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[Editorial]

English be made national language

letters to the Editor

Sir, — Kudos to Dipankar Pattanayak for his letter “English is India’s regional language” (15 August) whereby he takes up the cause of English as India’s regional language. The only language which can link a Manipuri with a Gujarati or a Bengali with a Tamil, the language spoken by innumerable Indians of Anglo origin or the language which has a considerable influence on the literature and vocabularies of all premier Indian languages and also which remains one of the official languages of Nagaland and Mizoram is no less an Indian language than Hindi, Marathi or Oriya. Besides languages have no nationality of their own. If English is a foreign language since it is spoken in the United States, then so are Bengali, Urdu and Nepali as they are spoken in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal respectively. It will not be entirely out of context if the linguistic policy upheld by India, vis-a-vis the other modern multi-lingual nations of the world is examined.

India is the world’s only multilingual democracy where the language of one section of the populace is the designated national language. While English and French are Canada’s two national languages, Switzerland honours all the three languages: French, German and Italian that are spoken within its territory. Mauritius has a neutral language, English, as its official language, while Israel revived the use of Hebrew to make it the link among the multilingual Jews.

India, the largest democracy of the world, should take a cue from these nations to appreciate better what linguistic democracy is all about. Making Hindi the national language has resulted in a particular linguistic group getting an upper hand. Hindi’s dominant status gives its speakers an advantage in the limited job market. The resultant inequality flouts norms of democracy. This can be neutralised only by making English the national language as it is neutral. In the process, no particular state will be privileged, the way speakers of the Rajbhasa now are.

— Yours, etc., KAJAL CHATTERJEE.
Panihati, 19 August.

Decline of Indian tea

Sir, — Apropos “Tragedy of Tea” by Aditi Roy Ghatak (14-15 August). Lack of long-term perspective and macro planning has always characterised Indian tea industry leading to its present decline. This has been compounded further by the absence of scientific database to draw up strategic planning for the future. In early 1990s, for example, it was projected that Indians were drinking too much tea, almost 10 per cent increase in consumption per annum, and unless productivity was increased

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nothing would be left for export at the turn of the century. Come 21st century the cycle is completed: with export declining the emphasis is to boost consumption of tea in the country.

Improvement of quality may be a way out of the current imbroglio, but it needs advanced planning both at the field and factory levels, and cannot be achieved quickly. Moreover, the limiting factors for quality, particularly the limitations and advantages of area-specific quality must be clearly understood to make any worthwhile effort. The challenge of Indian tea is to mark it as a beverage of 21st century not only by increasing brand equity both quantitatively and qualitatively, but by further value addition like packet tea, bio tea, hot and cold soluble instant tea, tea cola to name a few. A concept like this would be operative only if the consumer pattern of tea in the near future could be projected. Generic promotion of tea taking health dimensions into account would no doubt break new grounds, but the hard fact is that in retail markets no tea is available at less than Rs 120 per kg!

— Yours, etc., BARUNDEB BANERJEE.

Kolkata, 16 August

Shame on the CPI-M

Sir, — A mini black hole in a police lockup in Malda. And now police ruthlessly beat up and manhandle young women members of a left party, SUCI, on the streets of Kolkata. Their crime? They were exercising their democratic right to protest against price-increase in bus fares. It might be recalled that the undivided CPI had once led a massive and successful movement against one-paisa increase in tram fare. A Communist of more than 60 years and a victim of police repression on the streets and in prison, I hung my head in shame when I saw the incident on TV. Partners of the CPI--M-led Left Front government have protested strongly and called for immediate action against the policemen guilty of such uncivilised behaviour. The CPI-M leadership and the state government, however, have chosen, in their customary arrogance, to ignore this shameful act! Shame on the CPI-M! Shame on the Communist chief minister, who also holds the home portfolio!

— Yours, etc., SUBRATA BANERJEE.

Sahaganj, 12 August.

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