The written answers given by Hon'ble Governor Shr Arif Mohammed Khan to the questions received from The Week. Portions of the matter published as interview was not part of the questions asked.

1. Your last four months in Kerala look quite tumultuous for an onlooker. How has been it for you?

Answer: I don’t think they are tumultuous. Yes, you may say that they were full of activity including visit to various districts to attend programs which gave me great opportunity to meet and interact with remarkable Malayalis who have strong sense of public service and have devoted their lives to very lofty objectives. Additionally, what has left me overwhelmed was my interaction with common people whose language I am not able to speak yet they showed so much affection and love that it has redoubled my desire to learn their language fast so that I am able to talk to them without the help of an interpreter.

2. What are those things which you like about Kerala and dislike about it?

Answer: Kerala is one of our leader states. In the field of education and health Kerala is worthy of emulation but there is another feature of Kerala that no body talks about but it has deeply impacted me. I have said it at many places that Kerala is a caring society. The way Kerala takes care of the uncared for is simply fabulous. That explains why people all over India happily entrust their healthcare to a Malayali.

There is hardly anything which I dislike but there is something which saddens me and that is the state of our universities. It appears that the university communities instead of being in a position to influence the policy makers, often yield to the pressure which comes from non-academic quarters and sometime take decisions which result in the erosion of autonomy and serious embarrassment. If I use the phrase of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore then our institutions of higher education must preserve and protect the ‘dignity of intellect’ because that alone can safeguard the autonomy and higher standards of any university.

3. You have interacted with almost all community leaders during these months. What were the results?

Answer: I interact with people to assure them that as constitutional head of the State I am accessible to them. It is not only the leaders but I receive emails from so many people including young students of class 7 and 8, who say that they have something important to discuss with me at the earliest. I often check my mail after day’s work and in such cases I make my staff to call their parents in the midst of night and request them to bring their child to Raj Bhavan in the morning. In one such case, it came as a pleasant surprise that this young student of class 7, who lives in Trivandrum desired to discuss the issue of Maradu flats in Kochi. No one related to him owned a flat there, yet he was so anxious about the demolition of the flats that he was keen to talk to me about it. It is this caring mindset of a Malayali that I love.
4. In the last four months, you have got many admirers in Kerala. At the same time, you are being vehemently opposed by some others. This is something very unusual about Governors. How do you look at this polarized effect you have in Kerala?

Answer: I thank all those who have shown their love for their kindness. I am also thankful to the critics. But you must keep it in mind that criticism has come mostly from politicians. I think their criticism is part of their professional requirements. I would like to request the critics to look carefully at the oath that I have taken. I am duty bound to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and Law. I have not enacted the law but my sacred duty is to defend a measure that Parliament has enacted and President has assented to it. If I fail to defend the law then I have no business to sit in the Raj Bhavan.

I would also like to request you not to take the statements of the politicians on face value, they do many things for extraneous reasons. Only recently we have read that a senior politician has publicly admitted that in the matter of appointment of a senior officer he did so because he wanted to favor this individual because of his ethnicity. Now this confession goes against the oath that makes it binding on a minister to do right to all manner of people without affection or ill will.

5. Leaders of both the fronts have alleged that you are playing politics. Some even go to the extent of saying that you are acting as the president of the State BJP unit. How will you respond to this criticism?

Answer: If discharging my duty to defend the Constitution and law is politics then I would like to make it clear that no amount of criticism or even threats that my movement would become difficult are not going to deter me and I shall continue to be faithful to my oath. The allegation that I am acting as BJP President of the state is ridiculous. Let them realize that I have spoken not just in Kerala but have been invited by people in various states including Delhi to speak on CAA and I firmly hold the view that through this measure the Parliament has given a legal shape to the promise which Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and other national leaders had made to the Non-Muslim population of the then Pakistan. Our national leaders were cognizant of the fact that the status of these people had become worse than their status in British India. They were reduced to the status of Zimmi (who for their protection depended totally on others) not because they had demanded partition of India but because our national leadership had accepted the demand of partition. It was this realization that made Mahatma Gandhi to make the promise that these people can come to India at anytime and they will have right to citizenship. CAA has only redeemed the pledge of father of the nation.

6. Agitation against CAA has been stirring up the country for various reasons. Do you think the insecurities of Muslims on NRC and NPR, once they are implemented, are valid?

Answer: CAA is about giving citizenship to those who came to India illegally in order to save their lives and honor. Look at the reports of the human rights groups in Pakistan. Even the 2019 report says that more than 1000 non-Muslims girls are abducted and forced to change their religion in Pakistan every year. You go to google and just type ‘forced conversions in
Pakistan’ and see how many write ups appear on the screen. Some of the most moving articles on this subject are written by Pakistani Muslim women. Being women they understand the pain of these unfortunate people but some of us in India refuse to have any empathy for them and demand that those who have fled to save their lives should be clubbed with those who have come illegally for economic reasons. Have a heart, the two cannot be equated. The worst form of inequality is when you treat the unequals as equals.

7. Why do you think young people, in Kerala and many other states, are so agitated about political decisions? Some allege these young people are being influenced by ‘anti-social’ external forces. Do you agree?

Answer: I have already said that Kerala society has a strong sense of empathy. Here one will join her neighbour if she is feeling anxious about something without caring to know whether there are any real grounds for that anxiety. CAA is about giving citizenship to those who have been persecuted for being non-Muslim in Pakistan. It has nothing to do with the Indian citizens. Even Assam accord has accepted the voter list of 1971. So there is no reason to feel anxious. I have no idea about anti-social elements but I find it strange that many well known public figures who are today opposing CAA are the people who had, while in government were party to the decision to introduce NRC and NPR.

8. Great democracies like the US and France have allowed young people to voice their dissent. What is the harm if young Indians also voice their opinion, even if they have a view different from the government's. Don't you think these young people have a right to make their voice heard?

Answer: Expression of dissent is the essence of democracy. You can't think of democracy without freedom to dissent and its expression. It is the duty of the government and policy makers to listen to dissent. Problem is not about expression of dissent. Problem arises when one resorts to violence and desires to impose one’s views on others by showing muscle power. You must have seen the recorded videos of Indian History Congress held in Kannur University. It was Mr Irfan Habib, who raised the issue of Kashmir and CAA and posed the questions to me. But when I tried to respond to his criticism then he charged towards me and had a scuffle with my ADC and security officers and then his supporters created a din that I had to end my speech within few minutes.

9. You had a great personal rapport with Rajiv Gandhi. What are your impressions about Rahul Gandhi, who incidentally is an MP from Kerala?

Answer: You know I had withdrawn myself from electoral politics about 10 years back and had devoted myself totally to my first love that is reading and writing. So I had no occasion to interact with Mr Rahul Gandhi or for that matter most other people in politics during this time. Secondly even if I know somebody, I would never like to sit in judgment about that person.
10. You had walked out of the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1986 over differences in the Shah Bano case. What, according to you, were the compulsions that Rajiv Gandhi may have faced at those times?

Answer: This question has been discussed in detail including in the books of prominent historians like Prof Bipin Chandra and Prof Ramchandra Guha. Now I need not give my assessment of the reasons that compelled Rajiv Ji to reverse the judgment of the Supreme Court in Shah Bano case. But I can tell you about me. I had defended the judgment of the Supreme Court in Parliament with the backing of the then Prime Minister, so when he decided to change his stand, there was no option before me but to resign from his council of Ministers.

11. You have been a strong opponent of triple talaq for more than three decades. What were the reasons that prompted you?

Answer: Since 1986, I have maintained that Triple Talaq was an innovation, it violated the commands of Quran, it was oppressive for women, it was unjust and it deserved to be jettisoned at the earliest. The Muslim Personal Law Board which had defended triple talaq in 1986, realized its baneful impact, and in their affidavit submitted in 2017 before the Hon Supreme Court admitted everything that they had opposed in 1986. The law which abolished triple talaq and made it a punishable offense is a remarkable feat in empowering women which will ultimately empower the society.

12. Governors in other states, like Maharashtra and West Bengal, too, have been criticised in recent times for playing politics. As a Governor, do you feel a Governor should strive to be seen as non-partisan?

Answer: Governor must be non-partisan as far as the political parties and players are concerned. But a Governor will violate his oath if he tries to be non-partisan when the confrontation is between the law of the land and those who challenge the sanctity of the law. The constitutional sanctity of a law can be challenged only before the higher courts of law but state governments or legislatures have no power to decide about the sanctity of a law which comes under the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament.

13. Just before taking oath you had said in an interview that "Kerala conjures up lot of fascinating images as the God's own country". Do you still stick hold that point of view after four months?

Answer: Yes, I have found Kerala to be more fascinating than what I had thought earlier. I am so proud of people of Kerala and I have already said I love their strong sense of empathy for the weak, for the old and for the distressed persons. In fact in Governors Conference, I requested my counterparts to impress on their state governments to send official teams to Kerala to study the old age homes, the homes for young girls and the homes that look after the differently abled persons, autistic children and others. I can say with all humility that I consider myself fortunate that I have got this opportunity to serve this great state of India and its people.
14. What message do you have to give to your admirers and critics?

Answer: I am a human being who like anybody else, has his limitations. But I can say with conviction that I am doing my best to live up to my oath that I will devote myself to the service and well being of the people of Kerala. Specially to the critics, I would say, please read the Constitution, see the provisions that explain the role and duties of a Governor. I am sure if they take this pain to familiarize themselves with the constitutional provisions, then they would realize that what I am doing is nothing but performing a duty I am charged with by the Constitution.