting his cabinet of billionaires and multi-millionaires and trying to decide which of his many often-bewildering promises he will actually keep.

As the cabinet choices show, despite some hypocritical criticisms of the "elite" and big bankers, this will be business as usual for the world's No. 1 superpower as it steps up its aggressive anti-people policies. Such policies, both within the US and globally, will simply be carried out more blatantly and in your face by a billionaire businessman and his Wall Street buddies without the "liberal" veneer provided by outgoing African American President Barack Obama and the unsuccessful Democratic Presidential woman candidate, Hillary Clinton.

It is direct rule by a capitalist for the capitalist class, of a billionaire for the billionaires, without the necessity of relying on the smokescreen of an Obama or Clinton.

Clinton, by the way, if her record and pronouncement were anything to go by, including supporting a "no fly zone in Syria," would have been just as, if not more, aggressive and militaristic than Trump. As Julian Assange notes, "Under Hillary Clinton, the world's largest ever arms deal was made with Saudi Arabia, [worth] more than \$80 billion. In fact, during her tenure as Secretary of State, total arms exports from the United States in terms of the dollar value, doubled."

And as for Obama, among other things he perfected drone warfare, embarked on a \$1 trillion nuclear modernization program, gave even more money to the Zionist state of Israel, all the while deporting hundreds of thousands at home and further militarizing police forces that

Intensifying Global Crisis and Conflict

(This paper was presented by Malcolm Guy on 6th Ojha Sanajaoba Memorial lecture held at VC's Court room on Dec. 30, 2016)

have proceeded to gun down working people, especially black men, in record numbers.

The US is a superpower in decline, as was illustrated in large part by the US elite's inability to ensure the election of Clinton and their now desperate attempts to "normalize" and legitimize this foul-mouthed and more transparent fellow member of the ruling elite. The disarray among factions of the US elite has led to accusations of voting manipulation and serious calls for a recount.

As Trump reveals, a fading superpower can be even more dangerous and reactionary and the possibilities of a true fascist regime, in which US imperialism completely sheds its democratic shell and the true face of the capitalist class dictatorship is exposed, like of Hitler in the 1930s, remains extremely high.

Besides the election of Trump, 2016 has been a major year for events exposing the profound and deepening crisis of imperialism. These include the 52-48 BREXIT decision to support the exit of Britain from the European Union, the devastating purges, arrests and detentions of opponents and critics of NATO-ally and strongman Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey following a failed military coup, the widening chaos in Libya, the prolonged migration crisis, as well as the dead-end COP discussions as the globe faces an unmitigated climate crisis.

As if to exemplify the growing divide between rich and poor and North and South as 2016 draws to close, while countless millions of the world's toiling people mourned the loss of a beloved and respected revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, the ruling elites in the US and their imperialist allies (including Canada's "pretty boy" Justin Trudeau) boycotted Castro's

funeral.

It's currently 3 minutes to midnight according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. By that mean the world is as close as it has ever been to the brink of nuclear holocaust that threatens humanity's very existence.

If we go by the mainstream press who parrot every lie and spin from Washington and Brussels, the enemy of peace is clearly Russia for annexing Crimea, for propping up a murderous regime in Syria, even for hacking Clinton's emails in order to influence the outcomes of the US elections. Iran is another warmongering state that threatens world peace by attempting to develop nuclear weapons and for supporting other evil regimes in the region.

In truth, as John Pilger wrote in May 2016, "In the last eighteen months, the greatest build up of military forces since World War Two - led by the United States - is taking place along Russia's western frontier. Not since Hitler invaded the Soviet Union have foreign troops presented such a demonstrable threat to Russia. What makes the prospect of nuclear war even more dangerous is a parallel US campaign against China."

US-led militarization and war
Pilger points out that it is the US "that has attacked and sought to overthrow more than 50 government, many of them democracies, and bombed from Asia to the Middle East, causing the deaths and dispossession of millions of people. (And) most of America's wars (almost all of them against defenceless countries) have been launched not by Republican presidents but by liberal Democrats: Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton, Obama."

"Donald Trump is a symptom of this, but he is also a maverick. He says the invasion of Iraq was a crime; he

doesn't want to go to war with Russia and China." As a result, Pilger, in an article written before the US elections, quite rightly points out the dangers of a Hillary Clinton. "She is no maverick. She embodies the resilience and violence of a system whose vaunted "exceptionalism" is totalitarian within an occasional liberal face."

Indeed, under Trump, as under Obama, US imperialism stands as the principal purveyor of militarism and war, and the biggest destabilizing factor in the world today. The protracted economic crisis of the global capitalist system has impelled US imperialism to become ever more aggressive in controlling more territory as sources of raw materials and low-cost labor, as captive markets and supply routes, and as launching pads for projecting military force overseas. Its aim is "full-spectrum dominance" of the entire planet.

The US also sees the emergence of new powers such as Russia and China as a threat to its global hegemony. The US is worried by the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an alliance to counter the US-NATO alliance, as well as the establishment of the BRICS economic bloc made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. China is also pursuing its own regional trade accord, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which excludes the United States.

To preserve its global dominance the US has proceeded to unleash wars of terror throughout the world under the guise of waging a global war "on terror". Over the last 15 years the US and its allies have bombed, invaded or occupied at least seven countries. In 2015, the US officially dropped over 22,000 bombs, including drone strikes, on Iraq and Syria alone, an average of over 60 bombs per day. (To be contd.....)

National & International News

Demonetisation: Rs 4,500 per day ATM limit is of little help when 2/3 machines run dry

New Delhi, Dec. 31: ATMs will dispense a maximum Rs 4,500 per day per account holder beginning 1 January, said a circular from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday. Friday marked the end of the 50-day period Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised he will take to bring back normalcy after the demonetisation of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes on 9 November. Earlier, daily limit was Rs 2,500 per day. An enhanced limit is a relief for citizens and will help to shorten queues further, but only in areas where ATMs are dispensing cash.

The problem is only a third of the total ATMs in the country (around 2 lakh) are dispensing cash and most of them are in urban centres with the periphery areas continuing to run dry, according to reports (read here and here). In other words, the enhanced ATM withdrawal limits would not help the people in non-metros much.

Banks are unable to fill their ATMs on account of an acute cash shortage, especially lower denomination notes that is persisting even after 50 days of demonetisation and the situation is unlikely to get better soon, said a few bankers this writer spoke to. "We are looking at February-March before things become normal," said one of the bankers. This is the reason banks have asked the government to extend the curbs on cash withdrawals beyond 30 December till the time there is adequate quantity of new currency infused in the banking system. Ultimately, it is the banker who has to face the angry customer. The RBI has retained the weekly

cash withdrawal limit of Rs 24,000. But, the problem is that banks are unable to honor even that amount and the customer is forced to often settle for what is available at the moment at the bank counter. Of course, this situation will ease further in the weeks ahead, but much depends on the ability of government mints to churn out sufficient units of new currency. Until 19 December, the RBI has infused Rs 5.92 lakh crore of currencies into the system, which is less than half of what the public has deposited in the form of invalidated notes (Rs 12.44 lakh crore as on 10 December).

On Friday, PM Modi launched a new payment app, BHIM, that allows anyone to transfer money to any bank accounts. The PM stressed on the need to embrace cashless payment modes at the earliest and elaborated on the incentives government planning to encourage individuals and merchants using electronic payment modes. A change into cashless economy is indeed good in an aspiring economy and government initiatives, such as UPI-supported BHIM app, are helpful to facilitate such a migration.

But, Modi's immediate challenge remains to 1) normalise the cash situation in the economy; and 2) give a convincing cost-benefit analysis of the demonetisation exercise to 125 crore Indians. Modi has a major task of justifying his act that has pushed the economy into an economic standstill and has caused gross inconvenience to a large number of the population due to the lack of preparedness of the government to implement the currency swap.

When PM address the nation on the New Year Eve, there are questions he'll need to answer on how did the note ban help the country to achieve the originally stated goals — black money, fake currency, corruption and terror funding. Also, most critically, the general public would expect clarity from the PM on when the cash crunch will end. The 50 days the PM sought has, for sure, eased the pain to an extent, but has not ended the cash crunch.

Another question the PM owes answer is clarity on the political funding. Though his government has repeatedly assured that rules will be same for all, there is lack of clarity on political funding since the government also says that provisions

of existing laws will continue. This would mean that political parties will enjoy certain immunity from tax scrutiny since cash donations below Rs 20,000 do not require the source to be revealed. Can Modi score a point by stating that the government will work towards the necessary changes in laws to make all political donations through digital mode? If yes, that'll be much bigger catalyst in the process of creating a cashless economy than announcing lucky draws.

For now, when the PM addresses the nation on the eve of new year, the big question common man probably would want to ask the PM is how long the current cash shortage will continue.

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