

## Hefazat chief's comment unacceptable

### It is against the teachings of Islam, the constitution and the spirit of '71

WE take serious issue with the comments of the chief of Hefazat-e-Islam (HI), that girls should at most attend school up to class IV or V, since educated girls are prone to be “disobedient”. Not only that, he made those present at the assemblage take a vow to comply with his views.

These can only be his views and not representative of any injunctions of the Holy Quran or the Hadith. And they do not reflect the basic rights that our constitution guarantees, the ethos we nurture, and the spirit of the Liberation War. But this is not the first time that we have heard the nonagenarian comment on women, and coming from a religious leader, it is disheartening.

However, while we are shocked by these remarks, we are also surprised by the reticence of the government to come out with a strong rebuttal even after three days. And merely brushing it off as the HI chief's exercise of freedom of speech, as per the statement of the education minister, may be misconstrued in many ways, endorsement of it being one. But it also leaves us to wonder why such comments have been allowed to go unchallenged by the administration.

We believe that such remarks are the outcome of compromise with the HI. In the first instance, we saw the tinkering with the textbooks, at HI's insistence, that has tarnished our secular values, and then recognising the highest madrasa degree as equivalent to a master's degree, without any reform of the curriculum. While one is not against granting of such recognition, should the administration do so without modification of the curriculum which such a degree would validate?

Women constitute half of our population, and no nation can progress with half of its people divested of their fundamental rights. Anyone who expresses or endorses such a view would want us to descend to the days of Jahiliyyah.

## Two billion jobs to be at risk by 2030

### We must prepare ourselves for the fourth industrial revolution

WITH rapid technological advancement and the ever-increasing digitisation of various industries, a large number of expatriate workers employed in blue-collar jobs may have to return home by 2030 due to job displacement. As this newspaper reported yesterday, the number of jobs expected to be displaced by the year 2030 now stands at two billion and may easily rise given the speed at which technology is currently moving forward.

One study suggests that Bangladesh would lose about 53.8 lakh jobs by 2041 from only five sectors because of increased automation. This, under any circumstances, should be of grave concern. However, given that the youth now comprises of 65 percent of our population, Bangladesh has a window of opportunity to rapidly place itself in a position of strength during the fourth industrial revolution.

According to experts, both the public and private sectors should immediately adopt new technologies that are now available such as smart manufacturing, analytics and the Internet of Things, among others. And our education should be made more technology-driven in order to train people, particularly the youth, to be more proficient at handling this new influx of technology.

2030 is not far away, and the rate of change in technology use that we are currently seeing means that the government and the private sector do not have much time to make the necessary adjustments as called for by experts. Therefore, we urge both to start drawing up their plans for the approaching industrial revolution now so that Bangladesh does not lag behind other countries as it had done during past industrial revolutions.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Extrajudicial killing at its highest ever

According to human rights group Ain O Salish Kendra, last year witnessed the highest number of extrajudicial killings recorded in our country's history. Other serious human rights abuses such as enforced disappearances also continued throughout 2018.

Every citizen of our country should be worried about these findings. It is indicative of the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh. It also shows how our law enforcing agencies are not particularly bothered about following the legal process. It almost seems as if they have been given a *carte blanche* when it comes to dealing with criminals or alleged criminals.

This dangerous mindset and approach to dealing with matters of law and order can deeply hurt people's confidence in the rule of law and the overall judicial system.

What is even more disturbing is the overall indifference in society regarding this problem. We seem to have almost accepted it as a part of our daily lives.

Every man or woman deserves a fair trial and must be given a fair chance to defend himself or herself in a court of law.

Monirul Kabir, By e-mail

# CITIZENSHIP BILL

## What does the future hold for Assam?

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

IT seems like “Yesterday Once More” in the political churn in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam. First, it is the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to weed out “illegal” immigrants from Bangladesh irrespective of their faith, and now it is the Citizenship Amendment Bill to give citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan. On January 7, the Lok Sabha, where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has a clear majority, passed the bill which, however, remained stuck in the Rajya Sabha, where the party lacks the numerical strength. The party is possibly waiting for the fortnight-long budget session set to start on January 31 to push it through in the Rajya Sabha without any certainty that the opposition will allow it to happen as the ruling party hopes the passage of the legislation will add muscle to its ideological narrative in the run-up to the parliamentary polls.

While the NRC revived the ethnic and linguistic divides between the Assamese-speaking people and other tribal groups in the northeast with their distinct mother tongues, the Citizenship Amendment Bill has added a religious fault line by proposing Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha coincided with a 12-hour shutdown in Assam and other north-eastern states that evoked a good response in most areas. This was preceded and followed by almost regular street protests in Assamese-speaking majority areas of Assam and other parts of north-eastern states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, creating unrest and political realignment in the region. There were also protest marches and class boycott by the powerful All Assam Students Union (AASU), which had led a violent agitation for six years from 1979 to 1985 against the illegal immigration of Hindus and Muslims from Bangladesh.

More worryingly, murmurs of “independent Assam” were heard on January 7 at a meeting resulting in the lodging of FIRs against a leading intellectual, Hiren Gohain, journalist Manjit Mahanta and rights activist Akhilesh Gogoi on the charge of sedition. Equally disquieting was the threat held out by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to pull out of the peace talks with the government which have been underway for the last seven years. Taken together, all these developments, many in Assam think, have tended to create the atmospherics that hark back to the years of agitation against illegal immigration in 1980s and the ULFA insurgency in 1990s.

The BJP must have factored in the political cost of pushing through the Citizenship Amendment Bill. Its key ally in Assam, Asom Gana Parishad, has parted ways with the saffron party, and strong unhappiness is emanating from other allies in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. The BJP shares power with the regional outfits in three of these states while enjoys friendly ties with ruling parties in the others. The BJP made “illegal” immigration from Bangladesh a major plank in the 2014 parliamentary election in Assam and the 2016 assembly polls in the state that helped the party to come to power.

As I said in an earlier article on the issue of NRC, the BJP is working on a two-track mission in Assam: first, it is

country into India); and (3) as per the Citizenship Bill, it is 2014.

The BJP supports NRC and is keen to implement the Assam Accord in its totality and turn the Citizenship Amendment Bill into an Act. But all its allies in the northeast disagree and contend that the Citizenship Bill runs counter to the Assam Accord and makes it rather meaningless. Their argument is that the Assam Accord talks about “all” illegal immigrants—Hindus and Muslims—while the Citizenship Bill talks only about Hindu immigrants.

In a bid to sugar-coat the Citizenship Bill and hard-sell it in the northeast, the Narendra Modi government set up a nine-member committee to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, which is aimed at ensuring reservation for the

hopes to as many of them as possible in order to compensate for the shortfall it might face in other parts of India, especially the heartland states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, where its electoral graph has reached the saturation point in the last four years and is now facing the law of diminishing returns. One reason could be that the BJP is enthused by its impressive performance in recent panchayat polls in Assam.

But the BJP is clearly looking at the political message of the Citizenship Bill beyond Assam and other parts of the northeast to carry forward its Hindutva statement. The BJP is of late further sharpening its ideological narrative as evidenced by its chief Amit Shah's speech at the party's National Council meeting



Activists from the All Assam Students Union (AASU) protest against the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 that would give citizenship to non-Muslims from neighbouring countries.

PHOTO: ANUWAR HAZARIKA/REUTERS

backing NRC to stop immigration of Hindus and Muslims without publicly naming any community to woo the majority of the people in the state's Brahmaputra valley, whose mother tongue is Assamese. Secondly, to address the ruffled feelings among Bangla-speaking Hindu immigrants concentrated mainly in the Barak valley, it brought the Citizenship Amendment Bill. The result is rather intriguing: Assam has now three separate cut-off dates for identifying “illegal” immigrants: (1) as per NRC, it is 1951; (2) as per the 1985 Assam peace accord (which ended six years of anti-“foreigners” agitation by AASU), it is March 24, 1971, (the day the Operation Searchlight was launched by the occupation Pakistan army in Bangladesh, sparking the outflow of refugees from that

Assamese-speaking majority in certain categories of jobs and admission in educational institutions. Besides, Home Minister Rajnath Singh has assured in parliament that the government would protect the north-eastern state's identity and culture. However, it seems there are not many takers for the government's gesture. The committee's fate is uncertain as its chairman and five other members chosen by the federal government have refused to be a part of it, sensing the public mood in Assam, while AASU declined the invitation to nominate a member to the panel.

Why is the BJP bent on pushing through the Citizenship Amendment Bill risking its allies in the northeast? The region has a total of 24 parliamentary seats at stake. The party is pinning its

in New Delhi on January 11, where he dug into history and likened the coming parliamentary polls to the battle of Panipat in 1761 that had pitted the Hindu Maratha Peshwas (warrior) against the Afghan army of Ahmad Shah Abdali. A few days before Shah's speech, a similar Hindu nationalistic tone was the core of Assam's senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma who ratcheted up the rhetoric by claiming that the Citizenship Bill would ensure that certain parts of the state do not go the Muhammad Ali Jinnah way. It remains to be seen what the past and the future of ethnic-linguistic-religio political cauldron of politics hold for Assam and the north-eastern India.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for The Daily Star.

# SDGs and grim global realities

BHARAT DOGRA

IN recent times the development discourse all over the world has been heavily influenced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set up by the United Nations in 2015 for the year 2030.

These goals are in the form of specific targets set up for key areas of development, protection of environment and various forms of life, etc.

If these goals are achieved, then these 15 years will be the most successful years of human history in terms of reducing

which other available evidence indicates that this may be a period of some very adverse trends. For example, if we look at the previous 15 to 30 years, then it is clear that the world has been passing through times of very high and perhaps unprecedented inequalities. The SDGs also talk about reducing inequalities, but not specifically about how exactly these trends will be checked and how the forces which are responsible for these trends will be checked.

Similarly, it is clear that these are times of very heavy spending on arms and ammunition, as well as increasing overall military budgets. The world is not

illegal, by individuals, criminals and private militias. All this has been increasing.

The sum total of government and private expenditure on arms and ammunition is truly massive. This is also very expensive in terms of snatching away resources from meeting the needs of people. There are deeply entrenched reasons why weapons go on proliferating despite everyone knowing how destructive and expensive these are. There are also very powerful forces who want this to continue. But SDG documents do not tell us exactly how this trend can be checked or resolved, or what big, new

terms of the steps necessary for checking this. There are powerful forces which are responsible for this and there are also important weaknesses in the efforts. The SDG documents do not tell us how these forces will be challenged, and how these weaknesses will be removed.

As there are no details of any specific initiatives which are significantly different from the earlier efforts that failed, there is no assurance at all that the inequalities (and the huge wasteful consumption which inevitably accompanies big inequalities) will be curbed, and there is even less assurance that the destructive arms proliferation will be checked. Again there is no assurance that climate change will be checked before it is too late and tipping points are reached.

In such a situation, it is not at all clear how highly ambitious goals of meeting basic needs of all human beings will be achieved.

Thus while the SDGs are laudable objectives and can be helpful in improving priorities to some extent, several questions arise when these are examined with reference to the grim realities of several important existing trends.

What are the structural problems due to which the performance of the earlier few decades has been so disappointing? What are the weaknesses at the level of global governance due to which the most serious global problems (WMDs, climate change, ocean pollution, currency and trade reforms, etc.) could not be tackled effectively so far? We need to find frank and truthful answers to these tough questions and we need to take the necessary remedial action on the basis of these truthful answers for correcting structural problems and injustices as well as for significantly improving global governance and its capacity to solve the most pressing problems. It is not adequate merely to set up good targets for priority areas, we should face the grim reality of the very tough conditions within which these targets have to be reached and take adequate steps to improve the overall conditions.

Bharat Dogra is a freelance journalist who has been involved with several social movements and initiatives.

Copyright: The Statesman/Asia News Network



These are times of very heavy spending on arms and ammunition, as well as increasing overall military budgets.

PHOTO: SUMY SADURNI/AFP

distress. Hunger is sought to be almost eliminated while poverty will be reduced greatly. If SDGs help to establish the right priorities in terms of such objectives, then this is a very good initiative.

However, we cannot ignore some disturbing aspects. The most ambitious goals of reducing distress have been set for a time period (2015-2030) about

only over-loaded with destructive weapons (including weapons of mass destruction) but in addition this high risk load is spreading and increasing rapidly. The statistics of high arms spending are generally presented mainly in the context of the spending of various governments but in addition there is also the heavy spending on arms and ammunition, legal and

and different initiatives will be taken on this important issue.

The period of SDGs is also a highly sensitive one when life-threatening environmental changes like climate change are likely to increase and cause a lot of destruction and distress. This has been well-recognised for about three decades, yet the world has badly lagged behind in

*The sum total of government and private expenditure on arms and ammunition is truly massive. This is also very expensive in terms of snatching away resources from meeting the needs of people.*