

Poetry section

You, Therefore

BY REGINALD SHEPHERD (For Robert Philen)

You are like me, you will die too, but not today:
 you, incommensurate, therefore the hours shine:
 if I say to you "To you I say," you have not been
 set to music, or broadcast live on the ghost
 radio, may never be an oil painting or
 Old Master's charcoal sketch: you are
 a concordance of person, number, voice,
 and place, strawberries spread through your name
 as if it were budding shrubs, how you remind me
 of some spring, the waters as cool and clear
 (late rain clings to your leaves, shaken by light wind),
 which is where you occur in grassy moonlight:
 and you are a lily, an aster, white trillium
 or viburnum, by all rights mine, white star
 in the meadow sky, the snow still arriving
 from its earthwards journeys, here where there is
 no snow (I dreamed the snow was you,
 when there was snow), you are my right,
 have come to be my night (your body takes on
 the dimensions of sleep, the shape of sleep
 becomes you): and you fall from the sky
 with several flowers, words spill from your mouth
 in waves, your lips taste like the sea, salt-sweet (trees
 and seas have flown away, I call it
 loving you): home is nowhere, therefore you,
 a kind of dwell and welcome, song after all,
 and free of any eden we can name

(Courtesy: www.poetryfoundation.org)

Saharanpur: 4 arrested for damaging Ambedkar statue

PTI Lucknow, May 21: Four persons have been arrested for allegedly damaging a statue of Dalit icon B R Ambedkar in Mirzapur village of Saharanpur district, police said today. According to a UP Police spokesperson, a hand of the statue in the village was found damaged on May 19. Following this, police sprung into action and arrested four

persons yesterday for their alleged involvement in the case. "A case has been registered. Four persons have been arrested, while a hunt for others who are suspected to be involved is on. A new statue has been installed after replacing the old one," the spokesperson added. Police also said they have formed a 10-member team of villagers to ensure security for the statue.

By: Yambem Laba
'The first BJP government in Manipur under N Biren Singh appears to be set for a long innings ahead but he needs to show where he means business'

The outgoing Congress chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh ruled Manipur for 15 years. His bravado against bete noire NSCN (IM) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah apart, he had much to answer for.

Firstly, the accusation against him from Prime Minister Narendra Modi - that he was the 10 per cent chief minister. The Manipuri people almost tolerated him for the 10 per cent cut, which he supposedly levied on all financial transactions that passed across his desk. And, according to a former accountant-general of Manipur, he has allegedly amassed wealth that can even shame Ali Baba!

When the elections results to the 11th Manipur Legislative Assembly were being announced in mid-March, the BJP was to name its chief ministerial candidate. Till then the pretender to the throne was the octogenarian Thaonajam Chaoba Singh, the state's veteran politician, who had donned almost all colours of the various political parties in the state and also served as Union minister of state in the previous NDA government under AB Vajpayee. (Some years ago when The Statesman wrote about his activities, in a bid to cover lost ground, he even filed a Rs 50 crore defamation case against the newspaper. Chaoba contested from the Nambol assembly constituency but lost.

Then the race for chief minister became wide open and the choice of the saffron brigade was Nongthombam Biren Singh, former footballer of the Border Security Force and editor of a Manipuri vernacular daily. He had been an MLA since 2002.

Biren was also a minister in the Ibobi government during its second tenure. Besides being Ibobi's spokesperson, he was his favourite as well. The BJP secured only 21 seats in the 60-member Assembly against 28 by Ibobi's Congress. The expectation was that Governor Najma Heptullah would invite the Congress - it having the single largest majority - to form a new

government But she ignored all constitutional precedence and asked the BJP to form the government

Although Biren is said to have secured just seven votes in his favour against the 14 secured by Thongam Biswajit for the legislature party leadership, the BJP think-tank, in a bid to win a psychological war against the Congress, installed Biren, who was with the Congress till October 2016. It was a marriage of convenience.

Four Naga People's Front MLAs, whose avowed objective is the balkanisation of Manipur, supported Biren. The others who backed him included the four-member National People's Party, and one each from the Lok Jana Shakti Party and Trinamool Congress. Then there was the first defector from the Congress, Thaonajam Shyamkumar. He had earlier served a stint in the Bihar "Guest House" in Delhi but was made a cabinet minister. The deputy chief minister's post was given to NPP's Yumnam Joykumar Singh. He is a former director-general of the Manipur police, and is currently under the scanner of the Manipur High Court in the infamous fake encounter case of Manipur, involving the Army and the police over the death of 1,528 people.

The expectations of BJP chief Amit Shah and Union home minister Rajnath Singh, that some Congress MLAs would change colours, came not a day soon. First two Congress legislators deserted and shortly thereafter, four others followed suit. The lone TMC MLA also formally joined the BJP. Thus from 21 in mid-March, the BJP tally has risen up to 29, while the Congress's strength has depleted to 21.

None of the defectors seems to be worried about attracting the provisions of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution and be disqualified. Either they are sure of being re-elected as BJP legislators or are waiting for more Congress legislators to join them, so as to escape the clauses of the 10th Schedule. Anyway with Governor Najma Heptullah having sworn in a freshly defected legislator as a Cabinet Minister, the green signal seems to have been given from the Raj Bhawan itself, so there seems to be no need for sudden panic. And

anyway Speaker Yumnam Khemchand seems to be in no hurry either.

Now that Biren can be said to be firmly in power for over a month, it is time for a quick review. His first notable move was to appease the Nagas, particularly Tangkhuls. There is no love lost between the Tangkhul tribesmen to which Muivah belongs and the Meiteis after Ibobi prevented the NSCN (IM) supreme from entering Manipur through the Mao gate to visit his native village Sodal in Ukhrul in May 2010. So angry were the Tangkhuls that in October last year when Ibobi went to Ukhrul to inaugurate a public hospital, rebels fired at his helicopter, forcing him to make a hasty retreat.

Last month Chief Minister Biren travelled to Ukhrul by road, halting at various places en route and was given rousing welcome. At Ukhrul town he appeared dressed in full Tangkhul Naga warrior attire and won the hearts of the thousands of people gathered there at the Tangkhul Naga Long grounds. He announced a welfare package of Rs 100 crore for the development of Ukhrul and another Rs 1 crore for the Shirui Lilly Tourism festival, slated later this month.

After a few days, he visited Kangpokpi, the heartland of the Kukis. On November 1 the pro-NSCN (IM) Manipur-based United Naga Council, had imposed an indefinite economic blockade of the state's two vital national highways in protest against the Ibobi government's decision to create a separate district with head-quarters at Kangpokpi, a Kuki-dominated area in the Naga-majority Senapati district. The blockade was lifted within five days of Biren taking over.

Once there the chief minister was accorded an even bigger welcome. He was carried to the meeting site on a Kuki tribal palanquin. There he announced a special package worth over Rs 120 crore. While it raised the Kukis' spirits, it must have come as a dampener to the Nagas who had been demanding the roll-back of the creation of this district as it was carved out of the Naga majority Senapati district. All such political theatrics apart, Biren has announced that he will go all out against corruption. But

all that he has been able to do so far is to post two officers to handle complaints who forward them to the state Vigilance Commission (earlier filled by Ibobi's henchmen). And till date the only corrupt person to have been caught is a humble peon who is said to have been suspended. What Biren needs to do is to revive the old mechanism of the Public Grievance Redressal system. For instance, the State Human Rights Commission has been lying defunct for the last seven years as perhaps Ibobi thought what might be good for the people is a nuisance for the government. The Human Rights Commission, whilst I was a member of it, was the poorest in the country in terms of infrastructure and state support but it was by far the most pro-active in India, having aided the National Human Rights Commission to make landmark judgments. This needs to be looked into immediately.

The other key body is the State Information Commission, which Ibobi had managed to keep half paralysed, appointing only the Chief Information Commissioner and not a single member. The Right to Information Act is a key instrument in bringing about transparency in the state's administration.

Alas, Biren has also not talked about appointing a Lok Pal/ Lok Ayukta to supervise the functioning of his administration inter alia by keeping a tab on corrupt practices.

There have been talks about starting an investigation into the functioning of certain state government undertakings by the CBI. For instance the Manipur Development Society has been singled out but the Loktak Development Authority, which is directly under the Chief Minister and was the other flagship of the BJP's tirade against the Ibobi Government, has been left out. This will not augur well for him in the long run.

All said and done, Biren appears to be set for a long innings ahead but he needs to show where he means business, and suspending a peon is no solution to the colossal problem of corruption and lack of administration in the state.

(The writer is the Imphal-based special representative of The Statesman)
 (Courtesy: The Statesman)

National and International News

Curfew imposed in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur following protests against lynching of four

PTI Jharkhand, May 21: Protest against lynching of four persons intensified on Sunday and the police had to fire in the air to disperse a mob, while prohibitory orders under Section 144 were imposed in four areas. Police fired in the air to disperse a mob that blocked roads in Mango area, demanding arrest of culprits involved in the lynching of four persons in Seraikela-Kharswan district on

Thursday. "Police fired in the air and hurled tear gas shells to disperse the mob in Mango. However, the situation is under control now and adequate force have been deployed in the area," Deputy Commissioner of East Singhbhum district Amit Kumar said. Besides Mango, members of that community also put up road blockade in Dhatkidih under Bistupur police station area. Four persons the community were

lynched on Thursday by villagers suspecting them to be child lifters in Seraikela-Kharswan district, while three others of another community were also beaten to death on the same suspicion at Nagadhi in East Singhbhum district the same day. People had blocked Bistupur station road yesterday also demanding arrest of those involved in the lynching. Meanwhile, prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPc has been promulgated in four police

station areas of the steel city here in view of the prevailing tension. The prohibitory order would be in effect between 10pm Sunday and 6am Monday in Mango, Azadnagar, Oidih and MGM police station limits as a precautionary measure, sub-divisional officer (Dhalbhum), Manoj Ranjan said. "We have deployed adequate force including Rapid Action Force to maintain law and order," he said. Meanwhile, Congress attacked

Raghuvard Das government on the issue and alleged that "jungle raj" was prevailing in the state. "Beginning from Jamshedpur, Seraikela, Dhanbad and Bokaro, the rumours of child lifting has been gaining ground for the last seven days, which led to lynching," AICC spokesperson Ajoy Kumar said in a

statement. The chief minister on Saturday announced Rs 2 lakh compensation to the family members of each of the deceased. He had also condemned the incidents and directed the officials to identify those who were spreading rumours of child lifters and taking law into their own hands.

Trump, in address to Muslims, urges fight against terror

Riyadh, May 21: Even as his administration fights for its travel ban from several Muslim-majority countries, President Donald Trump is using the nation that is home to Islam's holiest site as a backdrop to call for Muslim unity in the fight against terrorism. Trump's speech, the centerpiece of his two-day visit to Saudi Arabia, will address the leaders of 50 Muslim-majority countries to cast the challenge of extremism as a "battle between good and evil" and urge Arab leaders to "drive out the terrorists from your places of worship," according to a draft of the speech obtained by The Associated Press. Trump, whose campaign was frequently punctuated by bouts of anti-Islamic rhetoric, is poised to soften some of his language about Islam. Though during the campaign he repeatedly stressed the need to say the words "radical Islamic

terrorism" and criticized his opponent, Hillary Clinton, for not doing so that phrase is not included in the draft. The speech comes amid a renewed courtship of the United States' Arab allies as Trump is set to have individual meetings with leaders of several nations, including Egypt and Qatar, before then participating in a roundtable with the Gulf Cooperation Council and joining Saudi King Salman in opening Riyadh's new anti-terrorism center. The address also notably refrains from mentioning democracy and human rights topics Arab leaders often view as US moralising in favor of the more limited goals of peace and stability. "We are not here to lecture to tell other peoples how to live, what to do or who to be. We are here instead to offer partnership in building a better future for us all," according to the copy of his speech.

1 killed, 34 hurt as tourist bus overturns in Mumbai

PTI Mumbai, May 21: One person was killed and 34 other passengers were injured when a tourist bus overturned in Dadar area here early today, a police official said. The Borivali-bound bus with 35 passengers onboard was coming from Devrukh town in Maharashtra's Ratangiri district when its driver lost control over the vehicle at around 5 AM. After which, the bus hit a road-divider on Dadar TT bridge and then toppled, Matunga police station's Senior Inspector B M Kakad said. One of the passengers, Sainath Bahalekar (35), died in the accident while the 34 injured

passengers were rushed to a hospital, he said. The accident briefly led to traffic disruption on the bridge. Later, the bus was removed from the spot and the traffic movement was restored, Kakad said. The police have arrested the bus driver, Muttu Nadar, who also sustained minor injuries in the accident, he said. Kakad said it does not appear that the driver was in an inebriated state but his blood samples have been taken for further examination. A case has been registered against the driver on the charge of causing death by negligence, rash driving and endangering life or personal safety of others, he said.

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