

Editorial

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Deflected focus: the dress debacle

The most important factor for formation of organizations by students should be to develop core competencies in areas including but not limited to learning to communicate effectively, the ability to think critically, building character, preparing for citizenship, living with diversity, preparing for global society, acquiring broader interests and preparing for a career and vocational development. And central to the development of these core competencies is the necessity for students to focus on their academic pursuits as utmost priority.

It goes without saying that politics has to have a large role in any organisation including that of students. The need to activate and prepare young minds to observe and form critical opinions and learn to assert their opinions and collective suggestions cannot be stressed enough. There is however an inherent risk for the young impressionable minds to be led astray from their focus of developing the core competencies to dabbling with issues which are beyond their area of interest and relevance.

With the multitude of mushrooming student bodies in the state raising a plethora of issues and not infrequently at loggerheads among themselves, it is no surprise then that every so often these organizations steps out of their area of relevancy and tries to raise non-issues for no apparent reason except maybe to announce their continuing presence which many could equate with 'attention-seeking' behavior.

The latest instance of a few groups of student organizations announcing their intention to ban certain dresses by teachers raking up more unwanted feedbacks from every social sphere is a valid point in case. Raising issues concerning the lack of essential facilities for students or educational institutions, speaking out against the incessant disturbances being applied on the academic atmosphere in the state and protests/demands for timely and smooth functioning of the state mechanism responsible for dispensing education in the state are valid and necessary steps that warrant support and appreciation. Such activities imply that the students are focused on advancing their academic pursuits and are aware of the impacts of any disturbances in the smooth functioning of the academic mechanism in the state. However, turning their attention to such flimsy and irrelevant matters as the dress of the teachers points to a regressive mentality counterproductive to their intellectual growth and global outlook which they should be trying to develop. It would not come as a surprise to anybody if such announcements and decisions are revealed to be made under the influence and direction of certain vested interests rather than a collective decision derived at after deliberations and consultations by the student organizations. This is exactly where the society begins getting concerned about the students who are still yet to mature intellectually as well as emotionally being swayed by certain ideologies and influences that goes counterproductive to the development of their core competencies.

Another cause for concern as witnessed during the recent announcement to ban or rather impose a dress code on the teachers by the student organizations is the increasingly evident self-appointed role of an executive body with the self-sanctioned right and power to impose its decisions in the society which is far removed from the main purpose of representing the students both within the institutions and externally on issues relating to facilities, support and services.

As prospective candidates for leading the society towards progress and development in the near future, students play a huge role in the society. The expectations placed on them by the society should be taken into account in every conduct and decision they take as the results will reflect the future path the society is taking. Perseverance, restraint and broadened perspective should be the guiding principle in their quest for perfection and progress. But most important of all, they should understand the thin line dividing activism and extremism.

Lest The North-East Fall Asleep

By- Tuiseam A. Shishak

The Election Commission announces 2019 Lok Sabha poll dates beginning April 11. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Amit Shah declares: "BJP will make the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2016 part of the party manifesto for the next elections and pass it on return to power this year" (Nagaland Post). The CAB, 2016 seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian extraction; Muslims are completely excluded. Could there be any ulterior or deceptive motive? I fear even the inclusion of "Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian" is just a cover-up; the Modi government's primary interest is the Hindus from Bangladesh.

Having been defeated in the Raja Sabha, why is the current BJP Government determined to bring back CAB and pass it into law? Because that's the only way they can control the North-East in general and the Church (Christians) in the hills in particular. How? By allowing millions of Hindus from Bangladesh to settle down anywhere in the North-East as Indian citizens, thereby inhabiting the length and breadth of the eight North-Eastern States. Once the CAB becomes law, no government can stop the flow of alien Hindus to any state in the North-East. Indigenous Assamese have been very alarmed about the growing non-Assamese population; Tripura already has her indigenous population reduced to perhaps less than 40%. Which State will be the next victim? How the North-East votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha election will either bury the CAB once and for all or bring it back to life to haunt us and even destroy the majestic land and the unique peoples of the North-Eastern valleys and hills.

To be sure, most of those Bangladesh Hindu refugees will enter Nagaland from Assam as has been the case with the Miyas who have been filling up the foothills all these years. It is absolute nonsense to say that Nagaland is already protected by Article 371A of the Indian Constitution as well as the Chin Hills and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations Act 1873. According to Mr. Hayithung Tungeo, former Naga BJP, "Presently, North East is infiltrated with 2-3 lakh illegal immigrants but as and when CAB is implemented, it would be swarmed by them."

The battle for CAB has just begun — the battle the NORTH-EAST must win and crush once and for all to save their indigenous land for posterity. In the valley the All Assam Student Union (AASU) must once more lead as it did in the 1980 Assam Movement, and not forgetting the courageous Meitei women (*Meira Paibi, Nupi lan*) in the Imphal Valley; in the hills the Church and the Student Unions must lead. Thanks to Mizoram, Meghalaya and Sikkim for facing the BJP Government head on; sadly Nagaland has fallen short of the expectation. Are the 12 Naga BJPs part of the problem? This time the citizens of the North-East must in one voice let New Delhi know that we are masters of our God-given land, and we will never allow the current RSS-controlled BJP Government or any government in Delhi to decide our fate. How long will the citizens of the North-East continue to live under the deception and suppression of the New Delhi Government?

To begin with, since when did the Government of India consider the North-East as genuinely an integral part of India? All we know is that since India's independence from Britain in August 1947, New Delhi has always considered the North-East in general and the hilly regions in particular as buffer zones,

strategically important from the defense standpoint but not as an integral part of the country of India. That's how they have treated the North-East all these years. In Delhi's mind, the real India did not cross West Bengal.

The classic example occurred in 1962 when the Chinese attacked NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency), now Arunachal Pradesh, and took Tawang. Prime Minister Nehru and the Indian Army fled, leaving the helpless citizens of NEFA to fend for themselves. But who cared as long as mainland India was intact? Then the Chinese Army suddenly withdrew from NEFA. In the words of Nari Rustomji, "There can be little doubt that, had the Chinese wished it, they could have continued their advance on November 22nd and, within a matter of days, threatened the entire Assam valley by a series of thrusts through the four northern Divisions of NEFA. Their unilateral declaration of cease-fire with effect from midnight of November 21st was as surprising in its suddenness as their lightning *putsch* on November 19th and will remain one of the unsolved riddles of history" (Enchanted Frontiers, p. 292). What if indeed the Chinese had come and occupied the Assam Valley? Where would India be today? It was divine intervention, not New Delhi, that saved the North-East. Sure enough, Nehru's government officials and the Army came back. Maybe they said "sorry" for having deserted the tribals of NEFA in a time of crisis; I hope so. But this time they assured them they would do everything to defend NEFA and its citizens. Of course, that was only after the Chinese Army had unilaterally declared ceasefire and withdrawn. Since India's independence in 1947, the Government of India's treatment of the North-East has been worse than step-motherly. As for the Nagas, the experience can be labeled as "brutal," even "hellish," because tens of thousands of Nagas (young and old) have been killed by the Indian Army in the past 70 years of the Naga political struggle to free themselves from India's forcible occupation of Naga territory in the 1950s. The Congress Party, which ruled India for over half a century, failed to solve the Naga problem, leaving only empty promises. Coming to power in 2014, the current RSS-controlled BJP Government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi continued with more empty promises such as that the Naga political issue would be solved within 18 months. Maybe if Atal B. Vajpai were the Prime Minister today the Naga political problem might have been solved. One should not be confused about the two BJP governments—the one under Vajpai and the other under Modi. The BJP government under Vajpai was a secular government for the most part. If there were RSS politicians and other radical Hindus supporting BJP, Vajpai kept them under control. Many of us thought persons like Arun Shorie and L.K. Advani were among the left radicals among Vajpai's cabinet members but certainly no longer. No sooner had Modi taken charge of the BJP government in 2014 than the ugly heads of RSS cadres began popping up everywhere. Either Modi is a genuine RSS, and there is enough evidence that he is, or he is not able to control the RSS's destructive Hindutva activities all over India though much more in BJP-ruled states like UP where Modi and his right-hand man Party President Amit Shah have placed Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister. No one can be more RSS than Adityanath.

What about Modi's 2014 campaign promise of 15 lakh rupees to be deposited in the bank for every Indian? This is 2019 and Modi says nothing about it anymore. Will Rahul Gandhi's election campaign promise of Rs.72,000 minimum income to 25 crore Indian poor be

more genuine? In March 2018, following the Nagaland State Assembly elections, Governor P.B. Acharya said the Naga political issue would be solved within 6 months. Now the BJP-RSS hierarchy is saying that after the Lok Sabha elections, the Naga political issue will be solved. What's next? Nagas are smarter than that, I hope. Thanks to the American Baptist missionaries who brought us education and the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Could one reason for not solving the Naga problem be that the RSS-controlled BJP has not quite succeeded in placing their Hindu trishul by the altar of the Church in Nagaland? As Secretary of the BJP NE States Coordination Council, Governor Acharya wrote to then Prime Minister Vajpai: "We have achieved our vowed object of piercing Trishul in the chest of so-called 'Lord Christ'" (Mid Day). Once more I would urge the Naga national workers and fellow Nagas not to ever believe the Central Government in Delhi until the final Agreement is signed and witnessed by either a UK or US Government representative, if not a UN representative. How long will the FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT signed August 3, 2015 between NSCN-IM and the Modi Government remain, as it were, a skeleton agreement just because the Naga national leaders will not compromise with what they consider absolutely essential for the very survival and security of the Naga nation? For example, Nagas inhabiting the contiguous region of Indo-Myanmar, now forcibly divided and placed in four Indian states and in Myanmar by Britain, India and Myanmar, want to live under one political umbrella. To the Nagas "integration" means geographical/physical integration. The Interlocutor to the Naga Peace Talks, R.N. Ravi's talk about Pan-Naga sounds like Naga integration by remote control because that's exactly what the so-called emotional and cultural integration is all about. My fear is that, like the Congress Government, Modi's BJP Government may also fail miserably. Let us talk about development. "Development" is Prime Minister Modi's favorite word, and rightly so because that's what every Indian citizen yearns for. Not only does Modi talk about development all the time, he seems to be inaugurating either new projects with sanctions of crores of rupees or the completion of projects begun by his predecessors, again involving thousands of crore rupees. Many are wondering how many of the new projects he has inaugurated so far have actually been executed. Modi inaugurated in recent months the completion of the longest bridge over a river between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, begun years ago. We know money doesn't grow on trees, and I do question where Modi is getting the money to fund all the projects he has announced and even inaugurated.

I do want to remind the current BJP government as well as the old Congress Party that since India's independence in 1947, New Delhi's investment in the North-East, until very recently, has been what I would call mere "tokenism." I must add that even this "token" investment or development in the North-East has only been achieved following strikes, road blockages, and violence resulting in the loss of human life and property.

In the past decade or two the Government of India suddenly realized the tremendous potential in economic development by linking up with Myanmar and the rest of South East Asia via the North-East region. Hence the "Look East" slogan under the previous government, and now "Act East" under Modi's government. The current BJP government in Delhi says their top priority is the development of the North-East by

impressing upon the more than 45 million people in the so-called eight North-East Sister States all the good things (highways and byways, waterways, railways, institutions, hydro-projects, hotels and motels, all the other modern amenities, etc.) already coming. But wait! All these so-called "good things" are all appendices to the "Act East" which in fact is the FOUR-LANE INTERNATIONAL HIGHWAY being constructed to link mainland India and Myanmar and the rest of South-East Asia through the North-East which is linked to mainland India with only a small strip of land (often called the "chicken neck") between Bangladesh in the south and Bhutan in the north.

I caution Northerners not to get unduly excited over the four-lane Asian highway as well as the talked-about railway lines connecting the capitals of the eight North-Eastern States. Do you know who and what the railways will bring to our hill capitals? Have you thought of all kinds of undesirable elements coming to our villages? What about the hundreds and thousands who will be travelling back and forth between mainland India and South-East Asia via the North-East?

Now consider carefully some well-known Indian leaders' assessment of current Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his RSS-controlled BJP Government.

1. Kuldip Nayar (now deceased): "JP (Jayaprakash Narain, a Gandhian socialist) was conscious that the Jana Sangh was a political arm of the RSS. But he had been given an understanding that the two would part company. . . How could they have done so when the Jana Sangh itself was an RSS creation, with the avowed aim of creating a Hindu rashtra (kingdom)? Initially, the Jana Sangh members tried to explain to JP that the RSS wasn't what it was made out to be. When it came to the crunch, they refused point-blank to break ties with the RSS. JP felt cheated. But by then he was too sick to go back to the people to expose the Jana Sangh (the political BJP and the totalitarian RSS). The constitution is still a sacred document. But, I am afraid, in the 2019 election the BJP may try to get a two-thirds majority and if it does, the party would amend the constitution itself. Article 370, which gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir and the spirit of pluralism which protects minorities, could be the target. The party which is the political wing of the RSS may attempt to dilute if not abolish the concept of secularism." Referring to the immense suffering of the people during the Emergency (June 25, 1975 to 1977) under Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Mr. Nayar said, "But the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which suffered from the emergency most, does not seem to have learnt the lesson which it should have. Mrs. Gandhi was overtaken by the mania of one-person rule. Today Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also riding the same horse at the command of the Rashtriya Swayemsewak Sangh (RSS) and trying to change a pluralistic society, which gives purpose to the nation, into a Hindu Rashtra of sorts."

Kuldip Nayar: Secularism is the ideology which we have chosen in contrast to Pakistan's Islamic order (Nagaland Post). And hours before his death he wrote: "The ruling BJP must always remember that the Northeast is a plural society devoid of much communal violence unlike the Hindu heartland. Hence it is paramount that the Centre should concentrate more on development and good governance rather than trying to impose its Hindutva philosophies" (Nagaland Post). "He (Kuldip Nayar) was concerned about bhofanist, indifferent or pro-establishment press and felt that the present conditions in the country require the judiciary, the press and students to speak out" (Morung Express).

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