

*"Happiness is not something you postpone for the future; it is something you design for the present."*

--- Jim Rohn

## The Shillong Times

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### Trivializing the political discourse

RAHUL Gandhi's jacket worn at the Peace Concert in Shillong became the highlight of national television channels. And that was fed by someone from the rival political party just to square up things with the AICC President who once called the BJP led NDA Government at the centre, "suit boot ki sarkar." Prime Minister Modi was verbally lacerated by the Gandhi scion for the suit embossed with his name during his visit to the USA. The BJP has not forgotten this slur and have taunted the Gandhi scion about graduating to an expensive Burberry jacket from his otherwise non-sartorial kurta pyjama because the economy under Modi is doing well. Such crass debates take away from the substantive issues that plague the state of Meghalaya. Surely that question should not have been a priority for the media. That it became the first question of the day when Rahul Gandhi had his informal interface with the press, exposes the falling standards of journalism here and anywhere in this country. Media ethics is all but forgotten in the quest for "newsy" stuff.

The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) on its part erred by inviting media persons to ostensibly share their views about the grand old party and to tell them what ails it and what the media pitch should be. Is it the role of the media to tell a political party how to conduct itself? The media is not expected to lean towards any political party. But that's an unwritten code that is broken time and again. And having invited the media to interact with Rahul Gandhi is it prudent on the part of the Congress party bosses to tell the media not to report the proceedings of the discussions. Of course Rahul Gandhi was honest enough to say that if the interaction is informal then he could be more open about a lot of issues otherwise he would be guarded in his responses. But that is neither here nor there. Rahul Gandhi is in Meghalaya to rejuvenate his Party which has suffered a major attrition in the past two months. That's understandable. What is not understood is why the AICC President should spend so much time discussing the BJP and Modi since the media is well briefed about those issues. The media wants to know the Congress road map for winning Meghalaya but that was not articulated. The Meghalaya Congress has not got its act together yet.

### Uphold credibility of judicial system

Editor,  
An expert Committee of the Bar Council of India is considering a plea to ban lawmakers - Members of Parliament and Members of the Assemblies - from doubling up as practicing advocates, saying they are salaried public servants and cannot ride two horses at the same time. The petition filed by Supreme Court advocate Ashwini Upadhyay contended that MPs and MLAs draw their salaries from the Consolidated Fund of India, hence are "employees of the state".  
The BCI Rule 49 also restricts a salaried employee from practicing as an advocate, the petition said. Many senior advocates practicing in the Supreme Court are also party politicians and sitting MPs and even Ministers. He contended that it amounted to "professional misconduct" that MLAs and MPs, who get salary and other benefits from the public fund, appear against the government. Some of these lawmakers even hold corporate retainerships. They appear against the State to defend their lawbreaker clients in the Court of Law, which is the matter of conflict of interest. While an advocate should be fully dedicated to his profession, legislators are also expected to dedicate their fulltime to the public and their constituents ahead of their personal and financial interests,' the petition said.

Justice Chelameswar by jointly addressing a press conference at his residence and joined by Justices Ranjan Gogoi, Madan Lokur and Kurien Joseph have merely denigrated the judicial system. In a democracy there may be differences and dissensions but since the issue was an intra-judiciary tussle and partly an executive-judiciary one, it could have been sorted out in camera and not by public airing in an unnecessary/undue haste at the cost of the dignity of the Apex Court and creation of delusion in the minds of the general people of the country.

Liberty of free expression is not to be confounded or confused with license to make unfounded allegations against any institution, much less the Judiciary. An Advocate in a profession as well as in his conduct should be diligent and conform to the requirements of the law by which an Advocate plays an important role in the preservation of justice system. Any violation of the principles of professional ethics by an Advocate is unfortunate and unacceptable. Any kind of deviance not only affects the system but corrodes the faith of the people at large.

The present unfortunate incident/indecent revelation is because of intermixing of Executive and Judiciary

Unstoppable politics has already entered the portals of the judiciary with the CPM General Secretary, indicating that the Opposition parties have started discussions on the present judicial crisis and the possibility of moving an impeachment motion in the Parliament against the Chief Justice of India.

He was referring to the crisis triggered by the accusation of judicial impropriety against the CJI of the Supreme Court by four senior-most judges. However, this reaction has not received immediate approval of any principal Opposition party. The Congress is maintaining meaningful silence on the proposal except for a cryptic comment of its President that the points raised by the judges are "extremely important". It put out a statement asking the judiciary to discuss within itself the issues raised by the four judges.

The Samajwadi Party spokesperson rejected the proposal for impeachment on the ground that it is an internal matter of the judiciary and must be resolved by the judges themselves. But, the party wants full details behind the issues. The DMK, TMC, and TDP are also not in favour of any drastic action against the CJI at this juncture. Importantly, the CPM has not given the grounds on which it wants to initiate impeachment proceedings.

The main complaint of the four judges was that "cases of national interest" were being allocated to "preferred Benches" in the apex court. The case in question related to the PILs on the death of the CBI judge BH Loya, who was hearing the alleged "fake encounter" case of Sohrabuddin Sheik, which were allocated to the Bench of the CJI.

As is known, the four judges addressed a press conference on 12th January to vent their grievances against the CJI - a move hitherto unknown. The Executive Body of the Supreme Court Bar

Functions continued for long by allowing dual functioning of lawyer-leaders like Kapil Sibal, Salman Khurshid and Manish Tewari in contravention of the provisions of the Constitution of India for keeping the Executive, and the Judiciary independent & survival of democracy.

The Advocates Act, 1961 & the Bar Council of India Rules, 1949 / 2016 need to be amended to ban/debar dual functioning politicians as lawmakers and lawyers.

Yours etc.,  
Samares Bandyopadhyay  
Advocate, Kolkata High Court, Kolkata

### Padmavati sacrifice and modern playboys

Editor,  
Every community has its own perspective on an issue. That usually varies with time. What was considered outrageous some thirty years ago is pretty normal now. Why? This calls for serious introspection vis-a-vis the social changes, and our acceptance of a lot of things. Now we consume anything which is seemingly mouth-watering, even though it may cause social indigestion and spiritual anemia.  
Well, almost the entire educated world condemned the 'Karni Sena' or Rajput community because they vehemently resisted a Bollywood film on Padmavati. These puritan

# Rift in Judiciary Keep politics at arm's length

By Dr S.Saraswathi

Association passed a resolution that all pending PIL petitions be transferred to the court of the CJI and if the CJI could not for some reason hear a PIL, it could be assigned to the Bench of one of the senior-most judges.

By convention, the CJI is the master of the roster and assigns various cases to different Benches. It is also an established practice that the CJI first hears important cases of public interest or sensitive matters. If he is not willing to undertake this for some reason, it should be assigned to the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court.

This practice was also confirmed by the Supreme Court in 1996 in a case pertaining to bribery charges against some former members of the higher judiciary to manipulate court orders in favour of some unrecognised medical colleges. The court held that it was "the duty of the CJI to assign judicial work to brother judges", and that "by doing so, he does not become a judge of his own cause". It established the authority of the CJI in allotting cases by stating that "it is contempt to imply that the CJI would assign it to a Bench which would not pass an order adverse to him".

The apex court said that if such allegations were to be considered...then no judge would be spared. The judge told the petitioner's lawyer that the allegation "amounted to a deliberate attempt to scandalise the institution and denigrate the system".

In the controversy raging today, five serious allegations are made by the four judges that the administration of the Supreme Court is not in order; some senior judges arrogated to themselves the "authority to deal with and pronounce upon" cases over the past months; administrative powers are misused by the CJI to selectively assign

cases to judges of his choice; cases of far-reaching consequences are assigned without any rational basis. Pertinently, the complaints are mostly about the basis of selection of Benches to hear cases and not about any individual judge.

Hardly a year ago, the question of declaration of assets by judges created a big controversy in which a former CJI was involved. The CJI's contention was that there was no need to "reach a consensus" and also that the apex court need not give advice to High Courts on the issue of declaration of assets. A judge of the Karnataka High Court was reported to have questioned the authority of the CJI to speak for all judges of the Supreme Court.

Protecting the dignity of the entire judicial system is the duty of not only the Bar and the Bench, but of the entire constitutional machinery established in the country. If politics of political parties is allowed to enter into this area, the consequences would be catastrophic for the future of democracy in the country where the judiciary is vested with the power to interpret the Constitution.

It is becoming all the more important since the State, meaning the Union or State Government, is increasingly becoming a party to litigations thereby bringing interested political parties to take sides openly. Divisive politics is fast spreading in the country under the guidance, encouragement and even leadership of political parties at times. The judiciary has to protect itself from external interference in order to preserve its independence.

Bouts of tension between judges may be happening and may be known to persons within the judiciary. They do not come in the open and become subject matter for public debates. The open schism enacted in an appeal court in Queensland in Australia in a murder case in 2015 between the President and the CJ is said to be a rare instance. It was depicted as a "gross

violation of judicial ethics".

The judges cannot be expected to form a cohesive block all the time on all issues. Diversity is also an essential component of fair and impartial justice. Dissenting verdicts and reversal of judgments on appeal are common. But, they are not samples of incoherence or rift, but differences caused by evidence and interpretation necessary for dispensation of "justice". The theory of "collegiality" was propounded by a judge of the Supreme Court in Canada to institutionalise them to work for common interest in getting the law right.

What we see as rift in the judiciary today is caused by non-judicial matters and external influence. Hence, it is a challenge to our basic democratic norms and practices. It is the responsibility of individual judges to safeguard the independence of the judiciary and protect the dignity of the entire judicial system against onslaughts from within and outside.

There are different practices of allocation of cases in various countries. In the US, all nine judges of the SC hear all cases and there is no separate Bench. In UK, cases are allocated on random basis and the President or Deputy President will sit on most cases and specialists in particular areas may be selected. In South Africa, there is no allocation of cases and a quorum of 8 or 9 out of 11 judges hear all cases. In Australia, a roster is proposed by the CJ for each case, but CJ's power is only recommendatory.

Political parties on the prowl are likely to pick the point of assignment of cases to Benches unless the judiciary maintains solidarity and keeps politics at arm's length. ---

INFA  
(The author is Former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

## Homelessness challenge

# Reprieve for slum dwellers

By Moin Qazi

A revolutionary step has been taken giving hope to millions of slum dwellers across the country.

The National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Act, 2017 which extends time till December 31, 2020 for protection of slums and unauthorised colonies from eviction in the national capital region, got President Kovind's assent. This law amends the earlier law under which the immunity ended on December 31, 2017.

One of the most challenging problems of our times is homelessness. While we continue to record improvements in dealing with poverty, homelessness has been plagued with myopic responses from policy pundits. The apathetic approach of successive governments is symptomatic of the disease that ails India's housing system.

Housing is often the bedrock of other development interventions: owning land boosts health profiles, educational outcomes and gender equality. Decent housing is a rising tide that lifts all boats. The converse is equally true. India's slums are horribly chaotic and sickening. Inmates live in cramped shacks made of rotting wood with rickety corrugated roofs. They are not only visual eyesores but also emblems of raw inequality.

Every day, more and more families find themselves in a struggle to keep a decent roof over their heads. There are millions of low-income families who live in overcrowded, inadequate and unsafe shacks made of rotting wood and corrugated steel, crammed between dusty paths and open sewers with virtually no sanitation, environmental risk factors and lack of even the barest infrastructure. They experience exclusion, evictions, discrimination, insecure tenure, and lack of hope of accessing adequate and affordable housing in their lifetimes.

The challenges for India are daunting, and homelessness has become a powerful monster. An estimated 65 million people, or 13.6 million households, are housed in urban slums according to the 2011 Census. It also showed that an additional 1.8 million people in India are homeless.

India is urbanising fast. Around 38 per cent of India will be urbanised by 2025. This would mean that some 540 million people will be living in urban areas by the said year. Experts estimate that 18 million households in India are in need of low-income housing. This, paired with a shrinking supply of land and high construction costs, is leading to a growing slum population. It is also estimated that by 2025, more than 42 per cent of India's population will be urban.

Providing stable and affordable housing is first major step towards establishing and sustaining a basic standard of living for every household. Several attempts to relocate slum dwellers to the city's fringes have gone in vain because the location restricts the residents' access to employment, schools and other amenities. Slum-dwellers prefer upgradation of existing facilities and secure tenancy. Evictions from slums and demolition of settlements have risen, as cities expand and are brought under programmes

that aim to create centres similar to those in western countries.

House prices have been stretching further and further away from normal wages, making it difficult for low income families to get on the housing ladder. Faced with the enormity of the housing need and financial weakness of those in need, the government builds low-income housing units and distributes these, at very high levels of subsidy. With no clear definition and a lot of fudging, anything is possible. So we get a plethora of "low-cost" home schemes with ambiguous rules for entitlement. Due to the high proportion of subsidy, only a few such units are built.

The housing units are usually attractive to members of the middle class, who often maneuver the eligibility rules and succeed in displacing the intended beneficiaries. We need a mass programme of social house building if we have to relieve the congestion of the homeless. Or still better, we should work on modest step-by-step upgrades to slums in partnership with residents replacing precarious cardboard or tin shanties with larger and higher-quality constructions.

The policy solutions can be loosely labelled; the government should improve the legal and regulatory environment and increase the supply of affordable, legal shelter with tenure security and access to basic services and amenities. The State should undertake physical upgradation of informal settlements, which can be accompanied by the provision of public services such as access to roads, electricity, water supply and sanitation. These services create a high level of perceived tenure security without a formal change of the legal status and have encouraged local improvements and investment.

The social consultancy firm Facility Solutions Group (FSG) says that up to 37 million households -- a quarter of India's urban population -- lives in informal housing, including slums. It recommends giving them basic property rights. The report argues that this would encourage residents to invest in home improvement and encourage municipalities to provide infrastructure and better services. The research specifically focuses on owner-occupants, those who don't pay rent and are not investing in improving their homes because of fear of eviction.

There are various categories of slums in India: unidentified, identified, recognised, notified and unauthorised housing. The report divides informal housing into three segments: insecure housing (unidentified slums) where people have no property rights and are most vulnerable to eviction; transitional housing (recognised slums and identified slums) which exist in government records and are gaining de facto rights; secure housing (notified slums and unauthorised housing) where people have some property rights and can't be evicted summarily. In India, slums classified as "unobjectionable" are eligible to be upgraded. These are in non-residential zones, on low-lying lands, or where roads and other public infrastructure have been proposed.-INFA

“No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men.”

--- Thomas Carlyle

## The Shillong Times

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### A Populist Budget

SOME have termed the BJP-led NDA budget for 2018-19 a “Sub ka Saath” budget as it cuts across all sectors and categories of citizens. This was unmistakably a budget aimed at the 2019 general elections. Hence it tries to please the voter, the poor, the farmer, women, youth, scheduled tribes and scheduled castes et al. While North East India as a region was not mentioned and the budget was largely pan-Indian, the Ministry for Development of the North East Region (MDoNER) was allocated Rs 3000 crore for 2018-19. This is an 11.8 percent rise from the previous year’s which was Rs 2682.45 crore. That the budget looks at a Restructured Bamboo Mission fund of Rs 1200 crores also means that the North Eastern Region will get a substantial outlay, being the home of the bamboo. The region is also getting an allocation of Rs 1014.09 crore for aviation infrastructure which would enhance air connectivity within the region. However, the problem of air transport of perishables such as flowers and niche products from the region still remains a challenge. Interestingly the Sela Pass a high altitude mountain pass will see the construction of a tunnel under it for enhancing tourism prospects although knowledgeable sources believe this is more to do with military expediency.

The highlight of this Budget is the health insurance scheme of Rs five lakh per annum for 10 crore vulnerable families which will amount to 50 crore beneficiaries. This is essentially for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation. Finance Minister, Jaitley terms this as the world’s largest government funded health care programme. This government had drawn much flak for not addressing farmer’s distress and farmer suicides. It was therefore not surprising that the Budget speaks of doubling farmers’ income by 2022 and that it would keep Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the all unannounced crops of kharif at least at one and half times of their production cost. Jaitley termed this as a ‘historic decision’ and was confident it would yield results. While Jaitley read out the Budget he missed no opportunity to point out that reforms and changes had largely put a halt to corruption. Prime Minister Modi on his part stated that the Budget will provide the citizens of India, “ease of living.”

### LOOKING BACK

May 14, 1989

### PM lashes out at opposition leaders

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi said today that opposition leaders who were talking about “value based politics” had been either indicated by courts or inquiry commission. Corruption charges have been leveled against many opposition Chief Ministers but none of them removed, they still continues in power. How could such people level

corruption charges against others, he asked.

Addressing the Congress Seva Dal worker here today, the Prime Minister said the opposition had miserably failed in ruling their states. Now they wanted to come to power at the centre. Those who failed at the regional level could never rule at the centre.

# Patronage versus populist democracy

By Patricia Mukhim

In his book, Populism and Patronage: Why populists win elections in India, Asia and Beyond, Paul D Kenny says after Mahatmas Gandhi’s assassination in 1948, the turbulent politics of the Indian Independence Movement was quickly curtailed. This happened because the Congress government led by Jawaharlal Nehru engineered a state of democratic stability through distribution of patronage to its political supporters. But this model of governance collapsed within a few years of Nehru’s death. The one-party dominant system descended into a crisis. A weakened central leadership resulted in infighting in the Congress leading to electoral losses in several states in 1967.

In 1969 the Congress Party split up and Indira Gandhi took the reins of the majority faction. Indira had realised that the regional satraps who broke away from the Congress had actually weakened the hold of the Party over the states. She decided to establish direct contact with the people. To establish her authority Indira Gandhi had to push through some populist policies, the major one being the nationalisation of banks and bringing to an end the privy purses of the royalty of India – the Rajahs and Maharajahs who once ruled their respective territories before the British united India.

Like Narendra Modi, Indira Gandhi too used a new media strategy to connect directly to the people. But she also found out that patronage democracy through party networks had its merits and trying to win elections without the help of the regional satraps was a rather difficult task. Indira Gandhi then resorted to a sort of tyrannical rule by suspending democracy in July 1975. This led to a series of abuses such as the clampdown on press freedom, sending political rivals and dissenters to prison and Sanjay Gandhi unleashed his forced sterilisation programme in the name of family planning. This black spot in India’s post independence history ended after twenty one months when elections were declared in 1977 where Indira was badly defeated. She returned to power in 1980 and ruled until her death in 1984. By the time Rajiv Gandhi took over in 1984 the party network was in a shambles. After that it was populism that won votes not

patronage through party networks. To explain populism better, Kenny says this is a political movement that links political leaders to supporters without any party network. Populism is where personalistic leaders seek to establish unmediated links with mass constituencies who are otherwise free of existing party affiliations and institutional ties, in their quest to gain and retain power. This is exactly the politics played out in Meghalaya. Here candidates usually mobilize a diverse support base of unattached voters and make rhetorical appeals to a virtuous “people” in opposition to a corrupt establishment. This is what Rahul Gandhi did when he came to Shillong and got the state Congress machinery to round up different stakeholders so that he could pitch his campaign around the venality of the BJP. In doing so the Gandhi scion diverted peoples’ attention from the anti-incumbency factor that the Congress government is suffering due to its seven year rule. It was a clever strategy and it seemed to work because several groups of people representing a cross section of society from church leaders to traditional heads, all listened intently while Rahul Gandhi held forth that the Congress Party will deliver the people of this state from the ugly clutches of the BJP and its ally the NPP.

Interestingly no one is even talking about the regional parties. They have slipped out of our collective consciousness because of their own infirmities. What is the point of the UDP, HSPDP, KHNAM, PDF, GNC – a total of five regional fronts fighting elections on separate planks. What prevents them from uniting on a single platform if the idea is to serve the people? But that is hardly the case. Each of these leaders is a chief ministerial aspirant. That is the perennial problem that has plagued the regional parties of Meghalaya for decades and nothing much has changed. Their appeal is to vote them to power so that they can safeguard our culture and tradition. Other than that they have no solid electoral agenda to sell to the public. And

actually no one believes that they mean business since they will never be able to get a majority. They will always have to align with a national party. This time they have not been upfront as to whom they will align with, post the results on March 3. One of the regional party honchos has denied having any truck with the NPP. That leaves an alliance with the Congress Party which of course is an old marriage of convenience tried out in the past.

Hence when people speak of ideology here it sounds rather strange. There is no ideology worth its salt hence every party must strive to be populist. It serves those who appeal for populist votes to have constituents that are not deeply embedded in existing party networks. Perhaps the Congress Party in Meghalaya and elsewhere has realised that it takes a lot of money, time and energy to mobilise party networks right down to the grassroots so it is better to appeal to populist voters who can be won over by short term promises and also by distribution of freebies. The breakdown of the party-voter connect is complete. Even in the BJP it is the RSS network and their zeal which wins votes rather than the political party machinery. Any wonder than why the RSS is wielding so much clout?

Patronage democracy is a system where the political party is made stable by a constant maintenance of a complex system of quid pro quo, in which money, goods and services flow from the party in control of the government through subordinate brokers to supporters. This ensures that the votes flow back in return. But there is a rupture in this patronage network that links political parties and voters. In the patronage system political parties are linked to voters by senior office bearers of the party who are given “posts” from which some financial benefits accrue. The problem with this arrangement is that every elected MLA from the ruling party would want his/her major supporter to be given such perks. Besides, that there are also those party MLAs from the ruling party who have lost the elections but have to be accommodated in such posts to allow for mobility so they can continue with the party work. Alas! Most of those who are appointed to such posts forget the party and become self-serving individuals who throw their

weights around and thereby manage to alienate the ordinary grass-roots supporters. This is where patronage democracy collapses and populist democracy or direct appeal by candidates to their constituents work. The only problem is that today the constituents have got wiser. They don’t want to wait five years for development that may never happen. They have been victims of broken promises for too long. So they prefer ready cash before voting and let the government that comes in do what it likes. How does it matter to them anyway?

The reason one speaks about the Congress Party in the context of Meghalaya is because this is the party that has ruled Meghalaya for the longest period. Its slow decay here is due to internal rivalries where supporters of the party that have served it well in fair weather and foul are not given due recognition whereas the contractor class with its fluctuating loyalties is allowed free rein. In fact it is this contractor class that is the downfall of most political parties and results in the collapse of patronage democracy.

Populist democracy however has its pitfalls as Kenny summarises. He says that when populist leaders attain power they erode the formal and informal institutional constraints on their authority and personalize power to such an extent as to challenge the very basis of democracy. We have seen such leaders emerge in our own backyards. Many of them use the party platform simply because the party system is still the basis of our democracy and because governments are made up of political parties. Otherwise, these populists who win through sheer money power would have ridden roughshod over any institutional handicaps. They would have used the government machinery as their private vehicle and distributed public goods as private patronage. Even with the checks and balances that is how they distribute the MLA scheme.

So as Meghalaya readies itself for the polls one can only ruminate about the results. But it’s going to be one hell of a task to predict the elections results this time. For now every political party is winning.

Board is to go for thorough proof reading before the book is prescribed for the students. On the other hand, I am also shocked when I see that most of the topics or the contents of the books are almost the same with the old books. Let me also question the Board and the Education Department of Meghalaya whether the changing of books or prescribing of new books for students is simply a business or whether it is meant to help students to update their knowledge according to the times?

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

**Another error in new MBOSE book**

Editor,  
There is a saying, “I was born intelligent but education ruined me”. This is exactly happens when the book prescribed to the

Modi pushes globalization overseas and protectionism at home

## India’s customs duties highest for ASEAN

By Subrata Majumder

Prime Minister Narendra Modi placed himself in a paradoxical situation in the World Economic Forum at Davos. While he was assertive for protection of globalisation in the summit, he is toeing protectionism at home with the hope that it will give fresh life to the Make in India initiative, which flopped. He reverted to import substitution and increased import tariff to give protection to domestic manufacturers. In the summit, he said “many countries are now becoming more and more self-centred. It seems globalisation is sinking”. He quibbled, “As opposed to globalisation, the forces of protection are emerging”

Given the lackluster progress of Make in India, the government reverted to import substitution programme - a pre-WTO protectionist measure - to infuse a new lease of life in the initiative. For example, the government made mandatory to procure railway equipment for metro projects from domestic sources. According to the policy, a minimum of 75 percent of metro coaches and critical signaling equipment are to be procured from domestic sources by the central and state level metro project authorities.

The government raised custom duty on various electronic goods in December last, embracing mobile handsets, microwave ovens, television sets LED lamps and cameras.

Today, India’s custom duties are the highest, compared to ASEAN countries. While India’s simple average MFN rate is 13 percent, the rates are much lower in Indonesia (7-8 percent), Malaysia (5-6 percent), Myanmar (5-6 percent) and Vietnam (10-11 percent). In addition to MFN rate in India additional duties are imposed to protect the domestic industries, taking the effective duties more than double of MFN rates.

The last World Economic Forum at Davos ended in shivers, with Trump quieting the summit to advocate his America First policy. The Guardian said Davos, without Donald Trump, was like Hamlet without prince. Toeing the Modi’s Make in India move - an attempt for inward growth - Trump’s move for America First acted as a tool for growth without polarising on global growth parameters. The main aim for inward development for both Modi and Trump was to create job opportunities. Given this economic philosophy of the two leaders, globalisation was feared on feeble plank.

Modi’s chant for globalisation reinforced Chinese President Xi Jinping’s assertion in its favour. But, why did Modi echo Xi Jinping’s advocacy for globalisation, despite having political bitterness and huge trade deficit, which mounted the pressure on BOP. More than 50 percent of India’s trade deficit is due to China’s dumping goods in India. Is it that business interests forced Modi to put a lid on political bitterness and trade deficit and praised Jinping’s leadership for globalization?

During the three years period of Modi regime, Make in India initiative has faced paradoxical trends of investment. While foreign investors were gung ho to invest in India, domestic investors were reluctant to put their money, despite India ramping up in the Ease of Doing Business and

growth in the world. Given this state of affairs of investment, Modi has no other choice, but to rely on foreign investment.

In recent times, China made a volte-face in diluting its rigidity towards India. Its backtrack in the Doklam standoff and increasing investment in India in search for a bigger market after Trump’s threat of tariff restriction unraveled a new look at India by China for clinching better economic engagement, while burying the hatchet of political bickering. India-China economic relation increased manifold during the Modi administration. Unlike his predecessors, Modi tried to woo Chinese investment with two main goals. First, to increase Chinese investment and second, use Chinese investment to reduce the wide trade deficit gap by curbing cheap Chinese exports, instead of using anti-dumping measures.

The attempts yielded results. Chinese companies, which were losing business in their domestic market because of yuan appreciation, were attracted by India’s higher growth trajectory, which comprised large middle class and non-aging people. Six top brand Chinese smartphone makers (Xiaomi, Oppo, OnePlus, Gionee, Vivo, Huawei) have established their manufacturing facilities in India.

India accounted for 60 to 70 of the global sales of these Chinese handset companies. Global sales account for 30 to 35 percent of the total sales of these companies. In a way, India acted as an engine for the global presence of these Chinese companies. For Xiaomi’s smartphones, India accounts for 67 percent of its global sales, for Vivo 73 percent, for Oppo, it is 48 percent and for Gionee it is one-fourth. A Chinese company has become the fourth in the series to manufacture metro coaches in India as a part of India’s drive for import substitution.

With Modi-Xi Jinping relations entering into a new horizon, Chinese investors rushed into India with mega investment proposals. During 2016, Chinese companies proposed US \$2.3 billion worth of investment in India.

Responding to the Chinese initiative, Indian think tank NITI Aayog showed renewed interest in Chinese investment, despite the security concern. Underpinning the concern over a large trade deficit, Indian honchos asserted that India cannot forever remain a Chinese market without broader economic ties. Both NITI Aayog and the National Reform Commission of China entered several agreements of economic cooperation in November 2016, embracing energy, urban development, Digital India as well as greater access of Indian IT firms in China.

China Railway Corporation (CRC) is carrying out feasibility studies of high speed trains between Chennai and New Delhi. It will be no wonder if China can grab the construction deal of the longest route of high speed train and could pose a major challenge to Japanese hegemony in the high speed train field. China has already proven its capability after winning the Jakarta - Bandung 150 km high speed rail project against stiff competition from Japan. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

### MBOSE Exams Schedule

Editor,  
Regarding the routine for the Class XI Science Exam, 2018. MBOSE has released a notification (no. 803) dated 29th January, 2018 regarding the rescheduling for two subjects, one of which is Computer Science. This has favoured only the students opting for Computers, as after the Chemistry exam on 20th March, 2018, they will have a gap of 5 days to prepare for that exam. Thus, the Computer students can chiefly concentrate on the other 5 subjects till the exam commences and enough time for preparing for Computers during the 5 day gap. On the contrary students having Biology have a gap of only 1 day to prepare for the exam which includes the vast course of Botany and Zoology. This gives an upper

hand to students having Computers in comparison to students with Biology, which is bound to affect their results and is definitely not fair. Through this letter I want to request the MBOSE authority to do equal justice to all the students by rescheduling the Biology exams too.

Yours etc.,  
Dipjoy Gupta,  
Via email

### ( II )

Editor,  
In the MBOSE Class XII examination there is only one day’s gap between Chemistry and Biology whereas for other subjects there is a gap of five days. This schedule is unjustified as it privileges some students over others. I request the MBOSE authorities to rework the examination schedule so that all students are on an equal footing.

Yours etc.,  
S Boro,  
Via email

### Tolerance for intolerance!

Editor,  
Apropos the article, “Why attack children? The loss of innocence” by Ananya S Guha (ST, Jan 30, 2018), the film, Padmavati is based on Malik Muhammad Jayasi’s poem which according to historians is a fiction and not fact. It is a shame that unruly mobs are using fiction as a pretext for taking the law into their own hands. These Frankenstein monsters have taken to such inhuman extremes as to openly issue death threats to Deepika Padukone just for portraying the character of Padmavati in the film and even attack and pelt hapless school children with stones. It is a pity that our administration has miserably

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

### Another error in new MBOSE book

Editor,  
There is a saying, “I was born intelligent but education ruined me”. This is exactly happens when the book prescribed to the

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.

*“Character is power; it makes friends, draws patronage and support and opens the way to wealth, honor and happiness.”*

--- John Howe

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.172 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2018

### Rs 70 crore conundrum

MUCH has been made of the Rs 70 crore promised by the NDA Government's Tourism Minister, KJ Alphons to the churches. His idea was to turn the church precincts into tourist centres after the needed makeover. Under normal circumstances this promise would not have been taken amiss. But this is election time in Meghalaya and it is easy to misinterpret Alphon's statements and to see it as an electoral inducement, coming as it does at this juncture. Such a faux-pas would not have happened if Alphons was properly briefed about the sentiments of people here vis-à-vis the BJP. The Party is seen as antithetical to Christian values and practices. The close links between the BJP and its social arm the RSS is undeniable. On January 21 last, Mohan Bhagwat the RSS supremo had stated in Guwahati that the aim of the RSS is to make India a Hindu Rashtra where everyone will embrace Hindutva. Such statements are sure to alienate the indigenous tribal population, some of whom follow their indigenous faith and others Christianity.

Prime Minister Modi inducted KJ Alphon into the ministry mainly to assure the Christians of Kerala that the BJP is neither anti-Christian nor anti-beef eating. Since Meghalaya is soon voting for its next government, Alphons was made the BJP's Christian mascot in this Christian majority state. The problem with Alphons is that he has not forgotten his former avatar of the Demolition man of Delhi when he served as the Commissioner of the Delhi Development Authority in 1994. That avatar is long forgotten by the people here, many of whom have hardly heard of his exploits in Delhi. It's a different matter that Alphons spent time as a seminarian in Shillong. But his exposure to the culture and sensitivities of the people here must have been limited for he would not have made that blatant offer of Rs 70 crore to the churches - an offer that has now backfired even as the Congress Party has turned into an electoral plank and termed that offer as a bribe by the BJP to the churches here. While the churches are not expected to be partisan they have evidently taken an anti-BJP stance to protect their interests. The attendance of church leaders in large numbers to meet Congress President Rahul Gandhi recently reveals their anxiety and the fact that they look to the Congress Party to fight their ideological battle with the Hindutva brigade. Whether this works remains to be seen. Should the church not have remained neutral is a question many are asking.

# Legacy of our political & social anxiety

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The pre-poll state of affairs in Meghalaya is bizarre because of the unprecedented movement of political troops like mercenaries whose anthill and hideouts are under siege. But more practically it is because the state is lacking statesmen and political leaders with vision. These anxieties have been expressed in various platforms of social media and other social networking sites. Right thinking electorates are confused and disappointed as to who they should cast their votes for while exercising their franchise. A 'NOTA' option is another alternative but since 'NOTA' cannot be the winner but the one who secures the second highest number of votes will be considered elected this is as good as dud option. The concept of NOTA may be good but it is also undemocratic because it contradicts and insults the wishes of the majority. In fact it should filter out unwanted candidates through re-election process till they disappear from the fray.

Furthermore, elections are in fact an opportunity to bring social change as perceived by most of the urban electorates who are more educated than the rural folks. But the sad thing is that the rural constituencies constitute more than 80% of seats in the house. And election times in the rural segments are nothing but a fighting match between groups of people who do not see societal change as a goal for the collective progress but merely a victory against the other group. And the primary issues within these groups are merely those which are personal, emotional and local in nature. Therefore, as a state we have inherited this type of thinking which is detrimental to the legislative process. And because of this, a conglomerate and coalition of heterogeneous and redundant personalities is inevitable in the next government too. But however, one thing that is clear in the minds of everyone is a genuine desire for change.

Yes, it is a common perception that change will happen with every electoral change, but what sort of change? Is it political change or social change? Social change can be defined as the sum total of the progress of all social indicators in the society or country. While political change is just a shift

of approach, style and nature of governance. India has achieved a political change from colonial governance and inherited most of the properties and characteristic from the British. But in terms of social development and progress nothing much has happened in comparison with other nations. And the reason for this is that there is a constant tussle between the opportunist and the true reformer. This is evident from the allegations and counter allegations by parties against one another and the excessive increase of candidates' assets and wealth.

A society in fact has the

**The new political outfit floated at that time is just an effort to polarize the people of the state. It has grossly misled the illiterate and has not contributed anything to the legislative and governance process of the newly formed state.**

capacity to progress but if it fails to understand this, then it is also meaningless to talk about past achievements. Social change or social transformation has been and is the subject matter for everyone especially the young generation. But it is also a goal in a civilized world where people always anticipate a better level of services in life. Though it is the subject matter of social science to know how and why changes happen but to understand the chain of events that lead to progress or the problems that prevent the society from progressing is indeed worth analyzing. We should not forget that the world we are living in today bears much of the legacy inherited from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards. This can be ascribed as the dawn for large scale corporations, new political alignments and other major innovative developments and technological advancements that further gave birth to new changes and development. In a country and state like ours, social change implies nothing more than the improvement of basic

necessities of life such as good drinking water, good roads, good community health care, good educational system, etc which are at present in a pathetic state and of inferior quality compared to other countries. But for God's sake we are living in the twenty first century where some fortunate ones can even afford to live in a space shuttle free from earthly pollution.

When India acquired a new political order, the tussle of power too began to surface which has pushed the efforts and motives of true reformers to the grave. A country which is dominated by strong religious sentimentalism and illiteracy; the tendency to indulge in sectarianism, superstitious belief and practice is very

common which also leads to various kinds of inhuman activities. Coupled with caste differences and deprivation, the sudden elevation of common man to governmental opportunity has further paved the way for opportunists to participate freely in governmental affairs. They are the parasites of society and are there just to fulfill their personal agenda. Our political masters at that time too have failed to eradicate these problems and rid these parasites from the helm of the state's affairs. But instead they have compromised on many occasions for the sake of establishing themselves permanently in the seat of power. It has happened with many political parties in the past and it will happen with new parties as well unless they realize the danger. Today we can see many such parasitic personalities with no contribution, vision and strategy for social changes. Yet they are honoured by political parties for the sake of capturing power (read retired bureaucrats).

In Meghalaya the legacy of this turmoil dates back to the inception of our statehood. Our patriarchs most of whom were learned men were strongly driven by the idea of self governance

which has also been echoed everywhere. And this has also led to the overwhelming mandate of regional governance in the first Assembly election. But the rural population has a limited understanding and places no significance to the idea of self-governance. Therefore, when a fellow kinsman propagates local parochial issues, that fellow becomes the hero for that segment of the population but a stumbling block to the progress of the entire community. The new political outfit floated at that time is just an effort to polarize the people of the state. It has grossly misled the illiterate and has not contributed anything to the legislative and governance process of the newly formed state. The emergence of such outfits without clear vision for the state has shattered the spirit of true reformation and finally ended up in a tussle for power and popularity. It was also a precedence that has paved the way for further division and split in a minority state. But nonetheless, it has also empowered common and illiterate people to venture into the political domain that has brought our little state into a deep imbroglio. The situation is further aggravated by the tactics of horse trading pioneered by the national party that has further bewildered our self-centered public representatives.

Looking at the traditional system of governance too which once upon a time was pure, just and infallible we see them in a mess today without any uniformity other than benefitting oneself especially by those at the helm of affairs. This happens in most of the Dorbar Shnong, Raid and Hima and even in District Councils. It seems that honesty and sincerity to serve the community has completely disappeared from the hearts of people and everyone is looking for an opportunity to secure his/her own first.

A state is defined by the nature of people and the nature of people is reflected by the class of representatives they project to govern their affairs. Looking at the kind of representatives we have sent to the state assembly it would appear that we the electors need to mend our faults.

### Menace of hawkers!

Editor,

The Jowai Municipal Board had done a commendable job by removing the roadside vendors in Iawmusiang Jowai. An announcement was even made a few months ago regarding their removal. Yet vendors continue to practice roadside vending in spite of the order given by the JMB. Open spaces for vendors to sell their goods are available but as soon as afternoon comes vendors would become a hindrance to the pedestrians and as a result cause congestion from Shyiap market to the market near CNI. Therefore, I urge the authorities concerned to be strict about enforcing the order on hawkers.

Yours etc.,  
Omarga Laloo,  
Mynthong,  
Jowai.

### Rescheduling of Biology exams!

Editor,

I am a student of Biology of MBOSE and I am facing a huge obstacle with the 2018 examination schedule for Class XII. We have only one day to cope up with the entire syllabus of Biology which is very vast and it is not possible to do so with a gap of just one day. I therefore request the MBOSE authorities to give us a few more days of gap to enable us to revise our Biology lesson. Since they have rescheduled the Computer exams we too need a similar condonation.

Yours etc.,  
Chesterfill Iawphniaw,  
Via email

### (II)

Editor,  
With regard to the declared MBOSE HSSLC SCIENCE routine, I as a

student of Biology feel very uneasy with the routine. It's quite unfair to see that Computer exam has a gap of 5 days whereas there is only 1 day's gap for Biology. The Biology syllabus is such a vast one that one would not be able to revise it within a day. As the Computer examination is being rescheduled, we request MBOSE to apply the same yardstick to Biology as well to allow us more time for revision. Since both the Biology and Computer students have to compete under the same playing field it will be very difficult for the Biology students to come up at par with the Computer students. From my side, I feel that all students should be treated equally before the Board. I don't want my younger brothers and sisters to lose their trust in the Board. MBOSE needs to win our trust.

Yours etc.,  
Silencegist Sanglyne  
Class XII Science student  
Via email

### Budgetary rural push not enough to deal with farm distress

## Modi may opt for snap Lok Sabha poll before the hype is off

By Nitya Chakraborty

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has played a gamble with his Government's last full budget for 2018-19 by staking the BJP's political future with the response from the country's distressed farming community to his budget proposals for reviving the rural sector. The Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has given no sops to the middle classes by offering any concessions in the income tax rates. The industrial sector has been assured of a big push through massive investment in the infra sector but the focus is solely on the rural areas including the announcement of the ambitious government funded medicare for the poor.

The Prime Minister earlier announced the intention of the government to double the income of the farmers by 2022 and now in this budget, the Finance Minister has announced that the Government wants the farmers to earn 1.5 times the production cost and the minimum selling price for the kharif crops has been set at 1.5 times the produce price. The centre will work with the states to see that all farmers get a fair price. All the recent reports submitted to the Government have mentioned of the farm distress and the need for modern marketing methods so that the farmers are able to sell their produce at their

a hype over the bonanza for the agriculture sector but if there is no immediate impact on the life of the farmers and adequate jobs are not generated, the hype of the Modi government over the farmer friendly budget, will be exhausted and the people will start assessing the situation on the basis of the hard reality they are facing in their day to day living.

The Modi Government has enjoyed the advantages of declining oil price in the first three years of its rule. This has given it big cushion to maintain the fiscal balance but this advantage is going as the prices have shot up in the fourth year and there is every possibility that the prices will further go up leading to steep hike in the import bill for oil. Prime Minister himself is getting feedback from his advisers that if the oil price touches US\$ 80 a barrel by the end of this year and there is some problem with the next monsoons, the economic situation will deteriorate from the end of 2018 making the political mood of the people difficult for the BJP and the Sangh Parivar in early 2019. The farmers package and the rural programmes on which the PM and his advisers are depending for a turnaround, will bring no relief to the BJP. Before the situation goes down further to the discomfiture of the saffrons, Prime Minister may opt for Lok Sabha poll along with

**The Modi Government has enjoyed the advantages of declining oil price in the first three years of its rule. This has given it big cushion to maintain the fiscal balance but this advantage is going as the prices have shot up in the fourth year and there is every possibility that the prices will further go up leading to steep hike in the import bill for oil.**

chosen time and get some margin. The present methods of storage and marketing are still outdated and act against the interests of farmers. The budget has announced the creation of an Rs. 2000 crore infra fund to strengthen the market connectivity.

The budget proposals make big allocations for agriculture in general but the social tensions and the religious divide have affected adversely the informal sector of rural economy, especially the agriculture, animal husbandry and the trade in cattles. This sector contributes in a big way to the rural growth and employment but still, the situation is not under control leading to continuing tensions among the daily wage earners and the farm workers. The demonetization and the social tensions have led to job erosion in the informal sector. That is not being taken into account. The farm sector will not have real growth if the underlying tensions in the rural areas are not dealt with. The recent tensions and riots in Kasganj of Uttar Pradesh indicate that the situation in the BJP ruled states is far from normal and the most affected are the people working in the informal sector.

There is no composite programme for big job generation in the economy in the interim period. The programmes announced in the budget will take its own time and it will have very little impact on the employment market in the next one year. The Government's propaganda machinery may try to create

the state assemblies for Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to project the elections as a referendum on the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The political situation may turn hostile further in the poll bound states this year as the indications from Rajasthan suggest. The Congress has been charged now and despite some hiccups, the opposition parties including the Congress are seriously making efforts to take on BJP unitedly. Prime Minister has been talking of the need for holding elections simultaneously in Lok Sabha and state assemblies and this thinking has to do with his assessment that without projecting him as the supreme leader, the state BJP chief ministers may not be able to achieve any success in the assembly elections. Their own performance is being rejected by the voters of their respective states. All the three states Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh face the prospects of acute anti-incumbency.

The 2018-19 budget proposals will be used by the centre and the BJP led mass organizations to project the Modi government as pro-poor and pro-farmer, the Opposition has to unitedly fight and expose the BJP government's policies. The opposition parties have to put their houses in order very fast and forge a common programme so that they are not caught napping if the Prime Minister gives them a surprise by announcing snap poll later this year. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Defrauded by IndiaPost

Editor,  
We often hear about parcels being received in a damaged condition. However, an incident took place yesterday that was absolutely shocking. I had a parcel arrive from Hong Kong from a well known business that cleared customs and reached my local post office(Laitumkhrah, Shillong. PIN code: 793003). It was handed to me completely empty of its contents.

The evening before, I had received a handwritten note without any seal or stamp from the post office requesting me to come pick up a parcel from the post office stating that it had arrived 'torn'. When I arrived at the post office last morning, however, I found the parcel not 'torn' but it had been opened and emptied of its contents. It weighed 1.78kgs when it left Hong Kong, and now blue ball point pen writing on the box indicated that it weighed only 262

grams.

A gentleman who identified himself as J. K. Shrivastava, informed me that I could either accept or refuse the parcel because perhaps 'customs officers' had opened it and removed all the contents, or alluding to the possibility that the seller was a fraud saying that, "these days there are a lot of problems with parcels from Hong Kong". I refused to accept the parcel.

When I asked the said gentleman if he could put a seal on the unofficial note he refused. When I asked him to accept a complaint he refused to do so also. He insisted that I should forget about the case because sometimes we have to accept a loss in life. Since the postmaster was not available I sent my complaint to her by registered post from Laitumkhrah post office itself.

After talking to other people in my locality it was brought to my notice that

several people have suffered this and even worse situations where their parcels never landed up but showed up on tracking as delivered. Some others received their opened parcels empty of their contents. No one has redressed any of their grievances either. What irks me about the whole thing is that we are expected to accept this as a the new age of service where bodies such as these ask us to come pick up parcels rather than deliver them themselves; where complains lead to being rushed pillar to post as if we lived in a failed autocratic state.

By addressing this letter to you I want ask any other people who have suffered similar problems to pursue their case through RTI to find out where such theft is taking place so that whoever is up to such mischief is brought to book. This is what I intend to do if my grievance is not addressed.

Yours etc.,  
Jansher A B Nongrum  
Shillong -3

# DESIGNING DREAMS

*Designer Kabita Baruah Medhi likes to keep it simple*

**N**ortheast India is an amalgamation of rich tradition and heritage. Each region is unique in its own way, connected by a thread of strong cultural values. Dresses worn by the natives of this region are known for their unique use of colours and designs. What sets apart a creative person from the rest is the fusion of these varied designs and creating a beauty out of it.

Kabita Baruah Medhi, who hails from Morigaon district of Assam, is a fashion designer by profession. She is the first Assamese woman to have opened up a boutique shop, Mili's Choice, in the picturesque town of Shillong in 2014.

Despite professional success in garnering her client's love towards her work, Kabita likes to keep it simple. For her, designing is passion rather than a profession.

## Humble Start:

It has been rightly said the best knowledge starts from home. Kabita's mother, Minu Baruah, is an expert weaver of Assamese garments. After her matriculation, Kabita started giving a helping hand to her mother in her work. This was her first tryst with weaving. Later, when she completed her Master's in Philosophy, Kabita got deeply involved with the process of designing and weaving. "My mother was my backbone and continues to be one while I shifted my lanes from a student of Philosophy to an amateur designer," Kabita said.

Kabita got married to Dr BN Medhi in 1997. Her second innings was a crucial juncture in shaping her ideas and creativity into a proper dimension.

## Shillong Phase:

Kabita shifted to Shillong with her husband in the summer of 1998. The idea of settling down in an entirely new place and getting accustomed to a new culture intimidated the family. While her husband started his job at the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), Kabita took control of their new home.

After the birth of their first baby, she went on to do a course in Fashion Designing from Sikkim Manipal University. After that, there was no looking back.

Kabita registered herself as an authorised designer of Silk Mark of India and immediately set up a handloom at the famed town of Sualkuchi. For the next couple of years, Kabita dedicated herself to understanding the amazing motifs of Khasi, Jaintias and Garos. She started working on



(Above) Kabita with actress Barsha Rani Bishaya and a model flaunts a modified dhara for special occasion;

the Khasi's 'Dhara'— a special dress worn by the Khasi women mostly during weddings, woven on the fine silk of Sualkuchi.

She constantly juggles her home in Shillong and her loom centre in Sualkuchi till this day to keep a tab on the work done by the weavers.

Kabita helped her mother in setting up another two handlooms in Morigaon and Sualkuchi, respectively. At present, four weavers are now

working in four of her handlooms in both of these places. Kabita is very selective in choosing her weavers and place abundant trust on them, who she considers as extended members of her family.

Her trust is now bearing fruit as one of her main weavers, Anu Rajbongshi, will be conferred with the Purvashree Award of 2018 for her immense perseverance and dedication in the field of weaving.

## Setting up Shop:

By 2012, Kabita felt an immediate need for a dedicated outlet where she can listen to and meet the needs of her growing clientele, especially the locals. By this time, her husband had left his job at NEIGRIHMS and started practising at his clinic at Fire Brigade area of Shillong.

Realising the need for an outlet, Dr Medhi helped her wife in opening her first shop on the ground floor of his clinic and aptly named it 'Mili's Choice-Your one-stop ethnic destination in Shillong' in 2014.

Kabita said, "It took me 18 years to realise my dream of having a quaint space of my own and it would have been never possible without my husband's support."

Mili's Choice is now an important landmark point of the area.

## Work and exhibition:

Kabita now brilliantly fuses the beautiful motifs of Assamese tradition with that of Khasi's Jainsem and vice versa. She has a deep interest towards the colour combination of Red and Golden (Guna).

As an authorised designer of silk, Kabita has exhibited her work at the Guwahati and Jorhat branches of North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi), organised by Silk Mark of India. At the East India Fashion Week in Guwahati recently, Kabita presented her exquisite collection of designs in the inaugural show of the day.

The showstopper for her collections, Barsha Rani Bishaya, an acclaimed Assamese actress, walked down the ramp in a beautiful Mekhela-Chador of myriad hues. She mentioned Kabita's designs as very innovative and realistic in nature. "I am looking forward to wearing more of her designs in the near future. It's amazing as for how beautifully she has fused the season's mood with bright colours," Barsha said.

Kabita's scintillating show garnered immense love as she walked down the ramp with Barsha amid applause from the audiences. Her work in the fusion of Garo's Dakmanda, Jaintia's Dhara-Muka (Muga), Khasi's Dhara and Assamese Mekhela-Chador made a lasting impression on the public.

Kabita Baruah Medhi's endeavour of setting up her own space might have taken time but she has successfully made a mark in the business in a very short time. With the constant support of her family, she is now aiming for the stars.

(Contributed by Prabir Kumar Talukdar)



## Digital literacy is all you need

By Ranjan K Baruah

**D**igital marketing has become common nowadays. Well, the most essential knowledge needed to be associated with this field is knowledge about technology.

Initial knowledge should be digital literacy. Anyone who is an expert in internet may get involved in digital marketing. There are short-term courses designed for digital marketing.

Digital media is so pervasive that consumers have access to information any time and any place they want it.

Digital media is an ever-growing source of entertainment, news, shopping and social interaction, and consumers are now exposed not just to what your company says about your brand, but what the media, friends, relatives, peers, are saying as well. And they are more likely to believe them than you. People want brands they can trust, companies that know them, communications that are personalised and relevant, and offers tailored to their needs and preferences.

We need to know some of the key words connected with digital marketing.

In this regard mobile marketing is multi-channel online marketing technique focused at reaching a specific audience on their smart phone, tablets, or any other related devices through websites, e-mail, SMS and MMS, social media or mobile applications. Mobile marketing can provide customers with time and location sensitive, personalised information that promotes goods, services and ideas.

We are also familiar with many online portals engaged in trade



and commerce. Many of us buy online and order items through internet. There are sites like Amazon and others.

Online sites have more or less all products and customers can easily buy those products using mobile phones or laptops or computers. Apart from buying on digital platform we may market our products.

For getting involved in digital marketing what we need is our website, Blog post, Infographic, Interactive tools, social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), earned online coverage (PR, social media, and reviews), online brochures and look books, branding

assets (logos, fonts, etc.). It is not difficult to be a digital marketing professional. Anyone may start with the social media tools.

As most of us are using Facebook so this tool can be used to be digital marketing professionals. One may learn more about the Facebook family of apps and services with Facebook blueprint. Lots can be learned from Facebook blueprint.

There are many other online courses related to digital marketing.

The digital marketing industry in India is spread to almost all the business sectors. Some of the applications of e-marketing are shopping and order tracking, online banking, payment systems and content management.

The power of digital marketing allows geophysical barriers to disappear making all consumers and businesses on earth potential customers and suppliers.

Technology has provided us the platform and now it is up to us how we make best use of them. Any individual from Arunachal Pradesh may get involved in this provided he or she equipped with technology like use of internet.

Local products can be sold through digital branding and marketing.

We should not only look at buying goods through online shopping but we should also try and promote our local products through digital marketing. There are ample opportunities and it is up to us how we make best use of it.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and he can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjank@gmail.com for any career related queries)

## Lottery or message to humanity

**I** refuse to buy lottery tickets on principle. But I still reserve the right to feel cheated when someone else wins. (Hey, you want logic? Buy a calculator.)

Mind you, if I ever did win some big jackpot, I wouldn't change: I'd still be a bit of an annoying jerk, but I'd be one from my Learjet.

Lotteries are on my mind after listening to a shy but irritatingly nice reader whom I shall call Mr Goody. He believes that a recent spate of news reports about lottery winners contain 'A Message To Humanity'.

True story: A man who won a fortune on a lottery spent some of it on a medical check-up. The doctor congratulated him on his winnings and told him he had only a few weeks to live. The winner went home, hugged his family members and died. That sounds like an urban legend, but it's a news report about a New York guy named Donald Savastano. His funeral was a few days ago.

"It's impossible not to see a lesson there about what's really important in life, right," said Mr Goody. "Not money or length of days, but love, right?"

I reserved judgment, but he forwarded me another story, also from last month. A woman named Oksana Zaharov, 46, tried to buy a \$1 lottery ticket but was mistakenly given a \$10 ticket. Not wanting to inconvenience the shop staffer, she paid the higher price — and won a fortune. "See how the Universe rewarded her for being nice," Mr Goody asked.

I asked contacts for comments. A Delhi correspondent forwarded me a 2016 story about a young labourer from West Bengal who managed to find a day's work in South India and spent some of his earnings to help

a disabled lottery ticket salesman. His ticket turned out to be so valuable that he raced to the police station in Kerala and refused to come out for two days.

My Indonesian correspondent was more sceptical. "Lotteries give you a one in 100 million chance of not going to work tomorrow. A night out with your buddies gives you a one in four chance of not going to work tomorrow," he said.

Good point. Still, I know people say that they'd quit their jobs if they won the lottery, but surely it would be WAY more fun to stay at work and misbehave all the time?

A colleague known for his scepticism sneered at my choice of topic. "More than 99.999 per cent of lottery transactions are worthless bits of paper being exchanged for actual money," he said. "Buyers get nothing but the questionable 'joy' of playing the game and choosing their own numbers."

Right on cue, a company called Jackpot Dotcom sent a press release saying it has set up a subscription service. Lottery firms get buyers' cash automatically every month, and buyers don't even get the pleasure of playing the game and choosing their own numbers.

I'd never sign up for something so idiotic. (But I'll still feel cheated to read about the winners.)

I'll give the last word to Mr Goody, whom I secretly like: "I always wanted to win the lottery but one day I looked around at my beautiful family and realised that I already had."

Awww.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

**THE FUNNY SIDE**  
Nury Vittachi

# A cancer-less society

By Dr Caleb Harris

Change is the flavour of the season and everyone seems to talk about it. While we in Meghalaya would get to know if there is truly a change on March 3, it remains to be seen if a change in the political dispensation would really bring about a change in our lives. As a child, I used to be excited about changes in my life, such as a new year, fresh academic year at school, new clothes, and so on. But not all change is pleasant. It was always painful to shift from one house to another or to change schools. Though change for the better may seem pleasant, we might still tend to cling on to the past, feeling hurt.

Apart from the several cancer patients I see daily, during my social interactions here in Shillong, I find a cancer patient in almost every family. As soon as I'm done introducing myself, people connect with me on that thread and share about their experiences. It pains me a lot as this is not the case in the other parts of the country where I've lived. Northeast India is considered the 'cancer capital' of India, as it reports 3.1% of the total cancer cases in the country, despite accounting for only 1.4% of the population.

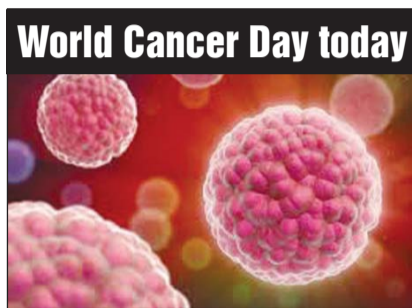
Can we expect a change in this predicament on March 3rd? Unlikely, but we can begin the process today. World cancer day, observed on February 4th annually, is an initiative of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), which is based in Switzerland. The theme for the years 2016-18 is 'We can, I can'. It is certain that we can bring about a change in this high incidence of cancer by initiating changes in our lifestyle.

Some of you might be wondering what can be done to reduce cancer, which, as someone commented recently 'was a result of divine justice'. Quite a lot of people I have interacted with feel that cancer is hereditary and feel that the high incidence of cancer in the Northeast Region may be due to some genetic defects. It is true that some cancers are transmitted hereditarily but the good news is that this is less than 10% of all cancers.

These generally manifest at a younger age and the person may suffer from several cancers. Also these may affect more than one person in the family. However, if several members of a family suffer from a particular cancer, it might also mean that all of them are exposed to the same cancer-causing agent.

While it is insensitive for someone to say that people (cancer patients) cannot compensate for the sins committed against the Unseen, (and he graciously apologised for the comment), I would say that several cancers are the result of sins which people commit against their own bodies and unfortunately for several of them, their bodies cannot compensate for the toxins produced, resulting in cancer.

Meghalaya has a very high incidence of esophageal and hypopharyngeal (parts of the food pipe) cancers, in addition to oral, lung and other cancers. The main cause for all of these cancers is tobacco and other substances like betel nut, alcohol, etc.. People usually tell me about the old man in their village who smoked continuously till the day he died, at the ripe age of 101. But as I said earlier, people respond differently to the toxins (carcinogens) produced by tobacco (and other substances). There is no way one can know about his inherent susceptibility to carcinogens and while



research is on to find these factors, it would be safe for us to avoid exposure to these carcinogens in this generation. Some people do blame us for not doing enough research to find out ways to prevent cancer, despite continued use of tobacco. But so far none has been able to provide even a single benefit for the use of tobacco. I remember, as a kid, watching the advertisements for tobacco and trying to make sense. It was in general portrayed that smoking would elevate the person to the next level in life, but it is baseless.

It is heartening that our government has taken steps to ban advertisements for tobacco, but the message is still spread by these tobacco giants indirectly, through surrogate advertisements and movies. The glorification of smoking by movie stars is a major influence on youngsters in initiating the habit. It is important to note that these companies target youngsters as they are at an

impressionable age and they get habituated for life.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) is a global standard for systematic monitoring of adult tobacco use and helps in tracking the key tobacco control indicators. GATS is a household survey of persons aged 15 years and above in all the 30 states and two union territories of India. The first round was conducted in 2009-10 and the second round in 2016-17. This was conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India.

While 28.6% of all Indians use tobacco in any form, it is unfortunate that 47% of people aged 15 years and above in Meghalaya use tobacco. For men, the figure comes to 59.8%, which means almost two of every three men use tobacco. Though this is cause to worry, we can find solace in the fact that the usage has reduced by about 15% as compared to GATS-1. This is attributed to the curbs on advertisement and the pictorial warnings on cigarette packets. Recently there was an effort by the tobacco lobby to get these warnings reduced from the current 85% to 40% but the Supreme Court has thwarted this attempt. GATS-2 showed that 52.9% of smokers considered quitting because of the pictorial warnings.

On world cancer day 2018, I implore you all to change your habits before it is too late. For those who feel that they have tried and failed, there is a 'Tobacco Cessation Clinic' at NEIGRIHMS which can help you through the process. It is difficult, but surely not impossible.

As a society, we must protect our children from getting initiated into use of tobacco, betel nut and other addictive substances.

This survey revealed that the age of initiation for smoking was 17 years. The Juvenile Justice Act forbids the sale of tobacco products to minors and does not allow establishments selling these within 100 yards of educational institutions. The penalty prescribed is imprisonment upto 7 years, with or without a fine upto a lakh rupee. But this is hardly enforced. We have to be the custodians of our society and ensure our children don't fall prey to the false propaganda of these businesses, whose only aim is to make money, at the expense of our health.

Changes effected today will bear fruit in due season and transform us into a society with 'less cancer'.

(The author is an assistant professor of Surgical Oncology at NEIGRIHMS)

# Child safety in wired world

By BK Mishra

In this digital world, it is important for every parent to take basic measures to ensure the safety of his or her ward. Many of the parents get little or no time to check on their children, especially teenagers. Despite the busy schedule, it becomes imperative for them to make some efforts keeping in mind the growing cases of cyber crime. Keep a watch on your children and follow the simple steps.

1. Make sure your child does not spend all of his/her time on the computer. Use RAZZUL software at home and it is great for children. But because all the games can be accessed online we can also activate the time limit feature in the software to only allow a certain amount of time online on weekends and weekdays. Many parents use the Internet as a babysitter, much like the television set. When we have things to do it is nice to have our children occupied but let's make sure they are not spending all of their time glued to the computer screen.

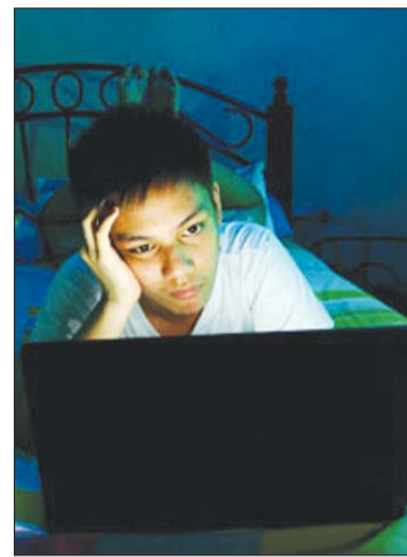
2. Keep the computer in an area where it can be monitored, like the family room, kitchen or living room, not in your child's bedroom. Many homes have the computer in the basement but I have to ask — is that a place where parents frequent? Usually not, and it is not a great place to have the computer hooked to the internet either. We have to monitor the activities of our children to make sure they are staying safe.

3. Learn enough about computers so you can enjoy them together with your kids. You have read this book so now you are learning! Again, I suggest that you sit down with your children and let them teach you more. You will be surprised at how eager they will be to show you their abilities. We all like to brag and children are no different. If you have to search for something for work or find an interest or hobby on the internet, ask your kids to help. Spend some quality time with them, and let them teach you.

4. Teach them never to meet an online friend offline unless you are with them. Although this sounds like common sense, many children have met with people in person that they met online as a stranger. I explained how easy it is to build rapport with children but unfortunately children don't really understand this concept. Children are very trusting and don't think there are people in this world who will harm them. It is up to you to let them know they do exist. There are too many children who have gone missing because of such meetings. Remember, children should never meet someone in person they have met online unless accompanied by a parent, not another older friend.

5. Watch your children when they're online and see where they go. Now that your computer is out in the open (Rule Number 2) keep an eye on what sites they like to visit or what chat programs they like to use. Knowing what your children are doing online will help you determine how much time they should be spending online as well as it will give you an idea of why they use the internet. You may see them going to sites that are not really appropriate for them and when you see this you can now tell them why it is inappropriate. You can also see how many people are on their chat list, or what chat rooms they are going into and what the topic of that room is. Remember, POS means "Parents over shoulder!"

6. Make sure that your children feel comfortable coming to you with questions and don't overreact if things go wrong. Communication is the key and your children have to know that they can come to you with any problems and not get the third degree.



Google Images

7. Keep children out of chatrooms or IRC (Internet Relay Chat) channels unless they are monitored. This sounds like a definite rule and to a certain extent it is. I am not a big fan of chatrooms because of all the nonsense that occurs within them. I have entered teen chatrooms during investigations to find that children can use foul language and they use these arenas to spout off (flame) and bully others. I don't feel these are healthy places for children to hang out but if your child feels they just have to be in them, then they should be monitored at all times. Links to inappropriate sites are posted in these rooms and in the IRC channels, files are traded to occupants that are not only inappropriate but illegal as well. There are certain websites which have monitored chatrooms for children but again these should be approved by the parents. Instant messaging with friends is common for most youth but the need for chatrooms where many unknown individuals hang out is not a necessity.

8. Encourage discussions between you and your child about what they enjoy online. Again keeping that line of communication open with your children about their likes and dislikes on the net enhances online activity for the child and gives you some peace of mind as a parent.

9. Teach them what information they can share with others online and what they can't (like telephone numbers, address, their full name and school). No information about your child should be given out over the internet. I know that as children get older they will want to do things like having a blog site where they can do a daily journal but for the very young, absolutely no information should be given out whatsoever. Giving out this information is just giving ammunition to predators. Just a name could be enough to gather information about your child, not to mention what school they go to, phone number and address. Let your children know that this is one rule that must be abided by no matter what.

10. Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends. Just as we like to know who our children are hanging out with at school, we should know who they are chatting with online. Have your child explain who these friends are, where they met them and why they like talking with them. Signs that they may be speaking to people they should not would be a sudden shutdown of the computer when you walk by or switching screens on the computer. You might also note if your children are getting phone calls from people you don't know or they are getting gifts from people you do not know. This is a very common occurrence with predators on the internet.

11. Warn them that people may not be what they seem to be and that people they chat with are not friends, they are just people they chat with. Though the majority of children on the net have pretended to be someone else, someone older or even a different sex, they seem to think everyone else tells the truth online. As a parent you have to drill into them that a lot of people pretend and are not who they say they are online, even if they know the lingo, or have sent a picture of themselves.

12. Discuss these rules, get your children to agree to adhere to them and post them near the computer as a reminder. One thing I have learned is that posting things around my office helps me not only remember but to adhere to them. When I see affirmations everyday, it keeps me on track and the same goes for rules. If they are discussed and posted, chances are that your children will abide by them.

(The author can be reached at mishrabasant24@yahoo.in)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, FEBRUARY 4, 2018

Venus square Jupiter on your solar return chart presents a mixed bag of successes and disappointments. You will have a stronger sense of purpose as you prepare a strategy for career growth. You would be able to present your best ideas in a manner that is pleasing for the audience and they would be more than interested. Some of plans that have been long pending will start to take shape and give desirable results. Be cautious to avoid being excessively emotional in your interpersonal interactions. A quiescent relationship will be rejuvenated and you will fortify your bond. Some of you may even plan some personal travel which will open up avenues that you once thought were closed.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. Your general well-being and emotional health depends on sound and meaningful relationships—both social and romantic. Financial prosperity or social success may come through your spouse at this time. Special attention to and from a partner is in focus. You keep an open mind and are receptive to new ideas and professional opportunities, which could lead to a new job while some of you, will be in for a promotion, perks recognition and prestige. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy during this cycle. You would maintain good relations and try to give to others exactly what you would like to receive just now. It's not about you right now—it's about someone else and the sweeter your attentions, the more delicious your rewards will be. You have a greater need than usual for contact and exchange. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to your work. The more willing you are to take on additional or different type of work, the more positive the rewards.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider network is possible at this time. Your work status may change for the better. Friends are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your relationships. Integrity and honesty are the key to attaining your desires now. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This phase is favorable for investments, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. A lot of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership. Your love life is more attractive and charming. You may be involved in activities connected with your children.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

A financial boost is possible, or you may gain financially through your partner. A deep and intimate connection made now could be revitalizing and even healing. You are more inclined to want to smooth over differences in a partnership concerning the sharing of power, intimacy matters, finances, and other emotionally-charged topics. Intimate relationships are intensified now. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands of others.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers. You are inclined to want to learn new work skills, or to improve your proficiency and output. It would be better to look at long term investments and

speculations for financial gains. Your approach to work at this time is pleasant, happy, and logical for the most part, unless you allow worry or scattered energy to enter the picture. You might also enjoy deciding on a different health or nutrition program.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

This week highlights friendship, romance and love in your life. You tend to take more interest in organizing your working environment—and this is an excellent time to do so. You are especially objective and intelligent when it comes to getting a handle on your daily affairs and all the little things that contribute to a feeling of efficiency and competency. This is an especially introspective period during which you have the chance to truly uncover your personal strengths and talents. There would be some changes in your social circle, and you meet new people.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

Business partnerships may suffer from ego conflicts, or adversaries may be challenging. Use this energy to work cooperatively on interpersonal issues. You may even find that you seem to need someone's assistance in order to do what you want to achieve. When a difference arises, you are quick to settle it, and have little patience for sweeping matters under the rug. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

It would be wiser to face difficult people and tough situations rather than take the easy way out for victory and success in professional ventures. Don't take the one you love for granted but show your love and appreciation. Some associations would be competitive in business but you shine and work well in your field of activity. You may have to face difficult people and exercise special care in handling them. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. You've been busy with all sorts of everyday activities, deeply involved in your work and routine. It's time to balance your life with some down time - to help you balance your lifestyle and gain time to rejuvenate. Issues come to light that originate from deep within. It's an excellent time to get in touch with what's been brewing beneath the surface. A secret may be revealed. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

During this phase you feel attracted to people with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others and you do it in a natural and warm manner. You will seek chatty and enthusiastic friends who stimulate your mental abilities. Your approach to work is pleasant and happy for the most part, unless you allow worry or low energy to get the better of you. You are inclined to want to learn new work skills, or to improve your skills and output in terms of work. There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers now.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This is a phase that brings excellent results for competition, written examinations, and legal matters. You're at your best when you are showing the world your practical, competent, and responsible side. Put off making important decisions with regard to family and domestic matters just now, and take care when it comes to communicating with family members. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to matters surrounding romance, children, and creativity. Be as non-judgmental as you can with romantic partners and your children. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings is therapeutic and healing.

# Winners never quit

By Imtitoshi Ao

Someone once said (and I quote), "A Great man is one who can make a small man feel great, and perform great." I ask you, is it really about setting audacious objectives and getting people to own and achieve them or is it getting someone else to do what you want done because he or she wants to do it or is it making people feel and take pride that they have done it or letting go while retaining the right to know what is going on or is it an art of accomplishing more than what scientific management says is possible? Think about it. Everyone has their own views; if you can achieve all the above points then you can be a great motivator and a great leader.

We wonder sometimes, we look back on our life and think, have we done this or that? Have we been able to motivate people? Are we a motivator of people? When you wake up in the morning do you look at the mirror? What do you see? Do you think that you are beautiful or handsome? If yes, then, how do you feel?

You maybe a musician, an author, a priest, a director, an IAS officer, a journalist, in fact anyone. Does this actually matter when it comes to you? What motivates you everyday? If you feel indifferent, then what gets you going? Maybe music, maybe the lyrics of a song, or is it money? It does cease to matter — be great, be the best you can.

So my friends, if you've understood my take on motivation and how it could help brighten your life, let's discuss more and take it further.

Couple of months back when I was training in a particular state, someone asked me "Sir, why are there so many suicides in India?"

A very good question I would say. Why is it? What would you have replied? I'll suggest, Avoid Negative Thoughts or Things and Habits. Believe in yourself.

(The author is a motivational speaker)

"I cannot even imagine where I would be today were it not for that handful of friends who have given me a heart full of joy. Let's face it, friends make life a lot more fun."

--- Charles R. Swindoll

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.175

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2018

### Kabul in siege

WHAT happened to a hotel in Kabul has now snowballed into a major crisis crippling the Afghan government under President Abdul Ghani. So far the attack in the heart of Afghanistan was launched by the Taliban but now the rebels have been strengthened by the Islamic state. It has been argued that the IS is losing out in Iraq and Syria and so it has now trained its guns on Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. The phased withdrawal of the US and NATO forces has brought the skirmishes between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces from the northern and eastern high doubts of the rebels to the southern interior. The inability of Afghan security forces to cope with the crisis has been exposed. The latest outrage was the militant raid in a military academy killing eleven soldiers and injuring a few. It was the fourth major attack in a spate of violence over the past few days. IS claimed it was behind an assault on the office of the aid group Save the Children in the eastern city of Jalalabad last fortnight in which six people were killed. Furthermore, an ambulance bomb in the city centre killed more than 100 people.

Militants owing allegiance to IS operate in mountains in the eastern part of Afghanistan. Many analysts were questioned whether they were solely responsible for the attacks in Kabul and elsewhere. The crux of the explosive crisis lies in US policy on the issue. Public opinion in the US is antagonised by the number of body bags of US soldiers coming back to the country. Washington started withdrawing US marines from Afghanistan in the Obama period. Now, Donald Trump's war on terrorism has been somewhat underprioritised by Capitol Hill. But the Afghan security forces certainly need western assistance. India also cannot disengage from the process of stabilisation in the mountainous terrain.

### LOOKING BACK

May 14, 1989

### Hostile Andaman tribe makes friendly gesture

The hostile Jarwas of the Anadaman and Nicobar Islands reciprocated to a friendly gesture of an expedition team by planting seedlings recently. Claimed to be for the first time in the South Andamans, the 27 Jarwas, including women and children came forward and started planting the seedlings of fruit bearing trees when they were shown

the way by the team members led by Mr S A Awaradi, Director, Tribal Welfare of the Island. The team members who went in the expedition to the South Andamans last month met the dreaded Jarwas twice as the incident of their responding to the friendly gesture occurred on March 30, official report said.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Personality cult - a curse for India

Editor,

I just happened to witness the preparations in Guwahati for the arrival of PM Narendra Modi on 3rd February. I was told that the state government spent some 15 crores in just beautifying the roads through which the PM would pass. After having seen the massive preparations (decorative lights, festoons and banners etc all over) I have not a shred of doubt regarding the exorbitant amount spent lavishly on just one man, who happens to be our prime minister. It is evident that we have a snobbish PM who likes to be welcomed with a fanfare. His followers seem to be mesmerized by him or else they must have been strictly instructed by the party command to put up such shows wherever Mr. Modi goes. The irony is that while India is a poor country where majority still live from hand to mouth, perhaps with just one dollar earning per day, our leader has the audacity to permit such wastage of the tax payers' money.

Personality cult is the curse of our country and Mr. Modi is presently having the most amount of benefit from

it. I have never seen any western leader of a country, being welcomed with such pomp, perhaps with the exception of Kim Jong Un. In India instead, this seems to be the current practice perpetuated by the BJP. As a citizen of India, I feel that all citizens with goodwill must condemn such snobbishness in our leaders. This is a real case of callousness of the rich and the powerful towards the poor and suffering millions. If Mr. Modi comes from a real humble beginning (a chaiwallah) then how could he permit such a massive spending on just a one-day affair. How many poor families could have benefited from such an amount of money which has simply gone down the drains? Is he not sensitive to the plight of so many poor Indians? Usually a person from a poor background displays great understanding and solidarity with other poor people, but in the case of Mr. Modi this does not seem to be the case. How long can Indian people tolerate such lavishness on the part of our leaders and extol a person even up to the point of almost deifying him? Enough with personality cult, let us be

As has been elaborated by a thinking few there is no dearth of issues for the Meghalaya electorate to consider before casting their votes on 27th February. But what will work for candidates on polling day may be entirely different. Pathetic road conditions, poor education scenario, unemployment, underdevelopment, corruption, traffic menace, ideology, principles of candidates or the antithesis of the above may play little role in deciding the fate of a particular candidate or parties in the ensuing election. The blame is on the political parties because issues that matter are placed on the back burner and voters are forced to consume mudslinging and personal attacks. May I dare to name the following as the criteria for the majority of voters to choose the 60 respected legislators in the 10th Legislative Assembly?

**Winnability**  
Winnability is the most proclaimed criteria for all political parties in choosing their respective candidates. 'Winnability', a word not found in the dictionary means 'popularity' or loosely used 'charisma'. Candidates, whether representing a party or no party will count on this enviable quality. The voters will look for winnable candidates for sure.

In the run up to the elections this paper and other print and electronic media have focused on some prestigious constituencies where heavyweights are contesting like South Shillong, East Shillong, Pynthoromkrah, Pynursla, Mawsynram, Songsak, South Tura, Ampati, Phulbari, etc. The ground reality checks are quite revealing. According to the findings and opinion of the local voters, except Ampati, the representatives of the above constituencies have performed unsatisfactorily. However, in spite of their failures they may still emerge victorious. The 'enlightened' voters of East Shillong might still send Ampareen Lyngdoh to the next Assembly with her education scam tainted tag. The opportunistic Hek could sail through though roads are without drains and electricity for the last 15 years. Prestone Tynsong might even be the next CM in spite of alleged continuous absence from duty as a cabinet minister. 'Nepotistic' South Shillong's Sanbor Shullai could still be

# What will work on February 27

By Albert Thyriani

a victor in spite of a FIR against him. PN Syiem could ward off the challenge of his opponents though roads in his constituency are hardly motorable. Similarly AT Mondal could still represent the plain belt constituency of Phulbari though the highway there is unrecognizable. Ironically the CM, Mukul Sangma has to contest also from Songsak as he is 'unsure' of winning in spite of his development feat in Ampati. However, his status could still end up with the dilemma of giving up one of them post 3rd March. In short, winnability is the winner though the voters could spring surprises. No heavy weight is unbeatable.

#### Religion

Religion is a huge factor. Voting still takes place on religious considerations. Even in the heart of the state capital religious or denominational pattern of voting is apparent. In general, therefore, performance, clean image, qualification, capability, ideology, principles or the lack of them may be secondary or no consideration at all for the electorate. The pride that a particular candidate belongs to their religion or denomination might influence them to vote for him or her. The religion-politics mix exists. Politicians attending religious functions and events are a common sight these days. Vote driven motive for such attendance is also a reason.

In this election more than before, there is no secret that a particular party is associated with a particular religion. It is expected that the adherents of that religion will vote for the candidates representing that political party. The persistent NPP-BJP nexus allegation by the Congress and the denial by the NPP is a proof of this point. Through the allegations the Congress hopes to influence the electorate (largely Christians) from voting for the Conrad-led party. On the other hand, the NPP by its robust denials expects to convince the voters of a non-existent NPP-BJP nexus, thus inviting votes for its candidates.

#### Family ties

Family ties do influence voters. A candidate usually

counts the votes of the members of his clan. Due to family disputes and differences, exceptions are there. Sisters of HDR Lyngdoh and Shibun Lyngdoh may campaign against their own siblings due to compulsion, but family relations do determine voting decisions and this election is no different. There are candidates who decide to join the fray looking at the size of his clan in a particular constituency. He or she trusts that the social kindred extents politically. It would be a pride and honour of an extended family to have one of its members as MLA.

#### Influence

Influence holds sway in Meghalaya politics. The citizens of the state will have to accept the fact, particularly in Garo Hills, that there are two influential Sangma families - the Mukul and Purno families. The Mukul family is with the Congress while the Purno is the NPP. The Mukul family has four of its members in the Congress list. The Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma (Ampati and Songsak) and his younger brother, Zenith Sangma (Rangsakona) are joined by their spouses, DikkanchiD Sangma (Mahendraganj) and Sandhiarani Sangma (Gambegre) respectively. The Purno family has James Sangma (Dadengre) and sister, Agatha Sangma (South Tura) who are contesting on NPP tickets. Conrad Sangma, of course is an MP and President of NPP and is the star campaigner of the party. It is expected that both influential families will do well in the coming election. Granted that all of them win, the two families will jointly constitute almost 12% of the state's lawmakers. Which family will take control of the state is the only question that remains.

#### Cash flow

Everyone agrees cash is the determining factor between winning and losing. If this is not the case then why is there is need for the ECI to monitor the outflow of cash from banks. There is no need to intercept vehicles and individuals who carry more than the prescribed amount. There is no need to set up flying squads to outsmart potential offenders.

In spite of stringent laws, candidates and their agents

will find means to avoid the watchdogs. The ECI officials can't reach everywhere. They can't be present in every nook and corner of the state 24/7. As someone, jokingly and seriously, has pointed out the ECI can't fix CCTVs in residences and private chambers of candidates and their workers. Secondly it is useful to remember that the Election Commission's officials are mainly state government employees. They are vested with powers only during elections. After the election they will be back in their offices as government servants. Can they dare to offend their potential political masters? Why should they go out of their way to catch their probable bosses? Should they have the commitment and conviction to ensure fair and free election? Should they risk harassment, unreasonable transfers and promotion delays to ensure that illegal use of cash during election is strictly curtailed? Just a recap, in 2008, 27 crore-patis contested the election out of whom 15 were elected constituting 25% of the MLAs as crore-patis. Witnessing a sharp rise, in 2013, 113 candidates were in the fray and 37 were successful thus making 60% of the legislators in the Assembly of the status of crore-patis. This election the figure is eagerly awaited as nominations are still on. But initial stories report most of the leaders are crore-patis. One leader's wealth grew astonishingly 100 times since 2008 to join the crore-pati club. It is naive to say that such candidates spend just 20 lakh as permitted by the Election Commission. In Meghalaya as in the rest of India as there is rampant use of money to influence voters. One consolation is that the coal money may not be so visible this time.

The beginning of this composition has winnability as the first criteria in the voters' mind. Winnability is linked with the other mentioned points but cash is actually what decides winnability. Cash wins elections. Except Manik Sarkar of Tripura, the poorest CM with a bank balance of Rs 2000, no poor soul wins election in India. Expect no Manik Sarkar from the voters here in Meghalaya.

economic pyramid.  
Yours etc.,  
Gary Marbaniang,  
Viaemail

economic pyramid.

Yours etc.,  
Gary Marbaniang,  
Viaemail

#### Problems at MUDA parking lot

Editor,  
I take this opportunity to bring to your notice a civic issue that I have encountered repeatedly, along with thousands of other Shillongites. The woes at MUDA parking lot at Police Bazar are well known to all. However, what is most annoying is that the parking attendants allow vehicles to enter even when no parking slots are available. Although they don't charge anything if the vehicle is not able to find a parking slot, but one is forced to waste up to an hour going all the way up and out of the parking lot. If the parking attendants just refuse entry in case all slots are full or almost full, it would save everyone a lot of time. Will the MUDA officials come up with a system to inform car owners when the parking lot is full? You owe it to the public!

Yours etc.,  
Dr Abhijeet Bhatia,  
NEIGRIHMS, Shillong

# Health; Life and Death: A Plaything in Meghalaya

By Elnathan W Lyngkhoi

Meghalaya is lacking in almost every way in the Health Sector. There is an acute shortage of medical infrastructure and personnel, in the state. It is learnt that this is due to years of mismanagement and misgovernance in the state. It was horrifying to find out from an article in The Times of India titled, 'These Indians might as well be in Bangladesh, about a certain woman named Dila from Hurui village in Meghalaya, bordering Bangladesh. Around two years ago Dila was in labour all night but her baby's head was not crowning. It was reported that the villagers carried her in a blood stained bed-sheet, strung across two bamboo poles to a hospital in Bangladesh, as the Umkiang Primary Health Centre on the Indian side of the border was a five hour long trek while the Bangladeshi hospital in Kanaighat was just an hour away. Unfortunately, even after successfully navigating through the dangerous terrain and dodging the BSF, Dila died shortly after arrival at the hospital. Governmental apathy has forced these people to depend on a foreign state rather than their government for such a basic service, as healthcare.

One factor engendering these deficiencies is the failure, to recognize the contextual realities of the region and bottoms-up planning of health schemes has been prioritized only on paper but not in practice. These deficiencies exist right from the top rungs of the State hierarchy. As per the CAG report from 2010-11 to 2015-16, the Chief Minister who is the Chairman of the State Health Mission, never convened a single meeting since 2011. However the media and the people have on numerous occasions seen him reprimand state officials for not giving adequate priority to the health sector. The NRHM reports showed that 75% of the doctors were running private clinics in their allotted quarters. Although this is legal it is disheartening to know that poor patients even prefer availing the services of such clinics, despite the fact that they had to shell out the costlier expenses compared to a government run facilities due to easier access to drugs and medical services in such clinics.

Extreme deficiencies in the health sector are visible in both the rural and urban areas. As per the population norms adopted by the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Meghalaya, one Sub Centre (SC) must be established for every 3000 population in Meghalaya. With a population of more than 29 lakhs, Meghalaya has an enormous shortfall of medical facilities, equipments and an overall shortage of 72% of doctors, 42% of nurses and 51% of pharmacists across its health centers and Hospitals. The situation is rather bleak, as the CAG reports in 2016, that numerous existing medical facilities lack essential amenities like 47% Sub Centres without water supply, 52% without labour tables and 11% SCs without toilets.

Alarmingly, Meghalaya has one of the lowest proportions of birth taking place in a health institution as 71% of births in the state take place at

home and only 29% in a health institution. The plight of the children in the state which is the eventual result of the lack of and the deficiencies of healthcare facilities is extremely sad. The infant mortality rate in Meghalaya is 30 %, which is higher than the national average of 26 pc. The inability to adequately implement healthcare policies in the state has resulted in the fact that in 2016, 73 % of the children in Meghalaya aged below 10 years did not receive routine immunization. These are the shortcomings in our health sector that forced people such as those of Hurui village to rely on a foreign state rather than their own.

The breakdown in the healthcare system in Meghalaya is not due to lack of funds but due to poor implementation. From 2004-05 to 2015-16, funds which remain unutilized ranges between 32% (Rs 48.02 crores) and 76% (Rs. 173.72 crores) each year. The CAG report, 2011-16, showed that an amount of Rs. 17.55 crore was approved for the procurement of medical equipment but the State Health Society was able to utilise only an amount of Rs. 6.50 crore for procuring hospital equipments during the period. Also shown, is the annual loss of around Rs. 35.12 lakh due to the inability to utilize equipments in district hospitals and community centers. The deplorable quality of healthcare is heightened by the failure of the State Quality Assurance Committee and the District Quality Assurance Committee formed in February 2014, to judiciously perform their responsibilities.

It is disheartening to know that when valuable and costly medical equipments were purchased, they were not utilized. It took 11 years for the Estimates Committee of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly to discover that medical equipments meant for the Trauma and Accident Centre were lying idle at the Nongpho Civil Hospital and the Trauma Centre is actually non-existent as the centre is being used by the District Medical and Health Office, Ri Bhoi since 2010. Another incident which highlights the pathetic condition of the healthcare delivery system in Meghalaya is the shocking report that rats were eating bits off a corpse at the Civil Hospital in Shillong. These anomalies in state run health institutions has forced many to question if there are any regulations, norms and ethics, at all, dictating medical care and practices in Meghalaya.

In Meghalaya, most of the District hospitals do not have essential drugs despite the funds being given for their procurement. Patients find it more convenient to procure medicines at a higher price at private pharmacies than depending on government facilities. One of the causes of this situation was partly cleared as scandal erupted when it was reported that during the period 2013-14 to 2015-16 the Joint Mission Director, NRHM, Meghalaya had procured medicines meant for the health institutions in the state without ascertaining the required amount from the Director of Health Services, Meghalaya. A superfluous amount was purchased and consequently, medicines valuing Rs. 58.86 crore were lost, due to overstocking and the expiration of their shelf life. (The author completed his Masters Degree from NEHU)

*“You do not exist to serve the illusion. The illusion exists to serve you.”*

--- Lauren Zimmerman

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.176 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2018

**Adityanath’s tall claims**

CHIEF Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Aditya Nath has said that his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has done more for development in the state in 10 months than earlier governments during their long tenures. For an instance, he has said that pension for differently-abled people has been increased by Rs 220 making it a total Rs 500. The government has given a clear directive that unlike the Samajwadi and Bahujan Samaj governments there will be no caste appeasement which according to him means pampering the largest minority community, the Muslims. This was said at a time when the saffron adherents of the BJP violently stopped the minority community from raising the national flag on Republic Day in Kasganj where communal tensions still persist. The Chief Minister has however ascribed it to an administrative glitch.

There are such instances galore. An IPS officer avowed his commitment to build the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as soon as possible. He was not aware that as a government official he could not take such a stand. And it was just a few days before the Supreme Court was to hear the case on the issue. Aditya Nath has turned his back on the notion that India has a composite culture declaring that the Taj Mahal is not part of Indian Culture. He had accused an SP MLA of creating disorder in Rampur. At the same time the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has served the UP government with 9 notices for violation of human rights. Children died in hospitals. Two men returning from a wedding were shot dead by the police. Aditya Nath supports fake encounters and has even asked district police to form encounter brigades. In such a murky background, how can he boast of development?

**LOOKING BACK**

May 14, 1989

**Rs. 7 Cr. Annual Burden on state exchequer**

The Meghalay Government decision to bring 26 high schools and 38 M.E. Schools under deficit system of grant-in aid will entail an additional expenditure of Rs. 7 crore annually for the State Govt. This information was given by the Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister, Mr D D Lapang at the concluding function that annual sports of the Church of Christ High School a Mawlai Nonglum in Shillong on Friday.

Mr Lapang also said that in keeping with the country's National Education Policy (NEP) 53 schools were provincialised in the one-year of the present gov't rule as compared to only 29 having been provincialised in the 17 years of the State's existence. Mr Lapang maintained that with a view to improving the standard of education in the State, the gov't has been taking all possible steps to enhance the pay structures of teachers in the deficit schools and colleges of the State.

Commenting on the NEP the Deputy CM said that it aims at combating unemployment by making education vacation oriented and increasing the availability of technical manpower in the country. He said that there are about 17,000 job-seekers in Meghalaya and called upon the educational institutions in helping the gov't to tackle this vital problem. Mr Lapang also cautioned the parents, teachers and the students to remain vigilant against disruptive forces trying to disturb peace and social harmony in State. He reminded them of the 1987 ordeal in which of precious academic year was wasted and the career of many students ruined because one section of the students had

chosen to agitate and disrupt smooth function of educational activities.

**Panchayat Bill to be introduced on Monday**

The Constitution (Sixty fourth Amendment) Bill slated for introduction by Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi in the Lok Sabha on Monday provides for conduct of elections within six months in case any panchayat is dissolved, and the life of the reconstituted panchayat will be for the rest of the five-year term.

Another important feature of the bill is constitution of finance commission in the states every five years to review the finances of the panchayats and recommend principles on the basis of which the state legislatures may determine the taxes to be appropriated by, or assigned to, the panchayats. The bill propose to make it obligatory for all states to establish a three tier system of panchayats at the villages, intermediate and district levels. However, the intermediate level set up is not a must for states with a population of less than two million.

Provisions would be made for reservations in the panchayats for women, scheduled castes and tribes. Seats in panchayats at all levels would be filled on the basis of direct election. However the state legislatures may make provisions to ensure representation in panchayats of MLAs, Lok Sabha members and panchayat chairpersons without voting rights.

**One Nation, One Poll**  
**No, perpetual poll syndrome**

By Poonam I Kaushish

Are early elections round the corner? And is the Modi Sarkar plumbing on having simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. These are two questions which are dominating the political stratosphere with both the President, Prime Minister dropping broad hints of concurrent elections to elected bodies at various levels a few days ago and the issue being discussed by a Parliamentary committee for the first time last week. Alongside, the Budgetary largesse for the *kisan and garib* point to doing away with the Perpetual Election Syndrome (PES) in the Great Indian Political Circus.

Politically, post Gujarat polls if one were to do State-wise estimates of BJP's future performance, it would be hard to expect them to repeat the 2014 feat: 282 Lok Sabha seats. Ground reports point to it losing 40-50 seats in Rajasthan, MP, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. Alongside, it's an uphill task to repeat 71 seats in UP.

Besides, if it suffers electoral setbacks in States going to polls later this year, there could be negative momentum prior to the general elections. More so, if the Opposition realizes its survival is linked to unity. Two, there is a big gap between promises and delivery in the absence of structural reforms. The big challenges — farmers' distress and unemployment are hard to solve in the next 12 months. Consequently, why wait?

Some Party leaders are averse to fast forwarding polls fearing that it could boomerang like the India Shining campaign did for Vajpayee in 2004. They cite the TINA (there is no alternative) factor to NaMo.

Questionably, is it an idea whose time has come? Is it in national interest? Given that over the last few decades the country has been afflicted by PES week after week, month after month. Wasteful expenditure, noisy campaigns, rallies blocking roads disrupting our lives! This year-long merry-go-round has wreaked havoc on our body politic --- right, left and centre.

Think. In 2006 five States Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry went to polls, in

2007 seven UP, Punjab, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal, Manipur and Uttarakhand and the following year four Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Mizoram and Rajasthan. In 2009 besides the Lok Sabha, Andhra, Assam and Arunachal and Bihar the subsequent year. In 2011 Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Puducherry and Bengal, 2012 UP, Goa, Punjab, Manipur and Uttarakhand, 2013 Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Mizoram, 2014 Lok Sabha, Maharashtra, Haryana, Telengana and Andhra, 2015 Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, J&K and in 2016 Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Bengal and Assam. In 2017, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh. In 2018 Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Karnataka.

The solution to India's chronic annual polls circus may perhaps lie in the panacea of holding one mega election every five years. Once a Party is elected and Governments formed they can get down to work, take hard decisions in public interest and concentrate on delivering good governance without having to worry about its impact on its vote banks. As it is several good initiatives are dumped due to electoral considerations lest it upset a caste, community, religion or region. This has led to policy paralysis, bad management and poor implementation.

Undoubtedly, it is one way to get rid of incompetence, malfeasance and casual governance and help 'save money'. The Centre for Media Studies estimated that over Rs 30,000 crores was spent on the 2014 general elections while Election Commission estimates Rs 4,500 crore spent for holding simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

Recall, the years 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 elections which saw concurrent elections for the Centre and State legislatures. It was only in 1971 when Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and advanced polls by a year that this synchronization fell apart.

This resulted in many unstable Governments at the Centre and States leading to early dissolution of the Lok Sabha or Assemblies.

Pertinently, the Election Commission had advocated synchronized elections in 1983. In 1999 the Law Commission's 170th report on electoral reform submitted to the Vajpayee Government stated, "this cycle of elections every year in and out of season should be ended and we must go back to when the Lok Sabha and all Legislative Assembly elections are held at once". Again in December 2015 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice recommended "a practicable method of holding simultaneous elections.

Hypothetically, if Lok Sabha elections are held within a year, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya would simultaneously have new Assemblies and Gujarat and Himachal too will have relatively new Houses. If elections in Odisha, Andhra, Telangana, Maharashtra and Haryana are brought forward, they too, will be added to the list. And in five years, if polls could be delayed in UP, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur or Lok Sabha and polls to the above Assemblies advanced a major part of the country would be having elections at the same time.

Obversely, holding concurrent elections dramatically shrinks the electorate's choices, is advantageous for national Parties over regional outfits and gives more credence to 'national issues' over local ones. Also, if State Assembly elections are going to be decided on 'national issues', what of federalism?

Besides, poll subjects at the Centre and in States are different; consequently it is not advisable to mix them. Two, it could create confusion for voters as a Party could be deserving of support at the Centre but not in a State. Further, having a fixed term of the Lok Sabha and the State Legislature goes against the basic tenets of Parliamentary democracy. Reduced diversity in

elected Governments could lead to greater power centralisation wherein Chief Ministers would need to wait for a nod from their mai-baap Centre. The press, Government institutions and civil society could be further shackled whereby India could cease to be a liberal, Constitutional democracy and become a 'managed' one.

Either way, the idea needs to be debated extensively and the pros and cons weighed before arriving at a final solution as the alteration would entail changing the Constitution's basic structure. Further, though the BJP, AIADMK and AGP back simultaneous polls, Congress, NCP, Left and Trinamool think its "impractical, unworkable, not feasible and anti-democratic."

Where do we go from here? The US model could be considered. The President and State Governors are elected directly for a fixed four-year term and choose their own teams. The President is answerable to the House of Representatives and Senate but is not required to seek their confidence vote. This ensures good governance, stability and continuity enabling him to take hard decisions without fear of losing power.

Also, Germany has a 'constructive vote of no confidence' where Parliament can withdraw confidence to the head of Government only if there is assurance of a majority for a prospective successor. This law is also in place in Belgium, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Albania, Israel and Lesotho.

In sum elections are the bedrock of our democracy but we should avoid duplication of polls. With States in election mode every year, running the Government is akin to running with the hare and hunting with the hound. India's democracy should not be reduced to a *tu-tu mein-mein* between Parties all the time. Modi could well position One Poll as the next big reform to 'clean' India, take the Opposition by surprise and market it as enough of destructive PES! --- INFA

**Confusion over new health protection scheme**

**Insurance no substitute for health care**

By Nantoo Banerjee

Is the government really serious about the newly proposed insurance-backed national health protection scheme (NHPS) in the budget? Probably not. It may protect insurance firms and private healthcare outfits, but not the common man's health. Only public hospitals, well-equipped public medical centres, dedicated physicians and para-medical staff and affordable medicines can help protect the health of the public. Not insurance companies. Not certainly in India where healthcare facilities are under acute shortage. Moreover, limited individual health insurance benefit does not cover even a fraction of highly inflated medicare costs in private hospitals and clinics.

The country's current system of health insurance cover is a joke, if not fraud on healthcare. It is shocking that the government, instead of trying to improve the highly inadequate state healthcare infrastructure on an emergency basis, should fund and trust insurance firms to take care of the suffering public. What the country needs are hundreds of large public hospitals, well equipped health centres and several lakhs of fresh medical practitioners and para-medics.

The existing public healthcare facilities are crumbling under severe pressure with their supplies far too inadequate compared to demand. Ministers and officials in the health department can see for themselves the plights of the suffering common man if they care to take a visit of the next door AIIMS and Safdarjung Hospitals by Delhi's inner Ring Road in the morning. Suffering ordinary citizens are forced to visit private hospitals and clinics and spend beyond their means for uncertain cure.

This explains why insurance companies and private hospitals came out immediately showering praises on the budget announcement of the proposed national health protection scheme. Large private healthcare providers are happy. "This will be a big boost for us. The current insurance schemes were unviable, but with this increase in cover, I think we will see a growth in our state-sponsored scheme patients," Suneeeta Reddy, MD, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise was quoted to have said. She may be absolutely right. Few insurance schemes in India will cover a Rs. 16-lakh bill for a dengue fever treatment in a private hospital. Health insurance policies do not cover even a cataract operation bill in so-called private hospitals run as trusts to avoid payment of corporate income tax.

For the insured, hospital bills are often inflated by 100 per cent or more than the claim entitlement for a treatment. Assuming that the NHPS becomes a reality, it will certainly mean a big boom for insurance companies and money-shark private healthcare establishments. However, going by the provisioning in the budget to run "the world's largest government-funded national health programme," there is little to be excited about the prospect of its easy take-off. Considering that this is the last full budget of the current NDA government before the next Lok Sabha election, the proposal may only serve as a pre-election campaign agenda. Finally, the government may blame states, which are required to share a part of the financial burden, for non-execution of the scheme on a national basis due to non-

participation by states.

The NHPS proposes to provide 100 million families with medical coverage of up to Rs 5,00,000 lakh per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation. Insurance companies say the scheme brings under its umbrella 40 per cent of India's population. The NHPS will replace the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), which provides an annual coverage of Rs 30,000. The Rs. 5,00,000-insurance cover actually is an upgrade of the coverage. What is not clear at this stage is how the government will fund such a gigantic scheme which is expected to cost anything between Rs. 1,00,000 crore and Rs. 1.5 lakh crore. The NITI Aayog and the Union health ministry indicated that the government's new flagship scheme was "likely to cost the exchequer anywhere between Rs 100 billion and Rs 120 billion." The Union government said it would provide 60 per cent funds, and the state governments were expected to pool in the remaining 40 per cent.

The government's calculation was based on the assumption that the premium per family would be between Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,200, though, on the contrary, a Rs. 5-lakh annual health insurance cover for a senior citizen now costs over Rs. 20,000. "We are expecting to cover around 50 per cent beneficiaries depending on the state governments' acceptance of the scheme," said Alok Kumar, adviser at NITI Aayog. The state governments, however, are yet to provide their consent for implementing this scheme. Experts believe that states may not agree because of their tight fiscal position and reluctance to replace their own health schemes with NHPS. "We will speak to the state governments," said NITI Aayog member (health) Vinod Paul.

Few will disagree that the government would have rather done well to spend the money on strengthening its hospitals, health centres, medical and para-medical institutions and nursing colleges across the country. In fact, this union budget has partly provided for such a programme. The decision to have 24 new government medical colleges and hospitals will ensure one medical college for every three parliamentary constituencies or nearly 50 lakh people. Quality healthcare at these centres can surely bring down the pressure on government or municipal-run medical facilities in big cities and district towns. If this programme is implemented well, they will genuinely help serve the nation's health and boost social security.

"Universal health insurance through private hospitals has not worked for poor anywhere. Biggest beneficiaries are the private hospitals and insurance companies. There is no substitute for public healthcare," former finance secretary Arvind Mayaram said on a micro-blogging site. Mysteriously, the union budget provides practically no extra sum for the mega health insurance cover programme for the country's 50 crore people. Contrary to the government's promise, the share of health allocation as percentage of GDP is down. The National Health Policy 2017 indicated that health expenditure would increase to 2.5 per cent of GDP, but the goal is still far. It is only around 1.2 per cent of the GDP right now. (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

**Voters taken for a ride**

Editor,

The recent joining of the four MLAs of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly—two Independents and other two from the National parties, to the BJP fold which is at the helm at the Centre should not be seen as a bolt from the blue to any discerning citizen, premised on the fact that the said defectors feel very self-assured that whatever political hues they don they can come up trumps as they have foreseen that their electorates can be simplistically taken for a ride.

Buttressed by such an unquestionable self-belief of their win-ability prospects, these representatives in question have cynically sensed the potential political clout they can wield in the near future for being with the Hindutva-oriented party, the BJP, thus promoting them to take this ship-jumping risk giving scant respect to the over-all public sentiments of their respective voters. Thus, they have veritably proven themselves to run with the hare and hunt with the

hounds whenever political opportunities come by. Admittedly, many if not all, still foresee that these four ex-MLAs, especially A L Hek and S. Shullai, are going to win hands down, come what may. And if, as I wish them good luck, they come out victorious at the ensuing hustings to be declared on March 3rd next, this quartet would be scoffing at their own electors on the sly, a la Puck, the clown in Shakespeare's 'Mid Summer night's dream' who has aptly said in Act III, Scene II : "Lord, what fools these mortals be".

Yours etc,  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Viaemail

**India – land of rising inequalities!**

Editor,

It is a story of motherhood and two Republics. When we were observing the Republic Day, a mother who had been starving for four days, died of hunger in a rented room in Moradabad. She got six chapattis from her impoverished neighbour on the day before her death. But when her daughters

had also been starving, how could a mother eat even a single chapatti? So, the mother distributed all six chapattis among her three daughters (Mother, I bow to thee!).

The very next day was the day one for IPL bids. On this day, English all rounder Ben Stokes had entered into one year playing contract with Rajasthan Royals for Rs.12.5 crore. Kings XI Punjab paid 11 crore to Lokesh Rahul and 7.6 crore to Ravichandran Ashwin. Kolkata Knight Riders gave 9.6 crore to Chris Lynn, 9.4 crore to Mitchell Stark and 7.4 crore to Dinesh Karthik. There were many other such deals of astronomical amount.

This is a saga of rising inequality among Indians that has glaringly been exposed in the Oxfam report.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

**Will MBOSE please respond?**

Editor

With regards to the original Routine of Class 12 Science Exam 2018, there was no gap between Computer Applications and Chemistry. In the greater interest of the students, the concerned authorities did a re-

scheduling on January 29, 2018 and the exam date for Computer Applications was shifted from March 19, 2018 to March 26, 2018. With this new arrangement, the Computer students will now get 5 days time for their final revision of their chapters. This will give them a fair chance to improve their performance both in the Board exam and even in the subsequent engineering entrance exams.

After this development, it has now become a matter of stress for the Biology students with only a day's gap to revise for the vast subject. In order to boost up their morale and overall performance both in the Board Exams and in the following Medical Entrance Exams, Biology too may be shifted to some other convenient date as deemed fit by the MBOSE authorities. In the process, a fair opportunity will be given to all for such an important exam of their careers.

Yours etc.,  
Bandana Goswami,  
Shillong-3

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.

*"We have to distrust each other. It is our only defense against betrayal."*

--- Tennessee Williams

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.177 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2018

### Honorary doctorates

HONORARY doctorates are not awarded on the basis of a thesis written but are recognition of lifelong achievements in different fields. For example, the University of Oxford conferred a D. Litt on Satyajit Ray for his outstanding contribution to film direction. It appears however that proximity to power instead of excellence or merit has been the criteria prompting Indian public universities to award degrees, honoris causa. Between 1947 and 2017, 100 public universities awarded about 2000 doctorates to 1400 people for no recognizable academic or other kinds of excellence. As the prefix Dr carries considerable weight in India, this is not a trifling matter. What is astonishing is that politicians of different parties in various important posts have shared the honour with Nobel Laureates and corporate tycoons. It will not be fair to name these politician beneficiaries but they include some of the highest dignitaries.

A number of problems confront the issue. Degrees are awarded by universities to officials and politicians but this unhealthy trend cannot be regulated because of a conflict of interest. However, honorary doctorates do not carry a financial remuneration and so they cannot be equated with offices of profit. In India, higher education is in the doldrums. Innovation and excellence are of utmost importance to keep in step with the demands of a global economy. Famous universities across the world confer honorary degrees in order to attract talent and inputs from outside. Indian universities however are sending out a disturbing signal. Power and patronage here play a major role. Intellectual dishonesty should not be encouraged to appease political greed. What is all the more regrettable is that some leaders in this country have sometime or other been associated with fake honorary doctorates. The question is: why does society not question this double standard.

### LOOKING BACK

May 14, 1989

### Governor stresses need of expanding library service

Assam and Meghalaya Governor Mr Bhisma Narain Singh today stressed the need for expanding the information network and library service to remote areas in the north eastern region. Mr Singh, who is also the chairman of the North Eastern Council (NEC) addressing a conference here"on the development of library services information system" said the public library services should be developed both in terms of quality and quantity. There was considerable scope for development of the services in the region, he felt. The conference,

organized jointly by the NEC and Assam Government, was attended by the Vice-Chancellor, the Education Commissioner, Secretaries and the Directors of Education of the seven state government. The Governor said the NEC was aware of the problems being faced by library officials in the region. The regional advisory committee, set up by the NEC, has already initiated measures toward implementation of these commendations made in the inaugural meeting on the development of library services, he said.

# Uncertain journey of engineering graduates in India

By Rabin Prasad Kalita

The dismal state of today's higher education especially in engineering courses in India is alarming. There are almost two million students that are enrolled in various engineering courses in private and government colleges. It is estimated that about 1.7 million engineering graduates are produced every year (according to India today & Aspiring Mind Study) and the number keeps going up year after year, which is more than the USA and China combined.

The woes of most engineering graduates are that many of them are not in a position to attain suitable as well as sustainable jobs as per their choices and skills? It is learnt that less than five lakhs are engaged in the job market while the rest remain unemployed or under employed. It raises enormous concerns of the fate of those poor unemployed graduates as well as their parents? Does it not reflect the economic downturn in the country? They keep running from pillar to post with a degree in hand to grab a job. However, even if one gets a job it may not be linked to the subject learnt. And yet most of them are bound to take up jobs which seem to be well below their technical qualification. They are willing to work for any salary forsaking even their degree profile. For example, four of my office colleagues who once passed out from some of the reputed IIT and NITs of this country are in jobs that have nothing to do with their engineering degree. The jobs they are executing now happen to be in a totally different field.

Why does it happen? There are a number of reasons: One is due to the inadequate applied skill they earned during the course. Moreover, they are shouldering a burden to repay their education loan too. The tension of those students rises so they take up any job just so they can start repaying the loan. The opening of the job market is also not adequate to accommodate them as per their technical qualifications. It is indeed a serious disorder in this field of education.

Add to all this is the standard of engineering colleges. Most of them are substandard engineering colleges and they are mushrooming everywhere in India now and each year their numbers grow. They have glossy brochures guarantying hundred percent placements. These are all on paper; the reality is something else. A huge number of poor students are becoming prey and succumb to these money chasing institutes every year. On the

other hand, it is pertinent to mention over here that, there is a significant decline in the commitment of the teachers nowadays and as a result of which the knowledge level of the students is just going down. The aspiration of students to score better marks in the exam any how is the prime motto for a sizeable numbers of institutes. They pay less importance to the mandate of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Getting admission in those colleges is very easy. A student is not admitted on the basis of merit but based on a simple entrance exam. It is disgusting that the quality of engineering education has now decayed considerably. Only an engineering degree on paper is not enough to

not getting a job. Moreover, the industrial automation in manufacturing hubs has also affected hiring opportunity and will have further effect in future.

Students are to be made aware of the possibilities and realities of each stream through counseling in the early stages in school itself. I would like to talk about my own child. He is a class twelve (science) final examinee this time. He is aspiring to be admitted for a software engineering course along with many others. But gradually his intention of studying engineering is fading after seeing the poor job statistics in this field due to overwhelming competition. So the point here is not to drive the youth into a field of study which has a low capacity for job creation or has reached saturation point. A serious

*"In India there is need to renew old teaching methodology: Old teaching techniques and outdated syllabus need to be updated according to the demand of the corporate and other sectors. Rather than theoretical-based learning an application based education is imperative like in western countries."*

guy who does well will survive in this fast moving globe.

Societal ignorance is another factor here. Most parents push their children to join engineering courses often by denying the children their own choices after Class XII. Although some of the students know the present dismal employment scenario but, opposing the decision of their parents is equal to being disrespectful, they feel. But the grim fact is that later when they fail to land themselves a job then they curse their parents.

There is serious lack of practical approach towards finding a job. Shivam, the son of friend is an engineering graduate since 2014. He has already lost three and half years of the golden period of his career searching for a job. Presently he is engaged in a nearby DTP center and is also hunting for a permanent solution to survive. There are thousands of examples of this kind all over and they keep adding to the millions of unemployed youth engineers. It is pathetic as well as ridiculous that having acquired an engineering degree one is

guy who does well will succeed in any field of study and it is worth mentioning that the students' choice has to be respected.

In India there is need to renew old teaching methodology: Old teaching techniques and outdated syllabus need to be updated according to the demand of the corporate and other sectors. Rather than theoretical-based learning an application based education is imperative like in western countries. Part time job opportunities for the students' concerned are to be provisioned by Industries for 10 to 12 hours a week in some of the core industries. This would help students to learn discipline, develop a work culture, learn team work, deadlines of tasks etc. These students will not be assigned any such training when they get into a job as a fresher after graduation. Hence, learning while working will help a student acquire expertise in his field of study. This is what my nephew says he had been doing as a part timer in Ford Manufacturing Plant at Detroit while he was studying MS (Master of Science) in Michigan State University, USA. Finally, he

was selected by the same company after clearing his MS.

Except for some of the frontline educational institutions, closed classroom education is still going on in the Indian education system. Teachers lecture in front of the students who gather information, keep noting as much as they can, study them, face the exam and acquire a degree. That's it! Where is the expansion of their technical ability to allow for creative thinking?

Right now it is obligatory on the part of Government to either create jobs all around or cut the number of engineers produced every year so as to balance both. There is a grave need to bring in strict regulations and vigil as well to the University affiliated colleges.

Besides technical education, our engineering students are to be simultaneously educated business development skill, self-employment, venture creation etc. In short they must learn how to become entrepreneurs. Isn't it mandatory to make these students more creative, self-reliant, action oriented, innovative etc.? All of these characteristics could have been so relevant to all the walks of life of engineers. These features ultimately attribute to personal development and entrepreneurial thinking. I presume that its inclusion in engineering education could be worthwhile so that a good number of unemployed youths should not be seeking employment under someone. And also they would be able to contribute in many ways in the 'Make in India Swadeshi movement'.

Is it the fault of the students that they could not land a job? Or is it the system that could not improve the quality of our engineers. So change in the engineering curriculum is inevitable to bring them up to the desired employable standards. There is a vast difference between demand and supply, so the balance is necessary. Internships are now an established means of training for students and also a source of hiring genuine employees. A serious thought and initiative by the government on this burning problem is much needed.

The author can be reached at rabin1966@gmail.com

# All because of a bad movie!

By Ananya S Guha

The entire orchestration against the movie Padmavati ( changed to Padmavat) by an ostensibly highbrow censor board but which took an infantile decision seems to be cooked up with most of the cooks as politicians. Keeping in mind elections of course! The media has contributed no less to this totally avoidable controversy. The media dubs the Karni Sena a fringe group but highlights it in such a sensational and screaming manner that it ceases to be a fringe group. So, even before the film is seen, violent protests start; the producer of the film is physically mauled, death threat is issued to the lead actress by a sitting MLA, and even one Opposition leader supports such total hooliganism. The point to be ominously noted is that cutting across party lines,

Why were the four state governments so silent, including the central government? Why did the other political leaders maintain a studied silence, including the Opposition leader? Is religion now a panacea for all evil? Are we accepting that this formula works, to crank up the vote bank (of course there is more than a connection between the vote bank and the money bank)? . So will political campaigns be designated by how many temples you visit? So, we are trying desperately to make the masses religious. But this religiosity with our kind of politics is the worst type of combination. Hidden in the film are actually anti-Muslim sentiments, thus making matters more hateful and vicious. Padmavat cannot claim to be a historical film, because history appears in snatches.

*"The Supreme Courts allows screening of the film on a particular date. Even before that there is vandalism in four states in a remarkable synchronous action, and school buses are attacked. And when you view the movie, what do you see? Rajputs including Jauhar are glorified, their Muslim antagonists lampooned ( note the way Allauddin gorges his food) in sharp contrast to the genteel ways of the Rajputs. Malik Kafur the hermaphrodite is lampooned in unbecoming ways."*

political parties have supported this cause. And the cause? Rajputs have been shown in a poor light.

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And when you view the movie, what do you see? Rajputs including Jauhar are glorified, their Muslim antagonists lampooned ( note the way Allauddin gorges his food) in sharp contrast to the genteel ways of the Rajputs. Malik Kafur the hermaphrodite is lampooned in unbecoming ways.

There are quite a few things intriguing here. Didn't the producer know all this? Then why did he let the controversy drag? Why was a fringe group given such lavish prominence? Was the entire thing engineered to rake up trouble? Why were all the political parties silent? For the elections? What was wrong with the film and what was so right, now that it has been given the clean chit? Was depicting Jauhar/Sati known by now as barbaric practices, a necessity in this much proclaimed 21st century. There seems to be confusion about glorification and vilification.

Further confusions. (1) Is it a good movie or a bad movie? (2) Is it a historical movie? (3) Are Rajputs being glorified or insulted? (4) What was the necessity for introducing a hermaphrodite, with abject mockery?

And the doubt lingers about the people behind the scene. Politicians/professional rivals or both? Of course it's the Karni Sena but they could well have been pawns in the hands of someone. Will someone tell me that whether all this justifies attacking school children? Does an epic poem deserve such treatment?

But the political questions remain elusive?

Although based on an epic poem, it is both bad history and bad film.

But again that is not important. What is important is the malevolence it has created, how a single film has held a country to ransom; how children have covered under sickening brute force and how of course the formula of religion is eating into the vitals of a nation, like cancerous poison. All because of a film? All because of a fringe group? All because we are paying so much attention to such fringe groups? All because of politicians and the heady vote bank? And finally all because of a bad movie?

But what lies in the future? You cannot write a book, you cannot make a movie. Sentiments are fine, but when sentiments are propped up by a totally insensitive media and political antagonists, the results as we have seen here are mayhem. Even the SC order pales into insignificance. Of course the classic box office thrives and promotes. The current formula about race and religion ( the two are one and inseparable) is now applied to academics, science and history. The formula stands head and shoulders above the country, like a monolith. We can't even carve edicts there, or if we can we have to scribble the formula. It is painful if not ridiculous that one bad movie has created such a noise in the country.

It speaks volumes of the political insecurity and sensational media. The Taj Mahal is bad, a fortress in Rajasthan is good. One arises out of evil, the other out of political good. Symbols clash in the most corrupt and vile manner. So the debate has been endless; temples, mosque, architecture, a historically unproven Queen, the cow ( read religion, or religious symbol) these will continue to recur as political motifs. Loosely held symbols, till one symbol will cancel out another and people will say enough is enough.

### TO THE EDITOR

### Wanted regular supply of LPG

Editor, Through your esteemed paper I wish to point out that the LPG consumers of Upper Kench's Trace (Bethesda) are suffering from irregular supply of cooking gas from Riwar Gas Agency. They have failed to provide us even one cylinder a month. Sometimes they don't show up for two months at a stretch. When we contact, the Agency over phone there's always a no-response tone. If Riwar Gas Agency cannot cater to the above mentioned residents then let other agencies do the needful but stop harassing us, the consumers.

Yours etc.,  
Residents of Upper Kench's Trace (Bethesda).  
Consumers of Riwar Gas Agency

### Civic amenities needed!

Editor, It was a pleasant sight to see months ago that the drain across DC bungalow Dowai was constructed and dustbins were kept for a cleaner environment. Sadly, these days the dustbins have ceased to exist leaving the drain filled mostly with plastic waste. This is harmful as drains tend to get clogged up. Another area where plastic waste is abundant is the lane that surrounds lawmusiang field, but what makes it worse is the urine stench that is forever emanating from this lane. Therefore, I suggest that the concerned authorities update themselves regarding the localities that need dustbins and also provide public toilets where necessary.

Yours etc.,  
Sachiwatki Lalo,  
Mynthong Dowai

### The system has to change!

Editor, "Scams", "rape", and "corruption" to name a few, are no longer new terms to the educated Indian. Since my childhood I have come across such dealings and have read and heard my fair share. In moments where the mind wanders into deep thought, I would ponder that as "active participants" in what has come to be known as the largest democracy in the world; by now we would know better when it comes to electing our so called representatives to public office, for these elected leaders are the ones empowered to look after the interests of the people. Considering current facts and circumstances however, it ends up being just wishful thinking. However, as one attempts to find an answer to the question as to how such deep-rooted problems continue to exist in the modern world, it would not

be hard to realise that the problem lies in us.

The system that we have created is our downfall in this regard. Why? You may ask. The answer, to me, is pretty simple. When the prerequisite for holding the post of being a holder of public office which also comes along with the power to legislate for the public requires no significant educational qualifications, while the post of a driver in an institution of any sort which generally involves going from point A to point B requires the candidate to complete the 8th grade as a minimum qualification, it does not take a genius to see that the big problem that we have comes from the laws created as part of this system we call a democracy.

My mind rages when I think of this issue, but I have neither the column space nor you, the reader have any more interest or time by now, before I bore you with more examples of

the said issue which has been in our minds long enough. All I can say at this point is that the majority of the leaders we have elected in this nation are either career criminals, and crooks, or uneducated, and thoroughly unqualified individuals who should be as far away from having the power to influence a young and developing population as possible; for a population swayed by the most retrograde ideals can be used to commit the most heinous acts of history, if the current events are anything to go by.

Our so called solution in the past has been to target the individuals committing the wrongs while being in public office and removing the said individuals. However, as the comedian Dave Chappelle mentions in The Bird Revelation that when we keep going after individuals, the system that puts them in power remains intact and therein lies the problem. For those of you reading this and having a problem with the fact that I'm

referring to a comedian's words, keep in mind that in the modern world we live in today where our so called leaders will try and placate the population through lies and false statements, comedians in my opinion, are just about the only group of people who will actually speak the truth as it is. Going after the people behind the scams, riots, and controversies is practically futile when the system that gave them that power still thrives. Therefore, for you the readers, who I would like to think are genuinely reasonable participants in a democracy, the fight to end problems such as these begins by realising that it is the existing system of laws that must be changed, or abolished even, not just the individuals in the wrong for law is the pillar of an efficiently functioning modern society.

Yours etc.,  
Peter W. Shylla,  
Via email

"You do not exist to serve the illusion.  
The illusion exists to serve you."

--- Lauren Zimmerman

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.178

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2018

### Stable Germany

THE political instability in Germany came to an end with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives and the Social Democrats (SPD) agreeing to a coalition deal. Europe's economic powerhouse has got closer to the formation of a new government after four months of uncertainty which put partner countries in the European Union and investors in a tizzy. The move may mean a shift in Germany's Euro Zone policy. The SPD would insist on being given the finance and labour ministries which were so far held by the conservatives. SPD leader Martin Schulz had said earlier that his party would ensure that an agreement with the conservatives would put an end to forced austerity and go all out to set up an investment budget for Euro zone. It is obvious that the conservatives led by Angela Merkel have had to make major concessions to bring SPD in line. The SPD have planned to revamp itself as the main opposition party and agreed to coalition talks with reluctance.

However, the agreement will end the prolonged uncertainty weakening German's role in international affairs. Merkel's continuance as Chancellor is in doubt. She had succeeded in cobbling together a government only after a void of four months. This was at a time when Europe faced major challenges. There is need for reform in the Euro zone and negotiations have to be completed for Brexit. Merkel had tried to form a government with two smaller parties earlier but failed. The renewal of the alliance with the SPD was a last ditch move.

### LOOKING BACK

May 14, 1989

## CM promises Adm. Unit for West Khasi Hills

An Administrative Unit would be set up in West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr Purno Sangma announced at a public meeting at Malangkona village bordering Assam in the West Khasi Hills District. This would be another step towards bringing administration closer to the people, he said. He said that he was aware of the difficulties borne by the travelers from the villages to Nongstoin since they had to make a detour via Assam, and said that their demand for a road link to Nongstoin would be studied.

Mr Sangma, who addressed a sizeable gathering in this border village despite a heavy downpour, said that the Phira

Committee was set up to look into the problems faced by the people in the Assam-Meghalaya border. He also said that many schools in the area had been brought under the deficit system. Speaking briefly at the meeting Leader of the HPU(BC) group in the Assembly Mr B G Momin said that he had joined the UMPF government in order to work for the welfare of the people. He had joined unconditionally, and said that rumour-mongers were spreading stories that he had joined Mr Sangma's Government, because of inducement. This was not true, he said. Among those present on the occasion was Health Minister.

# Meghalaya's fortune post March 2018

By Patricia Mukhim

Journalists are supposed to be able to read the mood of the people prior to the elections and to interpret that into electoral wins or losses. I think people give us more credit than is due to us. As media persons though, this is the time for us to grill all candidates, including the ones who can't read or write Khasi or English as to their "idea" of Meghalaya as it should be in 2023 and beyond. We should be asking the sitting MLAs what they have done in the last five years rather than us publishing their election rhetoric between now and February 27. The media should in fact get its act together and have a public forum where candidates are asked to answer questions from members of the public. It is our right to question them for they will be representing us and who wants to be taken down the dark alley of Alice in Wonderland, yet again.

Paul Lyngdoh the sitting MLA for instance has come up with an appeal to the people of his constituency and perhaps of Meghalaya to maximise results on Education, Economy and Environment and vowed to confront Corruption, Criminalisation and Cartelisation of governance. But the larger question is whether the UDP as a political party of long standing does have a document to share with the public on how it intends to realise the three E's and also the three C's. Crafting slogans is easy enough for those with a creative mind. But how to operationalise things on the ground is what requires a lot of planning, implementation and monitoring which MLAs and those in government don't do very well. To my mind the biggest drawback of every political party is the vacuum in thinking. None of the political parties have a think-tank which comprises some dedicated souls from amongst its cadres to bring to the table the voices of the people and to take back to the people a message that their collaborative efforts are needed to implement every development programme. Let us not fool ourselves even for a moment by imagining that people today are ready to believe political parties and candidates. We are all looking at how best

to use the respective candidates for our personal gain during these crucial weeks before the jamboree is over.

I was conversing with a colleague over the rise in the number of BPL families in some constituencies such as Shillong South and Pynthorumkhrah to name a few. Why has poverty risen by leaps and bounds in these constituencies? What is the socio-economic profile of these people? Are they kept at subsistence level so that they are easier to manipulate? What have the sitting MLAs done to ameliorate the pain and suffering of these people? Apart from trying to push people through the backdoor into government

**The Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme has far too many riders to be able to work for the poor. More than insurance, it is the primary and tertiary health care facilities which are the remit of the state to provide.**

run institutions, can we have the name of one MLA or minister who has thought through on what are Meghalaya's employment potentials outside the government sector? Has any MLA submitted a blueprint to the outgoing government on the employment policy it ought to adopt? I have not seen such a document and I don't believe it exists. So what really are MLAs doing other than supervising the construction of roads and footpaths and trying to push the PHED to provide drinking water to their constituents? Have any of the sitting MLAs done a research to find out the gaps in the health care system of Meghalaya? Have any of them questioned why Meghalaya, Government despite having a NEIGHRIHMS with state of the art facilities for treatment of a range of diseases including cancer, still continues to send its employees and their relatives to Vellore, Apollo Mumbai, Apollo Chennai et al? Should government employees be the privileged class while others cannot even afford basic health care? Did we

vote for a government so that the needs of the elite alone are looked after? As of 2016, Meghalaya has 68,280 employees and these and their family members only, out of the 30 lakh people of in the state are getting all the healthcare perks. Is this an equitable deal? The Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme has far too many riders to be able to work for the poor. More than insurance, it is the primary and tertiary health care facilities which are the remit of the state to provide. Insurance makes health care expensive and benefits the health care providers in the private sector. So how can the health insurance model benefit more people in Meghalaya?

On Thursday the BJP released a document called "Chargesheet Against Congress which lists all the sins of omission and commission of the Congress government in Meghalaya, especially the Education Scam. Well, the Education Scam may seem like a huge malfeasance for some thinking citizens but the voters of East Shillong Constituency don't care since not too many from that constituency were affected by the White Ink Scam and because the Courts have not pronounced judgement on the matter yet. People here continue to vote for what they get out of their MLAs and this is why we are where we are today. Rather than documenting the Congress scams and listing the areas they have failed why doesn't the BJP come up with its own list of "to dos" in the next five years? Why doesn't the BJP tell us how it will be different from the Congress with regular offenders like Sanbor Shullai in their fold? Can the BJP change peoples' mindsets overnight? Can they plug the loopholes of corruption and nepotism when this same man sits at the high table? That's something even the BJP cannot guarantee! So

the Party should stop this rhetoric of change.

Coming to the NPP which seems to be concentrating on campaigning rather than addressing the media on insubstantial issues, one would like to ask this Party who its chief ministerial candidate is, because this looks like the Party that might form the next government with the BJP as a very junior partner. If the NPP+BJP combine still does not end up with the magic figure of 31+ then who else will join this conglomerate? In September last year the UDP had made a public statement that it would not treat the BJP as a pariah. Now it has changed its stance! The UDP will be the most embarrassed when it decides to take the next course of action after March 3, 2018.

Meanwhile the "national" parties will be unleashing their star campaigners in Meghalaya to brainwash us on what they can do better than the other. Right now all the big guns of the Modi cabinet have descended in Nagaland. It remains to be seen if their collective body weight will be able to convince the Nagas that the BJP and its ally the NDPP led by Neiphiu Rio is the Party to vote for in case the Nagas want a quick solution to their eternal problem. If you ask me we have seen too many of these political shenanigans to be able to take any of these political parties seriously. When the Congress bigwigs come all they will be talking about is how demonetisation, GST, beef ban and the works are the legacy of the Modi government that the people of Meghalaya would not want to see repeated here. (In any case demonetisation and GST has hurt all states including the BJP ruled ones). The BJP in its turn will wave the non-official charge sheet of scams it has documented and ask us to abandon the Congress. The UDP and HSPDP are neither here nor there. The PDF is just going on a Mukul-bashing spree. Oh why do "We the People," have to suffer such ignominy and be treated like cretins that cannot read the signs of the times?

Indeed, the tea vendor is a shining example of professionalism.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

### Good traffic regulation

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily we would like to express our appreciation for the new traffic arrangement made by the Police in and around Polo Bazar Area. After the introduction of the new system, traffic problems have eased considerably and the movement of vehicles is more orderly. Although it is learnt that the new arrangement is on a trial basis, we think this could continue for some more time. Our only suggestion is to keep some police personnel in front of Matri Mandir so that parking of local taxis can be restricted for smooth running of vehicles.

I once again thank and congratulate the traffic police for this arrangement.

Yours etc.,  
S. Dey & Others,  
Shillong-1

## Opposition Unity Challenges within

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

The Opposition has had a packed ten days. First a NCP leader hosted a tea party followed by the Congress convening a meeting of 17 non-NDA Parties in New Delhi. Whereby Congress leader Sonia Gandhi called for Opposition unity on all issues of national importance.

Attended by almost all major Opposition Parties barring the BSP and AAP which said it had not been invited, its underscored, "We should altogether adopt a common approach and strategy both inside and outside Parliament".

Peritently, Sonia continues as UPA Chairperson instead of her son Congress President Rahul as she is obviously a better bet for safeguarding "Opposition unity" in Parliament by virtue of her seniority and experience and acceptability to several senior leaders. Besides, the leadership cannot ignore challenges within.

Recall, the NCP Chairperson had called for an Opposition march on Republic Day in Mumbai to protest against the NDA Government's politics and policies, specifically against the call by some BJP leaders to change the Constitution.

In fact, the CPI(M) General Secretary had called for "widest possible coming together of Opposition Parties" on a policy platform to defeat the BJP after the Gujarat Assembly election.

Doubtlessly, more than one leader is ready to call for, initiate and also lead Opposition unity.

Also, while Congress President Rahul accepted there might be differences among Opposition Parties in States, he reminded them they had a common aim of defeating the BJP at the Centre. Evidently, a new slogan for Opposition Unity is: Unity in Parliament, Opposition in States", to be used wherever applicable.

Additionally, unity leaders depict this as "secular forces" fighting "communal" politics although there is no clear definition or understanding of the concepts of secularism and communalism. Some Parties and organizations are given such labels.

Undeniably, struggle for Opposition unity is an interesting feature of multi-party Parliamentary politics in India. It is a formation from time to time with no permanent members and is a part of alliance politics. With the common enemy being identified in the ruling Party/coalition which is the cementing reason. The TINA (there is no alternative) factor provides the basis for this make-shift and artificial unity.

Significantly, the unity call by the Congress is not for fighting elections, but for adopting a common stand on national issues. These include matters like GST, foreign direct investment, powers of Constitutional functionaries, simultaneous elections, etc. Alongside, issues raised in Parliament and those to be brought before it and voted on.

Hence, the question of electoral alliance, seat sharing and allocation of constituencies are kept away from Opposition Unity call.

However, the ultimate goal is to defeat the NDA in the 2019 general elections --- a target which requires several rehearsals inside and outside Parliament and cultivation of a spirit of friendship and cooperation in diverse situations among Parties sharing the same objective.

There are three platforms for Opposition unity --- unity within the legislative bodies, unity outside these and on the streets and unity in the electoral field. Wherein, one does not include or exclude others.

Moreover, they are independent of one another and might or might not co-exist. Further, unity may also be restricted by area meaning a State or a local body resulting in friendship-cum-rivalry between same Parties at the same time.

Certainly, the Congress-led union of Parties seems to have a fancy for the word "united" like the UPA, United Front (UF) and United Democratic Front (UDF).

Furthermore, within Opposition unity, which is the

mantra of the non-BJP Parties to counter the Hindutva Brigade, Left unity is an integral element to be fostered and promoted by "left-oriented" Parties.

Besides the CPI and CPI(M), the Left broadly refers to many Leftist Parties, outfits and movements including the Revolutionary Socialist Party, Workers Party of India, Peasants and Workers Party, Forward Block, Viduthalai Siruttaiyal and many of the Dravidian Parties. Left unity is again in the making to face the next Lok Sabha elections next year.

Sadly, division within the CPI(M) is a major setback to Opposition unity for fighting elections. Recently, the CPM's Central Committee rejected a draft political resolution moved by its General Secretary favouring a tactical alliance with the Congress for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and accepted Karat's document rejecting any truck with the Grand Dame. This is a big jolt for Opposition unity even before its starts.

Indeed, it is a repetition of the CPI(M)'s refusal in 1997 to join the Deve Gowda United Front Government at the Centre if the Congress were to be a part of it. That decision too faced internal division.

Also, open display of division within division when questions regarding the split without differences between the CPI and CPI(M) are not settled is a setback to Opposition unity. Yet, the two Communist Parties as well as the two divisions within the CPI(M) have attended the unity call meeting by the Congress as if the divisions do not matter for unity to oppose.

Remember, the CPI(M) has been in power in Kerala and Tripura as the biggest partner in the ruling alliances. In both States, its main rival is the Congress which is now calling for Opposition unity, that is, unity of Parties opposed to the BJP.

In West Bengal, after 34 years of consecutive rule, the Left lost the 2011 and 2015 elections to Mamata's TMC -- a breakaway Congress group. In 2011 the TMC and Congress formed an alliance to fight their common rival CPM. In 2016, the Left (including CPM)-Congress alliance was defeated by the TMC fighting alone. The West Bengal Congress was also divided over the issue of alliance with the CPM.

In this struggle for unity, small Parties which do not have any chance of becoming the ruling Party might have an option to choose their electoral partners but the bigger Parties aspiring for capturing power have to join the enemies of their main rival.

Consequently, Opposition unity is made up of contenders to power against the ruling Party plus as many small Parties as possible which can fetch votes and/or win a few seats. Bluntly, it is arithmetical calculation alone where elections are concerned.

When such a unity is forged for taking positions in Parliament as a prelude to the general elections, national issues, interests and priorities become matters of secondary or no concern. Mustering strength to prevent the ruling alliance from conducting Parliamentary proceedings becomes the objective. At times, it ends in absurd situations like speaking in favour of something and voting against it.

Importantly, Opposition unity has been working exceedingly well in stalling Parliamentary proceedings and delaying legislations more than anything else. It is futile to hope that this can be extended to the electoral field where Parties have different expectations and need different abilities. Clearly, difficulties in forming Opposition unity are different from those in preserving a coalition Government experienced by the United Front Government in the late 1990s or by its successor the NDA in 1999. The challenges within are plenty as unity centres around the race for political power. ---

INFA  
(The author is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

### TO THE EDITOR

## The myth of beef ban!

Editor,

There has been a lot of hue and cry about a Central Government notification that many allege bans the sale of beef. Nothing could be further from the truth. The notification in question was issued on May 26, 2017 by the Environment Ministry, and is titled "Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017 - under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act."

For those who have actually read the notification, and have not been led by lies purported by a very desperate opposition, will know that the word 'beef' does not figure in the notification even once. In fact what the notification speaks about is the treatment of animals 'meant for slaughter' which in itself implies that slaughter is allowed. It lays down rules like -- if cattle are being taken to the market for sale, and if the market is farther than a certain distance, you will have to arrange for a vehicle to carry the animals in, and that you cannot make them walk long distances. The rules state that if cattle are

made to wait in the market before they are sold, food and water must be provided to them. These and similar rules only guide us humans to be more humane in our treatment of animals. I leave it to the readers to decide if humanity is too much to ask for. The notification does not advise us not to eat meat, but only exhorts us to be humane to animals while they are still alive.

Imagine that you were walking on the road and notice a man hitting a dog mercilessly with a stick. Would you cheer the man and enjoy the pain of the speechless and helpless poor animal or would you ask the man to let the poor dog go? The humanity in us will cause us to do the latter, and hence the rules under discussion.

However, one may argue that the rules are too strict to allow any livestock trade. Now, this is an argument that I would patiently listen to. But the fact is, before the notification received the official assent, it was placed in the public domain for a satisfactory long time. All state governments, different social organisations, and

the public were asked and allowed to make suggestions on the draft rules. Would you not agree that it was the duty of the state governments (and especially the governments of states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Kerala, where consumption of beef is common practice) to make suggestions about the draft that would make it less strict and more convenient? But these governments, for reasons best known to them (or perhaps because they foresaw a topic for future propaganda), did not respond to the call for suggestions. The only suggestions that came were from animal's rights groups, and other social organisations and persons who work for animal safety. As such, it is not surprising if the rules are stringent. The onus of moderating it lay with the state governments and they squandered their chance. However, the Central Government has agreed to review the rules even after it was notified. For this, we should applaud the Government. After all, the willingness to change and adapt is the only route to growth and development.

Yours etc.,  
Haka Lyngdoh  
Shillong - 14

## True professionalism!

Editor,  
Whenever I hear the word professionalism, the face of a young man comes to my mind. He is not a doctor or a lawyer but a tea vendor who sells tea from table to table at a workplace. He is very particular about his work, always maintains exact timings of his rounds and has a tremendous memory. "Are you a computer?" ~ is the question he has often been asked. After a full day's work, he collects money from his customers. So, he has to keep it in his mind how many cups a person has consumed on a particular day and also how many of those are big cups and how many small ones and also if there were any arrears of previous days.

Whenever anyone's body language has thrown a doubt, he emphatically starts narrating the details of his having tea associating with other things like who he has taken the first tea with, the exact location of his having

the second one and what he said to him at the time of receiving the third one! It is a real magic. But never has he overcharged anyone. Also, he never let anyone hurt his dignity of labour. He does not answer to anything that has been asked with an intention to make even friendly fun of him. He is indeed an embodiment of what professionalism really is.

Unfortunately, sometimes we brand those people as professionals who are like money making machines. A teacher who does not help his/ her students in the classroom but gives his/ her best as a private tutor, has generally got the label "a very professional teacher"! But how can a person be called professional when she/ he is actually neglecting her/ his profession?

It is a common error to link professionalism only with money. Professionalism is actually the high standard that we expect from a person who is well trained in a particular job. It is all about skill, honesty and integrity. It comes after following the high standards of 3D ~ dedication, determination and discipline that create and enhance the brand value of a person or a product or a company.

*"In our country religion is not different from philosophy and religion & philosophy don't differ from science."*

--- Virchand Gandhi

## The Shillong Times

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### Religion versus secularism

NEVER before has religion become the talking point in our elections except as whispering campaigns but today it's all about which party not to vote because of its apparent illiberal views on matters of faith and which party to choose because of its "secular" credentials. Religion is to be treated as a matter of personal faith and should not be used to score political points. And a political party that professes to be secular cannot bend over backwards to appease any religious group. The Congress Party did so in the Shah Bano case. Shah Bano a 60 year old woman went to court asking maintenance from her husband who had divorced her. The Supreme Court ruled in her favour in 1985. Shah Bano was entitled to maintenance from her ex-husband under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (with an upper limit of Rs. 500 a month) like any other Indian woman. The judgment was not the first granting a divorced Muslim woman maintenance under Section 125. But the orthodox Muslim mullahs termed the verdict an attack on Islam.

The Congress Government which was headed for an election that year took the side of conservative Muslims and enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. The most controversial provision of the Act was that it gave a Muslim woman the right to maintenance for the period of iddat (about three months) after the divorce, and shifted the onus of maintaining her to her relatives or the Wakf Board. The Act was discriminatory towards divorced Muslim women and deprived them the right to basic maintenance which women of other faiths had recourse to under secular law. So for the Congress today to parade as the paragon of secularism is a farce. More so since Rahul Gandhi had to follow in the footsteps of his rivals in Gujarat and visit temples during his election campaign recently. In India political parties have used every trick in the book including that of ghettoising and communalising people for vote banks. The agenda for the election should not revolve around religion but on more important issues of education, health, employment because these will build the capacity of the youth to question the status quo and demand their rights under the Constitution. Political parties should not distract voters with the ruse of religion.

### LOOKING BACK

May 14, 1989

### Goods movement rail exempt from 300-hour bandh

Rail traffic and food supplies along the National Highway have been exempted from the purview of the 300-hour Assam bandh the longest ever in the North East commencing from 5 AM on May 16 according to a press release of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). The bandh has been jointly called by the ABSU and the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) demanding the Centre's direct intervention on the 'Bodoland' issue.

The press release, issued in Shillong on Sunday stated that the decision was taken keeping in view the ensuing monsoons and the resultant disruption of road and rail traffic in the North East causing dislocation in the supply of essential commodities. The ABSU and the BPAC said that they would not want to "further increase the inconvenience" of the people in the North-East who "have extended their support" to the "peaceful, democratic and non-violent movement" for Bodoland.

Calling upon the people of Assam to make their 300-hour bandh a success, the press release clarified that state road works, state bus services, markets, offices and educational institutions will remain closed during the bandh.

### Gold bars worth Rs. 25 lakh seized from bus passengers

In what is believed to be the biggest haul of contraband gold in Meghalaya, the police has seized 19 gold bars bearing foreign markings weighing about 8 kg and valued at Rs. 25 lakh from two Mizo passengers travelling in a night super bus from the Aizawl to Shillong. Acting on a tip off, a police party led by the SP Jaintia Hills, Mr S K Jain, intercepted the bus at Jowai at the crack of dawn on Sunday and recovered the gold bars from the pouches of the two passengers.

The two smugglers who are no in Police custody stated that the gold bars, which were procured by them from the Burma border, were to be disposed off to the goldsmith in Shillong. Meanwhile, interrogations are on an the police are trying to verify the antecedents of the two arrested. Police sources said that the operation was the culmination of a constant vigil that was being maintained on the highway following information received by them about the movement of smugglers on the highway.

# "Slipstreaming" Meghalaya: A note to our next CM

By T Fightingstar Mawlong

To the potential next CM, Two things I know well about you. One, you are one of those hard-working political leaders. Two, judging from the nominations, you are also an experienced political leader, so I'm sure you must be aware of how people vote. Generally speaking, people in Meghalaya vote a particular candidate because of one or any of the following reasons: 1) we like the candidate's charisma although he is no leader or visionary 2) we are not impressed or convinced with the candidate we vote, but he will do 3) we can't stand the other candidates so we will rather have this candidate win even though we aren't expecting any good from him/her either 4) we know nothing about the candidate, not that we care, we vote him/her for the cash, and 5) we are sentimental voters, we vote in a heartbeat for someone who patriotically campaigns on "Khasi first" or on "Garo first" or some other minority issues. So most of us vote for the person we, deep inside, really don't have much hope to lift Meghalaya up. Or so to say, we vote for the heck of it.

Play better than the others in above points, you will sail through. Never mind the issues. And don't bother with the ideology.

But then again, it wouldn't hurt to genuinely bang on some critically important issues, would it? After all, it might give you those thousands of bonus votes to help your party win. Also perhaps, down the line, you'll be remembered as a legendary CM of Meghalaya.

Now speaking of issues, you should understand that the 'grand and elusive' economic problem in our state will remain 'grand and elusive' for a simple reason that education is failing. No country or region can bypass slow development with a decrepit education system. In fact, I'm sure you could instinctively feel that. But instead of seriously working on the education sector, as a state we are busy exaggerating how many jobs this or that scheme would create, or what and how many schemes would come our way. States like Himachal Pradesh or Kerala aren't waiting to revamp the economy with some fancy central schemes. They aren't standing still. They aren't playing for a second place. They're leading and putting more and more emphasis on education. So do you feel okay with the 'catch-up later on' attitude of our State?

With regard to our

education sector, the numbers are not so pretty to look at. We started late and so, understandably, we're well behind other states, but if we remain content with the 'catch-up later on' attitude in education, then Meghalaya will never be able to level up even with neighbouring states. The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) of the Ministry of Human Resource Development reveals that between 2010 and 2016 there has been a very little progress in Meghalaya's education sector, unlike other states. For instance, the number of college per lakh of the population was 16 in 2010 and 18 in 2016, a jump of only 2 in six years, which is way behind the national level (23 to 28), not to

**The absurdity of a teacher rushing through a huge syllabus for personal comfort is disturbing, to say the least. If you think about it, these teachers are robbing the future of the young generation. I can only imagine the same scenario in many other government schools in Meghalaya if not all. And I dare say this is a scam that is far worse than the infamous Meghalaya Education Scam. So will our next CM be brave enough to do something about it? I know it is a great challenge, but if you won't, probably no one else will.**

compare with top-performing states like Himachal Pradesh (from 38 to 47). While in many states the pupil-teacher ratio has reduced, for instance in Himachal Pradesh it has reduced from 21 to 19, in Meghalaya it has increased from 18 to 21. And let me remind you of the report of 'India Rankings 2017' under the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF): there isn't even one General Stream College from Meghalaya in the top 200, whereas there are many from Assam. So aren't we a shame claiming Shillong to be the educational hub of Northeast. For the record, students from Manipur, Nagaland etc flock to Shillong mainly because of a relatively peaceful and safe environment here. But at the end of the day, I agree, numbers are just numbers. In fact, there's more to our decrepit education other than the awful statistics.

### TO THE EDITOR

### MPs with criminal backgrounds

Editor,

In her incisive article, "Patronage versus populist democracy" (ST, Feb 2, 2018), Patricia Mukhim has highlighted the danger of patronage democracy which "is a system where the political party is made stable by a constant maintenance of a complex system of quid pro quo, in which money, goods and services flow from the party in control of the government through subordinate brokers to supporters." Unfortunately, according to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), which analysed the election affidavits filed before the Election Commission, 34 per cent of the new MPs face criminal charges. Thus, 16th Lok Sabha has the highest number of MPs with criminal cases as the

percentage in 2009 and 2004 stood at 30 and 24 respectively.

This fact stands in total contrast to the way officers in civil service are recruited. A person with a criminal record is not eligible to enter civil service. Before an appointment a thorough police verification (PVR) of the candidate is done. And if a person has any adverse police record then his or her candidature is rejected. Now, the question is ~ why should we have two diametrically different sets of rules ~ one for the elected executives and the other for the selected ones?

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

### Let the results speak!

Editor,  
This is a belated response to Albert

Here's a little example to help you visualize the malady. Last September I went to drop a friend of mine to Ampati HS School on his first day as a lecturer there. It looks impressive for a government school. When we first entered the school compound I could see the innocent students looking quite excited on seeing us. Perhaps they were thinking that they are getting two new teachers (I later learned that there have been no mathematics, chemistry and physics teachers for months). In my interaction with the students and a lone Science teacher on that day, I realized that the rate of teachers' absenteeism is quite high in this higher secondary school. Apparently, teachers from remote areas attend school on alternate weeks only or

room is a poor quality education. You can say that a decrepit education system is one of the biggest gaps between where Meghalaya wants to be and where it is now. The question now is, will that gap be like a vacuum to pull you along, to inspire you to find the innovative solution? Or will you choose to remain indifferent and arrogant!

I don't know if you have heard of a Physics concept called "slipstream". The slipstream or drafting or momentum-diffusion is the pocket of reduced pressure immediately behind an object that is moving swiftly through the air. This pocket is also moving with an object carrying other particles with it. When another vehicle moves directly behind the first vehicle, it got caught in this pocket of fast-moving space and experiences a large reduction of resistance while simultaneously being pulled forward by the first vehicle's momentum diffusion (the spread of momentum). Physics says that riding in the slipstream allows one to keep pace while using approximately 30% less energy.

If you are confused, let me redefine slipstream simply as the "optimal pathway toward the desired destination". Now in every economy, there are many slipstreams created by different sectors. But the fastest slipstream is the one that is created by an education sector. You, therefore, ought to understand the value of education and accordingly prioritize it as the first vehicle of development. If education sector is progressing at a good pace, all other sectors can keep pace with 30% less energy. So just imagine the benefit when all sectors are closely riding together with education at the front!

I appreciate the incumbent CM's initiatives on education like 'LEAP Meghalaya', but if we are serious with frog leaping Meghalaya from where it is now to where we all want it to be, then, frankly speaking, fancy initiatives are not the solution. We need a serious and comprehensive revamping of our education sector, from kindergarten to college level. And we need to make education collaborative and innovative to the best possible extent. Are you able and brave enough to do this?

Thyrniang's article, "The party to vote to power" (ST Jan 19, 2018) The writer is of the opinion that the 18,30,104 voters of Meghalaya is to go for a "Pan- State Party" on the voting day, February 27. The writer has not specifically mentioned which Party but it seemed to suggest that this is the Indian National Congress. I do not exactly know what the writer means by 'Pan State Party'. Perhaps he means a party which has its presence all over the state (having units and functionaries in every nook and corner of the state and which is widely known and accepted everywhere).

The point is that political parties like NPP, UDP and other parties are also pan-state parties but they may not be up to the scale of the Congress Party because these parties are of recent origin in the state. But it is not correct to under-rate or underestimate them and to say that they cannot

# Agenda of religion vs agenda for change

By Sonie Kharduit

In recent times with the fast approaching election dates innumerable texts and videos are circulated with lightning speed to stimulate and influence voter's views along a certain agenda and it's astonishing to witness rather sad to say that RELIGION has become the central theme in the whole process of agenda – setting for the new government. The discourse over religion has overridden all other essential issues which can make the next government more accountable and responsive.

Mark Twain's famous quote "I am quite sure now that often, very often, in matters concerning religion and politics a man's reasoning powers are not above the monkey's," reflects the same state of mind that we exhibit now. Not to mention the division of our unified country which was cleverly designed on religious grounds by our so called superior white Christian race. The sooner we realise this dangerous mixture of religion and politics the better for human existence.

Religion is a double edged sword in itself; it can be a cohesive as well as disintegrative factor based on its applications and the ugly fact of its inherent bias cannot be denied. The fight for religious supremacy is an extension of cold war. Israel and Palestine conflict till date is the manifestation of this fact. Hence

constitutional provisions. As we are all aware, politics per se is not dirty but people who run it turn it into a dirty game. Hence when people of integrity occupy those seats, the party will get cleansed. The main drawbacks of the Indian polity is that we tend to vote for a party rather than a person. Often even a person with criminal background also gets elected due to his association with the popular party. I believe if we want to decriminalise politics and bring in an effective government, we should start examining the candidate's integrity and character first and overcome any religious bias and nepotism. After all, the purpose of an election in a democracy is to elect our representatives who will fulfil the collective public interest and not that of a particular community or religion.

Coming to the non-partisan agenda, we have plenty of issues to worry about and make our new MLAs accountable rather than breaking our heads on the name and colour of the political parties. The choking city streets, sexual crimes against women, women's empowerment, rural development, quantity and quality jobs for our youth, the health sector, education- teachers legitimate demands etc. so why not we channelize our energy and opinion on these

**The main drawbacks of the Indian polity is that we tend to vote for a party rather than a person. Often even a person with criminal background also gets elected due to his association with the popular party. I believe if we want to decriminalise politics and bring in an effective government, we should start examining the candidate's integrity and character first and overcome any religious bias and nepotism.**

communal ideas spread like wild fire once ignited because we people breed it in every household discussion devoid of any reasoning and it's further flamed when politics capitalises on it for the vote bank politics. This is the rotten fact that even now as citizens of this country we could not overcome and hence with every new day a new sort of extreme form of nationalism resurfaces thereby corrupting the integrity and unity of this country.

Apparently, it looks like in our current state of affairs with this upcoming election, religious agenda has hijacked the whole public discourse. The knocking of BJP has awakened the so called Hill parties to unite against their common enemy. It's ironic that in the past three decades of existence these indigenous parties that had failed to even accommodate the unified tribal interest and serve together, now suddenly starts caring about peoples' aspirations, hence it's difficult to digest their intention. On the other side, many of us who proclaim the secular ideology of the Congress, I suppose, realize only half of the truth. Don't we realise that this secular image of Congress itself is the vote bank and for those who are ready to vote for the Congress because of religious considerations can be termed as communal voters which is against the spirit of the Election Commission of India's (ECI) pledge and the

issues rather than committing the same selfish mistake of dividing our people on religious line and not uniting for our common objectives for the common good? To say the least, our own extreme religious propaganda and propagation in Meghalaya is not new; it has already divided our families, resulted in failed marriages, and fragmented the Christian community into pro Presbyterian vs pro Catholic and various other forms of YOURS and OURS syndrome promoting enmity and distrust at every step of the way.

Hence by allowing politics in our religious space we are fuelling this anger and further widening the trust and tolerance gap, ultimately opening the gate to doomsdays where humanity will be eradicated without the need for another ice-age to transform lives on this planet since people are already weaponised with communal ammunition to wipe out other souls.

It's time for introspection and to ask ourselves what we want in the next five years rather than just enjoying the ongoing festive session ending on February 27. Many aspirants in this race during this time will ignite the whole state on fire with inflammable speeches and ethereal promises, but then the beauty of democracy is that people are supreme. This will help us to overcome all false temptations by choosing the right person for the right job - not the party or religious background.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Shilong-2.

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.

# CHALLENGING THE WAVES

*Age is no bar for Sucheta Jadhav who went on a trans-Atlantic journey at 50*

**O**n a lovely, wintry morning in Goa I was sailing with the INSV Tarini team. I often pleaded with them to be taken on their next trip, knowing well that was impossible for a naval boat. For the record, INSV Tarini is Indian Navy's second ocean going sailboat. With an all-woman crew of six officers from the Indian Navy is currently on circumnavigation project across the globe.

Capt Dilip Donde, the first Indian to sail solo around the world, introduced me to the Clipper Round the World Race 2017-18, a race that takes novices like me. It trains the aspirants, selects 20 and a capable skipper on a 70-foot long boat to race against 11 similar boats around the world.

Returning from training at the Tarini, I signed up for a trans-Atlantic crossing of 4,000 nautical miles becoming the first Indian woman on the race.

Training was in Gosport in the UK. The boats were moored in a sheltered marina but once into the Solent, the temperature dropped a few degrees and the wind picked up, whipping up white caps on the waves. After a long first day at sea, the question in my head was: Do I really want to do this? I did!

I learnt all kinds of knots, then progressed into preparing the main sail and the Yankee (a pair of staysails in



American lingo) before setting out, and hoisting them out at sea. Then we moved on to tacking, gybing, doing racing sail changes: putting on a new sail while the previous one was still on, and dropping with exhaustion by the day end.

Sailing into the marina, sails tucked away, the aroma of dinner wafting through the hatch and the sun painting watercolour masterpieces across the sky was heavenly.

Cooking while sailing is a delicate balancing act. The boat is never flat on the surface so everything, including the stove is at an angle. You land up using your arms to chop, stir and hold on to the cooking vessel and almost every other part of your body to balance yourself and avoid toppling over.

The last day of every training week was reserved for a deep clean. This involved taking the floor boards off,

vacuum drying the bilges, wiping the walls and handles with disinfectant and cleaning the heads. And after the insides were done, putting everything back and hosing down the deck.

Training done, I headed back home, counting down for the race to start on August 20, 2017 from Liverpool in the UK.

We set off with a lot of fanfare. There was a military band and a Uruguayan naval ship to flag us off.

Since I was on first 'watch', I continued on deck.

The big waves and swell made me feel queasy but it was a beautiful, starry night and I got my first glimpse of the Southern Cross. Then the next watch came to relieve me and the moment I got below deck, I threw up and felt better.

I had just crawled into my sleeping bag when I heard an enormous thud, followed by shouts from instructors

for everyone to get into their life jackets. We had been hit by a whale!

David, who was the watch, felt this push and a shuddering shake astern. He looked over to see a whale rolling away sideways even as he lost control of the steering.

The whale's pectoral fin had struck the starboard rudder and bent it so its top edge dug into the hull and made a hole in the lazarette, tearing the bearings and jamming the connection between the two rudders.

Within minutes the two rudders were disconnected making the port steering operational again. Our weeks of training kicked in. Rags were stuffed into the hole, with a wooden board nailed in to keep it all in place. The storm jib was put up with the main sail on second reef and we began to motor back to the shore.

There was a bus waiting to cart us off to the hotel and a huge crane in

position to get the boat into the dry dock. The Uruguayans did a fabulous job on the repairs. Along with the Clipper team and we set sail again, with a quiet nod to the sea gods.

In a crew diary of my first week at sea I wrote: "Today is a week since we left Punta del Este for our second attempt to reach Cape Town. The lovely weather we have now reminds me why I enjoy sailing."

The last couple of days have been sunny, even if cold. We also had some orcas put up a show for us. Four of them showing off their fins and surfacing to give us a view of their beautiful white underbellies.

Good weather means less rocky seas and the opportunity to helm. I'm learning to 'keep my head in the compass' till I get a sense of the wind and the waves. Especially the waves, which are these huge rollers that, when I look at them seem likely to wash right over us. The idea is to anticipate them, feel their motion as they roll under the boat and hold the steering steady so as not to let the boat go off course. All without too much movement of the wheel, since 'less is more' when helming.

Off watch, I find I can fall asleep almost immediately regardless of the boat's movements and have the most amazing dreams. Typically of being in some warm, foreign land, eating exotic meals. Cape Town beckons!"

What was to have been a 14-day downwind sail across the South Atlantic, however, soon became a series of temperamental weathers. The south westerly winds brought the icy Antarctic to our door. The challenging sail, the bone chilling cold and the delay frayed tempers and it needed conscious effort to maintain a civil atmosphere.

We sighted land 18 days later. As the last boat back, we expected a quiet, subdued entry. What we got was a rock star welcome, all guns blazing! The pier was lined with cheering, hooting, singing, waving well-wishers.

Without much ado, we were alongside, and were promptly handed two cases of chilled beer and a super-size bottle of champagne. Celebration! (IBNS/TWF)

*Image: Sucheta Jadhav in the Clipper Race / Other images from Clipper Race FB*

## Rural roads & political accountability

**P**olitical participation has been defined by Winer and Chodhury as the process of any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organised or unorganised, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods and intended to influence the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national. Spontaneous participation of all citizens in the political process and institutions of the country is the key factor for fostering democracy.

**Political problems of villages:** For centuries, national and state level politics did not affect our villages much. Villages could continue their normal life unhindered by the political developments taking place at a higher level. The introduction of the democratic political system provided new opportunities for our villagers to show some interest in politics. Villagers' active participation in the democratic system is of course, a good sign of a healthy development in our politics.

But unfortunately, it has led to some problems like decline in the standard of politics. Illiteracy is a nightmare of democracy. Many people with very poor educational background are entering politics. It is more so in the case of rural areas. The tendency of uneducated poor people to "sell their votes" for money, the control of politics by dominant class, the inability to elect competent representatives have led to further degradation of politics.

Even though one-third of the seats are reserved for women in the local bodies as per the provision of Panchayat Raj system, they are still under the control of their men folk. Politics is proving to be harmful for rural unity. The present political system has been successful to a great extent in establishing relative equality, in providing for distribution of power, in ensuring political participation for the rural poor and so on. But it is failure in safe guarding the unity of the villages which they have been able to maintain for centuries.

Villages too have become hot-bed of local poli-

tics today. All local issues, disputes and problems are looked at from political angle. This tendency has made people to become too much dependent on the politician and the government. Even for ordinary things such as cleaning village tank or well, repairing village mud road, leveling school playground, etc.- people expect village political leaders to get governmental help. This attitude of the villagers is providing to be harmful for the progress of the village.

**Problems of transportation:** Ri Bhoi district is in the midst of crises and changes. Though Villages in Ri Bhoi is known as the classical land of the villages her villages are not free from problems.

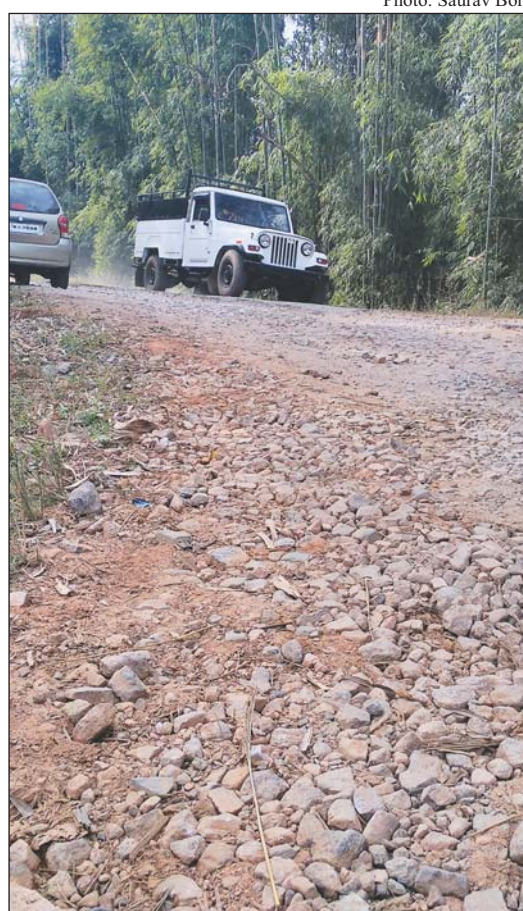
Some of the major problems with which most of the villagers are confronted even today can be grouped into three major types; economic, social and political problems.

The global importance of the villages unabated even in the present society is economic whereby most of the rural places in Ri Bhoi District the road connectivity is worse thus which has hampered the economy, especially to the peasant and farmers in which they have to suffer and face major problems when it comes for selling their product or in may be in other kind of work. And we can say that agriculture is the life of rural masses, and commercialisation of it determines the development of the region.

The role of rural roads in the sphere of agriculture cannot be ignored.

Proper road condition helps to connect with wider markets for these agricultural products. Linking up the entire county through the system of roads reaching down the villages is one of the major goals of Bharat Nirman. "Investment in roads reduces rural poverty not only through productivity growth, but also through increased non-agricultural employment opportunities and higher wages" (Fan et al., 2000:3587).

We have witnessed the dilapidated road conditions mostly in Jirang and Mawhati constituency in Ri Bhoi district roads like in Mairang-Ranibari Road via Patharkmah, Jirang Road, Killing-



Maikhuli Road, Byrnihat Road-Umden Road, Umling-Patharkmah Road, Umsning-Topatoli Road, Kyrdekulai-Dong Jingkiengdong Road, Patharkmah-Warmawsaw Road, Liarbang-Mawlasnai Road and all the Block II villages lack proper transportation and communication facilities. Still many villages are striving for improvement and getting better road connectivity from their region.

Moreover, most of the roads in these villages are constructed without proper drains on both sides. So rainwater gushes on the road reducing its longevity. A decade of pathetic road condition of this region, which is only becoming worse leading to the downfall of the economic, social and educational life of the rural people. The quality of life and socio-economic conditions of living of people may get significantly affected by the speed and ease with which they can carry their goods. In this sense, transport and economic development are interdependent and their relationship is both complex and dynamic.

*(Contributed by Dr Sandeep Gupta, assistant professor, & Phiralin Amy Marsing, PhD research scholar at University of Science and Technology)*

*(For full report log on to www.theshillongtimes.com)*

## Never doubt I love

**By Ratan Bhattacharjee**

**T**he history of Valentine's Day is tragic dark and bloody, though it is time to celebrate romance and love and kissy-face fealty. Emperor Claudius II executed two men both known by the name Valentine on February 14 of different years in the third century AD.

The Catholic Church all over Europe honoured martyrs with the celebration of St. Valentine's Day. From February 13 to 15 the Romans used to celebrate the feast of Lupercalia.

Noel Lenski, a historian of The University of Colorado at Boulder, was of the opinion that the Roman romantics getting drunk and naked were given liberty to make women fertile who actually line up for them. This brutal feat was regarded as a festivity of love.

Later, Pope Gelasius I combined the St. Valentine's Day with Lupercalia to expel the pagan rituals of physical intercourses. The drunken revelry was given a sophisticated coating. Here we cannot ignore the simultaneous happening of Norman celebration of Galatin's Day and it meant a love day as Galatin meant 'lover of women'.

In the post-industrial revolution era, valentine cards were made in mass scale and Valentine's Day ushered in a huge business. Today according to a market research by IBIS World, the V-Day sales reached \$17.6 billion and this year it is expected to reach the highest mark of \$18.6 billion.

"When every fowl cometh there to choose his mate," wrote Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the first English Valentine poem in honour of the arranged marriage between England's Richard II and Anne of Bohemia, May 3. He dreamed up the idea that all birds chose their mates. People used a different calendar before 1582.

After Chaucer's death, Valentine's Day celebrations got pushed back to February 14.

In Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a character who discovers two lovers in the woods and asks: "St Valentine is past; begin these wood-birds but to couple now?" Even Hamlet's fiancée Oph-

elia too sings "Good morrow. This St. Valentine's Day / All in the morning bedtime / And I a maid at your window / To be your valentine."

Even John Donne, the pioneer of metaphysical poetry who contested Petrarchan genre of love poetry, too glorified the Valentine's Day in his poem — *This day more cheerfully than ever shine / This day which might inflame thyself, old Valentine.*

It is exotic to hear a lover whispering to his beloved's ears in a Barista Coffee Shop: "Doubt thou the stars are fire / Doubt that the sun doth move / Doubt truth to be a liar / But never doubt I love" and only on Valentine's Day this is possible. Valentine's Day expectations are a set-up for heart-break. The most unpleasant experience of having one in a romantic relationship is the long waiting to say the three magical words 'I Love You'.

Silence on the part of the fiancée is like a quicksand which may drown the person seeking love and many overmuch optimistic lovers console their heart break by saying 'Waiting is love'. The Oscar Wilde's story *The Nightingale and the Rose* showed how the nightingale sacrificed itself on the thorns of the rose plant bleeding while singing to make the rose bloom for the boy it loved. The girl for whom the boy took the rose did not accept it saying that her lover would bring costly gifts which might be better than the rose. Probably for this girl, the Valentine's Day will never bring the romance in the air.

The Valentine's Day inside the mind is all that makes a real Valentine's Day, not the commercialisation done through sales and purchase of costly gifts, candy or flowers. So we need a Valentine's Day to touch the wishes and aspirations as we have for a holiday. Charles Lamb who craves for a Sunday across the whole week, found after his superannuation that all his week days have become Sundays. This waiting for a Sunday is the essence of the Valentine's Day.

*(The author is an associate professor and Head of the Post Graduate Department of English, Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata)*

## No trust in global media

This columnist no longer listens to the international media; luckily I still have the voices in my head. Which leads me to the following query.

Question: What is the main activity of the trained accountant? Answer: Embezzling money from clients, governments, charities and pretty much anyone who wanders by.

"Wait", says the nearest bean counter. "That can't be right. That's not our MAIN activity. We just do that in our tea breaks."

So you'd think. But type "accountant" into Google's news search function and items about them stealing stuff outnumber all reports about them doing mainstream accountant stuff such as auditing companies, filing tax returns, being boring, telling atrocious jokes, spilling coffee on their dark suits, flying to Bermuda with suitcases of cash, etc.

Clearly accountants are victims of the media's (and humanity's) inherent bias towards bad news.

I first got interested in this some years ago when there was a spate of articles about piano teachers molesting students. I was shocked. Piano teachers might be slow-rocking, hollow-eyed obsessives, yes, but uniquely evil?

Then came a spate of articles about DJs being uniquely evil for the same offence. I was shocked again. Then came articles about TV hosts being uniquely evil, priests being uniquely evil, parliamentarians being uniquely evil, etc.

A statistician eventually explained it to me. Pretty much everybody in the world has had to fend off a creepy guy at least once. That's 7.6 billion victims. So any journalist asking "has anyone been sexually harassed by a (insert profession here)" is guaranteed to get

500,000 people putting up their hands.

Andrew Cline, a professor who studies this, explained: "Once a master narrative has been set, it is very difficult to get journalists to see that their narrative is simply one way, and not necessarily the correct or best way, of viewing people and events."

A massive recent study in the US showed that the most common industries for sexual harassment cases were hotels, food service, retail and manufacturing. Piano teachers, DJs and TV hosts didn't even make the Top 10, and we all know that accountants and priests reproduce asexually, like algae and water fleas.

Fortunately, no one takes journalists all that seriously these days. By rights, we should be turning on the TV one night to find a newscaster saying: "Breaking news: Nobody believes us anymore."

One of my colleagues says that whenever he hears a surprising piece of news, he asks himself: "Is it true or is it CNN?" I thought that was a bit cruel until I watched the channel and saw a report blaming Republicans for the last Ice Age, which was 2.6 million years ago.

When did we stop believing? In 2016, every major international media outlet repeatedly told the world that a) Hillary Clinton would be US President and b) a win for Trump would lead to instant financial collapse in every market. In both cases, the opposite was true.

Anyway, any accountant reading this can now go back to what you normally do. If it's embezzling, I don't want to know. My fingers are in my ears, la la la la.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

**THE FUNNY SIDE**  
**Nury Vittachi**

# Little Thailand in Kolkata

By Souvik Ghosh

Angela Banerjee may not be a regular visitor to the market but these days she loves to visit a slice of little Venice not too far from her neighbourhood where she can not only shop for essentials but also hang out.

"It is an ideal place to click pictures while hanging out with friends," says the young woman who at the newly opened floating market in Kolkata's Patuli area.

The market, which was inaugurated by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on January 24, remains open throughout the day. One of the sellers says she comes at 6 am in the morning and stays till 9 pm at night with a break in the afternoon.

Floating markets are dime a dozen in Thailand. But on a trip to Bangkok, the bustling Thailand capital, one of the major attractions on the outskirts is the floating market of Damnoen Saduak.

On a busy day teeming with tourists across the world, Damnoen Saduak offers a unique sight of a market that prospered in and around a network of inland waterways characterising Thailand.

Tirtharaj, Baishali and Tuli, who were seen buying some items from the floating market in Kolkata, may not have visited Damnoen Saduak but gave a thumbs up to the concept in this eastern city.

Baishali, who stays in Garia on the southern outskirts, says: "Feeling nice to come here. It is different. Earlier the place was completely empty and deserted. It looks good now."

Taking a cue from Baishali, Tuli adds: "It is an amazing place. You (we) get such good vibes coming here."

"The concept is very creative. It is something to be appreciated" says another friend in the group, Tirtharaj.

The primary purpose of the market is to rehabilitate the vendors who were displaced from EM Bypass of Kolkata due to expansion of roads. From vegetables to fish to bindi, people can pick any item once they visit the market. Some visitors can even taste a few fuchkas (the crispy fried hollow ball filled with a mixture of spicy mashed potato stuffing and tamarind water) so famous in Kolkata as its signature street food.

However, in the Kolkata floating market, boats, instead of sailing through water, are anchored to the wooden piers from where buyers can bargain and buy.



(Above) The floating market in Kolkata has received mixed response from both buyers and sellers; and the market at Damnoen Saduak in Thailand

Flower seller Pappu Natua says he is making more profits than the usual market which was along the EM Bypass, the road that connects the city to the airport. Pappu says: "I am making more profits here (floating market). I am earning Rs 500 per day. Really happy with the rehabilitation."

Contradicting Pappu, Kamana Mondal, a vegetable seller, complains about

the inability to hand over items to the buyers easily. She even says some items had fallen into the water, leading to her loss.

"It is difficult for me to give the food items to the buyers by standing on the boat. Some are falling in the water. I am making loss," she says. Another seller Bimala Halder says instead of making profits, she is losing.

### Floating feat

Floating markets are many in Thailand. But on a trip to Bangkok, the bustling Thailand capital, one of the major attractions on the outskirts is the floating market of Damnoen Saduak. On a busy day teeming with tourists across the world, Damnoen Saduak offers a unique sight of a market that prospered in and around a network of inland waterways that characterise Thailand. Antique Buddha statues, swords, masks or lip-smacking Thai street food prepared by the women on boats, Damnoen Saduak is a tourist's delight to shop effortlessly, appreciate some Thai delicacy or simply laze around reclining in your boat and take photographs as your boatman steers you around.

"Items are sold here at lower prices compared to other markets while my travel fares have gone up."

The whole idea has not gone down well with several aged people who have voiced their displeasure over the market. Kamalendu Ganguly, a Patuli resident, says the whole market will be a complete failure.

He says, "It is problematic for the older people. Accidents will certainly occur, some people will die and the entire market will be closed. This is inevitable. Moreover, it is tough to buy things. We can't touch the items, hold it in hands. Problematic."

Another buyer echoes the words of Ganguly. Though she loved the grapes and also appreciated the cheap prices in the market, he feels it is "impractical".

The waste accumulation process in the market seems to be eco-friendly as none of the sellers are dumping wastes into the water to keep it clean. Wastes are accumulated in a storage that is dumped into the bin.

While only time can determine the fate of the market, colourful decorations coupled with bright lights have provided a unique destination for tourists and also people of the city to pay a visit. (IBNS-TWF)

Images by Avishek Mitra/IBNS

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, FEBRUARY 11, 2018

Moon sextile Venus is a good planetary position for achieving good opportunities and results. Inventiveness will play a significant part in your professional growth. Your innovative concepts will be well received by superiors, provided you remain vocal and articulate. Some of business and social experiments will produce pleasing outcomes. Presentation and analytical skills will help in successfully completing new assignments. There will be a visible change in your attitude and it will prove to be a boon for your professional growth. If you are on the threshold of beginning a new venture, you will get encouraging response. You are well poised to make smart moves and display great business acumen. It's a good time to resolve personal issues with old friends.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

You would express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you express verbally or write. This is a cycle of completion and transition. It is a time when we need to let go of things that no longer serve their purpose, and hold on to things that have a future. You would express your sympathetic and compassionate side. The ideas you plant now, will benefit you later. Others might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. Still, you are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever. You would stand alone, take action and start fresh.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

There is perfection and beauty in emotional relationships as you come from a deep and spiritual space within to relate in a new way with your loved one. You display great skill in sports or physical activity that wins you appreciation and brings an opportunity to travel. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication. You desire to learn and improve your practical and creative skills.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

You would improve your professional and personal relations, as you express yourself in a gracious and exalted manner. There could be a change in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. You can be lead away by enthusiasm unless careful inner balance is maintained. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. You are just fair and generous in family and professional situations. Your sense of humor takes you smoothly out of difficult situations.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

This phase is favorable for investments, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. A lot of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership. Your love life is more attractive and charming. You may be involved in activities connected with your children.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Realistic levels of optimism and confidence are with you, and you are able to attract fortunate circumstances into your life. Problems are easier to resolve. Your social life will likely increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful and helpful people. Matters related to universities, higher education, organized religion, publishing, legal affairs, and foreign interests proceed smoothly. You would be able to see the world around you in practical terms. This is an excellent time to seek advanced training and further your education. Remember to be thankful and humble.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

This is a significant time for romantic relationships as you move ahead together. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you come across as especially cooperative

in your professional and personal life. You desire to learn and improve your practical skills. New responsibilities are likely to present themselves and you would take them more seriously. You would be able to structure your life and your ambitions. You are now able to discipline yourself. Take this opportunity to structure your life and your goals, and work diligently towards them. Walking and communing with nature can be therapeutic pastimes.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

Socializing, romance, and stability are enhanced and in focus. Love, friendship, and relationships are emphasized. You are creative and you succeed in areas that allow you to make something beautiful, attractive, or entertaining. Any artistic or musical talent you have is more prominent. This helps you to stay on track and to meet your responsibilities. Your concern for your future is stronger than usual, and you may find that projects you start, or investments you make, will benefit you for years to come. This period brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

You may be recognized or rewarded in some way for the efforts you put forth. Because you project a more responsible and credible you, people in authority tend to be more inclined to appreciate you and recognize your work. Practical matters come into strong focus and demand attention. You would achieve success at work and complete projects through interplay of ideas and correlation of subjects since communication is your ability. You could be restless and pay occasional visits to friends and relatives.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

You would have positive feelings towards religion and religious people during this phase. You have a passionate nature, although you display self-discipline with people around you. Work and relationships go through a transformation. You may be thrown by certain developments in the family and feel compelled to take a strong stand or things can go out of hand. Complications in financial matters can be expected this week. Avoid confrontations. It's also a good time to break bad habits and start a healthy living routine.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

This phase brings confidence, pleasure, involvement, and grace in personal and professional relations. This enhances excellent work opportunities for people in a creative line, marketing, media, show business, consultancy and related fields. Romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities come into focus. Stick to your regular exercise routine and regular pattern of nutritious diet. Your confidence attracts opportunities and some of you may be promoted or your career could take a new direction.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

You would face new circumstances, changes and unfamiliar situations. A positive approach and well-spoken words would benefit and gain favors from people in authority and power. You may take up new assignments and projects that would bring creativity and innovative ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. More loving and appreciative relationships with your children may also figure at this time. This is an especially spiritual time for you—a time when you renew your energy and consider the things that are important to you.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This phase highlights friendship, romance and love in personal relations. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasures and worship during this time. The fine arts are inviting and involving as you channel your creative energy into it. A new person or opportunity leads to renewed interest in creative fields. Fresh attitudes and a new perspective are needed. You give and receive affection and love from friends and relatives. This is a good time to build your skills, get organized and attend to your health and well-being. Children do you proud.

## Tackling bull & bear



By Ranjan K Baruah

We are aware of the recent advertisements which are related to mutual funds. In today's edition I am trying to write something related to making money and a career option related to financial market. Before writing about the career option let us understand about the field that is yet to be explored by people in the state or in the North East.

Securities market is a component of the wider financial market where securities can be bought and sold between subjects of the economy, on the basis of demand and supply. Securities markets encompasses equity markets, bond markets and derivatives markets where prices can be determined and participants both professional and non-professionals can meet.

Securities markets can be split into below two — primary markets where new securities are issued and secondary markets where existing securities can be bought and sold.

Secondary markets can further be split into organised exchanges, such as stock exchanges and over-the-counter where individual parties come together and buy or sell securities directly.

For securities, a holder knowing that a secondary market exists in which their securities may be sold and converted into cash increases the willingness of people to hold stocks and bonds and thus increases the ability of firms to issue securities.

There are a number of professional participants of a securities market and these include brokerages, broker-dealers, market makers, investment managers, speculators as well as those providing the infrastructure,

such as clearing houses and securities depositories. A securities market is used in an economy to attract new capital, transfer real assets in financial assets, determine price which will balance demand and supply and provide a means to invest money both short and long term.

We keep money in banks or invest in many other areas. We also keep money in insurance companies.

Stock brokers work with institutional investors as securities traders, securities analysts, advisors or dealers. Brokers also work with banks, MF, pension funds, insurance companies and other FIs or work with individual clients. All companies require efficient researchers and hence this brings opportunity for people who are efficient in market research.

Like working for other companies one may also become good advisor and earn good amount. Like advisor smart young people may invest in share market and earn good amount of money. We need to study the market properly and nowadays there are many options to learn about the share market.

There is websites like [www.mon-economycontrol.com](http://www.mon-economycontrol.com) which help individuals to learn more about the recent trends in the share market. Presently, only two exchanges in India — the National Stock Exchange of India Ltd and the Bombay Stock Exchange — provide trading in futures and options. There are post graduation management courses related to securities analysts. Securities analysts' job involves a lot of reading, research, meeting people, writing etc. With ideas all of us may earn extra income or full time income through trading or through share market.

Some of the career options that come to our mind straight include broker/dealer, merchant banker, mutual fund distributor, research analyst, wealth manager. This financial services sector looks for graduates with commerce, economics, finance, mathematics, management background, etc.

There are many mutual funds companies or trade brokerage agen-

cies which hire aspirants. Leading brokers in India include Angel broking, ICICI Direct, Motilal Oswal, ShareKhan, HDFC Securities, Kotak Securities and Axis Direct, among others.

Stock brokers work with institutional investors as securities traders, securities analysts, advisors or dealers. Brokers also work with banks, MF, pension funds, insurance companies and other FIs or work with individual clients. All companies require efficient researchers and hence this brings opportunity for people who are efficient in market research.

Like working for other companies one may also become good advisor and earn good amount. Like advisor smart young people may invest in share market and earn good amount of money. We need to study the market properly and nowadays there are many options to learn about the share market.

There is websites like [www.mon-economycontrol.com](http://www.mon-economycontrol.com) which help individuals to learn more about the recent trends in the share market. Presently, only two exchanges in India — the National Stock Exchange of India Ltd and the Bombay Stock Exchange — provide trading in futures and options. There are post graduation management courses related to securities analysts. Securities analysts' job involves a lot of reading, research, meeting people, writing etc. With ideas all of us may earn extra income or full time income through trading or through share market.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at [bkranjn@gmail.com](mailto:bkranjn@gmail.com) or 8473943734 for any career related queries)



“At the point so near to zero, just almost before the death, life’s value jumps to infinity!”

--- Mehmet Murat ildan

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.181 SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2018

### BJP’s challenge in the NorthEast

TRIPURA, Meghalaya and Nagaland are heading towards Assembly elections this month. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s rally near Agartala started the BJP election campaign. The BJP has emerged for the first time as a key player to oust the Congress which has been in power since independence. Tripura has had a Left Front Government for a long spell. The BJP has experimented in Tripura by drawing in Congress leaders and supporters. In Nagaland and Meghalaya it has formed alliances with regional parties. It has shown a singular capacity to adapt. It has succeeded in the last few years in forming governments in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur by tying up with regional parties. The North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) was formed in 2016 and has filled the vacuum created by Congress failures.

In all the North Eastern states going to the polls this month the BJP has addressed such sensitive issues as ethnic, religious and linguistic concerns. Hindutva has been played down to appease non Hindu communities in these states. So have issues like hyper-nationalism and the beef ban. It has focused on the lapses of incumbent governments instead. Prime Minister Modi has promised to resolve local grievances. The 7th pay commission pay scales have been guaranteed, especially in Tripura. In Nagaland, the BJP has severed ties with the Naga People’s Front (NPF) which had been its oldest ally in the North East and has formed an alliance with the Nationalist Progressive Democratic Party, which is a splinter group of the NPF. In Tripura BJP has tried to cash in on tribal discontent by aligning itself with the Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura which wants a separate state. Of course, such alliances may generate cynicism among the voters as convenience is the only driving force.

### LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

### Mahanta visits disputed areas along Meghalaya border

Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta today visited some of the disputed areas along the border with Meghalaya and inspected development work. The Chief Minister visited Pilangkata,

Mohghuli and other villages where Meghalaya had allegedly encroached into Assam territory and attempted to set up a polling booths during the Meghalaya Assembly elections.

### TO THE EDITOR

### Intemperate use of chain saws in Garo Hills

Editor,  
In the wake of rampant illegal tree felling in the state which threatens to destroy the very ecology that we so proudly boast of, one major issue that needs to be discussed and tackled is the regulation of chain-saw laws. Talking about Garo Hills, the demand for chain-saws in and around the region has drastically surged which is a clear indication of the rising trend of its use. Chain saws have wreaked havoc as their use is completely unchecked and unregulated. Anyone today can get their hands on a chain saw for a meagre sum and there is no law to check who is buying it and what purpose he is buying it for. Both the buyer and the seller should be brought under the law and its possession and sale should both be made a licensed process which would help in checking the use of the machines as well as make people accountable for any illegal felling of trees that may be carried out through their licensed machine. Therefore, through your esteemed daily, I would like to make an appeal to the concerned authorities and to the ministry, to look into the matter and immediately regulate the use of chain saws in the state.

### Speed breakers necessary on national highways

Editor,  
Through this column, we would like to express our points of view over the concerns raised by Dominic S Wankhar through his letter “Why speed breakers on national highways (ST Jan 18, 2018)? Wankhar has questioned the erection of speed breakers along the National Highway in East Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya. We would like to inform him and all readers that the Jaintia Students Movement Central Body has submitted a memorandum to the PWD Minister, the Chief Secretary and the Deputy Commissioner of both East Jaintia Hills and West Jaintia Hills on 6th March 2016. In the said memorandum, we have urged the Government to construct speed breakers and footbridges in strategic locations like Lad Rymbai, Khliehriat, Wapung and Mookhep amongst other in East Jaintia Hills District where there are residences and schools and in these areas several trucks and other vehicles pass through thereby posing danger to

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request

the life of the people, especially school children who have to cross the road or walk along the national highway.

We hope that the life of the people and the school children are more precious than the vehicle of Dominic S Wankhar or other commuters travelling through the National Highway in these two districts. We appealed to you all to please bear with the inconveniences caused to him. These speed-breakers are important for the safety of people living in these two districts.

Thanking You  
Yours etc.,  
Leningstar Rymbai,  
Via email

### Irregular supply of LPG

Editor,  
I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the letters to the editor published repeatedly by The Shillong Times, to complain about the unending problem of LPG supply to consumers. Recently I read a letter from an LPG consumer from Mawprem, Jhalupara, Mawlai, Nongthymmai and yesterday I read a letter on the same subject appearing in the same newspaper written by an LPG consumer from Laban, Kenches Trace. Now, the question is who

# Rebellion in BJP & fewer Independent candidates for the 2018 election

By H H Mohrmen

Their constituencies even before they filed their nomination papers. In the case of the BJP candidates they are late starters hence it will be a challenging task for them to beat the other candidates who have run the race much ahead of them.

The BJP leadership thought they played their cards well when they delayed the announcement of the list of candidates from the Party. They thought it would prevent those who were denied tickets from contesting the election by jumping to some other party. But as predicted in this column earlier, the first candidate to rebel and also quit the party and to join another party to contest the election is none other than the sister of Shibun Lyngdoh President of the BJP in Meghalaya. Violet Lyngdoh the lone female Member in the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council joined the Conrad Sangma led National People’s Party and immediately filed her nomination papers as candidate of the party from the coal-rich Khliehriat Constituency. Violet also claimed that she had worked for the party and nurtured the constituency. With her leaving the BJP more than thirty booth level and Mandal units in its constituency were also dissolved. They have joined the NPP en-mass.

But Khliehriat is not the only constituency where the BJP has suffered a major jolt after the party ticket was allotted to another candidate. When the BJP decided to allot the party ticket to the former MLA Sanbor Shullai who only recently joined the party, the other contender who had joined the party much earlier was denied the party ticket. Manas Choudhuri former Cabinet Minister in the government of Meghalaya claimed that he had built the party in the constituency from the grass roots level and naturally felt humiliated that the ticket was given to a rank newcomer. He decided to quit the party and rejoined the Congress (from which

he had quit a few months back) and filed his nomination to contest the election as the party’s candidate from the prestigious Shillong South constituency.

In another prestigious constituency the delay to decide on the party ticket has put the candidate Marki Mulieh member of Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council under tremendous pressure because it is not going to be easy for him to cover the more than fifty polling stations of Jowai constituency in a short span of time. The other contender to the party ticket was none other than his own uncle Sing Mulieh former cabinet minister in the state. But even if unlike other contenders the senior Mulieh may not join the fray and contest the election from some other Party, his support to his nephew is crucial for Marki. If Sing Mulieh decides to not support the junior Mulieh then it will be a tough fight for Marki to win the prestigious seat.

Similarly the BJP suffered a pre-poll revolt in the different constituencies in the Garo hills where party workers resigned en-mass just because their leader were denied party ticket to contest the coming election. Most of the BJP contenders resigned from the party and are contesting as independent candidates. Senior BJP leader and party’s state vice president Edmund K. Sangma filed his nomination as independent candidate from Raksamgre constituency against Jonathan Rabha the BJP nominee. Another rebel BJP candidate is Chiang D. Shira who resigned from the party and filed his nomination as independent candidate for North Tura constituency. Besides Sangma and Shira another rebel candidate is Rahinath Barchung who is contesting against the BJP official nominee K.C. Boro for Tikrikilla constituency.

The BJP leadership needs to work extra hard if they are to win more than five seats in the coming election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. In the prevailing situation it looks like it will be a challenge to win as many seats as its leaders have

hoped for and it would need more than the Modi magic for the BJP to cross the single digit mark in the next house.

Another unusual development in the pre-election scenario this time is the decreasing numbers of independent candidates contesting in the election. In the 2013 election Jaintia hills elected Stephen Mukhim, Hopeful Bamon, Robinus Syngkon and Justine Dkhar as independent candidates to the august house, but this time around all the elected MLAs joined different parties and are contesting the election on party tickets. There must be a reason for the above mentioned representatives who have won as independents candidates to decide to join different political parties. That there are very less or no candidates contesting the election as independent candidates is a development which needs to be taken seriously.

The decreasing numbers of independent candidates particularly in Jaintia is a good sign and it will be good for democracy in the long run because most of the time the independent MLAs are the cause of instability in the government. In fact the presence of large numbers of independent candidates is also a major factor which encourages horse trading in the government formation. In a situation where in all probability the state will have a coalition government; the fact that there are less contenders who will fight as independent candidates will go a long way in strengthening democracy in Meghalaya.

On one hand the decreasing numbers of independent MLAs is going to be good for the state but the very fact that we have many small parties which have mushroomed in the state will again be the factors of instability in the state because in case of a hung assembly the small parties with few MLAs will be king makers in the government formation in Meghalaya.

inequality in the country which is detrimental to democracy. A growing economic gap and divide in the country between the privileged and affluent class and the majority of people of the country who cannot afford to have two square meals in a day is threatening survival of democracy. He asserted that the people’s representatives have an important role to play and be more responsive to the socio-economic realities of the country as they are also public servants. He, however, underlined that the move may trouble a few MPs.

Varun Gandhi, a scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, unlike all other members of the family, is the only politician of the country who has raised such a fundamental issue. He deserves kudos! That he has the conscience, courage and guts to make such a move is revolutionary and highly commendable.

Yours etc.,  
Samares  
Bandyopadhyay  
Advocate, Kolkata  
High Court  
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.

# Fate Of Regional Parties in Meghalaya

By Barnes Mawrie

Way back in the 1970s there was a laudable regional party in Meghalaya known as the All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference (APHLC) which unfortunately merged with the Congress in 1976. This party came into existence with a very noble and praiseworthy cause, namely, to demand separate statehood for the Khasi-Pnar and Garo People. The immediate reason behind this was the Assam Government’s draconian law of enforcing Assamese language on all hill peoples. This regional party remained active and effective for some years but finally the human factors played a role in destroying it. Since the demise of APHLC, Meghalaya has seen the mushrooming of innumerable regional parties. Every time an

Maharashtra alone. The voice of Meghalaya is so feeble and it would be feeble still if it is the voice of a regional party. Economically Meghalaya has nothing to boast of. There are no industries, no large scale agriculture or horticulture, no corporate investments etc. The only scope perhaps for the state’s income is tourism (eco-tourism and cultural tourism), but unfortunately, even this opportunity is squandered away due to lack of planning and investment. Meghalaya is still a baby tied to its mother’s apron string. It has to depend totally on the generosity of the central government. De facto the central government (be it the Congress or BJP) would care a hoot about a regional party with so little political significance. Experience has

**These regional parties have established their credentials even at the national level and are able to synchronize regionalism with nationalism. They have laudable political goals and they strive to be loyal to the people of their particular states. Moreover, these parties are situated in state with huge populations and consequently they have a sizable representation in Parliaments. In Indian politics where numbers count, these regional parties become powerful mouthpieces for their respective peoples of their states in national politics.**

assembly election is in the offing, a new party is born. The latest arrival on the political scenario is the People’s Democratic Front (PDF) founded and led by the rebel Congress MLA, Mr. P. N. Syiem. Unlike in other states in India where regional parties have established themselves as reliable alternatives to national parties, in Meghalaya instead, regional parties have discredited themselves and proven unreliable. In Tamilnadu we have two formidable regional parties, the DMK and the AIADMK with 37 MPs in the Lok Sabha. In Odisha we have the BJD with 20 MPs in the Lok Sabha. In UP we have prominent regional parties like the SP and the BSP. These regional parties have established their credentials even at the national level and are able to synchronize regionalism with nationalism. They have laudable political goals and they strive to be loyal to the people of their particular states. Moreover, these parties are situated in state with huge populations and consequently they have a sizable representation in Parliaments. In Indian politics where numbers count, these regional parties become powerful mouthpieces for their respective peoples of their states in national politics.

Coming to Meghalaya, we see a very bleak future for our regional parties. Meghalaya counts for nothing both in economics and politics at the national scenario. We are not a significant economic power unlike Assam and other states in India. Politically, Meghalaya has just 3 MP seats in the Lok Sabha while Assam at least has 14 seats. What is 3 in the midst of 545 MPs, 80 of whom come from UP, 29 from MP, 40 from Bihar and 48 from

shown that when a regional party is in power, there has been little inflow of financial assistance from the centre and this cripples development in the state. A regional party at the North-east regional level would be the ideal one. Such a party would mean that we could have 26 seats in the Lok Sabha and that would be a very significant number. With such a number political bargaining would be possible. But how far can this dream be realized only God knows. However, it is not an impossible thing, perhaps one day a great statesman would emerge in our region to bring together our political leaders under one banner.

As of today, regional parties in Meghalaya and in other hill states have a very bleak future. Politically they are toothless and economically they are not viable. Voting them to power would be almost suicidal, for, up to now none of them has been inspiring in the manner they function. The frequent splitting of parties and the unscrupulous change of allegiance of party members, is so disheartening to us that it would be sheer stupidity to invest in these parties. The only salvation for our state is to choose a national party so that development can be facilitated. After all, Meghalaya is still an underdeveloped state and we still need badly the financial support of the central government. However, we need politicians who have a conscience for right and wrong, politicians who possess a certain degree of patriotism and regionalism and who are committed to the welfare of the people and the state. Leaders with such calibre would make a great difference to the state even if they are affiliated to the national party.

*“How can I be reasonable? To me our love was everything and you were my whole life. It is not very pleasant to realize that to you it was only an episode.”*

--- W. Somerset Maugham

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.182 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2018

### Fake news – a present threat

COME election time and fake news portals come up and fill the space with ugly and salacious details about political leaders. Such a piece of news regarding a senior RSS pracharak working in Nagaland was apparently attributed to the NSCN (group not mentioned) was not only circulated but also tweeted by responsible people of a rival political party. The NSCN later clarified that the news was fake. But by then the fake news had spread like wild fire. The website that first put out the story had meanwhile disappeared. And considering that India is not known to have a robust cyber-security outfit, such fake news could be dangerous. These days pictures are morphed to show someone in a bad light. This is what political rivals use egregiously. We are today a digitised generation with a smart phone. Even youngsters now use mobile phones as their plaything. Everyone has become a consumer of news through the social media mainly through WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter and people quickly form their opinions based on such fake news. By the time the ‘fakeness’ of the news is deconstructed, the images are settled in a person’s mind and the clarification might not reach everyone who had first seen the fake news. This is how political opponents spread lies about their rivals.

Fake news has a devastating effect on citizens of a democracy who need to make an informed choice about who to vote for and why. In the past citizens had some faith on the traditional media and they formed their opinions through it. Now when it is no longer clear what is false and what is correct people have begin to lose confidence in media as a whole and by extension in the government. Many people now say they don’t watch television. Such is the lack of faith in the media! This mistrust is like poison because it can destroy not just relationships and friendships but the entire society and the nation too. But who will rein in these fake news warriors who operate from “sleeper” cells of a different kind?

### LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

### Constitution for redressing staff grievances

A high powered Committee comprising officers and staff of the Meghalaya Assembly Secretariat has been formed to examine in depth all disputes, claims and counter claims, grievances etc. and to suggest the fundamental rights of every aggrieved employee. The Committee was constituted at the suggestion of the Speaker, Mr P G Marbaniang at 'Staffmeet choired by him.

# Meghalaya Elections: A hotch-potch outcome

To look for and expect on Feb 27+

There is election euphoria everywhere. Election fever has gripped the state. The social media has contributed to the excitement and has enabled us to have a glimpse at the show of strength of candidates and political parties at the time of filing of nomination and major rallies. Though mainly rhetoric of charges and counter charges we can still listen to them. Naturally all candidates are buoyant about their chances of winning though only 60 of the 440 candidates will be the fortunate ones. All parties are confident of forming the next government either singly or in coalition. Let me put down in black and what I look for and expect on February 27 and following the exciting days.

**Giant killers**  
I like underdogs. The world still remembers the thrill of the 2002 FIFA World Cup opening match on 31 May in which the little known Senegal beat defending Champions, France 1-0. Which Indian will forget the historic upset triumph of the Indian Cricket over mighty West Indies on June 25, 1983? Less than two seasons ago the foot-balling world witnessed the fairy tale of unheralded Leicester City FC lifting the English Premier League leaving all giants like Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool, Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur behind. Last year new comer Aizawl FC too did the impossible by surprisingly winning the I-League.

Giant killing certainly takes place in politics. In every election giant killers emerge. This election too I look forward to giant killers. I look forward to upsets and wins. It would be exciting if a lesser known, a poorer, less influential, even a younger (newer) candidate defeats a well-known, rich, powerful and dated candidate. It would be sensational if an underdog relegates a heavy weight to the second or third position. This is not just for the thrill of it but it is good for democracy. It will restore a sense of sanity to the crazy situation we are in today, where only crorepatin can contest and win election. It will categorically and unequivocally debunk the reality that that politics is meant only for the rich. It

By Albert Thyrniang

tells us there is some sort of level playing field. It will be a lesson that nothing can be taken for granted. It reinforces the fact that change is possible. More importantly, it will give hope that merit can triumph over rich cash, power, influence and even dynasty.

**Communal forces to come a cropper**

In spite of tall talks the saffron party will come a cropper. The negative sentiments in other parts of India, the anti-Christian activities outside the state, the central government's anti-Christian decisions, the waning Modi popularity, the less than spectacular achievement of the central government, the attempt of Christian appeasement and the latest denial of visa to a Christian pastor to visit Garo Hills will be the reasons for a miserable show. The communal party's initial favour of sweeping the

*“Hindutva is just the opposite or at least it is portrayed to be so. We see the opposite of Hinduism in fundamentalists and fanatics.”*

polls in the state by dint of being in power in Delhi and the Modi effect will come to a near naught.

Meghalaya is not for saffronization. Hindutva is not meant for Meghalaya. Meghalaya cannot accept policies of right-wing nationalists 'that seek to glorify only ancient Hindu culture and history. Meghalaya cannot go the Gujarat or UP or Rajasthan or even the Assam way. Recently it was reported that the Assam Legislative Assembly was "saffronised" as its premises was decorated only with saffron colour. Last month the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, while addressing 'the biggest' RSS rally in Guwahati, said that 'Hinduism' unites all people thus making India a Hindu nation. There are allegations that the RSS is controlling the chief secretary, director general of police and top officials in Assam. It is quite certain the Meghalaya electorate will keep saffronization, Hindutva, the RSS and communal forces at bay. Hinduism, of course,

fanatics.

**Winnability over merit**

Notwithstanding one or two giant killers, one expects winnability (whatever that means) to triumph over merit. The corrupt, the tainted, the ideology-less, the criminal case holders, the non-performers, the illiterate may thrash the clean, the ideologically sound, the qualified, the educated and the capable candidates at the ballot box. In short, by and large, winnable candidates will prevail over meritorious contestants.

**All parties to fall short of expectation**

Contrary to optimistic claims by leaders of political parties, all will fall short of expectation. No party will secure a majority - simple or absolute. No one will cross the 31 magical mark. For obvious reason all have overestimated themselves. But in their heart of hearts they know more or less the final outcome. A few social media users have conducted 'polls' and 'survey' for their parties. One such enthusiastic guy predicted 36 seats for an alliance based on his polls. He was trolled

badly because his alliance is putting up candidates only in 40 odd constituencies. Only four losers from that alliance! Amazing! Forget 36, even 31 out of 40 will never happen. It is certainly a case of overrating oneself. The unrealistic expectation of all parties will fall far short of their goals. All the 'go solo' claims will fall flat on February 27.

**Post poll national-regional alliance**

Therefore, it leaves us with only one option - post poll national-regional alliance. Though in politics there are no permanent friends or enemies the Congress and the BJP will never come together. The Congress and the NPP coalition is ruled out because, again it is unthinkable that Mukul and Conrad will work together. The BJP and NPP is a natural combination as the duo are partners in Manipur and Rajasthan and the NPP plays a supporting role at the centre. The BJP/UDP-HSPDP/NPP alliance might be possible but there will be too much of ego clash with so many personalities involved. A Congress and UDP/HSPDP alliance too cannot be ruled out. However, in all these amalgamations, the party spokespersons will have to justify to the public their well-documented denial of any nexus among themselves. The pre-scripted justification is expected to be, 'for the sake of the state' narrative. Before one forgets, the independents will be crucial. They could be the king makers. In case of a hung Assembly they could be kept 'hostage' in 5 star hotels. Black cash and plum portfolios will be offered. Leaders of political parties from Delhi will have to outsmart each other before formation of a new government. Will the BJP repeat its tricks like it did in Goa and Manipur? Or will the Congress have learnt its lessons and leave its bitter rivals fuming? Two groups will stake claim to form a government. They could even parade their MLAs in Raj Bhavan. The governor could be accused of being partisan. The next government could come with a very heavy price.

## Musk and the race for Outer Space

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

### Beating the Rhetoric

The advent of modern photography has emerged as a powerful tool to capture human history and the progress of mankind. The lunar landing of Neil Armstrong inspired millions, so did other iconic photographs. Whether it be the Napalm war in Vietnam or Soviet war on Afghanistan, photographs in the modern era have consistently defined mankind. And in this same realm the recent photograph of a spacesuit clad mannequin driving a car in the space, with the blue earth in the background is a spectacular sight.

Elon Musk in his race to the outer space captivated the imagination of mankind all over the world, like never before, when Space X Falcon Heavy, the world's most powerful rocket was recently launched. The mission though a demo mission demonstrated how Space X had developed the capability to launch heavy rocket missions into outer space. Dummy flights usually have a chunk of metal as a payload, so that

detered the resolve of such companies which are moving ahead. Closer home, in India companies like TeamIndus are looking at cost effective measures of lunar landing while participating in competitions like the Google's Lunar Landing Project. It is clear that private corporations are taking an increased interest in outer space than ever before.

Worldwide such events would bring up new policy challenges for lawmakers. First of all, space is still governed by the Outer Space Treaty which has limited to negligible role for private corporations. Once private corporations take an increased role in space, one of the first changes that have to be made is regarding the Outer Space Treaty. While military operations and installations might perhaps still be banned for private corporations civilian installations would have to be permitted under amended provisions, if introduced. Yet the buck would not stop here. The introduction of

*“Once private corporations take an increased role in space, one of the first changes that have to be made is regarding the Outer Space Treaty. While military operations and installations might perhaps still be banned for private corporations civilian installations would have to be permitted under amended provisions, if introduced. Yet the buck would not stop here.”*

no significant damage occurs if the flights fail. However Space X decided to use a Roadster with the manquinn in the driving seat. SpaceX hid a few Easter eggs in the roadster as well. Though it has since fallen out of orbit, yet the point has been proven.

The image of the roadster however has brought other important topics and discussions into the fora now. One of the first issues that this launch uncovers is the acceptance that private players have finally arrived in outer space.

Since the start of human endeavour into space it has always been a nation specific activity. Although 1980's onwards private companies started contributing towards space research yet the role had remained rather limited. The companies were majorly responsible for offering payloads or small satellites which used the space that was offered by agencies like National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA), European Space Agency (ESA) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) among others.

However companies like Space X are now beginning to push the envelope. These companies are not limiting their role into satellites alone. They are engaging themselves in independent vertical operations without dependence or license from national space agencies. Indeed, the long term aim of Elon Musk's Space X is to develop colony in Mars where humans can live. Others like Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic aim to develop space tourism. In its course companies like Space X and Virgin Atlantic have suffered setbacks as well, whether in the form of human lives or property destruction. Yet these incidents have not

private corporations would introduce new legislative challenges which would require new administrative approaches. For example if Space X is able to colonise space tomorrow then would that entail that space can be divided by corporations among themselves or would the plant their states under their nation's flag, whichever is their country of origin. Assuming that civilian installations are installed and colonies are built who would provide security in such colonies. If the private corporations are allowed to keep their own security forces would that entail to military installations in space, a provision which is not allowed even for sovereign states under the Outer Space Treaty today. Further it would open up questions on status of minerals and other natural resources if found in these areas, nationality of citizens born in these colonies and so on. Each small issue would require new thinking and imaginative policymaking. India too has awakened to the realities of private corporations in outside space. The Draft Space Activities Bill was recently put out, for public consumptions and comments. Although the draft is a long way away from a perfect bill, yet it does indicate that Indian government too has started moving their thoughts in this direction. The road to private players playing a predominant role in space is still way ahead, however as the recent Space X activities have shown up, the preparations have already begun. The race in Outer Space is poised for interesting times ahead, in the future.

-(Views expressed by the author are personal)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Visa to South African pastor politicized

Editor,  
The denial of Visa to the South African Baptist Pastor was unnecessarily politicised by BJP opponents, mainly by the Congress party in Meghalaya, in order to draw political mileage from the present politically fluid situation by putting the blame squarely on the BJP led NDA government at the centre. I consider this absurd and with no logical base. One does not know the real reason/s as to (i) why he was initially denied a visa and (2) why was he the only one who was denied visa to come to India out of the thousands who had applied for it? After all, those in the opposition tend to find fault with everything to gain political mileage especially during an election. Sane people should shun this quick-fix cheap politics. I firmly believe that people, of Garo Hills and elsewhere are not as gullible as some tend to believe and I am sure they can see through all this nonsense.

In fact the sesquicentennial celebrations of the Baptist Church at Rajasimla was a grand success without the

Pastor from South Africa and the Baptist Christian faith in Garo Hills has not lessened, in fact it grew more fervent and stronger in faith with the celebrations of the Sesquicentennial there. Of course the celebrations would have been more colourful and would have added dimension with the presence and living message from the Pastor but to me the Rajasimla celebrations did not lack anything. It has in fact instilled more hope, peace and unity among the Baptists of the Garo Hills.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

### Stop politicising Christ!

Editor,  
Those who live by extortion, blackmail, kidnapping, rape, killings, molestation, flesh trafficking. Illegal drug trade are themselves anti-Christian. It is no use dubbing BJP with that tag when we look at ourselves in the mirror of Christianity! James Chapter 4:17 says, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does

not do it to him it is sin. " I am not pro-BJP but I support a balanced view. Suppose you apply for a loan from a bank and your application is rejected due to an error in filling up of the loan application form, shall you call the bank anti-Christian and now during election time in course of filling nomination papers if there is an error while filling up of the nomination papers, shall we call Mr Ram Singh the DC or (Returning Officer) West Garo Hills as anti-Christian or anti Garo for rejecting the nomination papers? No we cannot!

Similarly for the Indian Consulate's action on rejection of the preacher's visa in South Africa shall we blame the Government in Delhi? It is important to view the issue in the proper perspective and not politicize it. Reportedly Mr K J Alphons, Union Tourism Minister had clarified that none of the senior Baptist leaders ever broached him on the subject of visa rejection (ref. ST report 2nd para of page 5 of Friday Feb 9th) Slander just for the sake of gaining political mileage is a low blow and shall never stand scrutiny in the eyes of God Almighty come Judgment Day! We always pray; Let Your Will be done on earth and May

Your Kingdom come etc. Did Jesus ever want a kingdom packed with extortion, blackmail kidnapping rape, killings, molestation, flesh trafficking, drug conduits and a few compromising churches? Is this what Christianity in most of us is all about? I'd rather like to be called an atheist than be such a hypocrite! Neither marathon temple hopping spree of 32 temples in Gujarat polls could help Rahul Gandhi the Congress president earn the Gujarat throne nor did Christmas Carol bashing in Rajasthan help the saffron party in Rajasthan and the MP by-polls. So what gives? The normative way of God! It shows that God has a panacea for all kinds of ailments including that of malaise in governance or misadventure! Let us try to be the kind of Christians that Jesus would want us to be here and not always live by the rhetoric anti-Christian while living and doing exactly the opposite of what a Christian's life is supposed to be. Jesus never said in the Bible that HE came to save the Christians only nor did HE ever try to please people but preached and practiced the Truth and in fact

almost all people hated HIM for exposing them for what they are! If one is a true follower of Christ Jesus then he will never be a man-pleaser! (Galatians Chapter 1 vs 10) Truly sorry for the hard plain talk

Yours etc.,  
Sonaram M Sangma,  
Tura.

### Invalid ST certificates?

Editor,  
I wish to inform you of an incident that occurred on February 5, 2018, when I went to file my nomination papers for the 18-West Shillong constituency. While inspecting my papers, the Returning Officer informed me that the Scheduled Tribe Certificate issued by the competent authority of the former composite United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District had become invalid and I was advised to obtain a fresh certificate which I, fortunately, could obtain since I filed my papers well before the deadline of February 7, 2018 for had I decided to file my papers on the last day itself, I am sure that I would not have been able to complete the process.

In this connection, what

is perplexing is that the relevant notification which rendered the Scheduled Tribe certificate, issued by the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, invalid, has not been given wide publicity so as to enable the affected parties to do the needful as the implications in this regard are wide ranging.

For instance, if the above mentioned ST certificates have indeed become invalid, it logically follows that the possessors of such ST certificates (which I am sure number in the thousands) have ceased to be Scheduled Tribes and are, therefore, liable to be served with Income Tax Payment Notices.

Hence for the convenience of the affected parties, I request the concerned District authorities to kindly clarify on the above matter.

Yours etc.,  
Donald Shanpru  
Shillong- 2

*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.*

"Those who attain to any excellence commonly spend life in some single pursuit, for excellence is not often gained upon easier terms."

--- Samuel Johnson

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.183 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2018

### Bangladesh Politics

BANGLADESH Nationalist party (BNP) Leader and former Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia has been sentenced to five years imprisonment on charges of corruption. It certainly boosts Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's power base. The BNP leader may be debarred from contesting the elections in December this year. Her party will then boycott the polls as it did in 2013. Hasina will then romp in almost uncontested. That may subvert Bangladesh democracy by making a personality cult around Sheikh Hasina whose image has been sagging of late. Bangladeshis had been dissatisfied with her nepotism, corruption and encouragement to faction fighting. Her personal animosity against Khaleda is known to all. She believes that the BNP is in cahoots with the Jamaat-i-Islami, several of whose members had colluded with Pakistan during the liberation war. It is not all together untrue. Hasina's desire for revenge is understandable because of the assassination of her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. But hatred should not be the driving force in politics.

In fact, if Hasina gives a blow to democracy, that will run counter to the fervour behind the liberation war. Khaleda's husband, Major Ziaur Rehman read the declaration of independence on March 27, 1971. He was also a valiant fighter in the 1971 war. Hasina is at war with terrorists and radical Islamists which are points in her favour. But her opposition to Zia is personal animus. However, there is no denying that Khaleda cannot escape the taint of corruption.

### LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

### State High Power Comm. to study border problem

Meghalaya govt has set up a high-power advisory committee under the chairmanship of the Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Mr D D Lapang, to look into matters concerning the order areas of the state and assist the Meghalaya Government in the settlement of the inter state boundary dispute with Assam.

The other members of the Committee are the Deputy Speaker, Mr J D Rymbai, Power Minister Mr Atul C. Marak, CEM Khasi Hills District Council Mr G S Massar, Mr H Suchiang, MLA, and Mr H S Lyngdoh, MLA Special Secretary Revenue Mr J M Phira is the members Secretary. It may be recalled that on April 27 last the Assam and Meghalaya Chief Minister informally discussed issues pertaining to the problems between the two states in Shillong. At the meeting while both states agreed to maintain status quo pending final settlement on the other hand Meghalaya pointed out to Assam concern over reports of encroachment, from its sides

into certain territories of Meghalaya.

It may also be mentioned that as a result of the previous meetings held between the Meghalaya and Assam counterparts last year, Meghalaya has also constituted a high level official committee to review the existing arrangements and make specific recommendations for the socio economic development of people in border areas. The committee, known, as the Phira Committee, Mr J M Phira as its convener and the Special Secretary, PWD Mr B Kharmalki, Political Secretary, Mr W M S Pariat, Community Development Secretary, Mr N Prasad the DIG of Police (SB), Mr S R Shangpliang and the Revenue Officer on Special Duty, Mr T Lamare are its members. The committee was set up to review the existing arrangements and make specific recommendations for the socio-economic development of the people in the border areas.

# Is political ideology still relevant?

By Sonie Kharduit

"A political ideology is very handy to have. It's a real time-saver, because it tells you what you think about things you know nothing about"- Hendrik Herzberg. I couldn't agree more with the said statement when we try to dissect and examine the functioning and the degree of commitment of our political parties.

It might be easy for the American citizens to choose the type of government they want. Dual polity setup makes the system simple with the Democrats versus Republican ideologies; people just need to align themselves among these two.

Whereas the arrangement in our country is a complex mixture of multi-party system along with their multiple ideological interests which makes the whole country susceptible to frequent conflict and unstable government. In fact the country is seated on the mouth of an active volcano which can explode anytime if our political masters do wish so.

**The need for political ideology**

Political ideologies are a set of ideas, ethical ideals, principles or doctrines which serve as the guiding star for any political party. They give identity for its existence and how it differentiates itself from others. Basically it's a necessary evil in the political ecosystem. It protects and gives voice to the unvoiced minority interest which is the hallmark requirement in democratic sphere, but likewise it also degenerates and dilutes the whole idea of national integrity due to its inherent divisive tendency. But our country can't avoid this necessary evil. The heterogenic character of our society provides no scope for a successful dual ideological arrangement like USA. This fact is clearly understood by our Constitution makers, hence the concept of multiple party system was adopted which brought the said evil into our polity.

Usually, the political ideas around the world are spaced between three prominent ideologies, grouped under the tag name of CENTRE, RIGHT and LEFT. Each class claims to be the torch bearer of certain ideals and thereby it has the potential to generate vote banks. In the Indian context for example, the BJP takes the RIGHT ideologies (the conservatives stand) to protect the original identity and culture of original India minus the hazards of western influence. The CENTRE role is played by the Congress which is a neutral stand with no right or left tilt and this is the reasons why minorities in any country prefer a centrist party to secure their presence among the

majority. Finally the Communist party takes the role of the LEFT; its ideology is total opposite of the RIGHT, radical changes, socialist stand, and bourgeoisie supremacy.

With globalisation and the interdependence of various economies, market principle is taking the centre stage and hence the role of capitalist class can't be neglected if the country wants to progress. These realities pose a great challenge for the extreme form of communist ideology and it's for this reason India was forced to adopt a MIXED economy set up.

**Emergence of Regional parties:**

Post the Independence era, the dominance of single party is losing steam with the emergence of strong regional parties due to the politicization of diversified socio-economic-political interest of India's vibrant diversities. Generation and mobilization of vote banks is an easy task here. We just need one great personality with excellent oratory skills and one hot factious ISSUE which has the potential to build a strong visible wall within an invisible plot immediately amongst various parties. In the words of Saddam Hussein, "Politics is when you say you are going to do one thing while intending to do another. Then you do neither what you said nor what you intended." The statement sounds righteous indeed from a cruel dictator in this political Game of Thrones.

Regional parties like the ones in South India are constructed mainly on linguistic lines especially in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Tamil and Telegu has been the identifier object to separate and distinguish themselves from other Indians. While coming to the north especially in UP, Dalit and caste issues took centre stage. The Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP)and the Samajwadi party(SP) prevail by riding hard on these issues; the same yardstick can be extended to Bihar as well. We also witnessed in recent times the emergence of Hardik Patel capitalizing on reservation demands. He won the hearts and the support of many in the Patidar community which also can be factored as one of the reasons for BJP's dwindling vote share in Gujarat in the recent elections.

Hence to conclude we have plenty of reasons to divide this country but little reasons to unite. Foreseeing this fact our Constitution makers has

cleverly designed a federation with a strong centre to safeguard the unity and integrity of India.

While doing this comparative study I just stumbled on the fact that we are still fortunate enough that none of our aspirants in the upcoming game of thrones capitalised on the reservation issue yet. Our Garo community occupying the much generous 40% share alone, while the Khasis and Jaintias with a bigger population have to be contented with 40% which is the state's reservation criteria although it is illogical and unfair considering the population share. This generous 40% space proved advantageous for the Garo tribes in state sponsored medical or engineering educations. They can get entry even with much lower percentages and this advantage can be extended to job reservation as well.

Coming back to the issue, we are fortunate that none have politicized this issue till now in the manner that Hardik Patel did in Gujarat. I'm sure if anyone picks up this issue and converts it into a vote bank package, the state will turn into a battle ground and the Christian peace loving image will disappear into the wilderness. We as citizens of this state should be cautious not to fall under into such trap of some selfish people who have no vision for the collective progress of all tribes in the state. A political problem should always be addressed through constructive political debates and through appropriate channels without resorting to violence and riots. This marks the maturity of true democracy.

**Political ideology eclipsed under populist measures**

In the course of time populist measures have become prominent in our political discourse. The founding principles have taken a back seat when election dates arrive. Leaders capitalise on the needs and illegitimate desires of the public. The distribution of goodies like table fan, TVs, ACs, mobile phones, Tablets, bicycles, free water, highly subsidised electricity, corrode the whole idea of collective welfare-state ideals. These goodies are temporary in nature with no concrete positive externalities in the overall community betterment. Our valuable votes getting sold for a price, is the worst form of moral degradation of constitutional values.

Now a day's political manifestos are framed by evaluating and exploiting the ongoing emotional arousal of the public, like the ongoing anti-BJP stance in

our state, exploiting the fear sentiments of the Christians. If we pull out any of them and legally pen down their promises to fulfil and safeguard the Christian interests, I really doubt any would dare to do come forward, because they lack the integrity and honest courage. Whereas an honest candidate will not hesitate to commit himself even to such legally binding documents because his intentions is honest and clear with no self interested agenda.

**Dynastic politics- the eye-sore of Indian politics**

The Gandhi who delivered India from British rule and the other Gandhi who monopolised India's political system after independence do not share any real connection at all. Unfortunately, by sharing identical last names the latter Gandhi did get to exploit people's sentiments which allowed them to establish a dynastic political empire. Centralization of power and decision-making, provide no scope for intra-party democracy, no accountability in financial management and no scope for merit. Defection becomes attractive. Our CM spends more time in Delhi conveying every new step taken as well as taking the PM slogan, "more governance, less government," literally. This sounds attractive when dynastic politics is brought into the picture. Dynastic politics was part of the Congress downfall in the 2014 general election and in the subsequent years when the throne is occupied by an inefficient, zero-personality figure with no charisma.

If any kind of political upheaval and reinstatement of true democratic values with an efficient government in place is to happen, then active participation of the citizens is needed at the local and national levels. Populist and dynastic politics should be eliminated, and more importantly dynamic and like-minded people should enter the political scene to cleanse the rotten system. As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." We need more of actors not commentators to bring the required changes. Money and muscle power are the current challenges but it is our vote that puts the corrupt on the throne. Once we turn the game around things can definitely change.

# The Text and Context

By Ananya S Guha

The brutal killing of Ankit Saxena brings to the fore certain questions; rather intriguing ones, about Indian society, but we have to face these questions. Did the father of the girl he loved, kill him because he was a Hindu, or because he objected to the match since he did not think it appropriate that they get involved because of certain other reasons such as the man being too young; not a good match; not from a 'good' background etc? Of course we have all jumped to the Hindu-Muslim binary rightly or even wrongly. The issue is the divide and gulf that exists between the two communities. The young man did not give a thought to it. Not even the girl perhaps. But we do, and we are convinced that we know why it happened.

masquerading as leaders. Even love has been anatomized in the most bizarre and brutal manner. Inter-faith marriages have been dubbed as jihads. Ashrafal was killed as a suspect of this vermin- 'love jihad'. Incongruities are spelled upon, when there are none. Things imagined become reality, reality which is purged of truth leading to death. And this is slowly but surely building up as slow poison, gnawing into an otherwise organic society.

It is in this context that Ankit Saxena's brutal murder has to be viewed. The cause again was love, an ante jihad, or an obverse jihad. The perpetrator thought that his daughter and her lover were perversely errant. Ankit loved wrongly and had to pay the price.

**Poor Ankit, he did not understand that he fell in love- wrongly. His was the text, not the context. Trapped in this vicious cycle of history and present developments, it is only innocent people making the bulwark of the country, who are mauled and murdered. An entire people, the community, the caste or class suffer because of it. Nothing is finite. It is a long chain of opprobrium, hatred and surrender, to the ignominious truth. They suffer it. But the backlash comes from the people who can be exploited, the unemployed; by the people masquerading as leaders. Even love has been anatomized in the most bizarre and brutal manner. Inter-faith marriages have been dubbed as jihads. Ashrafal was killed as a suspect of this vermin- 'love jihad'.**

In all this of course more hatred will be fanned. An eye for eye theory! Why is all this going awry in India? It does not happen because of one incident. The genesis is in the past. Killings over the cow issue, love jihad, a young man being killed on the eve of Id! Don't we remember? And with each incident the divide becomes wider, the wounds cut deeper. And such wounds transfer into hatred, even murder. One Ashrafal will lead to another, no matter who is the person. The context leads to a bizarre text, where sheer hatred is the protagonist.

In this case caution is advocated by no less than Ankit's father. The hatred however is being sowed deeper and deeper. The chasm is becoming wider. But the formula for hatred necessitated by political expediency is clear. The writing is on the wall. It says we hate one another. But no one is interested to find out the reason, to examine the country's checkered history since Independence or even before it. Within India nations exist. They are the soul. And if the soul is hurt, the body will wince, the body will rebel, the body will retrograde.

Poor Ankit, he did not understand that he fell in love- wrongly. His was the text, not the context. Trapped in this vicious cycle of history and present developments, it is only innocent people making the bulwark of the country, who are mauled and murdered. An entire people, the community, the caste or class suffer because of it. Nothing is finite. It is a long chain of opprobrium, hatred and surrender, to the ignominious truth. They suffer it. But the backlash comes from the people who can be exploited, the unemployed; by the people

Underneath, society has become so fractious and hateful that neighbours cannot tolerate each other. Walls have been built and our prismatic chains tether us to the worst kind of malice. Otherwise how can such insane murders take place in broad daylight? Ankit's father has been a symbol of faith and tolerance despite the tragedy. The occult in India can work mystic ways. We have to now reinforce things beyond religion, caste and community; we have to re appraise and re- admit love. We have to perceive individuals as individuals. Who will take the lead? If political expediency transcends everything else, what is left of the country? If religiousness and religiosity are confounded as worst aberrations, like the jihadists themselves, then where is the difference? Where are our ancient virtues that we proclaim again and again? Can wrongs be answered only by wrongs?

Once and for all the context must be totally reorganized and dismantled. For once we must realize that the common culture of all is societal good, well being and decent living. To the impoverished, religion is secondary, and that one can say with absolutism. The common good has been misrepresented. The common good lies not only in the stratification of diversity but its unity. Victims like Ankit, young as they are have fallen a prey to the vicious deceptions and lies of a polity, having a long history of distrust and suspicion. And the country though again and again pilfered went by the process of absorption, cultural, religious, whatever one may call it.

And we have to abide by this absorption if we are to endure as Nation.

### TO THE EDITOR

### CMs with criminal cases!

Editor, Election Commission in its affidavit filed in the Supreme Court has proposed that those accused of offences punishable with at least five years in jail be barred from contesting elections after a court frames charges against them and if the case is registered at least six months prior to the election. Now with the shocking report of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealing that as many as 11 out of total 31 state Chief Ministers in the country have criminal cases registered against them, it is imperative that the Central government accept the recommendations instead of waiting for directions from

the Apex Court. Unfortunately every poll-reform of this type comes only after the Supreme Court's directions with no government of any alliance or party serious for probity in public life.

It is time for a consolidated move to eliminate wrong-doers from being poll-contestants. Defaulters of public-dues should be barred from contesting the next elections or holding any official post till all dues are cleared. Those not entitled to government accommodations should vacate them. It is a shame that even persons occupying the high positions of Prime Minister are defaulters of dues for use of Indian Air Force (IAF) aircrafts for non-official purposes. Every

post-retirement benefit including government-accommodation, pension, secretariat etc should be snatched forever from former Prime Ministers in case of default at the time of demitting the office.

Yours etc.,  
Madhu Agrawal  
Guinness Record Holder for letters in newspapers)  
Delhi - 6

### Your vote counts!

Editor Meghalaya is soon going to the polls but there is a lot confusion about who to vote for and who to with our votes. It is a fact that Meghalaya needs all-round development and for this we voters have a big role to play. Should we vote a political

party, which is strong? Or should we vote someone who is from our caste or religion? Should we go with what the media wants us to believe? Or should we actually think for a few minutes before casting our votes because those votes will determine the kind of government we will have in the next five years. Hence introspection before voting is necessary. Our votes are a reflection of our own informed opinions hence we should not be influenced by others in this aspect. We should not let people manipulate our thoughts or push in their narrow agenda in our minds. We need to be aware of what is happening in our constituency and our state and vote for those who have the vision to bring change. My request to all

voters is to please think before you vote, because, your vote counts.

Your etc.,  
Asha Kumari Rai  
Student, NEHU (M.Com)  
Shillong 7

### Change in traffic routes!

Editor, I would like to bring to your notice that the new road from Oakland to Polo Towers was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister to ease the traffic on the main thorough fare which is used for various destinations. The Chief Minister had assured the residents that there will be no charge in the route which is meant for two ways.

But recently the Traffic Police have arbitrarily changed the traffic rules and

the said route has been made one way (from Oakland to Polo) and parking has been allowed which has put the residents coming from Polo to Oakland and Police Bazar to great difficulties including wastage of time. Not only this, but even other areas in Police Bazar have been changed for reasons best known to the Traffic Police which takes decisions without assessing the impact of the change in traffic rules. I request the Police Chief to kindly look into the matter and do the needful for the easy movement of traffic from Police Bazar to Polo.

Yours etc.,  
Shankar Lal  
Singhanian  
Shillong-1

"We're born alone, we live alone, we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we're not alone."

-- Orson Welles

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.184 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2018

### Sense from Mehbooba

TALKS, even with the enemy cannot be anti-national. J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti was only being sensible when she appealed to the Centre for talks with Pakistan to resolve the diverse problems of her state. There has been a sharp increase in cease fire violations. Infiltration from across the border continues. Attacks by the militants have not decreased nor the number of militants. True, some of them have been killed by the security forces but that does not signify. When the PDP and the BJP formed a coalition in 2015, both parties agreed on a bilateral dialogue with Pakistan and on Parleys with internal stakeholders. Internal dialogue has not taken place. Pakistan's attack in Pathankot and Uri has scuttled dialogue with Islamabad as also the latter's internal problems. Regular meetings between National Security Advisors of the two countries put a wrap on information.

Public engagements since the Mumbai massacre have been cut off. As a result, India cannot address its concerns to Pakistan and overtures at the International forums can at best be perfunctory. Is there any risk in talking to Pakistan? There is no point in departing from the avowed policy of bilateralism and indulging in heroics about what Sardar Vallabh Patel would have done ages ago. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that Pakistan will have to pay for the Sanjowa attack. But both she and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj bank on diplomacy. The Indian Army's swagger reminds one of a military action hero in a Bollywood film. War means death and destruction. Jammu has become communally polarised. Divisiveness will aggravate the agony of the people of Jammu & Kashmir.

### LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

### Marshall, Kirmani indisposed

The west Indies will have to do without leading fast bowler Malcolm Marshall for the first three one day cricket internationals against India in the coming series. The West Indies Cricket Board of control announced yesterday that Marshall injured his wrist in a Red Stripe Cup match for Barbados on Sunday and would be unable to play in the first three of five scheduled matches. The first is at Kensington Oval here on Tuesday and Tuesday and

the second and third are at Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad on March 9 and 11. All rounder Eldine Baptiste, out of the West Indies team for its last two tours of England and Australia, returns following consistent performances in the Red Stripe Cup competition Opening batsman Philip Simmons, is also back in the squad of 13 announced by the West Indies Cricket Board of Control.

### TO THE EDITOR

### Why trade charges through the media?

Editor,  
Today we are fed up with political parties, especially the national parties, which are trading charges against each other with vitriolic overtones. The way they do it through the media is extraordinary. They have so much time to excel in this but no time to spread the message of brotherhood and amity. On the other hand the media faithfully carry such nonsense to be consumed by the readers. This is horrendous and highly unacceptable. Remember that the public cannot be taken for a ride and in fact very few people digest such divisive charges and accusations. In fact, it is the Congress and the BJP, which indulge in this grandstanding of holier than thou attitude accusing one another of spreading divisiveness and falsehood. They are the ones that are the source of divisiveness and falsehood. Since they are themselves divisive they spread divisiveness among the people but people detest them. The more they spread vitriolic divisiveness the more people distance themselves from them. We urge people to abhor such parties and lend their ears only to parties which promote truthfulness and amity among the people in the

society. Because in the end those indulging in falsehood and divisiveness will be isolated.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Via email

### Is media pampering minorities?

Editor,  
If something makes one look at certain reputed media with the eyes of suspicion then it is for their blatant display of double standards. The integrity of the media then is greatly compromised. When such unethical tricks are played at the cost of humanity then the consequences could be disastrous. This could steadily push the society into the sea of frustration. Thereafter comes social anarchy.  
This glaring aberration in the world of media is clearly visible. Only those suffering from a varying degree of mental glaucoma may fail to see it. Have we not witnessed the media fraternity setting off alarm bells when the victims of crime are from a particular community while they maintain a "brutal silence" when the perpetrators are those they consider minority? Yes, the particular minority are eternally beloved, so they are blameless. Even

## Spiritual politics

# New brand arrival

By Dr S. Saraswathi

Entire nation is watching with unmatched interest the arrival of Rajnikanth to politics. Even NTR, MGR, and Jayalalitha who all made meteoric rise in politics did not provoke this much of excitement among friends and foes alike that we experience today.

The event has become doubly significant and has gained national attention as the arrival of "spiritual politics". Fed up with all-pervasive degeneration of politics, he wants to recast the system and promote "truthful, straightforward, and clean" politics. Rajnikanth explains that "honest and secular politics is spiritual politics". He was emphatic that everything had to be changed and that changes should be ushered in with transparency without shades of any caste or religion.

There is no instant taker among the numerous parties in Tamil Nadu to Rajini's spiritual politics. It is difficult for them to come out of Dravidian politics. His spiritual politics is an enigma to common people. They straightaway want to know what he can do to improve their daily life and what stand he will take on major issues they face. They want him to speak immediately on issues like the state of PDS, bus strike, Neet, Cauvery water, etc., as their politics starts and ends with their daily life.

Their interests are so self-centred that they are not concerned about the way living conditions can be bettered for posterity. Perhaps, the end justifies the means more to the people at the receiving end than to the rulers.

The newcomer Rajini, unlike members of established political families, is not constrained by loyalty factor and can have no hesitation in chalking out his route and plan of action in politics. In social set up, where cases of sons and daughters in politics ideologically confronting their parents are rare, Rajini enjoys freedom to embark on innovations.

He has only to please his fans. In the film world, the hero sets the style and the fans endorse it and not the other way. Thus, the acceptability of spiritual politics which he wants to establish depends on his ability to convince his fans and followers. In the atmosphere of

den spiritual causes of world affairs. The two authors have outlined the core platform for "transformational politics" which is an "attempt to create a synthesis out of polarity". The synthesis will replace the politics of rivalries, conflicts, divisions, and competitions.

The authors explain that spirituality based politics is guided by moral values, i.e. politics not directed to promote only individual interests, but to raise their deepest values as human beings, to provide greater sense of community, higher vision of public life and service to the common good. Regard for others and courage in politics are projected to offset money power in politics, and apathy and cynicism of the public.

Common good in the place of greed and lust for power is at the centre of the higher vision of public life offered in spiritual politics. Spirituality here is not to be confused with religion in politics or treated as opposite of "secular" politics. It is very much a secular concept aimed at achieving progress, prosperity and peace for all through fair means with a spirit of service. The adjective "spiritual" given to politics is concerned with material well-being for all and not a metaphysical doctrine or a utopian ideal.

In this sense, it is not ir-

relevant in our country where multi-polar groups and interests with conflicting thoughts and competitive ambitions flourish. Any religion can help one to attain spirituality, but spirituality does not need a base in religion.

In India, no political party can presently hope to win an election by presenting abstract concepts, moral lessons or even welfare ideologies. These have to be translated into concrete schemes and programmes that make sense to the voters in everyday life. Crudely put, it is the rule of subsidies and cash for votes in

many places.

In this context, the very term "spiritual politics" may frighten people. Self-proclaimed secularists and rationalists may try to twist it out of shape to create a bogey of religion in politics. Hence, a more acceptable term like "value-based politics" with clear enunciation of the values to be promoted and cherished may be needed if it wants to survive.

The Washington Post, in a poll has found that more than healthcare and education, American voters are concerned about moral values. Key areas of what is called "spiritual activism" are said to be care of the poor and handicapped, and reduction of violence and drug abuse.

Mahatma Gandhi advocated spiritualisation of politics by which he meant not mixing up of religion and politics, but politics based on truth and non-violence. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, internationally renowned peace-maker and founder of the Art of Living wants spirituality to come into politics. To him, politics is for caring for people. He says, "We need to spiritualise politics, socialise business, and secularise religion. Devoid of spirituality, politics breeds corruption".

The Center for Visionary Leadership, Washington DC, founded in 1996 is assisting people to develop the inner spiritual resources.

*The two authors have outlined the core platform for "transformational politics" which is an "attempt to create a synthesis out of polarity".*

## RSS is serious about turning Taj Mahal into a temple

# Vinay Katiyar's warning is no empty slogan

By Amulya Ganguli

It will be unwise to dismiss BJP MP Vinay Katiyar's warning about converting the Taj Mahal to "our temple", the Tejo mandir, as the hate rant of a well-known rabble-rouser. It has to be acknowledged that the Sangh parivar generally gives advance notice of its game plans. For instance, the first indication that it was targeting the Babri masjid was given by the VHP in 1985 when it spoke of how Babur had a mosque built by demolishing a temple marking Lord Ram's birthplace to humiliate the Hindus.

Four years later, the BJP took up the issue - and the

demolition of the Babri masjid, found the Taj to be "so wasteful, so decadent and in the end so cruel that I found it painful to be there for very long".

Before Naipaul, there was P.N. Oak, a pioneer in the matter of rewriting history in line with the parivar's beliefs, who was the first to claim that the tomb of Mumtaz and Shahjehan was a Shiva temple - Tejo Mahalaya - just as the Vatican was a "vatika" or a garden in Vedic times and that the Kaaba in Mecca and Westminster Abbey were also Hindu temples. He also saw a link between Christianity and

*Just as the Muslim League chose the slogan, "Islam khatre mein hain" (Islam is in danger) as its battle cry after the party's setbacks in the 1937 elections showed that there was no way to defeat the Congress other than by whipping up communal sentiments, the BJP, too, decided to play the religious/communal card to come back into political reckoning. Considering that unlike in the late 1980s, the BJP is on a strong wicket now, what is the need for the party and the parivar to opt for a destructive path aimed at the world's most famous monument?*

rest is history. It has to be remembered that the VHP's reference to a demolished temple was made a year after the BJP suffered its worst ever electoral debacle when it won only two Lok Sabha seats.

Evidently as a result of this huge setback in 1984, the saffron brotherhood had started hunting for an issue which could revive its fortunes and what issue could be more emotive than one about a Hindu deity and the depredations of alien invaders who were followers of another religion?

Just as the Muslim League chose the slogan, "Islam khatre mein hain" (Islam is in danger) as its battle cry after the party's setbacks in the 1937 elections showed that there was no way to defeat the Congress other than by whipping up communal sentiments, the BJP, too, decided to play the religious/communal card to come back into political reckoning.

Considering that unlike in the late 1980s, the BJP is on a strong wicket now, what is the need for the party and the parivar to opt for a destructive path aimed at the world's most famous monument?

However, the targeting of the "blot" on Indian culture, to quote BJP MLA Sangeet Som's description of the mausoleum, is a part of the Hindutva brigade's longstanding project of erasing the country's Islamic past which can be seen in the rewriting of history by saffron apparatchiki from the time when Murlu Manohar Joshi was the human resource development minister in Atal Behari Vajpayee's cabinet.

In a way, this penchant for revisionism is no different from the eagerness of the Islamic zealots to wipe out the unIslamic past of their countries as could be seen from the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Similarities of this nature tend to link the fundamentalist groups of all religions.

It is worth recalling that the Taj has aroused the wrath of the saffronites for quite some time. V.S. Naipaul, who applauded the

of "intolerance" is ever raised by any conscious citizens when the people for the majority are killed. No media panel discussions are called as in other similar cases. Even the condemnation of the onslaught on humanity is ever heard. None of the horrid crimes by a particular community become a "Dadri" the stench of which is still being felt by our double standard columnists.

Well, had there not been double standards in reporting the attacks on "humanity;" if ever the 'freedom of expression' is truly valued, such barbaric perpetrators, no matter which community they are from, would not have at all reared their ugly heads. Is it not probable in the near future that those fanatic villains might "double-cross" and pose continuous threats that would be the death knell for the "service of upright journalism" too! The prelude to that situation is double clear now than ever before.

Yours etc.,

Saili Grewal,

Shillong-2

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.

*"The greatest sweetener of human life is Friendship. To raise this to the highest pitch of enjoyment, is a secret which but few discover."*

--- Joseph Addison

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.185

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2018

### BJP's Chargesheet against Congress

THE BJP recently released a documents listing the scams of the MUA Government in its 8-year tenure. The BJP has adopted a smart strategy to remind people of the scams and malfeasance that have tarred the MUA Government which ruled Meghalaya for eight long years. Public memory is notoriously short so the booklet is a good reminder that electing the same government might only exacerbate the matter and corruption would be more entrenched. The Chargesheet leaves no doubt at all that it has been cleverly crafted by someone with a legal mind and who has gone through the CAG reports over eight years. Some of the charges are bound to stick like the Education scam. Prima facie there does not seem to be any evidence to suggest that the police recruitment exercise was also manipulated. But the points related to the PHED are spot on. Crores of rupees have been siphoned off from the PHED over several years. In fact the first big scam in Meghalaya which blew up in the 1980's was in the PHED. The then PHED minister had to resign his post. But the major players including some senior politicians and businessmen got away unscathed.

What is amusing is that this meticulously documented Chargesheet does not have the name of the publisher which is a mandatory requirement for printing what is very clearly an election-related document. It is surprising that the state BJP would commit such a gaffe considering that it has in its midst a suave and articulate Supreme Court lawyer. What is interesting are the comments of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) on the complaint made by the Congress against this Chargesheet. He says the matter will be examined and if found to have violated the Election Code of Conduct then action would be taken on the BJP. But isn't there such thing as a pro-active attitude? Couldn't the CEO have taken suo-motu action against the BJP before this was pointed out by the Congress? But even if the CEO takes delayed action the fact of the matter is that the Chargesheet has reached far and wide and is the topic of avid conversations.

## LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

### Reservation for SC-ST

Union Minister of State for Home Mr P Chidambaram has made it clear that the reservation of jobs for the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities in the country would not be disturbed as long as "discrimination based on condition of social backwardness continued". This is a reassuring statement especially for the myriad miniscule communities which are deprived and discriminated against socially and economically. That these sections deserve full protection under the Constitution cannot be questioned. It does not require any statistical back up for appreciating the fact that despite the existence of such a reservation facility for the last forty years, there are a large section of people who are still lying in the backwards of the country.

The North East, for one, has a wide spectrum of tribes which were not fortunate enough to get facilities, opportunities and exposure that the average man in the hinterland of the country has had. If these tribes are not provided with protection against stiff competition from the more advanced communities, it is unlikely that they will ever be able to catch up with the rest.

The critics of the reservation system however say that the backward communities have developed vested interest in the system. If the policy of reservation

has been tending to take away the spirit of competition and breed a sense of complacency, then there is need for a close look at the entire issue. After all, the reservation system cannot be devoid of element of competition among the ST and SC communities themselves.

In this context the Meghalaya Chief Minister's repeated stress on hard work by the tribals is notable. Perhaps Mr Sangma is the first tribal leader in the North East who has been vociferously campaigning against the growing illusions among the new generation tribals about the reservation system. Mr Sangma has of late been taking every opportunity to tell some home truth to the fellow tribals about the grim realities of today. Although the tribal students and job-seekers have an assured quota for themselves, it does not necessarily ensure every such applicant a seat or job just because he or she is tribal. The emphasis, therefore, has to be on merit even if the choice has to be made between one tribal and another. Moreover, sooner or later the reservation system will be withdrawn. Before such a day comes it is imperative that the backward communities get fully attuned to the stiff world of competition.

# Election 2018: Repeating the rhetoric

By Patricia Mukhim

We are not a thinking, questioning community and we love rhetoric. I can't understand why we swallow hook, line and sinker what politicians promise us on the eve of elections without demonstrating to us the paradigm they will follow to get that goal. It's the same old guys saying the same old boring stuff! A WhatsApp status of a friend of mine says, "Shock me; say something intelligent." I love this status because it challenges us to get out of the pedestrian stuff. These days when we pass through different localities in the evening we get to hear election lectures which are no different from those we heard twenty years ago. In these electoral platforms there is no space for raising questions. And the supporters of candidates actually sniff around to see that no agent provocateur is lurking nearby to spoil the broth for their candidate. If a potential trouble maker is around he or she is quickly but forcefully whisked out of the venue. One ray of hope is what happened recently at Jowai, where candidates came together on a common platform and were asked searching questions by a leading columnist, HH Mohrmen. This platform was put together by the Jaintia Journalists Union. It's a pity that the journalistic fraternity in Shillong are unable to take up this challenge of putting candidates and political party honchos through the grill. However, one cannot blame anyone. Day after day journalists have been running from pillar to post attending press conferences at different political party headquarters. They hope to receive pearls of wisdom but all they get is a refined version of a cat-fight and no one is any the wiser after those press conferences.

Is this what democracy was meant to be? A whole nonsensical game of the pot calling the kettle black! Come on show us how you are going to change the fates of 65% of our young population. Show us what educational reforms you have in store to make our young people more questioning and more

scientific in their approach to issues. Land or its availability will be the biggest challenge for Meghalaya. Do you have the courage of conviction to bring in land reforms in this cosy tribal state where the oft repeated rhetoric is, "Land belongs to the community?" Have you bothered to ask which section of the community owns that land? Yes, let's hear which political party has the political spine to carry out a cadastral survey in Meghalaya if it comes to power. Why is the BJP obsessed with lifting the ban on coal mining? And why set a deadline of 180 days for that extractive, environmentally destructive activity? Why not set a deadline instead by which time the BJP will ensure that Meghalaya will have uninterrupted electricity supply? Or set a deadline when the BJP will ensure every household in Meghalaya will have potable drinking water? And then also show us how you propose to address the problem of hawkers who have overtaken every available footpath in town. Show us where you intend to locate or relocate these hawkers who have been demanding their rights for a long time now. Does any political party even care for them? Your local BJP state unit should have briefed you on these pressing problems starting Meghalaya in the face other than the rhetoric about roads and traffic jams.

Aren't the issues above more important than lifting the ban on coal? And yes since the ban is imposed by the NGT and it cannot be lifted without a mining plan, should the BJP not have developed a shadow mining policy that it can share with the public? Why is the BJP so engrossed with an issue that benefits the coal mafia? Why is it silent on critical issues of bread and butter? Does the urbane leadership of the BJP know Meghalaya has the highest number of female headed households that wallow in poverty and that

street children are on the rise? Does this feature in the BJP's vision document? This facet of matrilineal Meghalaya is what needs to CHANGE. The reason I am addressing these questions to the BJP is because it keeps harping on CHANGE. The Congress is tried and tested and found wanting on many fronts here. The Congress is aware of all the problems listed above. It has allowed these psycho-social wounds to fester. The Congress has no vision on rehabilitating school and college drop-outs. These are the categories that require the collective commitment of all political parties but there is only silence on these fronts.

On Thursday, Nirmala Sitharaman the Union Defence Minister unfurled the BJP's vision document. She categorically stated that India is now a power surplus state. If so why are we in Meghalaya power starved? Is it not the remit of the central government to enable the state governments to benefit from the country's over-all development gains? If a BJP government does not, for some reason come to power in Meghalaya, will the state be deprived of what other BJP ruled states are enjoying? These are tough questions to ask and tougher to answer.

The BJP as a brand new party has to use several pairs of lenses to see things as they are and not as painted by the local Mandals. And yes, there are many in Meghalaya who have this morbid fear that the if the BJP comes to power in Meghalaya it will trample on our rights to Freedom of Religion and the right to choose own food from a menu of our choice. No one here wants their rights to celebrate Valentine's Day, Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday and any day that will be invented in the future and which people wish to celebrate, to be curtailed by a bunch of illogical loudmouths who believe this country is a mono-cultural monolith. No it isn't and the earlier the Sangh Parivar,

which is dictating terms to the BJP now, realises this stark reality the better it is for all concerned.

I must confess that in 2014 when the BJP came to power and Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, many of us had forgotten those fears of a Hindutva onslaught. We believed that Modi would single-mindedly pursue a development agenda and that he would rein in the fundamentalist elements of the Sangh Parivar. But the RSS and its ugly cousins did not waste any time in raising their ugly heads and then some BJP MPs would come up with one or other profanity against religious minorities. A country as vast and disparate as India is, cannot afford to have a political party with an exclusivist agenda ruling the country.

Prime Minister Modi must be aware that ever since he came to power and shortly before that there has been such a churn in the media world. Media persons are under coercion to fall in line or fall out with the ruling dispensation. The media today is sharply divided between that which is blatantly pro-government and some which have taken an independent stance and very few that are critical of the government. We are a democracy and the press is a key supporting pillar for that democracy to move on the right track. If this pillar crumbles because we have all decided to capitulate then democracy will shrivel and fade away and before we know it a totalitarian regime would have taken over.

I am sure that democracy is dear to the heart of every Indian. If it is then let us speak up without fear or favour. In doing so we are not saying we favour this or that political party because they have all fallen short of our expectations. In fact, today what we need more than ever is a political revolution that will throw up better alternatives. India deserves that alternative political-ideological model!

### Killed for love!

Editor,

This refers to the article, "The text and context" by Ananya S Guha (ST, Feb 14, 2018). After Ashrafal was killed as a 'love - jihad' suspect by the team 'A', Ankit Saxena has been butchered on the altar of hatred by the team 'B' for his, so to speak, 'reverse - love - jihad'. Unfortunately, both the teams 'A' and 'B' belong to the same country and it is, as it were, a football match of hatred where the lovers' hearts are used to make the ball to get them kicked all the time. In this game of hatred, strangely, both the teams always win as the players get killjoy at the cost of the lovers' dream of union, breaking the walls of caste and religious hatred. Whenever a goal is scored either by the team 'A' or 'B' or 'C' or 'D', Mother India cries out in pain as it takes her further from her goal of materializing unity and fraternity among her children.

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.

## Whom to blame?

By Aiborlang Nongsiej

The father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi once said, "There is enough for everyone's needs but not for everyone's greed." It is very unfortunate for the 46 year old state of Meghalaya, to hear politicians pointing fingers at one another at the slow pace of development in the state. Of course, as an educator I do understand the language of the politicians during the election campaign. However, as the election is approaching it is the duty of us common citizens to make them realize their fundamental duties when they capture the seats as rulers or law makers in the State Legislative Assembly or in the Parliament. It is interesting to hear similar ideas and issues being repeated in most of the election campaigns but which are never fulfilled till date. For the last two elections (2008 and 2013) similar issues and agenda were repeated by the candidates. Someone rightly said that politicians are people who promise to build bridges even when there is no river.

Since 21st January 1972, when Meghalaya became a full-fledged state until date it is still lagging behind in infrastructure, roads, cleanliness, education, and health. At the same time it is shameful for the state not to have its own Legislative Assembly building till date. 46 years are over and the golden jubilee of statehood is approaching but where is the State Assembly building? We the citizens of Meghalaya are happy, if at all the money sanctioned for making the State Assembly were to be used for the development of the state, but sad to say that even in terms of development we are far behind compared to the rest of the states. We the voters have trusted the politicians but till date these promises are unfulfilled. Sorry to point out the reality about our politicians, but I feel this is the best time to wake them up.

I was surprised when reading the different newspapers especially the report of your paper (ST 14 Feb, 2018) about the election campaign of the former Union minister Agatha K. Sangma who stated that, the failure of the state government in bringing development in the state has pushed her to return to politics. Moreover, she added that, South Tura cannot develop with just an MLA scheme of Rs 2 crores. Even though I do not favour any political party yet as a concerned citizen of Meghalaya I can't digest such statements from the former MP who was once had the privilege of being a union minister in the central government. I am not against her but I just want to question what she as a young politician was doing for Meghalaya particularly for Tura constituency when she was the Union Minister? Where was the MP scheme in her tenure if MLA scheme is not enough for Tura? Why is she realizing only now that the state government is failing in all spheres such as health, education, road condition, and infrastructure? I am sure that these issues are also the same when she was in alliance with the UPA government in the centre, and so, why was she closing her eyes to these issues when she was an MP? Likewise there are so many politicians who long to bring development but never make it happen while they occupy the seat as MP or MLA.

Having travelled and stayed in most states in Northeast India I feel ashamed at the low literacy rate in Meghalaya compared to other states like Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland. In bringing education to the state I salute the missionaries who worked heart and soul leaving their

own comfortable countries, to spread education in our region. Several times I used to reflect, why our state literacy is very low in spite of Shillong city being the educational hub of Northeast India. For all these lacunae I blame our politicians who never foresee the development of education in the state. It is surprising to see that books keep on changing but the syllabus and the contents of the books are almost the same, just cut and paste. We continue to point fingers at one another and one party condemning the other party especially during elections. As a result nothing is done for the state.

We believe that this coming assembly election of 2018 will bring many changes in developing the state, however, we detest any move to disrupt the religious practices, tradition and culture of the people. Frankly speaking we are not happy with any party that works with the religion as an agenda be it a national party or a regional party because the preamble of the Constitution of India plainly declares India as a secular state and the Fundamental rights Art. 25-28 speak clearly that any Indian citizen is free to follow any religion because India has no state religion. I mention this because of the anti-minority stances of the right wing fundamentalists and the attack on some of the churches recently in Bangalore as reported by the different news channels especially CNN IBN. According to the news report the attack on the churches is led by the Bajrang Dal, who are Hindu fundamentalists. Therefore, any party that comes to power in Meghalaya must work entirely for the development of the state and not interfere with any religion that the people follow or believe in at present.

As far as my knowledge is concerned, most of the candidates for the upcoming election in our state have also been MLAs in the past. This makes me surprised at the way they are canvassing for the election and blaming each other for not bringing the development in the state, while they are have been in the hot seats in the past. As a result, who do we blame for the lack of development in the state of Meghalaya, be it the road conditions, infrastructure, health, water problem and many other social issues. At the same time the voters should be prudent enough to vote for the right candidate, or else these same issues will be repeated in the next state election 2023. We the common people are also surprised to hear the same politicians, since the last two or three state elections promising to bring change in the state if voted to power. Five years are over but where are those changes? At the same time the BJP has placed a beautiful quotation around the city, "Time for change, time for BJP". Though the BJP has is using all ways and means to form a government in Meghalaya, but frankly speaking from where will the change come if the leading BJP candidates like AL Hek, JA Lyngdoh, Robinus Syngkon, Sanbor Shullai who were sitting MLAs but have done nothing for the state.

Having said so, I am not against any party and Article 19 of the Indian constitution assures of our freedom of speech. Hence, as a concerned citizen I wish to make my voice heard after having had several conversation with my friends. Lastly my wish and prayer for the state is that any party that comes to power must fulfill the promises made and work for the growth and development of the state in all spheres.

## TO THE EDITOR

### Can't see why Paul can't win

Editor,

As an officer in one of the State Government Departments, I have been more often than not deputed to attend the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly whenever sessions when held during those years of 2008-2013 for exclusively noting down points, questions etc pertaining to my department and raised by the members of the House. Thereafter I had to prepare and tweak the reports in case any response is required for transmission to the Govt. at the shortest possible time. Apart from this official assignment, I also keenly followed, though beside the point, the art of speaking and the wittiness of words uttered by the Assembly's member, especially of Conrad Sangma then MLA of 48-Selsella and that of Manas Chaudhuri, representing the 19-South Shillong constituency respectively. Lest I forget, I was also no less spellbound by the oratorical gift of Paul Lyngdoh of 18-West Shillong constituency, notwithstanding his age. Lyngdoh's successful delivery has wrought the much needed changes in his constituency.

After the results of the Assembly election were announced on February 28, 2013, I had shot off a Letter

to the Editor which figured under these very columns of your daily in which I had bemoaned the defeat of Conrad Sangma, and other prominent MLAs. Fortunately, Paul Lyngdoh had managed to retain his prestigious seat. I still relish the latter's oratory prowess on the floor of the Assembly even in the days of its final session. I only hope to see him even after the ensuing polls scheduled for February 27 next.

However, this time around I visualize that Lyngdoh is facing a tough challenge from his main rival Mohendro Rapsang, a prominent and a kind business tycoon of the city. In this context and quirky as it may sound, it bears recall that decades ago in the MLA election to the erstwhile 19-Jaiaw constituency, which covered to date a large chunk of areas under the now 18-West Shillong seat, the then two bitter rivals were PR Kyndiah and SM Jyrwa both now deceased. Of the rival duo, the latter besides being the Rangbah Shnong of Jaiaw Langsning was also very popular and of an amiable disposition and readily accessible to all concerned, but sadly, he never succeeded at the hustings and thus PR Kyndiah invariably managed to hold the fort as an MLA. Conversely, SM Jyrwa never ever lost an election to the KHADC from

that very constituency. Such an uncanny electoral outcome was not far to seek consequent on a scrupulous soul-searching analysis: The electorate of the then 19-Jaiaw constituency which largely consisted of refined and educated voters and, markedly, Jaiaw Lumsyntiew, a constituent part of the then 19-Jaiaw constituency had a phenomenal literacy rate as I'm given to understand that it occupied the highest literacy benchmark in the city. The sum total fact was that the voters have had to choose Kyndiah on the premise of educational background in as much as he was no mean writer in English whereby constraining the enlightened voters with the Hobson's choice in electing Kyndiah. Thus, the voters were convinced that the latter can successfully highlight their civic problems in the Assembly and to also ably deal with the ingenious IAS officers at the Secretariat. Hence, Kyndiah always had the last laugh in such electoral battles. Coincidentally, and without mincing words, Paul Lyngdoh being a Post Graduate in English and a writer of note whose books are read in the educational institutions will redefine PR Kyndiah's magic. But I shudder to think otherwise!

Yours etc.,  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Via email

"A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing."

--- George Bernard Shaw

## The Shillong Times

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### Oli takes office

K P Oli has been appointed Prime Minister of Nepal three months after the completion of parliamentary elections and it is hoped that Nepal may finally have a stable government but uncertainties remain. Oli's party, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) is in alliance with the CPN-Maoist Centre with a total of 174 seats in the 275 member Parliament. Oli's CPN-UML itself won 121 seats which is a little short of a simple majority. It had been agreed before the polls that the two parties will form a coalition. The merger of the parties has not yet taken place and Nepal's politics is unpredictably volatile. Oli had to wait for the appointment as Prime Minister until the upper house elections had been concluded. He now has to implement the Constitution and achieve a consensus on such key provisions of the Constitution as the Republican character of the country and relations between the Centre and the provinces. The political flux in Nepal since 2006 has been due to the discord between the different parties. Justice to war victims has been a divisive issue. The judiciary has been politicised and corruption in the country is rampant. All this has led to public unrest. Oli will have to meet the challenge of inspiring public confidence.

Oli's victory has been brought about partly by his party's anti-India stand. He could catch the pulse of the nation that way. New Delhi had been blamed for supporting the Madhes who caused an economic blockade antagonising the people of Nepal. India and Nepal have been linked by geography, religion and political history. China cannot take the place of India with an economic package. Oli will have to walk a tight rope to strike a balance between two neighbours. India for its part has to wipe out the impression of playing Big Brother. Sushma Swaraj's recent visit to Kathmandu may have gone a long way in creating goodwill between India and Nepal.

### LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

### Adivasi Council demands ST status

The Adivasi Council of Assam in recent memorandum to the Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has demanded that the descendants of aboriginal people who have migrated to Assam from other parts of the country during the last century and early part of the present century as tea garden labourers and have become permanent residents of Assam long back should be accorded recognition as scheduled tribes like their kinsmen in the places of their origin.

The Adivasi Council of Assam pointed out that the

state government in 1978 recommended nine communities among the tea tribes for recognition as scheduled tribes, but no action was initiated in this regard so far. The ACA demands quick implementation of this recommendation. Among other demand placed by the Adivasi Council are formation of Tea Tribes Development Board at the sub divisional level, inclusion of a member from the tea tribe community in the APSC, setting up a guest house exclusively for the tea tribes at Guwahati.

# Communalism- In the light of India's freedom movement

By Sonie Kharduit

British times witnessed communal clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims, particularly under the Mughals but it was individualistic in character. It entirely depended on the King's moral convictions, some were ruthless and others were secular benevolent like Akbar. Additionally these ancient and medieval rulers became part of Indian culture and settled here, whereas the British didn't make India their home, rather it was just a commercial space of colonialism. The social fabric of India remained harmonious till the advent of the British.

In the assessment of different factors responsible for the growth of communalism, the reasons can be as follows:

1. The backwardness of the Muslims as a minority, adherence to traditional and conservative ideology left them behind the English educated Hindu middle class in politics as well as in trade and economics.

2. Indian renaissance was more revivalist than reformist. Instead of promoting secularism they looked backward and derived inspiration from the Vedas, which other communities did not receive well.

3. Final ingredient was poured by the *Divide and rule policy* of the British. Prior to the freedom struggle the British took the hardcore anti-Muslim stand and in the later stage with the rise of Hindu middle class intelligentsia which sowed the seeds of Indian freedom among the masses, the British reversed the policy and now became pro-Muslim with the intention to weaken and fracture the social fabric of Indian society. The partition of Bengal can be viewed under this context, and the last nail in the coffin was the partition of the Indian sub-continent on religious grounds thereby creating a permanent gulf between various communities.

**Current communal scene:**

Often, in conversations nowadays, whether at home, taxi, bus, public space, office, people are charged with the only anger as to why the Christian community is subjected to harassment and killing, churches are destroyed and they are restricted to perform rituals. Yes this is known and the facts are verified and not mere social media hype. And all the incidents are connected with Hindutva linked outfits. The locations of such crimes are well mapped especially inside Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and in fact the whole of

North, North Western and Central part of India where Christianity has limited presence.

Now coming back to the historical perspectives of communal development when viewed from the prism of freedom struggle movement, apparently these regions are the most active regions where there was a huge mass involvement, the Sepoy mutiny being the most prominent amongst other. The point to note here is that axe of British cruelty fell on these people the most, these regions bore the brunt of the worst form of human injustice which will not heal anytime soon. The whole of idea of freedom movement revolves around the anti-British thought with the sole intention of throwing the British out of the country along with their culture and religion which they propagated just to prove their supremacy and commercial interests. Hence the anti-Christian flame was ignited long back but the blame for its continuation has to be shared equally. The dangerous cocktail of religion and politics is continuously utilized as a theme of government-making till now.

If ones asks the question as to why this communal phenomenon is not visible in the North eastern states or in the South India, the answer is obvious. These regions were not active participants in the freedom struggle. In the North East particularly the British got a free hand to regulate and promote their policy. The backwardness provided a perfect platform for the white race to extend its domination, the missionaries got free pass to operate with abundant financial support. I suppose this is the reason we have abundant Christian population in this region. Preferably we got to taste only the sweet side of British policy without getting to share the same assault that our brothers and sisters experienced in the other parts of India. Historically the whole tribal movement in the struggle were mostly constricted to local grievances. They were not interested nor had knowledge about Nationalism, and the same scene can be extended to the North Eastern states where tribal population is quite large. Hence the people of this region did not taste the ugly and cruel side of the British which is now reflected in our strong affinity towards western religion and culture.

**Politics- a remedy for safeguarding minority interests?**

An important question for the citizens of Meghalaya to

introspect and contemplate upon before surrendering our valuable votes is whether we can expect and trust our candidates to safeguards the collective fear of Christians ones elected, leaving aside all developmental agenda which no one discusses now? Past experiences of politics offer no optimism at all. People are mere vote bank tools and politicians capitalise on the fear sentiments. That how the political masters get to claim the crown of political power; that's why we don't see real progress or development in our respective constituencies. Rural constituencies are the worst where the people are suffering with the least HDI index. So it's naive and foolish on our part to expect politics with the current standard we are practicing, to be the saviour of Christianity and Christians. Undeniably, altogether the current communal problem which we are facing is because we mix religion and politics and expect politics to cure our malady. There is no faith system in politics; vote bank is the only faith they are tied to no matter how sleazy and tacky their morality will be.

**Way ahead:**

We shouldn't forget that the agony of minorities is not restricted to only the Christian community. Minorities around the world, whether on basis of ethnicity, linguistics, religion etc always have to pay the price as a negative fallout of political war. The Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar, the Kurds in Syria-Turkey, the Christians in Central Africa etc are examples. We cannot replace democracy but we can improve the way it function, where countries like Norway and Sweden can exhibit wonderful results through democracy. All this is possible due to active participation and altruism of citizens in establishing non-biased and effective government to deliver their expectations and aspirations. There jails are being converted into hotels and museums since the crime rate is almost zero. People don't find crime attractive anymore because the quality of life is already good if not perfect. Constructive and clean politics can bring affirmative results whereas divisive politics brings destruction and hatred and it's sad that we are practising the latter politics.

# The Great Election Jamboree

By Dabormaian Jude Kharmawphlang

It is that time of the year when elections are looming in the foreseeable distance. We shall vote for our representatives after weighing our choices and scaling the pros and cons. Our indices will be swayed by what appeals to us the most, what we feel is the party or candidate with the agreeable foresight for the state, constituency and the people, or so we believe. Issues that have been hanging in the air and congesting our thoughts are to be addressed, or so we hope. 'Development' is a word that occurs at every gathering around this time that even the mics know of its composing alphabets. Development of infrastructure and beautification projects are hyped about in towns and

them, we need to reassess the issue from an economic perspective without disregarding the duty we have towards protecting the environment and ecology.

Nauseatingly, the Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently visited the state capital to release BJP's vision document. Whilst the BJP are the only party to mention anything related to women's rights and empowerment, they have set a standard so low, it almost sweeps the dust with the ineffective and minimally short-term programme of providing one sanitary pad for each woman in a BPL household. The audacity to offer one packet of napkin per household instead of advocating for the removal of the essential item from the

**The periodical participation with politics points to the fact that democracy is viewed only at its infantile stage. More disturbing is the public's seemingly intoxicated behaviour every five years over cultish political figures who sway around with colourful manifestos which melt away our consciousness and theirs. Our representatives should not only be held accountable every few years and our participation with governance should not be confined to such illusory forms of engagement, where lies heap upon lies to eventually wire in disappointment after the concluding 5 years.**

district headquarters and roads are promised to be paved in villages and rural areas. However, the pavement for the oppressed and marginalised is still naked and bereft of any substantial gravel.

Jobs have been promised by all parties but workers rights are still being ignored. Employment doesn't stop at giving someone an occupation. Working conditions, living wages and equal pay for equal work, to name a few, are fundamentally important aspects to ensure not just a frail "employment" but a secure environment for the employed to flourish and take part in the economy. We all know how exploitative labour is rampant in many sectors, with minimum wages hard to even acquire, whilst disposable and unprotected contract workers comprise the bulk of the workforce. When we are not arming our people with the required tools to partake in the economy, how is it still a surprise that our markets are slumping?

When it comes to the coal industry, we cannot deny that it is an important cornerstone of the economy. It provides jobs, generates revenue and so on and so forth. Whilst tribals in other regions are advocating for the protection of their land, we see how the elites in our state are exploiting their own "tribal" identity and using the rhetoric of indigenous rights while actually vying for its desecration. Additionally, coal mining drags with it feudal-like conditions for immigrant and non-immigrants labourers alike, without substantial protection for their lives, and safety. With the BJP promising to lift the ban on coal mining and the NPP working in tandem with

"luxury" list of taxed products, which makes it inaccessible in the first place, shows how out of touch policy makers are with women's issues. Also, it is outrageous to think that this facade of a statement is the (only) prominent point in relation to women's issues when last year, we saw an unprecedented rise in crimes related to sexual violence towards women in our beloved matrilineal state.

It seems that around the election period, the public servants and public alike get a high from electoral politics. There is a sudden upsurge for politics itself and its participation. It does bring about a fraternal feeling that is otherwise difficult to come by. The eagerness of the people to partake in democracy is commendable but elections are just a facet of democracy. Democracy is not confined to just elections. The periodical participation with politics points to the fact that democracy is viewed only at its infantile stage. More disturbing is the public's seemingly intoxicated behaviour every five years over cultish political figures who sway around with colourful manifestos which melt away our consciousness and theirs. Our representatives should not only be held accountable every few years and our participation with governance should not be confined to such illusory forms of engagement, where lies heap upon lies to eventually wire in disappointment after the concluding 5 years.

When we leave our houses to cast our votes, let us remember the spirit of democracy that illuminates our paths as we approach the booths. Let not that spirit be clustered and crushed in the upcoming months and years after the election is done and dusted.

### TO THE EDITOR

### Traffic chaos & STP response!

Editor,  
The Shillong Traffic Police (STP) is possibly one of the most inept departments. They seem to be constantly at work while yielding no results. Lack of understanding of how traffic is to be regulated is obviously the prime reason for the ineptitude and this is at display every few weeks when all the traffic rules change leaving the common man confounded. The constant unexpected deviations in the traffic routes are too frequent for comfort and have severely affected people. Commuters cannot make informed travel choices anymore because no one knows what fancy drill the department will run each day. It is understandable that the department initially required time to experiment with different routes which, for just reasons, initially had the cooperation of the people. However, more recently, the experiments have turned frequent, random, without adequate warning and with an indifference to the

difficulties faced by commuters and citizens.

The grievances of the public are to do with the impractical routes and prohibitions in place. For instance, vehicles travelling from Kench's Trace are not permitted to make a right turn towards Civil Hospital. Instead, they must make a turn-around from the Anjali Petrol Pump which is extremely cumbersome and enhances travel time excessively. This presumably well-intended but illogical move, in reality, aggravates the bottleneck traffic around Anjali Petrol pump.

Next, the Police Bazar area has been reduced to an experimental lab with frequent changes. As on today, vehicles from Thana Road, Quinton Road and Jail Road must turn their vehicles from Presbyterian Church, provided, you drive around the Assembly and if it is mercifully permitted, to proceed to G.S. Road as a new prohibition disallows commuters from turning around the Police Bazar circle.

Similarly, without warning vehicles travelling

from Umsohsun are now prohibited from making a right turn towards Butcher Road to go to Rhino or Laban and instead must drive through Police Bazar Point towards Presbyterian Church to find a permissible turn.

Next, the new road connecting Police Bazar to Polo facilitated two-way traffic when it was inaugurated. But, as usual, without warning this was abruptly converted into a one-way road. We soon discovered that no virtue was involved in this move. Rather, the beneficiaries of this move are neighbouring business concerns which now use a large stretch of one side of the road as parking for their customers, without any objection from the department. At least, the department is thoughtful about some business interests but seems to have least concern for traffic or for the general public.

With all the chaos the only unaffected group are the taxi drivers who enjoy absolute immunity in their operations. They park, embark, disembark whenever and wherever and

the police officers are either helpless or in cahoots. The evenings in Police Bazar circle are a grim spectacle. Their experiments of Traffic Police have been going on for too long without any results exhibiting their incompetence. This is the sad truth.

The problems are further compounded when such random and unplanned changes are enforced by uncouth traffic personnel. The general public is addressed with in the manner the traffic police officers interact with erring cab drivers. The lack of respect for the public and lack of basic etiquette by these traffic police officers is disgraceful and a grave cause of concern.

The Traffic department has completely ignored the problem of areas such as Civil Hospital point, Anjalee point, Mawlai, and the entire Barik-Nongthymmai highway, which are contributing factors for the mismanaged urban traffic in Shillong, and has resulted in its almost complete breakdown.

The Office of the

Superintendent of Police (Traffic) should immediately take remedial measures.

Yours etc.,  
B. Khongwar, W. Kyndiah & others,  
Via email

### What are Elections for?

Editor,  
Come February 27, the state of Meghalaya will go to the polls. Elections are the essence of democracy otherwise we would be living in a chaotic and primitive stage. This time many parties and new candidates are in the fray. They have with their various manifestos for ostensibly to better our lives but these are not implemented when they achieve power. Looking back at the last five years, we are yet to see overall development of the state. The rural populace are the worst sufferers. There are no motorable roads, no proper sanitation, no primary healthcare centers and no proper schools buildings. This has resulted

in a pathetic state of life for the villagers.

Politicians and political parties make promises during elections, which pale into insignificance when they are elected. The BJP have assured the electorate that there will be no ban on cow slaughter or caste or religions discrimination. There is too much infighting in the ruling dispensation to devote to governance. The only option left are the regional parties but will they ever deliver the goods? We are yet to see.

Therefore I beseech you to give a clarion call to the younger generation through your newspaper to come out in large numbers and to follow their conscience not to vote for the candidate or any party which cannot fulfill the aspirations of the people. Elections are meant to bring governments that can in turn bring progress and prosperity of the people and not for the candidate or party.

Yours etc.,  
Michael N. Lyngdoh  
Shillong-14

# Das's next project on teenage love

Her latest feature film is making waves globally. After premiering at Toronto International Film Festival last September, the film is now touring festivals worldwide. This has kept director, producer, cinematographer and editor RIMA DAS busy, so much so that even after pursuing for two weeks, she remained unreachable. Desperation led to a few terse words but they could not lessen Das's humility. "I was not ignoring your calls. I was really busy these days and was coming back home really late," says the filmmaker, her voice still groggy from sleep or lack of it. Her ingenuity showed in her attitude.

After a short introduction, the 37-year-old filmmaker starts talking about her father's village, Chhayaagon, where she spent her childhood before moving to another place 2km from the village. But her attachment with Chhayaagon always remained as her grandparents live there. It was in this village that she got the idea of her second and latest feature, *Village Rockstars*, and it was here that she shot the film over four years. "Finance was the biggest problem. My first feature film (*The Man with Binoculars*, 2016) was chaotic as that was my first full length and I was depressed. But after I met the children there at a Bihu function, I got the idea for *Village Rockstars*. Whenever I got money I would go and shoot," says the soft-spoken filmmaker, who is associated with the Mumbai film industry for seven years now.

Das, who is a one-woman team, says she had no film background and never got a formal training in movie making. "My father being a teacher and mother a businesswoman, there was no influence from the family. However, later when I started making films, my family always stood by me and helped me financially," she concedes.

Das always wanted to be an actor and used to act in plays staged in school and later in college. It was her visit to Mumbai while still studying at Pune University that Das experienced the world of movie-making. "I went to Mumbai for some acting workshops but was still not sure whether to take



up acting as a profession. In the meantime, I met friends there and they introduced me to world cinema. It changed my view and I thought to myself, 'so you can make films with minimalistic budget'. That was how I came into filmmaking," she recalls.

Her first short film *Pratha*, which tells the story of a young girl suddenly becoming a woman to her family and society after puberty, in 2009 won many accolades which boosted Das's morale to plunge into filmmaking. But financial struggle continued. But Das was not to give up. So she planned a feature film, *The Man with*



*Binoculars*. She says she trained three youngsters from her village in production and post-production works and with the amateur group, she shot the film.

A deeper introspection into her life reveals that Das got separated from her husband around seven years ago. "It was difficult to focus on filmmaking but now I can dedicate full time. I

am married to my films and enjoying my freedom."

Her Canon camera, which she found in 2007, is her power and voice and the medium of expression and Das uses it to the fullest. For Das, every film is like delivering a baby with

the usual birth pangs and the ecstatic feeling after delivery. About the latest film, she says, "Village Rockstars is an Assamese movie but it touched hearts everywhere and established a connection."

Talking to *The Shillong Times*, Das shares her experience in Mumbai, the joy of being a one-woman team and the harsh reality. Excerpts:

**How difficult was it to get a foothold without any training? Which filmmakers influenced you?**

When I started planning a movie I was not thinking anything about these things. My only thought was that 'I have a camera and I can make a movie'. When I was writing my first story, I was not thinking about a producer and a distributor. I thought if I get good cinematographer then I can start. My family helped me with money. I trained a group of three from the village. It was a total chaos and equally tough. They did not know anything about movies and I did not have formal training.

Well, I was not aping anyone. I actually started on my own. Then I found canon camera and started experimenting. I am very fond of visuals.

**What is your next project? What is the time frame to finish the project? Are you acting in the film?**

My next film is another Assamese feature and is about teenage love. I am shooting in Assam and want to finish it fast. But I am so busy travelling with my last film. Out of the 26 festivals that it went to, I travelled to 16 of them. I am also busy with interviews. I am not getting my creative space. I thought of finishing it fast but now it seems it will take time. It is 40 per cent complete.

No I am not acting in the film. It is difficult to do everything alone and then act also. It will affect my film.

There is no crew and I am working with my cousin sister who helped me during *Village Rockstar*.

**What are the issues in the North East which you want to take up as subjects of your films in future?**

I am not focusing on any particular issue. My films are more character driven. I like to create interesting characters like the little girl in *Village Rockstars*. But issues do creep into the film and they follow the storyline follow directly or indirectly. I am not just looking at issues. It is all like a collaboration of all and not one thing.

**You have become a sort of inspiration. What are the challenges of multi-tasking (playing the roles of director/actor/producer/editor) and being a woman?**

I had to go through a hard time during my first film. It is very hard being a single woman team.

**What are the films that you have acted in? Are you also a stage artiste?**

I did not do anything great in acting. For now I am focusing on filmmaking than acting but if someone casts me then I will act.

**Do you think the North East has enough bold filmmakers who can denounce the establishment and flag pertinent issues?**

Of course there are names like Jahnu Barua and Bhavendranath Saikia. The passion is always there but finance is a problem for all. There is no return and we don't have the right platform.

**How do you manage your finances? Do you have to take up any other job to finance your films?**

I do corporate and wedding films. I also do photo shoots to earn money. Also, my family helps me too. My

films are low-budget but the money required is not that a small amount. *Village Rockstars* got some grant.

**Was there any special show of Village Rockstars in the village? Is there any moment during the shooting with the children in your village that you would cherish forever?**

No there was no show in the village. I brought the children to the Mumbai festival. I could not take them to Toronto though. They saw it in big screen. But I am planning a country-wide release of the film because I want the villagers to watch it on big screen. The children saw it on big screen and they were happy.

There are many moments to cherish. Hard to say as shooting was organic.

**Do you think children can deliver social messages better than anyone on screen?**

I think so. However, it all depends on the subject. Children are powerful on screen because they are innocent. They are natural actors and do not fake.

**You had talked about Iranian films and Majid Majidi. Was there any influence on the making of Village Rockstars? Would you like to use more child characters in your future projects?**

No there was none. I like many directors, besides Majidi. But when I make my own movie I do not think... I like visuals and my style is very different in *Village Rockstars*. I was going with the flow and there was no storyboard. I think you (and the audience) will be the better judge.

There are children in all my movies. My third feature also has a child character. I cannot avoid them as they can create wonders. And I always love to work with children.

**You are a self-taught filmmaker which is an achievement in itself. It must have been difficult. So how important do you think is formal training for a filmmaker?**

Formal training is necessary but not mandatory. I have done it. I saw movies, read articles and watched interviews. I started shooting myself and that helped me learn the craft. I did not have the patience to go to a film school but I think it is important. But again, if you are passionate nothing can stop you.

**What are your other interests besides filmmaking? Anything else you want to share?**

Nothing. I always think about movies and give my 110 per cent. Apart from that I would love to work for children and women in villages. We have started a school, though small, in out village and that provides informal education to children.

**Do you wish to have a crew?**

I definitely would love to work with the crew. At the same time, I would love to make movies like the way I am doing. But it is too much pressure and the kind of projects I am thinking of, I need a crew.

## TALKING POINT

Enjoying every bit of it: (Top) Das during the shooting of *Village Rockstars* and a scene from the film



## Language of unity on UNESCO day

By Varsha Sinha & Rupam Ghosh

Language is the most powerful tool for preserving and developing cultural heritage. It is food for our minds which can bind people in the most amazing way possible. Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture, and also a way of treasuring it, for years and years to come!

The Bengali Language movement was a popular ethno-linguistic movement in Bangladesh, as a result of the linguistic consciousness of the Bengalis to protect the recognition of Bengali as a state language. On the day of February 21, 1952, five students and activists were killed in Dhaka. In 1956, Bengali was declared as the state language of Pakistan.

Since 2000 UNESCO has annually observed the International Mother's Language Day to promote the preservation and protection of all languages. Therefore, making Bengali the only language in the world, also known as language movement, and people sacrificing their lives for the love of their mother tongue, their identity, and their culture. Bengali has a rich history and immense cultural impact in India and around the world as well. From Asia's first

Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore to one of the most powerful freedom fighters of India Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, Bengali has produced many personalities who are influential even today.

What can be more heart touching than seeing people, especially youths, coming together to celebrate this day as language day. Let us all relive the language and culture of Khasi, Garo, Jaintia,

Bengali Language movement was a popular ethno-linguistic movement in Bangladesh

Bengali, Nepali and all other languages spoken in our state. Why not on this auspicious day we all pay heartiest homage to the ones who didn't even flinch before dying for this noble cause.

So, let us all come together and bring back the essence of the utmost joy in relishing our mother tongue. Because in this age of

guns and bloodshed all around the world if we don't let our language contribute its bit in bringing us together, then what will?

A special kind of beauty will emerge if we all come together and celebrate the different languages together in our language, of our language and for our language. The beauty of languages spreads across a thousand miles. So we definitely ought to come together and celebrate this day to cherish our beautiful languages with utmost reverence and awe.

The Shillong Bengalee Students' Association (SBSA), would take this opportunity to wish all the people of the state on the occasion of International Mother's Language Day. "Languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue," UNESCO.

(The authors are members of the Shillong Bengalee Students' Association, Guwahati)

## Know the pulse of the market

By Ranjan K Baruah

We have published articles on financial securities, share market and its present scenario. Many readers have emailed and messaged to write more about it as it is yet to be explored in our area. We have published some of the career options in our last edition and in this edition, we are publishing details about some of the terms. Most of these are available online.

**Stock broker:** A stock broker is a regulated professional individual, usually associated with a brokerage firm or broker dealer, who buys and sells stocks and other securities for both retail and institutional clients through a stock exchange or over the counter in return for a fee or commission. Stock brokers are known by numerous professional designations, depending on the licence they hold, the type of securities they sell or the services they provide. Most brokerage firms in India look for at least a bachelor's degree in a related field — accounting, finance, business or economics.

An applicant with a master's of business administration can receive higher level positions and compensation than an applicant with a bachelor's degree. On-the-job training is provided by the hiring firm. Having natural decision-making skills, math skills and taking initiative are important qualities in a successful candidate.

**Merchant banking:** The word merchant bank does not have a fixed definition as this term is used differently in different countries. In the US these are called investment banks and in the UK they are called accepting and issuing houses. The notification of the Ministry Of Finance here defines mer-

chant banker as a person who is engaged in the business of issue management either by making arrangements regarding selling, buying, or subscribing to the securities as manager, consultant, adviser in relation to such an issue management. In general the merchant banks are the financial institution which provides financial services, solutions and advice to corporate houses. Some of the world famous merchant banks are Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse & Morgan Stanley etc. In India there are many banks which are into the field of merchant banking some of the banks are ICICI, State Bank Of India, Punjab National Bank etc.

Evaluation of schemes is a function of various attributes of the schemes, for example scheme objective, investment universe, the risks that the fund is taking, among others. This requires the investor to put in time and effort. The investor also needs to have the requisite expertise to be able to understand the features and nuances as well as the ability to analyse and compare from among many options. A distributor of mutual funds or an investment advisor would be qualified and trained for such a job.

**Mutual fund distributor verses investment adviser:** We might be wondering about this two terms, both are supposed to help with individual's investment decisions, which may include selection of MF schemes. An MF distributor is more likely to be focused on MF products, whereas an investment adviser may have a broader basket of products and services. We will publish more about this topic in our next edition.

Updates

**AAI SPORTS Scholarships 2018:** In a bid to encourage promising young players, the Airport Authority of India is offering sports scholarships to candidates for outstanding sports persons for the financial year 2018-19. The scholarship will be given initially up to March 31, 2019, which is extendable based on the individual's performance/improvement in his/her event. Aspirants may send application before February 19.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkrnanjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)



# Death of a missionary author

By Alfonso Elengikal

Fr Giuseppe Mauro Ferrero, a member of the Society of St Paul and popularly known by his pen name J Maurus, passed away in Rome on February 1. He was 93 and has to his credit over 125 books, many of which have been translated into various Indian and European languages. All his books have been published by Better Yourself Books, which he founded way back in 1962.

J Maurus was born on April 14, 1924, at Piedmont, North Italy. As a young boy, Maurus came in contact with Fr (now blessed) James Alberione, the Founder of the Society of St Paul and other Pauline Congregations like the Daughters of St Paul and the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master both of which have their communities in India. Before long, he joined Fr Alberione, deciding to become a Priest in the Society of St Paul.

Soon after his Ordination in 1950, Fr Alberione asked him to travel to India (in 1951) pursuing the media apostolate which he initiated in 1914. Reaching Bombay with another young Pauline Priest, Maurus was sent to Allahabad, the Mother House of the Congregation, where he picked up English and a working knowledge of Hindi to be able to communicate with the local people. He also showed keen interest in the Indian Vedic literature.

Maurus published his first book *Just A Moment, Please* in 1960, which became an instant bestseller. From then on, there was no turning back: books began to flow from his pen non-stop. Soon enough, Maurus brought his books under a new brand name – Better Yourself Books. Before long, numerous titles from different Indian and foreign authors found their way to the new publishing firm.

Maurus did not stop there: together with his close friend and confidant, Fr Aloysius Rego, in 1963 he founded the youth magazine – *The Teenager*, which today, published from Mumbai, holds the unique record of being the longest surviving youth magazine in India, reaching every month thousands of young people and educational institutions in the country.

The monthly *Inspirational Quote* with a circulation of over 22,000 copies, is another brain child of Maurus. Through Fr Maurus returned to native Italy in 1985, after 35 long years of service in India, he continued writing till recently, sending his manuscripts regularly to the editorial office of ST PAULS/BYB in Mumbai. He also kept up his love for India, particularly for the young people of the country. He visited India whenever there was an opportunity, and kept in touch with many of us who knew him very personally, sending us his “love notes.” Fr J. Maurus has touched the soul of India in more ways than one can easily fathom. May he rest in peace!

(The author is the director of Guwahati-based North East Social Communications)



# Padman a promotional film?

By Souvik Ghosh

One thing which has changed greatly in Indian cinema of late is the manner of film promotion. From Amir Khan's wandering outside former Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly's house before 3 Idiots' release to the train journey undertaken by Shah Rukh Khan prior to the release of *Raees*, all were targeted primarily to sell their films.

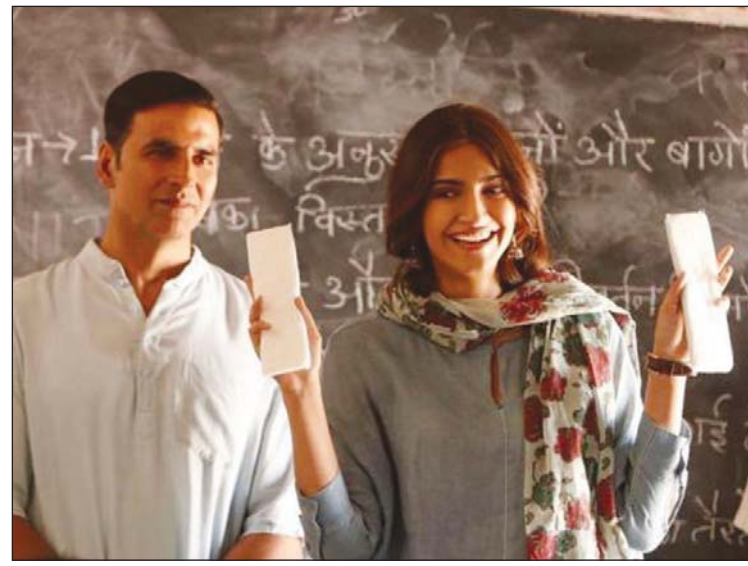
Though the filmmakers have never claimed the campaign as a part of their promotion, questions can certainly arise as to why the drive to break the social taboo of menstruation has started just countable days before the release of *Pad Man*?

A similar question has been raised by former statistics student residing in Bengaluru, Debapriya Dutta, who is completely convinced that #PadmanChallenge is nothing but a promotional activity.

In a friendly chat with IBNS, Debapriya says: “Well obviously it's a kind of promotional activity of the *Pad Man*. If not, then why such challenges just before the release of this film or after the trailer got released? They should have created awareness long ago and even protested when high taxes were levied on sanitary napkins calling it a product of luxury.”

However, Delhi resident Avantika contradicts. These are exemplary people and the most followed ones too. So if they endorse something of this sort, the taboo associated with periods may end.”

Avantika says, “It is a socially relevant topic that the film is themed upon and number of celebrities involved in the promotion only helps



in spreading the word farther, for

According to some women, even if the makers have carried out the campaign for the purpose of selling the film *Pad Man*, at least some awareness has been generated in the society.

Women celebrities along with men posing with sanitary napkins has certainly reverberated the message that pads are not something that should be wrapped in a plastic bag.

“I think it is a good way to promote a film. At least for the promotion of the movie, the condition of women's hygiene is coming out, and people can at least gain some knowledge from the promotion. Most of the Indians are still uneducated and has no idea what wrong is going on” says Tanisha Mukherjee, who is a recent pass out from Kolkata's Bhawanipur Education Society College.

Though Debapriya is not sure about the long term effect of the

#PadmanChallenge, she certainly feels “some amount of awareness should have been created which is really required in extremely remote places where 'periods' is considered a taboo”.

Periods as social taboo was also evident in the trailer of *Pad Man* where Akshay (who essayed the role of Tamil Nadu-based social activist Arunachalam Muruganantham), was looked down upon by his family members and most importantly his wife Radhika Apte in the film.

*Padman* is a story of Tamil Nadu-based social activist Arunachalam Muruganantham, who created a low-cost sanitary napkin making machine.

Muruganantham was inspired to create an inexpensive pad after seeing his wife use rags during her monthly cycle, just like 88 per cent of the females in India who do not have access to sanitary products.

Now considering the digital literacy, there is a big question mark as to how much the #PadmanChallenge, which has stormed the internet, will be effective in the rural areas.

Debapriya's concern about the long term effect is echoed by Tanisha as it will be a real challenge to continue the awareness after the film will be off at the theatre houses.

Tanisha says, “I think this has a chance to become history, since this issue of prime importance will gain no such success I guess. So there is a high chance the awareness will go away with the movie.” It will be interesting to see whether the celebrities continue to pose with the sanitary napkins even after the film is taken off from the theatre houses. Avantika reminds the campaign of eradicating open defecation which was greatly focussed in Akshay's other big hit *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*.

Avantika feels #PadmanChallenge is a just a beginning. “It isn't just a thing for the theatres and doesn't have a shelf life, I feel. We do have instances where cinema has enlightened us in myriad ways such as *Dangal* and *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* to name a few. This too is gonna spearhead a new day in the coming.”

Above all, it is undeniable that thinking about exploring a subject like menstruation in Bollywood is indeed a bold step by Balki since 10 years ago, the filmmakers probably would not have thought much about the box office collections.

The #PadmanChallenge has spilled into all sections of the society as commoners were also seen to pose with sanitary pads. All we can do now is to wait and watch how the campaign benefits the society. (IBNS)

## ‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambri

Sunday, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

A good year with positive developments gives you courage and energy as Moon trine Jupiter on your solar return chart. It's time to give up obsolete patterns and monotonous routines and have new vision about life. This is a year which supports your instinct to realize your dream. Financially it's a productive phase but expenses would remain on higher side. At home front, there will be complete peace and warmth that brings in joy and celebrations. You could see wavering energy levels at times and so need to take concrete steps to deal with the situation.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

You would be fun loving, energetic and willing to explore new ideas. You may feel frustrated in relationships as there is a lack of communication and it is hard for you to verbalize your true feelings and express them. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation. Health needs to be replenished with a planned diet and physical fitness schedules.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

You might particularly enjoy discussions about your early life, or the past. In fact, it's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, as you are more rational when it comes to personal matters now. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal past. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. It's a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

This phase brings harmonious relations with friends, colleagues and loved ones. There would be love, grace, beauty, happiness and pleasure in personal relations success and good fortune at work bring new opportunities for further progress. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You would be more determined and hard-working at this time.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

You would have to restructure and reorganize activities at work and analyze the situations at home. Your daily routines and business dealings need to be restructured for better gains and productivity. You tend to be a perfectionist while completing business projects and campaigns. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs taking it all in your stride. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

You would be compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives and gain respect from them. You are ambitious and ready to achieve professional goals and targets at any cost. You would maintain balance, strength and completion in personal and business partnership. Restructuring business schedules and dealings would be productive. If health is affected, fevers or minor infections are more likely.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

News and visitors from far off places are likely to arrive. You are loving and caring in personal relationships. You look at the world in terms of value and worth now, and what you have is foremost on your mind. Money issues pop up now - the discovery of a way to increase your income, an

unexpected gift or reward, or a brief and tiny financial crisis that motivates you to find new ways to make money are possible. You are blessed with good mood and health.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It would be better to make long term investments and speculations for financial gains. Group activities can be a therapeutic pastime.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. You would also form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. A sudden job opportunity, or some form of assistance with regards to career, home, or property matters, could be part of the picture. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your responsible side. Health needs to be addressed with a diet plan as well as some physical exercise.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender love and care. You feel fresh and re-energized. A blast of personal energy comes your way, and showing your leadership skills works for you now. You are at your most convincing, as others accept you at face value. Now you need a little attention, and career matters come to a head. This is also a strong period for finances and close partnerships. A pleasant surprise may be in store.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

Efforts at self-promotion might be made now. This is the time when you're noticed for what you've done or haven't done. Do your best to be in top form, make career adjustments if needed, and don't be afraid to show others exactly what you are made of. Perhaps this is not a time to make a presentation or to come on too strong to the world. You are feeling reflective rather than expressive. At this time, you instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

You will be creative, adventurous and unconventional at work and this brings appreciation from senior colleagues. Your partnerships are highlighted right now, and it's time to compromise. Insecurities in your partnerships are brought to light now, and the best way to handle this is to understand that you need others instead of competing for the limelight. Concentrate on truly listening to those close to you, and on playing a supportive role. Keep stress at bay.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

You're at your best when you are showing the world your practical, competent, and responsible side. A wonderful professional opportunity takes you towards success at this time. A personal meeting will lead to romance, love and long lasting relationship. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as changes may occur. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. Physical energy and good health enable you cooperate with busy schedule and work commitments.

# The Longing to Belong

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

In 2016, Toni Morrison delivered her Norton Lectures at Harvard on the ‘Literature of Belonging’ in which she considers fetishisation of skin colour and the questions posed by the era of mass migration. Her famous book, *The Origin of Others*, published on these concerns is now getting more and more significant in the context of the increasing visibility of white supremacist groups in the Trump era.

The longing to belong is the essence of all the stories of abandonment in Morrison's fiction. She began writing fiction independently to tell stories of initiation of black girls into womanhood defining the process of the complex meaning of being black and female in a culture that denigrates both qualities.

During the first 18-year period of her writing, from 1970 to 1988, she wrote five major novels *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *The Song Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), and then came the other novels, including the ever-debatable *God Help the Child* (2015).

Her great-grandmother was pitch-black, the blackest woman she had ever seen in her life and since she was aware of the pain when someone was compelled to internalise the feeling of being ugly forever. So she could not forget this pigmentation issue. Morrison's neighbourhood where she passed her childhood days was racially mixed — Poles, Italians and Jews as well as African Americans. She finally took her pen to make her words as her sword for inking over half a century her eight novels all to focus on the ‘longing to belong’. She began writing fiction independently to tell stories of initiation of black girls into womanhood defining the process of the complex meaning of being black and female in a culture that denigrates both qualities.

Alice Walker wrote very correctly about her fiction: “No one writes more beautifully than Toni Morrison. Really she was a wonderful stylist and a terrific thinker. As professor at Princeton University, teaching her undergraduate students ‘American Africanism’ she consistently explores issues of true complexity and terror and love in the lives of African Americans.”

And her novels are characterised by ‘visionary force and poetic import that gives life to an essential aspect of American reality’ to borrow the words of Swedish Academy. No wonder she became the first Afro-American writer to win the Nobel Prize worth \$8,25,000. She was just the eighth woman to win the prize since 1901.

She was born Chloe Anthony Wofford, the second of four children of George and Ramah Wofford, sharecroppers and the granddaughter of an Alabama slave. In 1949, she passed from Lorrain public schools and entered Howard University to take her BA degree in 1953.



Photo: Google Images

## February 18: A Birthday Tribute

A determination that was rare among the African Americans that time inspired her to attend Howard University although she earlier planned to be a dancer. She got a new direction after getting MA degree in American Literature from Cornell (1955). She taught a number of years in Texas South and Howard University. In 1967, she became a senior editor in the Random House. She married and had two sons. Her first recognition finally came after the protest by 48 black writers, including Maya Angelou, Amiri Baraka, Houston A Baker Jr, Angela Davis, in favour of her and she got Pulitzer in 1988 for *Beloved* which she rightly deserved and a little later to the expectation of all, a Nobel in 1993 and in 2012 the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Obama.

In 2015 she got her lifetime achievement award from the National Book Critics Circle for her books. In her latest, *God Help the Child*, which thundered off the press with 200,000 copies, she balanced between skimpy realism and over-wrought fantasy revolved around a successful cosmetics designer called *Bride* and the novel is a capstone of her jewelled career.

In this novel she again focuses on a woman whose life is over-determined by the pigment of her skin in a culture torn with sexual violence. As an adult she was distractingly gorgeous driving a Jaguar. The semi-magical worlds depicted with surreal touches fade when we see *Bride* losing her charms: her pubic hair lost, earring holes closed, periods stopped and breasts shrunk and she changes back into a little black girl. Many were critical of the novel talking of her slipslop style. But Toni Morrison told Hermione Hoby in an interview in *The Guardian*, “I am writing for the black people... I don't have to apologise.”

*God Help the Child*, which wrestles with issues of colourism and child abuse, was originally given the title *The Wrath of Children* as it was about children's fury about what adults have done to them and how they tried to get through it and over it and around it and how it affected them.

*Tar Baby* was its precedent in 1981 with a contemporary setting where a Sorbonne-educated fashion model, Jadine, falls in love with a penniless drifter who was at complete ease with himself and his blackness. According to Toni Morrison, “It is just a colour”.

Jadine was less obsessed than *Bride*. *Tar Baby* is more timeless phantasmagoria than identifiable present reality. And this is true about many of her novels, including *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*. The danger of colour is always a focus in her writings and thought since she began her publishing career. In *The Bluest Eye*, the story of Pecola Breedlove is also about the young black girl. Demonisation of an entire race for the black colour is not only a crime against the Afro-Americans but also against humanity. And if that relates to a female then it was a story of double marginalisation.

James Baldwin once talked about “a little white man deep inside of all of us”. Toni Morrison never really had it inside her and this probably made her so original and so loudly confident in her writing. Morrison fused two political trends in American culture: Black cultural nationalism and feminism. This is true of *The Bluest Eye* — her debut novel where Morrison makes the reader question ‘beauty’ and the consequences of beauty standards on individuals. According to the Swedish Academy, “One can delight in her unique narrative technique varying from book to book and developed independently, even though its roots stem from Faulkner and American writers from further South. The lasting impression is nevertheless sympathy, humanity of the kind which is always based on profound humor.”

(The author is Associate Professor, Head of the Post Graduate Department of English, Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata)

"A lot of people do not muster the courage to live their dreams because they are afraid to die."

--- Les Brown

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.188 SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2018

### Shocking political violence!

THE other day a live grenade was found in the spare tyre of a supporter of the Congress candidate in Shillong West constituency. This was followed by the torching of a house in Jaintia Hills on account of political differences. On Sunday, Jonathone N Sangma, the NCP candidate from Williamnagar, Garo Hills was killed in an IED blast along with his security guards while campaigning at Samanda. Before that Jonathone had been warned by unknown groups not to contest elections. Posters with sign of blood and bullets warning voters not to vote Jonathone Sangma were nailed to trees in the constituency. That no one has any clue as to who put up these posters and no action is taken against any individual or group as yet shows the absence of actionable intelligence to halt violence and bring in a climate where voters feel safe to come out and vote.

In the 2013 elections too, Jonathone Sangma had filed an FIR against a rival candidate alleging that the person was using militants to intimidate him. He was provided security provided by the government. Since it is a known fact that the only militant outfit with fire power in Garo Hills today is the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) led by Sohan Shira it can be safely assumed that the intimidation to Jonathone Sangma came from them. While the GNLA was not as active as it used to be and some of its cadres had surrendered, the fact remains that Sohan Shira continues to be a slippery customer and all attempts to arrest him have proven futile. So it appears that Sohan's military intelligence is one up on that of the police. At this rate when will the law catch up with this militant leader? And how many more lives will be lost in the process? The Meghalaya Police itself has suffered several casualties from the outfit. And election time is also when militant outfits come out of the woodwork to extort money from candidates by offering to help them canvass without a hitch or by warning people not to vote for the rival candidate. Either way, elections in militant infested areas are treacherous and the fact that Williamnagar constituency is not sanitised is dangerous for the intending candidates.

### LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

### Bodo ultra killed in encounter

A Bodo extremists was killed in another seriously injured in an encounter with the police at Alokjhar in Assam's Kokrajhar district this morning official reports said. Police also recovered the body of a supporter of Plains Tribal Council of Assam, a regional political party, from a ditch. The PTCA supporter, identified as

Kapsingh Basumatary was kidnapped from his house at Sarfanguri on May 10.

The extremists set on fire the Bangaligaon High School, a branch post office and Lailangpara Lower Primary School under Dalgaoon police station in Udalguri sub-division of Darrang district last night.

Political parties contesting in the election to Meghalaya State Legislative Assembly are competing among themselves in claiming the honour to be the agents of change if they are voted to power. Almost all the parties joining the fray promise to change Meghalaya in the next five years as if there is a magic wand to do it. The pertinent question whether the parties are serious or is this just empty election rhetoric to fool the people?

Can any party (or for that matter alliance of parties) really bring change in the next five years? Or to begin with, have the parties themselves initiated any change at all? What have the parties done so far which is worth calling a change? Did the parties introduce any change at all since they made the clarion call to bring change in the state? The saying goes that if we want to see change it must begin with oneself.

Let us now see if the parties have ushered any change beginning from the election. The total numbers of candidate contesting the February 27, election to the Meghalaya state Assembly is 370 and for the first time in the history of the state with a matrilineal culture, out of the 370 there is an increasing numbers of 30 women candidates in the fray. The Congress has fielded candidates to contest all the 60 seats in the house, the NPP 52, the BJP 47, UDP 35, PDF 26, NCP 21, HSPDP 13, KHAM 8, GNC 6 and the 85 other candidates are contesting as independents.

The first question that we need to ask is whether the increase in the number of women candidates contesting the election enough? It is indeed sad to note that in spite of the fact that there are more female than male voters in the state, yet there are only 32 women candidates contesting in the election this time. In a state where majority communities follow matrilineal system where lineage is taken from the mother, out of 370 candidates only 32 female candidates contesting the election works out to only 10 percent of candidature only. We claim that we give equal opportunity to women in the society but why do so few women contest the election? What change have the parties initiated on this front?

Considering that the major regional parties already have a pre-poll alliance the UDP, the HSPDP

By H H Mohrmen

and GNC together are contesting 54 out of the 60 vacant seats in the august house. The pre-poll arrangement makes the alliance second only to the Congress in terms of numbers of candidates contesting the ensuing election, but the question that begs the answer is what is the alternative that the alliance is offering? Is the alliance any different from the other regional parties or for that matter even from the national parties? Or are they only copying issues from each other without any ideological stances.

Other parties too like Aam Aadmi Party, Lok Janshakti Party, All India Trinamool Congress, Republican Party of India

in the district, they would find that the constituency particularly Sutnga village has experienced similar violent incidents in the last 2013 election too.

The election this time is highly sensitive and respective district administrations will have to be on high alert especially in the constituencies where there are reports of violence but this election also marked the sharp rise in the numbers of cases where cash was confiscated from different individuals across the state. Despite the wide publicity made by the Election Commission prohibiting the carrying of cash in the state beyond the permissible limit, yet the flying squad ceased cache of money from different

wherever the candidate is campaigning. In doing so the candidates have to incur huge amounts of money to hire cars and buses to ferry voters from their respective villages to the place where the campaign is. Right now candidates in Jaintia hills are hiring buses even from Assam and each candidate is hiring not less than 8 buses a day. Prohibiting the candidates to bring voters to campaign will help minimise the expenditure they incur during the election because one can do a simple calculation how much it will cost the candidates to hire minimum eight buses a day for more than twenty days.

Another Dorbar Shnong in Jowai which has taken a similar bold step to thwart unnecessary expenditure during election is the Khimmusniang locality. These developments which are initiated by the public not only sets good examples for other to follow but it is hoped that it will also bring major changes in the way the election is conducted in the district starting from the next district council elections in Jaintia hills in 2019.

If all the Dorbar Chnong follow the footsteps of Panaliar and Khimmusniang then the candidates would not have to spend money on hiring buses and cars to ferry the voters from one place to another. When campaigners visit different places there is also the issue of littering because the morning after the campaign one will find that the place is littered from one end to another.

The effort by the Jaintia Journalist Association to provide a common platform for the candidates in the Jaintia hills district to discuss and debates issues that the candidates consider important in their election campaign is another step in the right direction which could help improve election in the state.

In spite of all the bad press about the election campaign, there is a ray of hope that change will take place and in some places change is already taking place. Change can take place not because of the politicians or the political parties but the initiatives taken by the common people.

**The effort by the Jaintia Journalist Association to provide a common platform for the candidates in the Jaintia hills district to discuss and debates issues that the candidates consider important in their election campaign is another step in the right direction which could help improve election in the state.**

(A) and the North East India Development Party have also fielded candidates in some assembly constituencies. But this is rather a very different election because we already have reports of election related violence across the state. There was a violent attack on the brother of PN Syiem candidate from Mawsynram constituency in the East Khasi hills district; there were reports of election related violence in Nangbah village in the West Jaintia hills district, Sutnga village in the East Jaintia hills district and a live Chinese hand grenade was found from a spare tyre of a Bolero vehicle which belongs to Michael Pakyntein a strong supporter of Congress candidate from Shillong West Constituency Mohendro Rapsang. There are also cases of violence in the Garo hills regions, so one instance that this election is way different from the election in the past is the numbers of cases of election related violence that have occurred in the whole state.

Places like Sutnga already have a history of violence during the election. If the district administration in the area looks at the election history

parts of the state!

The other question is, what have the political parties done to control the election related violence? Has any party issued any directive to its cadres to see that there is no violence during the election? What about expenditure what have the parties done to see that there is no extravagant spending during election? Yet we continue to see wasteful spending of money in organising rallies and hiring of vehicles to ferry supporters to and fro.

Despite the violence and the use of money power during election, there are still reasons to be optimistic about the future election in the state. The silver lining in the sky is that certain communities have initiated measures to help clean the election process in the state. Local committee like that of the Dorbar Chnong Panaliar, Jowai took a bold step in prohibiting ferrying of voters from other localities and villages which fall under the 2- Jowai constituency to their localities when the respective candidate campaigns in the area.

The practice now is that candidates irrespective of their parties ferry people every day from their respective places to

the image, credibility and capability of the present Prime Minister to a great extent. My humble suggestion to the Modi Govt is to implement on war footing the following (i) scan all those people working in foreign

office (issue of passport), and those frequenting it (ii) appoint honest banking Ombudsman in every Public/Private sector banks (iii) Profile every mega tycoon doing business or those having maximum banking transactions overseas from each and every state to pre-empt future looting (iv) screws should be tightened on the present banking mechanism, through the office of Governor RBI and the Board of Directors of Banks concerned (v) Coordinate banking activity in all states and keep tabs of mega business tycoons and of other professions (vi) LOUs (Letter of Undertaking) for working capital loan from any bank must be checked and scanned and brought directly to the personal

notice of the Finance Minister. This must be done especially for those business tycoons earning net turnover of more than Rs 10 crore or above per day (vii) monthly banking transaction data of mega business tycoons and their money trails overseas may be updated directly to the Governor RBI and the FM and the PM. (viii) All airport and maritime authorities may be alerted about the movements of the mega rich and mega business tycoons and if found to be suspicious their Aadhar card and Pan Card may be deactivated and their overseas business partners be informed. Last but not the least Bitcoins or crypto currency handlers may be sniffed out as these people are also likely to create mayhem in the banking sector. Relaxing banking transaction norms for ease of doing business" is not a good idea. It needs tightening.

Yours etc.,  
Sonaram M Sangma  
Tura.

### Election bargain for "congestion free" Shillong town

Editor,

The biggest concern of Shillong town is the traffic jam. Much has been written about this issue but all goes in vain. One wonders why the authorities are so deaf and the leaders so dumb. I think now all the people need to come to the streets and beat the drum. The public should drive home the point that all speeches on development would be meaningless without a permanent solution to the roads choked with excess vehicles. The jammed traffic in Shillong town only renders many developmental plans not implementable and life more miserable. This is not the end of the story. The jammed street has failed each of us in multiple ways. It has put us in an awfully unpleasant situation. No other developmental plans will

ever make us jubilant now. The bottom line is that Shillong is badly longing for a congestion-free road communication.

Since the state is going to the polls very soon why don't we adopt a quick pro quo method? I am sure our visionary leaders who are earnestly committed to serving the public will sincerely listen to our concerns now. So, let's match their prayer to us for "our support" with our "humblest appeal" to address the road issues as soon as they form the new government.

In this, I would urge upon our prominent intellectual organization like ICARE and the local media to take this issue on a war footing. All other NGOs should join together to speak out in chorus about the bane of the road congestion. Yes, the road to success is pretty smooth right now. I hope, if we are sincere, that this two-way bargain will certainly bear fruit.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Grewal,  
Shillong-2

Bank frauds puncture Modi's no-scam claims

## Congress, BJP cannot pass on the buck to each other

By K. Raveendran

Congress and the BJP are playing hide and seek with the people of India by blaming each other for the massive banking fraud by Nirav Modi, the diamond dealer to the world's glitterati. Originally estimated to cost Rs 12,300 crore, the value of the plunder is now scaled up to Rs 30,000 crore. The BJP has added it to the infamous UPA scam list, and is even claiming credit for the 'alertness of the banking system introduced by the Narendra Modi government', which according to the party unearthed the fraud. NDA ministers have fished out a 2013 letter written by one of the then directors of Allahabad Bank, complaining to the Reserve Bank and the then finance secretary against granting loans to Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi. Not to be undone by the charge of political complicity, Congress has come out with its own damning evidence to pin down the Modi government by citing a complaint filed by a whistle blower in July 2016 on the entire fraud to Narendra Modi's office, which, according to Congress, was acknowledged by the PMO.

Irrespective of which side comes out more convincing in this clumsy spat, there is the undeniable fact that if the fraud was committed during the UPA regime, the responsibility for letting the scamsters escape with the loot must be squarely put to the Modi government. In fact, in an extremely biting sarcasm, Congress president Rahul Gandhi has even produced two 'guides' on how to first

government or out of it. Even if the frauds were perpetuated at the time of UPA, the NDA government cannot absolve itself of blame in any of the cases. In the absence of a formula to apportion responsibility in such a scenario, the two sides must share the guilt in equal proportions. Maybe an enterprising economist can work out a formula for quantifying responsibility for fraud committed over multiple governments, which could perhaps be a Nobel Prize winning effort. But until such time that we have a formula, the Modi government must stop claiming that it has finally given Indians a scam-free government.

Even more damaging for the Modi government is the latest RBI disclosure that during the past five years, four of which are under Modi, over Rs 60,000 crore worth of fraud had been committed on the country's public sector banks. According to the data, state-run banks have reported 8,670 'loan fraud' cases totalling Rs 61,260 crores over the last five financial years up to March 31, 2017. The total number could be even higher since these include only cases reported to the RBI and involved loans of Rs1 lakh or more.

Just as in the case of Nirav Modi, it is a no-brainer that such massive fraud could not have been possible without the connivance of bank officials. In fact, bankers have been steering funds to politically connected business tycoons, without due diligence, or after being pressed by government

**The RBI also cannot be above blame. The latest disclosure of the massive frauds emerged only after an enterprising Reuters reporter approached the RBI with an application under the RTI Act.**

plunder and then escape with the loot. His formula La(Mo) + Ni(Mo) ---(with Na(Mo) = Bha(Go) does sound valid. But the question that begs for an answer is: how did the Modi government allow the kingpin to continue defrauding the banking system for four years out of the seven, which happened to fall within the Modi government's rule despite the existence of complaints since 2013 and a whistle blower's account from 2016? If the UPA dispensation failed to act on the complaint or even that suppressed it, what prevented the Modi government to act? Especially, when it claims credit for the 'alertness' of the banking system. It is even more disturbing that the climax of the fraud, which was the escape part, got enacted just days before Narendra Modi and Nirav Modi were to appear in the controversial Davos photo, irrespective of whether the prime minister was aware of who all was posing with for the 'photo-op'.

The story wasn't any different when Vijay Mallya gave the slip to the law enforcement authorities after his ingenious fraud in which his companies defaulted on Rs 9,000 crores worth of loans the debonair conman never had the intention to pay back. He simply palmed off losses from his ill-fated Kingfisher airlines onto the banks. And the authorities kept looking the other way until he was ensconced in his safe haven. The same was the case with Lalit Modi, the self-proclaimed dictator of instant cricket. All the escapades happened either during Modi's time or with the active help of BJP leaders, whether in the

officials. Nirav Modi managed to transact thousands of crores of rupees, with bank officials making no proper entries, or vetting the credit limits of companies to which the huge amounts were being sanctioned. So much for the efficiency of our celebrated banking supervisory system.

The RBI also cannot be above blame. The latest disclosure of the massive frauds emerged only after an enterprising Reuters reporter approached the RBI with an application under the RTI Act. And this means that if there was no RTI query, the information would have stayed with the RBI. How can the RBI justify itself if anyone accuses it of being a party to the cover-up?

All this looted money belongs to the people of India, which could have been used for their welfare and progress. How can the country achieve progress when national wealth is plundered like this and the entire Establishment is engaged in a grand cover-up operation, subjecting people to untold miseries in the form of price increases and ever new tax burdens year after year? Our finance ministers keep blaming rising international crude prices for all our economic woes and reel out fancy statistics to show how every \$10 per barrel increase in the price of oil reduces economic growth by 0.2-0.3 percentage points. Have our government economists ever calculated the rate of growth such plundered astronomical amounts could have induced to the economy, or the reduction in tax burden it could have made possible if the moneys had remained in the system? (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Tighten the screws on banking sector

Editor,

Nirav Modi a diamond business Czar of Mumbai pulled off one of the most incredible bank loots during almost every Banking Ombudsman of Punjab National Bank (PNB) and the CBS (Core Banking System). This is neither a BJP nor Congress matter although the systematic looting through unpaid loans of Rs.1500 crores reportedly started under noble PM Manmohan Singh's rule from 2011! But the core question is how did it add up to Rs.11,000 Crores by January 2018. And how did Mr Smart, the then RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, the ex Planning Commission "think-tank" MS Ahluwalia, and the then CBI ex- Boss Ranjit Sinha did not sniff it out then and allowed the matter to drift to such a state? The Modi Govt. took office only on May 26 2014 but how did the loot blossom? Apparently

there is a deliberate attempt to denigrate and tarnish the image of PM Narendra Modi since just because the offender is also called Modi. Just because one Sohan Shira is a GNLA boss not all Shiras are a bad lot and can be tagged with the same 'militant' label!

This is obviously an insidious plot to malign the image of PM Narendra Modi since both the capers who pulled the "loot and scoot" operandi were Modis. But the million dollar question is how does a Belgian born (native place- Belgium, Antwerp EU) whose maternal uncle's name is Mehul Choksi become a "Modi" to loot under the tag name of Modi? I beg to remind the esteemed readers that this is neither a BJP nor Congress issue because it involves every citizen's hard earned money! When farmers are dying, middle class' people's income is squeezed, the billionaires and multi-billionaires are looting and escaping from the country. This is unacceptable as it lowers

*“Corruption, embezzlement, fraud, these are all characteristics which exist everywhere. It is regrettably the way human nature functions, whether we like it or not. What successful economies do is keep it to a minimum. No one has ever eliminated any of that stuff.”*

**---Alan Greenspan**

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**The great bank loot!**

YET another scamster, Nirav Modi has fled with the bank deposits of this country’s ordinary citizens. Earlier the British had made off with the Kohinoor diamond amongst other crown jewels of India ,but the British were colonisers and their action of looting the wealth of a colony they were unsure of retaining is par for the course. What is distressing is that in the last few years, first Lalit Modi the IPL Czar who took the game of cricket to a new high and violated all the rules of financial transactions fled India in 2010. Then Vijay Mallya the owner of an IPL team, Royal Challengers Bangalore left the country on March 2, 2016 because he owed the public sector banks over Rs 9000 crore in loans. And in January this year Nirav Modi a diamond merchant known to have designed some of the best jewellery for Hollywood film stars and other international celebrities, fled India after leaving behind unpaid loans amounting to Rs 11, 300 crores which he took from foreign and Indian banks. Loans from foreign banks were given to Nirav Modi on the basis of Letters of Undertakings (LoUs) from Indian banks. He did not have to pay any margin money for those loans since the Indian banks stood as guarantors. The bank that bled the most was Punjab National Bank. Nirav Modi was almost like an insider trader and was privy to the Bank’s operating password for Core Banking facilities.

The Punjab National Bank only detected the fraudulent deals on Januray 29 this year and filed a criminal complaint against Nirav Modi but by then he had already left India in early January. Modi is now living it up in a posh hotel in New York much like Mallya is doing so in the UK.

Today the confidence of ordinary depositors in the banking system has taken a beating. They wonder if their hard earned savings are safe in the nationalised or private banks if mega borrowers are allowed to loot and scoot. And while ordinary depositors are subjected to a regular KYC (Know Your Customer) process and have to regularly supply the banks all personal documents, the unscrupulous borrowers get away by violating all the banking norms. The irony of India is that small borrowers are harassed while defaulters escape scrutiny.

**TO THE EDITOR**

**Will they be too busy to listen?**

Editor,  
I am reminded of a story being told of a politician, who once being elected made himself completely inaccessible to the public. There was once a woman who went to the politician’s office to seek out his help to address her grievances. However, the politician responded by saying that now since he has taken up the cause of the constituency, he can no longer make time for individuals, to which the woman replied that she is still glad that God has not reached that level yet. This morning Mr W.H.D Syngkon the Congress candidate from Shillong North constituency visited my house. I politely opened the door and asked him and his followers to sit down, but before I could ask him any question he stood up and just requested me to vote for him and keep him in my prayers. The only conclusion that I could draw from his visit, was either that, he was not at all interested in my vote or simply too important to listen to the views and concerns of an ordinary voter. However, this

constituency presents us with a very big challenge of electing a representative since we are left with a choice between three well qualified candidates, if educational qualification were the only yardstick to measure their competence and ability, and two very kind individuals if morality and character can also be considered as a yardstick to measure their leadership capabilities. Between the five candidates there are four characteristics that can be immediately observed. The first one seems to have the characteristics of a wolf, the second of a fox, the third of a lamb and the fourth and fifth of a lion. There does not seem to be any candidate who possesses both the characteristics of a lion and a lamb within themselves. Personally an ideal candidate would have been someone who has enough courage to rule well like a lion where their core beliefs and values would have been all about protecting and serving their constituency, with the humility and meekness of a lamb where they intentionally and willingly choose to sacrifice every personal gain and benefits for the sake of the people

they are going to represent. The point is that it is hard to find people who possess both competence and character , but I guess we will have to make our choices based on the context of where we are right now.

Yours etc.,  
Pyndapbha Warjri  
Shillong-2

**Oratory Skills and Substance**

Editor,  
Apropos Jerome K. Diengдох’s letter, “Can’t see why Paul can’t win.” (ST Feb 16, 2018) I have this to comment. In my interaction with people and leaders in different fields of activity, I have met with individuals with oratory skills whose speeches have substance and who can convert them into action. Then there are those with oratory prowess who can keep the crowd spellbound for one or two hours even while they clap, cheer and laugh but at the end of the day you realize that it had no substance. And then there are those who have no oratory skills but who can work and deliver and are consistent

Front page news, comments and editorials of all local papers are focused on one single topic – the Meghalaya Assembly elections of 2018. Who said what; who accused whom; who is bad and who is good; who will win and who will lose; who has deserted whom and who has moved in with whom becomes the news of the day. It’s a circus. I mean it’s the tamasha that hits town once every five years and no one, absolutely no one, wants to miss the show, however macabre it may be. With less than a week from the day of reckoning, the political atmosphere has not only heated up but has definitely degenerated into a foul mouthed slanging match of language usually picked up from the gutter. In some instances deeds have followed such words to make this election more reminiscent of the gang wars of UP or Bihar rather than the civilised exercise of electing leaders for the state of Meghalaya. It speaks volumes for a community that prides itself with the outdated adage of “Ka Jaithynriew Tip Briew Tip Blei!” (A Humane God Fearing Community). Many of us want change little knowing that this is the type of change the politics of the day has bestowed upon us!

Kong Patricia Mukhim in her engaging article “Election 2018: repeating the rhetoric”, ST 16th Feb 2018, has really put into words the feelings many of us have towards the Assembly elections of this year. Media reports on what the parties and candidates are coming out with is disappointing to say the least. There is no substance nor reflection of public interest in what we hear except for the vision document of the BJP which touched on some relevant points of interest. Please go to social media to see what people really expect and the disappointment when they realise what they are likely to get instead and the senseless direction this election is taking. Promises, vague empty words of a paradise to come (lawei ba phrynai) is all that the public is being fed with. Choose us; elected me and my party; vote for me and for no other and I will turn Meghalaya into a paradise. Politicians and their parties shamelessly ignore and forget the fact that it was they and their selfish visionless actions that has

**The Good, the Bad & the Voiceless**

*By Toki Blah*

turned Meghalaya , once upon a time a paradise on Earth, into the hell hole that it now promises to be. The BJP has promised to bring back coal mining if voted to power. Frankly speaking, is that such a good deal for the state and the paradise that was once Meghalaya? Let me remind the reader that it is rat hole coal mining that has converted large portions of Meghalaya into an environmental death trap that will take another 1000 years to recover. Simply for the benefit of a few rich coal barons. It has turned many of our major rivers into dead,

*The tragedy of the hour is that the focus of the political system is on something else than solace to the people.*

lifeless water bodies. The poor in these mining areas drink poisoned contaminated water. Their votes count but apparently their health and lives are unimportant as no one seem bothered about it. It is unscientific rat hole coal mining that has sponsored and supported militancy, crime and underground activities within the state. Extractive coal mining resulted in the emergence of rich, selfish, illiterate, opportunistic and unthinking coal barons who then metamorphosed into politicians, the likes of which were never seen before. The power of money and not the power of the people has become the profile of Meghalaya politics. The NGT ban on rat hole mining promises to cleanse the rot that has set in! A second look at the idea of reintroducing coal mining is called for. It definitely is not in the real interest of the state and its people.

Has anyone cared to listen to the election speeches made at campaign meetings? They seldom vary from each other in theme and content. Speeches usually can be divided into three parts. The first is the “there are bad guys out there, so be wary” part. Every opposing candidate is branded a fool; a criminal in the making; a crook out to hoodwink the innocent and the gulleless. So people beware of the wolf in a sheep’s clothing.

The speaker then warms up and makes his pitch which forms the second part of the speech. It’s the “there is one and only one good guy; the Hero and his party who will save the doomed community from certain calamity. So people if you want salvation you better vote for me”. The last and third part of the speech is the sweetener. The speaker now begins to elaborate the benefits the constituency will get from voting for their hero. He promises water; better electric supply; better footpaths; community halls; fish ponds; playing fields; school fees for the poor;

blankets for the winter; umbrellas for the monsoons; dining sets ; tea sets; pots and pans and what have you! He neglects to inform the ignorant public that all of these will come from the public exchequer but will in no way help in the development of the state. He conveniently sidesteps the issue that he is basically propagating feudalism by way of patronising a few at the cost of many.

The emergence of illiterate businessmen in the guise of politicians has shifted the focus of politics from the general interest of society as a whole to the selfish interest of both the individual candidate as well as the individual voter. The needs of the individual voter has now taken precedence over the needs of the state. Nearly all parties and candidates refuse to address important and substantial concerns of the state. Take for instance the issue of influx and the outsider problem. It has caused law and order problems; loss of man days not to speak of loss of precious innocent lives. It is a problem that is bound to pop up once again sooner than later. Linked to the problem of influx is the opening up the economy of Meghalaya through the introduction of a railway; the establishment of a firm tourism policy and the access of the state to the potentials of the Act East Policy. The very foundations for all round development. Yet everyone

maintains a strict silence over the issue. It’s now obvious, except to the blind, that the outmoded ILP control mechanism is not going to work and that insisting on the ILP will only cause further law and order issues. Meghalaya needs a modern, practical and workable influx control apparatus. Surprisingly every politician in this election pretends the problem doesn’t exist. Mums the word! Everyone prefers to play safe. Or is it because no one has a clue on what to say and do. With the type of candidates in the fray this appears to be more the reason than anything else.

The other important issue which the current elections have bypassed is the economic upliftment of the state. Meghalaya is in an economic slump. Everyone has conveniently blamed the ban on unviable coal mining as the cause, forgetting that for 60 years we never even thought of alternate means of revenue generation. Today tourism is rapidly emerging as the most viable sector for both revenue as well as employment generation. The tragedy of the hour is that the focus of the political system is on something else than solace to the people. Calling the Congress bad or the BJP wicked or that regional parties are better than national ones is the political menu for the current polls but it’s not going to bring bread to the table for the common man. We need visionaries who will speak about the future of this state. Sadly they are missing! Again Meghalaya is urbanising at an alarming unplanned pace. It needs laws and regulations to enable its people to sustain themselves in a safe, humane and sustainable urban environment. Yet we have idiots who are against any Urban law that seeks to bring urban uniformity and safety. The tragedy is that such people are there, in the electoral forefront, befouling the electorate, posing as saviours of the Jaithynriew, spouting nonsense from the rooftops. “I lift up my eyes towards the mountains, whence shall help come to me the voiceless commoner?”

For the first time, rights of a consumer have been defined clearly, through this Bill. The Bill makes six provisions where the tribunals can launch enquiry into and act against unfair contracts. Unfair contracts have been described as those where the terms of the contract were set as such bringing disadvantage to the consumer. Those who are manufacturers are also expected to maintain product quality in all formats including design. If the quality of the product is found lacking then the manufacturer may be held liable for the same. Provisions such as these would go a long way in curbing menaces like lack of design uniformity or other issues like food and oil adulteration. Further to curb the menace of adulteration the Bill makes stringent provisions with express provisions for punishments in case of food and other adulteration. The Bill while structuring the consumer grievance panel makes for some changes in the territorial jurisdiction. The new territorial jurisdiction includes the place of business as well apart from the address of the consumer and the place where the event occurred. The monetary jurisdiction of the district forum and the state commission have been enhanced so as to be exercised in respect of defective goods or deficient services of value of upto Rs. 1 crore and Rs. 10 crores, respectively, from the existing limit of Rs 20 lakhs and Rs 1 crore respectively. Further both the district as well as the state commission have been

**Draft Consumer Protection Bill 2018**

*By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg*

**Beating the Rhetoric**

The Consumer Protection Act was first passed in 1986 and consumer rights became a law for the first time. It envisaged protecting the rights of the consumer while setting up a judicial mechanism which would act as a grievance redressal mechanism in multiple stages. Since then, consumer rights across the country have been protected through the mechanism that the Act of 1986 provided. With the passage of time, as India marches into a new era, it was imperative that a new law was brought in to replace the erstwhile Bill. An attempt was made in 2015 which was however not pursued and finally it has been replaced by the Draft Consumer Protection Bill that was placed in the Lok Sabha in January 2018.

In a new global environment, the world has become far more integrated like never before. The use of global supply chain systems, information technology and IT enabled services have redrawn businesses and relations between buyer and seller. The use of new forms of businesses like online e-commerce has also posed new challenges areas that redefine the buyer seller relationship. In such changed circumstances, it was indeed imperative that a new Bill was drawn in to replace the erstwhile Consumer Protection Act 1986.

For the first time, rights of a consumer have been defined clearly, through this Bill. The Bill makes six

provisions where the tribunals can launch enquiry into and act against unfair contracts. Unfair contracts have been described as those where the terms of the contract were set as such bringing disadvantage to the consumer. Those who are manufacturers are also expected to maintain product quality in all formats including design. If the quality of the product is found lacking then the manufacturer may be held liable for the same. Provisions such as these would go a long way in curbing menaces like lack of design uniformity or other issues like food and oil adulteration. Further to curb the menace of adulteration the Bill makes stringent provisions with express provisions for punishments in case of food and other adulteration. The Bill while structuring the consumer grievance panel makes for some changes in the territorial jurisdiction. The new territorial jurisdiction includes the place of business as well apart from the address of the consumer and the place where the event occurred. The monetary jurisdiction of the district forum and the state commission have been enhanced so as to be exercised in respect of defective goods or deficient services of value of upto Rs. 1 crore and Rs. 10 crores, respectively, from the existing limit of Rs 20 lakhs and Rs 1 crore respectively. Further both the district as well as the state commission have been

*“The monetary jurisdiction of the district forum and the state commission have been enhanced so as to be exercised in respect of defective goods or deficient services of value of upto Rs. 1 crore and Rs. 10 crores, respectively, from the existing limit of Rs 20 lakhs and Rs 1 crore respectively.”*

express rights of a consumer, and violation of any of these rights would trigger action if the consumer files a complaint. Four of these rights are important. These include (a) right to be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property (b) right to be informed of the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services, (c) right to be assured of access to a variety of goods or services at competitive prices (d) right to seek redressal against unfair or restrictive trade practices.

The Bill introduces a number of new provisions while strengthening some old penal provisions. For example, celebrities who are involved with misleading advertisements will be liable to pay penalties and damages. In the past two years a lot had been written on this aspect for example on the question of a certain Indian cricketer’s involvement with a builder group where a lot of people later lost their money. This new provision would seek to impose certain liabilities on celebrities so that they fulfil their due diligence while accepting any advertisement while keeping their commitment to the trust placed by the people of the country, on them as well. Further those who provide misleading services or products may be liable for a jail term of upto two years and a fine of 10 lakhs. This may be further extended to a term of 10 years with the fine being raised to 50 lakhs. The Bill also has

granted the powers to review their orders, a system that didn’t exist in the previous Act. In case, the issue being discussed has wider ramifications the state or the national commission make take the advice of independent experts from different fields.

For the first time this Bill introduces the concept of e-complaints. Aggrieved parties under the new Act will be able to file their complaints with the District and State authorities through online medium as well. This is a major step from the Act of 1986 which was becoming archaic in a new IT driven India. Also, the new Bill makes provisions to allow audio video participation of parties involved in the dispute. These steps would undoubtedly make the system faster and justice more efficient. The Bill also makes the orders of district, state and national commissions legally enforceable a decree from civil court. Failure to comply with the same would result in penal provisions.

The Bill also envisages setting up a National Consumer Protection Authority to promote, protect and enforce the right of consumers. It would also check unfair practises and work in tandem with other bodies and agencies to ensure that the rights of the consumers are protected. Once the Bill is passed into an Act it would indeed herald a new era in consumer rights protection in India.

*( Views expressed by the author are personal)*

after all. Having said all this, may the best person win!

Yours etc.,  
Michael N Syiem,  
Via email

**What are Elections for?**

Editor,  
Come February 27, the state of Meghalaya will go to the polls. Elections are the essence of democracy otherwise we would be living in a chaotic and primitive stage. This time many parties and new candidates are in the fray. They all have their manifestos, ostensibly to better our lives, but these are not implemented when they attain power. Looking back at the last five years, we are yet to see overall development of the state. The rural populace are the worst sufferers. There are no motorable roads, no proper sanitation, no primary healthcare centers and no proper schools buildings. This has resulted in a pathetic state of life for the villagers. Politicians and political parties make promises during elections, which pale into insignificance when

they are elected. The BJP have assured the electorate that there will be no ban on cow slaughter or caste or religions discrimination. There is too much infighting in the ruling dispensation to devote to governance. The only option left are the regional parties but will they ever deliver the goods? We are yet to see.

Therefore I beseech you to give a clarion call to the younger generation through your newspaper to come out in large numbers and to follow their conscience; not to vote for the candidate or any party which cannot fulfill the aspirations of the people. Elections are meant to bring governments that can in turn bring progress and prosperity of the people and not for the candidate or party.

Yours etc.,  
Michael N. Lyngдох  
Shillong-14

*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.*

"A broken heart is a very pleasant complaint for a man in London if he has a comfortable income."

--- George Bernard Shaw

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.190 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2018

### Need for independent investigation

ALTHOUGH the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has not covered itself with glory insofar as identifying the sources of terror in Jammu and Kashmir is concerned and has perhaps bungled by prescribing what a journalist should and should not be doing, it has in some instances been able to deliver quick results. In India we are crippled by the fact that we are unable to rely on any single investigative agency to remain absolutely objective and result-oriented in their task. The CBI is termed a 'caged parrot' which serves the interest of the ruling dispensation. This has robbed the agency of its reputation as a credible investigating body. The brief of the NIA is to investigate cases related to terror activities. In this context there is a clamour from different political parties in Meghalaya, particularly the National People's Party to set the ball rolling for a quick investigation by the NIA on the recent killing of MLA candidate from Williamnagar, Jonathone Sangma and two others on account of a powerful IED blast.

The NIA is expected to have the technical and scientific expertise to go into every case of terror killing and to enable the state to prevent such incidents from recurring. In Meghalaya, many ghastly crimes have been committed since the communal riots of 1979. Rape cases galore are lying unsolved and most cases fail because to hold up in a court of law because of shabby investigation which is torn to shreds by the defence lawyers. Jonathone Sangma's case and that of his two associates who died with him will remain one of those unsolved mysteries if it is handled by the state police. It is incumbent upon the central government to step in and commission the NIA to investigate the recent killing. The state police failed to act in a timely manner despite the literal writing on the wall with the picture of blood and bullets, warning Jonathone's supporters about the reprisals that would follow if they voted for him. This should inform us that the state police intelligence is in shambles. We cannot afford this slackness especially as another IED was found near the same place the following day. This intelligence failure has led to the loss of lives of many young policemen to militant bullets. Internal security in Meghalaya needs a serious makeover.

# On manifesto, religion, money and violence

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The stage is set, the die is rolled and the picture is clear. It is just a matter of days before 'election encounter' day and in time the dust and dirt concerning the squabbling for thrones that commenced a month ago will die down. Meghalaya is on the verge of witnessing its very own political 'game of thrones'. Every candidate and party in general have positioned themselves with plans and promises for the masses. Combinations and prospects of coalitions have already been arrived at tacitly. However, all of this might change drastically with the wide possibility of deceit and deception and political back-stabbing. The important point is this; in all of this gamesmanship, the masses are not in the picture. We are simply pawns being used by the political class and their cronies; all for their wellbeing. The masses are the means and not the end. In general, it has been that way in Meghalaya and by all current indications it will continue to be so in future. The election plans and manifestoes of the parties, the religion factor and so forth are all indications of that. The worst is yet to come! Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, every political party needs to reach out and market to the masses their objectives and action plans. Here, a manifesto becomes a critical document. It is a 'bible of promises' of a party. As such, a manifesto is a crucial document that has the power to convince voters to buy into those promises. However, these days a manifesto is as good as a piece of junk. As appealing as it might seem on viewing, all that enthusiasm dies a natural death with the passage of the first year of governance. Truth being, no one takes it seriously anymore. This is a crying shame! We have reduced a 'sacred political document' into a laughing farce. Concurrently and across political parties, their manifestoes do not carry much weight with the masses. In fact, they are more of a leisure reading. They bring more pessimism instead of optimism. They are being shrugged off as being unimportant and sometimes as being a joke. Thus, the age for

manifestoes is over. And calling it a 'vision document' again is being too ludicrous! What the voters need is an 'action plan'. The parties must stop preaching phrases such as 'we will create jobs' or 'we will improve education'. The argument must shift to 'how we will create jobs/improve education'. The presentation and the discussions must be on the executive aspects of the objective/promise. This will make the parties really put their heads together, as placing an 'action plan' is never an easy thing to do. All in all, this might just revive the interest of the voters as far as election-related documents are concerned.

Secondly, although it is unconstitutional to call any state a 'Christian state', but somehow here in Meghalaya we seem to take pride in it (for whatever reasons). Presently, this has backfired on us. Point being, unlike this time, religion/faith has never been an election issue in Meghalaya. Candidates and political parties never took positions in the name of religion. Now the chicken has come home to roost. The serious entry of the BJP into our state has set the cat amongst the pigeons. Only time will tell 'who' is the cat! In relation to this, I would like to draw attention to my article titled 'Beef tokenism' (ST April 24, 2015). There I made a veiled opinion on 'how the BJP will be using this very same "beef party" for entry into state politics'. The general feeling is that the non-tribal votes will all go to the BJP. On this backdrop, are the so called secular parties jittery? Are the masses scared? Looking at the discourse in the media (print/electronic) and the chatter on the streets, it does seem so. This has further led to the church into discreetly and openly 'shouting out' for secular forces. Mind you and at least in the context of Meghalaya, the word 'secular' is akin to anti-BJP. Clearly, there are better personal and quieter ways of intervening rather than 'shouting out,' and such ways are most effective! Be that as it may, religion/faith is a clear and present issue

in this election. That way, the only one and last non-election issue for ages has suddenly raised its ugly head. How the tables have turned!

Thirdly, money is always a factor in elections. This is an open secret. People will not say it out loud but they will do (give/take) money. Well, every now and then there is a report of election money being confiscated by the authorities but this is just the tip of the iceberg. The mountain heap of an iceberg is there quietly but openly present in the underbelly of the ocean. There are two aspects of the money-power play here. Firstly, it's the voter's level. These days candidates and parties are openly distributing money; both in cash and in kind. Sometimes it feels like an election is more about these petty gains alone; a blanket, a utensil, a television, furniture, notes of 500/1000/2000/3000 and so forth. What about the five years? Gradually it seems like it is skipping our thoughts and interpretation and sadly, no one seems to care much anymore. Is this the type of society we are going to build?

The winner in this situation is the candidate. This is because he/she knows that they basically have to feed the voters just once in five years; beyond that it is going to be a pretty cozy life. Secondly, it's the party's level. Although all parties involve themselves in money games; from the prospect of forming a government, I would like to focus more on the BJP. The truth is that the BJP is positioning itself to do a Manipur and Goa here in Meghalaya as well. In those other states, the BJP was not the single largest party post election; however, they did form and are still leading the coalition governments. So when the BJP national leaders said that 'if the BJP wins 12-15 seats they will form and lead the next government', take their word for it; we already have two examples.

Fourthly, as if money play was not bad enough, now we have excessive violence and intent to cause harm in elections. Brawls are common; there was a case of stabbing; deathly devices

being detected as well. Sadly, we are venturing into a situation so bad that there is murder in elections. I join voices with the many to express condolences to the family and near and dear ones of J.N. Sangma and his three aides. Our elections have never crossed such violent limits before and whoever is responsible for it must take a long and hard look at themselves and where they are leading our democratic process. Politics is about debate and dissent. It is about arguments. Battles are fought in the mind and in ideas. Encounters are done through a verbal duel of facts and wits. Clearly, we are losing all of that. Hence, if this cycle of violence continues then it will not be long before we reach the violent levels of Kerala, West Bengal etc. Do we want to be as such?

Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. However and even more scary is that 'lack of power reeks insanity'. It is this insanity that has led to the murder of this candidate. Very sad and disturbing! As such, if this insanity is not curtailed and mitigated our elections might have just seen a low dive into violent politics and this is just the beginning of the worse that is yet to come.

Lastly, there are many pretenders and contenders in this 'game of thrones'. All will be unfold as the game itself unfolds. Be that as it may, one thing is for sure; we can expect a lot of turmoil post election results. The Congress will not give up its bastion so easily and the BJP is now like a Chinese dragon spitting fire everywhere. The regional parties are also in the picture as a loose alliance. Overall, this might just be the most interesting election in recent times and who will come up on top is indeed anybody's guess. For all we know, the next five years will be lost in forming and toppling and reforming governments with the masses being mere insignificant spectators.

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

# Is Anybody Listening?

By Ananya S Guha

Politics is now only about electoral politics. After the voting is over and the results are out, no one bothers as to what is going to happen. No one sees change as something tangible that might happen, change for the better, change in livelihood, change in life style of the poor. No one pines for better health care or education. But who is this 'no one'? They are the upper middle classes who do not foresee any change, because their lifestyles continue, because their increments and dearness allowances come regularly. And, once in a while the pay revision! They celebrate India's victory in cricket, but murmur a few words when people are killed or when people die in floods or are hit by a cyclone.

Change never happens in India, because no one believes in it. Of course they can very well see the changes in their personal lives, for the better or the worse. Change is a mono construct in our lives, because we never believe that it can take place. What can take place are miracles. A beggar driving a Mercedes! If that happens that is not change, that is or will be a miracle. Like the government promising houses for the poor or insurance schemes, or pensions or free gas cylinders, or waiving farmers' loans, or providing free education for ALL, on the eve of elections in a particular state in North East India. Change is getting a political party out. Then,

However the saving grace in this year's budget has been the enhancement in allocation for education and health which are key issues for overall development.

Our politicians should not be content with vote banks only. The Indian electorate if dissatisfied, can change overnight. They don't like communal politics and divisiveness. The majority of them may be Hindus but they respect history and age old traditions. The poor are poor whether Hindus, Muslims or Dalits. Caste has come into the Indian polity in a sharp way to drive wedges, imbalance the society and create societal warring. The issue of the Dalits have led to uprising and created new political leaders who are vehemently against the right wing groups.

If housing has got mention in this year's budget it is good augury. But there must be careful planning, so that benefits accrue to all in every part of the country. True, things cannot be achieved overnight. For the time being we must be emphatic about removing poverty, achieving a level of living conditions with a planned methodology. Side by side education and health care must go on with sustainability. Smart cities can come later. We need to remove slums and hovels and have smart villages first.

Much has been discussed on demonetization and GST.

**The majority of them may be Hindus but they respect history and age old traditions. The poor are poor whether Hindus, Muslims or Dalits. Caste has come into the Indian polity in a sharp way to drive wedges, imbalance the society and create societal warring. The issue of the Dalits have led to uprising and created new political leaders who are vehemently against the right wing groups.**

development will spiral.

For three decades a lady fought for change in the Narmada Valley, is still fighting for it. The change she has brought about in the lives of the poor has gone unnoticed. Damn the dams they say. They are our wealth. But the wealth after constructing the dams, have not brought about any change. Have the lives of those living around the dams improved?

So change is nothing cataclysmic. If at all it happens in governmental policies, to create more positions, to smuggle in people through the back door. And of course there is lot of change in cash, exchange. The question is what are we heading for? Education is in the back seat, so is overall development. The claim that we are among the fastest growing economies sounds hollow when more than half the population cannot get full meals?

And then there are other developments such as child abuse and rape. Womanhood which is a part of ancient mythology in India is damned. Now we have the instance of baby Nirbhaya. Families after families have been traumatized by such bizarre happenings. We talk of education for the girl child. There are voices of protest, but they are muzzled by death threats and killings. Writers have even taken to the streets. So have teachers and the entire country after Junaid's killing.

While the benefits of the former are not clear, the latter seems to have fallen more on middle class entrepreneurs. Of course political capital is made out of it. That is the issue, the politics of everything from love to economics. Recently there was much ado about a film which turned out to be nothing- controversial, dishonourable or blasphemous. The point is that religion and 'culture' is inextricable from our present day scenario. And, the media always finds this a vantage point to trigger boisterous discussions. So what will be a non-event is converted into a national news, with threats and vandalism. The Karni Sena for example, if it is again and again a 'fringe' group, then why give it such importance, why are they invited to television studios for discussion? The media and politics have both an unholy and uneasy alliance. Subversion of this with a dispassionate media is needed. Will anybody listen? Added to this is the concoction of social media, imbued with threat calls and what are called hate mails.

It is the perversity of hate which is dominating the society today. Politicians viciously snipe at each other, love is a 'jihad', the Muslim invaders were rapists (like Tipu Sultan), what we have now is only entrapping the present with a vicious, ignoble and malevolent past. That is of course post tenth century onward!

### TO THE EDITOR

### Much ado about a badge!

Editor,  
Apropos the news report in your esteemed newspaper, (ST Feb 16, 2017) captioned 'HYC opposes students wearing badges to school,' there are some inferences that I would like to draw. The entire episode started when someone wanted to create mischief by trying to sensationalise (and I dare say, communalise) the school badge of BK Bajoria School, Shillong. This issue first originated on a Whatsapp group and from there spread like wildfire on all social media platforms. The actions of the culprits who started all this is highly condemnable mischief necessitates strong and timely action as it is aimed at creating communal disharmony. However, it is more disturbing to see certain pressure groups trying to make capital out of this matter and harping on an issue which has practically no sense whatsoever. Their claim is that the use of a religious icon hurts the sentiments of the non-Hindu community. Now, the school in question is a privately-run, non Christian school. What they choose to put on their badge is not illegal, as

long as it is within their reasonable legal rights as a private institution to do so. The icon of the Hindu Goddess of Learning on the badges in no way hurts the religious sentiments of any community. It is a symbolic celebration of knowledge and wisdom and must be taken to be the embodiment of the same. With all due respect, with as much fervour and seriousness that these pressure groups are pursuing this matter, why don't these individuals try to address the matter of the missionary schools all over Khasi-Jaintia Hills, which keep the symbol of the cross on their respective badges and uniforms? Doesn't that hurt the sentiments of non-Christians alike? Furthermore, why not ask the schools operated by the indigenous faiths to remove the symbol of the rooster from their badges and uniforms? That also is a right step in the direction of 360 degree secularism, is it not? Sadly, when it comes to handling the question of BK Bajoria School, certain pressure groups seem to be biased in their approach only towards a particular

religious group. I strongly believe that they should also be equally concerned about the use of religious iconography in all institutions of learning. To do otherwise would be utterly hypocritical and unfair. People should learn to study the legitimate causes and imminent effects of things properly before reacting abruptly.

In conclusion, I would request the management of BK Bajoria School to stick to their stance and if need be to take this matter to a court of law. Let the legal system be the correct interpreter of what secularism actually implies.

Yours etc.,  
Keith Nongsteng  
Via email

### Wanted transformational leaders!

Editor  
This letter is prompted by Jerome K Diengdoh's letter, 'Can't see why Paul can't win,' (ST Feb 16, 2018). Over the years we have seen Meghalaya state politics and its transformation. One such transformation is the

rise of 'transactional leadership'. These leaders works at the basic level of need satisfaction. They turn the entire state into a machine for their own benefit. Since the State will be going to the polls on Feb 27, to elect representatives to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly for a five year term, let us elect 'transformational leaders' not 'transactional leaders'. There is no dearth of young dynamic leaders who have shown exemplary attitude and administrative capability in their political careers. However, the biggest mistake that we as the electorate make while we elect our representatives is that we choose persons who do not engage by the basic rules of democracy and lack the skills of a politician. James Freeman Clarke said, "A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman of the next generation". So it is time indeed to ensure that transformation takes place now for the betterment of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah  
18-West Shillong  
Constituency  
Shillong -2

### India needs labour intensive growth engine!

Editor,  
This refers to the article on bank frauds titled, "Congress, BJP cannot pass on the buck to each other" by K. Raveendran (ST, Feb 19, 2018). Astronomical non-performing assets amounting to Rs. 2.86 lakh crore in 2016 - 17 to Nirav Modi's Rs. 11,400 crore PNB fraud are the signature that there is something wrong in our policy. It fails to prevent some market players or "gentlemen" from taking Panama or paradise or other unscrupulous shots with a cross bat to clear the ropes and send the ball totally out of the stadium! Moreover, it fails to run out batsmen who keep the fraud score-board moving by stealing singles in the form of NPAs. But it is not cricket!

While Rs. 500 crore was spent on just one single mega marriage in India during the period of demonetisation in November 2016; many non-creamy and honest people died after failing to get new

currency in exchange of their hard earned money during that time. Thus, the operation of demonetisation without having enough new currency to meet the demands, hit the poor the hardest as currency notes were their only means of livelihood. Demonetisation had demonstrated that our policy should be more sensitive to toiling masses.

Before taking any policy decision, we must remember that we have our very own 48.2 million children (the highest in the world) who have stunted growth as a result of malnutrition and hunger. We need to give more micro loans rather than macro credits to create income opportunities for as many employable people as possible. With the help of labour intensive technology, micro loans and land reforms, we can enhance the purchasing power of the masses and thus boost the market and generate employment and create a healthy cycle of inclusive growth.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

*“Contrary to what we learn from progressives in education and the media, the history of the Democratic Party well into the twentieth century is a virtually uninterrupted history of thievery, corruption, and bigotry.”*

--- Dinesh D'Souza

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.191 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2018

### International Mother Language Day

THERE are many important days in the annual calendar of the United Nations which are observed world-wide by its member countries. The UN urges states to observe these days as a reminder of their importance to our human and ecological existence. February 21 has been listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to be observed as International Mother Language Day for the past two decades. This year the theme is, "Towards Sustainable Futures through Multilingual Education." The UNESCO reiterates its commitment to linguistic diversity which in other words means a healthy respect for languages other than one's own. Learning as many languages as is possible helps in better and more effective communication. This observance needs to be taken seriously especially by a country like India with its myriad language groups. In the North Eastern part of India alone there are over 238 languages and each of these is important for those who communicate through it. Hence they cannot be reduced to the status of dialects. They are as important as the major languages and they ought to be offered as subjects that students can opt to take up.

We must have noticed how people's eyes immediately light up when we communicate in their language and how easily they resonate with what we say, than when they have to listen to a translation of our speeches. This heart connection is important especially for peace workers and teachers. It is a pity that in India too much importance has been given to English as a language of communication. English has now embedded itself even within families, so much so that parents and their children now communicate in English and thereby are no longer fluent in their mother languages. Many of the tribal languages of the North East are quickly becoming extinct because they have too few users and linguists to promote them. Some years ago the UNESCO has listed Khasi as an endangered language and this is not surprising.

Considering that English is the language in which most tribes have to write their important examinations in, parents insist that they excel in it. In the bargain the mother language is pushed to a secondary position. It is time now for educational institutions to promote the mother languages and to list as many languages as possible in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution so that they are given the pride of place they deserve.

### LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

### Another step forward

Almost the last of the off shoots of the 1962 Indo-China war is at last going to be removed shortly following an agreement between the two countries favouring re opening of their Consulates in Shanghai and Bombay. This is indirect outcome of the

fairly successful eight round of talks between the officials of both countries. Agreeing to raise the exchanges to a political level following these talks, there is the reported effort to ease the tension along the border.

### TO THE EDITOR

### Will the CEO Meghalaya please reply?

Editor,

The CEO Meghalaya had organized a demonstration for various applications (Apps) such as Suvridha, Samadhan, etc. with regards to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly election 2018, few days before the filing of nominations. However, as per the Suvridha website it appears that the Congress Candidate of 16 East Shillong has not taken any approval for holding Public Meetings in the Constituency whereas approvals for other parties are reflected in the application for public meetings. On contacting the Returning Officer for clarification he had cited the

following reasons: (a) that the Congress candidate had taken approval prior to filing of nomination which was done online (b) that the Suvridha application is outdated and needs to be upgraded. This is strange as the App was launched recently and demonstration was given few days before nomination. From the statements of the Returning Officer (Mr. Kharmalki i/c 16-East Shillong) which is that approval was taken before filing of nomination, this begs the questions as to how approval is granted even before finalizing of candidature? This means that if 5 candidates are aspiring for a party ticket from 16-East Shillong all of them can seek approval and be granted permission for holding public meetings! Imagine what a mess this

would cause to the portal. Secondly, he says the Congress candidate had applied online. If this was done online the information would be in the database and the approvals for the Congress party's public meetings will surely reflect in the Suvridha application. Thirdly, he says "the application has errors." If this is true how is it possible to pass entry for the other two candidates of the constituency but not for the Congress candidate? This sounds like a very strange and selectively working software, showing that there is major failure in implementing the online applications and a waste of public money. Continued efforts to contact the Returning Officer by telephone were met with no response after

the complaint was lodged with them. This prompts us to question the sincerity of the Election Commission with regards to the Model Code of Conduct. The concerned public demands immediate clarification from the Election Commission as to why the permission of the Congress Party from 16 - East Shillong for holding public meetings did not appear in the Suvridha App which we consider a serious dereliction of duty and breach of public trust. If the Election Commission cannot handle this App then how can we expect the Commission to protect the VVpat without glitches? We demand a clear and immediate explanation from the Election Commission with regards to this case. Yours etc.,

R Sawian,  
Via email

### A despicable act!

Editor,

The brutal and horrific killing of the NCP candidate late Jonathone N Sangma and members of his entourage is highly condemnable in a society which we all believe has peace and sanity. Unfortunately those behind the murder and the ones who perpetrated the act are insane and deserve no mercy. Political election in this state has suddenly changed all of a sudden with the entry of militancy backed-political nexus be it in the Khasi Hills or Garo Hills. Merely asking for a CBI probe is a political ploy.

Instead the NIA should step in and go to the root of the entire episode. The question is, does no political party have the courage to call a spade a spade and tackle this unholy nexus or are they just showing knee-jerk reaction to this unfortunate incident which snuffed out the innocent lives of good people?

Yours etc...

Dominic S. Wankhar  
Via email

### Will the Congress stop BJP-bashing?

Editor,

Not a day passes without the Congress finding fault with the BJP.

## When will the sun shine in WKH?

By Gervasius Nongkseh

The election temperature is at its highest peak. Agenda have been outlined, manifestos have been released and the momentum is built. Mud-throwing is a common phenomena and promises galore have been made. Gifts of cash and kind have been secretly distributed to lure voters. How we wish that it continues throughout the five years. Endless rallies, public meetings have been organised, sometimes causing public inconvenience. Door to door campaigns by candidates sometimes even disrupt family time. Party workers are spending sleepless nights to capture the last soul. While anti-incumbency might affect the ruling party, others suffer from anti-minority wave. This election seems to be the acme of all in recent times. Surreptitiously!

Listening to different candidates across the state at times we tend to imagine that a saviour has at last arrived. Though the same list of the last election is being used to read the promises such as development in roads, health care, electricity, water supply, education, farmers' welfare etc., but at least it is delivered in a new logic. All these are ideal development projects for constituencies especially in West Khasi Hills.

But will the sun shine in our state? Will the sun shine especially in West Khasi Hills? We learn from history that political promises have always remained empty promises. There is only smoke without fire. As February 27 draws near digression and deflection from important issues once again overpowers the scene. How it will turn up till the date will be known only on the March 3rd.

All the rhetoric will happen in a democracy. But the reason is loud and clear that all candidates want to draw our vision away from our goals. The concern is that in all the chaos and pandemonium the aam admi is taken for a ride. Often times the hoi polloi are blinded by promises and numbers. This is a wake-up call to all not to lose sight of the real issue, that is, development. Just as we know the importance of voting, equally important it is to know whom to vote for and who can deliver.

As voters from West Khasi Hills, this most god-forsaken area, we fear that another five years might just be wasted away in ineffective sameness. Besides many others, one of the most important issues mentioned by all the candidates in WKH is road connectivity. This is very important and integral to our lives. But strange enough none mentioned about repairing the existing roads. It saddens me to see the pathetic conditions of the roads. Some strategically important roads need mention here: (i) the

Nongstoin-Maweit road, (ii) the Nongstoin- Kynroh road. These dilapidated roads are equal to buffaloes' path-ways in the deep forests. One party has ruled Nongstoin for more than four decades and the other for one term and yet just to repair these roads is not a priority. How can we believe in more road connectivity when even the existing ones are in pathetic condition? Why is this promise now when for all these years you just sit with fingers crossed?

The Nongstoin-Maweit road is at its worst. It's a road one fears to tread on. If you don't believe go and have a personal recce of the road from Nongstoin to Maweit. I challenge you that you will come back with a curse on your lips if you still have the strength to do that at all. Sick people have died on the way, pregnant women have suffered immeasurably. The dichotomy is that thousands of coal-laden trucks everyday ply on that road. This is a clear day light robbing and systematic looting of our resources without ploughing back anything in return. And now just before elections, the candidates play the development card. Why couldn't they repair these roads first even before uttering a word? After all actions speak louder than words!

In 2016 the KHADC had showed some concern by giving an NOC to the Nongstoin - Domiasiat and Mawthabab-Ranikor roads but this project was aborted due to the noises made by anti-development groups. After that the KHADC allocated Rs 20 crores for the repairing of the roads but we have not seen the light of day. As of now it appears that WKH has reached a point of no return with regard to future development of any sort.

If we don't shed tears this time we will never do it. Enough is enough. We are tired of this same drama. The appeal to all voters is to use their power judiciously this time lest they will have to shed crocodile tears for another five years. This time they can use more of their reason than emotions. Small petty gifts should not blind us. After voting too we should not forget to follow up with our respective MLAs and the Government.

However, among these dark clouds see some light as we are a democracy and the power rests on people. History has proven that the voters cannot be taken for granted for too long. Therefore we cannot blame our politicians completely for the ineffectiveness. The ultimate blame lies with us the people. If we elect leaders who cannot deliver we cannot expect change. We are the change we want to see. This time let us prove that we cannot be taken for granted. We have the power to write a new chapter and create history. How we wish that the sun should shine soon!

## Inequality-multifaceted evils

By Sonie Kharduit

"INEQUALITY" is a very simple term which we tend to relate with economic disparity. I must emphatically say that its horizon is much wider than what we can imagine. Beyond economic aspects, it also casts shadows over various dimensions, from political to socio-religious aspects and the price of this malevolent trophy of inequality is bestowed unconditionally on women folk. They are the ones who bear the worst form of human abuse from the womb to the grave.

Gender inequality is the mother of all inequalities which prevents our country from realizing its full growth potential. In the word of our first woman PM, Indira Gandhi, "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist." This indeed justifies the uneven progress of India, when half of our population remains outside the path of development. In fact this problem is universal. Its presence can be felt in multiple forms across the globe. The recent report released by NITI Aayog, indicates the declining trend of sex ratio at birth (SRB), affecting 17 out of 21 large states in our country. This is happening despite several empowerment measures being implemented and is therefore a cause of great worry. Views from multiple agents point towards the poor implementation of the Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994. But it is also a fact that the gender problems in our country are outcomes of a plethora of historical injustice and discrimination, and the crime of such magnitude cannot be expected to be solved by a single Act on paper.

**Women's status- Past to present**

A conscientious soul with the courage to accept the ugly truth will undoubtedly conclude that the status of women has not changed to the desired levels. And this fact is no different whether we are born in a patrilineal or matrilineal society, as long as male chauvinism prevails. Though a very short phase was visible where our women were more or less equal in status with men during the early Vedic era (1600-1000BC), an egalitarian set up took its shape when women had equal political power and could actively participate in governance and decision making through Sabha and Samitis. But with the entry of later Vedic phase, the Sabha and Samiti disintegrated and the subsequent emergence of the kingdom system (Mahajanapadas), became the sole figure of decision making. The entry of religion via the ugly Varna system based on caste is a dramatic shift from the class division practiced earlier, further

ruined the status of women and since then they are at the receiving end of human injustice.

Deciphering the current status of women, the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) released by World Economic forum (WEF) can provide us a clear insight to determine how much progress has been made in this regard, and the recent ranking is not encouraging at all (108th out of 144 countries). The four parameters under GGI namely, health and survival, educational attainment, economic opportunity and political empowerment, enables us to measure the progress as well as the weaknesses, giving scope

*“Views from multiple agents point towards the poor implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994.”*

for improvements in our future policy making.

Coming back to each parameter, starting with health and survival, without going into the data one can always say women's reproductive health is still poor if not worsened. Progress in Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) is visible but the pace of improvement has not kept abreast with the required speed. Anaemic related deaths, delivery related death, pre-natal and post-natal complications, adolescent health care etc are all the same challenges prevalent in the 1950s, in which even after the post LPG (liberalization, Privatisation and Globalisation) tools and technologies couldn't eliminate. Although with the launch of NRHM and NURM (Rebranded as National Health Mission), a moral victory could be claimed with the increasing number of institutional deliveries, thereby preventing innumerable preventable deaths and the exemplary efforts of ANM and ASHAs in this regards is laudable.

To conclude one can say that women pay a heavy price for the hazards of health injustice. Its starts from birth and goes on to childhood, adulthood and womanhood because they are the ones who endure the biological responsibility of conceiving a baby, giving birth and finally the role of raising them. The male counterparts are relieve from the first-two roles but they hesitate to play the third role.

Educational attainment is no different for women, the literacy level of girls stands below boys

consistently (girls -65%; boys-82%). Girl's education is always considered a bad investment, the absurd social and cultural dogma places them at a disadvantage. Gandhi's precept that a woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity is not accepted in letter and spirit in Indian society till date. Over all educational upliftment of girls cannot be judged based upon some bang-up results in certain entrance exams, board exams, SSC or UPSC, they constitute only a minute drop in the oceans of women's distress. Low education attainment finally takes shape in their low labour force partition rate, drubbing

their struggle for a dignified life.

The abject performance in the above two parameters proves detrimental for the economic opportunity of women. Female Labour force participation rate (FLFP) as released by International Labour Organisation (ILO) India's stands poorly at 121 out of 131, the worst indicator in South east Asia (except Pakistan). FLFP rate for India was 27% against China 63.9%, 56.3% in US, 79.9% in Nepal, 57.4% in Bangladesh etc. Hence we are not in a comfortable position at all. On one hand we are being recognised as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, whereas half of our population remains invisibles in the development process. The gender pay disparity, workplace harassment, safety concerns and household responsibility which particularly Indian women take by default, further weaken India's FLFP.

The moribund Women's Reservation Bill speaks of the state of Political empowerment commitments for women in India. The global average for women in parliament stands at 22.4%, India fares worst at mere 12%. The non passage of the Women's Reservation Bill gives a clear signal of the dominance of male chauvinism. Recently a progressive step taken by Nagaland government to give political space in urban local bodies for women faced a huge protest forcing the government to abandon the whole process. Such protests typify the degree of intolerance by the male to see themselves on equal footing with women.

**Women's status in matrilineal society**

In my limited wisdom I see no difference in terms of struggle and subjugation of our women even in our matrilineal society. The alpha male ego still rules the decision making process and man will always be considered as the head of the family. The lineage we carry from mother's side is the only hallmark of being called a matrilineal society. Besides this our women shares the same fate as other women in this country. In fact the culture which we follow breeds further injustice, like the default inheritance of all family assets on the youngest daughter is incomprehensible nor does it justify this practice. Sometimes the most responsible person who has devoted his/her life for the family by virtue of being the eldest are ejected and made outcasts by the youngest daughter (Khun khatduh). Ironically even our Dorbar doesn't allow women participation which eventually means no scope for grassroots political empowerments. We are no different from the Nagas, bringing customary rights to justify and safeguard the male selfish interest.

**Women empowerment for injustice and inequality**

W o m e n ' s empowerment is the loudest statement we hear nowadays, but unfortunately it the least understood statement. In the words of Brigham young, "You educate a man, you educate only a man. You educate a woman, you educated a generation," needs to be realized in letter and spirit, because an empowered women is the seed of all other empowerment. Central government initiatives of issuing welfare schemes in the name of a woman are the sign of acceptance of this fact and a step in the right direction too.

Stereotyping women's capability is the worst form of violence we are committing towards our mothers and sisters, subjugating their rights and defeating the idea of a just and egalitarian society. The noble ideal of achieving an inclusive growth will remain a distant dream if we fail to acknowledge the importance of women's empowerment in national development. Hilary Clinton put forward a very strong statement in this regard by saying that Human Rights are Women's Rights and Women's Rights are Human Rights once and for all, suggesting that women's empowerment can be the remedy for the multiple problems arising from inequality.

In fact, the more the Congress lambasts the BJP the more popular the BJP becomes. If the Congress stops talking about BJP, the Party will fade from public memory. It is better for the Congress to have a good sleep rather than have sleepless nights by engaging the BJP. The Congress should keep its house in order so that it may bounce back to power in 2019 Lok Sabha general elections. Also the Congress ought to remember that BJP is not a force to be reckoned with in Meghalaya for the time being. It is yet to reach that stage when it will be suitably reckoned with because at present even in the present general elections it is not faring well. With much luck it may not even get five seats. So why worry about it? It will take another ten to twenty years for the saffron party to

firmly get a foothold in Meghalaya.

It must be remembered that it took nearly 30 years for the Congress to establish its supremacy in Meghalaya because the indigenous people of Meghalaya considered the Party as an outsiders' party or a non-tribal party in the same way that the BJP is also branded by the Congress and many others as a non-secular, anti minority, anti- Christian party and so on. So, leave BJP alone, let it take care itself. So also for the BJP, let Congress alone, let it take itself. I appeal to both the BJP and Congress, please stop this mud- slinging and trading of charges and thereby spreading divisiveness among the people here.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marweñ,  
Shillong-2.

*"A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul."*

--- George Bernard Shaw

**The Shillong Times**

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**Bihar backslides**

NITISH Kumar during his first two terms as Chief Minister of Bihar did very well in promoting school education. The projects of providing cycles to girls and improving mid-day meals proved very effective. Enrolment of girls went up. But dropout rates in higher secondary levels in the current tenure of Nitish Kumar remain high. Only 42% of class 1 students complete their secondary education. The gross enrolment ratio is 13% as against the all India target of 30% by 2020. Outlay on education in Bihar has also diminished. Cheating in classes 10-12 has escalated. At a Vaishali school, there are reports that even guardians helped in such cheating. The state holds students responsible. They have been prevented from wearing shoes and socks where they can hide their notes. Examination centres are also meant to be equipped with CCTV cameras. It shows the slide back under Nitish Kumar's present government. The Bihar government seems to treat all students as cheaters. It is like imposing prohibition to fight alcoholism in the state. Even moderate drinkers are penalised.

Nitish Kumar's governance was previously praised for welfare programmes and pushing up school enrolment but the present term of his chief ministership seems to lack the human touch. It puts the emphasis on punitive measures. It is a sad reflection on the political acumen of Nitish Kumar who was considered one of the best Chief Ministers in India. Diktats about not wearing shoes at examinations seem to be on the same lands as creating a caste hierarchy.

**LOOKING BACK**

May 15, 1989

**Jakhar under clouds**

Mr Balram Jakhar, the Lok Sabha Speaker is currently under heavy clouds with his alleged involvement as head of the Bharat Krishak Samaj in the import of 56 fodder making machines without payment of customs duty. What is graceful on his part in this apparently murky affair is that he called all Opposition leaders and others interested to his chamber, gave all relevant details of the case in question and himself proposed an Inquiry by government into the allegations. Meanwhile he also confessed that he had recommended customs duty exemption for the import of the fodder-making machines without being aware if there was anything irregular in

that. What is more, the Speaker offered on his own to suspend relevant rules of Lok Sabha to allow an immediate discussion on the matter if the members were not satisfied by his replies, and were insistent on debating the matter in the House. He offered further that members could then bring forward a motion for his removal from the office of the Speaker. Irrespective of the findings of the Inquiry to be constituted, Mr Jakhar's initiative in the matter can be said to have been highly dignified, befitting the high office he has held so long with such distinction.

**A bloodied election this one!**

By Patricia Mukhim

In the frenetic pace at which things are moving in this poll-bound state it is possible that Jonathone Sangma's death and the reasons leading to it will soon cease to become news. After all, this is the normal course of things in Meghalaya. The state's conviction rate on crimes is so abysmally low that it's a blur on the image of the State Police. Politically sensitive case right from 1979 onward have been buried in case files that are now eaten with white ants. In 2014 alone, 3679 cases of crimes were registered under the IPC of which 1944 were charge-sheeted. Only in 197 cases were the accused convicted. This brings the conviction rate to just 5 % a little better than Manipur where the conviction rate has always hovered at 4%. At that time IGP Law and Order GHP Raju had said that once the case is charge-sheeted it is beyond the purview of the police and is decided by the trial court. The moot point is how rock solid and fool-proof are those charge sheets which are based on police investigations! And I daresay shoddy investigation will not stand scrutiny in a court of law. The general excuse for shoddy investigation is that Police does not as yet have a separate investigation wing.

I don't want to pick bones with those who believe that death is destined. Personally, I believe Jonathone Sangma's death was preventable if the police had established area domination over pockets of East Garo Hills which are known hubs of the GNLA. But they failed to do so. In fact after GHP Raju and Rajiv Mehta, I wonder which other officers really have a grip on the GNLA's modus operandi. And I am not undermining the work put in by other officers posted to East Garo Hills. I am also conscious of the fact that many foot soldiers have lost their lives at the hands of these unscrupulous mercenaries - which is what the GNLA and its ilk are today. What surprised me was the time it took for the police force to reach the scene of the blast at Sawilgre under

Samanda Block. Now the Deputy Commissioner, East Garo Hills says that Jonathone was warned not to travel to Sawilgre and to restrict his election meetings only to Denamgre. Now which candidate will not want to reach out to the last voter if he/she wants to win the election? Besides, the villagers of Sawilgre had allegedly invited Jonathone there. But whether they were asked to do so under intimidation from the GNLA to lure the NCP candidate so that he becomes easy prey is what needs to be established because not one of them appeared at the meeting place. And planting IEDs is a meticulously planned ambush.

It is the brief of the state administration to ensure safety to every candidate so they can visit whatever part of the constituency they need to. If State Police cannot ensure area domination because of the lack of adequate security personnel and other wherewithal, they should have informed the Chief Electoral Officer who should in turn write to the Union Home Ministry explaining the situation as it is. What has happened in this case is a reluctance to share intelligence with the Union Home Ministry about the ground situation in Garo Hills because that would undo the repeated claims made by Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma that Meghalaya is safe and secure and his Government had ushered in this climate of security. Well, East and South Garo Hills are not as secure as Dr Sangma would have us believe. If there were security concerns, which evidently there were, since the DC East Garo Hills cautioned Jonathone not to visit certain areas of his constituency then why were these not brought to the fore? Who should be blamed for the death of Jonathone N Sangma? Or will his death be another closed case in the police files?

In the 2013 general elections, Jonathone Sangma was threatened by

the GNLA. They put up the same kind of posters that warned people who voted for him with fatal consequences. Jonathone filed an FIR with the Williamnagar Police. The Police apparently investigated the matter and the case is now in the lower court. For a while this case was used as a political tool by certain politicians against their rivals who threatened the stability of the government. When it was necessary to get compliance from the person the case would resurface and make news and then it would recede from public memory. You begin to wonder why the prosecution in this case is so weak why should the case drag on? Jonathone himself expressed concern that this case might not reach anywhere because it was politically sensitive. Perhaps the case would have taken a different turn if it reached the High Court. We would have known by now why the GNLA threatened people not to vote for Jonathone. If so, which candidate did they want to prop up under Williamnagar and why? Did the GNLA ask Jonathone to lay off and allow them a free rein if he is elected? Did Jonathone refuse to tow the line since 2013, hence the intimidation?

Several questions remain unanswered and the DGP has expressed his concern at the fact that two surrendered GNLA cadres who once held high profile posts in the organisation were with Jonathone Sangma. This actually made him more vulnerable. Did he think they would provide him fire power? Did he want to be one up on the GNLA since he would find out their modus operandi from the surrendered militants? Above all, whose purpose would the death of Jonathone Sangma serve? The GNLA? Or the rival candidates? All these doubts need to be cleared hence no less than the National Investigation Agency (NIA) which has specialised competence in dealing with crimes of terror should be brought in and allowed to do their job within a specified time line.

The people of Meghalaya should stand united now and say "No to Terror." We did not elect representatives to play footsie with terrorists and mercenaries and to use them during election time.

The people of Garo Hills have lost many young souls to terrorist bullets. How can we forget the brutal killing of Josbina Sangma right in front of her husband and children in June 2014? She was shot on the head at point blank range. But we seem to have forgotten this crime and others like it and slipped into our comfort zones. The tendency is to shut our eyes to the terror instead of confronting it. And many would also shut out their consciences by saying, "Let us pray for peace." I wish to remind good "Christians" that God helps those who help themselves and we cannot collude with evil and expect God to solve the earthly mess we create. And remaining silent in the face of terror is equivalent to collusion with the terrorists!

In 2000-2002 when RG Lyngdoh as Home Minister decided to take on the militants with full force he was literally told not to venture into Garo Hills by a senior politician. Hence while the HNLC was brought down in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, militancy in Garo Hills was allowed to thrive. Perhaps it was a case of political competition. And look where it has landed the state today.

One thing is very clear about militancy/insurgency. It cannot survive without political patronage. So who is providing the GNLA that patronage today? We cannot blame the villagers who are forced to allow militants to stay in their homes and to provide food for them. They are virtually held hostage. We should call the bluff and point our fingers where they should be pointed. Enough of mercenaries running our lives!

**Modi's balancing act between globalization and protectionism Approach should give 'make in India' a new lease of life**

By Subrata Majumder

Controversy roared when Prime Minister Narendra Modi sneered at protectionism and sided with Chinese President Xi Jinping to advocate globalization in Davos. Nevertheless, China too towed protectionism in the early stage of development. Its strategy helped to push the country as the global hub for manufacturing behind the wall of protectionism and swamped the world with cheap goods. In contrast, Indian protectionism languished and manufacturing, despite giving protection to the domestic economy, accounts for merely 18 percent of GDP in India as against 40 per cent in China.

Fundamentally, Chinese and Indian protectionism differ widely. Even though the aim of protectionism was common, that is, fostering the domestic industry behind the wall of high tariff, non-tariff barriers and hidden subsidies, Chinese protectionism was aimed at making the nation a global hub for manufacturing while India's protectionism was to make the nation self-sufficient in manufacturing. Chinese protectionism was to build up the industry with high scale of economic operation to produce cheap goods and make a foray into the global export market. Indian protectionism was to build up an industrial society with the focus on employment generation and industrial sovereignty.

Why has Chinese protectionism succeeded in establishing the nation as a global leader for manufacturing while India is languishing? Only a few big domestic houses are playing the lead role in manufacturing in India, while reaping the benefits of protectionism. Faulty policy and politics embedded reforms led the country to lose the global footprint in manufacturing. Unlike China, India lost the benefit of scale of operation, because of its excessive focus on small scale industries, whose main objective was employment generation and not manufacturing to prop up competitive industrial growth. Despite the country undergoing three decades of reforms, politics continues to be the rule of the day. Whenever politics dominates, reforms backtrack.

Protectionism has emerged as an important tool for the politician to have an edge in politics. Any reform, which is distant from short term gain, accords the opposition an important political tool to dismiss the gain. Prime Minister Narendra Modi committed 100 million jobs as an outcome of Make in India initiative. But, employment generation remains a far cry with the Make in India losing steam during the three years of Modi regime. Sensing the impact of dismal situation, policy makers reverted to protectionist measures to pacify job seekers.

Evidently, the first attempt of protectionist policy was witnessed when India went back to the import substitution programme. The government relaunched the import substitution programme to inject a new lease of life in the Make in India initiative. In 2016, the Ministry of Urban Development made it mandatory to procure railway equipment for metro projects from domestic sources. According to the policy, a minimum of 75 percent of metro coaches and critical signaling equipment are to be procured from domestic sources by the Central and State level metro project authorities.

The second tranche of import restriction was made when in December last import duties were raised on various electronic items, including mobile phones, microwave ovens, cameras and others. The move was viewed as a step to bolster

employment through incentivizing domestic industries. It did not end here. The move was further accelerated by imposing high tariff barriers on auto components, CKD and CBU motor vehicles, bus and truck tyre and perfumes and toiletries in the budget for 2018-19. These hikes in custom duties were mainly to protect the domestic industries.

To this end, eyebrows are raised on Modi's advocacy for globalization. NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar said in a recent Budget discussion that he "hoped" that the high tariffs in the budget were temporary phenomena". They further asked whether protectionism can give a fresh lease of life to Make in India, which is tottering. The main objective of Make in India was to make India the global hub for manufacturing.

Given the current trend of world manufacturing, where global value chain of manufacturing (GVC) plays crucial role, can protectionism provide a viable platform for GVC? The important benefit of GVC is the low cost of production at the transnational level. GVC does not attract foreign investment only, but also entices cheap imports from the low cost viable nations. Hence, protectionism will act as barrier to GVC's role in Make in India programme.

Labour intensive industries in developing countries have worked well in the GVC manufacturing network. Automobile, electronics and digitization are the heydays for world manufacturing. India is required to fit into this GVC network for the success of Make in India.

So far, India has trailed behind in this race. Lack of adequate skilled labour, lackluster export infrastructure, limitation of scale and difficulty in accessing cheap credit restricted India's scope to be a partner of GVC network. These economic ills shadowed India's potential as manufacturing-exporter, an essential part of GVC. Success of GVC manufacturing network depends on how the component makers, dubbed "Supporting Industries", function efficiently to upgrade the technology at a reduced cost and provide benefits to the assemblers.

Opportunities rose with the rise in wages in China, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia- the main partners for GVC in East Asia and ASEAN. India pitches as a low wage country. But only the cheap wages are not enough. Technology upgradation, skilled manpower and better export infrastructure are also essential for India to become potential partner party to GVC manufacturing network. Even though India underwent transformational changes from traditional industries to modern industries, such as automobile and electronic industries, the upgradation is required to make the country potent to GVC network for manufacturing, like Vietnam and other South East Asian countries.

Interestingly, China too is attuned to protectionism. Even after the rollback of several protectionism measures, China continues to be in the long band of trade restrictions. For example, the average MFN applied rate of duties on modern manufacturing merchandises is higher than India. In 2015, the average MFN applied rate of duties on electrical items were 8.9 percent in China, compared to 7.3 percent in India; on non-electrical items were 8.2 percent in China compared to 7.1 percent in India and on other machinery were 12.1 percent compared to 8.8 percent (according to a survey by Assocham).

Therefore, India should have an outward looking approach for industrial growth, while polarizing on protectionism. (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

**CEO'S Response!**

Editor, Apropos the letter to the editor, "Will the CEO Meghalaya please reply?" (ST Feb 22, 2018), it is apparent that as per the report of the Returning Officer, 16-East Shillong (ST) Assembly Constituency pertaining to the question of applying for permission prior to filing of nomination, consequent with the date of announcement of elections, the Model Code of Conduct had immediately come into force. Hence, all "intending" candidates wishing to hold public meetings were at liberty to apply for permission on Suvidha platform. In this instant case, the date and time of applying for permissions by the Indian National Congress Candidate of 16-East Shillong was undertaken on 24th January, 2018 for which orders were passed accordingly.

On the allegations made that the applications uploaded online by the Indian National Congress Candidate of 16-East Shillong, not allegedly appearing on the database, it is highlighted that all permissions once uploaded are on Public domain, hence

the above permissions as well as other permissions issued can be conveniently viewed by the Public on the website of ceomeghalaya.nic.in, under Suvidha category and hyperlinked to "Viewed Booked Status".

The complainant is therefore advised to browse the necessary link and take necessary steps to view the permissions which are duly uploaded. Once clicked, the permissions will be clearly visible and discerned by one and all, without any prejudice to any quarter.

Yours etc.,  
Chief Electoral Officer,  
Meghalaya

**Unethical advertisement!**

Editor, The BJP advertisement recently reeks of communalism. The advertisement specifically states that Mr PC Alexander, a Christians IAS officer was nominated to the post of the President of India by the BJP government under Atal Behari Vajpayee. Similarly, Prof GG Swell, a Khasi Christian, was proposed as the Vice-Presidential

Candidate by the BJP. It further mentions that the above were REJECTED by the Congress under Sonia Gandhi for their Christian and tribal identity.

An advertisement guru confirms that one of the basic tenets of advertising is to promote oneself or one's product or brand and not to malign another, even if that person or organisation happens to be a rival. The BJP has disregarded this cardinal rule. Hence that advertisement is unethical. Secondly, the advertisement is blatantly communal. One may question the BJP whether Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Speaker of Lok Sabha, etc nominated because of their religious, regional, tribal, caste, linguistic identity? To set the record straight the BJP nominated PC Alexander, a Christian and Prof. GG Swell, a Khasi Christian to the above posts because it was sure that the above two would not win the election. If the Party is eager to see a Christian/tribal occupying the two highest posts in the country why does it not nominate one today when the party is in power?

Yours etc.,  
Albert Thyrsiang,  
Viamail

**Administrative failure killed Jonathone!**

Editor, The brutal murder of Williamnagar NCP candidate Jonathone Sangma has sent shock waves across the State and in Williamnagar in particular. In any village of Williamnagar an eerie silence prevails. Cutting across party lines everyone has condemned the unholy, barbaric act. With heavy hearts all took part in the peace march, candle light service and funeral of Jonathone Sangma. The election mood has died down. To rub salt to the wounds, the District Administration, Williamnagar in a press release has blamed Jonathone Sangma of being reckless by venturing to Sawilgre when he only permitted to go up to Dinamonggre village. This is an attempt to pass the buck to others but for their own failure.

Dinamonggre and Sawilgre (where the crime happened) are adjacent to each other and the vulnerability level is the

same. So is Dinamonggre village not vulnerable area? Is the Administration saying that Jonathone Sangma would not have been killed if he travelled up to Dinamonggre village only? How were they so sure that Jonathone Sangma would have survived if Sawilgre was on their list? Are they saying that up to Dinamonggre there was adequate security and it was safe for him to travel? This clearly indicates that the District Administration is not only insensitive but has also not done it's security drill satisfactorily for the Assembly Election, 2018. This is a case of complete Administrative failure!

In 2013, Jonathone Sangma received a similar threat and even filed an FIR for that. This should have already sensitized the Administration to be extra-cautious on Sangma's security, particularly for this election. This time too he was threatened not to contest elections vide a poster, for which a police complaint was lodged but the Administration took it lightly and this has resulted in the gruesome murder of an innocent person.

This may be unpleasant to the Administration but the

public demands to know the following. (1) Why were only 2 security personnel provided to Jonathone Sangma despite maximum threat to his life? (2) Why did the Administration not take his complaint seriously? (3) What security measures and actions were taken following the complaint of a life threat? (4) Should the police not act on an FIR filed? (5) Were they waiting to act only after the person dies? (6) Is Jonathone's life not as precious as that of other candidates? (7) Where are all the security personnel that they are not deployed at vulnerable areas across the Singsang river?

It is very unfortunate that the Administration is not only trying to hide its failures but that it is also trying to blame Jonathone Sangma who is already dead and gone due to their all-round failure.

Yours etc.,  
Dogrik Marak,  
Via email

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.

“Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.”

--- John F. Kennedy

## The Shillong Times

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### Pre-poll Nagaland

NAGALAND goes to the poll on February 27. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has addressed some of the ticklish problems involved. The NSCN (IM) had been asserting that the elections could not be held until its dialogue with the Centre had been wrapped up. The PM assured the outfit that the Naga political issue would be resolved in the next few months keeping in mind the dignity of the Nagas. In August 2015, the Centre had announced that a framework agreement with the NSCN (IM) had been reached. A cease fire had been declared in 1997. The government is also in talks with other Naga political groups. The NSCN (K) which operates from the Myanmar border had not yet participated in the negotiations. Modi said that the resolution of the issue would strengthen the country. Together the Centre and the Nagaland government could then dedicate themselves to the development of the country.

Modi also concentrated on corruption, stressing the efforts of his government to eradicate loopholes and leakages. He said his vision for Nagaland was based on “Transformation by Transportation” which meant development of roads, rail and air connectivity as well as electricity access. He also addressed issues raised by the Eastern Nagaland Peoples Organisation (ENPO) extending to a demand for a separate state. Modi said that the Centre had always kept its doors open for giving special attention to the backward ENPO areas. The BJP has been in power in Nagaland for a number of years with the Naga People’s Front (NPF) leading the state government. But recently it has chosen to ally itself with its rival, the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP). The Congress on the other hand has been out of power in the state for a long time. The BJP has also taken in its stride the criticism of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council. Nagaland is one state in the North-East where the BJP does not have to make a fresh inroad.

I don't know about you but I find the rhetoric by our current MLA aspirants to be woefully ambiguous. Currently, the most trendy topics revolve around the crucial issues of unemployment (especially among the youth), the parallel issue of skills development and training, the management of resources to name just a few. A number of candidates have given their action plans on these. Some are worth listening to, while others have been downright ridiculous. What needs to be added to this mix are the unavoidable but very seldom talked about issues of inequality, the ongoing assault on the rights of workers/Labour, the persistence of endemic economic exploitation. These are all tied up together and no candidate with actual sense can disregard them while talking about their economic agenda. But yes, this is Meghalaya – land of the clouds – land of smoke and mirrors, land of clouded judgments.

We can no longer look the other way today on youth unemployment. It is in our faces on a daily basis, it is in the living room watching TV at 1pm or getting out of its bed at 12pm. I am referring of course to your children; my generation, my millennial peers. Many parents openly express how worried they are about their children's choice of lifestyles and work routine. It is true, it can be worrisome. But whose fault is it? Is it the fault of the children who want to work but have to face thousands of people for one lousy government post? Is it our fault if we cannot help but feel depressed by the lack of opportunities on the economic landscape? Is it our fault when we are paid crap wages while we watch the employers vacationing every few months in Europe? Is it our fault that

# Time for a Socialist regime

By Avner Pariat

we are left out in the open market and forced to fend for ourselves against businesses that are over 100 years old? Is it our parents' fault when they spend their savings on their children because the government refuses to support initiatives that are different and/or new? Whose fault is it?

Before the last election, the Congress Party pledged to create one lakh job opportunities within the state. They lied. But they are in good company; the BJP at the centre also lied, after they also promised something similar at the national level. They're liars. But that aside even if they did manage to achieve their targets, what sort of jobs are we talking about? Are we talking about being security guards for peanut wages and being ordered around like you're just a piece of meat? Are we talking about a job where you are readily dispensable if the owner finds someone cheaper and younger? Are we talking about a job with no provident fund, no casual leave, no sick leave, no mercy? If that is the case, then I along with my brethren will have to gracefully withdraw from such work. Work need not be a bed of roses but right now all that we are getting are the thorns!

Mukul Sangma as CM had been urging young job-seekers not to rely on the government for employment. That they should seek it in the private sector. He is not alone. Many political and administrative staffers have been saying this over many years and across many venues. Ok, fine, let's do it! Where are all these wonderful private sector jobs? Maybe he meant that we should start our own businesses? Ok, now give

us capital, give us subsidies, give us institutional protections so that we might grow our businesses. These are what each and every government delivers on for interested investors and “job-creators” (biggest joke of the century); even for the great, omnipotent and puissant MNCS (I am sticking out my tongue as I type this). If governments can aid and assist huge companies, why is it so difficult to help local people? Most of the government officials have no idea about what young employees need and want. They think that outdated skill development initiatives and training camps are relevant and apt. They're not. We don't need more beauticians, mechanics and electricians. That time has passed. We need to think earnestly about vocations for a new economy.

Of course, this current crop of hopeful MLAs will probably mean nothing in the long run. I do not see a single one offering anything new and systemic. Even those within the same party seem to be doing their own thing, not working towards a group goal. They are very vague on everything. Every single party out there today seems filled with men whose real agenda is to get “contracts” (god, I hate this word).

Can anyone tell me what differentiates one political party from the rest in this election season? Except for the Right wing BJP (a big no) everyone else sort of looks and sounds the same. The reason is because they all believe in the same economic order. They have no wish to change it. This is why if we want true economic justice and harmony to come about Meghalaya must turn towards SOCIALISM. The current economic order is unacceptable. It allows the rich to dominate politics and

make off with all the public money. There is too much concentration of wealth in the hands of just a few people. Socialism is an order designed for the many, not the few. A Socialist movement must be born here which is adamant that we do not need to be saved by rich people every five years. We must demand a new politics and especially a new economics; one which can serve us: the young, the poor, the ailing, the small, the people. We don't need to beg for our salvation.

Globally, young people are waking up to the renewed potentials of Socialism. We must be a part of this remarkable event. It will take time but I am confident that we are gaining momentum as more young people see beyond this facade and join together. Even this time around the fact that many established powers (INC and its candidates) are feeling threatened by the new ones is a sign of hope. Of course these new ones are also nothing to talk about to be sure but the fact should not be lost on us: people are fed up and want something better. It should not matter whether it is NPP, PDF, BJP that comes to power. We must continue to exert pressure on them even after the elections and show them that they are our tools, not the other way around. A Socialist movement is not about winning elections. It is about beliefs in a better system that will benefit the majority. We have never had that in Meghalaya so far. Time to start. Long live Socialism !!

The global rating agency Fitch has put PNB in its RWN (Rating Watch Negative) category not before commenting “this fraud raises question on both external and internal risk control and quality management supervision of the bank”. The Moody's Investors Service has also placed downgraded PNB's credit rating. To further hammer PNB's creditworthiness down, the India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) also has downgraded the bank's overall rating. It is in this backdrop that the CRISIL put PNB's rating on “Watch.”

Why not? Did not Nirav Modi, his business partners and PNB officials join hands in looting public money? Did the bank officials not know that Modi and his business partners furnished fraudulent LoUs to obtain advances for payments to overseas business suppliers? Now everybody knows they did!

What a shame! A crying shame! In its official website, the PNB takes pride in mentioning that the bank established in 1894 at Lahore (now in Pakistan), grew as a part of Swadeshi Movement and Lala Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri had accounts with it. However, employees had no hesitation to act against India while issuing loans to Nirav on fraudulent LoUs. Practically, they should be booked for high treason. Mind you, economic offences of gigantic dimensions too can be construed as an act of treason. Those PNB officials showed scant respect to the fact that the Jallianwala Bagh Committee maintained its account with the bank. Really, a legacy has been put to shreds.

Just imagine, the fraudulent withdrawals from the PNB had been continuing at least for the last one decade by Nirav Modi. We know that auditing is a continuous process in all banking institutions. But the PNB's top management remained silent on the facts that the Nirav Modi companies

## A Fraud Most Foul He Robbed PNB but Blamed it for Destroying His “Brand”

By Amlan Home Chowdhury

Unbelievable it may sound but the “Economic Powerhouse India”, as dubbed by the current Modi-led government at the Centre, witnessed 25,600 cases of bank frauds totalling Rs. 1.79 billion up to December 21, 2017.

Whether India has become an “Economic Powerhouse” or not yet remains a matter of academic discussion but it certainly has turned a haven for those who want to use fraudulently issued Letters of Understandings (LoU) to rob the public sector banks the way Nirav Modi did to bleed Punjab National Bank (PNB) of Rs. 11,300 crore

Can you imagine this 48-years old celebrity jeweller whose brands were worn by the Hollywood heartthrob Kate Winslet for her red-carpet walk at the 2016 Oscars was issued a robust 500 LoUs to comfortably rob the PNB? No wonder the Union Minister for Electronics and Information-technology Ravi Shankar Prasad divulged in the Parliament that the PSU banks lost Rs. 227.43 billion (Rs 22,743 crore) due to frauds.

The Nirav Modi-PNB scam, however, is the king of scams as the money involved far exceeds the other scams that had been taking place in the last one decade. The most worrisome matter is that this scam has tarnished the image of PNB so much so that its reputation, as second biggest lender bank after the State Bank of India, now is at stake.

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violated all set of rules prescribed for the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) and also defaulted on repayment schedule of loans taken from the Life Insurance Corporation of India, ICICI Bank and IDBI Bank.

It was only on January 16, 2018, that the PNB suspected fraudulent transactions. Here, a questions crop up. How could PNB's top management fail to detect the fraud when the dimension was so big? Apparently, this cannot happen unless a section of staff members are involved in it. The tree companies of Nirav Modi – Diamond R US, Solar Exports and Stellar Diamonds – practically took the bank for a ride. On examination, the bank found that several LoUs go back to 2010 and even earlier.

The whole heist created a very big bang globally on January 28, 2018 when the PNB filed a complaint with the CBI. On February 4, 2018, the CBI issued lookout notices against Nirav.

The All India Bank Officers Association (AIBOA) has justifiably questioned how the scam went undetected for so many years? Modi had floated 120 shell companies to commit the fraud. The Enforcement Directorate now is probing 120 shell companies that are allegedly linked to Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi of the Gitanjali Group.

The PNB, apparently, now is in a rescue mode. It has to regain the trust of the people. After this massive scam, it goes without saying that the bank's reputation has been tarnished.

Just imagine, it had been rescuing banks since 1939 beginning with the Bhagwan Dass Bank Limited being the first one. If a line is drawn from 1960 till 2003, we find that it amalgamated the Indo-Commercial Bank Limited in 1960, the Universal Bank of India in 1961, acquired the Hindustan Commercial Bank Limited and the New Bank of India in 1993. In 2003, the Nedungadi Bank was taken over by the PNB.

The major fraud earlier taking place in PNB was in 1986 in its London branch. As a result, the RBI required the PNB to transfer its London branch to the State Bank of India.

The Nirav Modi fraud case took place through gross misuse of the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Telecommunications) Code system which is the messaging system used by the banks across the world to send information and instructions in an encrypted format through a secure channel.

This happened despite the fact that the RBI had alerted all banks at least thrice since August 2016 on the need to prevent any “Potential malicious use of the SWIFT infrastructure”. Thus SWIFT-norms were totally violated.

Very interestingly, at a time when the the PNB is battling hard to retain its creditworthiness, the main culprit Nirav Modi sent a letter/mail to the bank authority blaming it for “Destroying My Brand.” For all practical purposes, the Nirav Modi “Brand,” owned by Firestar Diamond International Pvt. Ltd, currently stands destroyed. Dark clouds of uncertainty indeed have fallen on his business empire that spans across the globe.

The CBI has already booked Nirav Modi, his brother Nishal and wife Ami and business partner Mehul Chinubhai Choksi (Nirav's maternal uncle) who were partners or had links with different Nirav-companies including Stellar Diamonds, Solar Exports etc.

### TO THE EDITOR

## BSNL employee treats customers as ‘subjects’

Editor,  
I along with my wife recently went to get our Aadhar re-verification done at the BSNL CTO office. The elderly person who was manning the Customer Care Desk was rude to start with as he was dictating how the process works like a teacher does to his students. While my re-verification went through faultlessly, when my wife's turn came there was some problems matching her fingerprint. After trying a few times the person started rudely scolding my wife as if it was she who was creating the problem. Finally he stated that re-verification cannot be done and he can't waste his time on one client. When I confronted him saying it wasn't our fault he rudely walked away from the desk. He treated us as if we weren't clients but ‘subjects’ of BSNL.

Here I would like to appreciate the polite behaviour of a lady and a young staff in the same desk who made repeated attempts to re-verify my wife's account but failed due to the technical glitch. I would like to thank them for the professional approach they displayed during our interaction. As for the grumpy old man I wonder how the organization would make such a rude man sit in the Customer Service Desk. Perhaps he should be shifted to the tower maintenance department where he would have no customers to trouble him. I hope the concerned authorities bring to the kind notice of this man that the salary and pension which he takes home actually comes from the bills that ordinary

customers like me pay to the organization so that he doesn't treat customers as subjects in the limited term he has left in his job. Or perhaps he could learn a few good things about professionalism from the young people he shares the desk with at the fag end of his career.

Yours etc.,  
Subhadeep Bhattacherjee  
Shillong – 6

## Restore children's fundamental rights

Editor,  
While passing a slew of directives for effective implementation of the provisions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the Supreme Court on February 9, 2018 observed that even children have fundamental and human rights and they cannot be compelled to live in uncomfortable conditions merely because they have no voice in the affairs of state. The Apex Court also said that rights of children need to be enforced equally strongly and if the Executive ignores the mandate of Parliament with continuing callousness, it would only be detrimental to the children of the country.

It must be remembered that children are the future of the country and if they are not looked after, it is the future of the country that is at stake. A bench of the top court comprising justices Madan B Lokur and Deepak Gupta in its 62-page judgement directed the Ministry of Women and Child Development and all

state governments to ensure that all positions in the national and state commissions for protection of child rights are filled up well in time and adequate staff is provided to these statutory bodies so that they can function effectively. The bench said that the national and state commissions for protection of child rights have a very significant and proactive role to play in improving the lives of children.

Obviously therefore the state governments must ensure that all positions in the JJBs (Juvenile Justice Boards) and CWCs (Child Welfare Committees) are filled up expeditiously and in accordance with the model rules or the rules framed by the state government. Delay in filling up the positions would adversely impact on children which should be avoided.

In the above perspective it would be appropriate to assess how protected are the children in the Children's Hospital at Central Pohkseeh. This hospital is the only and unique Children's hospital in the whole of the state of Meghalaya and possibly in Assam as well where worried parents from far-off and endemic villages rush for treatment and early cure/recovery of their ailing children daily.

It has been and is still being observed that residents of Shillong – be it young bikers or matured adults speed past the hospital at supersonic speed without the vehicle's silencer and blowing horns much above the permissible limits of decibel level, thereby creating extreme noise pollution that disturbs the children, in quarantine in the hospital. This robs them of their right to silence and peace particularly when

they are far away from home and bereft of parental care and struggling hard to recover in an unfamiliar place.

Children are divine gifts bestowed by the Almighty on humankind for the perpetuation of the human race. Children are also incarnations of God. It is inexplicable as to how people in vehicles are so indifferent to the fundamental needs of children when they are sick and in trauma in hospitals and need empathy from all concerned in terms of caring, comfort and congeniality of environment. Why are the people of present generation cruel and merciless?

It would be worthwhile for the Meghalaya State Child Welfare Committee, the Police department, the State Pollution Control Board, the State Motor Vehicles Department along with the concerned RTO to take stock of the situation for restoration of children's fundamental rights and provide them due care and adequate protection and ensure permanent peace, tranquility, serenity and silence around the Children's Hospital.

Yours etc.,  
Samares Bandyopadhyay,  
Advocate  
Via email

## Rampant illegal mining in Meghalaya

Editor,  
The Supreme Court of India had once again allowed transportation of the remaining (about 7.8 lakhs MT) of already

extracted coal (extracted since 2014), for another four months from December 2017 to March 2018. It is a great relief for the Government of Meghalaya and the rampant illegal miners in the State. The fact is that since the winter of 2016 - 17 maximum quantity of coal transported from the state are newly extracted coal either illegally or freely which is widespread all over the State. The same continues till date. In reality, the already extracted coal remains in papers only but the physically and virtually transported coal now from Meghalaya is the newly one mined via the rat hole extractive method. But the Government and Authorities concerned are soft and turn a blind eye to this for reasons best known to them. If there is an independent enquiry or investigation by the CBI, the mess of black trading will come to light.

In the past thirty years coal was exported from Meghalaya by Six-Wheelers trucks, D - Model, S-Model, etc. which are not as strong as vehicles of today but they all carried above twelve tonnes. Thanks to modern technology of vehicle manufacturing companies which produced stronger and reliable vehicles, at present the maximum number of trucks transporting coal from Meghalaya are six-wheelers and few ten-wheelers, twelve-wheelers and other modern models which can carry above 20 tonnes of coal. A senior six-wheelers (1613 TC) truck driver said that a comfortable load for his vehicle is 15 to 17 tons, and whether he carries 9 tonnes or 15-tonnes, the difference in fuel consumption is negligible. It is high time for the Government to review the Transport rules and policies with practical on-road

experiments.

The Government allowed loading of 9-tonnes per truck, but only few trucks stuck to that, whereas most of them were overloaded. We have also seen in the local newspapers in the recent past where state police detained trucks transporting coal illegally and overloaded. We fear to say that many trucks ply without appropriate challans or even with duplicate ones. This calls for a thorough investigation and stern action against the errant truck drivers and owners.

The Government of Meghalaya is facing financial crunch but seems unwilling or lacks the mechanism to plug the loopholes in revenue collections. Really, mineral resources form a major revenue source for the state, yet, it hardly collects a revenue of 40 % from the total minerals exported, while the rest is leaked due to reasons stated above. It may be the same in other revenue collection sectors also. Let the Government be more sincere, more accountable and be ashamed of white lies. How can a Government that cannot stop illegal mining deliver anything to the people?

Yours etc.,  
Muhonsingh Marbaniang  
New Nongstoin  
West Khasi Hills-19

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.

# Footsteps of Amrapali Reverberate

By Amlan Home Chowdhury

As the dawn's cool breeze gently kisses you walking by the ancient ruins of Raja Vishal Ka Garh of Vaishali in Bihar, you have a strange feeling you hear the sounds of Ghungroo-chained footsteps of legendary Nagar Badhu of Lichhavis Amrapali going to meet Lord Buddha.

On a second eerie feeling, it would appear as if the ether is carrying from the nearby mango orchard the hymn Buddha Sharanam Gachhami hummed by saffron-robed Buddhist monks. The mango orchard was donated to Sangha or Buddhist monistic order by Vaishali's Nagar Badhu — the court dancer — Amrapali.

A little few more steps inside the ruins, you just cannot help but feel you hear the rhapsody of the last groan of a dying soldier and maniacal war cry by Magadh Emperor Ajatshatru who raided the Lichhavi Republic of Vaishali nearly 2600 years ago to wrest Amrapali and carry her away to Rajgir, his capital.

Vaishali, the most famous Mahajanapada of ancient Aryavarta, was loved by Lord Buddha. Lichhavis also loved him with all the sublimity. During Tathagata's last journey, he even had told to the weeping townsfolk of Vaishali that he might soon attain Mahaparinirvana: death, liberating him from the vortex of life and death.

This ancient city is associated with three characters: Buddha and peace, Emperor Ajatshatru and extreme violence and Amrapali and her lover's madness.

Let us turn over the pages of history of Vaishali where love, lust, betrayal, shrewd politicking and battle cries rattled amidst chanting of Buddha Sharanam Gachhami. As you turn over those pages and history unfolds, you feel you are reading an action-packed thriller.

Once inside the ancient rectangular brick build Raja Vishal Ka Garh, you have an uncanny feeling of having entered into a strange Xanadu where



**Time machine:** (Top) Remnants of the Raja Vishal Ka Garh where court dancers used to perform and (below left) Vyjayanthimala in the Bollywood film Amrapali

Vaishali's legendary Nagarbadhu or court dancer is dancing with the royal audience completely enraptured. If you don't have tastes for music and dance and have an inclination of a Yogi or recluse, you are not invited at the dancing programmes of Amrapali.

Of course Yogis irks her. Hence, you would feel she is singing a song that is meant for a Yogi like you: "Jao re jogi tum jaore, yeh hai prem-i-o ki nagri....." A beautiful song of the Bollywood vin-

tage Amrapali, the film showed Ajatshatru making numerous attempts to snatch Amrapali, destroy Vaishali Republic and kill Lord Buddha.

Of course Lord Buddha forbade Ajatshatru not to invade Vaishali but the cruel emperor invaded the Lichhavi Republic, destroyed it only to lose Amrapali who becomes a Monk. Just guess what happened next? Don't fall from the crest, Ajatshatru himself turns a Buddhist.

Vaishali, the Mahajanapada Buddha loved the most, really opiates you. In the morn's tranquility, one really turns imaginative! Moreover, the surrounding is such that one cannot help but to imagine the long bygone scenes of Buddha sitting under a mango tree in the legendary mango orchard that Amrapali had donated to his Sangha (monistic order) and delivering his discourses with citizen of the Mahajanapada listening to it.

As if you have gone back to those days of the past, you really hallucinate of an extremely beautiful dame and dancer — of course, Amrapali — walking leisurely through the thoroughfares of ancient Vaishali wearing glittering ornaments and gorgeous dresses to go to Raja Vishal Ka Garh or the parliament hall of ancient Lichhavis to perform her dance programme. Of course her maids equally attired with colourful dresses and adorned with ornaments, following her.

On turning over the pages of pages of Cullakalinga Jataka and Ekapanna Jataka, we find that there used to be 7,707 Rajas of the functioning democracy of Lichhavis. They would meet each year to elect one of their members as ultimate authority or ruler having a council of nine other Rajas to assist him in running the country. Was it not like our present day council of ministers?

These Buddhist scriptures say besides the elected ruler, there also used to be an Uparaja (deputy chief), Senapati (chief of army) and Bhandagarika (chancellor of exchequer). They were elected by the people through public voting.

There are records that Lord Buddha greatly supported republican system of Lichhavis and never liked Magadhan version of absolute monarchy.

As the Buddhist text Mahaparinirban Sutra says, Ajatshatru wanted to destroy the Lichhavi republicanism and Vajji confederacy. But Vaishali was stronger than his Magadh Kingdom.

Extremely cunning, Ajatshatru sent his wily minister Vassakara to meet Lord Buddha to get some tips on how to overthrow Lichhavi republic. On

getting Buddha's audience, Vassakara asked the Lord what were the ways of trouncing Vaishali.

To this question, Gautama said Lichhavis were simply invincible as they followed such golden rules as taking decisions by majority of opinions of Rajas (modern day Members of Parliament) and follow the ancient rules of Vaishali Gana (tantra) or democracy. Gautama said so long as the Rajas remain united, Ajatshatru cannot destroy Vaishali.

This proves Buddha strongly supported Lichhavi republicanism. Ajatshatru, in fact, wanted to know Buddha's view on the strong points of Lichhavi Republic so that he could formulate his war plan against the Vaishali people accordingly. He knew he has to sow the seeds of disunity among the Rajas through bribe. And he did that. The result was destruction of Vaishali.

A little away from Abhishek Pushkarni, there is a mango grove—Amrapalivana. Nearly 2600 years ago, it was here where Lord Buddha stayed at the invitation of Nagar Badhu or royal courtesan of the Lichhavis: Ambapali or Amrapali. Ajatshatru loved her so much so that he 16 invasions on Vaishali to destroy it and snatch Amrapali. Ultimately, he was successful. He had both Amrapali and Vaishali. But could not keep her for long as she became a Buddhist "Bhikshuni" — monk.

According to Buddhist legend, Ajatshatru became very closely associated with Buddha after the fall of Vaishali. Ajatshatru completely surrendered himself to Buddha, his Dhamma and his Sangha.



## Know about slaughtering before savouring meat

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Recently the Hyderabad based Muslim seminary Jamia Nizamia, started in

1876, issued a ban on Muslims eating prawn, shrimp, and crabs, calling them Makruh Tahrim (abominable).

According to Islam, there are three categories of food: Halal (allowed), Haram (prohibited), Makruh (strictly to be avoided as abominable).

Most Muslims eat meat, every kind. In fact the religion defines itself by the eating of meat — even though the Holy Prophet was a vegetarian. However, most Muslims have no idea of what they are allowed to eat. The maximum they know is that butchery is divided into two — Muslims eat Halaal and non-Muslims eat Jhatka. (It is another matter that the animals slaughtered in India are neither halaal nor jhatka and make a mockery of both religions). If you have Muslim acquaintances, you could pass this on to them.

There are four categories of food —

1. Halal - lawful.  
A halal slaughter involves a sharp knife. The animal should not see before it is slaughtered;

the animal must be well rested and fed before slaughtering, and the slaughtering may not take place in front of other animals. The jugular vein of the neck should be cut in order to drain all the blood of the live animal and the butcher should invoke Allah's name saying "Bismillah" in order to take the animal's life to meet the lawful need of food. Only vegetarian animals are allowed to be killed. Birds that eat seeds and vegetables are permitted. Birds that eat forbidden items like insects are only permitted if insects are not a major part of their diet. Insects such as Locusts are permitted, all others forbidden. Fruits and Vegetables must be inspected before eating to see that they have no insects. Fish killed by removal from water, or by a blow, are permitted. Shellfish are forbidden. Cheeses coagulated with acid or vegetable enzymes are permitted. Grains are permitted, provided they have not been prepared using animal fats or other forbidden ingredients. Vinegar which is not made from fermenting alcohol is permitted.

2. Haram - forbidden, unlawful.  
Haram is an Arabic term meaning "forbidden".

Acts that are haram are prohibited in the religious texts of the Quran and the Sunnah. If something is considered haram, it remains prohibited no matter



how good the intention is, or how honourable the purpose is.

In Islamic law, dietary prohibitions are said to help with the understanding of divine will.

Muslims are prohibited from consuming flowing blood. Meats that are considered haram, such as pork, dog, cat, monkey, or any other haram animals, can only be considered lawful in emergencies when a person is facing starvation and his life has to be saved through the consumption of this meat. However, these meats are NOT considered a necessity or permissible if his society possesses excess food.

All carnivores with fangs such as lions, tigers, wolves, dogs, cats are haram. All birds with talons such as hawks, falcons, vultures, eagles are haram. Domesticated donkeys are haram. Animals which are commanded to kill such as mice, scorpions, snakes, are haram. In fact all reptiles, amphibians (frogs) and rodents are haram. Any animal that has died before being slaughtered in the Islamic manner, or has not been properly slaughtered, is haram. Animals that are slaughtered in the name of anyone but Allah are prohibited.

Intoxicants, or Khamr, are prohibited in Islam. The Prophet forbade the trading, export, import, gifting of intoxicants, even with non-Muslims. It is not permissible for a Muslim to work in, or own, a place that sells intoxicants. This is not just alcohol but intoxicants, such as tobacco, paan, dokha, and khat.

A Muslim is not even allowed to sit at a table where alcohol is being served. Heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and any other substances which cause intoxication, are also forbidden.

Nutmeg, asafoetida, vanilla extract and gelatine are also

forbidden, either due to being intoxicants containing alcohol (vanilla extract) or other forbidden items such as pig parts (gelatine). This actually rules out most confectionary, as it contains nutmeg, vanilla extract and gelatine.

Anything made from a human part is haram. (But all commercial biscuits use melted human hair called L Cysteine. And most of the world's supply comes from the Hindu temple of Tirupati where the hair has been consecrated to the Hindu goddess).

Carnivorous animals, birds of prey and land animals without external ears (i.e. snakes, reptiles, worms, insects etc). Since all birds eat insects as the larger part of their diet, this should technically rule out all of them including chickens. But only Muslims run roadside chicken shops. Food contaminated with blood or by-products, or any of the above products, is illegal.

3. Mashbooh, Mushtabahat - questionable or doubtful.

There is a grey area called mashbooh. If one does not know the Halal or Haram status of a particular food or drink it should not be consumed.

4. Makrooh - inappropriate, distasteful or offensive.

Although makruh actions are less severe than haram, it is recommended to avoid performing them. This will give a Muslim a

better chance of reaping Allah's rewards.

Makruh food, determined by the Quran, states that man should only eat pure food, and anything that is impure is regarded as makruh. This includes food that is spoiled or rotten. Into this comes now prawn, shrimp, crabs — all of which are carrion eaters.

So, a Muslim should look out for:

Soup stock made of bones as these are likely to have pig in them, unless specially stated. Any cosmetic (lipstick etc.), or food dye of a pink/red colour as these are usually made from crushed and dried female insects called Cochineal beetles. Lard, which is usually fat from swine and is used in pastry. Gelatine, which is obtained by boiling the bones, and other waste parts of animals, and forms the basis of most sweets and jelly.

I am not even going into the emulsifiers used in food like Diglycerides and others (E470 to E483) which can be obtained from pork, or non-halal sources, or magnesium stearate which is used in medicine tablets. Even digestives have pepsin: a digestive enzyme made from pig stomachs.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

# Start your own cryptocurrency

Fed up of standing by watching while others make and lose fortunes on cryptocurrencies? Now you too can make and lose a fortune!

This columnist realised it was time to tackle this topic when a news report said more than 1,500 Bitcoin-like cryptocurrencies had been launched and a reader asked me for advice on starting his own.

Easy, I said. Whose head would you like to be on it? He chose his own, which showed me that he had no idea what a cryptocurrency was. They are not physical coins, so don't have anyone's heads on them.

Never mind. Most people don't understand these things. This is good.

Things you can sell to unsuspecting friends as Bitcoins: 1) game arcade tokens; 2) foreign coins; 3) toy medals; and 4) chocolate money.

But one of my more serious colleagues is starting his own cryptocurrency; so I know the system.

1. Download the main coin mining software from a website called Github, then hire a nerd, as you have to tweak the programme (with C++) to make it unique.

2. Think of a theme. It is impossible to be too wacky. For example, one person made a cryptocurrency called "Offerings to Chulhu", named after an alien from a 1928 sci-fi story. You'd think that was too silly to work, but it is going strong after several years.

3. When people start buying your currency, sell them all and run away as fast as you can.

If the last part of this process reminds you of anything, it should. It is the same technique used by people working for criminal gangs ("banks") for pushing evil scams such as sales of stocks and

shares, unit trusts, investment bonds, Ponzi schemes, etc. It's an exciting field. In January this year, the value of Bitcoins was going up and down so fast (in a \$10,000 range) that you had to discuss it with a live price tracker in your hand. Here's a typical conversation:

ME: "I'll buy your car for one Bitcoin." HIM: "No way! This car's worth more than... \$9,845." ME: "More than... \$11,245? No, it isn't. That's a good price." HIM: "Okay, you got a deal." ME: "I'm now transferring to you one Bitcoin." HIM: "Wait. This is only worth... \$7,231." ME: "Too late, Byeee." (Drives off)

Bitcoin analysts say the number of new coin issues is accelerating so we'll each have our own currency in "the mid-to-long-term future", meaning a week next Tuesday. Shopping will be challenging.

SHOPPER: "Do you accept Flurgles?" SHOPKEEPER: "Yes, but your change will be in Oogliewooglies." What to call your coin? All the cool names

have already been taken, including Mysterium, Einsteinium and BitBean. Others are odd, like the Melon, or desperately unimaginative, like the Namecoin.

I reckon it's time to stand out and get attention by using an ironically humorous name for your new Bitcoin. Four suggestions: 1) SweetLittleNothings; 2) Don'tBuyThese; 3) Moneypits; and 4) IdiotTokens.

Okay, hands up who'll buy an IdiotToken from me? And no, you can't pay me in cryptocurrencies. I want hard cash. I may be an idiot but I'm not stupid.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)



# Teach your kids to be independent

By Soumyadiptra Basu

A few years back, while reading an article on the internet about retirement plan, I came across a line that read "the key to early retirement lies in grooming independent and confident kids".

As I embark on my journey towards retirement this sentence has resonated with me. A recent statistic shows that 90 per cent of present day millionaires in this country are first generation ones and did not inherit any money from their parents. On the contrary, two thirds of the children who have received constant monetary support from their millionaire parents have more often than not ended up with lower net asset value as compared to their previous generation. Aren't these two statistics counterintuitive? How someone who gets a head start falters in life while the other with no financial support grows his net asset value from 0 to a million dollars in a lifetime?

Let's call the self-made millionaires Type A and the others as Type B. A little probing will show you the effect parents have on the individual success of these two types. Let me tell you a story to make my point clear and then I will get into the reasons why the two types have different degrees of success.

Mr Adams is a very successful businessman who by the dint of his strong work ethic has a net asset value exceeding \$2 million. He has brought up his two daughters, Ella and Mia with the hope that they will carry forward his legacy. Of the two kids, the elder one Ella is more submissive and lets herself being dictated by her father. Mia on the other hand has a mind of her own. From the very outset the difference in personalities was evident to Adams and he had made it clear to his daughters that if their lives didn't follow the trajectory that he had decided for them then they would not be a beneficiary to his estate post his death. Ella listened to her father, went to the school that he had chosen, majored in the subject that her



father wanted and even married the boy her dad selected for her.

However, with her father's spectre looming over at every step in her life she didn't grow up into a confident individual. Mia, true to her nature followed her heart. As was expected, the lives of the two sisters took two completely different paths. Ella lived a subsidised life funded by her father. Mr Adams created a position for her husband, Mark in his own company which was way higher than his credentials.

Ella's kids went to private school which was again funded by their grandfather. Such an expensive lifestyle surely wasn't affordable for Ella and

Mark on their own.

On the other end of the canvas, Mia slowly progresses through an ad agency, marries the guy who shares the same vision as her, starts her family and most importantly lives her life within her means. But things change when Mr Adams dies in a car wreck and Ella is paralyzed for life. With Mr. Adams gone, it does not take long for his partners to boot Mark out of the company since in the first place he is a total misfit in the organisation. With no income to pay for their affluent lifestyle, Ella and Mark had to file for bankruptcy and her kids had to be unenrolled from the private school. Within a heartbeat, this becomes a riches-to-

rags story. Mia on hearing of her sister's misery starts helping Ella's family but with her limited resources it is a long haul even on her part to pull her sister from the hole that their father had left them in.

The moral of the above story is that Mr Adams strengthened the strong but weakened the weak. He never let Ella live her own life which resulted in her downfall once he was dead. On the other hand by disapproving of Mia's personality he let her grow into a supremely independent and confident individual who not only took charge of her own life but also hauled her sister up post her father's death.

People like Ella are the Type B personalities that I mentioned

above and never take charge of their lives. They lack initiative and cannot face any storms in their lives. But we as parents are responsible for creating type B personalities. I can tell you from my own experiences there are lot of Mr Adams around us.

Money can buy new cars, lavish houses and expensive suits but it cannot buy discipline and doesn't teach you skills to be successful in life. Never underestimate the role hard work and failures play in life. Being a parent I understand what parents think when they try prop up the lives of their kids. I myself have been guilty on many occasions. When my son gets frustrated in not building the desired structure from his lego blocks and throws a fit, I try to comfort him instead of explaining to him how he can succeed next time.

But what we don't realise is that in life we need to develop courage, need to take calculated risks and stand our ground in moments of adversity. By building the lego tower for my son or finishing his homework, I am setting him up for failure later on his life. We should always explain the kids that success is always proportional to the efforts we put in. Many times I hear parents complaining of millennials living in their basement way past they have graduated.

But my question to the parents is why have you been an enabler to your kids throughout their life and why are they not getting the kids out from their house right away. While I am setting aside money for kids' college I am not letting them get any of my money or making them a beneficiary to my wealth unless they have demonstrated mature, responsible disciplined behavior and are well established in their profession. My request to all the parents out there, do not be an enabler to your kids, please teach them the virtues of frugality and live a life not out of borrowed or gifted money. Let's teach our own to live their own life.

(The author is an engineer at Qualcomm)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhandi

Sunday, FEBRUARY 25, 2018

Venus square Mars on your solar return chart gives mixed results. A lot of modification in your business plans or career plans is what would keep you busy. A discord over small issues with superiors and those in authoritative positions can cause avoidable stress. Harness your full potential and do not ignore the details to come back on track. Finer details are as important as getting into the larger framework of what is required to come out of the difficult situations. Financially things will be unwavering by and large. Travels will be suitable both professionally and personally, as you prefer to face the challenge of connecting with people from diverse fields. Childhood connect may prove to more be supportive in challenging times.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

The planetary configuration brings good results for you. Increased involvement with siblings, students, classmates, or neighbors may also figure at this time. This could also be a time of mental restlessness. The pace of your life may be a bit hectic now, and if you're not used to it, it could make you a tad nervous. You are more inclined to seek a broad understanding of people around. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating, and learning is highlighted. Your attention to the logical world of reason has also been a focus.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. Your home life is especially busy and sometimes hectic. Arguments with, or on behalf of, family members cannot be avoided but conflict resolution is bound to be quick and relatively easy. Excess energy is best channeled into constructive home improvement projects. You are slightly more defensive and certainly more protective than usual during this period. There may be the need to revisit old, nagging issues regarding personal finances.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

Communication, creativity and authority are highlighted. You are eager to investigate new things, whether scientific or technical. This is a phase of completion and transition. Social interaction is also emphasized. Give other people a little extra time and attention, notice their efforts on your behalf, and strengthen your connections. You are more curious and alert than usual, and you could be quite busy with errands, paperwork and phone calls. Much energy is expended in understanding and adapting to your immediate environment.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

Your need for a little attention and career matters come to a head. You're called to perform, perhaps on a moment's notice, and it's best to keep your cool and do whatever you can to show your competence. A sudden job opportunity, or some form of assistance with regard to career, home, or property matters, could be part of the picture. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your responsible side. Your mind is especially inquisitive and learning, short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections appeal strongly.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

You are especially fond of the life of the home and family, as their entertainment and pleasure are on your main agenda. There is ample support and unconditional love from your partner. Take this time to re-budget instead of making premature purchases. Hold off on decision-making regarding money. Instead, take the time to re-think your sources of income and how you spend your cash during this period. Put off finalizing anything important for the time being. In fact, some money-making ideas or ventures may be put on hold due to circumstances beyond your control.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

News and visitors from far off places are likely to arrive. You are loving and caring in personal relationships. You look at the world in terms of value and worth now, and what you have is foremost on your mind. Money issues pop up now-

the discovery of a way to increase your income, an unexpected gift or reward, or a brief and tiny financial crisis that motivates you to find new ways to make money are possible. You are blessed with good mood and health.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

This period brings good-luck for love and romance. More loving and appreciative relationships with your children may also figure now. Your power of attraction skyrockets during this phase. Yet, you are not aggressive in your approach to love. Instead, you attract more if you allow yourself to be pursued. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. At this time, you instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Any love affair begun now will be characterized by good cheer, fun, and a fair share of emotions.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

People at work might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions symbolic of status. You're called to take on an assignment, perhaps on a moment's notice, and it's best to keep your cool and do whatever you can to show your competence. A sudden job opportunity, or some form of assistance with regards to home or property matters, could be part of the picture. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your responsible side.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

This week brings new horizons in your romantic and love life. Your mind is especially inquisitive, when learning. Short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly. You enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress. It's a good time for rethinking and revising educational plans, paperwork, mental projects, and communications. Now you need a little attention, and career matters come to the fore. It's an excellent time to further your hobbies and interests.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

The stars promote your luck in service and work related areas. Your mind is especially sharp and you are quick on the uptake as additional work comes your way. You enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. Expressing yourself using your writing skills, through the medium of arts or talking to a confidante are ways to handle stress. It's a good time for rethinking and revising educational plans, paperwork, mental projects, and communications. You are most likely to express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities through an intellectual appreciation of art, cultural pursuits, and literature.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

In addition to your efforts and hard work pay close attention to performance metrics. Your efforts will be rewarded and continuity to perform work would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You have an increased interest in your own possessions. You are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort, and luxury. Romantic matters are usually from within the local environment close to home, although many romantic short trips may be undertaken for pleasure. You prefer an intellectual and communicative partner.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

This phase brings in happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, increasing travel opportunities, and connections to people of a different cultural background than yours is indicated. You desire to learn and improve your practical skills. You are especially drawn to family life where your affections find expression. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental or nostalgic now. You may now particularly value the aesthetics in and around your home. If things are out of sync on the home front, you will do whatever you can to re-create a peaceful and stable atmosphere.

## Ways to manage wealth

By Ranjan K Baruah

In the last edition we have published about share market as career options. In this edition we are publishing more about the same. Aspirants may search online for various information related to same and also start reading financial newspaper or magazines. Some further terms and agencies associated with share market are as follows:



**Research analyst:** A research analyst is a person who prepares investigative reports on securities or assets for in-house or client use. Other names for this function include financial analyst, securities analyst, investment analyst, equity analyst, ratings analyst, or simply "analyst". The work conducted by the research analyst is in an effort to inquire, examine, find or revise facts, principles and theories for internal use by a financial institution or an external financial client. The report an analyst prepares entails the examination of public records of securities of companies or industries, and often concludes with a "buy", "sell" or "hold" recommendation.

**Wealth manager/management:** Wealth management as an investment-advisory discipline which incorporates financial planning, investment portfolio management and a number of aggregated financial services. High-net-worth individuals (HNWIs), small-business owners and families who desire the assistance of a credentialed financial advisory specialist call upon wealth managers to coordinate for financial matters including buying shares or investing in mutual funds. Wealth management is a high-level professional service that combines financial and investment advice apart from others.

**NSE:** The National Stock Exchange (NSE) is the leading stock exchange in India and the fourth largest in the world by equity trading volume in 2015, according to World Federation of Exchanges (WFE). It began operations in 1994 and is ranked as the largest stock exchange in India in terms of total and average daily turnover for equity shares every year since 1995, based on annual reports of SEBI. NSE launched electronic

screen-based trading in 1994, derivatives trading (in the form of index futures) and internet trading in 2000, which were each the first of its kind in India.

NSE has a fully-integrated business model comprising our exchange listings, trading services, clearing and settlement services, indices, market data feeds, technology solutions and financial education offerings. NSE also oversees compliance by trading and clearing members and listed



companies with the rules and regulations of the exchange.

**BSE:** Established in 1875, BSE (formerly known as Bombay Stock Exchange Ltd.), is Asia's first and the Fastest Stock Exchange in world with the speed of 6 micro seconds and one of India's leading exchange groups. Over the past 141 years, BSE has facilitated the growth of the Indian corporate sector by providing it an efficient capital-raising platform. Popularly known as BSE, the bourse was established as "The Native

Share & Stock Brokers' Association" in 1875. Today BSE provides an efficient and transparent market for trading in equity, currencies, debt instruments, derivatives, mutual funds.

It also has a platform for trading in equities of small-and-medium enterprises (SME). India INX, India's 1st international exchange, located at GIFT CITY IFSC in Ahmedabad is a fully owned subsidiary of BSE. BSE is also the 1st listed stock exchange of India.

### Update

**AIIMS entrance:** Students may apply in the prescribed form through online mode only for the Entrance Examination for admission to the MBBS Course of All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi and eight other AIIMS (Patna, Bhopal, Jodhpur, Bhubaneswar, Rishikesh, Raipur, Guntur (Andhra Pradesh) and Nagpur (Maharashtra)). Online registrations shall be closed on March 5.

**North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology - NER-IST Entrance Examination (NEE) 2018:** Online applications are invited for Entrance Examination to be conducted for Base Module (Certificate Course), Diploma Module and Degree Module Courses in Technology streams and also Degree Module course in Forestry. The NEE 2018 shall be conducted for admission at three levels/courses. Students may apply on or before March 12.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at [kranjan@gmail.com](mailto:kranjan@gmail.com) or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

"Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few."

--- George Bernard Shaw

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.195

SHILLONG, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2018

### Election extravaganza!

THE last day for campaigning for the state assembly elections scheduled for February 27, ended on Saturday. All the candidates decided to display their numerical strength by way of rallies. Shillong city was choc-a-bloc with vehicles loaded mostly with young, energetic youth. The vehicles also had school going children as passengers. Obviously these kids have no votes but they waved the flags of the parties they "supported" as if their own lives depended on it. Considering that Shillong is battling the worst traffic jams in recent times, the administration should have disallowed this silly demonstration of strength by respective candidates by the number of vehicles they can bring to the roads. Many passengers including those coming from Guwahati were stuck in traffic jams for hours. Do citizens have to always pay the price because a few people have money to burn? Radical electoral reforms are overdue in this country. Democracy has acquired an ugly face during elections. And the amounts spent on such rallies by sitting MLAs must come from the local area development funds. Which candidate would burn their hard earned money? Is it possible for anyone without the kind of financial muscle displayed on Saturday, be able to contest and win elections? Isn't this blatant exhibition of money power a discouragement for ethical people to enter politics?

And the frenzy with which people join these rallies indicates that there are huge numbers of underworked or unemployed people who have free time in their hands. Gainfully employed people would have no merrymaking. It's a pitiable situation and one that we ought to be thinking seriously about. Politicians buy these young people for a few thousand rupees just to swell the number of visible supporters who they believe will inspire others. The jury is still out on whether the number of people joining the rallies will actually decide whether a candidate wins or loses. The more unfortunate part is that there are equally huge numbers of students who are preparing for their respective Board exams and are disturbed by the noise and frenzy. Is taking a call on such frivolous electioneering tactics not part of good governance? Its time someone takes up a PIL on this too!

# Rebel's death: more questions than answers

By Albert Thyrniang

Before anything else, congratulations to the Meghalaya Police Commando - Special Force (SF) for their success in gunning down Sohan D Shira, Meghalaya's 'most wanted terrorist'. It is a commendable achievement, the significance of which will be felt in the near and distant future. The self-proclaimed commander-in-chief of outlawed Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) was shot dead in a fierce gun battle with security forces at Dobu area of A'chakpek village, East Garo Hills on 24th February in a joint operation of the Garo Hills Police and Meghalaya's Special Force-10 commandos.

The dreaded militant's violent end came around 11:50 am. News of killing spread thick and fast through the social media, WhatsApp and Facebook. The forward and share facilities in these applications reached the news to the world audience in no time. The national print and electronic media picked up the sensational story and flashed the breaking news on TV screens and portal sites. Soon the battered body of the slain insurgent leader, lying near his sophisticated weapon, began to appear in the same social platforms. Apparently the militant supremo, in military camouflage, who had 'survived' many a gun battle, was shot several times in the head and the abdomen. He was but a shadow of his former self! He lived by the gun and died by the gun.

No sooner had of the death of the long illusive GNLA co-founder was confirmed, when questions were raised by concerned citizens, though mostly anonymously. Why was he traced just five days after the shocking assassination of Williamnagar NCP candidate, Jonathone Sangma, a former GNLA cadre and three others on February 19 in an IED blast? The GNLA has not claimed responsibility for the attack. Sohan is still the main suspect. Who killed Jonathone and his co-victims? We may never know the killers and the conspirators, if there are any. The wife of Jonathone who had asked the GNLA whether they killed her husband may have to live with the mystery for the rest of her life.

Jonathone Sangma who was an independent candidate from Williamnagar in 2013 had complained of threats to his supporters by underground elements not

to vote for him. The investigation led to the police filing charge sheet against Deborah Marak and Tennydard Marak on November 3 that year for alleged criminal conspiracy, undue influence in elections and criminal intimidation. What will happen to this case? Will it remain unsolved for ages? Did the GNLA work for the Social Welfare minister? Will the case that deserves imprisonment of the guilty of up to six months remain in the file forever? Will the investigation, even if handed to the CBI or NIA, unearth the truth?

Allegedly the GNLA had taken an anti-Congress stance in Songsak where the Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma is contesting. Threats of attacks on Congress party workers and a 365 day shutdown were issued through the social media, purportedly by Sohan himself using fake name, if the people of Songsak supported the CM. Rongara and Siju candidates were also intimidated by the outfit, say some reports. Is there any connection between political involvement of GNLA in Songsak and other constituencies and the encounter in Dobu? To an inquiring mind the timing is suspicious.

Why had the former Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC) 'area commander' for the East Garo Hills survived so long? How did he escape the police dragnet for more than nine years? Was it because of the lack of modern weaponry and logistics on the part of the police? Was it because of the difficult terrain? Was it because of poor intelligence? Were the GNLA superior in arms, intelligence and knowledge of their habitat? And the most pertinent question of all: was it because of political patronage that Sohan and his outfit were to escape the law for nearly a decade? Now that the man is dead the answers to these queries may go with him to the grave.

Uncomfortable questions are also being asked regarding the encounter itself? Why was the hard core C-In-C who carried a Rs 10 lakh bounty on his head gunned down alone? Where were his faithful and trained bodyguards? Reportedly, Sohan's well armed bodyguards stay about 1 km away from him. Could

the Special Force, with specific information about Sohan's location have allowed the bodyguards to escape to be able to reach their target man? And hence, did his aides abandon their boss for their own safety?

According to some individuals even the scene of the encounter looks suspicious. Was it tampered with? They have questions of the photographs of the slain militant that went viral after the GNLA chief was gunned down. Lying in a forested hill slope, in one photo two plastic bags were clearly seen near an assault rifle while in other photos the plastics bags are not visible? Were the plastics of any significance? Only expert investigators will be able to tell.

The whole state and particularly Garo hills views the death of the GNLA chief as good news. But the serious allegation of politician-militant nexus will remain a mystery forever. With the death of the man who knew the subject best, the Pandora's box will never be opened. The influential and the mighty who patronised militancy will go scot free. This is troubling. It would have been ideal had the 'criminal' been captured. Had he been arrested he could tell it all in court. Is there a conspiracy to eliminate the hard core rebel so that no one knows the truth?

Reduced to a negligible number, Meghalaya's most dreaded outfit might have had its final nail in its coffin. Hope the GNLA, formed in 2009 with the objective of 'sovereign Garoland', by deserted MPS officer, Pakchara R. Sangma alias Champion (currently in jail) and the deceased, Sohan, partly due to the carelessness and unwatchfulness of the state, will hence forth cease to exist. Hope that with the fall of the former ANVC's East Garo Hills area commander who had unleashed a reign of terror since 2009, Garo Hills will breathe easy. Hope the death of the accused of more than two-dozen killings, abductions, extortions, bomb blasts and attacks on security forces and civilians for over 2 decades will bring a sense of justice to the numerous victims. Hope the senseless violence and killings, the fear psychosis and insecurity, the ambushes and encounters, the armed conflict and operations will be the things of the past. Hope 1992 will be marked as

the beginning and 2018 as the end of militancy in this peace loving, beautiful and charming state. Hope the history of militancy and insurgency has ended and an era of peace and freedom has begun.

Hope the youth will now shun violence and focus on education, skills and jobs. Hope the citizens will have a free environment to work for their livelihood, advancement and progress. Hope the government will now be able to channelize resources to education, health, roads, water, electricity, tourism, promotion of arts, culture, sports, music and the whole lot of creative engagements. Hope the young, the old, the sick, the poor, the landless, the homeless, the jobless get much more attention to live a praiseworthy life. Hope the government will not be distracted anymore by 'enemies of the state'.

The 2018 election will be remembered as a bloody election. Earlier the stabbing of PN Syiem's brother in Mawsynram and some minor cases of violence were known. But never in the history of Meghalaya had there been election and party rivalry related deaths! This time two election related violent deaths have taken place within a span of a week. One, an innocent candidate was cold-bloodedly and inhumanly killed while on election trails. A person who stood for what he believed in had to unfortunately pay the ultimate price. A person who dared not to be intimidated by the gun had to make the supreme sacrifice. A father who he decided to fight by the ballot box had to fall victim to the bullets and IED bombs. A complainant against militant intimidation had to be silenced forever. A potential a giant killer had to be brutally killed.

The other death is that of the former GNLA supremo, Sohan D Sohan. While his death, the people of Garo hills hope, will bring lasting peace in the western region of the state yet it is also feared that the mystery of the annoying politico-militant nexus would have died with him. Only the unending questions will remain without answers. Sohan too will go the Fullmoon way.

Yours etc.,  
Gervasius Nongkseh  
West Khasi Hills,  
Nongstoin

### Postal service gone to the dogs

Editor,  
In India, we can't trust what the service providers claim. Most of them are big liars. They are so because we consumers never stand up and protest against them. We just keep enduring their disgusting services. Look at any government public service agencies, they are sure to let you down. Railways, airways, post office, hospital, insurance, telecommunication, or what have you, are usually mammoth service agencies but abnormally inefficient. Negligence and listlessness are their hallmarks.

Today I shall discuss the sorry state of affairs of the post offices in India. The postal department has left many of its believing customers in the lurch. This I'm citing in respect to a private cargo company DHL. About four months back I had sent a speed post document to Tura. I chose

this special service which the Government claims is committed to prompt delivery. And on the very next day, I again had sent parcel with a book to a scholar in Los Angeles, USA. To my surprise that very big parcel of about twenty kg was delivered on the third day in USA. I received the intimation message on my mobile set. But the 50 gram document sent to Tura, within our own state, was delivered only after eleven days. Now how can we expect "acche din" through this frustrating service?

Another latest bombshell! One of my registered packets sent by 'Kaizen Solution' of Nagpur on February 5, has not yet been delivered. One wonders when this smart government at the Centre will smarten up the postal department. Is three and a half years not a very long time to reform the postal department? Until we have the best communication service in the country, it is better if the BJP stops blowing the trumpet of Digital India.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Viaemail

## Politicians Vs Bureaucrats Delhi's ugly power battle

By Insaif

The power battle in Delhi has crossed all limits. The alleged assault on Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash last week by two MLAs during an emergency meeting has led to an ugly face-off between Chief Minister Kejriwal and his bureaucracy, which refuses to die out. In fact, it's become uglier leading to demand for action against the two MLAs who were sent to judicial custody and later released on bail, the IAS Association deciding that officers wouldn't meet or talk even over the phone to Chief Minister Kejriwal, his ministers or MLAs till the CM apologised and a 55-strong police team swooping down on Kejriwal's residence, without intimation to check footage of the 21 CCTV cameras for 'scientific evidence'. While the government employees justify their action saying the assault breaches their faith in the political executive of Delhi, Kejriwal and team deny the altercation and have knocked on Lt Governor Bajjal's door to break the impasse—of mistrust between the two sides. Chances of an early rapprochement don't look too bright. More so, as Kejriwal continues his tirade against the Centre. He accused Modi government of indulging in dadagiri aimed at "insulting and humiliating" him. Sadly, the tu-tu-mein-mein gets worse and it is aam admi who at the end will suffer the most. Does the Executive or the bureaucracy give a damn?

### Rajasthan Stir

Rajasthan has a knack for courting agitations! This time round the BJP-ruled State has egged on the farmers. Led by the All India Kisan Sabha, the farmers have accused the Vasundhara Raje government of reneging on its promise of farm loan waiver. They threatened to lay an indefinite siege on the Assembly on Thursday last, as the budgetary announcement dashed their hopes of getting their rightful dues. The government, however, appears to be spoiling for a fight. As it has been doing over the years with the Jats reservation issue. It has turned down the farmers' demand of a blanket loan waiver and unleashed a crackdown on farmers' leaders, arrested hundreds and asked authorities to ensure they didn't enter capital Jaipur. But the National Highway was brought to a standstill, farmers held protests in various parts of Jaipur and several towns. The simmering anger is far from receding and the BJP, which suffered heavily in the recent bypolls must rethink and act fast, only to avoid a bigger blow.

### Punjab's Revisits Khalistan

Punjab did finally keep its date with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. On Wednesday last, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh did well to take the opportunity and raise the Khalistan issue. Without mincing any words, he sought the Canadian government initiate tough action against 'radical elements' and even handed a list of nine Canada-based operatives allegedly involved in "target killings, hate crimes in Punjab, trying to radicalise the youth and financing and supplying weapons for terrorist activities." Obviously, he was well-prepared for the meeting, despite speculation in the media whether he would or not. Singh even shook hands with 'Khalistani sympathiser' Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, whom he had declined to meet last. At the end, Trudeau not only assured Singh his country didn't support any separatist movement in India or elsewhere, but agreed on strengthening

ties in higher education, technology, scientific research, innovation and skill development. Whether Ottawa delivers, is worth a wait.

### Assam Controversy

Assam is embroiled in an awkward controversy. Army Chief General Bipin Rawat has ruffled feathers of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), forcing its MP Maulana Badruddin to knock on Rashtrapati Bhavan doors. At a recent seminar on North East region, the General made note of population dynamics and singled out the AIUDF. He said if one looks at it, they have grown faster than the BJP over the years. "What will be the state of Assam, we will take a call on it...the demography can no longer be changed..." he lamented. Predictably, Badruddin hit back terming it as a "political statement" and wondered why a party of 'democratic and secular values,' rising faster than BJP, was the General's concern? The indulgence was against Rawat's mandate and urged President Kovind to act. Obviously, the General was hinting at what is suspected, i.e. the AIUDF is behind migration of Muslims from Bangladesh. With the NRC updation underway, the issue is indeed a hot potato.

### TN Filmy Politics

A masala-laden political script is unfolding in Tamil Nadu. With actor-politician Kamal Haasan finally launching his political party Makkal Neethi Mayyam in Madurai on Wednesday last, Thalaiivar Rajinikanth would need to complete his script quickly. He needs to go beyond launching of his website and an Android application "Rajini Mandram", where people can register as members. Plus, will he direct a political party or join the BJP? Indeed, the unfolding plot is unlike a typical film, wherein one rarely sees two super actors playing the lead role. Who of the two will eventually turn out to be the hero and the villain, is another big question. Apparently, fearing an unsavoury twist, Haasan is said to have told his co-star that the two must maintain 'dignity' even if they became rivals later and there should be no room for "abusive politics". This may not click. Today the rivalry between the DMK and AIADMK, founded by film stars CN Annadurai and MG Ramachandran respectively, is bitter and unsavoury, to say the least. Will the two new entrants be able to give a fresh political direction in the southern State and will they co-opt others for blockbuster 2019?

### How Happy Is MP

Madhya Pradesh is raring to know how happy its population is. The BJP-rules State is all set to undertake a pilot project in 10 schools with its own prepared happiness index activities. Under Department Anand, a draft report has been prepared keeping in mind the students' emotional needs and how to improve their personalities so they can lead a meaningful life. Sadly though, the index has a lengthy questionnaire, 168 and a set of 14 domains such as "life satisfaction, relationship, environment, health, governance and administration, education, safety and security, income, infrastructure, transportation, social inclusivity, social and cultural life, time use and meaningful engagement." Experts warn the interviews will take much longer and may not reflect the accurate level of happiness. Thus, the purpose of giving the people a voice and the government getting an idea of what more needs to be done, will get lost in the jumble. Is the government going to miss the woods for the trees? ---INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

### Lets' change the way we vote

Editor,  
Over the last two decades we have witnessed a lot of killings and violence in Garo Hills by militant groups that have no ideology of their own. They are reduced to extortionists who threaten and kill their own people. How many more innocent people have to die in the hands of these heartless minds? February 18 turned out to be a sad and black day for all of us here. As we mourn for the deaths, we all stand by the victims and their families with prayers and candle light vigils but the next day everyone has to move on as if things are back to normal. But no! Things are not normal. Not this time! Jonathone Sangma's death is unacceptable and we don't deserve this kind of brutal killings anymore. Brethrens killing brethrens in their own land! Those violent perpetrators who think that life is only about taking the lives of others must be brought to light. It is time for the government to act.Why are they silent? No serious condemnation was made and

no assurance given that people are in safe hands. Where is the Opposition too? They only remain power hungry and run after campaigns and votes with heavily armed bodyguards blaming other parties and playing cheap politics.

And now is the right time for the public to react. Its time for us the people to decide if we are going to live in fear or in peace. Time for the movement to happen. Time to voice out our anger. It is time to vote wisely because change may not come today, tomorrow or on Feb 27 or even on March 3. Unless we change our representatives and vote persons of humility and integrity who can protect and defend us, we in Garo Hills or elsewhere in the state will never be free from violence. A representative must be a person who will truly work for his people, vouch for them and above all keep the people free from harm. He must also be God-fearing to top it all. Change will happen only when we change the way we vote.

Yours etc.,  
L.A.Sangma  
New Tura

### Divisive politics won't work here!

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily I would to share with our readers my reflection about this 2018 election. This election is an eye opener for us. Never have we seen such an election in recent years. As we draw nearer to the polling day, every one from candidate to party worker has started working round the clock to hook the last fish. We question ourselves why such a pandemonium this time? Big bellies from the state capital have been camping here for days and months. This shows how strategically important the state is. But we should not think that they are going to pitch their camp forever here. They are just like feathers in the wind. If they are really concerned about the state then why do we see them only before elections?

Meghalaya which is rather a peaceful state and has a historically smooth election is today being shaken up. There is a psychological fear being

created in the minds of candidates and voters. Is it because we have to save our food habit or religion or culture? Whatever it is this kind of divisive method is not welcome anywhere. Again, we have no history of hero worship and crowd emotion in this hill state. But today this wave seems to have crept in. Crowd following is always risky. As a people who are 'tip brierw tip blei' we should tell the country and the world that we are a different people.

In all these new phenomena I would like to remind the voters not to get emotional. Let us vote for development and nothing else. Adult franchise is our birth right. Use it responsibly. Let the saying, 'Voters cannot be taken for granted' be true this time around. The small petty gifts should not blind us for five years. Use your finger responsibly. And yes we can. Do it.

And to all those who say 'it's no use voting' may I encourage you to never give up. Your one vote counts. Let us all go to vote and show the world that we can bring change together.

*“The difference between a democracy and a dictatorship is that in a democracy you vote first and take orders later; in a dictatorship you don’t have to waste your time voting.”*

--- Charles Bukowski

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.196 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2018

### Meghalaya votes today

ELECTIONS to the 60 member, Meghalaya Assembly begins at 7 am today. In the fray are 370 candidates of which 32 are women. The Congress has fielded candidates in 59 seats (election in Williamnagar is countermanded due to the death of Jonathone Sangma, the NCP candidate); the BJP in 47, NPP in 52 seats and the regional parties between them are contesting 42 seats. In Garo Hills the mood is sombre following the death of Jonathone Sangma the NCP candidate from Williamnagar. Most of the faces in the fray are tried and tested. So “change” as promised by all political parties seems like a pipe dream. There’s nothing much to celebrate about democracy in Meghalaya. On the contrary people here ought to introspect why democracy has failed their noble ideals.

Political analyst believe the fight is largely between the NPP and Congress in Garo Hills and between the NPP, Congress and regional parties in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The prediction this time is that Meghalaya will have a hung assembly since no party will get an absolute majority. This is a rerun of past elections, barring 2013 when the Congress got 29 seats, two short of an absolute majority. Independents later supported the Congress-led Meghalaya United Alliance (MUA) to form the Government. This time around it will be difficult for the Congress to mop up so many seats as it is also battling anti-incumbency after an eight-year rule. Hence Meghalaya’s next government will be a hotch-potch coalition of parties. Now whether this will result in another period of political chaos is also a moot point.

Whichever way we look at it politicians will continue to have a field day while for the large majority of people February 27 or March 3 will just another ordinary day. Meghalaya needs robust public policies that citizens can engage with and hold the Government accountable. The state has been functioning without an education, health or youth policy for over 45 years. Despite the ban on coal mining by the NGT in 2014 on account of the environmentally destructive and humanly unsafe rat hole mining, the state has failed to come up with a mining policy. This informs us how important governance has been for the Mukul Sangma government. As someone rightly said, “We have been moving on auto-pilot.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Mystery killing of Sohan!

Editor,

The successful tracking down of the alleged killer of Late Jonathone N. Sangma at Dobu, East Garo Hills within a very short time of only 6 days is very hard to believe. The encounter is unlike a South Indian movie where police are unable to track down anything. It is really commendable and the prize goes to SF-10 commandos. But is it not an irony, that the C-I-C of the GNLA, Sohan Shira, who had every time escaped from police dragnet and from any sort of encounter or operation has this time been killed alone without any of his boys turning casualty or being injured? It is unbelievable that the Police Department which could not even land a scratch on Sohan Shira in the last 8 years have devised strategies at lightning speed to kill him following the demand for CBI/NIA enquiry into the killing of Late J.N.Sangma.

In Garo Hills this episode and the chain of events have opened up a whole new chapter to ponder upon. Everyone now links the killing of Jonathone Sangma and Sohan Shira to a mastermind

they call “The Boss”. It cannot also be ruled out that these killings happened because of political rivalry and an attempt to disrupt the Assembly elections in Williamnagar where Ms Deborah Marak was certain to win this time. So why should a winning candidate invite havoc to herself by committing such an uncalculated, foolish act? Then, the Boss must have perpetrated the crime, taking advantage of the rivalry and FIR of Jonathone Sangma against Deborah Marak. The Boss had tried to disguise the whole scenario by this condemnable modus operandi to prevent Deborah Marak from winning the Assembly seat. The Boss must have used GNLA to execute his master plan, but when Deborah Marak and others demanded a CBI or NIA inquiry the boss has completely silenced the sole witness against him.

It is in the interest of the State and of the nation to dig out the buried crime and criminals and to bring the case to a logical end. There are questions on the politico-officio-militant nexus and many unanswered questions that must be answered. Truth will emerge only if the entire

The vision of the Meghalaya Board of School Education (hereafter to be referred as Board) is that, "it is committed to quality education for the holistic development of all students, culminating in attaining excellence in their lives, so that they will be a blessing to the society and the world at large." The textbook(s) of the Board, because of the distortions of historical facts, is/are examples of self-defeating the goal. The distortion of historical facts is 'historical negationism'. It means an illegitimate distortion which amounts to mishandling of the historical material and the abuse of the historical facts. When such distortions (deliberate or accidental) are observed in the text books, irrespective of the class in which the book is used, they become a matter of great concern for the students, parents, teachers and the academic fraternity at large. In the cases of distortions it is assumed that the imparting of knowledge is being misused for selfish goals.

The recent newspaper report regarding the Social Science textbook used for the Class IX students raises various questions about the vision and mission of the Board itself. In the book entitled Core Social Science for Class IX which is suggested by the Board for the students, information is given in a manner that fits the definition and concept of historical negationism. Few examples among many can be sorted out here. In the chapter "Freedom Fighters and Prominent Personalities of Meghalaya", there are wrong spellings of the names of the people and places in the book (Tirof Sing is spelled as Tirat Singh, Nongkhlaw is spelled as Nunlow, He is described as the chief of Hima Khadsawphra whereas in reality he was the chief of the state of Nongkhlaw - See page 65). This clearly depicts the copy-paste-editing/writing approaches of the author/editor that without any effort to check the historical facts. Pa Togan Sangma is being described as the freedom fighter of the Jaintia whereas in reality he was the freedom fighter of the Garo community (See page 67). To add to the problem, is the lack of chronological sense since the year and period of the struggle led by the freedom fighters is not mentioned.

# Quit Playing with Students’ Future

By Dr Rusievan Shangpliang

The major drawback is that there is no relevance in the topics. What has the Ahom Revolt got to do with the chapter? (See page 65) Do the authors have knowledge of history? Are they well versed with the historiographical trends in writing the history of the state of Meghalaya? Are they trying to mislead the students or alter history? Again, this negligence cannot be treated as a misinterpretation of facts; rather it indicates the motive of write-to-earn

from the tree, earrings, and so on." - See page 329).

In this book there are very few chapters that contribute to the development of reasoning or ideas or rational evaluation of different aspects of human life that would develop the students' thinking processes. It is surprising that topics such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, PAN Card and Adhaar Card, Credit Cards and Debit Cards, Demonetisation of Currency etc., gained more importance without any

*There is no guideline that gives the authors the authority to categorize between the prominent and the non-prominent. On what basis, credibility and criteria does one require to be considered prominent?*

profit approach.

In the topic "Prominent Personalities of Meghalaya", (See pages-67-71) the authors and the editor highlight some of the personalities that they think have contributed to the development of Meghalaya. It seems the authors are either influenced by their personal affiliations or by those whom they are getting benefits from. It is to be noted that the authors plainly ignored most of the people who have dedicated their lives for the welfare and upliftment of the state. Besides, the work and contribution of some individuals among those mentioned in the book, are still in the process of being questioned and yet to be validated. There is no guideline that gives the authors the authority to categorize between the prominent and the non-prominent. On what basis, credibility and criteria does one require to be considered prominent? This reveals that a great deal of subjectivity exists which has overlooked historical and factual information. Besides other misleading information, the book has wrongly presented the cultural aspect of the Khasi and Jaintia people by providing false information ("They have their own style of making gold, silver, necklaces, gold chains,

critical analysis. While dwelling on these issues, a greater amount of subjectivity is present and this clearly reflects the narrow approach and attitude of the author(s) concerned and the defeat of the vision of the Board. Moreover the grammar and language of the book is horrendous which would clearly hamper the students' learning process and knowledge.

Sincere thanks goes to those concerned individuals who brought this up to the awareness of the general public through the use of social media and other means. Thanks to organisations such as the Hynniewtrep Youth Council and the Khasi Students' Union who swiftly made a move as soon as the news spread to question this matter. However, the sale of the book cannot be stopped. While addressing the complaints, the Board clarified by putting the blames on technical errors and typos and ignored the fact that it was negligence and unprofessionalism on its part. The question is- Should we plainly accept this clarification? Who is responsible for such negligence? Is it the Board's teams that are going through the manuscripts submitted by the publishers or is it the Directorate of Educational Research and Training that helped in checking the

manuscripts? Is there something behind the submission of manuscripts? Why is the information and credentials regarding the authors and editors missing from the book? What are the procedures adopted by the Board in the preparation of a book? Is education in the state under threat? Why are the opinions and suggestions of the experts in their respective disciplines not taken into account before the book is published? If the book is going to be reviewed that means a new version has to come up. The concern here is who will bear the expenses of those who have bought the book? And more importantly, how will the accountability of the wrongdoings and attempts to play with the future of the students be fixed? Who will take a call?

It is a humble request to teachers of other disciplines to check the information in this book and other textbooks that are authorized by the Board for schools from Classes 1 to 10 and bring any matter to the notice of the concerned authorities and public as well so that such things will not happen in the future. Students are sent to school to gain knowledge. Who would have thought that the books could be misleading them? The trust that the students have on the books and on the teachers who use them to guide the students should be built on solid foundation. What will happen to the future of our students if the level of distortion is passed by blind eyes? Moreover, the drop out of about one lakh students from school without completing their School Leaving Certificate exam is taken lightly by the Board. Is it always the students' fault?

This is a matter of concern that needs immediate attention. But as of now, serious dedication is needed to be given to the ones who are still attending school before the number of drop-outs increase to two lakhs.

(The writer is Assistant Professor Dept. of History Synod College, Shillong)

# Forest Cover of India: Latest Report

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

## Beating the Rhetoric

The 1990's heralded a new era in human history. Technological advancement especially software industry was one of them. Among the many other terms that mankind began acquainting itself with another term that began to dominate discourses was environmental protection. Since the advent of Industrial Revolution, nations around the world have raced to advance themselves and their economy with scant regard for the natural environment. This led to rapid destruction of the natural environment until the 1990's when leaders across the world began to recognise environmental destruction and climate change as potential problems. Since then in the last twenty years the discourse has shifted to

(geographical area) under forest cover and it looks well on course to achieving that target. According to the report the total forest cover of the country stands at 708,273 sq.km (about 21.54% of India's total GA) while tree cover stands at 93,815 sq.km (about 2.85% of the total GA).

The composition of the increase of 8021 sq km in forest and tree cover is this: while forest cover grew by 6778 sq km during the same time tree cover grew by 1243 sq km. The increase in mangrove cover stands at 181 sq km thus taking the total mangrove area in the country to 4921 sq kms. The composition of dense forest, moderately dense forest and open forest according to the latest report stands at 98,158 sq. km (2.98% of GA), 308,318

*Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh in terms of area. However in a worrisome trend among the top five states only Orissa has not decreased its total forest cover in the preceding two years. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala are the three states where forest cover grew the most while the decrease was most in the three northeastern states of Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.*

newer ways of promoting development with terms like sustainable development being the key. Nations have also focussed on strengthening environmental regulations and establishing new targets like arresting the loss of natural forest cover and reversing the trend.

India too has not been lagging in its efforts to conserve the environment. Since the 1990s the Ministry of Environment has become a pivotal Ministry which is consulted when policies are framed. India has embarked on successful conservation models including successful ones like the Rhino Conservation Project of Kaziranga National Park. Further projects like Project Tiger and Project Snow Leopard have given a strong impetus to conservation efforts. Another aspect on which India has worked diligently is increasing forest cover. As population of the country continues to boom, and land comes under further pressure it is natural that forest land and natural habitats will feel pressure of land. Land is needed for housing, for hospitals for factories and schools. It is a resource which is limited in nature. Despite such constraints India has continued to work successfully towards increasing forest cover every year.

The Indian State of Forest Report released every two years gives an idea of the environmental health of the country. The latest status report on forest cover in the country speaks volumes about India's conservation efforts. In its latest report it has been observed that India's forest and tree cover has risen by 8,021 sq. km, up 1% since 2015, to 802,088 sq. Km. This is about 24.39% of the total geographical area of the country. The target that was set in the early 2000s was that India should have at least 33% of its total GA

*(Views expressed by the author are personal)*

episode is investigated by the central agencies. We no longer want this ugly master plan to be investigated by the State agency.

Let there be Satyameva Jayate!

Yours etc,  
Dogrik Marak  
Williamnagar

### Sohan Shira's death and unanswered questions

Editor,

Apropos the lead story in Sunday's edition of "The Shillong Times" I wish to pose a question whether by killing Sohan D Shira, GNLA Chief, militancy in Garo Hills will come to an end. To my mind, by killing the GNLA chief, GNLA may be weakened considerably but I cannot say whether GNLA will ultimately be brought to its knees. The survival of the militant organisation will largely depend on the resources, ability and number of cadres who are still remaining in the outfit. But from police sources the outfit, much before the killing of Sohan, was already shrinking in resources, ability and number. The only

dynamism and indomitable spirit was that of Sohan who still had the fire power. Hence, with the departure of Sohan the organisation will naturally dwindle and its cadres may be bound to surrender before the law enforcing authorities.

The other point is that the killing of Sohan has sent a strong message to the militants of Garo Hills and elsewhere in Meghalaya, that there is no place for living outlawed lives. Either you fall in line or you will be wiped out. In the same way the message is loud and clear to other militant outfits operating elsewhere in Garo Hills that the earlier they surrender, the better for them. Hence the killing will herald peaceful times in that part of the state. But, the killing itself was a heinous crime. Sohan is a person like anybody else. He had his body and his soul. Why did the SF-10 cadres choose to shoot him down instead of nabbing him alive? Was it not possible? Could not his group be overpowered by other methods or were various tactics or methods exhausted? Were our security forces trained only to shoot outlaws down? If that is the case is

SF-10 created purely for eliminating unwanted people? Where are the personal bodyguards of Sohan and his cadres who were with him? Was he alone at the spot? Why did the others escape or were made to escape? The incident has thrown too many questions than giving answers.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Shillong-2.

### Amusing mud-slinging by political parties

Editor,  
The political mudslinging drama between the BJP, NPP and the Congress and even between regional parties such as the PDF and the UDP-HSPDP alliance continues unabated because these parties have nothing of substance to talk about. Having said that, except for the UDP that has committed to make the Lokayukta functional as per its mandate, other political parties, regional and national have not spoken a word on this subject for reasons best known to them. The interstate border dispute

doesn't seem to bother the Congress or the NPP leaving aside the BJP which has spelt out its objectives. Issues such as employment generation, market development for our rural folks, making our highways safer, planning out a tourism policy, health, education, farmers policy etc....and a pro-environmental industrial policy are much needed but these parties choose to be blind or neglect them. Even on socio-economic security and child labour, integrating school drop-outs and assistance for women engaged in menial and hard jobs to eke out a living or even stressing on entrepreneurship development are not spoken of. No Party has listed these issues as part of their election manifesto. Most parties are simply copying and pasting stuff from past manifestos with just a bit of shake-up.

Yours etc...  
Dominic S. Wankhar,  
Via email

**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.**

"A lifetime of happiness? No man alive could bear it; it would be hell on earth."

--- George Bernard Shaw

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.197 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

### Meghalaya votes

AS of writing this editorial, voting in Meghalaya hovered at 77%. The final tally may take the figure slightly higher but not to the tally of the 2013 election which stood at 88.82%. Several reasons account for this low voter turnout. Firstly, in several polling booths across the state there were initial glitches with the EVMs. Polling in most booths could not start at 7 am the scheduled time but started at 8.00 or 8.15 am by which time the EVMs had started functioning. Reports coming in from the rural areas suggest that people who had queued up to vote went away after standing in the queue for hours and not being able to vote. The second reason could be a lack of interest in voting itself as it has apparently not met people's aspirations. Third, the choice of candidates left many constituents disappointed.

Be that as it may, this election might spring some surprises and political parties that were cocksure that they fielded the right candidate might just land a slap on their faces. Those assessed as "winnable" candidates might not cross the finishing line. Fact is no one has as yet been able to scientifically assess voter behaviour. The public mood swings like a pendulum gone crazy until the very last moment. Surprisingly, most voters spoken to in the long queues at different polling stations did not even know the names of all the candidates from their respective constituencies or the parties they contested from. They had decided who to vote for and only knew the name and symbol of that candidate. They did not even bother to know the antecedents of the other candidates. That's an informed electorate for you! The decision to vote a certain candidate is weighed against many factors personal and political. Most voters said they voted a candidate who could be trusted to stand by them at their hour of need; who is approachable and helpful. These are the three defining characteristics listed out by most voters. They did not bother much about party or ideology. And this has been the reason for Meghalaya's fractured mandate in all elections, after 1972.

Will the low voter turnout benefit any political party? Well, March 3, is not very far away and until then the curtains close on the election extravaganza.

### LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

## State Govt to set up 3 Adm. Units along Assam border

The Meghalaya Government has decided to set up Administrative Units at three strategic locations along the Assam-Meghalaya border in order primarily to check encroachment from Assam, and instill confidence into the local people. The Administrative Units will be

set up at Aradonga in the West Khasi Hills, Khanapara in the Easat Khasi Hills, and Khanduli in the Jaintia Hills, according to official sources. Preparations are already under way, and the offices are expected to become functional by late June or early July.

# Elephant in the room

By Edelbert Kharsyntiew

The election room, to be precise. Many have recognized it and called it by name. But it is still there, and I feel constrained to address it, not with arrogance or spite in my heart, but with sympathy, albeit with honesty. I'll go backward from 2014 when the Modiwave happened to the unforgettable 1992, when the Babri Masjid was demolished, to 1990 when Advani kicked off his rath yatra to support the Ram temple movement, further back to the 1950s when BJP was birthed from its parents the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the RSS. Mookerjee formed the BJS in 1951, and when he died in 1953, the RSS elements within the BJP ousted MC Sharma the elected successor to Mookerjee to install their own man Upadhyaya as leader who led till 1968 when Vajpayee took over. The moderate strategy of Vajpayee did not help, and popular sentiments pushed Advani and his hardline Hindutva agenda to the forefront. Through him, it culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid, when a rally of more than a lakh RSS, VHP and BJP activists combined turned violent that resulted in the destruction of the said mosque in Ayodhya.

Further still to 1925, when the RSS (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* or the National Patriotic Organization) was founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar from Nagpur, who had learned revolutionary techniques from the secret societies in Bengal where he was a student, to overthrow British rule in India. After he read V. D. Savarkar's "Hindutva" published in 1923, and personally met Savarkar in 1925 he changed course and adopted Savarkar's idea which was to set the house in order before they even think about overthrowing the British. This would be in the form of strengthening the Hindu society through reviving its religion and culture, which had been battered and bruised under outside influences, mainly Islam and Christianity. He conducted camps and trained the pracharaks or key workers who were sent to various places starting with Benaras Hindu University etc., to establish shakhas or Hindu theological schools for learning of Vedic texts. For perspective's sake, there were 51,335 shakhas in the country as of August 2015, with UP as the highest at 8,000 and 46 in Meghalaya. The pracharaks practiced renunciation from family ties and consecrated themselves to the cause of the RSS. The first experiment was in 1927 on Lakshmi Puja in Nagpur, when Hedgewar took around

100 trained pracharaks into the Muslim area, and when attacked, they fought back, resulting in mass exodus of Muslims from the area. This marked the first organized Hindu resistance and catapulted the RSS image and consolidated its position. They were on the right track, had their priorities right, and it explains why the RSS never participated in the Quit India movement against the British. These leaders were smart and chose their targets well. They knew it was futile to antagonize the British. This also explains why Savarkar pleaded mercy from the British government when he was jailed and vowed not to involve in anti-government activities. He had higher goals.

MS Golwalkar, another Maratha, became the longest serving head of the RSS from 1940 to 1973. His thoughts are compiled in two books - "Bunch of Thoughts" and "We, or our nationhood defined". He became a sanyasi in 1936, and was appointed leader of the RSS by Hedgewar in 1940, bypassing many seniors. Hedgewar's choice was proven right, since RSS grew under Golwalkar, from 1 lakh to a million members with 50 front organizations. Golwalkar's views were clear. He rejected socialism and communism and openly warned against the threat from Islam and Christianity. He said "The non-Hindu people of Hindustan must either adopt Hindu culture and languages, must learn and respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but of those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture...in a word they must cease to be foreigners; Or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizens' rights". He rejected the Constitution and the national flag. He somehow was inspired by Hitler's nationalistic fervor and treatment of the Jews, and applied it to 'indian Muslims' whom he saw as a 'foreign body' embedded in and destabilizing Hindu society. However, he later expressed appreciation for the Jews because of their cultural wealth and a revived language. The RSS's opposition of Gandhi can easily be understood, his pro-Muslim stance deeply resented, and Nathuram Godse - a former RSS member, who shot the Mahatma dead, thought he did the Hindu nation justice

by killing the Mahatma. The independence of India in 1947 therefore, was set in a context of tremendous cultural upheaval. On one hand, the RSS and its affiliates that wanted India to go the opposite direction to that of Pakistan, while the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, spearheaded the independence movement with over 70 million participants, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, wanted a secular India. Shashi Tharoor, in a recent interview by the Pakistani channel most succinctly crystallized the picture. He said "there are two different logics at work. One, seeing nationhood as in adhering in faith, and the other is in seeing a large diverse nation of people ... of caste, of creed, of color, of culture, of cuisine, of conviction, of costumes and of custom, and still rally around the consensus. The Indian Nationalist Movement ... never accepted the logic that because Pakistan has been created as a state for Muslims, that what remains must be necessarily a state for Hindus".

This was the India that Jawaharlal Nehru presented to the Northeast leaders at the Khasi National Durbar Hall, Mawkhar, while he appealed for them to join India prior to 1947. Today, the scene is changed, totally but gradually. Would the Northeast Christians have accepted the current notion of India way back in 1947? If not then, why now?

The world has changed in 2018, and the RSS has managed to turn the tide for the Hindu society, rising so to speak from the ashes of brutalized history, into becoming the largest organization in the world, and Hinduism as an aggressive proselytizing faith, at par, if not more than Islam and Christianity. The New Age philosophy that took the West by storm is basically Hindu with advaita or monism as the core concept. It was a convenient marriage of western materialism with eastern mysticism. The industrialized West of the 20th century, embraced modernism and abandoned its Judeo-Christian heritage. It prospered materially, but at the cost of its soul. It had rejected the personal, law-giving God of the Bible and came to India in search of spirituality. The Beatles etc led the way and hordes of young hippies, most of whom from affluent background, came to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh (later Osho) and other gurus, to learn yoga,

or the discovery of self through altered consciousness. Many thinkers like Francis Schaeffer and others saw a parallel in the attainment of altered consciousness through yoga and hallucinogenic drugs. Having achieved transcendental enlightenment, or the monistic/unitarian merging of atman and Brahman, they returned home and spread the idea. The Western door was opened to eastern mysticism, and thus the New Age was born. Hollywood movies buffed need only to listen to Jim Carrey to fully grasp what eastern monistic enlightenment is all about.

But however attractive advaita monism is, it is not palatable to the dualistic Abrahamic belief systems, where there is a clear cut distinction between Creator and creation, and any claim to divinity, with the exception of Jesus Christ, is nothing short of blasphemy. And worship of the divine manifestations in creation - whether animal, or tree or stone - while valid to the monistic adherents, is idolatrous to the latter. So the twin do not meet. RSS ideals are intrinsically opposed to the Judeo-Christian belief system of the Northeast. Having said that, I feel indebted to the Hindu friends who helped the liberalized Westerners to rediscover their theistic roots. Ironically, the trend has turned full circle. Rajiv Malhotra wrote about the U-Turn Theory, in which he demonstrates that the Westerners turned atheistic, then discovered spirituality through the Hindu gurus, and then turned back to Jesus. In spite of their best efforts, somehow the gurus could not fully hinduize westerners from a Judeo-Christian background. There are just not enough 'poison pills'.

Finally, the best way forward therefore is to live and let live. Let belief systems thrive or collapse based on their own innate strength and appeal, without the State machinery favoring one above the other. Tell the truth, and leave it to the individuals to decide. Let the NPP also tell the truth that they are an ally of the BJP and member of the NDA from its inception, and the fact that they are part of the NEDA and share power in Manipur. Let us not hesitate to call the elephant in the room by name.

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# National Science Day Celebration

By TFL Mawlong

It makes a lot of sense to think globally and act locally, and that is what sustainable development is all about. The idea of sustainable development is not new although the term "sustainable" and "sustainability" as such first appeared not so long ago in Oxford Dictionary in the second half of the 20th century. Plato in the 5th century and Pliny the older and Strabo in the 1st century, talked about different types of environmental degradation from human activities such as farming, logging, and mining. They also recommended that we used sustainable practices to maintain the youthfulness of mother earth. And in modern times the discussions on sustainable development happen far too frequently. Every year there are innumerable talks on sustainability at national, regional and international platforms.

Science is increasingly being called to produce knowledge and technology that promote sustainability. And this year the theme of our National Science Day celebration is "Science and Technology for a sustainable future". It goes without saying that the role of science in our society has never been more important.

There are all these workshops and seminars on sustainable development that we can count but worryingly, we are sidetracking or perhaps taking for granted certain things that should be the

awareness of scientific knowledge and technology. It can motivate the nation especially the youth in schools toward scientific thinking and practices. However, like all those big and dramatic motivations we get from films like "Rocky," we may be inspired for several days, but the excitement stirred by the program wears off rather quickly when confronted by the day-to-day reality of a scientifically backward society.

What can effectively drive youth to think scientifically and live scientifically is the small and mundane motivation which can come from the classroom every day. To motivate the youth it is important that school teachers engage in meaningful discussions with the students on a regular basis about the implication of scientific findings and concepts. Science needs to appeal to the youth not just because of job prospects but also of all the benefits that come in its package. As educators, we need to push students to scientific discussions. But for that, we need to first demystify science. Educators need to present science in an attractive and stimulating fashion. We need to stop teaching science in a dry, ineffective, semi-educated and boring way. We need to articulate the concepts clearly, innovatively and effectively. And educators should lead students to learn science "actively by

**The idea of sustainable development is not new although the term "sustainable" and "sustainability" as such first appeared not so long ago in Oxford Dictionary in the second half of the 20th century. Plato in the 5th century and Pliny the older and Strabo in the 1st century, talked about different types of environmental degradation from human activities such as farming, logging, and mining.**

keys in the episode. "How informed are we, and how scientific is our thinking and lifestyle?" The uninformed mass is least caring about sustainability. Also in a democracy, the uninformed electorate invite all sorts of unquestioned agenda as we witness in different election manifestoes this election. In fact, and it is a no-brainer that one of the biggest fears of failing to ensure a sustainable future is the unscientific and uninformed mass, not the knowledge of science.

There has been an increase in the frontiers of knowledge regarding sustainable growth and development but unfortunately, the downward filtration to the masses is rather slow in our society. More unfortunate is the assumption that scientific knowledge leads automatically to widespread acceptance by the mass through some yearly programs. Clearly, it doesn't work. As a society, we continue to think and live traditionally or primitively in survival mode, as one of the most unscientific society in the world if we don't count the primitive forest tribes in

Tongo, Amazon, Chotanagpur, Andaman and Nicobar, etc. Our acceptance of scientific knowledge is very low, except of course when coming to technological gadgets like the smart-phones, computers, and cars etc, which like a vampire are sucking the life out of us. The greatest benefit that science education can bring is when it increases public understanding and awareness. Programs like the "National Science Day" can contribute a lot to public

doing" not "passively by reading" of class notes. Unfortunately, education in Meghalaya is one of the worst, especially at the college level.

Lastly, to paraphrase Yuval Noah Harari, author of the international bestsellers "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind and Homo Deus", "Traditionally life has been divided into two main parts: a period of learning followed by a period of working. In the first part of life you build a stable identity and acquire personal and professional skills; in the second part of life you earn a living and contribute to society. By 2040, this traditional model will become obsolete, and the only way for humans to stay in the game will be to keep learning throughout their lives and to reinvent themselves again and again."

In the spirit of what Yuval Noah says above, if we continue to live traditionally, and are averse learning and adapting, as a society, "we will not only fail to meet the needs of the present we will also compromise the ability of future generation to meet their needs". The keys to scientific practice are continual learning and a scientific thinking, and the key to learning and scientific thinking is a sound scientific education.

(You may also read the article "Celebrating National Science Day" by TFL Mawlong published in The Shillong Times Newspaper On Feb 28, 2017. The link to the article is <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2017/02/28/celebrating-national-science-day/>)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Who will address income inequality in Meghalaya?

Editor,  
The manifestos of different political parties for the ensuing Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Elections, 2018 do not address the issue of increased inequalities of incomes and assets in Meghalaya. In the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, all countries unilaterally condemned inequality globally and in their own countries and region. One percent of the world population which is classed as top rich received 22% of the global incomes. When Meghalaya was created in 1972, there were very few rich people but after 46 years of statehood, there are now about 0.30% very rich families. (152 candidates contesting MLA election, 2018 are crorepati - ST 23.02.2018). Middle class families have not increased much compared to very rich people. The low income group in the rural sector are

amongst the 85% of the total rural families. The level of Below Poverty Line (BPL) in the urban agglomeration of the State indicates a significant downward trend of only 9.5% whereas, the BPL families in rural Meghalaya are still continuing in the range of 45% to 50%. The focus of changing governments or changing politics in Meghalaya should be on bridging the inequality of incomes and assets of the very rich and very poor people. Policies and programmes by the new state government must adopt stringent measures to reduce extreme wealth and put a check on tax evasion. Public revenues are to be used to improve basic living conditions and facilities of citizens in the rural areas and the urban slums; to mobilise better wages and working conditions to reduce social and economic discrimination.

In my short tenure in the District Administration of Ri-Bhoi District, where the land is very fertile and known as the Rice Bowl of Meghalaya, the district per

capita income is still at the level of the most economically backward. Changing politics/governments should not be only on routine anti-incumbency and a lip service of improving infrastructure, project sectors, tourism, health, education, etc but a mission to uplift the economic development of the very low income group.

Yours etc.,  
WL Lyngdoh,  
Via email

## Banks need a paradigm shift

Editor,  
In his article, "He robbed PNB but blamed it for destroying his 'brand'" (ST, Feb 24, 2018), Amlan Home Chowdhury has underscored a glaring fact - "Unbelievable it may sound but the "Economic Powerhouse India", as dubbed by the current Modi led government at the Centre, witnessed 25,600 cases of bank frauds totalling Rs. 1.79 billion up to December 21, 2017." As a matter of fact, macro bank defaulters are modern bank

dacoits. They have been looting astronomical amounts of public money in a country where 48.2 million children have stunted growth as a result of malnutrition and hunger. It is no wonder why India further slides two more ranks from 79 to 81 in just one year in recently published Corruption Perception Index 2017.

In a recent interview, Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh touched a very important point when he said, "We lend money without collateral or any guarantee, and we haven't had a problem of getting the money back. So I see that entire financial system rejects more than half of the population of the entire world that's the root cause of poverty." We know that Yunus gave micro loans to the poor and even to beggars through the Grameen Bank and the pay back rate of such loans was highly satisfactory. It stands in total contrast to the pay back rate of macro credits. Macro credits have indeed created huge bad loans amounting to Rs. 2.86

lakh crore in just one financial year in 2016 - 17 itself. Now, Nirav Modi's Rs. 11,400 crore PNB fraud triggers an economic reign of terror in our country.

It is interesting that we are very severe when it comes to a poor pickpocket, but we are not showing such an emotion in the case of perpetual bank frauds through which our own money are being siphoning off. And it is a new normal that we, the victims, should be penalised for the loot of our own money in a number of ways like penalty for not having minimum balance in a bank account, lower interest rates on EPF, GPF and bank accounts and high rate of inflation in essential commodities, education and health expenditures.

Though such adjectives as anti-nationals and terrorists are freely being used in our everyday vocabulary even to describe those who raise a voice of dissent, those financial terrorists have not yet been described as such. Things have come to such a pass that Nirav Modi has recently been mentioned as a gentleman!

But this cannot go on

and on. Our banking sector must have a paradigm shift in their policy to replace macro credits by micro loans for farming, cottage and small enterprises that mainly contribute to current livelihoods in our country. It will generate more employment and thus boost the market by enhancing the purchasing power of the masses. We must create, so to speak, an employment bridge that can connect excess food and hungry mouths. That bridge can only be built with the help of labour intensive technology, land reforms and micro loans. This trident can banish poverty and hunger and improve India's abysmal 131st position in Human Development Index.

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.