"Abortion and racism are both symptoms of a fundamental human error. The error is thinking that when someone stands in the way of our wants, we can justify getting that person out of our lives. Abortion and racism stem from the same poisonous root, selfishness."

--- Alveda King

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2019

Poll violence escalates in Bengal

ON Monday as Bengal went into its fourth round of polling violence rocked the state yet again. Union Minister, Babul Supriyo of the BJP alleged that those who were unlikely to vote the Trinamool Congress (TMC) were not allowed inside the polling booths. In the absence of central forces most people who feared violence were unwilling to even come out and vote. At Asansol were Supriyo is contesting against Moon Moon Sen of the TMC his vehicle which was parked outside the polling station in Barabani was vandalised when a fight erupted between workers of the BJP and the TMC even as Mamata Banerjee the TMC chief fights to retain Bengal and also to assert her leadership on the national stage. But if the kind of violence that overshadows Bengal today on account of the elections, and which seem to have the stamp of the ruling government are any indicator then the country does not seem to be in safe hands. Politics in Bengal has always been marked by violence right from the time when the Left Front ruled Bengal. Mamata Banerjee the present CM was herself a victim of CPM violence. She survived the attacks but has only imbibed the same kind of violence which her cadres are unleashing on TMC rivals particularly the BJP. The 'do or die' kind of politics being played out in Bengal today between the TMC and the BJP has normalised violence. Attempts by the Election Commission to transfer senior police officials before polling resulted in their complaining against the Commission. But what we are witnessing in Bengal today is complete lawlessness and it is no secret that the state police are completely compromised. Elections in the state have had to be scheduled for seven phases, to enable the movement of central security forces so people could come out and vote without being intimidated.

Visuals of Babul Supriyo sitting in a car with the rear windows smashed have gone viral even as the rival candidate Moon Moon Sen feigns ignorance of the incident stating that she was busy visiting her constituency to ensure smooth polling. Meanwhile Babul Supriyo was on the road to visit every polling station to ensure that there are no disruptions by TMC supporters. There are eight constituencies voting in Bengal on Monday and they happen to be the most violence-prone belt of the state. The fact that voting for As ansol constituency is scheduled for all seven phases of the national election tells us how violent elections in Bengal are.

Securing our seed sovereignty

By Gratia E. Dkhar, Naphishisha Nongsiej and Bhogtoram Mawroh

In an interview with the Hindu (April 6, 2012), Dr. Debal Deb, a rice conservationist, revealed that India had more than 100,000 varieties of Rice until as recently as 1970. However, as green revolution became an entrenched part of the agriculture policy of the State, this diversity came under tremendous attack due to emphasis on monoculture and hybrid crops. At present only 6000 varieties survive. This is very distressing especially considering that rice had its origins in India 14,000 years ago. Initially, it was only a single variety with farmers experimenting and gradually expanding the genetic diversity of the crops over time. There is a fear that if the assault continues this diversity which has taken more than 10,000 years to come into being could disappear entirely.

Dr Deb is trying to prevent that by creating a seed bank for more than 700 local rice varieties. Conserving these varieties is not only just a naive sentimental value, but many of these have high stress resilience in terms of pests and climate change. During the recent Biodiversity Festival organised by North East Network in Chizami, 7th-8th March 2019, Dr Deb shared that the nutritional content of many of these local varieties are incomparably higher than that of the hybrid varieties which are touted to have been developed for the same purpose.

At the same time, the process of developing newer varieties is ongoing with many new varieties being added to the list. These are seeds developed by agribusinesses by spending enormous sum of money. The monopoly power of these enterprises has reduced regional seed diversities. Their profit is maximised as the costs is recuperated (and much more) by ensuring that the farmers continually return to them for fresh supplies. annual feast of the first har-A consequence of all this is engendering of dependency and heightened vulnerability of the farmers. However, there is another story which needs to be told: the effort of indigenous farmers in not just conserving traditional seeds but developing and propagating newer ones. These indigenous farmers, with no connection to the corporations or harbouring the ulterior motive of profiting from their discovery, are developing still newer varieties and sharing them with the community. Bah Kolishon Barim from Liarsluid village is one tained from other varieties.

such farmer. The NESFAS team came across this story during the Rice Festival organised by NESFAS on the 13th March 2019 in Liarsluid where Bah Kolishon was one of the main speakers.

Bah Kolishon Barim is a 7 year old farmer from Liarsluid, a village associated with much local folklores. This particular village is under the Bhoirymbong CD Block of Ri Bhoi but within the traditional Khasi-Jaintia polity, it falls under the Raid Iapngar Khyrim Syiemship. Raid is a traditional political unit consisting of a collection of villages which together with other Raids constitute a Hima (tribal principality) under a Syiem (a Khasi King). Within the Raid, Bah Kolishon is recognised as the farmer who discovered the rice variety called "Khaw Jwain".

In 2008 while gathering the harvest that Bah Kolishon noticed two panicles of paddy with traits different from the rice variety, Kba Lakang that was cultivated. This new variety had longer stalks, broader leaves with shiny husk and bigger sized grains. Intrigued by this discovery, he showed his wife Kong Houstina Jalong, and decided to collect the seeds and keep them safely on the rynsan by the fireplace. In the following planting season, he sowed the new variety in a small plot of land. From the two panicles of paddy that he had saved, he harvested a can full of grains which is equivalent to a kilogram. Having noticed its immense potential, he decided to propagate it fur-

The next year, i.e., 2010, Bah Kolishon was able to harvest one and half sacks (around 80 kilograms) of paddy. He saved four cans of paddy for sowing in the next season while the rest was cooked and served with meat and other dishes at "bam ja thymmai" (an vest). Many who attended the feast which included the church and village elders complimented on the taste and aroma of this variety. Apart from being consumed as a staple food, local snacks can also be made from this variety.

Word of this new rice variety spread across the Raid, and it was nicknamed "Kba u kpa u heh" (Heh' being the nickname of Kolishon's eldest son). People started visiting his home asking for the seeds. In 2011, he harvested 50 sacks of rice, a yield above the average of 42 sacks ob-

produce was given as rent culture to the landlady (Bah throughout the world". But Kolishon had leased the it is only the physical conpaddy field from her) hailing from Mawlang, East Jaintia Hills. The land owner was delighted with the taste, texture and aroma of this rice and requested him to continue cultivating this variety. He saved four cans for himself and gave some to his brother-in-law, residing in the neighbouring village of Thadnongiaw (located within a travel distance of 20 minutes), for propagating the variety. In 2012, out of the 30 sacks, more than half was distributed to the other farmers from Khweng, Liarsluid. Pynthor and distant regions like Nongstoin and

Marmain. In 2013, Bah

Kolishon named the vari-

ety as "Kba Jwain" on account of its unique appear-Bah Kolishon learnt that the variety should be sowed in the second week of May and transplanted in June with harvesting beginning in November. The variety has the ability to withstand strong winds, is resilient to blight and can grow in fields with poor irrigation. Unlike the -4 year period of rotation for other varieties Kba Jwain does not need rotation for seven years. This practise of rotation is exolained as "u kba u thait ban shong ha juh ka jaka. Da ngi pynpher ka jakathung jong ka u kyndit noh" (the yield of a rice variety gets diminished when planted in the same plot. For it to be rejuvenated it has to be rotated with other varieties). The entire process does not use any external input and is completely organic. Interestingly, ten years after he discovered the Jwain

season. Article 9 titled in the Farmers' Rights in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture mentions that there should be recognition of "the enormous contribution that the local and indigenous communities and farmers of all regions of the world, particularly those in the centres of origin and crop diversity, have made and will continue to make for the conservation and development of plant genetic resources which constitute bhogtoram.nesfas@gmail.com

variety, Bah Kolishon has

noticed yet another pani-

cle different from the Kba

Lakang, possibly another

new variety. He has cur-

rently saved it for propa-

gation in the next growing

Almost half of the total the basis of food and agriproduction tribution to food production and agricultural which needs to be recognized. The values that underlie indigenous farming systems and the goals that it aspire to need to be promoted as well. The values system fol-

lowed by indigenous farm-

ers is in complete opposi-

tion to those of modern industrial farming which is based on debt creation through its emphasis on external inputs (seeds, soil improvement and plant protection technologies) and rent extraction (emphasis on intellectual property rights). The result of such tendencies is increasing marginalisation of farmers and decimation of the agrobiodiversity developed by countless farmers over long periods of Through experience human history. In contrast to all this, indigenous farmers like Bah Kolishon use not only the methods of experience and learning to add to the existing knowledge but also follow the indigenous values of sharing and concern for the common good to stave off exploitation of those who are vulnerable. The goal that indigenous farmers like Bah Kolishon aspire for, not just for their community but the world at large, is not just food security but food sovereignty. An important step in achieving this is achieving seed sovereignty i.e., the farmer's rights to breed and exchange diverse seeds which can be saved and which are not patented, genetically modified, owned or controlled by emerging seed corporations and giants, something indigenous farmers like Bah Kolishon have

been doing for generations. "Seed Sovereignty reclaims seeds Biodiversity as commons and public good" (Lexicon of Food).

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Racism in football! It's a problem here too

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

epitomized football as 'the beautiful game'. Indeed, football is a very popular sport globally (both in terms of participation viewership). This popularity gives rise to a fan/support base which is the 'heart and soul' of football. As such, in most circles the fans/supporters are considered as the most important stakeholders in 'the beautiful game'. They are responsible for creating an electrifying atmosphere in the stadia and performing as the 12th man. At times it seems as though national/ international 'relationships' and/or 'rivalries' are defined in terms of football. Amidst this heated/animated realm there are cases of overflowing emotions percolating into irresponsible expressions of supremacy. Contemsee racism here in Shillong porarily in football, this is mostly expressed in terms of 'my race against your race'. Hence, the problem of racism in football! At the moment, this problem hangs like 'Damocles Sword' thereby threatening to permanently tarnish and destroy what we all enjoy so wholeheartedly. Moreover, if we think that this is a western problem, then we are in for a rude shock. This is because it is a problem here in Shillong too. Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, let us lay down

what is racism and what are

its specificities? The 'United

Nations International Con-

Edson

Arantes

Nascimento (commonly

vention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination' defines 'racial discrimination' (thereby implicitly implying 'racism') as 'any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'. The definition is clubs together 'race' and 'ethnicity'. As a result this also impinges upon traits of heritage, culture and tribalism with one scoop (as these are closely associated with ethnicity). Amidst all these anthropological specifics, at the head of the pecking order in terms of global discrimination and antagonism is the phenomenon called 'racism'. To a lay person this is the only term that matters. All other terms and distinctions are purely academic. Racism is about appearance and physical features. It is defined by the shape of the face. It is looked at in terms of the colour of the skin. Racism is simply and literally 'black or white', 'dark or fair'. In general, the 'white and fair' have the notion of unrivalled superiority thereby depicting their supremacy across 'all forms of public life'. It is this cognition that breeds problems and instigates retribution. It defines behaviour and perception towards everything.

Secondly, racism in football is not new. Now it has reached levels of criticality across many nations. Players and sometimes even match officials are abused based on the color of their skin. Apart from racist chants; there are even cases of racist banners being displayed in the stadia. No doubt, this has led to FIFA and UEFA to call for drastic steps to check on racism; however, over the years this has proven to be woefully short of any degree of effectiveness. As a case in point, in recent years high profile incidents involving racism include the racist abuse of Mario Balotelli (Marseille and Italy), Antonio Rudiger (Chelsea and Germany), teaches at NEHU)

do Raheem Sterling (Manchester City and England), known as 'Pele') famously Kalidou Koulibaly (Napoli and Senegal), Mesut Ozil (Arsenal and Germany), Adebowale Ogungbure (Vissai Ninh Binh and Nigeria), Moise (Juventus and Italy), Kevin-Prince Boateng (Barcelona and Ghana), Mohamed Salah (Liverpool and Egypt), Patrice Evra (West Ham United and France) and so forth. These players have been subjected to 'monkey chants' to 'monkey gesticulation' to 'banners displaying a banana(s)' and many more. Importantly, the point to be noted here is that racism is more extreme in the case of those players representing countries where the population is predominantly white (like in the case of Balotelli, Rudiger and Sterling).

Thirdly, over the years we

as well; particularly in the context of the I-League and the Shillong Premiere League. In general, football has grown extensively in India. This is good for the sport. We have seen a revival of football clubs; most of which are driven through an investment of foreign players and foreign management. In this tryst with professionalism, the football clubs have been buying players of varied nationalities from across the globe to represent them on the field of play. In our local context, the football clubs based in Shillong have indeed led the way in this aspect. Well, one might think that all these developments would also result in the change of outlook of the fans/supporters and that they might be more open and progressive in their mindset. However, what is habitual nature is embedded in us all and indeed it never dies. Our inclinations of looking into things from the context of 'race' and 'racism' are a fore-

gone conclusion. What is even more disturbing is the grotesque show of such feeling of supremacy while watching the game from the stands the case of the I-League matches, when the local football clubs play against other teams at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Polo (and these other teams have in their roster players from Africa [or African origin]); at times you will be able to hear chants of 'Negro', 'Iong' (black), 'Shrieh' (monkey), 'Tngaw' (baboon) and so forth. In fact, sometimes even the African origin players of our very own local teams are not spared. This is a downright depiction of racism on our part. It is disturbing and highly condemnable and must be dealt with appropriately. Lest we forget that we as a race are also looked on as being inferior by others!

Fourthly, what to do about it? Is there a solution? To start with, the I-League is run by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and the Shillong Premier League by Shillong Sports Association. It is high time that these bodies take measures to deal with racism in football. These measures must be strict and penalizing. It must be noted that the number of people involved in racism at the stands are just a handful; but they bring shame to 'the beautiful game'. We need mechanisms to identify and catch hold of these people red-handed. Accordingly, they may be penalized and/ or they may be barred from football stadia for life altogether. Yes, the problem of racism here in Shillong is not as much as in the European football leagues. Nonetheless, the problem is to be nipped in the bud. To this end, the football clubs can do their own part through the public address system at the stadia. (The Author

TO THE EDITOR

Is Shillong vulnerable to terror attacks?

Editor, Having seen terror attacks in other parts of the world and even in India our fear is that Shillong may one day face the same fate. We do not know who will commit the act and when but the possibility is there. This possibility can be seen from the fact that all sorts of people come here from all parts of India and the world over and there is no mechanism whatsoever to monitor and keep a check on the movements and activities of the people coming here. We only rely on the police and their intelligence gathering. But police, being people as they are, cannot keep track of the movements and activities of every person. Even in advanced countries like the USA, UK and others, intelligence agencies have failed and frequent terror bombings and other

place regularly. Therefore it is imperative on all of us to be extra vigilant and alert wherever we are and to report to the police whenever we find suspicious objects or see suspicious movements and activities of people, especially those who are indoctrinated and radicalised.

Over the years we have seen heavy influx into Shillong and in other areas particularly from a particular community. We do not brand that all of them are terrorists or radicalised and indoctrinated and that they can be potential terrorists and suicide bombers but the possibilities are there because it is difficult to know who among them is indoctrinated and radicalised and we do not know when and where they will strike. Indeed radicalism and fanaticism perpetrated in the name of religion which leads to terrorism, decapitation, bloodshed, rape, bomb blasts, murder, and

ghastly massacres take other forms of violence are all crimes against humanity. No religion teaches all these. No religion preaches and promotes the cult of violence and if there is any religion that succumbs to such indoctrination and propagates crime and violence, then it is no religion at all but it is the act of the devil or a satanic cult. True religion teaches, preaches and propagates love and peace; love for oneself and love for neighbours and peace to oneself and to all men.

It is a great threat to world peace that there are religions today which succumb to the cult of violent groups and religious bigots or extremist religious ideologues. It seems as if the kingdom of God has fallen into the hands of Satan. It is indeed deadly and dangerous. Those religious teachers and their agents who teach, preach and propagate hatred, hate crimes, religious dogmatism, religious fanati-

cism, radicalism and violence should know that they are the disciples and soldiers of Lucifer. I appeal to one and all to pray for and shun these ideologies and the people who propagate them. Yours etc.,

Philip Marwein,

Press freedom diminishing in India

Editor, The fourth estate must

play the role of the third umpire to help the umpires (voters) on the field in a political IPL match between the ruling and the opposition parties in a democratic country. It will be highly unfortunate if the media takes on the role of the cheerleaders of the batting side. Freedom of the Press is now in great danger. Our position has gone further down to 140 among 180 countries

in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index. India has continuously been sliding down from 133rd position in 2016 to 136th in 2017 (down 3 ranks) to 138th in 2018 (down 2) to 140th in 2019 (down 2) on the World Press Freedom Ranking Index of the international free speech advocate Reporters Without Borders. This means that India has slid down 7 ranks in press freedom in the last 3 years. The Human Develop-

ment Index topper Norway has again got the first position in press freedom for three years on the trot. On the other hand, the Happiness Index topper Finland gets the second rank in the freedom of press. On India, the report says, 'Violence against journalists - including police violence, attacks by Maoists fighters and reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt politicians - is one of the most striking characteristics of the current state of press freedom in India. At

least six Indian journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018."

The report found an alarming rate of "coordinated hate campaigns waged on social networks against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva.

Indeed, alarm bells are ringing for our democracy. Dissent, debate and dialogue are central to democracy. On the other hand, democracy is the lifeblood of our Constitution and nation. We need to remember that democracy cannot survive without free press.

Yours etc., Sujit De, Kolkata

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.