

Message for today  
*Cowards die many times before their deaths;  
the valiant never taste of death but once.*  
– WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

# The Assam Tribune

## Deadly attack

Hardly a week has elapsed since India’s External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit in Islamabad, highlighted the requirement for India and Pakistan to bury the hatchet, and asserted that “Activities across borders characterized by terrorism and extremism are unlikely to encourage trade, energy flows, and connectivity,” when seven people, including a Kashmiri doctor, were killed in a terrorist attack at a construction site in Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir! That civilians were targeted in the killing testifies to the cowardly nature of the assault, and that the cross-border terrorists are being cowed down by the strong response of India’s security forces, and, therefore, are looking for soft targets. However, this is not the first instance when civilians have been killed; last June, for instance, nine pilgrims were killed at Raisi after the bus they were in plunged into a valley when it came under gunfire from terrorists. During 2024, so far, there have been four attacks and associated killings, including those of labourers. The motivation of the killers appears to be clear, being directed against non-Kashmiri migrants, thereby sending an unambiguous signal to a segment of the Kashmiri population as to their objective. Significantly, this attack had come after a new government led by Omar Abdullah was sworn in following the devolution of J&K into a Union Territory and the withdrawal of the region’s special status.

While J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah described the attacks as “dastardly” and spoke out against separatism, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has also branded them as a dastardly terror attack on civilians. As such soft targets are randomly selected, it is difficult for the Indian security forces to anticipate and ward them off – thus, it is good to learn that their efforts are being augmented by the induction of India’s National Investigation Agency, which is reportedly preparing to investigate the latest terror attack in the backdrop of possibilities that newly infiltrated terrorist groups are involved. It is pertinent also to note that of late Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has been sending feelers for a course-change in India-Pak relations aimed at a more amicable coexistence. Observers opine that improved relations would be a better option for ending cross-border terrorism since it might induce the Pakistani authorities to refrain from such actions. However, there is a fly in the ointment to this supposition. It is an open secret that today Pakistan is a dysfunctional nation, with the civilian government not quite being able to wield total control over some other players, including the army and intelligence agencies. It is also an open secret that the latter two entities are behind the cross-border terrorism, and unless they are restrained there seems to be less possibility that we might see an end to the deadly attacks like the one at Ganderbal.

## A different league

The Brahmaputra Volleyball League (BVL) is a shining example of how sports can be a powerful tool for social transformation, particularly in rural communities. Organized across Assam, the BVL features Under-12 and Under-16 players – both girls and boys – hailing from villages. Spearheaded by Abhijit Bhattacharya, a former Indian volleyball captain from Assam, the initiative began five years ago under the banner of ‘The Assam Volleyball Mission 100.’ The mission’s objective was simple: To distribute 100 volleyballs to 100 village teams and build a sustainable sports culture. With just Rs 2,500 for a ball, net and bamboo poles, a village could transform its sporting landscape. What began with local efforts has now evolved into a full-fledged league – the BVL – recognized globally as the largest community volleyball league in the world. Today, the BVL boasts more than 5,000 participants from 32 districts, with over 400 teams competing in the fifth edition. The league’s journey from its modest beginnings with just 400 players is a reflection of the vision of Abhijit and the power of community sports. The rise in participation among girls is a particularly heartening development, with nearly equal representation in the Under-16 category.

What sets the BVL apart is its community-driven approach. Without any initial external funding, the villagers took responsibility for hosting visiting teams, organizing meals, and creating a festival-like atmosphere. This engagement fostered a sense of belonging, friendship, and camaraderie among the participants and villagers alike. Such collaboration has contributed significantly to the league’s success, and the International Volleyball Federation has even expressed interest in this model for its potential to drive community development. The impact of the BVL on Assam’s volleyball landscape is undeniable. Today, 90 per cent of Assam’s State volleyball team consists of players nurtured through the league, a remarkable achievement considering India’s relatively low international ranking in the sport. Abhijit’s optimism shines through, despite the challenges Assam has traditionally faced on the national stage. More than just a sporting event, the BVL has strengthened the social fabric of Assam’s rural areas. When teams travel for matches, it’s not just about competition; it’s about cultural exchange, mutual respect, and building bonds. The decentralized nature of the league allows teams and villagers to organize matches according to their convenience, creating a flexible and inclusive framework. As the fifth edition kicks off, with around 900 matches scheduled, the BVL continues to inspire hope for the future of volleyball in Assam. It stands as a model that other sports, like football, could emulate, potentially unlocking more rural talent and fostering a deeper connection between sport and community.

# Obstructionism vs development

RAJEEV RANJAN ROY

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently spoke of global conspiracies being hatched to weaken the nation’s economy, democracy, and social fabric, he was echoing the concerns of many Indians. He isn’t the first Prime Minister to do so. Back in August 2011, Dr Manmohan Singh also told a delegation of CPM MPs that an international conspiracy was underway to destabilize India’s economic growth. Unlike overt wars, which allow countries to prepare counter-offensives, these invisible conspiracies catch us by surprise. This is why decisive action is urgently needed to contain such anti-development efforts.

There is much merit in what the Prime Minister said recently. Ironically, the development sector itself has become an antithesis of development, with several NGOs allegedly playing a pivotal role in destabilizing and derailing progress. Numerous examples abound. A leading English daily on October 3, citing Income Tax department investigations, revealed how two NGOs engaged in litigation to stall economic and development projects, including those of the Adani Group and JSW. The report disclosed that over 75 per cent of the funding for four NGOs during a five-year period came from abroad. Between 2015-21, Care India allegedly received 92 per cent of its funds from foreign sources, followed by Environics Trust at 95 per cent, Legal Initiative for Forest & Environment (LIFE) at 86 per cent, and Oxfam at 78 per cent. These NGOs are reportedly interconnected, with their main persons linked, according to the IT investigations.

In April this year, the Centre presented

its case in the Supreme Court against NGO Environics Trust, which had received 90 per cent of its funds from foreign sources and allegedly used them to finance agitations and protests against coal, steel, and thermal power projects, thereby stalling India’s development. The IT department, in an affidavit, stated that the Trust funded protests in a village in Odisha under the guise of distributing relief packages to households. The Trust transferred Rs 1,250 per individual involved in protests, who were named in an FIR. WhatsApp chats revealed the NGO’s managing trustee, Sreedhar Ramamurthi, informing Pratirodh Sangram Samiti’s Prashant Paikray about these transfers to 711 individuals and admitting that the Trust worked with foreign entities such as ‘Fair Green and Global Alliance II,’ comprised of six Dutch member organizations.

Across India, there are numerous instances of how activists have worked concertedly to obstruct progress. A notable example occurred in 2022, when the then Kerala Ports Minister, V Abdurahiman, criticized the Latin Catholic Church-led protests against the Vizhinjam International Sea Port as anti-national. He argued that hindering construction crucial to national development should be seen as an anti-national act, stating that these weren’t protests but something else altogether.

The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project in Tamil Nadu, developed in collaboration with Russia, also witnessed heavy protests allegedly sponsored by Church groups, which seemed intent on stalling progress. The Union Home Secretary had said in 2012 that bank accounts of four non-governmental organizations had been seized after it was

determined that they had been utilizing money from foreign sources to fund anti-nuclear protests. The CBI filed two cases, while the Tamil Nadu police Crime Branch filed two. More recently, Korean technology giant Samsung faced a five-week strike at its manufacturing unit in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, fuelled by activist-driven agitations.

In 2014, the Intelligence Bureau published a report titled ‘Impact of NGOs on Development,’ which said that opposition to numerous development projects by several NGOs, including Greenpeace, could negatively affect India’s economic growth by 2-3 per cent. Greenpeace had run a motivated campaign to stall the field trials of genetically modified crops, depriving Indian farmers of a technology widely used worldwide with significant benefits for over a decade. Dr Manmohan Singh had also criticized such efforts by NGOs for hindering India’s progress.

Big corporate houses have often struggled to deal with these invisible forces. In 2013, Tata Power’s Managing Director publicly criticized “foreign agencies,” including some NGOs, accusing them of using protests as leverage to block the company’s 4,000 MW Mundra project in Gujarat, despite the project adhering to environmental norms. Tata Power, however, stood firm against this pressure.

Who can forget the famous ruling by a three-member arbitral tribunal awarding Rs 766.78 crore to Tata Motors as compensation for losses incurred due to the forcible acquisition of land in Singur, West Bengal in 2006? This ruling was against the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC). The Left Front government had allocated 1,000 acres of farmland to build a

manufacturing plant, but violent protests led by Mamata Banerjee and local farmers, who claimed that 6,000 families were displaced without adequate compensation, resulted in the closure of the project.

The ruling emphasized Tata Motors’ losses, as they were forced to relocate to Sanand, Gujarat, after investing around Rs 1,000 crore in Singur. The tribunal ordered the WBIDC to pay 11 per cent interest annually from September 2016 until full compensation was made and to cover Rs 1 crore for court proceedings.

Whether motivated activists or organizations will take lessons from such rulings remains unclear. However, the verdict sends a loud and clear message: the Singurian cobweb of obstructionism, which is present in other parts of India, including the Northeast, must be eliminated like a malignant disease. If not, it will continue to eat away at India’s progress and its future potential. The Viksit Bharat vision must ensure that India’s developmental aspirations are fulfilled.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal succinctly articulated the frustration felt by both corporations and the government during the Vibrant Goa summit in March this year. He called for a mass movement against NGOs protesting developmental projects, labelling such obstructionism as the “worst form of injustice” against India’s poor.

India’s journey toward becoming a global economic powerhouse will be fraught with challenges, including those posed by obstructionist NGOs. But decisive, collaborative action at the highest levels is required to counter such regressive forces. It’s time to act to ensure that India’s development trajectory remains unshaken by motivated interference.

# Food adulteration: Prevention and control

ADHIR KUMAR DAS

To ensure public health and safety and also to deal with the offences arising out of food adulteration, the Parliament of India enacted the Food Adulteration Act of 1954, which came into effect in India on June 15, 1955. Prior to the enactment of the Food Adulteration Act, to deal with the offences of food adulteration, the provisions of Sections 272 and 273 of the IPC were applied, and prior to 1954, there were several State laws to regulate the quality of food. Subsequently, certain amendments were made to the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act to make it more stringent in the years 1964, 1976, 1986, 2001, and 2002.

The Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, was repealed in 2006, and a new Act was enacted by the Parliament and notified in the Gazette of India on August 24, 2006, as the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, by integrating various food laws that existed in the country to ensure public health and safety.

The Food Safety and Standards Act was recommended by the Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare in the Parliament, which then led to the creation of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The committee recommended a comprehensive food safety law and proposed the necessary regulations to be included for the implementation of the Act.

With the introduction of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, the following Acts

and orders were repealed: (1) Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, (2) Fruit Products Order, 1955, (3) Meat Food Products Order, 1973, (4) Vegetable Oil Products Control Order, 1947, (5) Edible Oils Packaging (Regulation) Order, 1998, and (6) Milk and Milk Products Order, 1992. The main objectives of the Act are to prevent the adulteration of food, protect the public from poisonous and harmful food, and prevent the sale of substandard food to protect the interests of consumers.

The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, was enacted by consolidating all laws and relevant orders to establish the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, which regulates the framework, rules, and guidelines for the manufacture, storage, distribution, and sale of food products. The provisions relating to penalties are prescribed in Sections 49 to 67 of the FSS Act of 2006 for violations as detailed in the Sections. Under the provisions of the Act, if a violation causes an injury, the penalty is up to six years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh. Further, if the violation results in a death, the penalty is at least seven years’ imprisonment or up to life imprisonment, and a fine of Rs 10 lakh.

For the effective implementation of the Act, a few amendments were made by the Food Safety and Standards (Amendment) Act, 2008 (Act 13 of 2008) and the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023 (Act 18 of 2023), which came into force w.e.f. 07-02-2008 and w.e.f. 08-11-2023,

respectively.

It is well known that to obtain higher profits, unscrupulous traders use inferior substances that are similar to the constituents of food. These include pebbles, stones, sand, chalk powder, and contaminated water to increase weight and gain more profits. Further, water, detergent, and synthetic milk are also added to milk to obtain more profit. On many occasions, formalin is used to preserve fish for a long time and to improve the appearance of the fish. This practice can cause abdominal discomfort, vomiting, renal injuries, and many other diseases.

The Supreme Court, in the ‘Swami Achyutanand Tirth and Others (Petitioners) vs Union of India and Others (Respondents),’ gave certain directions for the prevention of milk adulteration. In its judgement, the apex court held that “for curbing milk adulteration, an appropriate State-level committee headed by the Chief Secretary or the Secretary of Dairy Development and a district-level committee headed by the concerned District Collector shall be constituted, as is done in the State of Maharashtra, to review the work done to curb the adulteration of milk for manufacture, storage, distribution, sale, and import to ensure public health and safety.”

It is pertinent to mention here that Part IV of the Constitution of India has laid down certain guiding principles for the State to frame its policies in such a way that the fundamental rights granted in Part III of

the Constitution and other legal rights of its citizens are fulfilled. Article 47 of the Constitution of India outlines the State’s duty to improve the health and nutrition of citizens and to raise the standard of living, which includes the State’s duty to prohibit the production, import, and consumption of intoxicating substances.

The right to food is recognized in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

As per official records, the FSSAI analyzed 3.7 lakh food samples between 2019 and 2022 and found 90,473 samples to be non-conforming. According to data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Hyderabad ranked first in the country for food adulteration cases. In 2022, a total of 291 cases of food adulteration were reported across 19 major cities in the country.

It is highly desirable that, to prevent adulteration, the respective State governments, through their concerned departments, set up a website specifying the functions and responsibilities of the food safety authority empowered under the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, and also create awareness about the complaint mechanism. Further, the authorities concerned should conduct workshops to educate the general public, teaching them easy methods for detecting common adulterants in food to ensure public health.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Rising medicine prices and counterfeit drugs

Sir, – The recent government decision to increase the prices of essential medicines has sparked significant concern, especially since many of these medications are required for daily, long-term use by patients suffering from conditions like thalassemia, asthma, etc. This price hike can place an additional financial burden on individuals who rely on these drugs for their health and well-being.

Compounding this issue is the prevalence of counterfeit medicines in the market, which poses a serious risk to patient safety. It is imperative for the government to prioritize the introduction of robust legislation designed to ensure the authenticity of pharmaceuticals. Implementing a system requiring drug manufacturing companies to incorporate security features, such as barcodes or QR codes, would allow patients to verify the legitimacy of their medications easily. Yours etc., **Jyoti Kanoi**, Dibrugarh.

#### ‘Lady Justice’

Sir, – The Supreme Court of India has unveiled a new statue of ‘Lady Justice,’ reimagining the iconic image that is synonymous with legal practice worldwide. Traditionally, Lady Justice is depicted as a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales in one hand and a sword in the other. However, the new six-foot-tall statue, placed in the library, presents a different interpretation. This modern rendition features a woman dressed in a saree, without a blindfold, holding scales in one hand and a copy of the Constitution in the other, replacing the customary sword. While the blindfold in the classic representation has been widely understood to symbolize the impartiality of justice, the new statue’s unobstructed vision is intended to convey that the law sees everyone equally and is binding for all.

This reimagining of Lady Justice comes amid a series of legal reforms in India, including the introduction of new criminal

codes and a stated objective to ‘decolonize’ the country’s legal framework. Yours etc., **Chandan Kumar Nath**, Sorbhog, Barpeta.

#### Hassle over NOC

Sir, – Recently, the Directorate of Secondary Education released advertisements for the recruitment of 8,230 TGTs and 1,487 PGTs, which is a very welcome development. This effort of the government will elevate Assam’s education scenario to new heights. While most aspirants are happy with the recruitment rules, the in-service candidates or Assam government employees are troubled by the requirement of a no-objection certificate (NOC). This NOC is mandated just to prove the employment status of a candidate, but obtaining an NOC from the employer or higher authority is a time-consuming process. Since teachers are also taking on the responsibility of Head Teachers with financial powers, obtaining a non-liability certificate at this stage for a mere TET exam is out of the question.

A large number of aspirants for these upcoming recruitments are in-service

teachers, and hence, intra-departmental transfer or promotion or applying for a higher post should be exempted from the requirement of an NOC. I request the Government of Assam to put an end to this requirement for a hassle-free recruitment process, or otherwise issue a common prescribed form, just to be countersigned by the employer. Yours etc., **G Songate**, Silchar.

#### Selection of candidates

Sir, – Bypolls to the five Assembly constituencies in Assam are scheduled for November 13. Elections will be held in Dholai, Behali, Bongaigaon, Sidi, and Samaguri. Every political party should choose an efficient, knowledgeable and honest candidate for a constituency; nepotism should never be a factor in the selection process. The public representative is the guardian of his or her constituency, who should have what it takes to fulfil people’s aspirations. Yours etc., **Maheswar Dekka**, Rangiya.

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