

Editorial

Imphal, Monday, February 22, 2016

Aversions to change

Man, having the ability to judge and to arrange for alternatives, have taken the shortest road to development and progress. The unique gift of mental superiority over every living creature on the planet is what enables him to dominate and distinguish himself from every other creature in spite of the frailties and physical shortcomings. We take pride, and rightly so, in the fact that we can, and are still pushing ourselves to overcome the physical and mental restraints and limits. Yet ever so often, there comes a time when the collective conscience of a society seems to stop working, taken over by the wave of opinions and mob behavior. One such instance is the period running up to elections for choosing our representatives to the government. In fact, at present, the state is witnessing an increasing undeclared war of words with various political bigwigs starting to warm up with insinuations and counter blames for the state of affairs of the society, while highlighting their trumped up ideologies and deceptively believable assurances of progress and development. It seems unlikely that most of these old players remember being in the driving seat once, but with the absence of the foresight and impetus to carry out the promises they are doling out now. Given the fact that there is a constraint of resources, both financial and infrastructure with the state government, it is of great concern when the people in power are still hell-bent on pilfering these limited resources for themselves without the least consideration or remorse, leading the public to start questioning the motive and the seemingly earnest efforts of the government to develop the state which is evidently enjoying certain perks and assistances from the central Government due to its underdeveloped status. The state is yet to see a radical change in the system of governance with emphasis on transparency and efficiency. The various promises and agendas which were pushed on the face of the public during the election campaigns have been shelved for good, until the next one. On the other hand, a majority of us have cheapened ourselves by offering up our suffrage to the highest bidder. To cover up its shortcomings and deficiencies behind the excuse of a less than perfect world is nothing short of shirking its responsibility and a ploy to steal the riches and benefits meant for the public. What the public wants is a government that has the gumption to take calculated risks and pave new ways to initiate development and accelerate progress, one which can translate the aspirations of the people into concrete works and utilize the available resources efficiently. A Government more accessible to the common man which can expedite its development activities and which can effectively control and motivate its employees will surely win favors from the public. The present Government should realize that the increasingly informed public is getting restive for change and growth, and only those who have shown to deliver on their promises will endure.

Fresh firing between militants, forces in Pampore

PTI Srinagar, Feb 22: Fresh firing broke out between militants and security forces today as the operation against ultras holed up in a government building in Pampore area on the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway entered the third day. Militants inside the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) building, which is up in flames, engaged security forces in intermittent exchange of fire from 5.30 AM, a police official said. He said there were no fresh casualties so far today in the operation as security forces have adopted a strategy of wearing down militants physically as well as in terms of ammunition reserves. Two CRPF jawans and a civilian were killed and nine other jawans injured when militants opened fire

a on a CRPF convoy on Saturday afternoon. The ultras, whose exact number is not known yet, then took shelter inside the EDI building, triggering a stand off. Nearly 100 civilians — staff and students of EDI — were evacuated to safety by the security forces from the building. As the security forces mounted an assault on the building yesterday, they met with stiff resistance from the ultras who are holding vantage points inside the building. Two officers of the rank of captain and a Lance Naik from the elite Para Force of the Army were killed while trying to flush out the militants. While Captain Pawan Kumar was killed in a pre-dawn exchange of fire, Captain Tushar Mahajan and Lance Naik Om Prakash sustained fatal injuries in the afternoon.

I was never a part of JNU, yet JNU is a part of me

Spaces like Jawaharlal Nehru University reach further than an immediate community of teachers and students. And they provide much more than education as it is commonly understood.

Arundhati Ghosh

I never studied in Jawaharlal Nehru University, and I am not qualified to teach there. And yet when the state repression of the university began earlier this month, I was pulled in instantly. After almost 10 days of supporting the movement of students and teachers, mostly through social media, I asked myself — why this connection with JNU? I feel this story is not just mine.

I earned my undergraduate degree at Presidency College in Kolkata many years ago. Those days a student body called the Independent Consolidation was slowly forming in response to the need for creating a space for debate, dialogue and resistance and to keep large political parties, their interests, influence and resources away from matters of students. In a world where the oppressed turn to the parties on the Left to find their marginalised voices, it is difficult being in a state where the same Left parties become oppressive. Independent Consolidation, in that sense, was particularly important.

For many of us who came from small towns and districts to Kolkata to learn, this was our first tryst with collective ways of thinking and being. We learnt many things through Independent Consolidation, including organisational understanding, people dynamics, relationships of power, running elections, campaigning, barricading, marching, raising slogans — we learnt ways to make the unheard and invisible come alive in our struggle against the powers that be. It was an incredible time.

Confluence of ideas

While my life would take me elsewhere after Presidency, many of my friends went to this amazing place in Delhi called Jawaharlal Nehru University. Remember this was the early nineties, connectivity wasn't what it is today, and it was still possible to visualise places by just listening to stories. And I did. From the stories, JNU seemed like an ocean where many rivers meet, and I was pleasantly surprised on my first visit to the university to see the names of its hostels — Ganga, Godavari, Jhelum,

Kaveri. Along with the many students from Independent Consolidation who found place in JNU, there were others from different parts of the country who were engaged in multiple movements and belief systems. They came from all kinds of social, economic and political backgrounds — and many were first in their family or community to go to university.

Every time I went to JNU to meet my friends I would be left with a feeling that this was a place where these young people found a space to deepen their search for meanings in life. Often, I would be pulled into their debates. (That's why I do not understand when authorities sometimes talk about the 'outsiders' at universities — they have always been spaces that have embraced the outsider in their fierce passion for engagements.) Everything mattered to these students, every little incident in the social lives of the citizens of this big country would be discussed threadbare, often using theories that I would not immediately understand but would be forced to read grudgingly. Moreover, the fire of these debates was not limited to words alone — the students would march the streets over matters that, at first look, didn't necessarily have direct relevance to them. As students not just of education, but also of life, they would grapple with everything. As an outsider, I watched and observed and often thought that this is how the slice of citizenship in the making should look. I knew this was true not just for JNU. Many universities were free spaces for explorations. If not here, then where? If not now, then when?

Like the rivers that converge for a while and then diverge again, the students who came in from all over India took up jobs in different parts of the country and the world in different sectors after graduation. That is why you find a JNUite almost everywhere you go. I say "almost" because I have not seen too many of them in the corporate sector. But perhaps that is another story for another time.

Wit in dark times

Years after my first brushes with JNU, I connected back with it. Many of my

friends teach there now and I have formed friendships with its students, some of whom are my partners and colleagues in the arts. Today, as much as before, I see the same spirit for nuanced debate, sharp critical thinking, and rigorous practice among them. I learn of new books from JNU students that introduce me to new thoughts, and I get tickled by how the silliest of films get the wittiest of reviews in their midst. I learn the important similarities between philosophers across time from such associations, as also the differences between words like seduction, sedition and secession. I see a zest for life, a desire for a more equitable and just world, and a passion for making that happen at a cost sometimes too dear to themselves.

I also see in the face of dark times, laughter, humour, wit and love. In the world that is so full of market bluster and noisy babel, JNU fills me with energy, hope and delight. Today I am a hard-working Indian citizen and I pay my taxes. And I am proud and honoured that part of my taxes go into sustaining spaces where, despite dangers, dreams simmer, boil over and it still matters what you do while you stand your ground.

Of course, I have my criticisms of spaces like JNU. I have sometimes felt that students here develop an antipathy, a dismissiveness towards those they seek to confront. They have little curiosity when it comes to understanding the strengths of their oppositions and the reasons why these oppositions grow and win popular votes. Many are, therefore, shocked by election results. Many of them also seek to find quick gratification in any movement that catches the temporary imagination of people. I have observed their inability often to speak in a language that can connect people outside of academia to their thinking and actions. If one believes in multiplicities of voices, one needs to also train in multiple ways of speaking. I have often had intense debates with teachers and students of JNU on their lack of interest in the sector that's running the world today: business and financial markets. If historians

and political scientists don't engage in conversations across sectors — and I don't mean just understanding theories but also participating in daily conversations with practitioners of the sectors — will they truly understand what they critique? Or what about, say, conversations with leaders of religious thoughts?

Relevance of JNU

These are but some of my criticisms of JNU. But the fact that it can be critiqued, fought with, and even made fun of sometimes stands out in a country where those raising questions about the ways of a certain government are being branded anti-nationalists.

After a connection of so many years, I deeply understand the relevance of spaces like JNU in my life. Brilliance has a way of seeping in. I am inspired by these spaces to instill all the values of democracy into institutions where I have a role to play. JNU enables me to find time and energy to stand at town hall with posters demanding abolishment of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and write about the importance of independent support for the arts. It makes me question why corporate debts are erased with public money and why some governments find it necessary to efface the rights of tribal communities over their forestland. It reminds me of the agency of a *mashi* of a brother who once told me, "If our bodies are our only tools for survival, who are you to tell me which part of my body I will use to labour?" It makes me suspicious of do-gooders who parachute into communities to teach them the values of art and of gurus who only love their own voice. It also makes me laugh at individuals who think they are indispensable in collectives.

Spaces like JNU provide much more than education as it is commonly understood. They reach further than its immediate community of teachers and students. They become a metaphor for spaces that we would love to nurture and build across our lives, throughout our lives. And that is why JNU is a part of me even though I was never a part of JNU.

National & International News

JNU row: Five students accused in sedition case surface on campus

New Delhi, Feb. 22: Five Jawaharlal Nehru University students, who the police have been looking for in connection with a sedition case, surfaced on the University's campus late yesterday. The students maintained that they will not surrender but police can come and arrest them. They also said, they did not do anything wrong but were framed using a doctored video.

The five students Umar Khalid, Anirban Bhattacharya, Rama Naga, Ashutosh Kumar and Anant

Prakash had gone missing from the campus since 12th of this month after JNU Student leader Kanhaiya Kumar was arrested in a sedition case. A senior Police official said, a police team has right now been positioned outside the JNU and asked to wait for the students to surrender themselves before the police. He said, if they don't come till morning, police team will be sent to arrest them. Meanwhile, JNU Vice Chancellor Jagdish Kumar said, the enquiry for police as well as media persons has been barred for

now and a call in this regard will be taken this morning.

Kanhaiya's bail plea is likely to be heard by Delhi High Court tomorrow. He had approached the high court after the Supreme Court on Friday refused to hear his bail petition on the ground that it will set a dangerous precedent and had asked him to approach the high court.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court will hear today a plea seeking contempt action against jailed JNU Student leader Kanhaiya, former Delhi

University lecturer SAR Gilani and few others. The plea has been filed by a lawyer on the ground that the accused allegedly termed the execution of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru as judicial killing. The plea said, pamphlets were allegedly distributed during the event held at JNU on February 9th that termed death sentence to Guru as judicial killing, which outright tantamount to criminal contempt as the respondents are calling the judges of the apex court as killers.

IS blasts kill over 150 as US, Russia press Syria truce

AFP Sayyida Zeinab (Syria), Feb 22: A string of suicide bombings near a Shiite shrine outside Syria's capital and in Homs claimed by jihadists have killed more than 150 people, as Washington and Moscow worked to secure a ceasefire. The Islamic State group said it was behind the carnage.

US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday said a provisional deal had been reached on the terms of a truce in Syria's brutal five-year conflict, only for the bloodshed to intensify on the ground. Near Damascus, a car bombing followed by two consecutive suicide attacks ripped through the area of the Shiite shrine of Sayyida Zeinab and killed 96 people according to The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Syria's official news agency SANA, quoting a police source, said 178 people, including children, were among the wounded.

An AFP reporter said the blasts struck about 400 metres (yards) from the revered Shiite shrine containing the grave of a granddaughter of the Prophet Mohammed.

A January attack in the same area — also claimed by IS — killed 70 people. The Observatory also reported that two car bombs killed at least 59 people and wounded dozens in the pro-regime district of Al-Zahraa in the central city of Homs. IS said online that two suicide bombers struck in Sayyida Zeinab and two others drove explosive-packed cars into crowds in Homs. UN special envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura "strongly condemns"

the attacks, his spokesperson said in a statement.

State television footage from Homs showed emergency workers carrying a charred body on a stretcher past devastated shops

and mangled cars and minibuses. Al-Zahraa - whose residents are mostly from the same Alawite sect of Shia Islam as Syria's ruling clan - has been regularly targeted.

Budget session of Andhra Pradesh Assembly to commence on March 5

PTI Vijayawada, Feb. 22: The Budget session of Andhra Pradesh State Legislature will begin in Hyderabad on March 5. Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnu will present the state budget for 2016-17 financial year on March 10. Simultaneously, Agriculture Minister P Pulla Rao will present an exclusive budget for the agriculture sector on the same day, Ramakrishnu, who also holds the Legislative Affairs portfolio said here

today. The minister was addressing the inaugural session of the two-day conference of district collectors here today. The budget session is expected to continue till the end of March with 18 working days, official sources said. This will possibly be the last session of the AP Legislature to be held in Hyderabad, the joint Capital of AP and Telangana, as a new Legislature building is being built in Velagapudi village in the state's capital region Amaravati.

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