

“The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.”

--- Isaac Asimov

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.319

SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 1, 2019

Saving water, helping life

WARS of the future will be fought over the issue of water – this warning is in the air for quite some time. With major change in weather patterns and Monsoon spread of rains, India is currently staring at a serious water crisis. Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave vent to the fears for the future when he spoke of this at his revived Mann Ki Baath this Sunday, and stressed that the efforts of the Jal Shakti ministry should be complemented with valued support from the citizenry. India is sounding alarm bells about the worsening scenario, evident also in the century's worst situation in Chennai and the mega city of Bengaluru contemplating a five-year halt to apartment construction in view of the terrible water shortage. Some 50 per cent of India is now staring at drought. The North-Eastern states are also increasingly facing water scarcity. The Prime Minister's stress is rightly on conserving water – rather than allowing rain water to mostly return to the seas through our river systems. He has noted that only 8 per cent of the water received from rain is harvested and the rest goes largely waste apart from providing instant help to farming activities. Several villages are digging rainwater pits, as in Andhra Pradesh, to conserve water and this has helped promote agricultural activities on a long-term basis. The Centre's rural employment guarantee scheme includes such initiatives though there is the scope for widening such efforts.

There was below average rainfall in the last monsoon season. This time too, midway through the season, deficient rainfall is reported from several regions. Indian agriculture is dependent heavily on monsoon rains and notably agriculture contributes some 18 per cent of the nation's GDP and 58 per cent of the employment opportunities. All these depend on the availability of water. Even drinking water sources are drying up and the levels of ponds and lakes steadily coming down, year after year. Delhi-NRC region is stressed due to water scarcity. States like Rajasthan, parts of which are deserts, have undertaken intense tree-plantation drives as also improvements in upkeep of water bodies, bore-well recharge and widening of water catchment areas under the Jal Shakti schemes. Other states too would need to take more active involvement in such efforts. With a steady growth in population, India's water demand is set to double in another 10 years, as a NITI Ayog study reported recently. The PM's call for mass participation in water conservation must be taken by one and all with all its seriousness.

Minors involved in flesh trade in Jaiñtia Hills

By H H Mohrmen

Recently, West Jaiñtia hills district and Jowai town in particular has been in the news regarding a crime that occurred at Mihmyntdu, a village in the suburbs of the District Headquarter. The credit goes to the police of West Jaiñtia Hills District for being able to unearth the flesh trade ring which has been operating in the District for quite some time now. Those involved in the crime were booked but the question that remains unanswered is about the victims of the crime.

Of course prostitution is not a new trade; it is one of the oldest concerns that humans have faced since time immemorial and not very long ago such cases were also reported from the East Jaiñtia hills, during the hey-day of coal business. The question is why this particular case grabbed headlines and that too for several days consecutively? What is so special about this particular case that it caught the interest of the people for a considerable period of time?

It was reported that as many as 24 sex workers were involved in the recent case of flesh trade near Jowai, and what is utterly shocking is the fact that 9 out of 24 females who were engaged in the trade were minors. If this is not a cause of alarm for the community then this society is incapable of comprehending the gravity of this case. Ignorance is not bliss in this case. There were questions raised that as to why only clients who use their services were arrested, while the sex workers were allowed to go free? The point is because they are still minors and it is a crime to have sexual intercourse with minors even with their consent.

It is of course no surprise if adult women are engaged in the trade, but this flesh trade case is different because minor girls aged between 16 and 18 were involved in the illegal activity. The police were able to uncover the case after they received an FIR filed by the family of one

missing girl and this led them to the trail of a business which also involved women who run this business. It was reported that the FIR was also filed one month after the girl had disappeared from the place where she lived and once the police found the lead, they uncovered the underbelly of the crime which runs deep in the society.

The truth that as many as nine minors were involved in the trade should be a cause of grave concern for every right thinking citizen of this state. The question is, why would minor girls have to involve in a trade such as this? We have heard stories that women were forced into the sex trade because of circumstances which compel them to do so. Most often single mothers who have no other means to support their family are found to engage in the activity. There are also stories of women who are shunned by their families or stigmatized by the society who end up in prostitution, but the question is why would young girls engage in the act?

Perhaps initially, these minors were forced into prostitution, but what about later or the subsequent episodes? It could be about money, but still one fails to understand why they have to sell themselves that too at a very young age for the sake of money. What compels them to take this far-reaching step is a question that every one of us needs to ask and try to find answers to. But whatever the reason, the fact that minors were also engaged in the activity, the clients and the people who run this trade should be held responsible for forcing minor girls into the crime.

In the course of conversations there are people who suggest that perhaps, if the trade is legalised then it would

help reduce the number of rape cases which have been occurring very frequently in the state. Well, that is a wild conjecture. This debate has been going on for ages, but even if it is legalised, it is still illegal to use minor girls and boys in the trade. With regards to this particular case, the need of the hour is to make men folk and the society as a whole aware, that it is a crime to have sexual relationships with minors.

Some weeks ago I met a social worker who works on drug addiction. She informed me that some of the women who are involved in the case were her patients. Now this adds another dimension to the already complex problem. If some of the victims are also drug users then the other cause of concern for those who follow this case is the spread of HIV AIDS. Jaiñtia Hills both East and West already have a considerable numbers of people affected with the disease and this numbers is increasing every day. It is common knowledge that sex trade and drugs are a dangerous concoction, therefore this case is very serious and should be a matter of grave concern for the state and its people.

It is also heartening to know that the Police of West Jaiñtia Hills have taken the initiative to curb drugs menace which is rampant in the society, and now with this development the Police will have to work harder to keep the society safe. But the question is whether the Police alone can tackle this problem without the support of the society? Or is it just the responsibility of the police to solve a problem as big as this?

The question for the concerned citizens of the society is : What are we going to do now? It is easy to just blame the victims and their families for what has happened and abandon them altogether. But is it right to put the blame for what has happened squarely on the victims and their families? What about the

society? What have we done to protect the minors and the most vulnerable members of our society? Have we done enough to prevent minor girls from getting introduced to crimes such as this?

There is a famous African adage which says: 'It takes the whole village to raise a child,' and there is so much truth in the maxim. This same idea that we all belong to one community and we are responsible for the wellbeing of all, used to prevail in the Khasi Pnar society, but now that shared responsibility is gradually vanishing.

A boy was once brought to the village court for stealing a loaf of bread. When the judge heard the case, the boy told him that he stole the bread because he had not eaten for days together. When the judge pronounced his order, he got the boy punished for the crime he had committed, but he also fined, the leaders of the community and all those present in the court that day. In his order he said, "I fine you all because what kind of village is this, where a boy has to steal to feed himself? We are part of the society and we are responsible for the wellbeing of its members.

From what was reported, it is obvious that the community, the churches and other stake holders have failed them. We have failed them once, can we fail them again? The issue of minors getting into sex trade should not be the concern of the Police, the NGO which runs Child Line or the women police of Jowai only; it should be a collective responsibility of each and every one of us. We used to be proud of our tribal social structure which serves as a buffer of support and sustains the society. Our common goal is 'ka bhalang ka imlang sahang' (common good of all). We need to go back to our roots and reclaim what we have lost. It is all there in the society, we only need scratch a little and rekindle the spirit of belongingness in the tribal society.

Budget Focus

Revenue, the US & savings

By Shivaji Sarkar

The coming Budget has many expectations. More so, after presenting the interim budget, the then Finance Minister Piyush Goyal hinted that after returning to power the Narendra Modi government would give more relief to taxpayers in the main budget. Normally, a pre-election interim budget gets the final nod with minimum touches after polls. Would it be any different?

That is the great expectation. Many expect that it may not be so. The sops have already been announced pre-elections and now the government has no political compulsions. It has the option to be tough and may not be soft but is likely to have a glittering package.

After presentation of the interim budget, it is said that there are some mismatches in tax collection figures to the tune of almost Rs 1 lakh crore. Questions are being raised about the fiscal deficit figure of 3.4 per cent. Remember, mismatches were noticed even in the 2016-17 budget.

The revenue department has asked tax officials to scrutinise the mismatch in turnover towards services between income-tax returns and TDS. Many businesses, I-T department suspects, are not depositing all tax deductions. Even in customs collections mismatches are noticed. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Chairman P K Das in a letter to field formation stated that there was a considerable gap of Rs 12 lakh crore between the turnover on account of services as per the ITR/TDS (tax deducted at source) data and the value of services declared in the corresponding service tax returns for fiscal 2015-16.

If these suspicions are correct, it means the budgetary figures must be collated again. In such case, the government would be in a quandary how to correct its figures and allow the sops to taxpayers – no I-T up to Rs 5 lakh income, pension to farmers and many welfare schemes announced.

Rolling back is not easy but managing the finances in a not so bright economy is difficult. In the post-interim budget, there were questions also on growth figures. And it is now stated to be sub-6 per cent. Even government figures point to 6.8 per cent growth. This is not sufficient for a burgeoning population, a government that wants to reshape the country and an economy that has to sprint. The Narendra Modi government wants to pick it to \$5 trillion economy by 2024.

A good target indeed, but it needs to double the growth rate to around 12 per cent. The intentions of the Prime Minister are pro-people but the path is not so smooth. Revenue collection, a key to success, is not so promising. Having allowed almost 50 per cent of taxpayers to go out of the net, though a practical decision, there is less scope for widening the net.

Plus, the GST figures are yet to stabilize. It has acted more against the smaller entrepreneurs. So, further corrective steps and rationalisation of the rates is likely, but the transitory period may pose problems. The Centre's share of GST receipts is expected to be about Rs 1 trillion below the budget estimates in 2018-19. It is projected to grow over 20 per cent in 2019-20.

Therefore, the government is left with the option either to borrow more or be stingy on expenses. The second is not considered good for a fledgling economy that will have need crutches of government spending to boost the growth. But the net borrowing requirement was increased in the revised estimates of 2018-19 to Rs 4.47 trillion from Rs 4.07 trillion in the budget estimates. This means more

bonds must be launched. Leveraging more finances from government institutions like the RBI is a possibility. It may also consider selling its silver – PSU disinvestment. In some cases, it has been noticed that one PSU is purchasing the stakes of others and while these show better realisations, in reality, it is taking from one pocket to put in another.

The international scenario is becoming uneasy. The US' belligerence is an area of discomfort. It has forced India to buy oil at higher prices from American firms under threat of sanctions against Iran, a friend of India. Iran for years has supplied oil at discounted rates apart from providing many logistic supports such as transit to Central Asia. And as the region is hotting up, detour by aviation companies to avoid conflict zones are adding to expenses.

The US' withdrawal of concessions, forcing the scrapping of \$400 million missile deals from Russia and the call for giving sops to imports from the US to India are other difficult propositions. US President Donald Trump wants tax concessions by complaining about "high tariffs". There are points of friction, admits External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

Some analysts have questioned the US moves, as it is India's largest trade partner, including in defence. It is not easy to comprehend why the US is putting India almost at par with China.

Apart from bilateral relations, this is impinging on India's growth. Balancing the act, as Prime Minister Modi has been trying to do in Osaka, in Japan, he tries to keep it smooth. Though, relations with Japan, ASEAN and Pacific countries are being strengthened, foreign policy is becoming critical as it helps spur export growth and boost industries and businesses at home. These also have ramifications on IT sector and telecom, which want clarification on spectrum charges. Besides, the real estate sector is keen on GST policy.

The health and insurance sectors are demanding. Savings rate are at a low, but this is an opportunity too. For almost 40 years domestic savings has been the key to the country's growth. However, the private sector sits on their savings and pounces upon low-cost public savings. This needs correction to check the rising bank NPAs.

Interest rates and other benefits need to be increased to boost domestic savings. This should, as previously, be used for official programmes for it can take care for the government's rising fiscal deficit. Besides, it also takes care of happiness at the household level, which finally boosts consumption.

Undoubtedly, the Budget cannot give all solutions. It should be utilized to have a holistic look at the economy to create co-existence of industry, agriculture and overall happiness. The government must start looking at the economy in a holistic manner and ask the NITI Ayog to begin inter-sector dialogue and m u l t i - s e c t o r communication to create the needed synergy for growth.

The impending Budget has the government's hands full. It needs to give definite directions. And directions which give a boost to the economy. --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Let's be civil in anger

Editor, Apropos Eugene Thomas' letter, "MeECL services collapsing", (ST June 26, 2019), the writer has every right to point out the shortcomings of the MeECL, which requires some corrective steps. However to say, "Unlike you who get free power supply" is according to me a phrase that hinders cooperative solution and tends to aggravate the matter. We fail to realize that in the whole of India, University teachers are the most privileged of all in terms of superannuation age, contrary to school and college teachers and our State Government employees. With science inventions stagnating since 1948 and with the new concepts on humanities coming to a standstill, the only courses to be taken up right now are climate change, G.P.S. (geography) and fibre optics for 5G, 6G etc. We produce brilliant post graduates who pass their NET in one sitting just to send them to work as cashiers in banks, taxi drivers (if parents can afford to buy one) and in Chennai as cleaners in hospitals, distributing company products etc.

This is a very serious problem for India as a whole and the Union Government does not seem to realize this. If our youth could join university in time, there would be employment cascading up to Middle school. College teachers would go to Universities, and Class XI, XII to Colleges and so on. Ms Patricia Mukhim was right

when she lamented on lack of feedback on outcomes from our universities whose learned professors do not engage with the most pressing issues in society when they are morally bound to do so.

In future if we have to criticise any system let us restrain ourselves from excessive vitriol which could hurt the workers. Their parents would be humiliated for not being able to be part of the public that pays electricity bills and who knows they may tell their sons/daughters to ask for the meter reading in future. And finally, if the MeECL conducts survey of load declared and load consumed, we the public would bear the brunt. So long as it is hushed up let us not rake the rot, failing which more phases and more meters have to be installed according to rules.

Yours etc.
M. Khyriem,
Via email

Why oppose railways?

Editor, Though the Government of India has approved and sanctioned the railway project to connect parts of Ri Bhoi district with the rest of the northeast and mainland India as well, the stiff opposition from certain quarters persists. But there is logic and valid argument as to why certain opposition groups oppose the railways and I would like that there should be a public referendum and a logical

debate to this. The railway project would prove bad news to the truck lobby that brings in everything from other parts of the country. Secondly the self interested stakeholders would also lose their commission from trucks. Thirdly the process of essential commodities from raw materials to food items would lead to cut in taxes and other charges saving a lot of money to the consumers who are also the opposing groups. Fourthly tourism will increase thereby bringing in gradual change in the economic livelihoods of our people in the rural areas that includes all those in the tourism sector. Our local farmers can export their local produce to other parts of the country and there will be jobs for our local people especially those who espouse their love for the Jaidynriew (race). Perhaps this is one way to prove that they mean what they say.

A railway recruitment board or RRB would be based in Shillong that would be of use to many since the railways are the biggest job creator that employs lakhs of man-power every year. Influx would be controlled as the current government would be forced to set-up check-gates at various railway points. But even if a person were to enter the state illegally without a valid ILP permit, somehow while exiting he would have to produce his entry card.

I feel that there should be a logical argument to every disagreement. Mere protest will not solve anything and the ultimate losers would be our future generations who

are without jobs.

Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar
Via email

Dopamine and its impact

Editor, Have you ever wondered about the rise of social media users? Have you questioned yourself at any point about your attachment to your smartphone despite knowing very well that it is consuming a lot of your time? Have you wondered why children and teenagers get so hooked to computer/mobile games? Have you wondered about the reason behind loyalty cards and other programs launched by companies?

The hormone Dopamine lies at the root of the instances I spoke about. It causes reward seeking behaviour where the rewards can take various shapes and forms and link with our tendency towards instant gratification. This is further heightened in cases where the time and possibility of getting the rewards becomes unpredictable and variable. This hormone is also linked with pleasure – when we feel pleasure doing something, for example having a particular ice cream flavour, dopamine is released in our brain and it propagates our tendency to seek out the pleasurable activity again and again forming a positive feedback loop. Does this ring a bell in the context of marketing

strategy? Remember seeing the ad or hearing about a company that talks about selling "experiences", not products/services? What they actually mean is that they are trying to create a link between the product/service they are offering and release of dopamine in your brain so that you seek them out again and again!

On social media, every like or new comment resulting in new notifications form virtual rewards which propel us towards it more and more. The companies have also worked on building an element of anticipation and unpredictability in the algorithm which helps to hook the user onto the platform. Have you noticed how the Facebook feed used to come according to time of posts in the initial years and how they have changed it to move to an algorithm where the News Feed is customized and variable – so when a user refreshes the News Feed on the app, a new set of posts come in a different order.

Games – Every game on mobile or PC has levels and points built into it with the difficulty level and capability of the user creating variability/unpredictability – each level crossed/points earned charge up our dopamine pathways.

Gamification in market – Remember when someone you know was trying to buy a few more items (not necessarily essential) to gain a few more points on the loyalty card to cross a level – you can guess the reason – yes, dopamine. Companies are now actively implementing gamification in

their marketing strategy – implementing game-like elements.

Jio offered its services for free for 6 months. Unlimited data given to people who were used to buying data at high costs created a mania for the SIMs first. What were they doing? They were building the dopamine feedback loops in an entire population by eliminating the cost of accessing the service (lesser the cost, higher the tendency to use the service that creates dopamine surge). Result – If they had charged at the beginning, many would have opted for the starting plan which was offering free calls as well as 2 GB data. But by the time they made it chargeable, 1 GB/day had become the baseline for majority of the population. So, is the impact of dopamine all negative? No, it is not. When you set a target, exercise well and achieve your goal, you will feel dopamine surge – that is what makes you feel good. When you have scored good marks in a subject in school, dopamine pathway is energized. When you bowled out someone in a Mohalla cricket match, you still experienced similar feelings.

The responsibility is on us – we have to be able to differentiate the real rewards from the false rewards and redirect our dopamine's reward-seeking behavior in positive, fruitful endeavours. Otherwise, we will keep frittering away our time at the altar of instant gratification.

Yours etc.,
Deepjyoti Chakraborty,
Via email

“ Anyone who criticises me for talking about fair trade is a few pebbles short of a beach. Because everyone should care about it, just like everyone should care about the environment, because we all live here. ”

--- Chris Martin

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.320 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 02, 2019

Free press under stress

THE Modi Government has stopped giving advertisements to at least three mainstream newspapers in recent times. No reasons have been assigned for this ad freeze but editors of these newspapers are well aware why this has happened. The Hindu has been carrying a series of stories on the controversial Rafale deal. In fact, the Attorney General of India had alluded to the papers relating to the Rafale contract having been stolen from official files after the series of stories written by N Ram, Chairman of the Hindu Publishing group. The same story was also used by activists to bolster their claims that the Rafale contract was ridden with loopholes designed to benefit an Indian businessman who it is claimed has no expertise in defence aircrafts.

The Editor's Guild of India which normally takes a stand on issues relating to press freedom has not yet taken a stand on this issue. It appears that the Guild feels that suspension of advertisements by the Government does not necessarily imply a cap on press freedom. Many critics have however averred that freedom of the press has been under attack since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014. Journalists have themselves complained of intimidation for writing critical stories.

The big newspaper groups, which have a combined monthly readership of more than 26 million claim they are starved of government ads worth millions of rupees that began even before Modi was elected to power in the month of May this year.

It is a known fact that most newspapers and television channels survive on advertisements of which a large chunk come from Government. For instance the Times group's say that 15% of their advertising comes from the government which are mostly related to government tenders for contracts as well as publicising government schemes. In small towns and distant regions where advertisements from the private sector are negligible the freeze on Government advertisements could result in the closure of the newspapers.

BJP spokespersons however defend the Government saying that the media has been bitterly critical of the Modi Government and that in itself translates to freedom of speech and expression. But India is now ranked 140th out of 180 in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, lower than countries like Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Philippines. It ranked 80th out of 139 countries surveyed when the index was started in 2002. This should set the media thinking and fighting to claim its constitutional rights. Already sections of the media are toeing the Government line or self regulating. Is this what Indian democracy now implies?

US-China trade war: Quandaries ahead?

By Prof Munmun Majumdar

The New York Times had aptly summed up the gist of Mike Pence's speech at the Hudson Institute on 4 October 2018 with the headline, "Pence's China Speech Seen as Potent of New Cold War". Mike Pence's passionate defence of American interest suggested that the problem between China and the US goes far beyond a trade war. The National Security Strategy of December 2017 and the National Defense Strategy of January 2018 also indicated the overall emphasis of the US China relations as one of strategic competition. Against the background of the recent turn of events between US and China it is completely logical to agree that trade is only the instrument; the objective is indeed strategic competition.

It was President George W. Bush that first dubbed China a "strategic competitor" almost twenty years ago. The mood of American businesses towards China on intellectual property (IP) and technology theft began to turn sour during the Bush administration. The subsequent wars in the Middle East gave China a virtually free hand in East Asia. Although President Barack Obama's "rebalance" was intended to refocus on China, but Barack Obama's rhetoric was hardly matched by action. Subsequently, Trump has been able to successfully position his administration's approach to China as an overdue correction to the perceived failures of his predecessors. This has resonated positively across the security and defense community as well as with the human rights and religious freedom advocates, even if they may not always agree with his methods.

The broad bipartisan consensus is a development that no American politician can ignore. Any subsequent presidential candidate will find it difficult to soften China policy without being faulted of being weak. In any case, the new legislation that has been put in place with strong bipartisan support to make it difficult for China to acquire US technology defines a new framework for the relationship that any successor administration will find it extremely hard to change. It is indeed worth noting that the US' current stance on China is not divided along party lines and that despite their differences, the Democratic Party has asked the Trump administration to be tough with China on regulatory behaviors, unfair trade

practices, and human rights issues etc.

The tit-for-tat strategies adopted by the United States and China is possibly one of the nastiest outcomes of the collapse of the trade talk between them in Washington. This is not the first time such a thing has happened. But what is new is that what started as skirmishes over tariff issues now includes conflict over technology, diplomatic and geopolitical

" It was President George W. Bush that first dubbed China a "strategic competitor" almost twenty years ago. The mood of American businesses towards China on intellectual property (IP) and technology theft began to turn sour during the Bush administration. "

matters with feeble indications of calling it a day. An immediate question that arises is why did the US-China trade talk fail in the first place?

Many analysts say that the two had different expectations about the implementation of the draft agreement that became complicated with the dynamics of domestic politics in their individual

" The broad bipartisan consensus is a development that no American politician can ignore. Any subsequent presidential candidate will find it difficult to soften China policy without being faulted of being weak. "

countries. The core of the problem lies in the structure of China's political system that is built around a Leninist Party that claims absolute dominance over every facet of the economy and society. Party dominance gives any Chinese business connected to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) a privileged position - this practically means every Chinese business because no Chinese business can succeed against the will of the Party. This is precisely what the US and other countries deem as unfair. No Chinese leadership will ever compromise on the dominance of the CCP, and Xi Jinping has placed greater emphasis on CCP control. The creation of the National security

Commission chaired by Xi himself clearly show that Xi Jinping is much more than willing compared to his predecessor Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, to wield coercive power, both in terms of military and economic. Xi's visit to the Jiangxi province, which is housing mineral facilities for rare earth minerals is indicative of a strategic move, when he urged the Chinese people to start the new "Long March" with loyalty and unity for the

national's great survival. China was of the opinion that the newly drafted Foreign Investment law that was passed at the National People's Congress provided foreign firms with level playing ground and protection from illegal interference from the Chinese government. They were therefore reluctant to make any further legal changes to improve the

outcome of the trade talks. The Trump administration and American firms on the other hand, did not agree with China's position. Similar to the stand adopted by the European Union and many others the US saw China's new investment law as something that remains vague on the issues of forced technology transfers, intellectual property rights, and know-how disclosure etc. Unlike China, which wanted to implement the agreement through administrative actions and without any legal commitments, United States on the other hand, wanted to specify changes that China needs to make in legal terms and publicly disclose them in order to institutionalize an enforcement mechanism. Needless to say, that both US and

China were anxious and concerned about consequent domestic fallout and criticisms from not being able to arrive at robust concrete deals. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether US and China as in December 2018 in Buenos Aires would ultimately resolve the deadlock but as of now the US-China discord has spread beyond trade to foreign exchange and politics. The standoff between the US and China after the breakdown of the trade talks demonstrate that it is not simply triggered by the spontaneous reactions of strong leaders. Instead it displays a bitter fact that the two great economies have embarked on a war over a new global order. The escalation of US-China trade war to an economic and political warfare between the two big powers has the potential to bring about a fundamental transformation of US-China relations, affect the global trading system etc. The IMF Director Christine Lagarde has warned that retaliatory tariffs by the US and China will cause reduction of growth.

In this rivalry between two powers where trade is an instrument of strategic competition, it will become increasingly difficult for say the ASEAN countries to neatly separate the economic dimensions of their relationships with China from political and security dimensions. Then again the consequences of the trade war between the US and China becoming a technology war is enormous with the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that is not only all encompassing but is also moving at an exponential speed. For India, the Fourth Industrial Revolution presents both opportunities and challenges for enhancing productivity and sustaining growth. Navigating the US and China trade war however, has added another episode to the existing complexities of India's foreign policy challenges.

While the US President Donald Trump firmly believes that trade wars are "good" and "easy to win", Chinese President Xi Jinping has warned that a trade war will produce "no winners". What is certain is that the rising trade tension will definitely begin to bite at some point of time and become a source of volatility, which is unquestionably caused by the two countries' fight over global hegemony.

(The writer teaches Political Science at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong).

Innovation & R&D focus Will it revive the economy?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

There is widespread discussion and debate on how to revive the country's economy, what with preparations afoot to present the Budget. It goes without saying that in gearing up the economy and boosting manufacturing activity, innovation must be seen as the key. In fact, innovation is the basis for success, whether in industry or agriculture as this leads not just to an increased productivity at a low cost but also ensures economies of scale. Moreover, the quality of products based on sheer innovation assures their quality as well as an increased acceptability in the international market.

Though India ranks third among the most attractive investment destinations for technology transactions in the world, the government has reiterated that technology is a strong priority area with special focus to make it people science-centric and key element of economic growth is intrinsically related to development of appropriate technology. But it must remember that not just big units, but small and medium ones need to flourish in large numbers across the country with the right innovation and technology to meet global standards.

It is an admitted fact that the country is among the top-most countries in the world in the field of scientific research, positioned as one of the top five nations in the field of space exploration. The nation has regularly undertaken space missions, including missions to the moon and the famed Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). India is among the world's top five scientific powers and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch its first Indian human mission by 2022 or even earlier.

While the need for innovation is widely felt across the globe, including in India, the required impetus unfortunately has not been given in most areas despite the Government's 'Atal Innovation Mission', launched in 2016, which sought to focus on scaling start-up incubation centres and promoting innovation culture among schoolchildren. And, though the focus on innovation seems to have helped India improve its ranking in the Global Innovation Index, from 81st in 2015 to 57th in 2018, investment towards innovation in research and development is very low compared to an economy of India's size.

In comparison, whereas India invests 0.67 per cent of GDP in R&D, mature economies say such as the US or Japan, invest around 3 per cent of their GDP. Thus, it could be said there is lack of world class research infrastructure in the country. However, there are projections that engineering R&D and product development market in India is forecasted to grow at a CAGR of 20.55 per cent to reach US \$45 billion by 2020 from US \$28 billion in FY18.

In recent years, the government promoted research parks (RPs) and technology business incubators (TBIs), which would promote innovative ideas till these become viable commercial ventures. India is now the world's third largest technology start-up hub with incorporation of 1,000 new companies in 2017.

The first issue that the Centre needs to work upon is the strengthening of its industry-academia linkages. At least the major universities in the country have to become the hub of research and innovation. Academic institutions could play a significant role in knowledge creation and its transfer. However, even if the criterion of knowledge creation is fulfilled to some extent, knowledge transfer is rather poor in the country.

One may mention here, that for the past two-three decades we have been hear-

ing about lab-to-land transfer of technology, especially in the field of agriculture. Though some headway has been made in the past decade, primarily due to efforts of IITs and agricultural universities, the results in some regions of the country such as east and north-eastern parts are not quite encouraging. This has resulted in productivity not improving to global standards while agricultural diversification is not taking place to the extent necessary.

The lack of proper linkages between industry and academia is the lack of a collaborative strategy where the State governments have a vital role to play. Hardly a few universities have an Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) policy. There is, therefore, a lack of clarity on who owns the IP and how will information be shared between parties.

There are some aspects of the IP regime where the conflict between government and industry is manifest. Most of these pertain to the pharma sector. Section 3 (d) is also criticised for setting higher standard for patentability than mandated by Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). This aspect needs to be reviewed and a pragmatic approach framed.

India is aggressively working towards establishing itself as a leader in industrialisation and technological development. Significant innovations in the nuclear energy sector are likely as India looks to expand its nuclear capacity. Moreover, nanotechnology is expected to transform the Indian pharmaceutical industry. Apart from these highly sophisticated areas, there is need for innovation and technology to boost up the electronics sector as also ensure value addition in micro, small and agro-industrial sectors.

While there is no dearth of scientists in the country and technology that helps manufacturing, especially in labour-oriented and export sectors would have to be given special support and attention. The lack of R&D in the private sector unlike other countries is a cause of concern and the government may evolve means to ensure that this sector keeps a part of the profits for technology upgradation.

Meanwhile, a recent report by Nasscom and consulting firm Zinnov found that engineering and R&D (ER&D) services and products are the fastest growing segments of the tech industry in India today. Such services and products constituted \$36 billion of the total revenue of \$177 billion of the Indian tech industry. It was encouraging to learn that about 5 per cent of R&D is globally sourced and India has been the biggest beneficiary of that, accounting for 30 per cent of the total in 2018, up from 28 per cent in 2017.

The point that needs to be made here is that R&D has to be made available to not just big firms in the engineering, automotive and electronics sectors but to small ancillaries so that these can grow in a big way, increase productivity and improve quality standards. The 'Make in India' programme can become a reality only with the growth of innumerable micro and small sector firms spread across the country.

With experts harping on the need to move out, at least a part of the work force from agriculture, and job creation emerging as a big challenge, innovation and modernisation, specially of the small sector is imperative. ---INFA

Entry & Exit points in Meghalaya

Editor,
The KSU has repeatedly demanded for immediate construction and completion of the Entry and Exit points in Meghalaya. It is learnt that as many as 41 Entry and Exit points will be constructed in various points in the state. This will take a lot of time and in fact it will take many years and incur huge expenditure which the state can ill afford. Moreover, what purpose will these points serve? These E&E points are ill conceived and will in no way help in checking Influx. In fact these points will serve as money minting rackets for the government and others manning the check points. In fact introduction of the Inner Line

Permit (ILP) will be more useful and effective than putting in place E&E points and the cost for introduction of ILP is many times cheaper. However, the ILP is not a panacea for influx as this is difficult to tackle. Even in those states where ILP was introduced, influx cannot be completely contained. Hence, in spite of some setbacks it is advisable that the Government should put on hold the introduction of E&E points and in its place bring in ILP.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-email

Politicians don't change ideologies

Editor,
Apropos "Saffron cad-

res little care for PM's warning", by Arun Srivastava, (ST June 29, 2019), I believe that the writer was greatly misled by the confession of the Prime Minister that he has changed after winning a thumping victory. Changing an ideology which is firmly embedded is not only easy but practically impossible for it is embedded in our DNA. Now, that the exclusion zone Bay of Bengal is free from ASAT debris, as India Today has reported that debris which is meant to come to earth and most likely land at the Bay of Bengal would now remain in space near the International space station, the excursionists would have a fairly good time. Hence we cannot trust politicians. They shake hands with you today and tomorrow they shake your confidence and may shock you till you are

dumbfounded.
Yours etc.
M. Khyriem,
Viaemail

Kerala keeps BJP at bay

Editor,
After the landslide victory of the BJP in the recent general elections, there is an inexorable exodus from different national and regional parties to jump on the bandwagon of the BJP. Exodus from N. Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP continues as three of its leaders from Telangana joined the BJP on Thursday. In Kerala, AP Abdullakutty, who was a CPI(M) MP and former Congress MLA joined the BJP giving impetus to the otherwise depressed BJP in the state following its dismal performance in the recent

general election.

In West Bengal massive exodus from TMC and other parties is continuing as the BJP stands to gain more and more in the coming days. But the million dollar question is what has the BJP done to attract so many leaders to its fold? As everyone knows, BJP was a run-of-the-mill party and had nothing to boast about for a long time. But with Narendra Modi taking its rein, the party started shaking off its jinxes and victory started smiling on it.

Yes, Modi is the real mascot of the party, and he has taken and promoted the party to every nook and corner of India like the Congress party of yore. If he continues to provide an exemplary dispensation, more of India will undoubtedly join his party. But the lid of mystery is still kept closed as to why the

Keralites regard the BJP as a pariah. It may be recalled that while a lion's share of states was captured by the Modi magic, Kerala was not ready to swim with the saffron current. Why? The party must introspect and find the solution to break into the fortress of Kerala. If Modi can come back to the Prime Ministerial seat for the second time with good workable strategies, he should also be able to read the minds of the Keralites and come to them with new ideas to woo them to the BJP.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi - 15

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.

“Never memorize something that you can look up.”

--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.321

SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 3, 2019

Congress's leadership impasse

CONGRESS President Rahul Gandhi is adamant about stepping down from the Party leadership following the recent poll debacle. It is ironic that the Congress rank and file continue to resist leadership change. Dynasty has become a comfort zone for the thousands of Congress party workers who fear that a change of leadership at the top would lead to a deeper crisis than the Congress finds itself in now. But would that happen or is this an opportunity for the Party to be given new direction and leadership goals by Congress men and women who understand grassroots politics. Too many senior leaders in the Congress who call themselves strategists have never fought a popular election and therefore are unaware of the changing contours of the political landscape and the aspirations of people. Besides, the Congress does not have or encourage a talk-back mechanism where those at the primary units can talk directly to the Party President and inform him of the goings-on which are inimical to the growth of the Party. Rahul Gandhi following the leadership principle has taken the blame on himself for the recent poor performance of the Party. In short he has pulled in his thumb instead of pointing his fingers at others, although the Nehru-Gandhi scion did point to the fact that senior Congress leaders were busy promoting the political careers of their kith and kin.

When Rahul Gandhi's memoirs will be written he will be remembered as a good man who lacked the cutting edge leadership skills. This is largely because of Rahul's own protected life which in a sense is an abnormal life. His ability to sense the plight of India's poor is restricted to what the local satraps wish him to experience. He cannot set out on his own like other grass-roots leaders do. Hence even though he breathes sincerity, he lacks the emotional connect with ordinary people. Also he can never identify himself with the poor because he is not one of them. This is what his beta-noire Modi does best. These are a few of Rahul Gandhi's handicaps. Closer home too there are rumblings about the need for change in the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leadership after Mukul Sangma failed to win the Lok Sabha elections and also after the Party had to concede the Selsella seat to the NPP. In any battle, the losing side has to do a soul searching. The Meghalaya Congress is yet to do that. On the contrary we see an impatience to bring down the MDA Government and to woo a section of MLAs to form a Congress-led Government. This is not only opportunistic but it also exposes an insidious need to be in power at any cost; not because Congress MLAs wish to serve the people for they can still do so as MLAs but because they feel the loss of power and pelf. This is unlikely to win much favour for the Party and is also one reason why the Congress is losing steam.

Where is the fresh outlook we voted for, Mr Chief Minister?

By Dr Lakhon Kma

Over a year has passed since MDA came to power in the State of Meghalaya but we are yet to experience the visible changes that we all voted for. With every passing day, our hope is fast diminishing. There are myriad of problems staring at us but let me focus on the environmental issues this time and leave the rest for another day.

Environmental issues are multifarious in nature but the most challenging is the availability of potable water. With the arrival of every monsoon season accompanied with heavy precipitation, it seems to wipe out our memories of the dry spell of 4-5 months where acute water shortage is experienced, particularly in Shillong city. It's an irony that a State that stands boisterous as having places like Mawsynram and Sohra (Cherrapunjee) receiving the world's highest average annual rainfall of 11871 mm and 11777 mm, respectively, can also face acute shortage of water. Factoring in the population of our State and the per capita consumption of water, if we are able to harvest the excess water from these areas and other areas, in principle, there will be no dearth of water in any household throughout the year. However, subsequent State Governments have ignored this aspect of harvesting excess rain water in a well-planned manner. Take the example of Sohra, specifically the Dainthlen area. Most of these hills are barren with almost no agricultural activities around them owing to the nature of the soil and climatic conditions. But this area receives heavy rainfall and contributes to some of the strong river systems and gorgeous waterfalls in the greater Sohra area and beyond it. This is the perfect place to harvest rain water on a massive scale by building huge reservoirs and then channelizing the water wherever needed. Perhaps, MDA Government can take a cue from the proposed Indian Rivers Inter-links that aim to effectively manage water resources in India by linking Indian rivers by a network of reservoirs and canals. The project aims at reducing persistent floods in some parts and water

shortages in other parts of the country. In the similar manner, perhaps the Ministry of Water resources, Government of India would be forthcoming in the endeavors of the State Government to in rain water harvesting in a massive scale.

Conservation of our water resources is a must for sustainable utilization. Water bodies cannot be claimed by individuals as their personal rights although it might be located near their property or pass through it. Rather, the community ownership should be stressed for its maintenance, sustenance and utilization. Any activity that threatens the existence of water bodies should be curbed with iron hands. Take the example of Umtyngar River on the way to Sohra. What have we done to it? Mindless sand and boulder mining from the river bed has literally killed the river. It is further ravaged by uncontrolled cutting of hills around it for sand, gravels, boulders, etc. which resulted in the further deposition of soil during rainfall. The once pristine river where many of us have memorable events of picnics and outings is left muddy and dead by our greed. Sometimes I wonder-did we tribal really ever live in the lap of our mother nature to know its value in the distant past? Had our genes mutated so much that we are blinded by our greed to an extent that there is utter disconnection from our environment? Where is the tribal's harmony with nature or what we call 'mei ramew'? Anyway, since we are living in the time of selfish gains and complete disconnect from Mother Nature, perhaps, only policing will work. Time has come for the Government to be ruthless while dealing with conservation of water resources. If the existing provisions are not enough, bring new Act to make sure that nothing comes in between to hinder the conservation of our water bodies at any cost.

Keeping the demand on clean water in mind, the State Government should make it mandatory to have

a rain harvesting system in every new building plan. No permission should be granted by concerned agencies- MUDA or District Councils without this provision. For existing houses, a definite time period should be given to have rain water harvesting system. If necessary, Government should bring new rules in the Meghalaya Building-Bye Laws 2011 or similar laws of District Councils to make it mandatory and binding on all.

Rapid and unplanned urbanization around the greater Shillong areas is going to have the utmost impact on the demand and supply of potable water. While it cannot be stopped because of ever growing population, it needs to be regulated, particularly, around sources of water. The greater problem is, however, the mushrooming guest houses, holiday homes, hotels in residential areas which is going to put serious constraints on the water supply chains. Unless it is the only means of livelihood, no permission should be granted within the 'vicinity' of Shillong City to be defined by appropriate law to have the legal sanctity while encouraging these ventures around the new areas which are outside the perimeter of Greater Shillong. This will have dual purpose. 1. It will reduce constraints from the city and, 2. It will encourage tourism in untapped areas. E.g. setting up of tourist lodges, hotels, guest houses, etc around Laitlum, or on the way to Sohra, Mawlynnong, Dawki, Thadlaskien, Jakrem, Nongkhnum island, etc. will boost the local economy through tourism and equitable infrastructure development through good roads and civic amenities. This will be similar to what we see in Kerala. All tourists do not stay in Thiruvananthapuram or Kochi. Places like Thekkedy, Munnar, Allepy, etc. share the burden of tourists without any issue which helps the local economy as well as revenue generation of the State.

The other aspect to deal with will be the sewage

treatment. In spite of all the hype around, there has not been any concrete progress in this front on the ground. Vital exit points of rivers, particularly the ones originating from the city (if we can really call them 'rivers' rather than 'drains') need to be treated before they feed the Umiam lake so that if needed, the water can be used for human consumption without affecting power generation.

From all indications, one can foresee that all future conflicts and wars would be to gain control over the precious little water that will be available on the surface of the earth. Therefore, Government needs to be prepared to avoid any eventualities. It can come up with appropriate legislation to regulate water bodies including the pricing of water charged by the bore well owners and water tankers in the interest of the general public.

While stressing on the need to harvest rain water and conservation of water resources, I have cited some examples from closest places within a range. However, the story is similar and therefore, applicable across the length and breadth of the State. Notwithstanding the gravity of the issues under consideration, all the suggestions might still go to the drain owing to fund crunch in the State. Of course, it will depend on the MDA Government's priority in using its limited resources. Public should ask our honorable Chief Minister whether political appointments or the National Games, etc. are more important than regular payment of salary of the SSA teachers, investment in rain water harvesting, conservation of water bodies, sewage treatment, etc.

Every right thinking citizen of the State will agree that environmental issues should be kept above all other issues because it will decide what lies ahead for all of us in the near future. Going by expert analysis, by 2040, the entire world will face acute water shortage and Meghalaya is no exception; and the million dollar question is- Are we preparing for it?

Maan ki Baat of a Muslim Scholar

By Partha Pratim Mazumder

Modi government 2.0's first legislative attempt - the criminalization of the Triple Talaq has led to widespread agitation. In furtherance to their political agenda, the opposition has united as one to quash the Bill, irrespective of the benefit conferred on women. It is in this situation that PM Modi has brought to attention, the views of the former Congress Union Minister Arif Mohammad Khan, presently, a *Quran* scholar, in his Lok Sabha speech. Thus, the 1986 parliamentary debates of the Shah Bano case have gained momentum and it is against this backdrop that prominent journalist from the leading portal, *The Wire*, Arfa Khanum Sherwani interviewed Arif Mohammad Khan, who set her facts straight. Throughout the interview, one could see Arfa Khanum Sherwani trying to question Arif Mohammad Khan in a way to convey that the Modi government has segregated the country due to which the Muslims are suffering. Arif Mohammad Khan took none of her baits and proceeded to convey how the Congress government had treated Muslim women, a section of the society they had a responsibility towards, for their political appeasement agenda.

During the Shah Bano case in 1986, Parliament under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi had passed a law reversing the Supreme Court judgment which entitled the divorced women to get maintenance from their husband. However, according to the law passed, the husbands had no responsibility towards divorced women after the iddat period was over. This was done under the pressure of the Muslim males who did not want the added responsibility and thus, by appeasing the men, Congress had secured their vote bank.

Arif Mohammad Khan had resigned at this gross injustice, to which a Congress minister had stated, "*Upliftment of Muslims is not the responsibility of the Congress, if they want to lie in gutter, let them be*". According to Arif Khan, these are the seeds sown by the Congress, whose repercussions people in 2019 are facing when the current government has to fight the prevalence of immoral practices. Triple Talaq shouldn't have gone beyond 1986 and the fact that it has, is no one's but the previous Congress governments' fault. To one, this attitude of Congress may sound like complete and utter political apathy, something which isn't expected from the ruling party in a democracy. However, Arfa Khanum obviously viewed that as the ideal perception and is against the Modi government for attempting to break the practice. On her question on the future of Muslims, Arif Khan confidently said, "India's future is the future of the Muslims". Sherwani wasn't satisfied and pressed on, "What about the religious identity". To this, Arif Khan replied, "What status of Muslims are you talking about? The right to divorce a wife after repeating talaq thrice and throwing her out of the house? Or the right to marry four wives when you can't even support one?"

According to Sherwani, intolerance in India is on the rise and the Muslims are threatened. She stated, "We live in a kind of country where the politics revolve around an anti-Muslim pillar". Arif Khan put her in her right place by retorting, "What do you mean 'live in a kind of country'? Would you rather live in a place like Syria, or Yemen or even Pakistan?" He further elaborated by stating, "We live in the kind of country wherein *Deoband* form of interpretation is legal. The book states that it is okay to wage a war against other religions, and is being followed by four percent of

Muslims, who control the Islamic teachings. Moreover, this is the country where any tax such as jizya isn't levied from anyone and all the citizens are treated equally, so where is the question of intolerance?"

People like Sherwani believe that the Modi government is being intolerant towards Muslims when they don't introduce policies to appease them, as treating them equally is simply unacceptable. They don't realise that Congress never intended to uplift them, and only wanted to maintain a façade which gets the votes coming. An example of Congress' hypocrisy was related by Arif Khan, "Congress banned the 'Satanic Verses' (Salman Rushdie's novel) to appease the Muslims but never ensured its implementation. In fact, after the ban, the sales increased from 10 copies to 10,000 copies. After 3 months it was known that the Congress hadn't confiscated a single copy of the book. The Rajiv Gandhi government wasn't interested in any substance and merely in slogans."

None of the other minorities are raising questions about their participation in the parliament or intolerance towards them, including the Parsis which are immersed in being productive and economically beneficial for the country at large. This was also a problem for Arfa Khanum as she started harping about how Muslims are uneducated so they haven't been able to progress. Arif Mohammad Khan stated outright, "This is no one's, but the Muslim's own fault. Historically speaking, the *Maulvis* banned the *Muslims* from attending English education and till today, the children are put in Madrasahs where they are taught the Deoband interpretation of Quran and are preached against formal education." Moreover, even the men who cannot support multiple wives and children are keen on propagating, which just adds to their poverty-stricken condition.

Yet, Sherwani somehow tried to establish the fact that Muslims, as a community are being targeted under the intolerant Hindu regime. Arif Khan then explained that it is the "Nationalism and the unity factor which is binding the people and irrespective of the religion, the misfits under the Modi government are just that-misfits." He illustrated "how a particular Hindu community in Haryana, which had been quite powerful, under the Modi government has had to merge with the rest of people to be relevant."

Eventually out of accusations, Arfa Khanum Sherwani stated that "since majority people aren't well educated like Arif Khan and have their ideology brainwashed with *Deoband's* interpretation of *Quran*, their interests should also be taken into account." Essentially, Sherwani believes that Muslims with distorted thinking, who believe themselves to be superior and hence demand an Islamic state and preach the destruction of all other religions, need to be taken care of; and if their interests remain unfulfilled, the government has to answer for that. The government isn't indulging in vote bank politics and appeasement policies, and the liberals, perturbed with the idea of viewing Muslims at an equal footing with equal recognition under the law, believe that this is intolerance. This is exactly what Arfa Khanum Sherwani was trying to extract out of a respected Quran scholar, who showed her exactly what he thought about such conspiracy theories.

TO THE EDITOR

Gross Errors in MBOSE Textbooks: Clarification

Editor,

Apropos the letter captioned, "Gross Errors in MBOSE Textbooks" by M Khyriem, (ST June 20, 2019), I personally, independently and without any bias, after thorough studies and with extensive cross references and examination on the following topics wish to offer my clarification.

- (i) Ear trumpet
- (ii) Ultrasonography
- (iii) Sonic boom
- (iv) Experiment on Archimedes' principle
- (v) Experiment to show that sound wave need a medium to travel
- (vi) Kepler's law on planetary motion

The above topics are included in the Science Textbook of Class IX(Nine) MBOSE authored by V.K Sally and S.K Agarwal. With due respect I would like to state that all the descriptions, definitions, explanations, information and steps involved in describing and in the experimental verification of all the mentioned topics are correct and appropriate and are up to the standard of Class IX Students of our State, Meghalaya. It is found

that there is no default in the facts and scientific information and concepts of the above mentioned topics.

(i) Ear Trumpet: it is just an example on the application of the reflection of Sound: The information supplied in the textbook are all correct and up to the standard. It is old technology but the present students must have an idea about the old technologies, after all it's just an example

(ii) Ultrasonography: it is also just an example on the application of ultrasound; for details the students must pursue higher studies in Lab- Tech after they have passed their class XII Science. The brief information supplied about Ultrasonography is absolutely Correct.

(iii) Sonic Boom: All the information and explanation about Sonic Boom is absolute Correct, except the year "1948"; where the first object which moves with supersonic speed is produced may be omitted, as no evidence is available from where the information on the year is extracted (the evidence is not mentioned in the text as an extra information); but it is not a very serious misinformation as it is not a Scientific Default but rather a Historical Default.

(iv) Experiment on Archimedes' Principle: The Experiment on verification of Archimedes' Principle is absolutely correct. All the steps, diagrams, symbols assigned and the presentation are absolutely correct.

(v) Experiment to show that sound wave needs a medium to travel: All the steps in the activity are correct. Diagram is correctly presented, and the explanation is more than enough for the students of Class IX. For higher understanding on the phenomena the higher classes will discuss that in detail.

(vi) Kepler's Law on Planetary motion: Kepler's Law on planetary motion is not included in the Syllabus of Class IX MBOSE, because it is a high standard Law, not expected to be understood by all the students of Class IX Standard. However, it is inserted in the textbook of Science and Technology of class IX in the Chapter on Gravitation (Chapter -3) as an extra information (written within the special box) which is obviously important for extra-brilliant students to be aware about this Law in advance if they are interested.

This Article is not written to hurt or support any

person/Organization/ Association/ Board's feeling but rather it is to eliminate confusion and misunderstanding among all the teachers and students who teach and study Science respectively as their subject.

Yours etc.,
L. S. Rynghang (M.Sc Physics, B. Ed),
Via email

Learn to respect electoral verdicts

Editor,

Apropos the letter "Why Kerala failed the BJP?" (ST June 24, 2019) by Jerome K. Diengdoh, it is saddening to note that Mr. Diengdoh seems to hold little regard for the democratic wishes and choices of a large proportion of our country's population. In his letter, he outlines how the highly literate state of Kerala decided to vote in favour of the Congress-led UDF and opposed the largely pan India approval of the BJP. According to him, the people of Kerala, being on average more literate than their north Indian counterparts, were able to resist falling into the BJP's alleged trap of communal polarisation that supposedly swayed the less "educated" citizens of

states like UP and Bihar. It is disheartening that Mr Diengdoh seems to believe that unless a citizen holds some form of formal education, he or she is incapable of voting sensibly and can be easily misled. Mr Diengdoh further seems to imply that the votes cast by citizens of states with low literacy like UP, Rajasthan and even Meghalaya, hold little value since many of the people casting them are illiterate.

A high literacy rate does not automatically mean that a state is free from all societal issues and problems. The example of Kerala itself justifies this. Despite being a highly literate state, Kerala witnesses frequent political violence and has the highest rate of political murders in the country, while less literate states like Rajasthan and MP see far more peaceful elections. In addition to this, a 2018 Home Ministry report stated that communal clashes in Kerala doubled in the span of a year. Hence, Mr. Diengdoh's statement that Kerala is absolutely free from communal tension is not only incorrect, but made in poor taste and with a clear intention to portray other Indian states in a bad light, simply because they voted in favour of a certain party. Just as we cannot use a few instances of political violence to label the residents of Kerala as

'violent', we also cannot use low literacy rates to dismiss the political voices of the people of our country. Kerala's educational structure is commendable, and it should be the guiding example for other states, not a divisive tool. Mr Diengdoh also lavishes praise on the English people, highlighting their political consciousness and wisdom. He seems to forget that those very same Englishmen committed inhuman, heinous atrocities like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and even today, these "acutely conscious" Englishmen seem bereft of the simple dignity and class to tender an apology for the massacre.

In a democracy, it is important to harbour a democratic temper even when our favoured political parties fail to come to power. We should all have the grace and dignity to accept the verdict of the people of our country and refrain from questioning their intellect and understanding, even if we ourselves are not in favour of their choices. For that is the beauty of a democracy, as all people, regardless of literacy and community, get equal voices.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar
Shillong -3

"To be a good citizen, it's important to be able to put yourself in other people's shoes and see the big picture. If everything you see is rooted in your own identity, that becomes difficult or impossible."

--- Eli Pariser

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.322 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 4, 2019

New term, new Modi

THE second term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeing some welcome changes. For one, he has taken exception to a patently unacceptable behaviour from a BJP legislator in Madhya Pradesh, who attacked an official with a cricket bat. He did this in a fit of rage and in full public view. The Prime Minister's reaction came a couple of days later, by which time the young MLA had been arrested, and later released to a spirited welcome by BJP men. The MLA happens to be the son of a senior BJP leader. The PM's stand is that the party must take immediate action in such scenarios even if the guilty happens to be the "son of a prominent leader."

Irrespective of whether or not the official was guilty of wrongdoing, this action on the part of the MLA was condemnable. Equally objectionable was the "welcome" with flower garlands that was accorded to the legislator by BJP activists as he came out of police confinement. Mere words by the PM will alone not help. Action must follow, so that this will be a lesson to the ruling partymen, and others too, across the nation.

It is appreciable that the PM has taken a strong note of the incidents and called for action from the party leadership. In this context, it is noteworthy that PM Modi had not taken a very serious view of situations during his first term, when hapless Muslims were attacked or killed by cow vigilantes of the saffron shade. Dalits were attacked too in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, by the same kind of hoodlums, and the PM was generally silence personified. His failure to speak up or punish such forces in his own party or the Sangh Parivar caused distress to Muslims who were already hurt by the riots in Gujarat when Modi was in his initial years as CM. Notably, during the rest of his long innings as CM, and later as PM, there was hardly any communal riot. Even then, his failure to speak up and defend the hapless communities cannot be condoned.

If the PM desires to be more assertive now to check unacceptable behaviour from his partymen -- and others too -- this should be seen as a turn for the better. In a democracy, people's sentiments matter. Those from the ruling party must behave in a more responsible manner. Notably, the PM has also spoken in strong terms in parliament against absenteeism by MPs. So far so good.

St Edmund's College affairs

Editor,
St. Edmunds College has led the way since 1923 but what is happening in the College today are the darkest of days St. Edmunds has ever seen. The students resumed classes after a long break on July 1, 2019 and in spite of resuming classes very late the students, especially the first semester students, were welcomed with agitations and silent demonstrations. The students had some classes on July 1, but classes were suspended after 11 am. We very well understand that when the college management takes wrong decisions then the teachers are affected and when teachers agitate the students are affected. However the students are deeply disturbed and taken aback by the baseless termination of Sir Jeffreyson Wahlang who has been a mentor to many students and also the disrespect meted out to the teachers as a whole by the Governing Body.

The student community does not think that their teachers should be treated in such an inhumane manner to the extent that their common staff room has been

taken away from them and the teachers do not even have a separate canteen space where they can sit and eat. The teachers have put up their demands to the Governing Body of the College and some such demands are the dissolution of the governing body, reinstatement of Prof Jeffreyson Wahlang besides bringing uniform service rules for the teachers. Therefore the students as a whole would like this matter to be addressed by both sides with equal sense of responsibility for the general interests of the students of the college. We believe that the utmost responsibility of any College, i.e both management and staff, is the well being of the students, as the students are the means and ends of any educational institution.

Yours etc.,
Saphishisha Kharsynteng,
& other students of
St. Edmund's College

Dishonouring the memory of Edmund Rice

Editor,
Five months ago, I was

Knots and crosses. Everybody seems to be busy playing this game when it comes to strife-torn Kashmir. The Centre is busy disentangling Article 370's knot while the Opposition is busy ensuring it is not unraveled. Both cite history, politics, legalities, Constitutionalities et al with the devil taking the hindmost!

The face-off started with Home Minister Amit Shah making plain that the Article which gives special status to Jammu and Kashmir "is only a temporary provision and not a permanent one." He was participating in a debate to extend the President's rule in the State and pushed the BJP's pet issue, repeatedly mentioned in its election manifestos.

Predictably, all hell broke loose with the Congress-led Opposition slamming the Government.. "The Article is the only Constitutional link between the State and the rest of India. It is legally and politically inter-dependent. If one goes, the other goes too...The Article is irrevocable."

What is it about Article 370 that raises political tempers and hackles? Can one justify why Kashmir should get 'special status'? Given that the Article has become the biggest impediment to integration of J&K into the Indian Union and symbolises the emotional delineation between Srinagar and New Delhi.

Tragically, Kashmir has been mishandled since Independence. Unlike other 562 princely States which acceded to India after Independence, Nehru's kid gloving handling led to the loss of one-third State to Pakistan in 1948. After Maharaja Hari Singh signed the "Instrument of Accession" power was handed to Sheikh Abdulla who said the final decision about this would be taken by State Assembly.

Thereafter, Kashmir was given special status and Article 370 imposed bestowing a separate Constitution. Also, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications, the Central Government could make laws only with concurrence of the State Assembly, practically giving it the Veto power.

It stands to reason this became the most touchy feature of the larger Kashmir dispute specially within the States three regions: Muslim Kashmir Valley

delighted to read an article in your paper dated December 9, 2018 captioned, "St. Edmund's College felicitates 85 rank holders." St. Edmund's College, my Alma Mater, has almost always been in the spotlight for its positive contributions and achievements. However, in the light of the recent unfolding of (unfortunate) events in the College, it is rather disheartening to witness how the Management is outright stubborn towards the demands of the staff who work tirelessly (with the Management) in "imparting equitable education grounded on the core values of excellence, competition, and ideals". Furthermore, as stated in the report dated May 22 2019, "Teachers hold Black Flag Protest in St. Edmund's College", the primary demand of the staff is "to ensure respect and dignity of the teachers". The insensitivity of the management towards the genuine demands of the staff is sheer disregard for the goals and objectives of the Institution, perhaps even more so, the principles advocated by the Founder of the Institution, Edmund Rice.

where the Article is sacrosanct, Hindu Jammu where its abrogation is vociferously supported and Buddhist Ladakh which demands Union Territory status.

Moreover, while a citizen has only Indian citizenship, J&K residents have two citizenships, live under a separate set of laws, including those relating to ownership of property which bars an Indian citizen from purchasing land/property in the State.

Wealth Tax, Gift Tax & Urban Land Ceiling Act do not operate in the State.

Sadly, Nehru's promise that Article 370 was a temporary provision and would get eroded over a period of time has turned out to be a chimera. Worse, it has been made into an "untouchable" provision. Whereby the President has no right to suspend the Constitution, Supreme Court orders are not applicable on J&K, Parliament has no power to legislate Preventive Detention laws, citizens from other State's cannot get citizenship of J&K.

Look at the absurdity. A Kashmiri girl loses her J&K citizenship if she marries any person residing elsewhere. But if she marries a Pakistani both will get J&K citizenship. Clearly, such a discriminatory provision not only compromises on the right to live with dignity but should have no place in Indian law.

Those hankering for its repeal argue Article 370 conveys a wrong signal to Kashmiris, separatists, Pakistan and internationally that J&K is still to become an integral part of India. It also delinks the State from the country's mainstream, resulting in its non-development with money lining personal pockets. Woe fully, this has led to alienation of youth vis-a-vis jobs and livelihood whereby there is no Indian-ness among Kashmiris thereby depriving the State of industrial

Edmund Rice advocated for the poor; as an apprentice, he undertook legal proceedings to ensure that money went into the right hands. This leads to my next point which feels rather unjustified. Three years at St. Edmund's, 2011-2014, a certain amount was charged as 'Magazine Fee.' One wonders as to whatever happened to the Magazines (read Money because although Magazine Collectors exist, I am certain none of them would want to collect a thousand copies of the same Magazine, or would they?)

Through his life, Edmund Ignatius Rice has inspired many around the world. He has undoubtedly ignited a fire in me too which has inspired me to share my thoughts on the current situation at my beloved St. Edmund's College.

Facta non Verba!
Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Drastic climate change

Editor,
It is indeed a phenom-

Repeal of Article 370

Is J&K more vital than Bharat Mata?

By Poonam I Kaushish

development thanks to doors being shut for outside investment.

This in turn leads to fostering a "secessionist psyche" and fissiparous tendencies whereby anti-nationalist elements thrive by receiving shelter from Pakistan consequently abetting cross-border terrorism. Indeed, Article 370 is a boon for Kashmiri separatists leading to proliferation of rabid anti-India leaders.

Pertinently, during the Constituent Assembly de-

marking it as a special and different State, which spells danger for the nation State. Add to this, it has weakened and constricted the political and Constitutional integration of the State with India

It is not necessary to read the Chinar leaves to figure out that the end game has begun in Kashmir. It is too early to say which way the pendulum will swing as the Acts and the players are many and so also many 'ifs' and 'buts' which do not make a whole. But winds of change seem to be finally blowing over Kashmir. Trying to sweep away the cobwebs of mistrust, misgivings, deceit and sorrow and generate strong winds of public opinion. Hoping to reap a windfall of return to peace and sanity!

What is crucial is whether Shah's political astuteness and vision will bear fruit. Much will also depend on how his "zero tolerance to terrorism" plays out. But as Uri and Balakot underscore the Centre believes in an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. Already, over 150 militants have been killed this year along-with separatist leaders being put under house arrest and security cover of 919 people withdrawn. Alongside, it remains to be seen whether constituencies will be delimited and the stand the Centre takes on Article 35A which places curbs on non-residents ownership of property.

Our leaders need to realize that Kashmir is a national issue, which transcends political planks, ideology, philosophy and thesis. The need of hour is imagination, innovation and impetus. True, one cannot expect dramatic success overnight as winning the minds and heart of the people is not going to be easy. But the Centre's words of peace with dignity can act as salve to wounds. Perhaps even turn hatred into love.

But even as these words beckon a promise for the future, deep mistrust and lack of confidence is apparent. Kashmiris need to rise to the occasion. Keep above populism, cheap gimmicks and petty politics. Time to give peace a chance. Those who oppose Article 370 need to answer one question: Is Kashmir more important than India? What gives? ---- INFA

Why has the monsoon played truant with Kerala this time and moved northwards to hit Maharashtra and to wreak maximum havoc on it? On a close observation, it can be concluded that our climate has become erratic and so it has become unreliable too. In the past, climate used to be very precise and farmers could make use of its precision for sowing seeds and other related tasks depending on the weather. Unfortunately, the climate has now changed leaving the farmers and others in the lurch. Meteorological department has to study this climate change seriously and find solutions to equip the farmers and others with the latest updates on how to adapt themselves to face the challenges inherent in the climate changes.

Yours etc.,
T K Nandan,
Kochi -15

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.

Coaching centres Add-on to true education

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

"Students have become slaves of coaching institutes. They are being taught only to face competitive exams. Coaching institutions are promoting rote learning and not imparting actual knowledge", said Prakash Javadekar when he was the HRD Minister and working on revision of the National Education Policy of 2014. The remark is unforgettable and has to be recalled today, when we are considering the draft of the new policy released for public comments and views.

This strong statement against coaching institutes that have grown as parallel educational centres throughout the country reflects feelings expressed by many educationists. It is also conveyed clearly in the Draft Education Policy. The Policy holds the existing coaching centres as "harmful" for children and wants to end what it calls the "coaching culture" by resetting the pattern and purpose of education.

It says: "The present examination and present coaching culture are doing much harm especially at secondary school level, replacing valuable time for true learning with excessive examination, coaching and preparation".

The issue pertains to two major aspects of coaching centres - the reason for their growth and popularity, and the state of coaching institutes. The first is related to the quality of teaching and learning in formal educational institutions and their equipments and surroundings, and the second to the state of coaching centres and the way they are organised and conducted.

The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) reports that one out of every four students is taking private tuition (25%) in the country and in a couple of States, the percentage jumps to over three out of four (75%). Tripura and West Bengal in the eastern part of the country have recorded 81 per cent and 78 per cent enrolment of students in private coaching classes. Incidentally, it may be noted that coaching culture has been well established in many East Asian countries including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea before it spread all over the world to grow as a "multi-billion dollar global service-industry" offering various coaching services outside schools.

Beyond schools, 20 per cent at graduation level and 15 per cent at post-graduation level are availing private tuition in the country. West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar, Odisha, and Manipur are the top five States patronizing private coaching away from regular schools.

The draft recognises severe learning incapacity prevailing in student community across the country and emphasises the need to focus on building a firm foundation for reading and arithmetic from class I. Poor education standards, particularly in rural students pointed out in various survey reports year after year stand in sharp contrast to brilliant performance of elite institutions and shatter the hope of bridging the huge educational gap in society and achieving equality through universal education. One-fourth of the students are found unable to read texts even in their own language fluently and nearly 60 per cent are not able to do simple sums in arithmetic. The situation will nullify the benefits of Reservation Policy and Right to Education unless immediate measures are taken to maintain quality while expanding opportunities and concessions.

Coaching centres, known as "shadow education system" in some places are growing in number due to two divergent causes. One is to make up for the shortcomings of regular school teaching to prepare them to take annual

school examinations and Board examinations. Another is to prepare bright students to keep their rank and score and help them to remain on top to be sure of admissions to their chosen courses.

The system has far reaching implications for the organisation and process of formal schooling, for the very objective of "education for all", and for the future of students of all economic classes. At the same time, out-of-school coaching makes a dent on the family budget which has to be accepted by parents as unavoidable cost in the pursuit for a bright future for their wards.

The chief characteristics of the coaching centres are their supplementary role to formal institutions, private management and operation, and limitation to academic subjects to cater to the grades in formal system of education or to the syllabus of particular admission or competitive examination. The preparation they provide is purely examination-oriented as the education system in India is built around written tests.

Music and dance classes, teaching artistic skills, training in sports or yoga, learning classical languages for self-development and self-satisfaction do not come under coaching centres dealt with in the Draft policy.

The Supreme Court while dealing with a PIL on growth of "unrecognized" private coaching companies in the country in February this year stated that the private coaching centres need to be regulated as these cannot be wiped out, and asked the Union government to frame guidelines. What cannot be eliminated altogether must undergo necessary reforms.

In any case, there is no substance in wholesale rejection of all coaching classes as bad in idea and harmful to student interests. Where reforms and regulations are required, a constructive approach must be adopted.

Odisha is the first State in India to introduce the Odisha Coaching Institutes Act 2017, which seeks to regulate their operation. Mandatory registration of the centres, with respective district collector's office, and submission of details regarding the strength of students, qualifications of teachers, curriculum, etc., are prescribed. Bihar has also similar regulations. The Government of Maharashtra set up a panel of experts to draft rules to govern over 50,000 coaching centres operating in the State. Kota in Rajasthan is said to be the epicentre of coaching culture having thousands of institutes. Their annual turn-over is estimated to exceed Rs.1,500 crore.

The draft policy prepared by the Kasturirangan Committee states that the system of Board exams for 10th and 12th classes leads to stress and promotes coaching culture. It suggests incorporating a flexible system spread over four years between classes 9 and 12 and students may be allowed to take exams in various subjects as per their convenience.

Changes in the present assessment pattern, which gives exclusive importance to the examination system, are recommended to shift towards testing only the "understanding of core concepts and knowledge along with higher order capabilities such as creative thinking, analysis and applications throughout the education system and in all subjects, and in all tests in schools and colleges, admissions, or employment.

---INFA
(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

*“Science without religion is lame,
religion without science is blind.”*

---Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.323

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 5, 2019

Good side of the economy

THIS here is time for stock-taking vis-a-vis the state of the national economy and how India takes its cautious yet promising steps forward. The Economic Survey report presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Thursday will be followed by the presentation of the Annual Budget on Friday. A seven per cent growth is projected, which looks moderate but doable. There are the other feel-good factors, like a reiteration of the Modi government's plan to turn India into a \$5 trillion economy in the next five years – still a far cry from China's present \$13 trillion and US' 19 trillion. The Government's aim to reach the benefits of the economic growth to one and all is evident when the report cited Mahatma Gandhi's message, “Recall the face of the poorest individual and ask for yourself if the steps you contemplate is of any use to him or her.” It also lays stress on hastening economic growth by providing stronger support to big firms – a break from the socialist era contempt towards private sector.

In this context, the report also notes that the MSMEs must be freed from the shackles that converted them into dwarfs. “MSMEs need to be seen as a source of innovation, growth and job creation.” Put together, the manufacturing sector would require a much-needed fillip. This was unlike the past few years when the growth was marginal. The result of this was that job creation was to the minimum in the traditional sectors, though the services sector took giant leaps in creating such opportunities. Both these aspects need to be taken note of for a realistic assessment of the scenario. The survey also stressed the need for a minimum wage policy for bottom rung of wage earners in ways also as to drive up demand and strengthen the purchasing power of the burgeoning middle class. Two other aspects need special note. One, the contention that India will enjoy the “demographic dividend” phase in the next two decades, meaning population growth would be helping the nation in positive ways in this phase. At the same time, it is noted that some states would start transition into an ageing society some 10 years hence – which would exert pressure on the exchequer in terms of health care. Two, the report projects that India is moving forward from the Swachh Bharat phase in the past five years to a more promising Swasth and Sundar Bharat period. The first is still a work in progress, though.

LOOKING BACK

June 21, 1989

Buta urges Mahanta to hold talks with Bodos

Home Minister Mr Buta Singh today urged Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta to find a negotiated settlement of the Bodo problem at the earliest.

Reviewing the situation with Mr Mahanta here today, Mr Buta Singh said the continuance of the agitation launched by the All Bodo Students Union was a cause for “concern”. The All Bodo Students Union did not participate in the talks called

by the Assam Gana Parishad government at Guwahati early this week. The AASU has said it was prepared for talks with the Assam government in the presence of a central Minister and that it should be held outside the state. On the issue of Assam Nagaland boundary it was agreed that all steps should be taken to prevent recurrence of violence and normalization of the situation.

SC Order on Coal Mining – Welcome Reprieve for Environmentalists

By Patricia Mukhim

A learned advocate from Delhi called up on July 4 morning to ask (a) Why the coal mining lobby of Meghalaya is celebrating (b) what are they actually celebrating?

The answers are (a) the coal lobby has not read the finer details of the SC Order which has lifted the ban on coal mining but put in place stringent regulations. The Court has thrown out the claim that Meghalaya being a Sixth Schedule state is exempt from central mining laws and that the NGT has no jurisdiction over a tribal state that follows traditional mining methods.

It's enlightening to read the preamble to the July 3 Judgment in the matter of, “The State of Meghalaya vs All Dimas Hasao Students' Union. It says, “Natural resources of the country are not meant to be consumed only by the present generation of men or women of the region where natural resources are deposited. These treasures of nature are for all generations to come and for intelligent use of the entire country. The present generation owes a duty to preserve and conserve the natural resources of the nation so that it may be used in the best interest of coming generations as well and for the country as a whole.

The points under consideration of the apex court were as under:

1. Whether orders passed by the National Green Tribunal are without jurisdiction being beyond the purview of Sections 14, 15 and 16 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010?

2. Whether provisions of Mines and Minerals Development Regulation Act, 1957 are applicable in Tribal areas within the State of Meghalaya, included in Sixth Schedule of the Constitution?

3. Whether for mining the minerals from privately owned/community owned land in hills districts of Meghalaya, obtaining a mining lease is a statutory requirement under the MMDR Act, 1957 and the Mineral Concession Rules, 1960?

4. Whether under the MMDR Act, 1957 and Mineral Concession Rules, 1960, it is the State Government, who is to grant lease for mining of minerals in privately owned/community owned land or it is the owner of the minerals, who is to grant lease for carrying out mining operations?

5. Whether the State of Meghalaya has any statutory control over the mining of coal from privately owned/community owned land in hills districts of State of Meghalaya?

6. Whether the power to allot land for mining purposes is vested in Autonomous District Councils?

7. Whether the order of National Green Tribunal dated 17.04.2014 directing for complete ban on mining is unsustainable?

8. Whether the complete ban on mining of coal in the State of Meghalaya as directed by NGT deserved to 53 be vacated/modified in the interest of State and Tribals?

9. Whether NGT had any jurisdiction to constitute committees to submit reports, to implement the orders of NGT, to monitor storage/transportation; of minerals and to prepare action plan for restoration of environment?

10. Whether the NGT committed error in directing for constitution of fund, namely, Meghalaya Environment Protection and Restoration Fund?

11. Whether NGT by constituting Committees has delegated essential judicial powers to the Committees and has further encroached the constitutional scheme of administration of Tribal areas under Article 244(2) and Article 275(1) and Schedule VI of the Constitution?

12. Whether direction to deposit Rs.100/- crores by the State of Meghalaya by order dated 04.01.2019 of NGT impugned in C.A.No.2968 of 2019 is sustainable?

13. Whether NGT's order dated 31.03.2016 that after 15.05.2016 all remaining coal shall vest in the State of Meghalaya is sustainable?

14. Whether assessed and unassessed coal which has already been extracted and lying in different Districts of Meghalaya be permitted to be transported and what mechanism be adopted for disposal of such coal?

The Court order upheld in letter and spirit all actions taken by the NGT asserting that the Tribunal relied on several ground research including that of Dr OP Singh of NEHU which speaks of Acid Mine Drainage amongst other environmental damages caused by coal mining. The NGT also cited the reports of the State Pollution Control Board which had flagged the issue of grave environmental pollution since 1997 but which the State did not act upon.

The State Government was rapped in the knuckles for standing with the offenders instead of protecting the environment which is its constitutional duty. The Court pointed out that, “there were reports of the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board before the State Government pointing out environmental degradation and the Tribunal having taken up the issue, the submission on behalf of the State that the Tribunal has no jurisdiction is not expected from the State Government who is under constitutional obligation to ensure clean environment to all its citizens.” Pointing out that in cases pertaining to environmental matter the State has to act as facilitator and not as obstructionist. (Article 48A of the Constitution), the Court says, “The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country.”

The request submitted by the Government of

Meghalaya for issuance of Presidential Notification under Paragraph 12A(b) of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for exempting the State of Meghalaya from certain provisions of the MMDR Act, 1957 has not been acceded to. This request for exemption itself expresses recognition of the State of Meghalaya that provisions of Act, 1957 are applicable. The Court therefore concludes that there is nothing in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution which in any manner excludes the applicability of Act, 1957 in the Tribal areas of Hills District of State of Meghalaya.

The Court held that private owners of the land are also owners of the minerals and the minerals belong to the owners/Tribals but that coal mining was illegally going on unregulated by any statutory law in the Meghalaya without there being any mining lease. The contention on behalf of the State of Meghalaya that the MMDR Act, 1957 does not apply to State of Meghalaya is based on an erroneous reading of the statutory provisions, the Court said.

While implementing statutory regime for carrying mining operations in Meghalaya, the State has to ensure compliance of not only MMDR Act, 1957 but Mines Act, 1952 as well as Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, stated the Court order.

The Court also took umbrage at the fact the State Government despite being fully aware of the MMDR Act has argued that no mining lease is to be obtained for privately owned/community owned land by terming it, “unacceptable and not in a good spirit. Our country being governed by the Constitution of India all the States are to implement Parliamentary Acts in true spirit and in the present case the State having been advised time and again by Comptroller and Auditor General and being well aware of its statutory obligation as noticed above it comes ill from the State to contend before this Court that there is no requirement of mining lease for winning the minerals. The above stand of the State taken before this Court gives the impression that instead of implementing the Parliamentary enactment and regulatory regime for mineral regulation some vested interests wants to continue the illegal regime of illegal mining to the benefit of the few persons which is unacceptable and condemnable. We, thus, conclude that the State of Meghalaya has jurisdiction and power to ensure that no mining of coal should take place except when a mining lease granted under Mineral Concession Rules, 1960, Chapter V.”

Henceforth the District Council would not have any power to make any law with regard to grant of mining lease. The mining leases for winning the major minerals has to be granted in accordance with 1957 Act and Mineral Concession Rules, 1960.

The private owners of the land as well as community owners have both the surface right as well as sub-soil rights. 5) Para 12A sub-clause (b) of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution empowers that the President may, with respect to any Act of Parliament, by 190 notification, direct that it shall not apply to an autonomous district or an autonomous region in the State of Meghalaya, or shall apply to such district or region or any part thereof subject to such exceptions or modifications as he may specify in the notification.

The provisions of The Mines Act, 1952 are mandatory to be followed before working a mine. The regulations namely Coal Mines Regulations, 2017 also contains several regulatory provisions which need to be followed while working a mine by a mining lease holder. The enforcement of Mines Act, 1952 and the Regulations, 2017 have to be ensured by the State in the public interest

As per Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, environmental clearance is required for a project of coal for mining of any extent of area. While implementing statutory regime for carrying mining operations in the State of Meghalaya, the State has to ensure compliance of not only MMDR Act, 1957 but Mines Act, 1952 as well as Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. 10)

For carrying coal mining operations in privately owned/community owned land it is not the State Government which shall grant the mining lease under Chapter V of Rules, 1960, but it is the private owner/community owner of the land, who is also the owner of the mineral, who shall grant lease for mining of coal as per provisions of Chapter V of Rules, 1960 after obtaining 193 previous approval of the Central Government through the State Government.

Meghalaya has ample power and jurisdiction under the Act, 1957 and Rules, 1960 to check, control and prohibit coal mining operations. The Union Government having declared by Section 2 of 1957 Act to take under its control regulation and development of mineral, the power of Autonomous District Council to legislate on the subject shall also be denuded as that of the State Legislature.

All mining will henceforth be carried out by a mining lease holder as per the provisions of Act, 1957 and Rules, 1960 with an approved mining plan under the regulation and control of the State of Meghalaya. If mining operations are undertaken in privately owned/community owned land in Meghalaya in accordance with mining lease with approved mining plan as per Act, 1957 and Mineral Concessions Rule, 1960, the ban order dated 17.04.2014 of the tribunal of the NGT shall not come in the way of mining operations.

Claim of virtuous cycle in the economy is false

By Gyan Pathak

The Economic Survey 2018-19 is euphemistic in tone. A little despair on account of much troubled economy has been taken away instilling a little hope through attractive phrases and portraying an ailing economy as potentially a great economy of the future. Survey departs from traditional Anglo-Saxon thinking by viewing the economy as being either in a virtuous or a vicious cycle, and thus never in equilibrium, and then goes on claiming that the “virtuous cycle” has begun indirectly saying that “vicious cycle” has ended for good. However, the heart of the matter is that the present Indian economy is under great duress, under “vicious cycle” both in domestic and external sectors.

On India's External Sector, though the Economic Survey states that it continues to be stable, the Current Account Deficit (CAD) has increased to 2.1 per cent of GDP in 2018-19, up from 1.8 per cent in 2017-18. It can create a very difficult situation which the survey says “is within manageable levels”.

The widening of CAD was due to deterioration in trade deficit from 6.0 per cent of GDP in 2017-18 to 6.7 per cent in 2018-19 which does not augur well for the economy. The rising trend in crude oil prices may effect further deterioration in trade deficit. The only consolation is that acceleration in the growth of remittances has prevented a larger deterioration of CAD. Can this level of CAD be managed? The survey says that the trend of the total liabilities to GDP ratio inclusive of both debt and non-debt components, a rise in the share of foreign direct investment, and a fall in the net portfolio investment in total liabilities reflect a transition to more stable source of funding CAD. In sum, although CAD to GDP ratio has increased in 2018-19, the external indebtedness continues to be on a declining path, the survey emphasizes.

The Survey notes that India's foreign exchange reserves continue to be comfortably placed in excess of USD 400 billion. Though it is reassuring, the depreciation of the rupee against USD is potentially dangerous. The Rupee traded in the range of 65-68 per USD in 2017-18 but depreciated to 70-74 in 2018-19. Moreover, the exchange rate in 2018-19 has been more volatile, mainly due to volatility in crude prices. The survey tries to downplay it by stating that the exchange rate volatility is “not much due to net portfolio flows.” The Real Effective Exchange Rate also depreciated in 2018-19, making India's exports potentially more competitive. The income terms of trade, a metric that measures the purchasing power to import, has been on a rising trend. The reason the survey states that it is possibly because the growth of crude prices has still not exceeded the growth of India's export prices.

India's External Debt at end-December 2018, 1.6 per cent than its level at end-March 2018. The long-term debt declined by 2.4 per cent though its share was mostly same at 80.1 per cent of total external debt compared to 80.7 per cent during the same period. Such stagnation was more or less registered also in the composition of India's exports and import basket. It reveals that India needs much to do in this respect because the trade deficit was USD183.96 billion during the period. Since India's main trading partners continue to be the US, China, Hong Kong, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the country needs to protect itself from the ill effects of the trade war.

In the domestic sector too the economic survey is more emphatic on portraying the “potentially great Indian economy” such as \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25. It is just half at present. The economic survey emphasizes that to achieve this goal the country will need 8 per cent of sustained growth in years to come. The authors of the survey have talked much

about the ‘virtuous cycle’ implying that the status of the economy augurs well for the future. However, the document itself belies it.

The macroeconomic view presented in the survey says that the growth of GDP has moderated to 6.8 per cent in 2018-19 from 7.2 per cent in 2017-18. It has just avoided the word “declined” seemingly to soften the impact of the word in our mind. The inflation is contained at 3.4 per cent in 2018-19, but it is more so because of the low agricultural prices which tells another story that our farmers are at the receiving end against the promise given to them for doubling their income within three years from now. Non-Performing Assets as percentage of Gross Advances reduced to only 10.1 per cent at end-December 2018 from 11.5 per cent at end-March 2018.

Investment growth is still very tardy compared to the need of the country, though the survey says that it is recovering. The story of growth in fixed investment is not also at the level of pushing growth at the sustained level of 8 per cent though it has picked up from 8.3 per cent in 2016-17 to 9.3 per cent next year and further to 10.0 per cent in 2018-19. Fiscal deficit of the Central Government has also declined from 3.5 per cent of GDP in 2017-18 to 3.4 per cent in 2018-19, however, it is too small to arrest its adverse impact on the Indian Economy. Against all odds, the survey hopes that there are prospects of pickup in growth in 2019-20 on the back of further increase in private investment and acceleration in consumption.

On the fiscal position the survey states that FY 2018-19 ended with fiscal deficit at 3.4 per cent of GDP and debt to GDP ratio of 44.5 per cent (Provisional). It is undoubtedly too high. As per cent of GDP, total Central Government expenditure fell by only 0.3 percentage points in 2018-19 PA over 2017-18. There is 0.4 percentage point reduction in revenue expenditure and 0.1 percentage point increase in capital expenditure, which are minor to have desired impact. States' own tax and non-tax revenue displays robust growth in 2017-18 RE and envisaged to be maintained in 2018-19 BE. On the basis of this the survey predicts that the revised fiscal glide path envisages achieving fiscal deficit of 3 per cent of GDP by FY 2020-21 and Central Government debt to 40 per cent of GDP by 2024-25.

On money management and financial intermediation, the survey notes that the Banking System has improved as ratio of NPA has declined and credit growth accelerated. The statement needs a careful consideration because it involves Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code through which the issues are being resolved. Moreover, the RBI has reported that only 50,000 crore rupees have been received by banks from previously non-performing accounts. Liquidity conditions has remained systematically tight. Financial flows remained constrained because of decline in the equity finance raised from capital markets and stress in the NBFC sector. Capital mobilized through public equity issuance declined by 81 per cent in 2018-19. Credit growth rate y-o-y of the NBFCs declined from 30 per cent in March 2018 to 9 per cent in March 2019.

India's Sustainable Development Goal index is still very low between 42 and 69 for States and between 57 and 68 for UTs, which reflect poor performance of the government, though the Economic Survey is full of beautiful phrases creating great hope for the future of our economy. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Good move

Editor,
The current monsoon session of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is witnessing an important phase through the approval of several important bills. The bills are tabled after Zero hour in both the houses through pending, amendment and introduction of bills respectively by the members of parliament through a consensus motion. It is welcome to know that certain bills related to Special Economic Zones, the Dentists, Indian Medical Council and the Central Educational bills have been passed recently through an amendment tabled in the current session.

Further the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is asked

to share the details of all the Bills passed, amended or introduced, including private member bills, through a comprehensive list published daily in local newspapers and regional newspapers. Also the Press Information Bureau news portal may carry a detailed daily press release updates specifically announcing the list of Bills presented in the current session on a regular basis. (in a tabular format)

Such a positive and proactive move will help ensure that the citizens are well aware of Bills passed by the respective members on daily basis in every session of both the houses. The announcement may also carry complete details of the Bills along with the member's details. Thus the

information dissemination as suggested will further help Parliament to effectively manage public outreach initiatives through newspapers and PIB website press releases.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal
Bangalore 72

Congress will return

Editor,
After more than a month of the declaration of Lok Sabha election results, Rahul Gandhi, the Congress President tendered his resignation. It may be pertinent to note that soon after the Congress debacle in the recent general elections, Rahul offered his

willingness to resign but since no successor to the seat of the Congress President was found, his resignation was kept under pending.

Mounting public pressure on the party to act on the decision of Rahul's resignation without further procrastination, Rahul, sensing the pulse, hastened to offer his resignation. The CWC was forced to accept it to save itself from the disgrace of defeat. As a responsible leader, Rahul owning the responsibility of the Congress rout in the election took the landmark decision to resign from the party position.

Under the Congress constitution, the seniormost general

secretary, which in this case is Motilal Vora, the 90-year old former party treasurer, will be the working president of the party till next meeting of the Congress Working Committee is called.

It must be borne in mind that at present there is no mass leader like Rahul in the Congress party. He is still the real hero in the millions of hearts of the people of this country. And the reason why his party has been defeated is nothing but the BJP's political strategy of Hindutva. Another winning strategy adopted by the BJP was the celebration of the Balakot air strike undertaken by the Indian Air Force in retaliation for the Pulwama terror attack by extremists. But Rahul adopted a rather plain and straight forward

strategy which got rebuffed at the hustings.

Considering all aspects, it is imperative for the Congress party that Rahul should come back to take the reins of the party as he is the real hero of the masses and millions are carrying him in their hearts. Congress is the single largest party spread over every nook and cranny of India and the party is still relevant and acceptable to millions. People kept the Congress party away from the power this time but not forever and this is only for the time being. The party will soon come back with Rahul leading the nation. If winter comes now, can spring be far behind?

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Kochi-15

"An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field."

--- Niels Bohr

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.324

SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 6, 2019

Budget not populist

A sense of realism and lack of populism mark the first budget of the Modi government in its second term. Expectations were less from the common man this time as some huge welfare-pension schemes had been announced a few months before the 2019 polls via a short-term budget. There still is eminent stress on the rural sector, attending to the needs of the poor, and promising faster steps for infrastructure development. Curiously, the outlook of the budget presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman is more on long-term growth and less on what the government aims for the current fiscal, for which nine months are left. The PM has said this budget is of "Aasha, Vishwas and Akansha." Yet, no major reform has been hinted at. Fiscal deficit has been brought down from 3.4 per cent to 3.3 per cent. Hopes about reducing the tax burden on the salaried class have been dashed, and slabs remain unchanged, even as mega cities like Mumbai, Pune and Delhi are soon set for assembly polls. A fuel cess of one rupee and an additional tax of one rupee per litre of fuel have, instead, been added to the burden of the middle class. This could also result in inflationary trends.

The government plans to impose more taxes on the super-rich. Vis-a-vis direct taxes, a surcharge would be levied on those with taxable income under two brackets - one, with income of two to five crore; and the other with above five crore. The tax rate for these two categories would increase by 3 percentage points to 7 respectively. The Budget talks about raising the scenario of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to new levels. Notably, this initiative of the Modi government in its first term had not been impressive. Emphasis is on the government's goal of turning India into a \$5 trillion economy in a matter of five years from the present level of \$2.7 trillion. Five years ago, it stood at 1.85 trillion. An eight per cent growth is a pre-condition to such a rise, but the economy now grows at the rate of seven per cent. There are the feel-good factors for the poor and the middle class - like the housing loans being granted an additional Rs 1.5lakh relaxation over and above the existing Rs 2 lakh. There is promise to reach water, electricity and cooking gas to all homes. More retail traders have been brought into pension scheme. Overall, the optimism is moderate yet sustainable.

LOOKING BACK

June 21, 1989

Seven killed in Kokrajhar blast

At least seven persons including a woman were killed and eleven injured, when a powerful bomb exploded at Kokrajhar railway station in Assam today, according to official sources.

The bomb, apparently a time device, went off at 1.30 am and blew up about 60 feet of the platform number two of the station. The explosion caused extensive damage to other railway property and a tea stall. Sources said most of the victims were believed to be passengers waiting for a train.

Only one of those killed,

a woman water carrier employed by the railways, had so far been identified. The condition of four of the injured including an Assam Rifles jawan was said to be serious.

A railway spokesman said medical teams had been sent to Kokrajhar from Alipurduar and Bongaigaon junction. The entire area has been cordoned by police, and the CRPF and Assam Rifles jawans. High civil, police and railway officials have also rushed to Kokrajhar to coordinate investigations and relief operations.

The fact is that toilets are mere receptacles to receive waste; when we flush or pour water, the waste flows into a piped drain, which could be either connected,

practice must be discontinued." In 2011 during the course of his visit to the state's mining hotspots, this was what he has to say, "What we found most galling was the impunity with which the laws were being broken. None of the rat hole mines had leases; they simply did not exist on paper. All of them were operating without any environment clearance from the environment ministry or from the Pollution Control Board. These illegalities were enabled by the so-called legal ambiguity regarding mining in Sixth Schedule areas as mentioned in the Constitution. Bhusan adds, "We were informed that as

Water crisis is ours to change

By Sunita Narain

Summer of 2018, the Himalayan town of Shimla literally ran out of water. Summer of 2019, Chennai at the end of all rivers in India faced its day zero. These are not the only towns to confront this crisis. According to the 2018 Composite Water Index of the Niti Aayog, 600 million people-roughly half of Indians-face high to extreme water crisis; worse 70 per cent of the available water is contaminated. And by 2020, Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad will run out of groundwater and by 2030, as much as 40 per cent of India will have no drinking water.

But this is one future we can change. Water is a replenishable resource-it snows and rains each year. More importantly, other than in the case of agriculture, we don't consume water. We use and discharge. Therefore, it can be treated and then re-used and recycled. The agenda is also clear: first to augment available water by capturing every drop and doing this everywhere. In a climate-risked India, when rainfall is extreme and variable, it means doing more to capture rain and to recharge groundwater.

The second and most important agenda is to combine water augmentation with efficiency. Each drop must bring more crop and more of everything. This means designing deliberately to reduce water usage. In agriculture it means changing cropping patterns so that we stop growing water guzzling crops like rice, wheat and sugarcane in areas where water is scarce. It means re-designing policies to incentivize farmers to diversify crops; promoting diets that value water-prudent crops.

If water efficiency is the agenda for agriculture, then water-recycling has to be the agenda for cities and industries. Till date we have no data on how much water is used today in urban and industrial India. The last estimation was done in the mid-1990s, which said that agriculture uses some 75-80 per cent of available water. This is completely out of date. As cities grow they will require water. This water will be brought from longer distances, which increases cost and losses in transmission. Whatever water cities have is, therefore, expensive and is supplied inequitably to residents. Where people get none or little water they dig into the ground, which in turn depletes groundwater.

Worse and criminally, cities do not discharge clean water back into the environment-80 per cent is discharged as waste. The question is how much of it is cleaned and made available for reuse. We can do this. But we don't. Instead we flush, we forget, use and abuse. Whatever is there is contaminated.

The fact is that toilets are mere receptacles to receive waste; when we flush or pour water, the waste flows into a piped drain, which could be either connected,

or not, to a sewage treatment plant (STP). This STP may or may not work. The key is to build toilets that work and toilets that are connected to systems that will safely dispose of human excreta so that it does not become another source of pollution and another source of bad health. So, building toilets, however essential, must not be confused with sanitation.

But if we reinvent the way we treat our sewage, we can save water - first by not allowing it to be polluted and secondly by turning waste back into a resource. This is a potential game-changer.

Till now, the paradigm for urban sanitation has been costly. It requires first the supply of water, which if transported from longer distances, increases cost of supply. The more the water that is supplied, the more the sewage that is generated. So, the next part is to build underground conveyance systems to connect each household and to transport the wastewater also to longer distances to sewage treatment plants so it is cleaned before discharge. But even this is not enough. The fact is that our rivers have little clean water to assimilate even treated effluents. This means sewage treatment plants have to clean waste to near bathing water quality before being released into rivers. This never happens. Pollution grows even as governments chase pipe-dreams of building more sewage treatment plants, underground drains and toilets. It never adds up.

This approach also misses the opportunity. My colleagues at the Centre for Science and Environment have worked on what we call, "shit-flow" diagrams of cities - maps of journey of sewage. This shows up two realities. One, nearly all Indian cities do not treat or safely dispose the bulk of the human excreta. Two, most toilets in almost all cities, are not connected to underground pipes, but to individual septic tanks. This is on-site treatment, which needs to be recognized and worked with.

This on-site system would work, if the septic tank is built to specification; if the system for collection of the human excreta is regulated and if the sludge, so collected is taken to treatment points so that it can be made safe for reuse.

The fact is that sludge is nutrient rich. Today, the global nitrogen cycle is being destroyed because we take human excreta, which is rich in nutrients and dispose it in water. In this case, we can return the human excreta back to land, use it as fertilizer and reverse the sanitation cycle. The faecal sludge, after treatment, can be given to farmers and used as organic compost. Or, it can be treated and mixed

with other organic waste-like kitchen waste-and used for biogas, or to manufacture fuel pellets or ethanol.

The bottom-line is that unless our system of waste management is affordable, it cannot be sustainable. We need solutions that can reach water to all; take back the waste of all and do this in ways that can be Re-inventing the business of sewage so that it works the current on-site technologies will not only provide employment, it will also provide sustainable solutions so that waste, is not waste, it is a resource.

This is even more important in today's climate risked world.

Each year, without fail we have a vicious cycle of crippling and backbreaking drought and then devastating floods. But the fact is that this cycle is getting a new 'normal'. First, floods and droughts come together. Today, even as 40 per cent of the districts face prospects of drought, close to 25 per cent districts have had heavy rainfall of more than 100 mm in just a matter of hours. Rainfall is variable and extreme.

In 2017, Chandigarh, a city of open parks, was submerged under water. It had deficient rains till August 21 of that year, and then it got 115 mm of rain in just 12 hours. It drowned. In other words, it got roughly 15 per cent of its annual monsoon rain in just these hours. Also, in 2017, Bengaluru hardly had any rain and then it poured. It got 150 mm of rain in just about a day, which is close to 30 per cent of its annual monsoon rain. No wonder the city drowned.

This is a double-whammy. The fact is that on the one hand we are getting our water management wrong - we are building in floodplains, destroying our water-bodies and filling up our water channels. On the other hand, climate change is beginning to show its impact on the monsoons. It is leading to, what scientists predicted would happen, more rain in fewer number of rainy days. More rain and more extreme rain events!

It is time we got this reality. This means learning to cope with twin scenarios simultaneously. This means being obsessive about how to mitigate floods and how to live with scarcity of water. The good news is that doing one, can help the other. But we need to stop debating, dithering or dawdling. We know what to do. And we have no time to lose - climate change is only increasing with time as weather and rainfall will only get more variable, more extreme and more catastrophic.

The answer to floods is what has been discussed for long and was in fact practiced in flood-prone regions of India many decades ago. It requires planning systems that can divert and channelize water so that it does not flood land and destroy life. It means linking rivers to ponds, lakes and ditches so that water is free to flow. This will

distribute the water across the region and bring other benefits. It will recharge groundwater so that in the subsequent months of low rainfall there is water for drinking and irrigation. It will also ensure that there is food during the flood period, as wetlands are highly productive in terms of fish and plant food.

Mitigating floods and droughts have only one answer - obsessive attention to building millions and millions of connected and living water structures that will capture rain, be a sponge for flood and storehouse for drought.

Our water future is about our water wisdom. We need to learn from the fascinating case of ancient Rome and Edo, the city out of which grew Tokyo. Romans used to build huge aqueducts that ran for tens of miles to bring water to their settlements. These aqueducts even today are the most omnipresent symbols of that society's water management. And many experts have praised the Romans for the meticulousness with which they planned their water supply.

But, no, these aqueducts represent not the intelligence but the utter environmental mismanagement of the great Romans. Rome was built on the river Tiber. The city did not need any aqueduct. But as the waste of Rome was discharged directly into the Tiber, the river was polluted and water had to be brought from long distances. Water outlets were few as a result and the elite appropriated these using a system of slaves. On the contrary, traditional Japanese never discharged their waste into the rivers. Instead they composted the waste and then used them in the fields. Using the rivers, Edo had numerous water outlets and much more egalitarian water supply.

Water and culture go together. Water shortage is not about mere failure of rain. It is about the failure of society to live and share its water endowment.

The challenge is to confront the reality of current water management strategies and have the courage to stand for a different and more water secure future. The problem is in our mind - and in our inability to think and do things differently.

We are at a new juncture where livelihoods are threatened because of water mismanagement. We are also at a juncture when urban-industrial growth will demand more water for its development. The question then is how will India balance the needs of the old - agriculture and drinking of its rural populations - with the needs of the new - urban and industrial sectors? How will water productivity be enhanced so that it remains affordable and hence sustainable?

We can be water-secure, because we are water-wise. (The author is Director General, Centre for Science and Environment)

are the so-called NGOs and student unions who cried hoarse from roof tops to protect the land and its people (*Ka Ri bad ka Jaidbynriew*)?

The next course of action is for civil society and environmentalists to see that the mining lobby here adheres to the prescribed regulations, namely the MMDR Act 1957, the Mineral Concession Rules 1960, and the Environment Protection Act 1986. Watch out. We have experienced umpteen times how money power can play its role to bend and circumvent the rules and laws.

Yours etc,
Torist Mark,
Via email

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Rahil Nora Chopra

CONGRESS PONDERS: AFTER RAHUL, WHO?

The Congress is confused regarding the post of the President of the Congress party, as the Congress Working Committee, in its last meeting, rejected the resignation of Rahul Gandhi and appealed him to continue as party president. Meanwhile, many secretaries in the AICC and several office-bearers of Youth and Mahila Congress have resigned in the footsteps of Rahul Gandhi. The in-charge of Chhattisgarh, PL Punia, has also resigned. However, Rahul Gandhi is adamant that he will not continue as party president, and as the proverbial last nail, he tweeted out his resignation letter, in which he accepted responsibility for the 2019 Lok Sabha election performance by the Congress, and also mentioned that he would not have any say in the choosing of the new president. In the light of the finality of Rahul's decision, at last, few alternatives are being talked about and three names for the post of Congress president are in discussion. They are Mallikarjun Kharge, Ashok Gehlot and Sushil Kumar Shinde. Kharge was the party's leader in the 16th Lok Sabha and has an edge over the others, particularly because he is from the South, which has given Congress about 21 of the 52 seats in the current Lok Sabha. All the three leaders are considered loyalists of the Gandhi family. Another name floated on Saturday is of Manmohan Singh. Meanwhile, in political circles, there is rumour that an alternative is Sonia Gandhi who can become party chief

leader Tejashwi Yadav had surfaced on Saturday, not physically but on Twitter, where he posted a line: "I am undergoing the treatment for an injury to the ligament of the knee." In the last Lok Sabha election, his sister Misa Bharti, a Rajya Sabha MP, had interfered in the party affairs, while it seemed that brother Tej Pratap would launch a new party called "Tej Sena" resulting Tejashwi Yadav staying in Delhi. However, now Tejashwi's supporters are claiming that he would be back in Patna within a day or two and he would fight for Bihar problems. With Lalu in jail, RJD is moving towards a natural death and for the first time in 30 years, the RJD has no MP in the Lok Sabha.

WHY MAYAWATI IS QUEEN OF ALLIANCE-BREAKING

Formation and breaking of alliances are not new for Mayawati. In the last Lok Sabha election, Mayawati had made alliance with Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, but immediately after the result, she broke the partnership. For BSP, this is a routine exercise before and after the election. BSP had allied with SP for the first time in 1993 and with a favourable result, had together formed the government in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India. But in 1995, BSP broke the alliance and made her government, with outside support of BJP. Then again in 1996, BSP fought the election with Congress, but soon she broke the alliance with Congress and went again with BJP with a condition

For BSP, this is a routine exercise before and after the election. BSP had allied with SP for the first time in 1993 and with a favourable result, had together formed the government in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India.

temporarily so that party get time to choose a suitable candidate for the post of Congress president. Meanwhile, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who has made Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, has not been well received and there has been no announcement regarding a deputy leader in the Lok Sabha. Manish Tewari and Shashi Tharoor do not want to work under him.

AS BJP WORKING PRESIDENT, NADDA DOES SHAH'S BIDDING

J P Nadra, presently designated as the working president of the BJP, is likely to graduate to being a full-fledged president by the end of this year. Meanwhile, Nadra is indeed a working president, working hard at the behest of the real party chief. Amit Shah, it seems has drawn up a 120-day schedule for his understudy. Unlike the talk going the rounds, Shah's priority is not exactly the coming Assembly elections of Haryana, Jharkhand and Maharashtra - well, he thinks the BJP faces little challenge in these states - but the grassroots membership drive.

Apparently, the focus is on constituencies where the BJP had lost or had a low vote share in the Assembly elections - in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. And in all states, the drive is to get local block-level celebrities, people with any following in social media, who can influence opinions, into the saffron fold.

IS TEJASHWI YADAV BACK FROM POLITICAL WILDERNESS?

After the Lok Sabha election drubbing, the RJD leaders have been staying away from Bihar politics for over a month now and have shown no reaction or concern about the children's death in Muzaffarpur. No party leader from RJD has even visited Muzaffarpur. Senior leaders are blaming Tejashwi Prasad Yadav for the RJD debacle in the general election, in which it failed to win even one Lok Sabha seat. Recently, RJD

that both parties would make the government alternatively every six months. Once again, when BJP came to power after six months, she withdrew support. But BJP's Kalyan Singh saved his government by dividing BSP into two. It was then that Mayawati declared that she would never have any alliance with BJP, but after five years, in 2002, Mayawati became the UP Chief Minister with the support of BJP. It is the fact that if Mayawati had not made any alliance with SP this time, then the result of the BSP would have remained the same as of 2014. The alliance with SP in 2019 compelled Muslims to give votes to BSP candidates en masse resulting in the winning of BSP candidates from Bijnor, where the Hindu candidate of BSP was fighting against the Muslim candidate of Congress. Since BSP had given ticket to a Hindu candidate in Meerut in place of a Muslim candidate, BSP must have won it at all because of the support of SP votes to BSP. SP has lost in the 2019 Lok Sabha election because of their family dispute and now Mayawati has left the SP as usual. She will be looking to make a new alliance in the next election.

FOR MANMOHAN'S RAJYA SABHA RE-ENTRY, IT'S TAMILNADU OR RAJASTHAN

Congress is learnt to have asked ally DMK for a Rajya Sabha berth amid indication that it may be used to bring former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who retired recently on June 14, back to the Upper House. There are three vacancies from Tamil Nadu and DMK is reportedly agreeable to give extra votes to Congress. However, with the sudden demise of Rajasthan Rajya Sabha BJP MP Madan Lal Saini last week, the Congress wants Manmohan Singh to be elected from Rajasthan. (IPA)

TO THE EDITOR

The end of lawlessness

Editor,
As a silent onlooker to the rampant destruction of mother earth by people who care not for the environment and future generation, we wholeheartedly welcome the Supreme Court judgment on 3rd July 2019 vis-a-vis the coal mining issue in Meghalaya. In this connection I wish to quote Chandrabhusan's prophetic article in, "Down To Earth," February issue, of the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. His article 'Out of the legal hole' began with a headline, "There is no such thing as environmentally acceptable and safe rat-hole coal mining and hence this primitive

practice must be discontinued." In 2011 during the course of his visit to the state's mining hotspots, this was what he has to say, "What we found most galling was the impunity with which the laws were being broken. None of the rat hole mines had leases; they simply did not exist on paper. All of them were operating without any environment clearance from the environment ministry or from the Pollution Control Board. These illegalities were enabled by the so-called legal ambiguity regarding mining in Sixth Schedule areas as mentioned in the Constitution. Bhusan adds, "We were informed that as

Meghalaya is a Sixth Schedule state and the powers to make laws with respect to land belong to the Autonomous District Councils, land owners can mine without any permission from the State or the Union government. To bolster the argument, it was alluded that the coal mines in Meghalaya were never nationalised. We however found that the coal mines of Khasi and Jaintia were nationalised under the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act 1973. We also found that paragraph 9 of the Sixth Schedule clearly stipulates the need for licences or leases for the purpose of prospecting or extraction of minerals. In addition we legally established that all central mining and

environmental laws are applicable to the coal mines in Meghalaya. We prepared detailed reports and held meetings in Shillong and Tura about the need to enforce the mining and environmental norms. But nothing happened. However we knew that it was only a matter of time before these illegalities would be exposed...The political class supports these mines. The state govt. has challenged the NGT ban in the Supreme Court and the State Assembly in 2015 adopted a resolution urging the Centre to exempt Meghalaya from central laws so that rat-hole mining can continue. But such mines are environmentally

damaging and unsafe to be allowed and hence must be banned. The bottom line is the right to self-governance does not translate into the right to destroy the environment even in the Sixth Schedule areas."

While all sections of society hailed the Supreme Court judgment, the political class and the coal barons should hang their heads in shame. Had it not been for the petition filed by the All Dimas Students Union and Dima Hasao District Committee in the NGT we would have continued to see the wanton destruction of the environment to this day. We should thank them for doing this immeasurable favour to the state of Meghalaya. In all this, where

Creative women take it easy at Etsy

By Margaret Austin,
Tirna Chatterjee,
Tara Lang & Ian Nickens

As the sun rises over Kolkata, Agnika Banerjee settles behind a desk in the corner of her room, preparing for 8-10 hours of crafting delicate and detailed miniatures.

Nine hours later, as daylight warms the Midwestern plains in Columbia, Missouri, Melissa Tipton gets ready to mold polymer clay into tiny versions of colourful foods.

These two women on opposite sides of the world are turning creative passions into profitable enterprises by selling their handmade treasures through the international online marketplace Etsy.

Sites like these are empowering women around the world, giving them new ways to support themselves and their families and exposing customers to handmade goods from a myriad of cultures.

"My first order on Etsy was from California," Banerjee said. "An international order made me feel that I had arrived as a business person."

Etsy and similar sites are opening up new opportunities for female entrepreneurs while boosting women's workforce participation and economic fortunes.

Women currently account for 39 per cent of the workforce globally and 46 per cent in the US, according to the World Bank. The rate is 22 per cent in India, where 81 per cent of working women are self-employed.

Etsy sees the potential for growth in the South Asian nation, and is actively working to spread awareness of the site to Indian business owners who could use it. Teaching sellers how to use the platform and optimise their digital space aims to attract more sellers.

In India and elsewhere, access to business opportunities can change lives. A branch of the United Nations called UN Women put it this way: "Women's economic empowerment is central to realising women's rights and gender equality."

Self-made, self-trained

At 27, Banerjee was working in the human resources department at a project management company in Kolkata, feeling drained by a job she said was "mechanical and lacked creativity". After investing in a masters degree and gaining work experience, Banerjee wasn't satisfied with her career path. She began putting together a business plan that she said covered all the bases — "the name, the product design and range, the inventory and the government regulations".

Like many Etsy sellers, Banerjee is a self-taught businesswoman.

The online platform allowed her to enter the retail market easily. Etsy lets people without formal business training, or those who can't afford a brick-and-mortar shop or a booth in a marketplace, to sell their products on a much wider scale than previously possible.

Devi Chand, who lives in India's southern metropolis of



Chennai, started a store called "Papermelon" in 2009 that sells sustainable paper jewellery. She soon began showcasing her wares on Etsy. At first, she said she found the website a bit difficult to use.

But "as days passed by, the website has improved its interface, the listings have gotten a lot better and it's a lot more user-friendly now. It has become a lot easier to figure out the operations of the website".

Chand said Etsy is a great option for working moms like her.

"Dressing up and going to a 9-5 job isn't a luxury I can afford, so Etsy is perfect for me," said Chand, who has a 5-year-old. "My kid's school hour is my working hour."

Half a world away in Missouri, Tipton turned to library books and online courses to help her construct her business. She tested ideas "to see what worked and what flopped", she said.

"It was, and still is, a learning process," she said. "But I found that I really enjoy the business side of things."

As with any business, getting something off the ground takes a lot of footwork, especially when it's a one-person operation.

"In the beginning, I was working crazy hours to get things off the ground — 6 or 7 days a week, sometimes until 10 pm," she said.

After eight years, she's settled into a more reasonable schedule. But it's still a full-time job, and her main source of income.

Branching out

Etsy, like many of the shops it hosts, is homegrown, started in a Brooklyn apartment in 2005 by three friends with a knack for crafting. Their idea — the passion project of a creative trio — has blossomed into a site with 2.1 million active sellers, according to Etsy.

From its humble New York



beginnings, Etsy has made it to the big leagues, going public in 2015 with an initial public offering (IPO) of \$100 million. In the company's prospectus, the demographics of its sellers were

laid out — and they were 86 per cent women.

Embracing its global platform, in July 2018, Etsy expanded into places with gaps in the independent-craft market, like Germany

and India. Himanshu Wardhan, the CEO of Etsy India, said India's market had high potential for handicrafts.

"India has such a wealth of handloom and handicrafts, and

TIPS FOR STARTERS

► Opening an Etsy shop is relatively straightforward and can provide for an optimal home for your products, the company says

► Etsy.com is an e-commerce website that focuses on handmade or re-purposed items

► For only 20 cents, a seller can start his or her own listing on the Etsy marketplace. This allows the 19.8 million Etsy buyers to view and potentially purchase those handmade or repurposed items, according to the Etsy website

► There are a few key steps to maintaining a successful Etsy shop. First, set small and attainable goals

► Secondly, invest in photography that displays products in the best light possible. Taking photos that are sharp, simple and illustrative is key to selling success, Etsy says

► Finally, think of an Etsy store as a brick-and-mortar shop instead of an online database. That makes the shop feel more thoughtfully designed

what's even more special is that every artisan has an amazing story as well," Wardhan said. "This is very exciting for us at Etsy, with our global community of 2 million sellers. We believe that these extremely talented artisans should not lose out because of a lack of digital awareness," he added.

When the company came to India, Etsy and 'Daastkari Haat Samiti', which is a national association of crafts people with members from all states of India, organized a photography workshop for traditional artisans.

On this occasion the founder of 'Daastkari Haat Samiti', politician and promoter of Indian handicrafts Jaya Jaitly lauded what Etsy is doing.

"We are happy for Etsy's help in pursuing a process of empowering crafts people to handle online promotion and marketing," she said. "Kari-gars (craftsmen) have skill and even design awareness now, but need assistance in coping with presentation in a digital world. Skills in photography will be a good tool for that."

Online shopping & independent retailers

Etsy has something that conglomerates like Amazon lack — a stock of handcrafted, vintage and sometimes personalized items sold by independent retailers all over the world.

Customers on the site seek out "goods that are unique and that reflect their personality and style, not simply mass-produced, generic goods", as described by Etsy. The selection ranges from eccentric doughnut earrings, natural lotions and potions and knitted cat coasters.

Selling handcrafted goods targets a specific audience, one that is looking for an emotional connection with the items they buy. In the age of conglomerates

like Amazon and Walmart, Etsy offers a convenient but different alternative.

Ruchi Pugalia, founder of the shop "Comfy Mummy" in Hyderabad, India, sells T-shirts, shirts, pullovers designed especially for mothers and kids. Pugalia first started selling on the website in 2012.

"Monday morning is never a drag," she said, "because I love what I get to do for a living!"

Pugalia started her Etsy work at home. "Then as the work expanded — we were a small team — our work moved to a small space very close to home, to what we lovingly call our 'workshop,'" she said. "My business has grown over the years. Like any business, it had its ups and downs, but I am very happy with how it has turned out."

She said it's "so special" to be able to share her art with the world.

Buyers and revenue

When asked about her buyers, Devi Chand says her buyers are mostly from abroad. "As the INR (Indian Rupee) was not one of the listed currencies when I started out, my buyers were all from abroad, the only payment option was through PayPal and until recently PayPal did not accept Indian currency."

Chand says, "Etsy is a good place to build your career as a handicraft seller, but no one should completely depend on an external revenue chain, as they might change their policies or the fact that when it comes to Indian sellers, they are left behind because of the shipment delays and availability."

"A seller from the US will obviously have an upper hand when it comes to selling on Etsy, because if a buyer from US sees my shop and a shop of a woman in the States, he/she will prefer the local seller because they might think that international shipping is a problem. Although it's not but usually the buyer gets biased," she adds.

Chand, however, regrets that "people are not aware of it as much as they should be and hence Etsy should conduct workshops for women all over India so that they know that their crafts can be sold from home without having to set up a shop at any fair or market".

"But nonetheless it's a great platform."

Pugalia on the other hand believes that, those who seek, find them and Etsy has done an incredible job with their customers and sellers. Sellers get to showcase their art to the entire world, and she says, "This is the reason why it is so special."

When asked about the growth of her business, Pugalia says, "My business has grown over the years, like any business it had its ups and downs but I am very happy with how it has turned out."

(This story is part of a series of special reports on India and the US undertaken by the University of Missouri Journalism students. It was overseen by Laura Ungar, Midwest Editor/Correspondent with the St. Louis Bureau of Kaiser Health News and journalist Sujoy Dhar, founder of the Indian news agency India Blooms News Service)

Indie electronica guru to perform in city

By Prasanta Phukon

Dualist Inquiry is an Indie Electronica, a solo electronica project and is among the top 5 Indie Electronica act in the country.

Sahej Bakshi, the man behind Dualist Inquiry, has around 32 hits. His unique music was also noticed by *Rolling Stones* that featured him several times, the first being in August 2011. "The newest kid in town is perhaps the farthest ahead," the magazine wrote.

An *NH7 Weekender Review* of December 2010 said, "Experimental live mixing, guitar solos reminiscent of the New Wave and a lot of heart, Dualist Inquiry is creating a niche for himself. His set had every individual in the establishment moving and after the last track was played the crowd wanted an encore."

Dualist Inquiry, apart from being a performing artist, is also a music producer and music entrepreneur and

runs a record label by the name Dualism Records.

Come July 13, the city will experience this vibrant musician at Clou 9. The event will be organised by 'Alchemy Events and Promotions', a Guwahati-based event management company that hosts events in Shillong too.

Bakshi first rose to prominence in what was then an amorphous Indian independent music scene, capturing fans at the intersection of guitar music and rhythmic electronic dance. A full-length debut followed with *Doppelganger*, an album that did as much for Bakshi's blazing popularity as it did for a legion of budding music producers keen to make it in the industry, in 2013.

The next two years turned out to be the most challenging with his internal and external worlds colliding in spectacular fashion.

In an effort to resist being divided into discrete sections or categories in



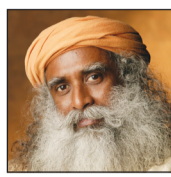
music, Bakshi burrowed deep to explore a new sonic playground, going on to write and release another full-length album, 2016's *Dreamcatcher*, a more wholesome, pop-oriented album that pre-dated regional trends and took both critics and fans by surprise.

By 2017, after having delivered three immensely-popular EPs, a pair of ambitious full length albums and headlining almost every major stage in India, Bakshi retreated into solitude with a conscious goal to learn and evolve. Eventually, the hiatus led to the birth of boxout.fm, an online community radio station he co-founded with DJ McCiter. It is a platform that is making noise for all the correct reasons and has rightfully become a pillar for community-supported initiatives in music.

The inspiration garnered from this helped birthed a brand new chapter for Dualist Inquiry, one bursting with revitalised ideas.

Enhancing yourself

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



Question: When heads of businesses and leaders interact with you, what are some of the biggest obstacles

they face in terms of making businesses grow? How does one handle situations where you feel, "It's not in my hands, I can't fix this?"

Sadhguru: I think the main problem is people are trying to be on the fast lane without having a fast car. When you are in such a condition, you naturally crack up all the time. You will be enormously stressful. It is like taking your old Maruti on the F1 track. All your wheels will fly in different directions. If you want to drive at a speed, you must have an appropriate machine.

Essentially, nothing has been done about the inner wellbeing of the human being. We are trying to get into a higher level of action without being in a higher level of function. Without enhancing yourself, if you try to enhance your activity, it is a sure way to get into places where you should not be. Either you or your business will have to break.

The problem with most people is their own thoughts and emotions are a huge issue. The psychological drama is taking such a big toll. People are capable of suffering what happened ten years ago, and they are capable of suffering what is going to happen day after tomorrow, already. They think they are suffering their past and future, but they are only suffering two faculties that are exclusive to human beings on this planet—memory and imagination.

Most people do not know how to handle their memory and imagination. Does what happened yesterday or ten years ago exist right now? No. Does what may happen day after tomorrow exist right now? No. So, in other words, you are suffering that which does not exist. That's called insanity. People say, "This is human nature." This is not human nature. This is the nature of people who have not taken charge of human nature.

Whatever goals you may have, essentially it is your competence that will take you where you have to go. Everyone can have big goals, but do you have the fuel to get there?

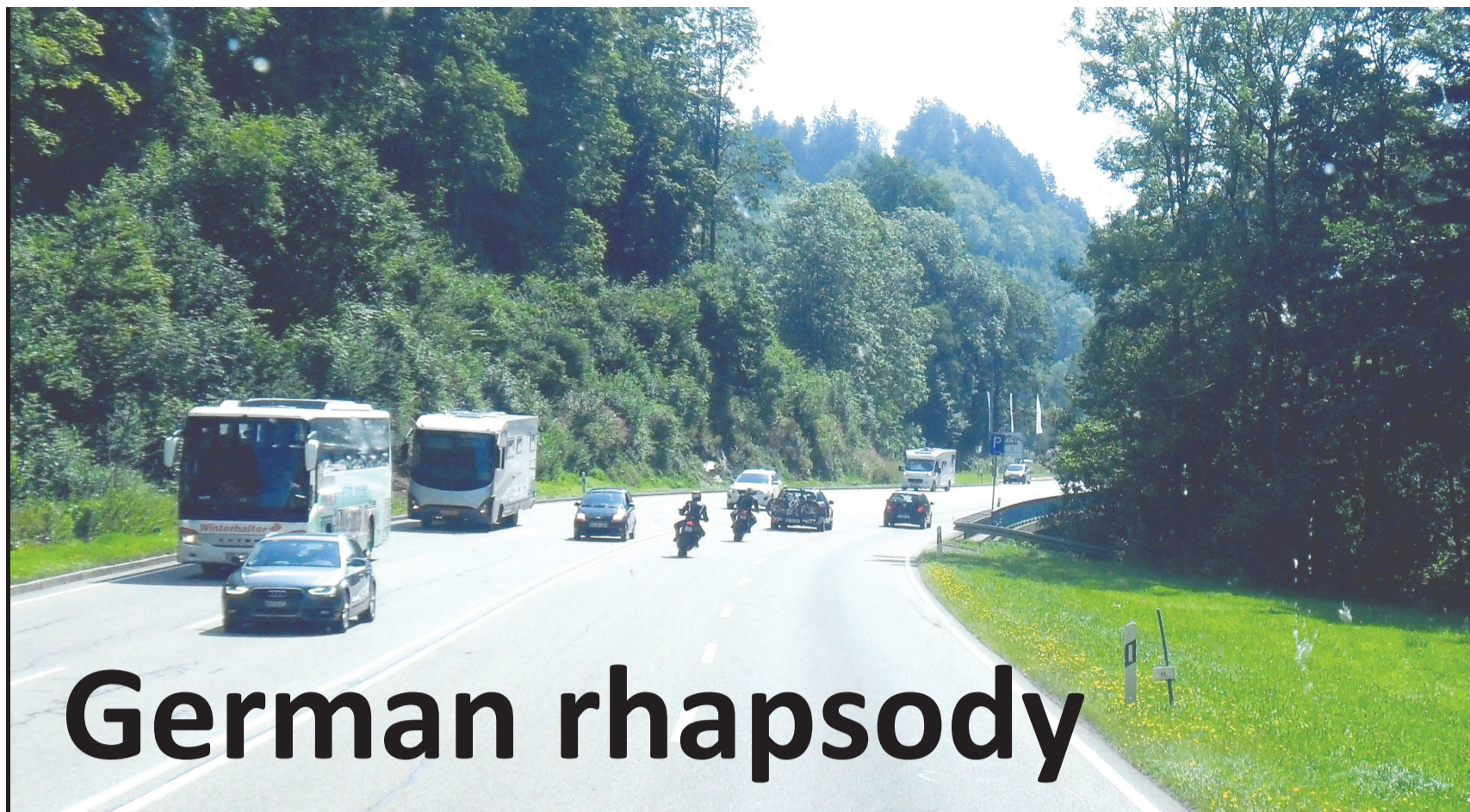
Success does not come to you just because you desire it. It comes to you because you are equipped. The two fundamental ingredients for any kind of successful activity on the planet are to be able to use your physical body and your mind to their fullest potential. If this has to happen, you must be pleasant by your own nature. That means you are not an "issue" in your life. If you are not the issue, you can deal with external issues with absolute freedom. If you yourself are the issue, everything is a problem. What human beings need to do within themselves has just not been done. We are only trying to constantly enhance external activity in competition with someone else. This will lead to many issues within a human being and around them.

Of all the machines on the planet, the human system is the most sophisticated machine. This is a super-computer. I am asking you, have you read the user's manual? When you have not even read the user's manual, you will operate this by accident. When you operate this by accident, it will only function by accident. When you are functioning by accident, everything is accidental. When it is all accidental, you will naturally be stressful and on the verge of breaking down.

Yoga is that user's manual. It will help you become balanced internally, it will make you joyful by your own nature, help you do your best. In doing your best, there is success. You may not be better than someone else, but you will be the best you can. And then, you can handle anything that life throws at you with grace.

Leadership essentially means that every thought or emotion you generate, every action you perform, impacts millions of people. When you have such a privilege, it is very important that you work upon yourself. If you understand that the work you are doing is important, who you are needs to be worked at continuously—not just increasing your knowledge or studying at a university, but enhancing this piece of life that you refer to as "myself" to the highest possible level.

(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)



German rhapsody

By Parag Ranjan Dutta

Eindhoven, Netherlands, August 11, 2012: My wife and I were on a 15-day tour of Europe. After an early continental breakfast we headed towards the German city of Cologne, enjoyed an orientation tour of the city. But we were eagerly waiting for the river cruise on the Rhine, from Boppard to St Goar, which was a lifetime experience.

As we passed by the lovely little towns, medieval castles, beautiful crop fields and vineyards on hill slopes along the Rhine, the natural and cultural landscapes intertwined to form a collage of some sort. After a one-and-a-half hour cruise, we alighted from the steamer and our coach rolled on towards Heidelberg. We were still following the Rhine to our left and reached Heidelberg late in the afternoon, almost in the twilight hour. Under the mellow sun, Heidelberg looked magical, with few cars and pedestrians on the roads.

Heidelberg is a world famous town university of Germany. We had dinner at an Indian restaurant. While most of the group members were relaxing after a hectic day's activity I preferred to go for a stroll around. Darkness hadn't descended yet because in Europe, day-

light lasts till nine to quarter past nine in the evening. Beautiful trams were passing by, elderly women walking slowly back to their homes and small boys were peddling their bicycles in the special lanes. To my surprise I noticed a barber shop with a signboard in English!

August 12: We were staying at Hirschberg for the night with NH hotels, a Spanish chain of hotels found across the major cities of Europe. The hotel location was far from the maddening crowd and almost outside the city limit of Heidelberg. The surrounding was full of greenery. On the eighth day of our tour, we were to reach Switzerland. After breakfast, we all assembled for a memorable photo session and hurried onto the coach for a long journey to the Swiss town of Engelberg.

At about eight, the wheels of the coach rolled on towards Black Forest. Beautiful German countryside on both sides of the road was a treat to the eyes. Wheat crop was already harvested and carefully packed to be sent to the market. Just before entering the Black Forest region, the landscape changed from the barren fields to lush green Alpine meadows and small settlements with few huts.

During our drive through the Black Forest region of Germany we came across the most picturesque stretch of the entire tour. Germany was gradually unfolding its natural charm which made me mesmerised. The Black Forest is a deeply wooded region of mixed deciduous trees mainly of pine, elm, spruce and fir. Black Forest gets its name from the thick canopy of the evergreen coniferous forest which makes the sunlight very difficult to reach the forest floor. Hence the forest looks dark and black.

According to another view, the dark coloured fir and pine trees

make the forest look dark and black. To our right, the Alpine meadows looked like green Persian carpets. As we passed through the Black Forest, the famous American poet Robert Frost's words crossed my mind, "The woods are lovely dark and deep/But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep/And miles to go before I sleep."

The second largest river of Europe, the Danube, originates here in the Black Forest region of southwestern Germany. Black Forest is also the name of a block mountain where the mighty Rhine flows through a rift valley in between the Black Forest and Mt Vosges of France but to commoners, 'Black Forest' is just the brand name of a pastry.

Our coach captain stopped at Drubba clock factory premises at Titisee for a lunch break and a visit to the clock museum. Nestled between two low lying mountain ranges, the clock factory is in the midst of a dense forest. The journey of the family shop began in 1956 when a couple, Klaus and Ursula Drubba, came to Titisee and began manufacturing and selling cuckoo clocks in the Black Forest village which is the home of original cuckoo clocks. The largest clock in the entire Black Forest region can be seen at the entrance to the factory.

Above the clock there is a small balcony decorated with flowers. A small stream with crystal clear water leisurely flows past the clock factory. The beautiful mountain range just behind the clock factory is clothed with conifers interspersed with Alpine meadows. The only German mountain railway track passes through the scenic Black Forest region.

The railway line is just above the hotel Hofgut Sternen and passes through a forest of dark fir trees. Hofgut Sternen has a self-service restaurant,

Revenna Grill, for local cuisine. But we enjoyed a very tasty Indian cuisine in a makeshift tent. After lunch we had some time to visit to the clock factory and the museum. We were told that the wooden frames of the clocks are made of a hard wood variety, called linden found in Europe. There was a live demo of how the clocks are made.

After spending about an hour we headed towards the Rhine Falls at Schaffhausen along the German Swiss border.

As we hit the road settlements with typical house type designs and decorated with flower beds hanging from windows and balconies appeared at intervals and they looked very much colourful. Better known as Rhine falls, here the mighty Rhine plunges down cascading through a fall of 23 meters.

From a great distance we could hear the thundering sound and saw pure white foam of the falls. Schaffhausen is spectacular and the largest waterfall and one of the most important hydro-power generating stations of Europe. This border town is a popular day-trip destination from Zurich and other Swiss cities.

Restaurants, souvenir shops and boat trips are available at Schaffhausen. The surrounding countryside is beautiful. The waterfall can be best seen from the right bank of the river and one can have a stroll along the sidewalks. We took a boat ride by paying five Euros each to reach a very steep cliff in the middle of the falls, where hardly one can stand with ease.

We had to climb a number of very narrow and steep steps carved on the tough cliff itself. I had to be extra careful standing on the precipice while taking pictures of the thunderous fall and the surrounding countryside. We spent about an hour at Schaffhausen and continued our journey to Zurich and then to Engelberg, our destination for three nights in Switzerland.

(The author is former head of the Department of Geography at St Edmund's College)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 7, 2019

Moon sextile Sun on your solar return chart and this is going to be an exciting year. It would turn out to be golden phase of your life. You will receive help and support from your father. He will help you in any major initiative that you take. You will also develop contacts with higher government officials and get your work done. You will be in a position of authority at your workplace. New responsibilities would be given to you. And you will accept the challenge. You will not face much challenge at your work place. Your elder brother/sister will help you. Your friends will remain loyal to you. You will be undertaking a lot of business related trips. There will be joy and cheer in family ties. Loved ones will come closer. Your mate will be your source of inspiration. You will remain in good spirits overall and will be doing many noteworthy activities.

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.

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 find yourself more accountable than ever when it comes to your work and output.

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.

TRAVELLER'S DIARY

Earn from virtual world

By Ranjan K Baruah

Technology has become an integral part of our life. There is no individual on earth who is not dependent, directly or indirectly, on technology and gadgets. We talk about digital world and virtual world when there is discussion related to internet or communication through gadgets. A virtual world is computer-based simulated environments which may be populated by many users.

It is a world which is computer-based online community or similar. Users interact with each other in this simulated world using text-based, two-dimensional or three-dimensional graphical models. All virtual worlds possess the qualities of persistence and interactivity. This enables users to explore the inherent benefits of socialisation and allows them to study human nature and users' abilities. Simply put, a virtual world may also be called a digital world.

Let us connect virtual world with our career. There are many career options but we are discussing about Virtual Assistant as one of the career options. A virtual assistant (VA) is generally self-employed and provides professional administrative, technical or creative assistance to clients remotely from a home office or any other place because virtual assistants are independent professionals rather than employees. Clients are not responsible for any employee-related taxes, insurance or benefits, except in the context that those indirect expenses are included in a VA's fees.

Common modes of communication and data delivery include the internet, e-mail and phone-call conferences, online work spaces, fax machine, etc. Increasingly, VAs are utilising technology like Skype, Slack, as well as Google Voice. Professionals may work on contract basis or as part-timers depending on the work and the clients' requirements. They may also work for big companies or corporate houses.

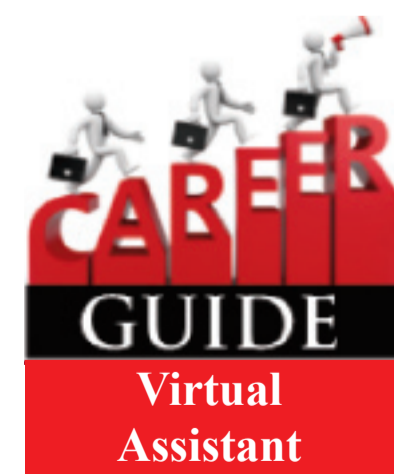
The best part is someone without formal educational qualification may

master assistant, virtual marketing assistant and virtual content writing assistant are specific professionals that are usually experienced employees from corporate environment that started to set up their own virtual offices. Students from northeastern region may choose this option and get engaged with different clients from different parts of the country or rest of the world.

Updates:

CDS Exam: Union Public Service Commission shall conduct Combined Defence Service Examination for selection of officers in Indian defence services which includes Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force. The written examination of CDS shall be conducted on September 8 and aspirants may apply only on or before 6 pm of July 8. For IMA and Officers' Training Academy, Chennai—Degree of a recognised University or equivalent is required. For Indian Naval Academy—Degree in Engineering from a recognised University/Institution and for Air Force Academy—Degree of a recognised University (with Physics and Mathematics at 10+2 level) or Bachelor of Engineering is must. There are direct entry schemes for aspirants with NCC 'C' certificates. Both male and female may apply for this examination and details are also available in the official websites.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer and also motivational speaker and can be contacted at 8473943734 or bkranj@ gmail.com for any queries)



become a virtual assistant if s/he has digital skills. It is always advantageous for individuals from computer background as they are equipped with technical knowledge.

The general VA is sometimes called an online administrative assistant, online personal assistant or online sales assistant. A virtual web-

"I'm sure the universe is full of intelligent life. It's just been too intelligent to come here."

--- Arthur C. Clarke

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.326 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 8, 2019

Crisis in Karnataka

WHILE a huge churning is on in the Congress party at the national level, situations are conspiring to force it to take more hits at the regional levels. There is hope that some young leaders like Jyotiraditya Scindia and Milind Deora are likely to take an active role at the AICC level, which might do well for the party. The leadership crisis at the central level is making matters worse for the Congress at state levels too, as is evident now in Karnataka. The Congress-JD(Secular) government led by HD Kumaraswamy has lost its majority support. In a fast-deteriorating situation, altogether 13 of the ruling side legislators have put in their resignations. The situation is irretrievable as the chief minister had already stretched himself beyond limits to accommodate varying interests by way of offering cabinet berths. His return from post-poll vacationing abroad on Sunday might be of little help to contain the rebellions in his own JDS as also the Congress.

The government led by Kumaraswamy, in office since May 2018, is already seen as being among the most-corrupt because the CM himself has been under intense pressure from all sides. The unholy political experiment of allowing a smaller party to head the government while the bigger party took the back seat was itself an invitation to trouble. The alliance itself was crafted in an unprincipled way, post-poll, to deny the largest party – the BJP – a chance to run the government. All these polluted the state's political atmosphere so much that everyone in the ruling party was seeking their pound of flesh. What has obviously added to the snowballing of a political crisis now is the washout the JDS-Congress alliance faced in the Lok Sabha polls. The BJP won 26 of the 28 seats, leaving only one each seat to the Congress and the JDS. Even granted that this was a verdict for political positioning at the Centre, it abundantly proved the erosion in the support base for the Congress and the JDS. The ruling side legislators who were waiting to target the top brass in their respective parties found they could strike now, when the iron is hot. Kumaraswamy has rejected proposals from within his party too to quit the post, and is bent on trying a few more tricks to remain in the saddle. Having made so many compromises, it is time he stepped down rather than vitiate the political atmosphere. Karnataka is only one state where dissidence is building up in the Congress party. The sooner the party sets its house in order at both central and state levels, the better for its existence.

SC Order: Victory for the People

By HH Mohrmen

Immediately after the Supreme Court order was made public, the statement from the CM's office was, 'it is the victory of the people' and indeed it is. It is the victory of the people on all counts, because the Honourable Court has maintained that natural resources are not to be usurped by the current generation only, but it has to be judiciously used keeping the future generations in mind too. It has also spelled out that the duty of the Government is to serve its people and not to protect the business interests of the selected few.

People asked me what my take on the Supreme Court order on coal mining is. My first reaction was, that if I had it my way, I would earnestly wish that we reduce using fossil fuels because it is major contributor to producing CO2 that increases global warming. On second thoughts though, since many people depend for their livelihoods on the activity, then there should be some reprieve for those affected. Therefore if coal mining is to resume, the Court order is the answer to the prayer of the people who are concerned about the environment and advocate against its degradation as is happening in the State.

This column is consistent in its opinion on that rat-hole mining is illegal because the activity is being carried out without any control and regulations by any authority whatsoever. Coal mining has been a free-for-all activity that anyone who strikes coal can extract the same in whichever manner one wishes to extract the mineral. Before the NGT intervention, coal mining in the state is similar to the erstwhile gold rush in the west where anybody can do whatever or however one likes with the coal that one strikes. It is the only business where not even the permission from the village dorbar shnong is required to start the activity.

It is rather amusing that if one is operating any business, one has to provide necessary papers to start the business, but no paper is required for coal mining because there is no mechanism in place to control and regulate the activity. The analogy I use

is, if one is to operate a taxi, one has to avail permit, driver's license and other documents to be able to do the business, but for coal mining no papers are required. If a person hits coal, he only needs to have the required capital to start the business and nothing more. It is because of the absence of any mechanism to control and regulate coal mining in the state which made NGT intervention and subsequent ban on coal mining necessary.

It is because of the absence of regulatory mechanisms that all our streams and rivers in the coal mining areas are affected by Acid Mine Drainage in which the pH level of the water is below three which means that it

have regulations which will manage coal mining in Meghalaya. In fact the order has made it clear that not only coal but all mining activities in the state has to be under the National laws and Acts which apply in the entire country. Although the court upheld the unique land ownership system which prevails in the State by virtue of it being a 6th Schedule area, but it also reiterated that all the national acts and regulation which governs mining in the country are now applicable here too. The State is not exempted from any National Acts or Rules that govern mining in the country.

Although both the MDA and the MUA have pleaded in the court that the ban should be lifted on several

Before the NGT intervention, coal mining in the state is similar to the erstwhile gold rush in the west where anybody can do whatever or however one likes with the coal that one strikes.

is not fit for human consumption. In the absence of a regulatory mechanism to control coal mining, we find that land in the coal depot and mining areas are affected by pollution and even paddy fields located near the coal depot had to be abandoned because it can no longer be used for cultivation. This column has persistently demanded that the Government should come up with its own mining policy, to control the activity and save our water and land from pollution but to no avail.

The point is, coal mining has been going in the state without any regulations, but now in the Court judgement, we have a mechanism in place to see that mining is carried out in accordance with different laws which govern mining in the country. The Supreme Court order has done what the state has failed to do a long time ago; it has put a mechanism in place which will manage coal mining in the entire state. With this Court ruling we now finally

grounds, but the court flatly rejected the pleas, except the argument of land ownership in the tribal area. Both the governments had pleaded in the court on behalf of the mining lobby and at time became obstructionist in implementing regulation to ensure that the environment is protected and the safety of the miners is upheld. Instead of celebrating the lifting of the NGT ban on coal mining, the Government should bow its head in shame because all its contentions in the apex court were knocked down one by one.

The pleas which challenged the jurisdiction of the NGT including the Committees constituted by same was rejected. The court order stated that there is nothing in the Sixth Schedule to indicate that Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 cannot operate in the State of Meghalaya. The judgement has in fact ordered that the mining in the state should comply to not only MMDR Act, 1957, but Mines Act 1952 and Environment (Protection)

Act, 1986 and Mineral Concession Rule 1960 too.

Both the MUA and MDA government had also tried to impress upon the Central government to invoke paragraph 12A sub-clause (b) of the Sixth Schedule to lift the coal ban from the state, but since there is no order from the President's office, it implies that all acts and laws which govern mining in the country also apply to the state. This Order has far reaching consequences in which it was made obvious that all laws passed by Parliament are applicable in the State too. With regards to the plea that the fined imposed by the NGT on the state be considered, the Court ordered that the State Government should instead deposit the Rs 100 crore from Meghalaya Environment Protection and Restoration Fund (MEPRF). This means that the State Government did not get any reprieve on this court too.

Although from the Court order it is obvious that both the governments have pleaded and fought hard on behalf of mining and for the interests of the coal lobby, yet the wisdom of the Court saw otherwise. The Court order not only ensured that the livelihoods of the people continues, but it also maintained that natural resources should be used diligently bearing in the mind the interests of the future generation of the country too.

It is now over five years since the NGT banned rat-hole mining in the state, and the outcome of the ban as appeared from the judgement is that we will see no more rat-hole mines but a new system of coal mining in the state. The hope is that this will be the end to rat-hole mining which pollutes water and land, destroys the environment and provides no safety or protection for the miners. Now miners will have to avail mining plans, environment clearance and other papers before they begin mining, to ensure that the environment is protected. Therefore the court order is indeed a victory of the people, but just not the kind of people that the two governments fought for. It is the victory of the general public, their children and the generations to come.

The Harijan issue in Shillong must be solved without violence

By Edelbert Kharsyntiew

The threat of violence against the Harijans of Shillong is wrong. Far from being 'aggressors' the Harijans came in peace, to serve; to do the most menial of jobs in Shillong, which in those days, no one else was willing to do. It is not their fault for being there at the place they currently are and have been for the last 150 years. They did not choose to live there. It was the then rulers' arrangement with the approval of the Syiem Mylliem who did not see the possibility that Iewduh would need to expand in the future.

They came as 'servers' and had served Shillong for a long time, till its local tribal population grew and many of them impoverished, to the point that they started clamoring for the same job they earlier despised. In this regard, the Shillong residents especially of the immediate vicinity of Mawkhar, Jaiaw etc would be more grateful to our Harijan friends (if only they speak up) than those who were never served by them.

Some vested interests are clearly fishing in troubled waters in pitting the Dalits against the Khasi tribals. I read many articles by mainline reporters who either did not know the ground realities or who spun the story, obviously with an axe to grind, wanting to project the Khasis in bad light. They twisted facts and changed the name "Sweepers colony" or Them Meteor (or Meteor valley from the Khasi term "Khar Meteor" a reference to the "non-tribal sweepers") to "Punjabi Lane" with dangerous implications.

None of these reports mention about "Iewduh" the main Khasi market in the whole Khasi Hills district under the Syiem of Mylliem and his myntris (mantris) which is located right across the road from the said colony. The Sweepers Colony is on this side of the road, and Iewduh on the other and much further from Police Bazaar. This proximity is what makes the issue a daily irritant, and brings the Harijan folks in constant touch with especially the rural tribal folks who come to Iewduh and the local taxi and bus drivers who 'had to ply' through the lane daily. Currently the road that runs from Iewduh towards Police Bazaar through the Harijan colony, a stretch of 200 to 300 meters is cordoned off which worsens the overall congestion. For argument's sake, if cordoning helps, relocation would permanently solve the issue.

For most of the rural Khasi folks who come to the market, with their small stature, the local Harijans, many of whom have moved on in life and acquired education and confidence, are street smart and with the understandable protective streak over their turf, they come across as menacing. Some of them did turn rowdies like Lal Singh, who the local market people feared, till he met his unfortunate end at the hands of the militants. The bus conductors' episode that flared up tension last year, was also due to the same reason – proximity and daily interface between the two. No one knows for sure what exactly happened, except, it seems, from a few mainstream reporters from great distances, that it was due to the bus conductors' eve teasing of the Harijan girls who were drawing water. The locals who understand and read Khasi heard differently. The driver of a local bus, on a weekend morning, with no passengers in the bus except his young sons, parked the bus and went for tea. The spot where he parked the bus was close to the water tap and it irked the Harijans, who beat up the boys. The rumour spread that the boy died, and that sparked the riot. The police were swift to act and the government provided full protection to the colony, and thankfully, not even a single life was lost.

The colony is in the market area and therefore, the economic war angle also has to be pointed out. Anyone who visits Shillong and sees Police Bazaar will find it to be predominantly non-tribal. It is a general ward and hence exempted from the local indigenous administrative system of the District Council, mainly the land acquisition laws, where non-tribals are barred from land purchase or ownership. So Police Bazaar is a melting pot of Marwaris, Bengalis, Punjabis, Parsis, Gujaratis, and others. After the NRC Assam data were released, many believed that the Bangladeshi population in Police Bazaar which provides cheap labour is sizeable. Influx is another main concern for the locals. Apart from Police Bazaar there are other similar areas in Shillong, whose population spurt brings endless nightmare to the locals. There are areas in Shillong where labourers sleep in shifts due to space problem, which created a deep seated resentment among locals because of job losses. This explains why the local NGOs' independently check work permits of non-tribals' and this becomes regular news. Under past Congress rule, District Councils were paralyzed. This created a vacuum which NGOs filled, stated Paul Lyngdoh, the present District Council EM, in charge of Trade.

If a visitor moves on from Police Bazaar to Iewduh, he will see many shops taken over by non-tribals, which clearly reflects on the corruption on the part of the District Councils and Syiems in the past, through arbitrary issuance of trading licenses. A cold chill ran down the spine of the local Khasis who felt they were losing control even over Iewduh. The local hawkers' proliferation all over Shillong and its streets today, supported by NGOs like TUR (Thma U Rangli translated as 'Struggle of the Downtrodden') can be interpreted as the shrinking of the Khasi market space in Shillong due to corruption, apathy and mindlessness of past administrations.

Now the Police Bazaar is not even one kilometre from Iewduh, and the Sweepers Colony is exactly in between the two. It served as a buffer zone between them. From both economic and cultural standpoints, the Sweepers Colony is therefore used as a pawn. The Dalit card is being played up again. The sad truth is that from a non-tribal business stand-point in Shillong, an illegal migrant from Bangladesh or elsewhere, even if he differs in religion, is preferable to a 'hate-filled' Khasi.

To leave all this behind, and restore peace and trust between the locals and others, the Khasis have to be empowered economically. Iewduh has to expand, but the Harijan friends have to be compensated. The Government of Meghalaya had assured the Harijans of a better, more livable location. The Harijans have to trust and be on the right side of the current changing scenario. That area between two major markets is not meant to be a colony. Nowhere in the world would something like this be accepted. A friendly exchange is needed, and confidence-building measures are to be put in place. Many of those in the Sweepers colony are Christians. Pastors and other Christians have to come closer to them at such times, and assure them of their prayers and support. We wish and pray that a peaceful agreement between the Government and the residents of the colony is arrived at soon and not based on fear or bitterness, but on goodwill and practical wisdom, considering the rapid changing scenario of Shillong, the Northeast and the country at large.

(The writer can be contacted at edelbertk@gmail.com)

TO THE EDITOR

In service of the nation

Editor,

Captain Clifford Nongrum is someone whose name should precede the English word 'BRAVE.' Truly he was the bravest man who lived his dreams, Being a son of a retired army man my dad always motivates me to join the Indian Army but I often end up arguing with him as to why I should choose a life that has no guarantee and he would say, "If you die a brave death for a good reason your life is worth it because you die for the sake of thousands of lives out there. Though I never joined the army it was not until my friend lost his father who

was a captain in the para forces that I experienced an inspiring moment when his son was recruited in the same para force a couple of months later and his inspiring words are "My dad lived his dreams so am I" The story of Captain Clifford Nongrum should inspire more young boys to join the Indian Army and serve the nation.

Yours etc.,
Nissar Fazil
Ladrymbai
East Jaintia Hills

Killing us with stench!

Editor,

Through your esteemed

daily, I wish to protest as a concerned citizen about the intolerable and foul stench that has been emanating from the Marten Landfill for the past few weeks. The horrible stench can be detected throughout Mawlai and its adjoining areas during the daytime. My residence is about 3 kilometres away from the landfill, yet the stench makes me feel as if I'm living right next to it! The stench is so nauseating for many that it deprives us of the mood to eat and work. This is a serious health issue that has to be dealt with. I need not remind the concerned authorities that under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, Right to Life also includes within its ambit the right to health-hazard free living conditions and a clean environment (by extension, clean air). This situation as far as I can recall has never happened before, hence there must be a lapse in the management of the landfill.

Either the landfill has reached its optimum capacity to take in more waste, or the concerned authorities have been doing an absolutely terrible job at handling the dumpsite. I strongly urge the Shillong Municipal Board to address this matter forthwith. The State

Pollution Control Board must not remain a mute spectator and must take proactive steps to address this health issue.

Yours etc.,
Keith T. Nongsteng,
Via email

In solidarity

Editor,

We the alumni of St. Edmund's College stand in solidarity with and support the demands of the MCTA, SEC unit. As alumni of the college it saddens us to see that the well being and concerns of our teachers are being overlooked and intentionally being ignored by the Sponsoring Body, i.e. the Christian Brothers Congregation, India. We demand therefore, immediate redressal of the same by the Christian Brothers Congregation and urge the Government to look into the matter.

As alumni we also stand in solidarity with the present students of the College who are also victims of this grave mismanagement of the College. We want for our fellow students to be able to sit in class and receive education in the true sense of the term for which this very College is mandated to do. This is, however, not possible if the demands of the teachers are not met. Not taking care of the teachers' indicates that the

Congregation does not uphold the interests of the students as well.

Amongst all these, we pray for the re-instatement of Sir Jeffreyson Wahlang at the earliest. We condemn the injustice meted on the teachers of St. Edmund's College.

Yours etc.,
Joy Pathaw & Demi
Grace Kharlukhi
Alumni, St. Edmund's
College
Batch 2013, 2014, 2015.

PAN-Aadhar interchangeability

Editor,

The recent budget announcement relating Aadhar interchangeability in lieu of PAN card may evoke a mixed response amidst the existing confusions. Salaried tax payers are under immense pressure to "honestly" file income tax returns every year notwithstanding prevailing confusions yet prevailing to attaching Aadhar with PAN. Also the rule that Aadhar may be quoted in the absence of a PAN is unclear as it may set a precedent of not adhering to mandatory quoting of PAN card details.

While the move has been made to ease the tax compliance burden,

confirming to Aadhar validation for all the necessary services is debatable, post the Supreme Court verdict making Aadhar a voluntary option to the citizens. However, the other sop of "Aadhar on Arrival" to NRIs with Indian passports which equates the same to a visa service is notable, with a primary intent to attract key investments to the economy.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Bengaluru- 72

A bad decision

Editor,

This has reference to media reports that the Centre has decided to bar medical practitioners at single-doctor clinics and small nursing homes that don't have registered pharmacies, from selling branded medicines or vaccines to patients. This decision is unwarranted. The genuine intention of the Centre might be interpreted adversely and people wonder if Government has bowed to the pressure tactics of the pharma lobby.

A doctor of a small clinic is responsible for his acts of checking the patients and dispensing the right medicines for them. It is childish to say that single-doctor clinics and small nursing homes that don't

have registered pharmacies should not sell branded medicines or vaccines to patients without having drug licenses. Schedule K of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act must not be repealed as it allows doctors to sell medicines to patients even without a drug license or without billing patients separately for the medicines sold.

The Centre's decision came following widespread complaints that doctors sell pills to patients without having drug licenses. A doctor is supposed to be the expert advisor on medical matters relating to the health of patients and with the new decision of the Centre, doctors' roles in health care is being trivialized. Hence, the decision of the Centre to go ahead with implementing the new proposal approved by the drug consultative committee under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is to be reviewed and it should not be implemented as it violate the rights of genuine and superior status of doctors.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi- 15

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.

"Too much action with too little intent makes for wasteful exertion of energy and the confusion between movement and progress."

--- Steve Maraboli

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.327

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 9, 2019

War of words over SC Judgment

THE Supreme Court judgment of July 3 is significant in that it recognizes the inalienable rights of tribals of Meghalaya over land and resources, under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. However, that ownership does not imply that the owner has absolute rights to exploit minerals and other resources as if there is no tomorrow. The apex court stresses on responsible and judicious mining of coal and other minerals keeping through strict regulations as laid down in the MMDR Act, 1957, the Mineral Concession Rules, 1960, and the Environmental Protection Act 1986. All three were Acts and Rules that were completely disregarded by the owners of private mines that operated without any accountability or permission from any quarters and therefore assumed that they owned the very planet. Mere ownership of land and resources does not vest the owner with the right to exploit those resources indiscriminately and injudiciously to the point of polluting the rivers, the air and with utter disregard for human safety including the safety of the miners who work under precarious conditions. Have the illegal mine owners forgotten the number of lives lost on account of mine flooding or mine collapse?

The apex court has at last made it clear that mining in the rat-hole format is no longer permissible because it does not comply with the aforesaid regulations that are applied across the country. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution does not exempt the State from important Acts and Rules applied nationally, more so because Para 12 (A) of the Sixth Schedule clearly states that, whenever there is a conflict of interest between the District Councils and the State Legislature, the latter would prevail. This Clause was inserted in 1972 after Meghalaya was granted statehood, because the legislators then were conscious of the fact that the ADCs could overstep their briefs and disregard their larger constitutional duties. It is ironic that a different set of legislators in the 21st century (2015) under the MUA-2 Government should pass an Assembly resolution seeking a Presidential notification to exempt Meghalaya, from the provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, and the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1957. Fortunately this never received Presidential assent because the only objective of the Government then was to give complete autonomy to illegal mining of coal, merely because politics is so reliant on coal money. Hence the war of words between the Congress-led MUA and the MDA Government over the SC ruling is unnecessary. Both sides seem to have taken positions only on behalf of the illegal coal mine owners without any concern for citizens and their rights to a clean environment and the right to life of miners.

Need for a people's movement on urban governance

By Toki Blah

It would be the understatement of the century to say that the people of Shillong are the most unhappy and insecure stakeholders regarding what is happening to their beloved city. This feeling cuts across all sections of society. We beef about traffic congestion; the inadequacy of our narrow hill roads to accommodate the ever increasing number of vehicles that through them. Hundreds of new vehicles are registered everyday; thousands of tourist vehicles from outside the state choke our roads and byelanes. Moving from one destination to another within the city has become a wastage of precious time, torture laced with anxiety, uncalled for expenses and hair tearing frustration. Government Departments like the PWD, Urban Affairs and Transport, tasked with providing ease of movement to a suffering public, continue to remain mute and helpless service providers. The Police and its traffic department is the only Govt entity visibly engaged in providing relief in an ever deteriorating situation. Unfortunately they fight a losing battle. We feel helpless over the invasion and occupation of our footpaths by unruly hawkers and vendors. Movement in Shillong has turned from a leisurely pastime of a hill station into a horrible urban nightmare. Sadly relief is nowhere in sight.

As if that were not enough, our cup of urban misery continues to overflow. Something horrible is happening to the city's water supply system. Municipality water sources along the Riat Laban are drying up. A major water crisis is looming up. Enhancement of the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS) seems stuck at some point and the latest inspection by the Legislative Committee on the Environment, shows the Govt run JNV school at Mawphlang casually emptying its entire toilet waste into the GSWSS reservoir. Thousands of people of Shillong have therefore been drinking faecal contaminated water every day! It's disgusting! Its criminal! Yet the public reaction to this scandalous incident is an incredulous silence. It indicates the level of indifference that the governance of the state has sunk into.

Then again because of the inability of the Govt supply system to keep up with public demand, people are forced to buy water from private vendors. Purchase of water is no longer restricted to occasional weddings or funerals but is increasingly becoming an everyday affair for every

household in the city. Selling water has become a roaring business. An indiscriminate and thoroughly unscientific exploitation of our underground water reserves is taking place. Its similar to rat hole mining of coal and the Supreme court has in its recent monumental judgement recognised people's right over their land but also of the need to regulate how this right is exercised. The same with underground water. We can't afford indiscriminate commercialisation of scarce community assets. The Govt should step in with regulations to prevent rampant commercial exploitation of our underground water resources.

the city. The Synjuk prefers to spend its energy and time on hazy, indistinct and unproductive political exercises. Third all past attempts to clean up the Wah Umkhras had been disjointed, stand alone, sporadic and uncoordinated efforts. Stakeholders have not been able to come together on a common platform with a single pre determined goal - to clean up the two rivers. Does this mean we should give up on the concept of good Urban Governance? I think not.

Of social and political significance is the constant public outcry that the Government has to do something to address the increasing civic woes and

In the absence of any type of industrial effluents flowing into the two streams, it is clear that domestic waste from Shillong households alone is responsible for turning these pristine water bodies into the turbid stinking gutters they are today. This simply highlights three basic flaws in our urban governance system.

The other day there was a discussion over the status of the Wah Umkhras and the Umshyri. Shillong and greater Shillong form the catchment area of the two rivers. In the absence of any type of industrial effluents flowing into the two streams, it is clear that domestic waste from Shillong households alone is responsible for turning these pristine water bodies into the turbid stinking gutters they are today. This simply highlights three basic flaws in our urban governance system. First, there is no sustainable waste disposal concept for both solid and liquid waste. We don't have a sewage system. The overflowing septic tanks are simply flushed into our nullahs and drains to end up in the two streams. Taken from this perspective, we the people of Shillong are the most unhygienic and uncouth citizens of this country! Second, we do not have, or to be more correct we refuse to have a comprehensive civic institution that should have taken care of the entire city's civic governance requirements. Shillong dorbars have their Synjuk but this Apex body has stubbornly refused to address the civic needs of

ailments of the city. Individuals, NGOs, Dorbars and civil society itself is anxious that something positive needs to be done by the Govt. Do something but what? Nobody has cared to explain. The irony is when Govt proposes to hold municipal elections everyone says no. So civic polls as one of the means to redress our civic ailments seems out of the question for the near foreseeable future. Now without going into the merits or demerits of the vexed need for Civic Polls, which incidentally could be the key to accessing JNNURM funding for improvement of Shillong Urban Infrastructure, there is also the need to attain the view of the common man on what he perceives of the vexed issues mentioned above. Is he satisfied with the civic services at his disposal? Is he contented with the current system of supply of drinking water, the way our waste is managed, the supply of electricity, the way traffic is managed in the city, the current status of the Wahumkhras and the Umshyri, the lack of civic amenities like parks, playgrounds and markets, the invasion of our pavements by hawkers and vendors, the services rendered with respect to urban health and

education? If not, what does he want? Where are the areas /sections that he feels are in need of improvement? Does he believe that better cooperation and coordination between the Govt agencies and our traditional bodies is the key towards a better managed Shillong? In essence the need of the hour is to come out with a Vision Statement of what the common citizen of Shillong thinks of his city and how he perceives it 5, 10, 15 years hence.

A Facebook post titled "PLASTIC TSUNAMI HITS UMIAM LAKE - SHILLONG POST" has gone viral amongst Shillong FB users. It shows the upper reaches of Umiam Lake covered from shore to shore with plastic garbage. It's sickening to see how we have treated one of our most cherished landmarks. In no time the entire lake will be covered with the plastic waste from the Wah Umkhras. The scenic beauty of the Umiam lake will be gone forever. Plastic waste will enter the generators at the power house and hundreds of crores worth of machinery will be damaged. Power generation will stop. Is no one bothered?

Let us be candid and face the truth. MeECL continues to remain in the ICCU. Next to impossible to expect any reaction from this terminally ill patient despite the threat to Umiam Lake. The institution constitutionally mandated to manage our water bodies, the KHADC, has failed us. No relief can be expected from this body of Sleepy Joes. The Urban Department of the Government seems to think that if it continues to close its eyes and mind on the deterioration of the Wah Umkhras and the Umshyri, the problem will automatically solve itself. The only body of elected representatives that has distinguished itself with its concern for a besieged Shillong society is the above mentioned Legislative Committee on the Environment. It has raised public concern and awareness on the ills of the GSWSS. It is hoped that the Committee will also take up the survival of Umiam Lake as well as the cleaning up of the Wah Umkhras as its next priority.

The public however needs to be involved. We must mobilise those stakeholders who desire an environmentally sustainable, cleaner Shillong and we see this desire in our youth. The younger generation is anxious about the environment. They want safeguards. Can someone, like Pla Iew for instance, take the lead in mobilising our youth to save Shillong city?

Reclaiming our rivers

By Barnes Mawrie

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), has come out with its latest report indicating that the number of critically polluted rivers in India has risen from 302 two years ago to 351 today. This is a dangerous trend in terms of preserving our natural environment especially our water bodies. In the perspective of the recent prediction that clean water will become a scarce commodity in the coming decades, the need to re-think seriously on this issue is most imperative. As a Shillongite myself, I have seen Wah Umkhras and other streams in the city in the early years. The deformation that has taken place in these rivers is horrifying. The stream which runs through my locality Rynjah, used to have clear water and deep pools. Swimming and fishing were our daily hobbies. Believe it or not, today this stream has become a dirty "nala" (drain). Greedy people have encroached into the river, filling up mud and consequently, the river is going through a slow death. In my calculation, this stream will disappear altogether in ten years' time.

Another river dear to my memory is Umpling river which used to be a big and broad river with gushing waters and deep pools along its course. This river too has lost its former grandeur and today it is laden with filth and dirt dumped into it by insensitive and uncivilized citizens. While we were school boys in Mawlai about forty years ago, Wah Umkhras was a great river with a huge volume of water flowing through it. The water was crystal clear and a variety of fishes were found in it. People from near and far used to come either to fish or to bathe and wash their clothes in it. Today Wah Umkhras is a dying river transporting the filth of Shillong downward to Barapani. Those who have witnessed its former glory, will definitely watch it today with a deep sense of sorrow and regret. The same plight has also befallen Umshyri another big river running through the city.

Rivers are God's greatest gift to any country because they provide life-sustaining water. India is in fact blessed with a good network of rivers which crisscross this vast subcontinent. Unfortunately, we Indians lack sensitivity towards our natural environment. It is enough to look at the condition of our great rivers, the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Cauvery or Godavari in order to feel ashamed of ourselves. These great rivers holy as they are considered, yet in reality nobody cares for their integrity. Coming to our own city, our two important rivers, Wah Umkhras and Umshyri are in a miserable condition. We have heard many talks about "clean river campaign" but so far nothing is done. Encroachment into these rivers

is going on unchecked. Big buildings along Wah Umkhras river are being constructed. Is it legal to encroach into the river course? How many times, the NGT orders to dismantle illegal structures along the river, are being openly flouted? I still remember that it was as early as during Mr. VS Jafa's term as DC of East Khasi Hills, that an order was issued for dismantling all structures along the river. The action was initiated, but it died a premature death as political pressures were there to halt the order. Everyone is aware that there are hundreds of illegal structures along these rivers, but there is no political will from the part of any government to implement any evacuation drive.

The rivers and water bodies in our state are so vital for feeding ground water tables which in turn supply water to our wells and springs. The manner we destroy the green cover and the degree of pollution our rivers suffer, will eventually cause the extinction of these water bodies. What will happen to our posterity in the next century is everyone's conjecture. Our children and grandchildren are going to fight for drinking water which will become extremely scarce. Signs of water shortage are already evident. Many water springs and pools are drying up and the water volume in our streams and rivers is fast declining. We are all responsible for this man-made disaster and if we do not repent and act resolutely, we are all doomed. Can we still reclaim our rivers and streams? Yes we can if we decide to. There is need for honesty and political will on the part of the government as not to be blackmailed by pressure groups and selfish politicians.

Last year, two rivers the Yamuna and Ganges were granted "legal rights" implying that any harm done to them is punishable by law. New Zealand and some Latin American countries are pioneers in this environment protection drive. Probably it is time that the sensible citizens of Shillong should demand for "legal rights" for our rivers and streams running through our city. It is a relief to hear the Modi 2.0 Government pledging the "Har Ghar Jal" (water for every family) because this is the most fundamental basic need of man. However, the question is: how can we assure water to all families if we do not take care of our rivers? I hope that they will think of implementing a stricter law to guarantee the well-being of all the rivers and water bodies in our country. This should be understood by every Indian as a fight for survival and self preservation.

Why defend the indefensible?

Editor,

Apropos L.S. Rynhang's letter "Gross Errors in MBOSE: Text books: A Clarification (ST July 3, 2019), I wish to express that I had taken pains to point out errors not because of any self interest but because of my concern for students of Class IX and X studying Physics in Meghalaya. I have taught Physics in a renowned college for nearly forty years. In 1966 we were fortunate to have a renowned professor of Physics, N Ganguly known in Calcutta University as Graphite Ganguly as recorded in the Science Journal of the 1950s. There were others too in Chemistry and Mathematics whose classes we never missed. N. Ganguly would never teach any important Physics principle without experiments and models which were all in working condition. Archimedes, Bell Jar covering the electric bell, Ampere's swimming rule to show deflection on a magnetic needle

when a long wire in Magnetic meridian would deflect left or right when current is passed through were part of his demonstrations. Then there's Madeburg's hemisphere, Michael Faraday's 'Law of electromagnetic induction' with a brief history of rusty lodestone dropped onto a vertical coil to deflect the current reading device, torch cells of zinc, carbon and ammonium chloride as paste (electrolyte) and black charcoal as polarizer. In short we never had a blind study on anything.

The writer should understand that all explanations on trumpet, ultra-sonics, to melt fog in the runway; to manufacture cosmetics to detect enemy vehicles, are all fabricated. The main purpose of the trumpet is to amplify the sound from the trumpet blower who has his mouth swollen with air. So to do the reverse and to insert the small end into the ear hole is laughable. One cannot explain ultra-sound by sidelining the test probe,

which only technicians of the test probe can explain. As students we had carried out experiments on Archimedes. Reading the text is not only amusing but laughable. Supersonic boom is a pack of lies. It is true that jet fighters with more than 2 mach or less can cause a false explosion to the man on the ground.

If the writer wishes to know more he could read the Ya Perelman Physics for entertainment book 2, page 306 of Mir Publication Moscow. In case he wishes to read this, I can Xerox and post it to the writer.

Any Physics principle for beginners needs sound explanation, without which the mathematical part would simply be committed to memory and vomited out during examinations. The explanation on why passengers in a bus fall backwards when the driver accelerates could be revisited by the learned writer. Students today are extremely unfortunate not to have mathematical formulae backed up by simple experiments. Lots of

ammeters, galvanometers, voltmeters resistance box were received by the Government in the 1980's. It appears that no one used them and no one knows where they have been stored. Physics teaching right from class IX needs experiments and models and there are many in everyday life to help mindful teachers to imbibe more knowledge on Physics so as to engage students. I have also gone through the Class X text which is no different from one of Class IX. For example why 'Ambulance' is reversely written could be discussed in the classroom.

So what is the solution? The final remedy would be to switch to CBSE. ICSE is too deep and comprehensive. No student can commit to memory all the hundreds of formulae during the exams. Finally, I sincerely request the writer to co-operate and point out mistakes committed. A rejoinder is appreciated but to defend the indefensible is to do disservice to the

students. We need to let go off our physical and mental burden, especially the wrong ones, so that we can see our children enjoying their youth in playgrounds and not in private homes undergoing private tuition.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong- 14

Shocking behaviour

Editor,

Close on the heels of Pope Francis asked forgiveness on behalf of his church for all the sins committed by the clergies under his papacy, yet another shocking news of a sleazy crime committed by a Catholic priest at a boys' home on the outskirts of Kochi has come to light. The priest allegedly sexually abused the inmates and the whole shocking news came to light when one of the victims' parents lodged a complaint with the Palluruthy police station.

The accused Fr George

alias Fr Jerry Thareparambil is the director of the boys' home run by the Church. He belongs to the Order of Discalced Carmelites (ODC). It is learnt that he had been abusing the boys for long and the boys were in constant fear. It is pertinent to note that a few boys who escaped from the home were roaming at Kannamaly a few kilometers away from the boys' home. Having been alerted by the public, the police reached and rounded up the children. On interrogation, the children disclosed that they had run out of the home for fear of the priest and his sexual abuse.

How shocking is this heinous act. The protector himself ravages the children. The crime committed by the perpetrator on the boys will have far-reaching consequences on the children and on the society they are living in. These traumatic children must be given the best counselling, or else they would also become pederast (homosexual) repeating the same

sinful acts when they grow up.

It is high time the church overhauled its present system of order in which priests are allowed to binge drink and eat. Also, the church must look into the circumstances which helped the culprit commit this horrible act and take practical steps so that such crimes will not be repeated in future.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi -15

Spectacular performance by India

Editor,

The recently concluded India Sri Lanka match witnessed a spectacular performance by Indian batsmen while chasing a target. A unbroken 150+ run partnership between Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul helped India to amass huge win against Sri Lanka. The top order batsmen have emerged

successful now by setting a precedent of not losing early wickets while promising over 100+ run opening stand. Not to forget Rohit Sharma's massive world record of 5 tons in the tournament, especially on holy English soil and who will also soon break Sachin Tendulkar's record of most runs in a world cup match by a player.

The bowlers however failed to capitalise on early fall of wickets leading a batsman to score a century and thus opponents putting 250+ runs on the scoreboard. The fielding also witnessed missed chances of catches and run saves. With the final result of the match however favouring India's win, the shortcomings witnessed during the fielding needs to be improved. The same will perhaps help the team to prepare well for the next crucial match against New Zealand in the semi finals.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal
Bangalore 72

"A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life."

--- Charles Darwin

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.328 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2019

Human and Child Trafficking in Meghalaya

ONE of the prime reasons for human trafficking is poverty and Meghalaya as a state is increasingly dipping below poverty line. This can be measured from the under-nutrition and malnutrition of its growing population and women in the reproductive age. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Meghalaya is 39 per 1000 live births while maternal mortality is 211 per one lakh births in 2016 with only 48.6% institutional deliveries. Statistics inform that 12% of the total state population lives below poverty line of which 12.5% is in rural Meghalaya and 9.3% in urban Meghalaya according to the 2016 socio economic census. This pushes children into forced labour instead of being in schools.

Feminisation of poverty is an appropriate term for Meghalaya because of the rise in the number of female-headed households. In 2015 Meghalaya topped the list of female headed households at 9.8% followed by Kerala at 9.7%. The problem with woman heading a household is her vulnerability to poverty. Studies show that female-headed households face a higher risk of being poor vis-à-vis the male-headed households. Meghalaya is also the state with the highest fertility ratio hence the family size is also unusually large. Since the tribals of Meghalaya practice the matrilineal system, when a man abandons/divorces his wife the burden for bringing up children and educating them rests with the mother who more often than not does not get maintenance from the estranged husband. The rise in the number of street children who then get easily trafficked into child labour and of girl-children being trafficked for sex is on the rise. Unfortunately societal response to this is lukewarm and even religious institutions have not begun to discuss this burning issue with the seriousness it deserves. However, trafficking happens across ages and several adult women have had to be rescued by police who are tipped off by activists working in the area of human trafficking. At the global level 21 million adults and children are being forced into unpaid labour and subjected to violence and torture. Human trafficking encompasses several illicit activities whose operators make up what is called the shadow economy. According to the International Labour Organization forced labour in the global private economy generates \$150 billion in illegal profits every year hence it is big business. It is this lure for money that pushes individuals to run the trade and to prey on vulnerable minor children and sometimes young girls who are pushed to the limits of poverty. The only way to tackle human trafficking is for civil society to take responsibility for this social crime. All religious and social institutions and governments must converge to end this modern day slavery.

Farmers' Commission: A critical gap filled - I

By K.N. Kumar

The gap between the government and her people is perhaps at the root of most distress and misery, especially so in the rural areas.

Democratic governments are founded on the belief that their representative character will ensure that the people's grievances are somehow listened to and understood; and thereafter, addressed. That may be good in theory, but in practice, the status varies state to state and country to country. Kerala tops the list as the best governed state in 2018 and Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland share the joint honour of being the worst governed among the smaller states (Public Affairs Centre's report of 2018).

According to the BBC's analysis of the best governed countries in 2018, Denmark is number one in the list while the USA, so called leader of the free world, is not even in the top six. How strictly a state adheres to the rule of law; how much trust its government inspires in its citizens; and how much social progress is in evidence, are some of the measures based on which the above assessment was done. And, of course, you will not ask me where we are, as a country, in this list!

Without intending to minimize the influence of the other reasons, I will hold that a good number of our institutions meant to deliver services to the people have become dysfunctional or non-functional over time, because they are manned either by indifferent or incompetent people. That some of them are also unabashedly corrupt adds up to the story line. It is clear to me that it is not so much about the design of these institutions as the men who man them. It would be imprudent to single out any one institution, because the corrosion is too widespread and commonplace for one to bother listing them. An answer as to how we can halt this regress lies possibly in the quick development of social capital in the society. A society with higher social capital is better governed, because of the continuous pressure exerted on the non-performing institutions by the citizens. Kerala performs well because Keralites ask questions and an average citizen of Kerala feels sufficiently empowered because he knows how and who to ask questions. Rural areas across the country suffer even more than the urban areas because both - the people's ability to question, and their access to the governing institutions are relatively muted. The limited point is - the further you are from your people, the worse you are, as a government!

So, how do we reach out to the large numbers of vulnerable rural farmers who are suffering from decades of indifference despite their contributions to the

economy and food security being so high? How do we bridge the gap between the farmers and the government so the farm policy priorities are accurately understood? Can we erect an open and a de-bureaucratised body that organically connects the farmers with their elected government?

I think the Meghalaya Farmer Empowerment Commission could well be such a body, if it works with the above objective of reaching out to the farmers, codifies their concerns and accurately projects their issues to the policy makers and the implementing agencies. Farmers being the most vulnerable of all the economically active sections, it is not just prudent to have a body like this, it is urgent. Meghalaya is the only state in the country to establish a Statutory Standing Commission for the Farmers - notified in May this year as the Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission, 2019 (MFEC). Haryana's 'Kisan Aayog' set up about six years ago is not a statutory body. As the MFEC is preparing itself to catalyse the progress and welfare of the large farming population of Meghalaya, a discussion on the rationale behind the creation of the MFEC, the magnitude of the task ahead of it; and the agenda it has to set for itself is perhaps, timely. This set of two articles is therefore, an effort to seek views, suggestions and comments from the enlightened citizens and farmer interest groups, so that a sensible action plan can be taken up by the Commission.

I start with a working premise that in our state, there are at least three lakh households that depend upon agriculture and allied sectors. Included in this number are the land owners, the landless cultivators, fish farmers, dairy and piggy farmers, backyard poultry and other bird rearers, mushroom growers, Rubber, Mulberry, Eri and Muga plantation farmers, and petty vendors who sell the agricultural commodities, etc.

The Meghalaya Agriculture Census, 2011 makes a distinction between 'ownership holdings' and 'operational holdings'. The operational holdings are agnostic to the title, legal form, size or location while the ownership holdings have a defined owner with a legal title who may (or not) cultivate the land himself. The Agriculture Census reveals that the total number of land Holdings in our state is 2.09 lakh with a cultivated area of 2.87 lakh hectares. 96.67% of all

these holdings are wholly owned; leaving a small number of partly owned and partly leased-in holdings (2.22%). If we assume that each of these land holders has a family and taking the average family size at five, prima facie more than a million people appear to be critically dependent upon agriculture, ie., on whatever happens in their respective fields during and after a cropping season.

The story however, is incomplete because it is not just about the operational land holders engaged in agriculture - we need also to take into account the numbers of people who are engaged in animal husbandry, fishery, sericulture and weaving, and small vending activities (with or without any land ownership). In fact, the tendency to pick animal husbandry or petty trading as livelihood activities is far more pronounced when people do not hold any land. The classification therefore, gets a bit blurred here because a large percentage of the operational land holders are also engaged in animal husbandry and such other activities. A small land holder cannot make ends meet only with agriculture, the average land holding size of Meghalaya being just about 1.34 hectares. He will need to pursue multiple livelihood options, if he were to lead to an optimal life. We do not have any accurate numbers of the land-less people who are exclusively dependent upon animal husbandry activities in our state, so one has to estimate by extrapolating the national data. The livestock sector currently employs about 8% of India's workforce. Keeping Meghalaya's labour-force participation rate (44.11) in mind and subjecting it to the proportion of the rural marginal workers at 22%, we may derive an approximate figure of about 2.5 lakh people engaging themselves in Animal husbandry sector alone. To this figure (subject to further scrutiny) we may now add up another 22,000 fish pond owners who have been supported by the Meghalaya State Aquaculture Mission. Add to this the number of people engaged in non-edible fibre crops like Jute, Cotton and Ramie and the plantation workers engaged in rubber, the three types of silk worm rearers, Mulberry, Eri and Muga, the numbers of weavers who depend upon the silk so produced, the number of petty vendors who sell vegetables and fruits, etc. All inclusive, one can safely deduce that people directly or indirectly dependent upon agriculture and allied activities in our state number at least 15 lakhs. That is half of Meghalaya's population -

and the zone of work, for the Commission!

I will need to put a rider to the above numbers at this stage. The Agricultural Census 2010 was not done on a 100% saturation basis. It was a census of just about 20% of the villages. It may therefore, at the best be indicative, may have been dated, and certainly not the truth. To test the accuracy, I did a dip-stick survey at Laitdiengsai village a few days ago. Of the 160 households, only seven households owned land and each one of them had hundreds of acres among themselves while the remaining farmers from 153 households were all landless and therefore, are the lessees of these seven families. None from the seven families cultivates the land, all that they do is to collect the lease rents on the basis of 'farm-beds', of the size of about 10 feet length and two feet width @ Rs.20 per bed for two seasons. If this ratio holds good at least for the East Khasi Hills district, then the landlessness in the Khasi Hills region is far more acute than what the Agricultural Census suggests. I am not aware of the situation in Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills, but I don't think it would be grossly different from the Khasi Hills region. This skew in the land ownership may well be at the root of the agrarian distress of the state, and therefore, should be opened for a deep public debate. How can the farm sector improve when a large number of people dependent upon it, do not have the security of land ownership?

Be that as it may, a priori, distress is inevitable if close to half or more population of the state depends upon a decelerating sector year after year. The sector's growth rate of 2.69% in the state GSDP (2016-17) is a discouraging figure, even by national standards (India's growth rate in agriculture and allied sectors was 4.9 per cent in 2016-17). Consistently low public investment in agriculture leads to limited capital formation, difficult terrain and costly labour make agriculture unviable, unregulated presence of middlemen and vendors slices off the crop and cash surpluses of the producers, a lethargic, patronizing and at times rent-seeking delivery system demotivates the farmers, and the largely reticent and the semi-literate farming population has a very low sense of self-esteem, so they do not powerfully articulate their concerns. "Why don't your departmental officers treat us with respect?" a farmer asked me, during the Farmers' Parliament. "Is it because, we are not suited and booted?"

(The writer is Chairperson, Meghalaya Farmers' Commission)

Plight of Karnataka lays bare Congress-JD(S) coalition fault lines

Kumaraswamy's Government falls prey to inherent instability

By Kalyani Shankar

Why do the coalition governments in general do not succeed in India? It has been for various reasons both at the state and at the federal level. Historically, this has been proved not once or twice, but many times.

The latest in the series is the H.D. Kumaraswamy led Karnataka government, which is crumbling but there is nothing surprising about that. The "Aya Ram, Gaya Ram" culture continues despite stringent anti-defection laws and the horse-trading is being done unabashedly. The legislators are taken to resorts to keep them in a camp.

Right from the beginning the Congress-JD(S) coalition was shaky although the entire Opposition graced the occasion of the swearing-in ceremony of Kumaraswamy just a year ago. It was thought that it might make the beginning of the Opposition unity against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's juggernaut, but ultimately the Opposition

government in 1977, they could co-exist despite a massive majority just for three years. The V. P. Singh government, which was supported in an unusual manner by the Left and the Right in 1989, collapsed within months. The two United Front governments propped up by the Congress from outside also collapsed within two years.

At the state level, the first coalition experiment was the Samyukthavidayak Dal in which the Jana Sangh was a partner in 1967. The BJP-BSP government in 1995 collapsed within four months due to inherent contradictions. The BJP-BSP governments in 1997 and 2002 also did not last long. Even in Karnataka the BJP-JD(S) coalition was formed in 2006 but that too did not last long.

The BJP-PDP government coalition in Jammu and Kashmir lasted just three years - from 2015-2018. It was the BJP that

The office of the Governor must be made free from political hold. Thirdly, coalition has come to symbolize instability in India because the ruling party has to pander to the needs of the coalition partners. It depends on the competency of the chief minister or the Prime Minister to run the coalition. The political parties need to be very clear of each other's expectations and working platform.

remained divided.

One of the reasons for the failure of the Karnataka experiment was because the local Congress and the JD(S) leaders had been at loggerheads. Former Congress chief minister Siddaramaiah has been sulking for his bête noire Kumaraswamy getting the top post. Secondly, there were allegations of the BJP poaching on the Congress and JD(S) legislators. Thirdly, the unnatural character of the coalition where the major party Congress supported the minor party JD(S) was not conducive.

In the past one year, many times news emerged from Bangalore that the government was shaky. So the collapse was coming sooner or later for obvious reasons.

This brings us to the larger issue of why coalitions do not succeed in Indian politics. They collapse because of their inherent contradictions. Both the national parties - Congress and the BJP - have not succeeded in the coalition experiment earlier also. While the Congress played the game of supporting the coalition and pulling out at will, the BJP had tried a few times some coalition experiments. The coalition governments were formed at the federal level in 1989, 1990, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2004-2009) by several political parties. The first coalition government, which completed its full-term, was the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA-1 that remained in power for six years because the BJP provided the spine. The United Progressive Alliance remained in power for a decade for a different reason, as it allowed the coalition partners to make money from their ministries.

When the anti Indira forces came together to throw out the Indira Gandhi

pulled out of the government. There was a clear divide between the Valley where the PDP was strong and the Jammu region where the BJP won many seats. Ultimately, the BJP felt there was no point in continuing the experiment and pulled out of the government in June 2018 after three years. The United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala holds primarily because it is a coalition led by two minority interests - Muslims and Christians.

Why do the coalition governments fail? Often they are not stable because of a lack of a common minimum programme as suggested by the Second Administrative Commission. Secondly, defections are often encouraged, where the role of the Governor is important and the Sarkaria Commission recommendations should be implemented. The office of the Governor must be made free from political hold. Thirdly, coalition has come to symbolize instability in India because the ruling party has to pander to the needs of the coalition partners. It depends on the competency of the chief minister or the Prime Minister to run the coalition. The political parties need to be very clear of each other's expectations and working platform.

A coalition government at the state or federal level would be stable only when the national parties lead it, which would be a glue to bind them. What is happening is that political parties come together for power and that is the only glue that binds them. There should be a common bond among the partners or else it will be shaky. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Legislative ethnic cleansing will marginalize Khasi tribe

Editor, Very few observers have till now realised that influx from across the borders and mainland India is not the only danger for the Khasi tribals of Meghalaya. Ironically it is the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council that poses this danger and this could happen if it does not backtrack from its aggressive short-sighted project and ill-advised plan of what it assumed would benefit the *jaitbynriew*. No doubt many are concerned that one day the Khasi people would become a minority because of the large scale influx from outside, but the worst could happen if KHADC unleashes a dragon (if it could) that will in a few years time rob the existence of the

people it vows to protect because of some unwise strategy.

These are the controversial bills to define who is a Khasi, so in short, (i) if your father is not a Khasi, the mother who is a Khasi along with the children are also not Khasi. (ii) If a Khasi takes the surname of the father who is also a Khasi, then the offsprings will not be classified as Khasi. (iii) This one affects religion, and it has already become legalised without consulting the Christian community. It is that if a Khasi male who is a Christian marries a non-Khasi woman then his children will have to go through a ceremony called 'tang jait' which since the Christian religion came to Khasi Hills has never been a mandatory practice by the Khasi believers of Christian faith. So those children of Christian families because of their Biblical faith who

refuse this 'forced initiation compelling ceremony' will no more be counted as Khasis. Shockingly, this will not happen to the Jaintias and Garos who are protected by their own Autonomous District Councils.

The scenario here is that these said tribes will not be marginalised but the Khasi tribals will be going down. e.g if Meghalaya is composed of indigenous 90% tribals, and the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos are 30% each, then the Khasi population after the legislative ethnic cleansing will be only about 20%. Unfortunately, the 10% or more will not be accepted as Khasi by the KHADC legislative decree. They cannot claim to be Scheduled tribes. Their future will be devastated and so too that of their their offsprings for generations to come, and sadly the Khasi race will surely be

further marginalised, and the outcasts will become a nameless group of people without any rights and opportunities in their own land.

This is a wake up call for 'ka Jaitbynriew.' The public representatives and all those responsible Seng Bhalang should have serious thoughts about the subject matter before it is too late. A Khasi has always been a Khasi. Those that the so called legislative bill says otherwise were many of them in the forefront of the Hill State movement, and a number of them lost their lives in some agitations for their homeland with the pride of being Khasi. Interestingly there are those former and present MLAs and MDCs who are themselves the direct descendants of the very people that the mentioned bills has now classified as non-Khasis.

This requires that the Khasi community search its heart to prevent the tribe from diminishing and becoming lost and swallowed up in their own land by the legislative ethnic cleansing.

Yours etc.,
Kithok Kharkamni
Shillong-2

Ban all forms of plastics

Editor, Through your esteemed daily I would like to congratulate the District Administration, East Khasi Hills for the notification banning the use of plastic in tourist spots etc. In this connection I would like to point out that earlier too such notification were issued but to no effect. Unless a concerted effort by forming task force etc to curb the menace of plastics is undertaken there will not be any impact of this

notification.

Further, I would like to request the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills to bring out a notification for a blanket ban on the use of plastic in any forms. There has to be sincere effort by the State Government so that a total ban can be imposed as has been done in other states of our country. It is seen that plastic bags of different colours and microns are used by the vendors, shopkeepers and hawkers which are carcinogenic in nature.

If we are to save our environment, Umiam Dam and the city, then the use of plastic should be totally banned.

Yours etc.,
S.L. Singhania,
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.

"Too much action with too little intent makes for wasteful exertion of energy and the confusion between movement and progress."

--- Steve Maraboli

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.329

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2019

Time to end housing woes

THE Supreme Court's intervention to set right the wrongs in the housing sector is timely. Chaos reigns in the sector and the scenario is worsening due to lack of governmental interest in this important matter. The apex court has asked the Centre to frame a policy to protect home buyers who are cheated or are put into serious trouble by real estate companies. This directive came in response to petitions filed by home-buyers who put money in the Jaypee Infratech Ltd and were treated to an unending wait for delivery of accommodation. The court stretched the plea to a wider level to cover the problems of home-buyers across the country.

Due to fluctuations in market, legal hassles and other reasons, several real estate firms have not been able to meet the expectations of home-buyers who have put their hard-earned money into such ventures in the hope that they could soon own a flat or a villa. In several cases, the land acquired for the purpose by companies ends up in litigation. Monetary issues too pose problems in the successful completion of housing projects. With a substantial part of the money already put into such projects, the long delay or even cheating they face becomes unbearable.

Notably, most urban dwellers who put money in housing ventures are middle-income groups, though substantial numbers go for luxury, high-end accommodations too. Delay or cheating hurts all more so in the case of the salaried middle income families, as in many cases what they put in is their lifetime's savings. The gratuity and other end-of-service benefits a white collar employee gets is just sufficient for the purchase of a home at the fag end of his life, and no more. This, at a time when middle-scale flats cost as high as a crore or more in most cities. Once the hard-earned money is put into some private housing schemes, their fate is often sealed. So many crooks are playing games in this sector also because successive governments have not been able to regulate the activities in this sector.

While Independent India started five-year plans, a critical neglect was of the housing sector. Cities began building themselves up with no governmental help or regulations in place. The result is chaotic growth of urban sprawls without proper roads, water facilities and drainage systems. This neglect continues for the past 70 years and it the reason why India hardly has planned cities; the exceptions being Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar, Navi Mumbai and Gandhinagar. The rest is in total chaos. Government cannot be allowed to abdicate its responsibility.

Farmers' commission: A critical gap filled - II

By K.N. Kumar

some individual exceptions, but we are not talking about them here. In all this humdrum, there is hardly any space or time for any serious interaction with the farmers - thereby leaving a huge gap that cannot be bridged so easily.

That brings me to my principal point that there has never been any effort in the past to establish a standing and permanent institutional mechanism to support the cause of the farmers. There is no body that articulates the farmer grievances based on a systematic study of their con-

"The one who is educated can be organized and the one who is organized can be empowered."

cerns, and urges or nudges the government to initiate action in that regard on a regular basis. There have been ad hoc commissions set up time to time, by various state governments and even the Government of India, to look into specific issues concerning the farmers, but not a permanent standing commission by statute. Therefore, there is a huge knowledge gap in the mainstream society leading to an inadequate appreciation of the farm sector issues. Even the civil society does not precisely understand the complex, inter-linked farm sector issues. Therefore, the idea that there should be a publicly funded body to pick the farm distress signals and stand up for the rights of the genuine farmers is not just prudent, but timely too. The Commission should not just be a platform to engage the farmers regularly - it should also codify their rights and mainstream them so their agenda becomes a part of public discourse in due course of time. A derivative of all this effort by the Commission should be to find lasting, sustainable and long-term solutions to alleviate the agrarian distress. The issues are fundamental, so the response should not be just a muted murmur.

Farmer empowerment may consist of at least three major layers - economic, social and political. Each of these components needs to be worked on in-

dependently and together, but I think the primary ones are the economic and social layers. It certainly is a long haul, but it needs to be begun soon enough to avoid any distress expressing in the near time. Farmers can be empowered only when their interests are collectivized and when they begin speaking about their concerns powerfully on a common platform. It is not my argument that such an organization would have to be necessarily a government body. It does not have to be, but it could take a long time, if we have to leave it

to an organic growth process. In the absence of a powerful farmer organization on the lines of a Shetkari Sangathan, catalysing such a process in the interim through a public body will perhaps be necessary. Empowerment is as much about educating people as it is about organizing them. The one who is educated can be organized and the one who is organized can be empowered. Economic empowerment enables political empowerment and thereby leads to a better realization of rights. Unfortunately in our system the ones with authority do not always understand the people's needs and the ones with needs do not have any authority. The Farmers Commission can benefit both.

Just to give a brief on some of the farmer concerns that beg answers are - (1) Are all the state and central developmental schemes appropriately conceptualized? And if so, are they all delivered such that there is an efficient return on the investments? (2) Why the state or the civil society is helpless in purging the scourge of the middlemen in agriculture? (3) Why don't the people discuss the near absence of authentic land records and why isn't a comprehensive cadastral survey of Meghalaya's lands done so far? And why are land reforms a taboo subject in the state? (4) How have the vendors come to dominate the input delivery system? Why are we so disdainful toward the native seeds and obsess over the

MNC seeds driven by vendors? (5) What will happen to the state's agriculture if the next generation of youth does not want to pursue it as a profession? (6) If organic agriculture is sought to be promoted then why higher prices cannot be ensured for the organic products? (7) Why isn't the commodity marketing system not getting decentralized and is concentrated in a few hands? How are these archaic laws and traditional systems dominating the agriculture commodity marketing in Meghalaya? (8) Why isn't crop insurance system benefitting the farmers in the state? (9) After decades of investment in developing irrigation, how is it that the cropping intensity is only 120% in the state? For how long will we keep the land fallow during the winters in a water rich state? (10) Why aren't there any major technological breakthroughs in hill agriculture? Why the foot print of the institution meant for developing and transferring technologies in the state so minimal? Questions galore and answers do not come by, so very easily or soon.

Besides the above issues, I also think that as a society we will not just need to acknowledge the farmer rights and entitlements, but also help codify them so they are internalized by the officials of all the departments. The necessity to codify farmer rights flows out of prudential reasons - if the primary sector fails, it will have a cascading negative effect on the secondary and tertiary sectors, if food security is impacted, the very base of social security will have been eroded. Even as we are discussing and prioritizing other things, the agrarian distress is creeping in. When it hits, it will hit really hard and the human suffering will be incalculably large. 3 lakh farmers committed suicides in India since 1995, failure of high value crops, debt burden and price crash being the primary reasons. Fortunately, we as a state have been spared of such a widespread calamity partly because the farmers here are wise enough not to excessively depend upon high value inputs as also because the assistance from the Government of India is very liberal, compared to the rest of India. How long will this luck last?

(The writer is Chairperson, Meghalaya Farmers' Commission)

Police to watch court registry:

A sign of deepening rot

Decision plants doubt in public mind

By K Raveendran

The move by Supreme Court Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi to deploy officers from CBI and Delhi Police to guard against abuse of Registry administration of the court amounts to an official confirmation of the rot that has set in at the hallowed precincts of the highest court of the land, just like any other institution of governance.

The police officers are being appointed on deputation to keep a tab on suspect listing of cases and other activities of employees and lawyers. Manipulation of Registry records came to full public gaze when it was discovered that two court officials had changed the content of an order by the court requiring Reliance Communications chairman Anil Ambani to personally appear in a contempt of court case. The order as uploaded on the Supreme Court website said that Ambani's presence in the case had been dispensed with, instead of stating that it had 'not' been dispensed with. The CJI then dismissed the two employees from service and they have since been arrested.

It may be sheer coincidence that the abuse came to light, probably due to the high profile nature of the case and the person involved in it. Otherwise it would have gone unnoticed and the proceedings of the case would have progressed on the lines desired by the manipulators.

We have heard in the past about special 'agents' who facilitate what is known in legal parlance as bench hunting, a process by which influential litigants get their cases heard by 'pliable' benches. This happens mostly in the lower courts, but development of the practice as a full-fledged business by unscrupulous elements has had its impact even on the apex court. There have been several cases where these agents had managed to fix benches hearing cases that may be sensitive to influential people, whether in the corporate sector, government or even the general public.

Influence peddling happens at different levels for interested parties. It could start with the bench itself. In the event of attempts at that level not yielding results, the parties could approach facilitators who help in 'buying' favourable decisions. And even when such attempts fail, they could subvert the proc-

ess by manipulating various things, including the date of hearing to suit the requirements of the persons who are both desirous of such change and can afford to pay. It is an open secret that there are agents ready to push things at every level.

The points raised by the landmark press conference by four senior judges -- led by retired Supreme Court judge Chelameswar, and one of them the present CJI -- are still fresh in public memory. The judges had expressed concern about judicial decisions being marred by bias, bench preferences and lack of transparency.

The press conference that Justice Chelameswar himself described as an 'extraordinary event', was to highlight the fact that the administration of the Supreme Court was "not in order and many things which are less than desirable have happened in the last few months." Unless this institution is preserved, "democracy will not survive" in this country, Chelameswar cautioned.

In 2014, former Supreme Court Bar Association president Dushyant Dave had stormed into the court of the then CJI, Justice R M Lodha, to complain that 'bench hunting' was rampant in the apex court too, forcing the CJI to initiate a probe.

The Chief Justice ordered a probe into the charge as it was seen that the trend "will eventually shake people's confidence in the Indian justice system".

Curiously, a bench headed by Justice Dipak Misra, who later became the CJI himself, had talked about the danger of 'forum shopping'. He had warned that if the tendency is allowed to prevail, "it is likely to usher in anarchy, whim and caprice and in the ultimate eventuate shake the faith in the adjudicating system."

The biggest irony, however, is that Justice Misra, when he became the chief justice, was accused of all that he was lamenting about earlier. In fact, one of the most serious charges levelled by the four judges at the press conference was about manipulation of the roster so as to pick judges of choice to hear certain cases.

(IPA Service)

Exploiting ground water

Editor,

I am a resident of Nongrim Hills and wish to inform that the Dorbar Shnong Nongrim Hills together with all the residents of the locality led by the then Headman, Mr Joshua Kharkongor had agreed upon and stood against the drilling of water in 2008. Then, in 2013, the Landmark Hotel located in Upper Nongrim Hills went ahead with the drilling of water in their premises. Again, this time too, the Dorbar Shnong led by the then Headman, Mr. James Lyngwa and General Secretary, Bantylli Narry, with the support of all the residents of the locality managed to stop the drilling.

But, surprisingly, in May 2019, the Landmark Hotel was given permission to drill water in their premises by the Executive Committee Dorbar Shnong headed by the present Headman, Mr. Bantylli Narry, who spearheaded the protest in 2013. He now claims that this is a community service.

Attached to this email

are letters to the Rangbah Shnong and signed by the residents of Nongrim Hills and also a letter to the C.E.M KHADC. I request the local MLA, MDC and the KHADC to intervene and stop this destructive process.

Yours etc,

Paul Andy Kharkongor
(A concerned resident of Nongrim Hills),
Shillong-14

LCS at Dawki

Editor,

The Land Customs Station (LCS) at Dawki (Tamabil) is quite an important border crossing point on the Indo-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya. The LCS, however, requires some facelift. There are no proper arrangements for seating passengers and neither is there a proper place to fill up the required forms either by the foreign visitors or by the Indian tourists intending to cross over to the foreign country. In addition, the washrooms are horrible and one is afraid that the circumstances might

lead to severe health problems. Moreover, due to heavy traffic of stone loaded trucks heading towards the international border-crossing and the fleet of empty lorries that return after unloading the heavy materials there is hardly any space for the small cars at the LCS gate. There are no traffic policemen to help and control the movement of heavy commercial vehicles. Secondly, to gain an ecstatic experience the tourists keep visiting the spot to have a glance of the border crossings but do not find any proper place to park their vehicles, both private and hired. Further, the road right at the border gate and up to the no-man's land is in a very bad shape with pot holes and slush. The authorities may thus prepare a road map and make sure that it matches the expectations of the masses and create a proper impression of India in general and Meghalaya in particular.

Yours etc.,
Bibhash Dhar,
Via email

Plan-B for the Umiam Bridge

Editor,

Whenever I pass through the Umiam bridge a thought crosses my mind as to what would happen to Shillong City and the people living downstream (Umroi side), should there be any major crack and the dam gives way and the bridge collapses. Shillong would be totally disconnected but it will be a disaster for people living below the dam and the surrounding areas. We have heard stories from across the world of major dam collapse like in Brazil, China and India too. The miseries and tragedies are unimaginable. There will be loss of power supply, loss of lives, loss of connectivity. The Umiam Dam, built in the early 1960s has already crossed its shelf life. It is one of the major dams of the North East and of the State in particular. The bridge over the dam is the only connecting link to Shillong.

Heavy and incessant rains in Shillong and nearby areas in the past few days make me think of the consequences that would follow should the dam collapse owing to the pressure from the volume of water and the heavy traffic (24/7) along the bridge. I am not pessimistic but rather realistic on this issue. My humble request as a citizen to the Power Department and the PWD Department is to have a unified approach and immediately plan to construct an alternative road linking Shillong with the National Highway. There should be a conscious effort by these Departments to think and act correctly and immediately to avoid any grave consequences should any major mishap arises, which we hope and pray will not!

Yours etc.,
R.N. Rymbai,
Shillong-8

The water we drink

Editor,

Going through Toki Blah's "Need for people's movements on urban governance" (ST July 9,

at all for the fast growing city be it in water management or construction laws or roads.

The old Jowai road through Loreto school which if expanded in the 1972's would have lessened traffic snarl was never attended to. The remaining forest cover that guards the water hole in the slopes of Lum Shyllong overlooking Shillong, would soon be done away with as combating traffic snarl is more precious than water which had become very noisy this week when KV Shyllong at Mawphlang had to be closed, forgetting the other many such activities all along the river from Assam Rifles housing complex to the reservoir. In the midst of all these, climate change the culprit for snatching Sohra world's wettest place (which our CM boasted in Switzerland) was never attended to, save in G20 summit. India ranks third in pollution and it will move to the first place when Adani would assure more trillion tons of coal to be thrust on to an 18th century James Watt engine. Prime Minister Modi's assurance of free water for all is just a day dream.

Our old environmentalist died fasting to call for cleaning the Ganges, the promise to clean it was made by Modi after the 2014 win. Television debates are dominated by politics when Muslims are blamed for polluting the holy river by the leather industry. The Prime Minister's clarion call to our village headmen is not for 2019, but for 2022 as Rome was not built in a day even if JCB's were there. And we should handle our rivers with respect as these rivers, especially the Surmah ones do have short temper in the monsoon. I once rebuked my bosom friend for dumping coal on his paddy field. He replied, "I eat Punjab white rice." I am going to meet him one day to ask him what kind of water he cooks his rice with.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
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.

"The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it."

--- Neil deGrasse Tyson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.330

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 12, 2019

Clean Shillong Initiative

THE recent plastic onslaught on the Umiam Lake has left Chief Minister Conrad Sangma with no option but to take the bull by the horns. The incessant rains recently have not only exposed the shoddy road construction work but also the absence of storm drains which have led to the flooding of the Umkhrar river after several years. There are many flaws with the storm drains constructed out of the funds received from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) years ago. Storm drains have certain specifications but the most important one is that they should have traps to prevent solid waste from entering the streams and rivers around the city of Shillong. To add to our woes are the ubiquitous single use plastic bags which have become a modern day scourge. They are found in every drain, stream and river and finally end up at the Umiam Lake where all kinds of marine life then feast on them.

To say that the recent rains have caused a minor disaster across the state is an understatement. While parts of Garo Hills are flood prone and will have to be dealt with separately since flood control requires different strategies, it is the flooding caused by anthropogenic activities within the city of Shillong that requires deft handling. Citizen's bodies need to pitch in and so too the much vaunted local dorbars whose writ runs in all the localities of Shillong. And what about the Khasi Hills District Council? How can it pitch in to this work of cleaning up the only habitat that those who have been born and bred here have? The problem with Shillong is that the jurisdiction of the Shillong Municipal Board is limited to a radius of 10x10 square kilometer. But Greater Shillong generates garbage too and its sanitation has to be taken care of. It is high time that this division ends. Citizens have to realize that free rides are no longer possible and that we have to pay for civic services in order to sustain this city and make it liveable. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has taken the present challenges with the urgency deserved and his government proposes to bring in a firm from Colorado USA, to convert solid waste into power which the state will purchase at a rate that is fair and viable. The unit when set up would require 150 MT of garbage daily. This could be one way of addressing the overflowing Marten landfill. The Clean Shillong initiative requires the active participation of citizens of Shillong in order to be sustainable and successful. We owe it to ourselves to join this movement!

Is Sustainable Tourism a Myth?

By Patricia Mukhim

The other day we saw a release from the West Jaintia Students' Union (WJSU) warning "outsiders" not to interfere and raise any alarm on the limestone mining in the area since "limestone" has been gifted by God for the community to mine the way they want (laissez faire). The word "outsiders" here means people who don't belong to West Jaintia Hills. This is a new form of exclusivism that has entered our lexicon. The Khasis use the phrase, "leh katba mon" (do what I please) in a defiant sort of way when someone tells us to refrain from doing something. Now telling people to, "lay their hands off our affairs," has become the new parlance of pressure groups in the guise of students' bodies. In the first place why should a students' body be worried about mining? How are they linked to the mining business? Does mining have anything to do with education? If at all, enlightened students should be questioning the sustainability of the whole mining exercise where hills have come down one by one and forests are being cleared with the mining debris left behind for no one to clean up. Students should be concerned about the bleak future that mining portends. I once asked a limestone mine owner and transporter how long the limestone would last. His reply was a casual, "At least 50 years." By implication he would be dead and gone by then and hardly matters what sort of planet he leaves behind. Such people must be funding the pressure groups to ensure that no whistle blowers get anywhere near the mining sites; least of all environmentalists whose lives are in constant danger.

And pray what are we mining the limestone for? It is to send at the minimum 300 trucks load of it to Bangladesh. There is little or no value addition in Meghalaya despite there being about 14 cement companies in the state; the majority of them in Jaintia Hills. The exports include limestone from Lafarge Company with mines at Nongtra in Shella and the daily consignment going to Chatak in Bangladesh via conveyor belts. The irony is that people in these mining areas also want to hard-sell their villages as tourist destinations. In fact the corporate social responsibility (CSR) fund from Lafarge which is to be spent on rejuvenating the

forests around the mining areas is partly claimed by the affected communities for promoting tourism. This is an absolute travesty! Of course Lafarge is paying a decent amount to address environmental concerns but what about the local miners many of whom have abandoned the mines and left them to the elements without a care for the environment?

Our mindsets are such that we are able to distance ourselves from the environment as if we are not part of it. And what is it that makes us do that? Money of course! When money plays a dominant role in our decision making then everything is justified. So does this mean money is bad? Is capital bad? No it isn't! It's our mode of earning money and of spending it that is problematic.

There were great philanthropists that earned big money in their time but they spent that for social causes. Andrew Carnegie, George Soros, Warren Buffet and our own Azim Premji earned wealth so they could set up foundations for social welfare. Do you have even one cement merchant doing that in our state? Or a limestone exporter who has set up a school? Or a coal mine owner who has started a college or hospital? Not one! Why? Because it seems that the culture of philanthropy is not in the Khasi-Jaintia DNA. We have proved to be selfish people wanting to exploit all resources for one generation and leaving behind a barren earth. And in this exploit there are many who assist the rapid deforestation. Many of them are in the Forest and Environment Department. They help bend the rules so forests can be cleared mercilessly. Any attempt to point out the devastation caused by irresponsible mining is quickly rebutted by citing the Sixth Schedule. As if this Schedule was created to destroy the future of the "jaidbyrniew!" It is unfortunate that the descendants of Rev JIM Nichols Roy - the architect of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution - who envisaged it as an instrument for protecting his people - the weak and defenceless tribals against the more advanced non-tribals (since the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district was part of Assam then and

ruled by the Assamese gentry) - are no longer here to defend its legacy and its core ideology. They have all migrated to the United State their motherland.

This brings me to the Tourism aspect in Meghalaya. Let's face certain facts. Those in the State Tourism Department don't visit these sites like ordinary travelers minus the ML 01 carriers hence they don't see what they should see and remedy. Ordinary travelers like us who are footloose and fancy free but only on weekends, tend to get away from the city to where our hearts call. Alas! Almost all the tourist sites are overcrowded and noisy. You thought you would get out of the city for a breather but realize how wrong you are. About 500 or more vehicles from Assam make their way to Sohra alone. The traffic jam on Saturdays and Sundays starts from the Air Force headquarters and does not end until you are closer home. Is that any charm for a Sunday drive?

So you are tempted to rant over Facebook at the complete lack of regulations on the number of tourists that can visit any destination so that equanimity is maintained and the destination does not turn into a cacophonous bus stop or railway station. But you are warned not to speak harshly for you will affect the livelihoods of the local 'people.' The word 'people' is an idiom that is most misleading. The question to ask is - how many locals are benefiting from the tourism business? Do they have a voice in placing their suggestions before the so-called tourism promotion societies? Would the "destination owners" listen to voices of dissent or do they believe that all of us should conform because 'peoples' livelihoods are at stake? Do the tour operators, hoteliers and guest house owners worry that the tourism destinations are getting overheated? That there are too many footfalls and carbon footprints per day which have their impact on the vulnerable settings? Or is the idea simply to make money while the destinations are able to 'sell' themselves and then abandon them once they have served the capitalistic purpose? It is indeed agonizing that Sohra a place with so much history and culture is now a "commodity" sold to those that have the money to buy its beauty!

Sadder still is the fact that the tour promotion societies will not admit that most tourism destinations are now overcrowded and have far exceeded their carrying capacity. Here too the caveat is that those who are not from Hima Sohra have no right to speak about its impending disaster.

So if we don't live in West Jaintia Hills we are banned from speaking against coal and limestone mining and if we don't live in Sohra we will be hunted down for speaking against the greed that has turned Sohra into a savagely ravaged woman, since it is in the feminine ('Ka Sohra') that every place in Khasi-Jaintia land is referred to.

What is it with the greed of our people that we can't even think of the immediate future? Here the blame lies with the government. A government is elected to 'govern.' The word govern according to the Cambridge dictionary means to control and be responsible for the public business of a country, state, city or other organised group. Governance in turn is a process whereby the government which wields power, authority and influence also enacts policies and takes decisions concerning public life and social upliftment. Good governance means coming up with good policies that bring about order in society.

In 1988 on becoming CM of Meghalaya, the late PA Sangma was appalled to discover that Meghalaya did not have a single policy in place. The state was functioning on auto-pilot. He immediately came up with a Health Policy and started initiating others in the more crucial departments but did not have enough time because he was unseated in 1990 by those who preferred to function without policies.

Today his son Conrad Sangma is on the hot seat. He has initiated the Education Policy which is yet to see the light of day. Now his Government is coming up with the Water Policy and soon with the Solid, Liquid and Biochemical Waste Management Policy. But a more urgent policy needed today is on Tourism and the regulatory mechanisms. If Meghalaya tarries with this policy and there are no serious deliberations and no regulations in place soon, Meghalaya tourism will die a natural death. And that would be disastrous!

A Place Called Ksan

By Janet Hujon

In December 2018 fifteen miners drowned in the flooded rat hole mines of Ksan in the Jaintia Hills. This was local, national and international news. Had this tragedy not occurred I would never have known that such a place even existed. I was however familiar with the word *Ksan* and decided to remind myself of its meaning.

Ksan - to justify, legalise, win (Reverend E Bars, *Khasi-English Dictionary*). So, superficially at least, a somewhat positive connotation. But something nagged and made me turn to Dr. Iarlington Kharkongor's *Khasi Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Ka Dienshonhi*, which said: *ksan, n. kaba said ban pynksan ia la kañia; kaba said ban pyllait na ka jingshah kynnoh pop* (vindication)

ksan, v. jop ha ka jingialeh thong ne kano-kano ka jingialeh (to win)

ksanv. 'to win', tallies with Reverend Bars' explanation. Although within the context of the horrific events at the coal mine, one is prompted to ask who actually did the

state was brought back from the brink. Yet the selfish re-interpretation of traditional laws can only contribute further to the ongoing depletion of Meghalaya's natural beauty and wealth.

It would be interesting to know how this coal mining area earned its name. What was *Ksan* before it became the source of funds to bolster the dreams and lifestyles of get-rich-quick barons pocketing profits without getting their hands dirty or losing their lives?

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell prompts us to tussle with an uncomfortable truth. Writing about coal miners in Yorkshire and Lancashire he observes that the work of the coal miner is so 'remote' from our every day experience that "...we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins. In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as

Isn't it convenient that the ostensible protection of indigenous rights over land use somehow entails and justifies a blatant denial of the ongoing destruction of our hills, our forests and our rivers to further line the pockets of a few who smugly tell themselves they are fighting for our rights? Really? What about our fundamental human right to clean air and fresh water? Our children's right to inherit a land revered and protected by our forebears? Don't all these basic rights come under the protective umbrella of indigenous rights? And what about the miners' right to a safe working environment? But then I forget, miners are migrants and not members of the *jaitbyrniew*.

struggling and who won in the end? *Ksan* as a noun then provides more food for thought because the English equivalents - 'vindication', 'justify' or 'legalise' - do hint at the possibility of a darker interpretation and we find that in Dr Kharkongor's definition. *Ksan* (as a noun) refers to evidence used to support an argument in order to avoid blame. Reading that explanation suddenly made me realise the poignant irony of the tragedy at *Ksan*, a word. Here is a place that did not set out to do so, but now unwittingly embodies the duplicitous nature of government policies.

Isn't it convenient that the ostensible protection of indigenous rights over land use somehow entails and justifies a blatant denial of the ongoing destruction of our hills, our forests and our rivers to further line the pockets of a few who smugly tell themselves they are fighting for our rights? Really? What about our fundamental human right to clean air and fresh water? Our children's right to inherit a land revered and protected by our forebears? Don't all these basic rights come under the protective umbrella of indigenous rights? And what about the miners' right to a safe working environment? But then I forget, miners are migrants and not members of the *jaitbyrniew*. Although as Torist Mark points out it is ironically thanks to the petition launched by the All Dimasa Students Union and the Dima Hasao District Committee (non-*jaitbyrniew*), that the NGT imposed a ban on coal mining. For a while and to a certain extent at least our

an 'intellectual' and a superior person generally... For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior...all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust"... (emphasis mine) *The Road to Wigan Pier* was published in 1937. We have travelled far in time but have we come far enough?

For The Coal Miners Of Ksan And darkness was on the face of the deep/but the Spirit of God no longer moves/ upon the face of the waters/ for we are the abandoned/who served lesser gods/we are the faceless nameless expendables/whose worth was measured/ by the weight of coal/ we carried in baskets/ to the top of the shaft

We were the first explorers/in this underworld/ stigmata-embossed/ when the rough rock/ on which we lay / branded its imprint/ on our soft flesh/for us there are no rich pickings/just a long wait/ for deliverance/ for life to get better/knowing what we have always known/ that forever we are suspended/between light and darkness/ life and death

But some day/ from the bowels of the earth/ will come a reckoning/ when the tired earth/ shafted and hollowed/ shakes with fury/ and exacts her revenge/ and only then will you begin to know/ the terrifying comfort of that abiding truth...in death we are all born equal

TO THE EDITOR

Umiam pollution: What's the way forward?

Editor,
The recent concern over the pollution of the Umiam Lake has been revived again by pictures of dirty plastic and other garbage in the lake which had gone viral over social media. In this connection I recollect an important meeting of all heads and secretaries of various departments of the Govt. of Meghalaya which was convened by late Mr EK Mawlong soon after he took over as Chief Minister. This meeting was unique because unlike all govt. meetings the chief minister requested Mr P Kharkongor, IAS to offer a prayer before we start the meeting. Many issues were discussed but one very important issue which I believed was the concern of late Mr Mawlong was the heavy silting of the Umiam Lake. He had suggested that a series of check dams be built along the Umkhrar and Umshyri Rivers. This would prevent silting to a great extent. A decision was taken that concerned departments namely MSEB (at that time), PWD, PHE, Urban Affairs, Municipality, District Council Affairs etc. should take action and prepare project reports

for execution. His suggestion never saw the light, perhaps because as with all multi-department projects, no department would take initiative and own the project, unless earmarked.

We noticed that iron nettings were constructed along the bank of the Umkhrar River which I guess had cost a lot of money. We do not know how much they have prevented people from throwing garbage into the river. We notice check-dams were constructed in the Umtyngar River to prevent silting of the dam of the Greater Shillong Water Works. Unless experts have alternative scientific methods, as a layman I think these check-dams would have prevented all the garbage we notice today from pouring into the lake. Periodic cleaning of these check-dams could be easily done. Of course strict implementation of garbage clearance by every household should be enforced with fines, only after creating enough awareness of all concerned.

Yours etc.,
T. Mark
Former Director,
Education
Meghalaya

Shillong's poor drainage

Editor,
The relentless rains have been really hard for the people of Meghalaya especially for the people of Shillong. The rain has disturbed daily activities and daily life. It's hard to walk around the city without getting soaked in overflowing drain water. But why is this happening? What is the reason that our roads are flooding and even our compounds are getting flooded?

Shillong is blessed abundant rainfall every year but when it comes to proper drainage we are still lagging far behind. The lack of proper drainage system is leading to flash floods in the urban areas from rivers like Umshyri and Umkhrar. Humans have reduced the size of the water bodies by encroaching on it and building walls around the rivers thereby restricting their flow. And not only are the waters from these rivers rising to danger levels but they're also very polluted which is another concern for those bearing the brunt of the floods. Moving around has become really difficult in places like these.

We no longer have time to think on what people should do and not do. We have debated enough on these issues. Now is the time to act on how to control these floods. The Government alone cannot be held responsible for solving this problem. We must join hands as proud residents of Shillong and make sure that the city lives up to its name.

Yours etc.,
Reakor Shisha
Kharkrang
Laitmynsaw Village,
Upper Shillong.

Al Qaeda's macabre plans

Editor,
It is disheartening to learn that the al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, in his first video on Kashmir, has asked terrorists to inflict 'unrelenting blows' on the Indian Army and the government to bleed the economy and make the country suffer. It may be recalled that Zawahiri took over the reins of al Qaeda after the death of Osama bin Laden. In the video, Zawahiri said, "I am of the view that the Mujahideen in Kashmir - at this stage at least - should focus with

single mind on inflicting unrelenting blows on the Indian Army and the government so as to bleed the Indian economy and make India suffer sustained losses in man-power and equipment." The video has also asked the terrorists to establish stronger channels of communication with their Muslim brethren all over the world.

Zawahiri's exhortation to fight in Kashmir is not specific but part of the worldwide Muslim community's 'Jihad against a vast array of forces.' Another shocking exhortation of the al Qaeda chief is that all the Islamic scholars must propagate this message of Jihad.

India must consider this as a very serious issue and Zawahiri's statement has indeed given a real shot in the arm of the armed terrorists in Kashmir, who otherwise had been keeping a low profile. But the most unfortunate thing was that the chief had not mentioned the real reason to unleash 'jihad' on the Indian Army and the government. What did India do to become the target of their attack? India started to react when so many innocent people were being killed by the armed terrorists. Wasn't the

country right when it took pre-emptive measures to counter or thwart the attempt of terrorists who killed innocent people without any valid reasons at all? Does al Qaeda justify killing innocent people? If they justify killing the innocent then people have to single them out and expose their real intentions. Why cannot they utter a single syllable of love in their entire life? Have they ever shown mercy or compassion on their enemies? Have they ever included 'repentance' in their lexicon of life? Have they ever deeply considered the aftermath of their macabre killing plans? Needless to say, their hearts are steeled to commit any extreme of sin.

In the light of the release of the video detailing plans of attacking the Indian Army and the Indian government, security must be beefed up in Kashmir and elsewhere in the country. Muslim brothers must not fall prey to the evil plans of the terrorist organisations and let them remain loyal to India. Their lives are precious and must not be cut short through violent ways.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Kochi -15

"If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"

--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.331 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 13, 2019

Ailing Railways, PPP mode

ON Friday, Parliament heard that the Indian Railways will not be privatized as a whole, but the PPP mode would be adopted for new lines and projects so as to generate much-needed funds. In effect, this would be a partial privatization of the railways; not a bad idea altogether. The history of railways in India is a long story of neglect. The railways that forms the lifeline for the nation is ailing on several fronts and the Modi government's promise of changing the scenario for the better, an offer made in 2014, is yet to seriously translate into reality. Populism of successive governments and lack of initiative to invest heavily in modernization are the principal reasons for the way this sector is made to suffer for long years. The British Raj gave India the railway facility much before most nations around the world could experience its onset. Today, across the world, the railway systems have taken firm hold and several nations modernised it to a level that India is made to take a backseat. When trains run in China with speeds above 300km per hour, a feat achieved by Japan much before, India's express trains run at speeds of less than 100km per hour – though there are a few showpieces which scaled their speeds up marginally. The terrible scenario of trains waiting for more time at signals than at stations is continuing, much to the discomfiture of the travelling public.

The railways faced serious funds crunch for long years because successive governments kept fares at unreasonably low levels. Also, a large part of the earnings the Railways made from freight is lost to it in recent decades because railways – run by babus and a unionised workforce -- failed in reliability and punctuality while truck services took major advantage of these. Those like Mamata Banerjee who led the railways for various terms played to the gallery and refused to rationalise fares. The resultant funds crunch meant major initiatives like modernization of tracks and raising the line lengths to new heights had to be held back. Big cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru with their teeming populations took small strides to Metro system only recently, while Kolkata had introduced it in the 1980s and Delhi in the 1990s. Work on Bullet trains – promised by Modi in 2014 – is under way on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad sector, while the promise of modernization of tracks is mostly a dream. Without modernization, the railways' speed will remain at snail's pace.

Meghalaya Agriculture policy- need for ground assessment

By K L Tariang

Meghalaya is yet to have a Policy on Agriculture. As reported recently by the Shillong Times newspaper, the state Agriculture Minister stated that the formulation of such a policy is a no mean task and has also not given any timeline for bringing out the Policy. However, as the majority of the state's rural population depends on agriculture as a mean of livelihood such a policy is necessary as a pathway of improving the agricultural activities for the benefit of the farmers, the society and the state economy at large as well as for food security.

Even without a policy, agriculture including that of its allied activities such as that of Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and others did, however, receive adequate attention in Meghalaya from successive state governments since statehood was attained, not to overlook the attention given by the erstwhile Assam government. There have been no dearth of agricultural schemes, technological support, supply of inputs, infrastructure built up, extension works and trainings and a host of other activities brought in so far for agricultural development. While much has been achieved in the field, apparently there is still much to be done. Lately mission modes programmes have been introduced which, however, still need to show results as anticipated. The setting up of the State Farmers' Commission recently is another initiative. However, in the absence of a State Agriculture Policy which is expected to take into consideration the primary, secondary and tertiary processes in agricultural production, the outcomes might not be as rewarding as expected.

As reported, the state government has been going through the agriculture policies of other states which are more advanced in the agricultural sector to provide background for shaping our own state policy. Expectedly the local aspects such as the agro-climatic conditions, topography, socio-economic condition of the farmers, the land tenure system and others will be blended in as well to bring out a workable Policy. While

optimistically the Policy will come through at a later stage, it would be necessary, perhaps, in the meanwhile to assess the present state of the farmers in the state. Like in the rest of the country there could be farmer's distress here as well if income from farming does not commensurate with the efforts put in and if it is disproportionately low in comparison with the production. Supporting infrastructure could be still inadequate and there could be scarcity of physical and financial resources. Moreover, unpredictable weather conditions often upset the farmers' expectations. These possible drawbacks besides others could lead many farmers to be disillusioned with the farming profession and may be pessimistic of its prospects as well.

The disillusionment and pessimism could lead many farmers to look for alternatives to farming and may not encourage their children to continue with farming either, thereby reducing the participation of family members in farming. In some cases it may cease to be an ancestral or a traditional occupation if its prospects diminish. Moreover, diversified income generating opportunities in the rural areas and wages oriented government rural development schemes could attract many farmers towards these opportunities leading them to focus less on agriculture or allied activities. Some farmers may also be displaced from their agriculture land when an increasing number of urban population purchase land in the rural areas for non-agricultural purposes. These and other occurrences would consequently reduce the farmer's population size and if pessimism also has a disabbling influence then the state agriculture production could be adversely affected.

An assessment of the varying size of land holdings of farmers in the state will specify the number of large, medium, small and marginal farmers regardless of the ownership status and this will also indicate the number of landless farmers. This will

determine the type of agricultural activities better suited and economically viable to individual farmers for improved and sustained production. Meanwhile there has been an intrusion of non-agricultural activities into cultivated and cultivable land in recent years. Mining alone must have intruded into large tracts of existing and potential agricultural and horticultural land. Those which have potential for sericulture, fishery, livestock and other allied activities must be affected as well. The resultant damages from such intrusion could be irrecoverable thereby reducing the original potential area available for agriculture and related activities in the state. An assessment of the extent of the area loss and those still available will provide a realistic projection of future plans for expansion of agriculture and allied activities.

Undoubtedly much efforts have been put in to make farmers aware about the incentives offered by the government for agricultural development. However, the literacy rate of most of our farmers may not be up to that level to make them easily absorb what has been propagated. Therefore many farmers may not be fully conversant about the government agricultural schemes and about their provisions. The awareness about Minimum Support Price (MSP) where government declares the rate for purchase of agricultural produces from the farmers might not be well disseminated much to the advantage of the middleman instead. Many farmers may not be able to take advantage of crop insurance, livestock insurance, the soil health card scheme, the kisan credit card and a host of other individual schemes possibly for want of more hand holding exercises. In fact, there have been frequent introduction of various agriculture schemes under different nomenclatures and with elaborate guidelines which at times baffle even a scholarly individual. So how can an illiterate or poorly literate farmer grasp their basic concepts even if frequently elucidated. It would be necessary therefore to assess the literacy rate of our farmers

for defining appropriate methodology and approaches for dissemination of information and for better absorption.

Meanwhile the scheme of Direct Cash Transfer which involves transferring the amount due directly to the beneficiaries' bank accounts instead of providing it through government offices is much in vogue now and applicable to farmers as well. The number of farmers with mobile phones, with bank or post office accounts and with Aadhar cards are essential information required for implementing the cash transfer scheme effectively. Further as environmental protection should be in the forefront of all development initiatives, it would be necessary to assess farmer's concerns for the environment and its vulnerability out of the practices they have adopted. Gauging the farmers' awareness and opinion about politics and government is also essential as their consciousness on these aspects will be advantageous to their profession especially as they have a high numerical strength at the time of electing public representatives.

There could be many other aspects of ground assessments which can give up to date information to supplement existing information available. In fact, direct interactions with the farmers on their home front without formalities sans their representatives could provide more in-depth understanding of their issues and what they look forward to. While it would not be feasible to have a detailed assessment on the ground to look into the farmer's individual issues and the other aspects mentioned, however a widespread random sample size assessment could bring out enough data and information to reflect the larger picture. It is imperative perhaps to have such a ground assessment preferably by an independent agency. The information gathered would besides other considerations be worthwhile for the formulation of the State Agriculture Policy and for those who are involved in the subject of agriculture and allied activities in the state.

Education: The missing link

By Partha Pratim Mazumder

A learning crisis in India seems imminent even as educational reforms surge ahead. Provision of schools does not guarantee the availability of necessary facilities in schools. The gap is still wide when compared to the enrolment of children in the school and learning outcomes. The job situation in India does not reflect a crisis, but it is a matter of serious concern. A crisis is understood as an emergency that demands immediate attention, without which we will see a calamity of sorts. There is no immediate calamity of any kind on hand. But there is a deeply insidious problem at work in the form of shrinking employment opportunities, a shrinking formal jobs, and a shrinking labour force. A populous and demographically young country like India has a lot to gain if the expanding working-age population can join the labour force and be provided with gainful employment. More hands at work can ensure greater prosperity and relatively evenly spread growth.

One of the biggest issues India is facing is Unemployment. In fact most people voted for Mr. Modi on that account. There is this strange expectation and perception that Mr. Modi will waive the problem away with a magic wand. To those hoping for a miracle, please stop day dreaming. Most people lay the blame at the door of our faulty education policy. Well, faulty no doubt it is but to say the entire problem of unemployment is because of the education policy seems a tad exaggerated.

Yes, several educated youth, especially professionally qualified ones are sitting idle or involved in some entrepreneurial activities. Of the large section of people who are unable to find work are engineers. Now, are they unemployed in the truest sense? Unemployment is basically when a person willing and capable to work does not find a job at the going wage rate. And it is the last phrase, which is the root cause. "At the going wage rate," or the prevailing one in essence it means, you are this engineer strutting around with a good performance and a degree, you apply through job portals and meet recruiters and you get job offers but at what salary? Rs 30,000 a month! Sorry, you say. No way will I work for that measly amount. I would rather sit at home. And those angry words become your reality. You sit at home and let jobs pass you by because sorry, they are not worth your caliber. And you are not technically unemployed. You are voluntarily unemployed.

That is where one aspect of the issue lies. As we acquire higher education, we obviously seek what are called, "white collar jobs" implying those people who work within the confines of an office. The other type relegated to the shunned category as it is associated with those who are uneducated include construction workers, factory workers and so on. Now, after our qualifications, it is a no brainer to know that we shall not touch that area. It is not what you had studied for. Fair enough!

Now, let's look at this third category of our populace. The plumbers, electricians, salon owners, tailors, contractors, cab (read uber or ola) drivers etc. They are self employed and work whenever and wherever they want. The demand for their services arises from time to time in every household. In fact that engineer son of yours sitting idle at home chases the plumber around when suddenly the water supply stops. When your electricity conks out, whom do you call? The rather elusive electrician? Such people are working at their own pace, earn what they demand and lead a life which meets their requirements. They send their kids to school too. I am not saying they enjoy a plush life. But, considering they earn pretty well in a day, with no boss to

answer to and no appraisals, tension of a raise, meeting deadlines and with so many metros and residential complexes, they are never short of work either.

But would you, a bright engineer with a degree, capable as you may be, do such jobs? Will you become an Uber driver? Or an electrician? I would not expect you to say yes. You will not touch such work even with a barge pole. In fact, I expect you to question me and ask me if I am fine. And here is where we as a society have gone awry. We educate our kids to vie for degrees. We want them to be a CEO by 40. We live to see them sitting in a plush office, with power, a handsome salary, paid vacations and the works. Ever thought about the demand-supply ratio for such jobs? No, why should we. Our kid is a bright graduate software engineer. How can the supply of jobs run out for him? The bitter and unpalatable truth is that it does dry up. Then what?

Nowhere do we even consider that perhaps a skill will be a better acquisition. We are educated folks. Why would we have such a preposterous thought? Honestly, I would shudder at the thought of my son becoming a carpenter. He may make lots of money but he WILL HAVE NO SOCIAL PRESTIGE. And that my dear folks is the core issue. We are good at aping the West. Quite the experts at that! Then why can't we see that a plumber and a banker being treated with equal respect? No child hesitates in saying that my dad is a carpenter. The entire thrust on degrees in our country is what has let us down. Our problem is society's perception and expectation.

Skill education was the agenda in this government's last term too. But who and in how much time will we realise that no profession is demeaning? Acquiring a qualification, sitting jobless and becoming depressed is a natural outcome. If only we learn to treat our helpers, who come to us with their tools in our dire need, with equal respect and honour, maybe decades later we will see some change. Yes, one change is there as more kids are turning to self owned ventures. But not many parents are supportive of that either. We are a generation moulded in a step by step acquisition of degrees and certificates. We do not pause to think, how will it help in the long run?

Till then I will file my prestigious degrees in a file, rarely opened, while you could get them framed? The choice is yours, caught as we both are in a quagmire. Both under-employment and this form of discouragement are a significant loss of productive potential. This is particularly troubling when it pertains to India's large and growing youth population. Pathways to productive and high-quality employment are essential to deliver better living standards to citizens, but also for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

So, how can we address the problem? Addressing the underemployment crisis entails a three-pronged strategy. First, we must improve the quality of jobs by improving productivity in agriculture and in enterprises. Second, we must align education, technical and vocational education and training to market demand. Third, we must make enduring and long-term investments in human capital through good-quality education, skills, and on-the-job training, as well as in basic social protection.

Recent data suggests that there is rising unemployment. To be sure, this is a problem. But perhaps the larger and arguably more pressing challenge is under-employment.

TO THE EDITOR

Save the Wah Umiam

Editor,
The comment of top Govt officials that the picture of the Umiam with plastic debris is an old one comes as a shock and surprise. It means that all along the Govt knew about the huge amount of waste being dumped into the Umiam lake but was clearly turning a blind eye. For years now plastic and waste from the Wah Umkrah and Umshyri Rivers flow and collectively meet at a place which we the local people call Ro Ro (Ranab Lum between Mawlai and Nongkseh) and after a short course it makes its way through the main Umiam river and all the waste flows and is deposited at Dongrola and slowly makes its way to the Umiam Lake. For years now the people from Mawdun villages and Kyndongrla collect these plastics and solid waste for recycling which in fact is a huge favour for us as it helps clean the river with their small efforts. This shows that people living in these areas are more educated than us living in the urban and the adjoining areas. The caption "Umiam water

level rises; Dam gates likely to be opened," makes one wonder whether the Umiam reservoir since inception has remained the same and that the stone pillars which indicate the water level are accurate because huge amount of sand, soil and solid waste has been deposited in the lake for decades now. During the British rule a check dam was built at WeiKain for the then Shillong Hydro project (behind the Present Mahindra servicing centre Jingkieng Mawlai). The question now arises whether the Govt has any plan or policy for reclaiming the Umiam Lake from the present dangers it faces? From what we can see happening now it seems that there is very little concern by the Govt and other agencies for the Lake as well as the Dam.

Let me cite a small example. The sign in Khyndailad, "Litter free zone." Has become a big joke because no one cares at all!
As a concerned citizen I feel that much more stringent acts and laws should be enacted and

stringently implemented. Government should involve all stakeholders, hotels, hospitals, government institutions, shopkeepers, school, colleges, religious institutions, localities, etc to save the Umiam River and for a green and clean state as a whole.

Yours etc.,
John. E. Lyngdoh
Pyngrope
Shillong-17

Why waste precious water?

Editor,
I came across in your daily the announcement by the Chief Engineer MePGCL, of the likelihood of releasing precious water from the Umiam reservoir should the rains continue as predicted by the IMD. We appreciate this timely warning for the concerned villagers to take adequate precautions. But at this time let us also remind ourselves how precious water is particularly when we face power cuts every year for the simple reason that there is not enough water in the

lake. Sadly, we now have to waste the excess water at the lake. I therefore urge the authorities concerned to find out ways and means to save this precious water.

One way of doing it is to construct two or three check dams upstream and convert them as road bridges to connect Shillong with villages in the Shilliang Um area. This will result in reducing the road distance with those villages and tremendously boost their economy. In fact these villages will ultimately form part of greater Shillong and help in decongesting the over saturated city. Whatever silt is deposited in these mini reservoirs upstream can be de-silted regularly and whenever the water level falls in the main lake, it can be fed from the mini reservoirs. I know the project entails a huge cost but it is worth investing in, considering the benefits which will far surpass the expenses in the long run. Even if for one reason or the other the Government does not agree with this suggestion, I urge them to

address this issue urgently.
Yours etc
A Syiemlieh
Viaemail

Indian cricket team has matured

Editor,
The Indian team captain was very humble to accept a 'devastating' defeat as announced during the press conference post completion of the semi final game where India lost to New Zealand. The maturity demonstrated during the press conference of having accepted the defeat is overwhelming especially when a team with successive win records and being notable favourites to claim the title, lost the semi finals match only by a whisker.

Unlike previous World Cups, the team has achieved a notable and magnificent performance with exception of only 2 major losses including the semi finals and injuries to key players. The team's opening batsmen were at the right occasion bringing

a formidable partnership without giving much room by losing wickets at tense moments, with the exception of the semi final game. The bowling department too performed well with a hat trick by Mohd Shami and spinners/pacers snatching away the crucial game from opponents through important wickets- a key highlight of the team.

Finally the support staff mentored by Coach Ravi Shastri need to be lauded for their efforts made to reach the semi finals and also by staying focused on players performance and fitness during the tournament. BCCI should now take a stand on the exceptional performance demonstrated in the World Cup only to retain the support staff and coach or perhaps to start afresh with the selection process.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Bengaluru-72

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 need more women stand-ups

Celebrity host and award winning comedian **NITINN R MIRANNI** recently performed for the first time in Shillong as well as the North East and his *Shouldn't Have Said That* show was a sold-out. The performer spoke to **HEATHER CECILIA PHANWAR** about his first show, the audience in India, lack of women stand-ups in the country, his experience in Shillong and much more.

The 40-year old stand-up comedian lived in Dubai for almost all his life. Nitinn, who has been doing stand-up for 11 years, has tried his hand in almost every industry like real estate and Wizcraft. He emceed and hosted many shows.

Sometimes shows don't go as planned and there are some gaps in between. Organisers used to tell me to entertain the crowd, and in that I tried to do comedy for two to three minutes. After the shows, people used to come up to me and tell me that they enjoyed even if it for a few minutes, that I should do full time, he said.

When asked about how he chose comedy, he said one day while he was at work, he just felt he should resign.

Growing up as an expat Indian I was trying to figure out what I was supposed to do in life. Comedy was my calling. There was not much happening in Dubai in terms of comedy. I took a leap of faith and by the grace of God here I am. I realised that I genuinely like entertaining people and making them laugh, the comedian said.

Talking about his childhood he said that he was an introvert. But it was easy for him to tell jokes and he found a nice meaning to himself. It is therapeutic for him to entertain people.

We all lead a stressful life, especially in the corporate world. It is nice to be a reason for the people to be laughing.

Miranni said he does a lot of on-the-spot thing but usually has enough material ready before going up on stage. Also, he does a lot of research about the place where he is supposed to perform, studies about the people there and their mannerisms.

His shows are usually dialogues and not monologues. For him it's about creating moments. He has done shows all over the world now and impromptu comedy is what he does. He comes up with jokes on the spot. It connects with the audience. Even the audience is very smart nowadays, they know the difference between an on-the-spot joke and a joke that has been written before. We get respect from the audience if the joke is impromptu, he said.

There were a couple of shows he did in the past where he ended up doing 30 minutes of on-the-spot impromptu comedy.

When it comes to the audience Miranni, who tries to do five shows a month, said, he is very flexible in terms of the audience's energy.

It's like being a chef. If I'm a chef and if my audience doesn't like sushi and I keep on giving them sushi, I'm not going to say you're a bad audience. I need to find their taste buds in terms of comedy, what are they laughing at and what they enjoy more. I sort of go around that and figure



LAUGHTER THERAPY: The stand-up in the city recently; and (below) the audience thoroughly enjoyed the show

ure out things, the performer asserted.

On Indian audience

The Indian audience is finally getting up to comedy, Miranni feels. He is very happy to say that they know their comedy now. Four to five years back there was no scene for comedy but right now, especially in Shillong, he was very impressed by the intellect and the audience being able to get the nuances, the references that he did. He compared the Shillong audience to that in New York.

They are quite witty. When you say India, you do more of Hindi and all that stuff but I was excited to do my international stuff here as well. The voice inside my head speaks to me in English. However, I like doing Hindi comedy as well, he said.

On his jokes

Miranni said he does political jokes but not much because I think our politicians are doing stand-up comedy themselves.

I prefer to stay away from it because I realised politics divide an audience, people are quite touchy about politics and you know groups, parties they take it too hard. They get offended easily and you will not know until you are half way through. Personally, I don't understand politics and I don't do it simple as that. I face a lot of threats all the time, he informed.

First joke

Talking about his first show, Miranni said it was really bad and nobody laughed.

But then the second one I did impromptu comedy. That really got the audience on my side. The moment it happened on the

spot it got me. A local act in my show is my responsibility as an artiste to support them. I would love to see more female stand-up comedians. That is the voice that is missing in the Indian society. I know women will be funnier than men. It will be nice to have equal representation.

His motto

Miranni said his motto in comedy is not to offend the audience but to befriend them. One of the best testimonials he got and which he keeps very close to his heart was when he did a show in Kuwait and a local magazine wrote, 'To watch him perform is like watching your best friend telling you a story. That's the vibe he wants to create. But sometimes people do misbehave, they get offended.'

Stand-up in India

Comedy in India is definitely evolving and even the audience is evolving, according to Miranni. They know what kind of comedy they like be it dry humour or dark comedy.

Five years back, people didn't know this and it's nice to see this now. They know what they want to laugh at, they want political humour, satire and they know the difference, which is a very good thing. The only thing that pricks is that now in India everything is too much. Now everybody is a comedian. We spend a lot of effort doing what we do, he added.

According to the artiste, WhatsApp jokes and all should be slowed down because when we get a joke it's like oh another joke but that's not what humour is supposed to do to you.

When asked about the audience in India, Miranni pointed out that it has potential but it has a different path altogether. Culture is as old as stand-up comedy but I think there is a lot of confusion with what stand-up comedy is and I really hope it reaches a good place in India.

It had already but I think the more people start supporting live comedy the more it will be. Comedy feeds your soul. Support the art, said Miranni, who has done US, Middle East and India tours.

Supporting live shows

People should understand and support live comedy. What is happening right now is that people are getting lazy and they watch everything on YouTube, the comedian rued.

Live comedy is an experi-

ence it is one of the greatest experiences you can have and it's a favour to you. When you attend a live show, you cannot touch your phone. It's like a meditation class for an hour or so where you come and just laugh amongst people. You're laughing with a guy who's a Muslim, a CEO of a company, with a person who is going through something in life. You're in a holy space where people from all walks of life are sitting together and just laughing. It unites people. On a philosophical level, it is a nice place to be in. People should support themselves by coming to stand-up live comedy. They think they are doing the artiste a favour but believe me when you walk out of a show, it's therapy for you. Looking now at the pace of things there are people at 24 who are getting heart attacks so the stress level is really high all over the world, especially in India. So whatever chance you get attend it. I would call a live comedy show a meditation class. You come, you laugh, you get your blood rushing and then you leave, said Miranni, whose idol is Jim Carrey.

The stand-up comedian also loves the performances of Kevin Hart and Trevor Noah. In fact, he has opened for Noah a couple of times and will be doing it again in Abu Dhabi. He has also opened for Eddie Griffin and Marlon Wayans.

Show in Shillong

When the show was being planned, Miranni had spoken to one of the organisers and asked him if he was sure to do it. He had said he wanted to give it a shot. The show was decided in one week. Usually you need time to fix a particular show but 80 per cent of the tickets were

sold out in two days. Sometimes as an artist you become a producer as well and think if I go there the show won't work but I realised as an artiste you just come and perform. I'm glad to do it. I've been to odd places to do stand-up comedy and it has been an amazing experience, Miranni said, adding that the audience here was fun.

I had an amazing time

Shouldn't Have Said That, organised by Rockski EMG, was one of the best stand-up comedy shows that Shillong has experienced in recent time.

The show started with a local act, stand-up comedian Dulal Saikia from Guwahati.

Saikia started off pretty well and instantly connected with the crowd. He captured the audience even if it was only for 15 minutes.

Miranni is one of a kind. With his black coat and black ripped jeans, he looked like a movie star. His punchline for every joke was spot on and the crowd really connected with him. From the beginning of the show till the end, there was not a time that the crowd lost interest. From one joke to the other, Miranni proved his entertainment skills.

Through his local references, it showed that he studied about Shillong before his show. The impromptu acts were the best. From Bun-chai (Banshai), the traffic reference in Shillong where he said it (the road) is more of a parking lot and instead of Rapido there should be another company by the name Walkido, to Shil-long being far away (according to Miranni maybe that's why Shillong got its name), Miranni left everyone in splits.

Charlene Ropmay, who was among the audience, said, 'It was my first live comedy show and it was worth every second. I had such an amazing time, one of the happiest experiences of my life. Thanks to Nitinn, his laughter therapy was top notch.'

Dude made me laugh since the time he showed up on stage. He was terrific! And yes! It was true when he mentioned that Shillong traffic is more of a parking lot now, Pyntgen Kongwang, who was laughing even after the show.

The crowd was in awe at his take on different accents. From Thai, Japanese, British to Chinese, the stand-up nailed it. His impersonation of Enrique Iglesias in a music video was effortless. His witty one-liners made an instant impact. What made him different from other performers was his interaction with the audience. His impromptu acts got the crowd going.

An audience member said these are the kind of shows Shillong needs. More stand-ups should be popularised. It really is a breath of fresh air and you laugh to your heart's content. Miranni, I lost my virginity of being in a stand-up comedy for the first time in your show," was her message.

Bakynsai Thabah summarised Miranni's performance in two sentences 'Talent personified and brutally funny. It's a gut busting piece of stand-up comedy.'

By Dr Anjana Kannankara

The importance of knowing one's blood type is crucial due to various reasons. It can be useful to prevent the risk of receiving an incompatible blood type or to get timely medical assistance at times of need such as blood transfusion and surgeries. The information about blood type can be a significant tool for understanding how the body reacts to food, susceptibility to diseases, natural reaction towards stress, the aging process and much more.

Normally, blood group is of 4 types A, B, AB and O. It is compulsory to identify and match blood groups before donating or receiving blood, otherwise it can be dangerous or even worsen the health problems.

In this article, we will have a quick look about the rare blood group known as Bombay Blood Group, as part of creating awareness that in turn might be helpful in saving lives.

What is Bombay blood group

The h/h blood group, also known as Oh or the Bombay blood group, is a

rare blood type. It fails to express A, B or H antigen on their red cells or other tissues.

To understand more about Bombay blood group we must understand the details of blood grouping. When someone has blood group A, it means that the person has antigen of type A and antibody of type B in his/her blood. People with AB have both antigen A and B in their blood and no antibodies. People with O blood group have only antibodies A and B and no antigens. However what is not generally known is that all these groups have an antigen H in the blood as well. There are very few people who do not have this antigen H in their blood. Instead they have antibody H because of which no other blood can be given to them.

This is the Bombay blood type. This blood phenotype was first discovered in Bombay, now known as Mumbai, in India, by Dr YM Bhende in 1952.



It is mostly confined to the region of Southeast Asia India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran.

It is observed to occur in 1 out of every 250,000 people except in parts of India where the incidence has been observed to be as much as 1 in every 10,000. It is estimated that only 4 per million people in the world have this

blood type.

All the blood groups primarily contain a protein called the H antigen. The antigens A and B are made from the H antigen. Bombay blood group is also called the HH group. The peculiarity is that they do not express the H antigen. As a result they cannot form A antigens or B antigens on their

red blood cells. They only have the H antibody which none of the other blood groups have.

They can donate blood to anybody with ABO grouping but can receive blood only from people with Bombay blood group. Hence, it is observed they could be included in the category of universal donors.

Reverse grouping or serum grouping has to be performed to detect the Bombay blood group. This can identify the H antibody using anti-H Lectin reagent.

During cell grouping or forward grouping, Bombay blood group would be categorised as O group because it would not show any reaction to anti-A and anti-B antibodies just like a normal O group would do.

Serious hemolytic transfusion reactions occur that might result in death hence matching of blood type is absolutely essential before transfusion. If two different blood types are mixed, it

can lead to a clumping of blood cells that can be potentially fatal.

Persons with this blood group must be very cautious and alert. Registering themselves with various blood banks and hospitals would ensure the availability of the same blood group in times of emergency.

During surgeries prior arrangement for sufficient blood availability could be ensured with proper planning. Proposals to keep a few units of such blood in frozen state (cryopreservation) can be considered for acute emergencies.

Contact the blood banks and organisations that arrange blood donation to trace people with similar blood type. If required, messages can be forwarded to those in other cities too. Check the details of blood groups of all family members as mostly this blood group is found among closely related people. Advertising in the media could also help greatly considering the rarity of the blood.

(The author is director-TGL Foundation, editor-Anthropology Today and senior director-FWO)

Fitness job anyone

By Ranjan K Baruah

On December 11 in 2014, the United Nations General Assembly declared June 21 as the International Day of Yoga. This day is observed around the world with different activities. In India, we have seen the celebration of the day by governments, civil society, academic institutions. All these are popularising Yoga. To be optimistic it is also bringing more career opportunities related to Yoga.

Yoga is a more than five thousand-year-old art or practice of staying fit mentally and physically by means of exercises as well as mind control practices such as controlled breathing, deep meditation etc. Yoga is a Sanskrit word that means union that is of the body, mind and spirit.

Yoga is an amalgamation of breathing exercises and structured movement. It is an excellent tool to enhance the body's internal health and external beauty and to achieve a higher standard of overall health and immunity.

As an alternative, Yoga can be looked as a powerful way to remain fit and healthy as we are more associated with technology in our daily life and away from nature. We are more dependent on machine that has many side effects. Due to this, health and fitness have become areas of major concern in the fast-paced life. People are also trying to become conscious about health and wellness. Although the practice of yoga has been prevailing in India from several centuries, yoga as a career option has become popular only in the recent past.

Yoga can be used to manage stress, psycho-somatic and lifestyle related disorders. Non-communicable diseases can be cured by Yoga therapy. Modern hospitals and institutes are gradually adopting this system of therapy. Yoga demonstrations, yoga conferences, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, magazines and journals have also contributed immensely to the popularity of this

discipline.

Foremost careers and opportunities in this area are that of yoga consultants, yoga therapists, yoga trainers/ instructors/ teachers. There are graduate and post-graduate level courses related to yoga. There are some short-term certificate courses too.

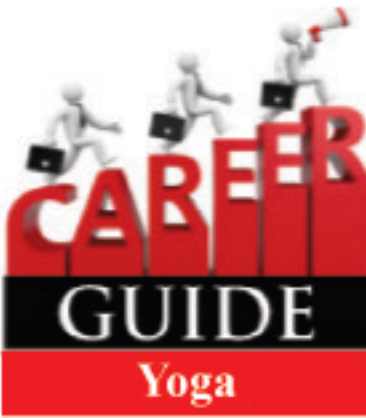
Courses include Yogic Science and Human Consciousness, Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences, Yoga and Alternative Therapy, Yoga Education, Applied Yoga and Holistic Health, Yoga Therapy and Spiritual Counseling, etc.

Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY) is an autonomous organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, and is fully funded by Department of AYUSH, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. There are many other institutes which offer courses and training related to Yoga like Indian Institute of Yoga and Naturopathy, Parmarth Niketan Ashram, The Yoga Institute etc.

The best part is individuals with less academic qualification may also take it up as career by becoming instructors. Yoga is bringing more opportunities as health and wellness is an important aspect of life.

Educational institutes, corporate and other institutes appoint yoga instructors for training. Yoga instructors may look for employment at general fitness centres, yoga studios or seek their own clients through self-employment. Nowadays yoga centres are booming in different parts of the country as well as the world as demand has increased. There would be demand for yoga and instructors in our region in near future which makes yoga as an emerging career opportunity.

(The author is a career mentor, skill trainer and also motivational speaker and can be contacted at 8473943734 or bkrnanjan@gmail.com for any queries)



I thought you are my friend, I trusted you'

By BK Mishra

Hope you all know where Pollachi is it is a town and a taluk headquarters in Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. We might have heard of the infamous Pollachi case where the accused lured women with fake female accounts on Facebook. In most of the cases, they struck a conversation with the victims, asking questions on lesbianism and other sex-related topics. After a friendship, conversations turned into sexual chats and they later revealed their identity and forced the women to meet in person citing their chats. They harassed women in moving vehicles, hotels and even in a farmhouse near Anamalai forest. The victims were from Chennai, Coimbatore, Salem and many parts of Tamil Nadu and they included school and college teachers, doctors, senior secondary and college students.

Now when we look at such cases and many other cases of similar nature which are reported in various parts of the country and also in our state, we wonder how did these men build trust on their victims? How does one who meets someone on Facebook build trust?

Here lies the answer — first is following, second friend request, third liking posts, fourth sending private messages, fifth constant contact over chat. The next step is graduating to WhatsApp with phone number sharing. Starting from Hi, how are you today? and slowly but progressively sharing one's life. Men share what women want to hear. Women share everything.

What lessons on using social media have we learned then?

■ Social media is dangerous in the hands of women who are unable to distinguish between safe and unsafe connections

■ Men are following you online because they think you are great looking, sexy and attractive. Wrong. They are following to see if you are gettable.



■ The more male followers you have, the more admirers you have. Wrong. There are more people who believe you are vulnerable.

■ Men find you on social media through search engine and find their prey: who next to target? True. The search feature allows location wise searching but most targets are found through friend's friends. So beware of who are your friends friends.

■ When someone sends you a text message, you must respond. Wrong. Never respond unless you know the person, male or female.

■ Female friends are safe connections. Wrong. Some males pose as females on social media to gain your friendship.

■ All my friends are known to me for many years and are safe connections. Wrong. People grow and change. Some get into bad ways and make bad connections. So even if you trust your friend, beware of the connections she has.

■ I can share all my pictures on Facebook. True but be selective and restrict only few friends can see some of them.

■ I trust men who are open with me. The more open a man is, the more open you become and he knows everything about you. Never

Remember that although using fake names is a violation of the Facebook Terms of Use, people are not always who they say they are. You should always be careful when sending friend requests to or accepting friend requests from people you do not know in the real world. And it is always risky to meet anyone in person whom you don't know through real world friends.

The most important message such cases give is The victim always says I thought you are my friend. I trusted you.

(The author can be reached at mishrabasant24@gmail.com)

fall for openness among men.

Basic rules on social media are:

- Never chat with strangers
- Never reveal or exchange phone numbers or address
- Never share updates or whereabouts publicly, never share location updates with men you meet online or offline
- Never share intimate pictures
- Never burst out on social media and allow someone to know your vulnerability and take advantage of your weakness
- Your Facebook is a revelation of your life, thoughts, activities, opinions, and lifestyle. Choose what you want to share with whom

Here are 10 ways to stay safe on Facebook

- Monitor suspicious activity/links
- Remove friends as appropriate
- Keep your wall clean
- Turn off Facebook chat
- Change your password often
- Be careful who you share your password with
- Hide your year of birth
- Keep your private info private
- Adjust your privacy settings
- Protect your mobile device

Star - Gazing

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 14, 2019

Moonsquare Neptune on your solar return chart which means you will have mixed results this year. You will work hard to achieve your targets and keep things going. There would be stiff competition at your workplace. Your rivals would conspire against you and try to bring down your reputation. But you will remain alert. And will have full backing of peers and superiors. Your mate will remain on your side in hour of need. There would be some problems at health front. You may take to yoga, meditation, and some form of light exercises. You will remain popular among friends.

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. Insecurity 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 enables you cooperate with busy schedule and work commitments.

'Anand's way of motivating others makes him genius'

Two years after playing a blind man in *Kaabil*, actor **Hrithik Roshan** essays mathematician **Anand Kumar** on-screen in *Vikas Bahl's Super 30*. Ahead of the film's release this week, **Hrithik** gets candid with journalists. **IBNS-TWF** brings excerpts:

Since the film is all about dreams, tell us what was the craziest dream you had while growing up?

The craziest ambition I had is of being an astronaut. I wanted to explore and go to space. But the real unrealistic dream was of becoming an actor.

Did you dream of something and then achieve it but you thought it to be unachievable at first?

It was acting only. I didn't know how will it work and all. I didn't know whether I would be able to deliver dialogues or not. I was fearful. But I knew that I have to do it. Something inside me told that I will have to try.

You don't look like the character in *Super 30*. Tell us how you slipped into it.

People used to praise me for my hard work in all films including *Koi... Mil Gaya*, *Guzaarish*, *Jodhaa Akbar*. But the paradox is all these characters were the easiest because the first emotional connect with the script and character is so strong that it gets into every cell of my body. After hearing those scripts, what I had to do was only the physical manifestations of the things written in the script.

What kind of preparations you had to go through for the character like mathematician **Anand Kumar** who is a genius? Are you a mathematics genius?

I was not good. I was very average. I don't think it is his intellect that makes him like who he is but his way of motivating others. The way he motivates to do mathematics makes it all easier.

How do your kids react to your performances?

My kids are very honest. Both of them are very honest. They used to give me marks. They have given me maximum 8.5 and lowest 6.5.

Anti-tobacco message in film

Director **Biswajeet Bora** is back with a short feature film, *Dhuyein Se Dhuyein Tak*, which has an anti-tobacco message. The film stars veteran actor **Rajendra Gupta**, **Sagarika Mishra** and **Baharul Islam**. The film will be shortly showcased in film festivals and on digital platform. A socially responsible filmmaker, Bora always comes up with social causes in his stories. His first film *Aisa Yeh Jaahaan* was India's first carbon neutral film. Bora has recently signed a film for Navjeevan films for a Bollywood jungle adventure titled *Safari Park*. He was away from the mainstream cinema for a while but during this period he made a few Assamese commercial movies, which are supposed to be trendsetters in the local film industry.

~ *Lipika Ajmera*



“Everything must be made as simple as possible. But not simpler.”

--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.333

SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 15, 2019

Politics sans principles

This is time for defections in politics. With the Lok Sabha polls seeing the BJP emerging as an unassailable force, the mood in the Opposition is downbeat. A leadership crisis in the Congress has further complicated matters. Selfish politicians on the losing side naturally look out for greener pastures. The BJP is giving out hints it would welcome one and all into the saffron shade – if only to finish off the Opposition. A game of defections from the Congress to the BJP was enacted in an unholy manner in Goa this past week. In Punjab, the resignation of Navjot Singh Sidhu from the Captain Amrinder Singh cabinet has dealt a heavy blow to the Congress ministry and the party. Political uncertainty is in the air. The only consolation is that the Opposition is too weak in terms of numbers in the assembly. The Congress has 77 members while the BJP has just three seats and its partner the SAD 15 seats, topped by the AAP as principal opposition with 20 seats. Chances of a split in the Congress cannot be ruled out.

The JDS-Congress government in Karnataka is tottering and bearing the weight of its own contradictions. The 13-month-old HD Kumaraswamy government, formed by an unholy post-poll alliance between two parties had an uneasy existence all along. Now, with the Congress party becoming rudderless and losing its old clout, several legislators are willing to help the BJP pull down the government and make personal gains. Chief Minister Kumaraswamy, who made too many compromises to remain in the saddle, is at his wits' end now. Head of a small party, he bargained for trouble. A countdown has begun in another opposition-ruled state, West Bengal, where BJP claims over 100 MLAs have approached it for entry – mostly from the TMC and also from the Congress and the CPI-M. Mamata Banerjee, who formed TMC 20 years ago and captured power in the state in 2011, is now on the defensive. With BJP making big waves in the LS polls in the state, the mood in the TMC might be downbeat. Unprincipled politics is at play across the spectrum. The BJP's roller-coaster ride is bound to see the fall of Opposition-run governments one after another. A strong opposition is a must for effective functioning of democracy. Under the present circumstances, this is unlikely to materialize. So many uncouth politicians are spoiling the show of democracy in India today and are engaged in a circus without a ring.

Behdienkhlam: Fulfilling the Covenant

By H H Mohrmen

It is incomplete to describe Behdienkhlam by its literary meaning which means, 'to eradicate or rid off plague, epidemic or pestilence and evil. It is also not about the people and how nature had influence their farming culture and agricultural practices only; it is not just a cultural festival either. In fact it has multiple meanings. It begins with the clans offering food to their ancestors and culminates with the bringing of the 'ronggs', and the competition amongst the dancer to touch the 'Symbood khnong and the Khnong-blai' which will in turn bless them with good health and finally the untying of the knots 'kдох sarang' which is the official closure of the festivals. But the essence of the Behdienkhlam is in the different meanings that it has which helps people connect with the most important festival of the hills.

There are altogether six annual Behdienkhlam festivals celebrated by the Pnars of different communities called Raids at different points of time in a year. The timing is significant because it links with the farming activities of the people. Of the six Behdienkhlam festivals, the first one is celebrated by the raid Chyrmang, followed by the raid Jowai, Tuber, ʔalong, Mukhla and finally the raid Muthlong and all the festivals have different connotations which is relevant to their own raids. And each and every Behdienkhlam celebrate by different raids has myriads of meanings unique to the particular area.

One symbolic representation of the Behdienkhlam which is rarely mentioned is that it is the fulfilment of the covenant. Yes, Behdienkhlam is the fulfilment of the covenant between humans and God, before He decided to go settle in his rightful place in the heavens far from his creation. There are two lessons that can be learned from this symbolic meaning of Behdienkhlam which of course is part of the creation stories according to the Pnar version of the Hynniewtrep Hynniewskum.

This implies that like the other monotheistic religions, particularly the Abrahamic religion which include Judaism,

Christianity and Islam, the Pnars too believe in a Sky God, or God in heaven who lives far away from his people. Although Pnars also give offerings to the other deities in their pantheon of gods like 'ka Syiem waboooh, u Rynkaw u basa also known as ka Syiem Rymaw, ka Syiem Sngi, u Syiem pyrthat and ki blai chnong ki blai raid, yet u Tre kirod is the supreme God in the belief system. But another striking similarity that the Niamtre has with the other monotheistic religions particularly those from Judeo-Christian tradition is the importance of covenants.

According to the Jewish tradition, their God is a covenant-making and

Jews, the corresponding word found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament Greek is DIATHEKE. The Greek differentiates between a covenant where one party is the benefactor and the other the recipient (diatheke) and other covenants made between equal parties, where the word SUNTHEKE is used. The Greek word 'Suntheke' which means to place together, in other words a two way arrangement or coming together in agreement, also carries the original meaning of the Hebrew word.

A 'diatheke' covenant can be between a superior person and lesser mortals, such as between a king and

The point is that God making a covenant with humans is not restricted to the Abrahamic religion only, but it is common even in a tribal religion like the Niamtre.

covenant-keeping God and there are many instances in the holy book of the Jews or the Hebrew Bible in which He entered into covenant with humans. And in all these covenants made, man is the beneficiary with very little to offer in return apart from loving devotion and faithful service to Him (Deuteronomy 7: 7-11). The word which is used in the original Jewish scripture for 'covenant,' is BERITH the origin of which is from a root which means 'to cut or divide.' BERITH as the word suggests, means a sacrificial custom in connection with covenant-making; it is a customs of dividing the animal by which the covenant was ratified, and laying them out in two halves for the two or more parties. As is the custom, the contracting parties would then "walk between the pieces" to establish the covenant (Genesis 15:10; Jeremiah 34:18-19).

But when the Holy Book or the Hebrew Bible was translated to the dominant language of the time, and particularly for use by the diaspora or the non-Hebrew speaking

his subjects, whereas a 'suntheke' covenant is between equals, such as in Romans 1:31 & Luke 22: 5. Every Biblical covenant is a 'diatheke' covenant, being instituted by God as the initiator, to humankind who has the liberty to exercise their free will to either accept, or rebel and reject God's covenants. It may also be noted that the English word used to denote the two books in the Christian Bible is Testament. In the Christian tradition, the Hebrew Bible was designated as the Old Testament, where one can find the old covenant that God had with His (chosen) people which also laid the foundation for the new and the ultimate covenant as found in the Christians scriptures. The Christian scriptures include the four gospels and the other Book written during the early Christian period after Jesus Christ had died.

The point is that God making a covenant with humans is not restricted to the Abrahamic religion only, but it is common even in a tribal religion like the Niamtre. Although Niamtre is not a strict monotheistic religion because they also give offerings to other

deities, yet it is a monotheistic tradition which believes in the existence of a Supreme God, U Blai Tre Kirod and the other deities are subordinate to the One. Like the God of the Jews in the Pnar of the Raid Jowai context too, God is not a Father in heaven, but a Supreme Being, the One and the only one.

Similarly the covenant in the case of the Niamtre according to the creation stories as recorder by the people of raid Jowai, is that after God had placed all creation on the earth he instituted the religion by which people should worship and live their lives. And also after he had established moral laws and customs and traditions, he told them that it is time for Him to leave the Earth and move to the celestial world, his eternal dwelling place. But before He disappeared from their sight eternally, he made a covenant with the people that he will visit them in spirit once a year and asked humans to promise to provide Him special offerings during His annual visit to the Earth. However U Tre Kirod did not ask for assortments of offerings from the people, but he instead asked from them a dance to be performed in His deference with all of their heart and soul. A dance whatever the condition may be, and wherever it may be, and dance which could only be describe as a dance in the spirit.

Behdienkhlam is therefore not only about beating the rooftops to chase away illness and evilspirits; it is the Pnar's way of honouring the Almighty on his annual sojourn to visit them; it is keeping the covenant they made with U Tre Kirod, when he, in the beginning came down to make arrangements for the seven ways to settle on Earth. The covenant is diatheke wherein God is asking nothing from his children but a dance of a joyful spirit and He in return will bless them with good health and prosperity. The four days and three nights Behdienkhlam festival is an important time for the people, because it is the time that they not only welcome God to the Raid the chnong, the community or to their hearths and homes but more importantly it is the time when they welcome Him into their hearts and into their souls.

Is outdated bureaucracy a hindrance to India's emergence as world superpower?

By Rupesh Dutta

The people of India have given a huge mandate to the present BJP-led NDA Government to give a big push to reformation of various sectors in the country. However, we all know that the biggest hurdle to reformation in India is excessive red tapism and bureaucratic control of sectors that require specialisation. In a way it makes no sense that important organisations like the Army, the Navy and the Air Force should be controlled by an IAS officer. Likewise technical Central Ministries should be headed by non-IAS officers as unlike the 20th Century where there was very less automation, the 21st Century is the age of specialisation and technology will play a very important role in defining the future of a country.

Whereas the British Raj system of bureaucracy that has prevailed in our country for so many years has done enough damage to the socio-economic development of this great country, the British and for that matter almost all the developed nations in the world have now gone in favour of corporate culture rather than bureaucratic culture.

However, in our country the bureaucracy still tries very hard to control all cadres recruited under UPSC and now services like IFS, IPS, IRS, IES etc have been pushed to the corner more so

from Defence and non-IAS UPSC cadres as they too have undergone the same rigorous process of recruitment through UPSC. At the State level there is a need to clearly define the minimum years of service for the post of Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary, Principal Secretary, Secretary etc and en-cadrement of posts should be withdrawn immediately to allow officers from other UPSC recruited cadres to come on deputation.

Till such time the reformation of bureaucracy is done both in Central and State level the dream of making India a super power or a developed country will not happen and India as a country will be known the world over as a bureaucratic super power or bureaucratic world champion.

Meanwhile the steps taken by the current BJP Government in bringing specialists as Joint Secretary through lateral entry is an excellent step and more management experts, specialist, scientists and corporate professionals should be brought as Joint Secretary in every Ministry and if required even at the level of Additional Secretary and Secretary.

Perhaps it is high time that India as a country make a special study on how bureaucracy works in

The world today is moving towards business corporate culture where economic strength prevails over military strength and it is felt that as long as the BJP led Government allows bureaucracy to control the defence forces and suppress all other specialised UPSC cadres and corporate world, the people of this country will feel that the mandate given by the people to the BJP led Government for quick reformation is by and large getting defeated and people in general will continue to feel that any Government is the same and life goes on as usual without any meaningful changes in their life time.

because the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) which controls all the UPSC recruited cadres are all manned by IAS officers and therefore all the grievances of all other services are being outrightly ignored thus making India a world champion in bureaucracy. In some North Eastern States some of the Chief Secretaries are of Joint Secretary rank whereas traditionally the senior most or next senior most IAS officer within the State cadre should be chosen as the Chief Secretary.

Similarly many officers are becoming principal secretaries at very young age in the State Governments leaving no room for officers from other UPSC services to come on deputation. In short this is how IAS are controlling both Central and State Governments. To make the matter worse some posts like Finance, Home, Personnel and Administrative reforms and Planning are strictly encadred for IAS officers in State Government leaving no room for other UPSC cadres to penetrate and in Central Government Departments only IAS officers in DoPT decides who should be Secretary or additional secretary or Joint secretary of a Department and the Cabinet Ministers who have very little knowledge of how bureaucracy works normally agrees with whatever proposals that is being placed by IAS officers. Therefore there is a need to post officers from Army, Navy, Air Force, IPS, IFS, IRS, IES etc in DoPT and the selection process for the post of Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary etc should also include officers

developed countries like Japan, US, UK, France, Germany, Singapore etc by engaging renowned international consultants otherwise the present boring bureaucracy will continue to say that Indian bureaucracy is the best in the world and we will remain a backward country in spite of having tremendous human resources.

The world today is moving towards business corporate culture where economic strength prevails over military strength and it is felt that as long as the BJP led Government allows bureaucracy to control the defence forces and suppress all other specialised UPSC cadres and corporate world, the people of this country will feel that the mandate given by the people to the BJP led Government for quick reformation is by and large getting defeated and people in general will continue to feel that any Government is the same and life goes on as usual without any meaningful changes in their life time.

Thus the big question still exist as to why the Government which is now having huge majority in the parliament is hesitating in bringing officials from defence forces and other UPSC recruited cadres in decision making process and the bigger question remains whether the democracy we have is controlled by politicians or by the all powerful bureaucracy.

(Rupesh Dutta is a Delhi based journalist and can be contacted at Rupeshdutta@yahoo.com)

TO THE EDITOR

Where are we headed?

Editor,

Having read the article, "Is Sustainable Tourism a Myth, by Patricia Mukhim (ST July 12, 2019), I too have this feeling of frustration about the way things are here in Shillong town and in the Khasi- Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. Shillong is actually quite lawless. It is next to impossible to try and make sense of it all. Last Saturday two of my friends and I went for a drive to Mawkkok in the evening. We left Mawkkok at around 6 PM and got home at 11PM.

The traffic jam was well past Mylliem main market. Yet in all of this there were private cars with tinted windows and siren blaring, overtaking in order to bypass this jam. How is that allowed? And if it is not allowed then who is going to take action against these people? Our Ministers, Government Officials, Army, Air Force and Cars with AS number plates use these same tactics to get through traffic even on weekends! So the common man is, in most of these instances, the victim because we are not related and do not have any BIG-WIG connections.

Even within city limits how

is it that cars, buses, tourist taxis, local cabs, two wheelers are allowed to park all day by the roadside without having to pay a single rupee by way of parking fees? These vehicles further reduce the width of the already narrow roads of Shillong! Shopping complexes are allowed to open without providing parking spaces for customers. How? Vendors and hawkers are everywhere. They occupy walking space, bus stops and taxi stands. Therefore where can people walk except on the road? This also causes traffic to slow down considerably. Classic examples are Laitumkhrah and Civil Hospital.

Our tourist spots are completely ruined and clogged with so much garbage and traffic that instead of finding peace and quiet one feels like tearing the hair out of one's head out of sheer frustration. How is it that all these hawkers are allowed to set up shop anywhere? And where do they throw their garbage? Generally it's by the road side, down the hillside, streams and drains. Examples are Ryndang Brier on the way to Umiam, Wards Lake, Mawkkok bridge to name a few. The

list could very well fill your newspaper.

Suddenly, now its jump on the bandwagon of, 'Save Umiam.' What about Wah Umkhrah, Umshyri and the stream that flows through Malki - Dhanketi etc. Here again how is it that people are allowed to live and build so close to and in fact right over these streams beginning from Malki, Dhanketi, Lumparing, Riatsamthiah to Polo etc.

Mr Toki Blah recently wrote an insightful article about Urban Governance and whose job is it? As a lay person I have to assume that it's our Ministers and MLA's responsibility. So when these say they go to work and that too is questionable then what is it that they do when they are in their offices? Yet they so often flaunt their authority by going around with sirens blaring, escorts and pilot vehicles. Do they need so many? And how many of them have actually walked on their pavements or sat in three hour traffic jams? But they all feel this constant need to travel ABROAD. Recently our Chief Minister went to Switzerland and came back to tell the people of the state that corporations were going to adopt a number of villages

in Meghalaya. The question is why and what for? In the whole scheme of things even if it were only on paper the idea seems so bizarre.

At this point there seems to be only questions, and the answers my friend as the wise Bob Dylan wrote is 'Blowing in the Wind?'

Yours etc.,
Christine Tina,
Via email

Space exploration

Editor,

In a speech on space exploration in 2006, APJ Abdul Kalam said, "The Moon is very important because it has the potential to become an intermediate space station between Earth and Mars." Yes, the Chandrayaan mission is therefore very important to India and ISRO has carried on further its efforts to materialise the Moon mission through Chandrayaan-2.

The ISRO team pursued the lunar mission plan and discussed it with the then President of India APJ Abdul Kalam. Being an ardent space-

technology loving man, Kalam gave the green signal and India's first Moon mission plan – Chandrayaan -1 was concretized. On October 22, 2008 Chandrayaan-1 was launched from SatishDhawan Space Centre with Moon Mineralogy Mapper aboard the Chandrayaan-1 spacecraft, which could confirm the presence of solid ice on the Moon.

With the successful launch of the Chandrayaan-1 and with the detection of water contents on the surface of the Moon, ISRO's eyes now set on sending another Moon mission. But this time it would be grander, hence the plan is now to go a step ahead and soft land a rover on the Moon. This is a rare feat only a few countries have achieved it so far.

Having received government approval, the mission Chandrayaan-2 aims to carry forward the work done by Chandrayaan-1 and explore the Moon surface further. The ISRO also is zealous about the study of the frozen helium on the Moon. Frozen helium is an excellent source of clean energy and so it will become one of the most sought after resources when the world turns to production of energy through fusion. This

energy produced using helium in the Moon can also energise the vehicles for transporting materials from the Moon to man's future habitats in Mars and to his natural abode, the earth.

ISRO will be all set to launch Chandrayaan -2 on July 15. If successful, it will make India the first country to soft-land a rover on the Moon's South Polar Region which is known as the dark side. The six-wheeled rover, named Pragyan will explore the Moon's surface and travel around 500 meters from the landing spot. The fresh data from Chandrayaan-2 will bolster ISRO's Gaganyaan mission that aims to send humans to space by 2021-22.

Certainly, the exploration of the Moon through Chandrayaan will excite and electrify the entire nation. The whole nation is single-mindedly praying for the successful launch of Chandrayaan-2. Wish all success to ISRO team.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
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.

“When you look into the eyes of an animal you've rescued, you can't help but fall in love.”

--- Paul Shaffer

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.334

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2019

Meghalaya's closed economy

THE closure of Swiggy a food ordering and delivery company that provides food service on call and is linked to the restaurants of the city is a killjoy for the people of Shillong. Many had learnt to rely on this service when visitors would suddenly drop by and decide to stay back for lunch or dinner and there is not enough time to cook a meal. It is actually a win-win situation for the service provider, the client and the restaurant owners. To bring every online service delivery under the ambit of the “Trading by non-tribal Section” of the Sixth Schedule is to stretch the Schedule too far. Meghalaya is not a state belonging only to the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes. Even before it became a full-fledged state it had a substantial chunk of non-tribal residents, many of whom have been here for several generations. Do they need to prove their citizenship to the state of Meghalaya again and again? The children of the permanent non-tribal residents of Meghalaya cannot be treated as pariah forever. At some point the state has to concede them certain rights under the Indian Constitution. It is a different matter that this constituency has not yet knocked the doors of the courts for justice.

Let's understand one thing. The market is an open and competitive space and it is unconstitutional to drag the idea of 'reservation' into this space. At least in the online business let there be a level playing field. What does the KHADC have to say about hordes of tribals buying stuff online at the cost of the tribal retailers? Will Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra etc., also be asked to have trading licenses or cease to operate? It is bad enough that we do not have the Uber or Ola model of online transportation network companies that are easy on the pocket and that can be called at any time of the day; even early morning or after midnight. Instead, we allow local taxis to fleece passengers when they reserve them because drivers decide the rates and passengers have no say at all. In Meghalaya everything is tilted towards the seller; the buyer is squeezed no end and no institution comes forward to moderate the rates. And just when the consumer enjoys the ease of ordering food to their doorstep, in steps the KHADC to put an end to the business.

By freezing a section of the population into a corner we are creating conditions for people to seek justice the legal way. This will one day curtail whatever legitimate powers the District Councils enjoy today. It is erroneous to forget that the Sixth Schedule is subservient to the Constitution of India which believes in justice and equity to all citizens.

Lady Hydari Park: Some animal-human issues

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Mahatma Gandhi said, 'the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated'. Well, we seem to treat our domesticated animals humanely. That way we are on the good side of Gandhi. However, this article stretches beyond the domain of domesticated pets and points towards the larger issue of animals within the park at the heart of Shillong city. On hindsight, there has been a news story on the park in recent months. Historically, it has been known as 'Lady Hydari Park' (named after the wife of Muhammad Saleh Akbar Hydari, the first Indian governor of undivided Assam) but last year the Khasi Students' Union pressured the change of name into 'Ka Phan Nonglait Park' (as an honour to Phan Nonglait, the first Khasi woman who revolted against the British during the time of freedom fighter U Tirot Sing Syiem). Nonetheless, I have used the above name for the purpose of this article as till date the entry ticket reads as 'Lady Hydari Park, Department of Forest and Environment, Government of Meghalaya.' Be that as it may, the name and its name changing is not the brief here (with even Google maps and tour operators/agencies playing it safe by showing both names). The crux of the matter is the nature of animal-keeping and the difficulty which the park faces today. As such, if only the government/pressure groups would have seen the real issues at hand. Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, Lady Hydari Park is located at the heart of Shillong city. That way it is an 'urban park'. As such, going by the strict sense of the term it is a recreational park which is supposed to have wide open spaces for relaxation and rejuvenation. Accordingly, it is left to wonder as to how the features of a 'Zoo' (or 'Animal Land' in the words of KSU) resonate with it. Well, one might point to the fact of animals being kept and show-cased there. However, that is a travesty of what a Zoo is supposed to be in actuality. This is because the Central Zoo Authority (which is a statutory body of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and established in 1991) has laid down specific guidelines for a zoo as against parks (like our Lady

Hydari Park). These are enforced through the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and the National Zoo Policy, 1998. Flowing from these, concurrently the focus and action plans are based upon stressing on the conservation of the rich biodiversity with emphasis on wild fauna, conservation of endangered species, inspiring empathy from visitors towards wild animals and creation of a database for information sharing with other agen-

we do not care for the animals in the park. On the other hand, caring would be difficult because of paucity of space. As such, it shall be best if the animal enclosures are wiped out altogether and the animals are moved to other more conducive habitations of the north-east for the time being. This is where the issue of having our own state zoo becomes critical. It is a necessity and a priority. However, everything moves slowly in Meghalaya and the state

tant. Proper planning and control is a must. The National Zoo Policy, 1998 also lays special emphasis on this aspect. However, this is most likely to fall into place when and only when we have a proper state zoo. Till that time, all is supposedly lost! This is another precise reason as to why the animal enclosures at the park are to be dismantled altogether for now.

Fourthly, I would like to highlight some of the fine prints of the National Zoo Policy, 1998. This is particularly important for Meghalaya as we are in the prolonged process of establishing it. The fine prints are; first, 'since zoos require a significant amount of resources in the form of land, water, energy and money, no new zoo shall be set-up unless a sustained supply of resources is guaranteed'. Second, 'every zoo shall maintain a healthy, hygienic and natural environment so that the visitors get an adequate opportunity to experience a natural environment'. Third, 'the enclosure for all the species displayed or kept in a zoo shall be of such size that all animals get adequate space for free movement and exercise and no animal is unduly dominated or harassed by any other animal'. Fourth, 'a zoo shall not allow any animal to be provoked or tortured for the purpose of extracting any performance or tricks for the benefit of the visitors' and finally, 'each zoo should have a well drawn-up plan for educating the visitors'. These are all extremely important points. However, everything else depends on the 'first' fine print. As such, let us hope that we get our state zoo at the very earliest.

Lastly, apart from having a zoo, what is more important is that we have a 'zoological culture'. We must develop a culture of empathy towards animals and assimilate knowledge from them. This can only happen through the proper management of a zoo and interest taken by the stakeholders. Lest we forget, there are thoughts in management that have developed through 'observation of animals'; the most famous in recent times being 'The Wolf Pack Hierarchy' as recorded by a series of informational documentaries including the BBC's Frozen Planet.

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

“It is a necessity and a priority. However, everything moves slowly in Meghalaya and the state zoo 'news story' is no different. It is disheartening to note that it has been more than a decade now since the inception of the initiatives for establishing a state zoo. One can only wonder as to when it shall see the light of day with the state government already acknowledging that it would take some more time.”

ties involved in in-situ and ex-situ conservation. Hence, a zoo is a specialized spacious space with primary focus on animals and their wellbeing whilst disseminating knowledge to the interested stakeholders. This specialized thinking is the need of the hour and as such, shifting the animals from their current location is the clarion call.

Secondly and in relation to the above, let us be candid and get down to brass tacks! Lady Hydari Park is just an urban park by all means and purposes. Let us not supplement the word zoo or animal land with it. If anything, the sections where the animals are kept in their enclosures is pitiable. They are so small. They are terrifyingly unhygienic. The birds hardly have space to fly. The fishes and ducks swim in filthy waters. Picture this; the Himalayan Black Bear is kept in a tight enclosure of just 'six by three meters'. Just hold on a second and register this bear analogy in your thoughts. You will realize the gravity of the problem we are dealing with. It is sad to say that

zoo 'news story' is no different. It is disheartening to note that it has been more than a decade now since the inception of the initiatives for establishing a state zoo. One can only wonder as to when it shall see the light of day with the state government already acknowledging that it would take some more time.

Thirdly, ill mannered visitors are an irritant. Many visitors are irresponsible and inept. They engage in taunting and disturbing the animals. Carrying of sticks and twigs to poke into the animals are a common sight. Add to that, the shouts and screams directed at the animals when they are at their sleep. If only we could put those very ill mannered visitors inside those small cages then they would see the painful side of things. As such, it is sad to say that we do not have a 'zoological culture'. We do not deserve to have animals in our midst. Most of us go to the park to have a jolly good time with not even the slightest inclination to learn about the animals from the display boards. This is where the management of the place becomes impor-

Relevance of statistics to a state like Meghalaya

By Gary Marbanian

Statistics Day is celebrated on June 29 every year in India, in honour of the famed Statistician, P.C Mahabalanis who was instrumental in formulating the momentous Second Five year plan. This year Statistics Day fell on a Saturday and it was celebrated without much fanfare here in Meghalaya. The beauty of Statistics is that it is relevant to a wide range of subjects. In fact Statistics has become the subject which is the kingpin of other disciplines.

To a layperson Statistics is simply just numbers. For eg a housewife running a family will not be aware that she is using Statistics in her day to day life. How much monthly expenditure needs to be incurred on basic household items like rice, dal, sugar, oil etc. These are information which are of utmost importance to a person running a household. A slight increase in the price of a household item whose elasticity of demand is high will definitely lead to a change in the consumption pattern of many households. At the macro level, data on prices of basic consumption articles is of prime importance to policy makers since important price indices like the Wholesale Price Index(WPI) and Consumer Price Index(CPI) are formulated on the basis of information collected from local markets from all across the country. Likewise when it comes to other different economic and social indicators like Gross Domestic Product, Index of Industrial Production, Infant Mortality Rate etc, a layperson will look at all the numbers derived from such data as relevant to his or her life. Alas! Statistics to a majority of people is simply irrelevant information. But there's a lot more to Statistics than meets the eye.

If we look at food production, an area which Meghalaya and the rest of the North East have so far been dismal, Statistics has a pivotal role to play. It is such a shame that States like Meghalaya are so heavily dependent on import of food grains from other states. The potential that a district like Ri-Bhoi has in terms of food production is immense. Ri-Bhoi district has the potential to turn into our very own food basket. I remember a former neighbor of ours who used to own a plot of arable land in Ri Bhoi. They used to

give the land to some local persons to cultivate and they would share the produce. The rice that they would get from that plot of land would suffice for the whole year. Ri Bhoi district is one of the most fertile district in the whole of the region and farmers just need better farming techniques to reap the full potential of their fertile land. And for farmers to be able to implement better farming techniques they need better education. With increase in population a food crisis is looming large over us. In years gone by, people in rural areas used to produce sufficient food grains to last them the whole year but with the increase in population and scarcity of arable land, farmers are finding it hard to produce enough food grains even to meet their own needs. Agriculture is a way of life for people in the rural areas and unless farmers implement better farming techniques, an impending food crisis is inevitable.

Is there really a correlation between a farmer's educational attainment level and higher agricultural output? This is where Statistics can play an important role in ascertaining whether education really plays a positive role in higher agricultural output. The Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation is one of the most used and most popular statistical tool out there and it is used in a wide range of disciplines. Using Sampling method, if data on educational level of the farmers and the annual yield per acre in monetary value could be collected from various districts in Meghalaya, the Karl's Pearson Co-relation Co-efficient could be calculated and based on the coefficient derived, we can find out if there is really a co-relation between education and agricultural output. If the Co-efficient is somewhere in the range between 0.5 and 0.8, then we can safely say that higher educational attainment plays a positive role when it comes to higher agricultural output.

If there is a positive correlation between education and agricultural output, then farmers in the State deserve better education and education which is relevant to agriculture.

To the Editor

Was CAU a misplaced priority?

Editor,

The issue of Central Agricultural University (CAU) has of late assumed unprecedented dimension both in the societal, political and media circles as well. Importantly a letter that appeared in these columns under the caption of 'CAU: The missed opportunity' (ST 29th June 2019) was also scripted by none other than the ex-bureaucrat, Mr H. Chinkhenthang who was incidentally also in charge of Agriculture Sector, Govt. of Meghalaya. He has unmistakably averred that when the Congress Party that was at the helm of power both in the Centre and in our State, the Central Govt. had proffered a very preferential hand-out to Meghalaya in establishing a CAU. This primacy was given to our State perhaps due to its peaceful aura and Shillong being the hub of academic pursuits. It goes without saying that the establishment of CAU could have gone a long way to enable tribal students for higher studies pertaining to agro-oriented researches within the State and open up avenues of employment for the local unemployed youth. Notwithstanding such overwhelming gestures of the Cen-

tre, our then State Govt. did not really move on top gear to seize that God-given opportunity but kept the offer on the back burner by advancing unaccommodating excuses which ultimately led to the loss of opportunity to set up CAU. Hence, the shift of the CAU headquarter to Imphal as the then Manipur Govt. could come forward with alacrity to offer the required land space for the establishment of this institute which stands tall now.

However, as per reliable sources and for the information of the above writer and the public at large, that was the 'First offer' by the then Central Govt. in the late eighties and early nineties.

No doubt, the indigent denizens of Meghalaya are nursing a hope that CAU shall still be founded herein and that hope came into reality with the 'Second offer' in 2008 from the then Central Govt. with the proposal to establish another Central Agricultural University in North East India with its headquarter at Barapani (Umiam), Meghalaya by re-defining the jurisdiction of CAU, Imphal. Undoubtedly, the headquarters of the Indian Council of Agricultural complex for North East Region and other Central organizations like NESAC,

BSI research centres in the vicinity came in handy to provide the required academic and research synergism and to help in establishing dynamic linkages with existing institutions. Being centrally located, the new CAU headquarter which would have the jurisdiction over the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim as proposed at the initial stages would have had easy accessibility from all these states under consideration while the CAU, Imphal will have the jurisdiction over the states of Manipur and Tripura with expansion to cover the state of Nagaland, which did not yet have a central university.

The Planning Commission of India in 2009 also conveyed in principle, the approval for setting up of a new Central Agricultural University at Shillong (Meghalaya) duly bifurcating the existing CAU, Imphal with well defined jurisdiction. Subsequently, an identified site which indicated a compact block of land at Kyrdemkulai with easy accessibility, desired topography, gentle terrain and with suitable environments forming the outer boundary was acquired by the State Government of

Meghalaya through proper land acquisition proceedings which was taken possession of by the State Department of Agriculture. Finally in 2014, and as mandated the 200 acres of GOI recommended land was handed over to the Central Govt. authority through its representative, the Vice Chancellor of CAU, Imphal for setting up the Central Agricultural University, Barapani (Umiam) which was also published in the State Gazette of Meghalaya with proper Memorandum of Transfer.

Interestingly, during the course of the aforesaid events, it was learned that the jurisdiction of the new CAU, Barapani (Umiam) will cover the states of Meghalaya and Nagaland while the revised jurisdiction of the present CAU Imphal will be over the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura. This reversal of equation of the jurisdiction of the proposed new CAU from the initial four states to just two states with only Meghalaya and the addition of the state of Nagaland under its jurisdiction gave a political twist of the change of events and who knows perhaps due to the sepa-

rate handsome financial allocations by the Central government for the respective CAUs with campus headquarters at Imphal and Barapani (Umiam).

Nevertheless, Meghalaya should not be ideally self-satisfied with just the Agriculture College (established in 2015) presently under CAU, Imphal in the sprawling 200 acres of land at Kyrdemkulai, otherwise and perhaps CAU, Imphal has the unwieldy privilege of becoming the largest Agricultural University in the country with presently thirteen constituent colleges. In one of my letters which appeared in your daily - "How Meghalaya missed the CAU!" (ST 14th August 2018), I had stated therein that the loss of CAU has become a cry over spilt milk! In the present scenario, I may be wrong so also the above state ex-bureaucrat but there is a silver-lining at the end of the tunnel - when and only if the present state government under the dynamic leadership of the youthful and knowledgeable CM with the blessing of the present government at the Centre, pursues the matter in right earnest so as not to miss the "Third opportunity" for setting up the Central Agricultural University in Meghalaya. The CM has rightly stated (ST July

9, 2019) that the Bill has to be moved in Parliament under Entry 64 to facilitate establishment of CAU, Barapani (Umiam) or CAU, Umiam (Kyrdemkulai) as an Institution of National Importance. It is odd now to see that the Party which was in power in the State during the open-handed 'offers' of the then Central Govt. from the same party and which is now sitting in the opposition has ventured to assert that it wholeheartedly supports the establishment of CAU in Meghalaya. This is nothing short of shedding crocodile tears, for what was this party doing when it was at the helm and this is for all to see as things unfold themselves.

Hence I wish that the new Central Agricultural University with headquarter at Kyrdemkulai sees the 'Light of Day' for the benefit of not just the people of Meghalaya but for all those in this region. As for the faulty recruitment by CAU, Imphal (ST July 9, 2019), the RTI activist, as mentioned in the news report, merits to be tapped on the shoulders for shedding the information in the public domain and the affected agricultural graduates and post-graduates students too have correctly conveyed the matter to the State gov-

ernment through the Agriculture Minister as the Central Reservation policy in this case should be adhered to for the constitutional right of the STs, SCs, OBCs and other meritorious applicants.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Via email

Arbitrary action of CRPF

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper I would like to highlight the unauthorized action taken by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in the Fourth Furlong area of capital city by erecting barbed wire fencing on the PWD road along the boundary walls of their officers' quarter complex for reasons best known to them. Such illegal action by the CRPF authority has narrowed road width considerably thereby causing immense hardship to pedestrians as well as motorists who use this stretch of PWD road. This road is one of the busiest roads of Shillong connecting NEIGHIMS, B.K Bajoria School, BRO, BSF, Assam Rifles, NEEPCO and other institutions of New Shillong. Many Ambulances pass through this road round the clock at high speed overtak-

ing normal traffic. Restriction of width of the road has thus posed grave danger to the life and limb of school children and motorists as well and there is every possibility of fatal accidents any time if the unauthorized barbed wire is not removed immediately. It can be seen from the official website of PWD, Meghalaya (http://megpwd.gov.in) that the main objective of the Department is to formulate, plan, design, construct, operate and maintain public infrastructure efficiently and effectively in order to protect public safety and enhance the economic activities of rural and urban habitations. It is evident from the facts narrated above that CRPF authority has encroached upon the domain of state PWD and put the life of general citizens to danger. I therefore, urge upon the concerned authority to look into the matter keeping in mind the safety and security of the general public.

Yours etc.,
N.K. Kehar
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.

“Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.”

--- Carl Sagan

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.335

SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2019

Who owns Meghalaya?

THE demand by the Meghalaya Land and Forest Owners' Association (MLFOA) that the State Government should assert its authority and seek a Presidential decree to exempt Meghalaya from central mining laws etc., because Meghalaya is a Sixth Schedule state, reeks of a selfish attempt to bring in from the backdoor the practice of unsustainable mining yet again. In the first place, has the above Organisation consulted every tribal in Meghalaya before claiming to be the rightful owners of land and forests in Meghalaya? After having displayed such callousness for so many decades by mining coal to a point where rivers and the soil have turned toxic and never lifting a finger to reclaim the abandoned mines and rejuvenate the rivers, how does this group dare to assert its rights over all of Meghalaya? This appropriation of tribal rights by a few greedy men ought to be exposed. On the pretext of strengthening the Sixth Schedule from whose ambit mining has now been taken away, the MLFOA now wants to ensure that the coal mining process will revert to the dark old days of sending young boys to their death inside the rat holes.

Surprisingly this same group was completely silent during the mine tragedy that took the lives of 15 or more miners in December 2018 and many others before that. Only now has this mercenary group raised its ugly head. Time and again the Instrument of Accession is cited to buttress the right of tribals over their land in Meghalaya. The point is that after the signing of the Instrument of Accession all the powers vested with the chieftains are now transferred to the Indian state. It's a different matter that some people who are fixated on this matter have done much to spin their own narratives around the Instrument of Accession. When arguments such as “land belongs to the people” are loudly flagged, the claimants to such narratives ought to be asked (1) Who are those people they represent? (2) Does the MLFOA include every Khasi, Jaintia and Garo or only a few who have converted community land into private land through a venal process and by depriving impoverished fellow tribals who have had to sell their land under duress because of poverty? For too long some groups with vested interests and with connection to powerful forces within the political system have used the argument of “the people” to lay claim over resources that belong to the community? The Khasi community never envisaged that a forest surrounding a catchment area should belong to one person. There is such a thing as Common Property Resources (CPR) which are to be held in a sacred trust by custodians of customary practices and tradition. Do we still have that today? Have the District Councils been able to address landlessness? An Institution that has failed to protect the interests of people but is rather sold out to a clique of the tribal elite does not deserve to be further empowered.

TO THE EDITOR

Snag in Chandrayan launch

Editor,
Only 54 minutes 24 seconds stood between success and failure of Chandrayaan Mission-2, a project of five long years. Interestingly it was also the historic data 50 years ago of man on the moon, when Neil Armstrong saw the beautiful planet of ours and as told by Martin Armstrong on Sunday last, that his father did spend his old days in pain to see a “fragile” planet being robbed by plunderers. ISRO had had successes and failures too as has the USA and China, the main polluters of 98% debris in space. Had it not been for NDTV, the only reliable channel in India, the failed attempt to shoot micro SAT R on February 12, 2019, would have been hushed up. Equally, the case of Balakot in which the success of the mission was dubious would not have been known, though the purpose for the thumping victory has been served.

It is a wakeup call to the Chief Election Commission to tell them that EVM, as any other modern machines are

not perfect and to call someone a false claimant with deviant behaviour is unacceptable. I take this opportunity to congratulate NDTV on the Best Journalism Award given by USA media. It should keep doing the good unbiased work for the sake of our country. Journalism with one foot outside and one foot inside prison is true journalism. Chandrayaan Mission-2 is to put man on the moon in 2024. Let us learn from history of space exploration of 1986 Challenger Crew which sadly took seven lives one of whom was a lady teacher of school kids, in which weeping of school children, all over USA was reported. It should also be mentioned that the moon mission crew of 1969 did not have insurance cover. Let this be like throwing a wet blanket, it is not. It teaches us to be more careful and more vigilant in our future.

The Man on the Moon Mission by 2024 would examine moon water which would be transported to the water starved planet earth where underground water table as on 2019 July is down by 20%. More importantly human possibility of settlement

could also be studied which is good news for all of us. On July 15, the NDTV evening news revealed people on NDRF boats with left hand on the steel bar to prevent them from falling and the NRC paper on the right the only ‘gold’ they retrieved from flooded homes, a stark reminder of this planet we live in. If the NRC goes under water it means an end to their lives. But if the moon is habitable, the NRC does not matter as unlike the CAB, the Moon (Interplanetary Law) does not have ideological or political boundaries. And because Man on Moon would weigh 1/6th of Man on Earth, more work could be done on paddy fields to produce more food on moon and there would be no need of nutreala any more!

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong -14.

Chandrayan mission

Editor,
Throwing a spanner into the works of launching of Chandrayaan-2, some technical snag developed in the rocket that made the

Digital Finance Inclusion

Paradigm shift in thinking vital

By Moin Qazi

The financial industry's efforts to serve lower-income customers have gone through four distinct phases: from social banking to micro-finance to financial inclusion and now technology-driven financial services or digital financial inclusion.

Undeniably, digital technologies have become the most powerful lever for financial inclusion and are considered the smartest way to rapidly unlock economic opportunity and accelerate social development with economic empowerment. Digital tools have fostered speedier and more inclusive growth by dramatically reducing financial service providers' costs and making services more convenient and accessible for users, especially low-income subscribers in remote locations. Money sits in a virtual account on a server where it can be transferred with the click of a button.

According to the latest RBI report, total digital transactions in volume terms recorded a growth rate of 58.8% during 2018-19 against 50.4% in 2017-18. The RBI says digital transactions in value terms grew by 19.5% during 2018-19, compared to 22.2% in 2017-18. The Central Bank report states the digital finance landscape has witnessed unprecedented waves of innovation. It has accordingly ambitious target to push volumes of digital transactions four times by 2021.

Digital finance payments and financial services delivered via mobile phones and internet are greasing the wheels of the economic system and transforming lives and economic prospects of individuals, businesses and Governments across the developing world, thus boosting GDP and financial inclusion a reality.

In contrast to digital financial systems, physical channels are prohibitive for low income populations. One, physical banking is relatively costlier and riskier for consumers to perform even while engaging in basic financial activities, payments, savings, investments and remittances. Two, it is very costly for utility firms, banks, insurance companies and other institutions to transact as it makes their operations infeasible and unsustainable. Digital

channels offer a robust fix for problems encountered by consumers and financial institutions in traditional systems of finance.

Digital financial revolution or “fintech,” has fundamentally changed people's lives and transformed the business landscape. In many markets, cash is fast becoming obsolete and transactions are mostly via digital tools. Banking is also moving into a presence-less, paperless and real-time era: While there will always be bank branches, banks will become more “invisible” in how they deliver their services, many of which will primarily be accessed online.

The fintech revolution is led by many players, including commercial, small finance and payment banks, telecommunication firms and financial technology companies. It harnesses technology to reinvent traditional business models, creating opportunities to connect India's unbanked communities to affordable and reliable financial tools at unprecedented speed and scale. It offers a preview of what the global banking model may look like a generation from now.

Fintech has freed bank staff from counters and relieved customers of the inconvenience of transacting during banking hours. Most financial work can be done via smartphone, improving payment systems, eliminating paper receipts and reducing frictions consequently, not only saving customers' time and money but improving their quality of life.

Meanwhile, data footprint provided by smartphones and data-connected mobile phones is providing an opportunity to bring people with limited credit-history into the mainstream through alternate credit profiles. Alongside, Artificial Intelligence and machine learning algorithms can assess the user's credit worthiness making it possible to provide loans to them even in the absence of traditional credit history.

Digital finance also offers major technological and infrastructure

challenges. Sparse populations, inconsistent network coverage, insufficient capital for building new business models and customers' lack of trust and comfort with technology can stand in the way of success, particularly in remote or underserved communities.

The risks of implementing digital financial services are not just operational and technical there are security, affordability and safety concerns. An example: customer privacy loss is inevitable, despite efforts to create safeguards. For India's financial inclusion industry to capitalise fully on the benefits of digital finance, the accompanying risks must be understood and addressed.

In several cases reliance on computers has proved to be deceptive whereby debt burden and repayment capacity must be scrutinized, else it can lead to over-lending and customer over-indebtedness, rejection of a loan based on opaque reasoning, including arbitrary profiling based on factors like location.

In microfinance individual traits can best be captured by personal interface. Someone might pay off your loan, but computer modelling tells one that anyone from a particular area is likely to default. Evidence shows the best clients are those who get entry on their transparent and unvarnished honesty shining through their financial dealings and not on credit scores.

However, digital finance can have negative effects for financial inclusion. Providers of digital finance services can be profit-seeking corporations that use digital finance to maximise their profitability or profitable opportunities of businesses affiliated with digital finance providers, namely banks, financial and non-financial institutions.

Corporate providers of digital finance services use an aggressive marketing tactic to persuade high and middle income customers to utilize a new or existing digital finance platform or infrastructure. They must use a less-aggressive marketing tactic to persuade low-income and poor customers to employ new or existing digital platforms or infrastructure if they believe

the latter cannot afford the associated fees.

This is a challenge which goes unrecognized with the changing dynamics of digital financial inclusion. Governments globally will have to step up and take control of its regulatory provisions to deal with discrete challenges, which have emerged with the rampant use of technology and multiple stakeholders. Adequate knowledge of challenges in digital financial inclusion, is a priority which must be addressed with precision.

India has to contend with its geographical and cultural divide. The aversion of ‘other India’ to digital finance has more to do with their aversion to everything that has to do with technology. This stems from their lack of trust in it. It is also partly on account of consumers low technical literacy.

Women often face additional barriers: Less access to mobile phone, lower literacy and numeracy levels, less confidence in using technology and restrictions on travel or social interaction. Furthermore, villagers' value personal relationships particularly when it comes to money. They will not trust technology which they do not understand for anything except very basic payments.

India culturally believes in cash and a paradigm shift in thinking will need time and resources. It involves migration to new social, cultural patterns and habits given marked demographic and class issues built into India's cashless transition. Although it would be impossible for it to become a cashless economy in the immediate future as making India cashless is like treating multiple chronic societal diseases with one injection. Also, there are several challenges which may constrain full-scale digital transition in the foreseeable future.

It's in everyone's interest to pay heed to ex-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan words: “In managing, promoting and protecting the Internet's presence in our lives, we need to be no less creative than those who invented it.” Clearly, there is a need for governance, but that does not necessarily mean that it has to be done in the traditional way, for something that is so very different. --- INFA

Water Crisis

Astute conservation vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Prime Minister Modi's radio broadcast on the last day of June exhorted people to start a mass movement to conserve water. He rightly pointed out the need to save every drop of water as only 8 per cent of water received from rainfall was being utilised in the country, urging all Indians to join hands in this endeavour.

“Come let us join water conservation and involve ourselves in making a list of making more and more innovative methods to motivate people to conserve water”, the Prime Minister said. He added that India's challenge of water conservation of water was significant but could be met with concerted and joint action. The remarks came a day ahead of ‘water conservation campaign’ in 255 water stressed districts in the country.

The campaign --Jal Shakti Abhiyan -- began on July 1 and would continue till end-November in 1593 water-stressed blocks, falling under 255 critical districts. Activities during the campaign are expected to include construction of rooftop rainwater harvesting infrastructure, check dams, trenches, ponds and watershed structures.

Obviously, there are expectations that the newly-created Jal Shakti Mantralaya would consolidate water policy and management, which till recently had been spread across seven ministries. According to one estimate, only around one in five rural households has piped water connection. Within this, there is noticeable regional disparity, with States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar lagging the national average in piped water connections.

Undoubtedly, the scale of the challenge is even more complex than Swaachh Bharat. Even as the focus is on rural households, the government cannot lose sight of the conditions prevailing in urban slums where people are largely dependent on hand pump, each one shared by many households.

Official data shows that coverage of village households with piped water has annually increased from 12 per cent in 2013-14 to 17 per cent in 2017-18 and may be a little over 18 per cent now, highlighting the need to seriously accelerate the programme. Thus, the challenge to achieve 100 per cent coverage of piped water supply by 2024 is indeed a massive task and entails lot of expenditure which has not been made available even in the current Budget. The project of increasing toilet coverage from just 33 per cent in October 2014 to around 99 per cent now may be statistically correct, but most of these toilets are non-functional as they do not have water connections.

Therefore, to ensure piped water to a large section of the population entails harnessing technology to augment water conservation. For example, Israel recycles around 94 per cent of water it uses. Thus, recycling can increase water availability even in times of rainfall deficiency. The government has not outlined whether recycling would be carried out and the technology that would be used for the purpose. Since India has very good relations with Israel, exploring technology tie-ups with that country should be explored.

Meanwhile, it is worthwhile to refer to an evaluation of 400 cities globally in 2018 with focus on mega cities facing high combined levels of water scarcity -- recent and projected drought, wherein Chennai emerged in top position as the city facing the most severe water scarcity and drought. There are four Indian cities in the top 20 mega cities with populations above 10 million. Chennai aside, Kolkata ranks at number two, Mumbai at 11 and Delhi at 15. As is well known Chennai was exposed to devastating floods and experienced some of the wettest conditions in many years, resulting in some 1.8 million people being

displaced, the loss of over 500 lives and economic damage over \$3 billion. From too wet it has become too dry now in a matter of four years.

Large cities, mostly located along the banks of large rivers, are vulnerable because for the most part, the river systems are “vastly over allocated and mismanaged”. According to Alexis Morgan of WWF, drought to flooding is the “front edge of climate change”. In addition, is the loss of wetlands, specially in city like Kolkata and the looming crisis of floods and depleting water sources are evident. The world has lost 35 per cent of wetlands since 1970 and is losing these three times faster than forests, reports have noted.

It may be pertinent to examine certain actions towards conservation and judicious management of water. Here in India, not so educated people are in the habit of wasting water but this cannot be allowed to continue as the dimension of the crisis is growing. Let us examine the following: One, irrigated water is being used inefficiently. There is no reason that the rainfall deficit and water deficit regions of Maharashtra should produce sugar cane which uses 2500 litres of water for every kg of output. Similarly, the states of Punjab and Haryana where farmers get highly subsidised or free water, highly intensive rice cultivation has led to desertification. Crops like sugar cane and rice should only be grown in water surplus regions but populist ‘free water’ policies have achieved the opposite. Thus, large savings of water are needed, both in irrigation technology, recycling and management.

Two, groundwater storage is at least as great as surface water storage potential and is available at significantly lower costs, which needs to be explored in a bigger way. Three, appropriate design changes can significantly reduce water requirements for the industrial sector. For example, extensive use of recycling can reduce the amount of water needed to produce one tonne of steel by say 90-95 per cent.

Four, the cost of providing adequate potable water in a country like India is indeed quite high but the benefits include drastic reduction in water-borne diseases. Moreover, safe water is essential for the development of body and mind, specially of children.

Five, most countries still lack policies for integrated water management and India is no exception. There is need for all-round conservation methods such as water harvesting through an awareness generation mass movement about the impending crisis in the water sector. The movement should be more pronounced in water surplus States, highlighting the precarious situation in deficit States like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka etc., specially in the summer months.

India has not lost her water in an absolute sense but lost control over water. Collective wisdom is needed to evolve an ecological water resource policy. Together with mass forestation, mass water conservation through a peoples' programme can only save the country from being water stressed. Further, given the looming environmental crisis, the water sector needs total attention. There is need for a scientific action plan wherein details of conservation, water harvesting and recycling should be enumerated and followed strictly by municipalities, panchayats and also the private sector. Thus, the present endeavour of the government calls for concerted action by all stakeholders, including voluntary organisations and environmental groups as the challenge is indeed immense, not just for India but all populous countries across the globe. ---INFA

scientists defer the date of the launch of the Moon mission to a future date. Much to the chagrin of millions of people who had been eagerly waiting for the launch of Chandrayaan, the postponement came as a damp squib.

It is reported that the technical snag was a serious one and it was detected just hours before the launch - a gradual drop in the high-pressure helium bottles was the problem. They were meant to operate the valves of the cryogenic upper stage. However, the problem was observed on the GSLV rocket and not on the Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft. Now scientists need to fix the problem and await a new launch window when the optimum path to the moon can be taken.

Disappointment was writ large on the faces of the scientists and so many visitors including President Ram Nath Kovind who had arrived to watch the launch. Needless to say, a large number of viewers outside reached at the odd hour to watch the historic event as well. Anyway, it was good that the scientists were able to detect the technical snag. If it had not been detected, the enormous

amount of money and precious labour that went into its creation and its subsequent launch would have been lost and saddened the nation. Thank God, nothing like that happened, and our scientists could detect the snag well in advance and efforts are on to fix it. Now the nation is awaiting a new date for the launch.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Charitable act

Editor,
The recent news of Indian Railways ferrying 50,000 litres of water wagons to Chennai residents is very inspiring. The relief provided by Indian Railways “Water Train” to ferry drinking water at the time of acute water crisis is commendable. The Hon'ble Ministry of Railways and Southern Railway should be lauded for such a noteworthy effort to help people quench their thirst.

The Government on the other hand should now extensively involve citizens to put efforts to conserve water. Mere dependability on water train to quench the

thirst at short notice should not be the end of the road. Meticulous planning to conserve water including initiating steps to rain water harvesting will help every citizen quench his/her thirst. The efforts now to conserve water at micro level and public awareness programmes regarding the same should increase manifold. Chennai's acute water crisis is a wake-up call to all the citizens to use water judiciously and help conserve water for a better future.

Government may also involve multiple stakeholders and agencies to bring efficiency and innovation in water conservation. An effort should be made to reach out to international water agencies across the globe to understand and adopt smarter ways to conserve water and help citizens to consume it in a judicious manner. A new water policy primarily aimed at better steps to conserve water may also be looked into in order to avoid such a crisis arising yet again in the summer of 2020.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Bengaluru- 72

“As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.”

--- Nelson Mandela

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.336 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2019

Political circus in Karnataka

THE obituary of the 13-month-old JDS-Congress government in Karnataka has been written. The BJP is itching to form a new government, it being the largest party in the assembly and having the muscle-power to take matters forward with able backing from Delhi. At ground level, nothing seemed to work in favour of the Congress, and the BJP quietly played its games. While the BJP is pleased to have the last laugh in Karnataka, the price it pays for the game of defections and the encouragement it gives to such a political culture are matters of concern vis-a-vis the cause of a healthy democracy.

On the other hand, chief minister HD Kumaraswamy deserved no sympathy. He went in for an over-kill, bargained hard and got the CM post even when his JDS got only 37 seats in a house of 224, against 80 for the Congress and 104 for the BJP in the May 2018 assembly polls. The Congress let go of the CM post only to placate the JDS leader and to ensure the BJP did not grab power. Notably, also, the JDS-Congress alliance was an unprincipled, opportunistic tie-up effected after the elections even though the two parties had fought against each other. Once in power, the two parties pulled the government in different directions. A weakling, Kumaraswamy was often on the verge of tears. Amid all these, the corruption graph in governmental deals saw a huge surge.

Matters came to a head only after the BJP's roller coaster victory in the Lok Sabha polls. With the Congress and the JDS getting only one seat each, the BJP swept the polls with 25 seats. This, alongside the drubbing the Congress got at the national level too, fanned dissidence in Karnataka. The drama being enacted in the past few weeks had shades of horse-trading, with dissident Congress legislators being airlifted in a BJP leader's plane to Mumbai for safe-keeping. The matter reached the Supreme Court after the Assembly Speaker rejected the resignation letters of dissidents from the assembly.

The assembly was convened for Thursday to vote a trust motion, even as there was little hope for survival of this government. BJP leader and former CM BS Yeddyurappa is confident of forming an alternative ministry. While such change of governments through unfair means cannot be appreciated, chances are that a BJP government will be able to carry on in a more stable manner. Given the hopeless state of the Congress now, more MLAs are bound to join the BJP in the state.

To the Editor

Who is the outsider WJSU?

Editor,
The West Jaintia Students' Union had issued a warning to so called "OUTSIDERS" not to interfere and raise any alarm on the limestone mining in the area since limestone has been gifted by GOD for the community to mine the way they want (ST July 9, 2019). In the same newspaper (ST July 12, 2019), the editor Patricia Mukhim had raised the question as to who is the outsider that WJSU spoke of. After pausing awhile, I recollected that on the June 29, 2019 as reported in The Shillong Times the next day, the Governor of Meghalaya, Mr Tathagata Roy had expressed his strong views against mining of limestone and the devastation it has caused to the environment which he witnessed while travelling from Shillong to Dawki and back through Amlarem.

The WJSU statement came a week after the Governor's statement. So who is the outsider that the Union is hinting at? After looking at the calendar of events, it can be logically concluded that the outsider is the "Governor." I, for one was really happy to read what the Governor had said about coal mines and limestone quarries, particularly the latter which have damaged the ecology of Meghalaya and called the quarries 'Sore thumbs'. He also said that planting trees is not enough and he will take up the matter with the Chief Minister.

Patricia Mukhim too had raised relevant questions as to how students are concerned about mining when

they should be agitated about the adverse effects of mining. As for me who am not an "outsider" my immediate concern is for the beautiful suspension bridge over Umngot river which is the only one of its kind in the country. Built in the 1930s by the British, this beautiful bridge had served not only our generation but the last generations too. Having crossed its expected life and after 70 years of independence, our government has not been able to build a more modern and stronger bridge to link the southern part of West Jaintia Hills with East Khasi Hills, as well as the capital city of our state Shillong. This unique bridge is being used presently for transport of limestone in hundreds of trucks to Bangladesh every day. Recently when I was travelling to Dawki through this road, I could not but ask myself, "Who allowed this bridge to be abused to this extent?" Are we really heartless, brainless, and greedy to the point where we are blind even when we have eyes? And deaf when we have ears? Have we lost even our commonsense due to greed? I tried to get the story from the side of the authorities and this is what they said, "You see this bridge has crossed its life and the building of a new bridge is in the process, that's why no more maintenance is required." The last time this bridge was painted and repaired was in 2006!

This talk about the new bridge was there since the last three decades since this road happened to be a national highway. The reality is, unless immediate steps

are taken we are going to lose this beautiful bridge. My heart aches when I see the bridge and the abuse it is subjected to. In fact, it should be declared a HERITAGE structure by our Government. If anyone happens to go there, the rust on the bridge and especially on the 8 steel bar on which the bridge is being suspended is clearly visible. If the Government can spend several crores on the Chief Minister's and Chief Justice's residential bungalow, surely they should be able to spare some money to renovate and immediately order maintenance work for the bridge which is long overdue.

In my humble opinion, this bridge should be conserved by the state government and only essential commodities should be transported through it, not limestone. Yes the Government earns revenue from limestone. But my question is that Rs 4000 crore revenue was lost due to the coal ban from 2014 till date as calculated by some. What is the monetary loss to the environment caused by mining? How much will it cost to restore the devastating effects of mining on our eco system?

Unless we quantify this negative effect we cannot make comparisons. Our forefathers addressed nature as "MOTHER" and we have to ask ourselves if we are treating our mothers right? Because if we do not, we cannot blame anyone for the curse when it falls on us.

Every time there is a discussion on the devastating effects of mining on the environment, the word "Sixth

Karnataka crisis: The mind games in play

Supreme Court does tight rope walking

By K Raveendran

turns.

The court had earlier set a deadline for the Speaker to take a decision on the resignation of the MLAs who revolted against the

decide on the status of rebel lawmakers, but refused to grant everything to him on a platter by putting a rider on the his ability to

“The Speaker maintained the position that the resignation drama by the MLAs was part of a ‘strategy’ and, therefore, cannot be considered to have been taken by free will.”

Kumaraswamy government, which the Speaker refused to do as he approached the court in a counter move. The speaker insisted that he cannot be asked to stick to a deadline for taking a de-

force the revolting members to attend the assembly session, in which the Chief Minister is planning to move a vote of confidence motion. The game plan of the ruling alliance was to get the rebel legislators dis-

“The game plan of the ruling alliance was to get the rebel legislators disqualified for violating their respective party whips, which required them to vote in favour of the confidence motion.”

cision as he has to verify the genuineness of the resignation letters of the MLAs. The Speaker maintained the position that the resignation drama by the MLAs was part of a 'strategy' and, therefore, cannot be considered to have been taken by free will.

The court has since changed its stand and upheld the Speaker's power to decide on the resignation of the MLAs without setting a deadline. In its interim order the court said that the Speaker is free to

qualified for violating their respective party whips, which required them to vote in favour of the confidence motion. But the court has virtually blocked that route for the government, which was seeking to use the threat to bring the defiant MLAs around to supporting Kumaraswamy.

The court has given probably the best verdict in the given circumstances, at the same time promising to look into the whole gamut of issues inherent in the crisis. Accordingly, a consti-

tutional bench will be formed to examine the powers and responsibilities of the Speaker for once and all. While the Speaker's role is vital for the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy, over a period of time this role has come under a cloud, with speakers in most cases behaving like an extension of the government and safeguarding its interest to the exclusion of other considerations. Gone are the days when the speaker of the house used to follow a certain degree of impartiality and accommodated the sentiments of the opposition.

In the Karnataka instance itself, though the Speaker has been refusing to decide on the resignation letters of MLAs on the ground that their move was part of a strategy, critics could cite the same thing about his own decision to delay consideration of the resignations. In reality, it amounted to one strategy versus another, as the Speaker was seen trying to help the government tide over the crisis.

While both sides have claimed a degree of success from the latest court order, it brings little cheer to Kumaraswamy as the fate of his ministry appears sealed. With the rebel legislators threatening to stand their course, irrespective of whether they face disqualification, Kumaraswamy has virtually no hope of surviving the crisis.

In a way, that would be the best turn of events in the given situation. The JDS-Congress government had no credibility right from the first day of the ministry being sworn in, with Kumaraswamy constantly blaming the Congress party for not letting him rule in peace. Karnataka is yet another example of post-poll alliances formed only for the sake of capturing power failing to hold beyond the initial euphoria. (IPA Service)

Financial inclusion

Need to refresh policy

By Moin Qazi

Finance is the cementing force that holds all the pieces of our life together. It enables money to be in the right place, at the right time, and for the right situation. To borrow and save is to move money from the future to the present or from the present to the future. To insure is to move money to a "good" situation from one that is "bad". Ideal financial societies are those that provide safe and convenient ways of managing these simple monetary affairs. The process by which people have access to formal financial tools for managing their financial affairs is known as financial inclusion.

India's financial inclusion revolution received a steroidal boost when deposits in bank accounts opened under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) crossed the 1-lakh crore mark. According to government data, the total balance in PMJDY accounts stood at INR 1, 00,495.95 crore as on June-end 2019.

The total number of beneficiaries is 36.06 crore. This puts the average account balance of a Jan Dhan account at Rs 2,787. The number of zero balance accounts under PMJDY declined from 16 per cent of the total accounts in March 2018 to 14.37 per cent in March 2019. Recall, the PMJDY was launched on August 28, 2014, with an aim to provide universal access to banking facilities and accounts opened under it are Basic Savings Bank Deposit and carry an overdraft facility.

Enthusied by the success of the scheme, the government enhanced the accident insurance cover to Rs 2 lakh from Rs 1 lakh for new accounts opened after 28 August, 2018. The overdraft limit has also been doubled to Rs 10,000. The government also shifted the focus on accounts from 'every household' to 'every unbanked adult'. Over 50 per cent of the Jan Dhan account holders are women.

There are several reasons for financial exclusion and these will have to be addressed to make India financially inclusive country. Financial exclusion could be due to several reasons. One of these is the design of the products or services or the way they are sold. There may be barriers such as requirements of minimum balances, credit scores or other thresholds that cannot be met by a large number of people.

Financial institutions are leveraging technology to revolutionise product development, distribution, risk management, and a deepening understanding of lower-income customers to develop sustainable business models that meet the unique needs of the poor. Technological advances are improving data transmission, collection, and analysis, enabling organisations to develop low-cost distribution models and scalable risk-management practices.

By delving deep into data available from mobile usage and other sources and using algorithms, we can get insightful findings and variables that can help building surrogate financial histories of individuals, who do not have formal financial documentation.

Tech companies may be disrupting financial services, but they lack the solid relationships built up by traditional banks over generations. Traditional banks will continue to be the most trusted financial allies of people despite the fact that stringent regulation is effectively hamstringing them in remote areas which are being mostly served by banks weak digital and communications infrastructure and non-standardised processes has impeded shift towards digital banking.

The need of the hour is for the Modi-II Government to

reinvigorate, through a two-pronged strategy, the policy focus on financial inclusion, by one, meaningful access to bank accounts, and two, adopting a life-cycle approach to inclusion, where the account forms the gateway to access an entire gamut of products and services, including long term savings, investments, and insurance.

The biggest barrier to account usage is the lack of proximity to transaction points, and policy has tried to increase this through two routes, namely through payments banks and business correspondent (BC) networks. But viability remains a serious concern given multiple parallel networks of BCs in a geography has resulted in fragmentation of income streams and profitability.

Allowing for white-label BCs will ensure optimal utilisation, with multiple banks sharing the same BC. For this, the white-label BCs must meet certain prudential criteria and real-time technology capabilities for obtaining direct access to settlements systems.

Financial exclusion denies people the stability of a savings account, established credit and insurance. Since low income women live entire lives outside the formal banking system, they struggle with poor credit history and are most likely to fail in getting a loan.

Primarily, financial products are distributed through two systems -- branch and non-branch delivery. However, due to the limited reach and poor viability of the branch system in rural areas, a large number of initiatives have been taken to reach the last mile through the non-branch route. Some of the initiatives have been mobile ATMs, smart cards and mobile banking, use of intermediaries including SHGs, MFIs, post offices, and the business correspondent/facilitators model.

A revolutionary concept born out of it is the business correspondent model -- in which one financial institution or an agent carries out transactions on behalf of another, often because it has no local presence. It is a technology-driven model. This alternate service channels have tremendously expanded the outreach. These agents are better positioned to serve the remoter pockets as they operate in a limited geographical area, enjoy greater acceptability amongst the rural poor, have a greater understanding of the issues specific to the rural poor, and have flexibility in operations providing a level of comfort to their clientele.

It is one of the most effective initiatives that is now being replicated by many players to register rural footprints. The intermediaries chosen to spread banking services are called business facilitators and business correspondents. Facilitators identify borrowers, process loan applications, and create awareness about savings and banking products. Correspondents handle money directly, collecting deposits, disbursing loans, accepting loan repayments, and also selling mutual funds, pension and insurance products. Under the BF model, banks utilise the network of intermediaries such as not-for-profit organisations, microfinance institutions, post offices, non-banking finance companies, and retired bank employees to promote and sell financial services to rural households.

We cannot have one sector solution. There is need for convergence among all the players in the ecosystem. ---INFA

Schedule" comes in to justify mining and it is more shocking to see through media that, even the past and the present government endorsed this view that the Mines and Minerals development & Regulation Act 1957 do not apply in the Sixth Schedule area. Agreed that under the Sixth Schedule, the ownership of land is with the tribal and under the same Constitution, the freedom to use it, was also given to the tribal but in a way that it should not affect others.

Further, not everyone owns a coal mine or limestone quarry. In fact those who had some were already bought by the big players. Just a few days ago I visited a placed where plenty of coal can be seen on the roadside but to my surprise when I entered the village, poverty is clearly visible from the living conditions of the people. When I asked why, I was told that only the rich have coal, not everyone else. In fact with the introduction of machineries in the coal mines even our manual labour is no longer required by the rich.

In West Jaintia Hills, limestone mining started only in the last 10 years or so. Earlier it was extracted only manually for road repairs in small quantities. But at present with the help of machinery the first thing they do is "destroy the fertile top soil" then extract the limestone to great depths. You want to see the devastation with your own eyes? Use Google map and search Nongtalang (located between Dawki and Amlarem) where the destruction of

greenery is clearly visible and that is a 10 year job for the miner. These guys are richer now and can buy more and bigger machines which means they can work faster.

If anyone can stop this madness, it is only his Excellency the Governor of Meghalaya who had witnessed this sore thumb (as he put it) first hand for he needs no vote bank or money to win elections. One thing is sure, with his present views, he will be on a collision course with the present state government which seems to have a single agenda "mining". Almost every day we read media reports that the government is trying very hard to find ways how to mine the minerals in the state and even the Supreme Court order on the matter was only half read by those who are in favour of mining. From what I understand the order is something like, "You can cut the flesh as agreed in the contract but not a drop of blood should be spilled" (The Merchant of Venice).

Yours etc.,
A concerned citizen of
West Jaintia Hills
(Name withheld on
request)

The change we want

Editor,
We live in a constantly changing world. All the advancements that have been made in the field of science and technology have undeniably changed the way we live and do things. Some changes have been for the better and some for the worse. However technology being amoral has contrib-

uted both for the good and evil of society. The question though is, do we really need to change simply for the sake of change, or is it an inevitable thing? It is my personal observation that the men who are supposed to uphold the law and order are part of an institution that is the most corrupt in the state. However, this would not have been possible, if those who make the law are equally or even more corrupt? The executive does not appear to be doing too well either. We have banking institutions that exist primarily to service the rich and have no concern or responsibility to help the poor. We have educational establishments holding on to a method of learning that is as outdated and unproductive as the people who come out of them. Believe me, we have engineers who cannot even change a light bulb, lawyers who cannot argue a case, doctors who are clueless at what they are doing and teachers who couldn't care less about their students. It is therefore up to the present Government to examine the facts and begin to prioritize changes that are absolutely necessary and pivotal. The public can only wait and watch, if the present Government under the leadership of a young and dynamic Chief Minister will truly begin to walk the talk.

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri
Shillong- 2

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

“Our population and our use of the finite resources of planet Earth are growing exponentially, along with our technical ability to change the environment for good or ill.”

--- Stephen Hawking

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.337

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2019

Unending Kulbhushan saga

ONE step forward, two steps backwards. This has been India's experience in its dealings with Pakistan. The Kulbhushan Jadhav case is one example. With the International Court of Justice making it clear that Pakistan must review the death sentence it awarded to detained Kulbhushan Jhadav and allow consular access to him, Pakistan is reeling out excuses. It keeps insisting that India must first acknowledge he is a spy, without which his release would not be granted. The ICJ verdict has vindicated India's stand against Jadhav's conviction and incarceration.

India's latest plea for immediate release of Jadhav, made by external affairs minister S Jaishankar and others, is unlikely to be heeded by Pakistan. India has been trying to save the life of its citizen for the past few years. Jadhav was arrested from an area in Iran, to where he had gone ostensibly for business purposes. Branded as a spy, he had been abducted by Pakistani agents from Iran in March, 2016, and an arrest effected in Balochistan province before he was jailed, tried and convicted. A death sentence was awarded to him a year later. By denying him consular access, Pakistan clearly violated the Geneva Convention.

Pakistan has, a few days ago, lifted the ban on flights from and to India after a four-month impasse after its imposition immediately after the Balakot IAF bombings. Security was obviously a reason for this ban, but not the only reason for its continuation for so long. India suffered losses of hundreds of crores of rupees on this count, but Pakistan too suffered equally in terms of loss of money, also as India too effected a ban on flights from Pakistan to the eastern sector.

Despite a no-talks stand adopted by India vis-a-vis Pakistan on bilateral issues until Pakistan ends its support to terror, India took a few steps forward in relation to opening of the Kartarpur corridor for pilgrimage, which has religious significance for Sikhs from both sides of the border. The second round of talks ended successfully a few days ago. Alongside, Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan gives the impression that he is willing to build bridges with India. The military brass in Pakistan took a hit after the IAF overreach to Balakot at dead of night went unchallenged.

Pakistan is today facing a serious economic crisis. Its single-minded concentration of military build-up did it in. Playing the China game too will have its long-term adverse consequences to Pakistan. It is time Imran Khan acted in a positive manner vis-a-vis his nation's approach to India.

To the Editor

Self-created missed opportunities

Editor,
Apropos Jerome's K. Diengdoh's letter "Was CAU a misplaced priority?" (ST July 16, 2019), my humble reply is No. It certainly is not. Though the respected writer had also gone through "CAU: The missed opportunity", by H. Chikhanthang (Ex Principal Secretary) (ST June 29, 2016) I do like to write on paragraph 4 of the letter since after the publication of which there had been a temporary ceasefire (politicking) between the NPP and the Congress.

Paragraph 4 reads as follows: The views of different departments, such as Personnel, Planning and Finance etc's departments were sought for. They agreed to one point, that the state has no man power of its own to fill up the technical posts particularly at the higher levels. As such setting up of the said university (CAU) would lead to influx of scientists and other staff as well from outside the State. That in my opinion threw a spanner in the works and derailed the whole idea of setting up uni-

versity in the State.

Let the public also learn that the then government at Delhi had by their love and interest for our state taken pains to approach the state government not once but twice. So it only sums up the fact that the main cause for a golden opportunity missed was the scientists' influx and fear psychosis of the bureaucrats. I have used 'influx' but unwillingly as no such word of scientists influx could be detected in any dictionary. I do not have a smart phone with which to search for the word. The other cause, though small was the government of the day granting too much executive powers to bureaucrats.

Thank goodness we in the late 60's were blessed with professors from Dacca and Calcutta, the seat of learning of people like of Bose whose friend was Fermi with Boson and Fermions statistics. Let us also not neglect the 2015 approach of the NDA to Manipur CAU to amend an Act to club Nagaland with Manipur. Meghalaya with two BJP MLA's is being eyed by the Delhi people as not a green pasture same as our Kerala. So the last nail

to the CAU coffin was hit hard.

We in Meghalaya are not so lucky. The Scientists' Influx Fear Psychosis (SIFP) syndrome is not only utterly frustrating but very painful, in which a golden opportunity of 2009 was thrown to the winds. Equally, unlucky were we, when the German Salvationist priests had already acquired land for Agriculture University and Engineering college in 1912. Unfortunately, World War I broke out and the nervous King George VI of the beleaguered Commonwealth sent back our priests to the Fatherland. So a golden opportunity was lost in our Motherland twice one due to SIFP and one due to World War I. Twice unlucky is Meghalaya!

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong -14.

National Register of Citizens

Edditor
Union Home Minister
Amit Shah's statement on Wednesday in Parliament

Crisis of governance in Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

Going by a letter written by a former Principal Secretary of Agriculture that appeared in these columns on how Meghalaya lost the golden opportunity to set up the Central Agricultural University (CAU) much before Manipur was considered as the alternate venue, we learn how decisions are taken on crucial issues that impact the state in the long run. So when the Union Government in its wisdom offered a Central Agricultural University to Meghalaya way back in 1985, the political leaders at the time must have sought the opinion of the senior bureaucrats. According to Mr H Chinkenthang former Principal Secretary, Government of Meghalaya, the views of Personnel, Planning and Finance departments were sought for and the blighted consensus arrived at then by a bureaucracy that is supposed to advise the political executives looking at a long term vision, was as petty and xenophobic as it could get. The decision that a Central Agricultural University cannot be set up because Meghalaya at the time did not have indigenously grown agricultural scientists and technicians and bringing them from outside would lead to influx reeks of xenophobic mindset. The political executives are supposed to take decisions based on their own wisdom and the long term good of the people but that did not happen. Now we repent at leisure. And Manipur stole a march over us because its leaders were far more visionary and were not given to such bigoted ideas.

For several decades, it was the Khasi Students' Union that decided for us that we did not need a railhead at Byrnihat, again because of influx. This decision was taken without doing a cost-benefit analysis of the whole project. It was done at the behest of the large number of transporters who would have lost out with the coming of the railways. We all know that the freight cost by railways is much cheaper than road transport, hence our essential commodities would have cost much cheaper than they do today. But that was not to be. The state succumbed repeatedly to this pressure from the students' union because governments were too fragile

to take hard decisions and politicians were more concerned about staying afloat in their chairs than about the future of the state and its people. Many of the ills we suffer today are because of these short term decisions that were never debated by the people of Meghalaya because we had all outsourced all our problems to interest and pressure groups. I am sure that if such a proposal as the one for CAU were to come from the central government today, the Chief Minister who knows as much if not more than his bureaucrats would not have shot down the project on such a frivolous ground as "influx of scientists."

This brings me to the point on crisis of governance. I was reading a book by Jarred Diamond, "Upheaval - How nations cope with crisis and change." Diamond does an analysis of the word crisis. He says crisis is a sudden realization or a sudden acting on pressures that has been building for a long time. Like humans, the state can also become schizophrenic as it did when it was offered to set up the CAU in 1985 and refused to. Now while humans can take the help of psychiatrists and counseling psychologists, the state has no such resort. It trundles on from day to day even as one crisis piles on top of another with no solution in sight. The solutions obviously must come at a cost which the state is not willing to pay. Let me cite one example. The people of Shillong have wisely analysed that the cause for massive traffic jams today are because some of the leading educational institutions, all of which are located within a stone's throw of each other are unwilling to use school bus services for their students on different pretexts. Several Deputy Commissioners have tried to engage with the heads of these institutions but to no avail. They continue to resist any suggestion for using school buses. Mostly their flippant alibi is that they have no parking space. So the matter ends there. There is no exploring of new ideas. Governments give in too easily, mainly because the

children of the elite study in these schools and any disruption in the status quo could disrupt the fragile relations between those in the bureaucracy and politics and the heads of these institutions. So the problem replicates itself with more cars converging into our roads during school hours. And we continue to watch in helpless anger until the last straw on the camel back slips and we take the law into our hands. Then the law will label that as an act of lawlessness.

Another crisis concerns that of local governance vis-a-vis solid waste collection and disposal. The city of Shillong is divided into the Sixth Schedule zone, the Shillong Municipality zone, the Cantonment zone. The Shillong Municipality collects an annual tax from its denizens for executing certain work which is essentially to collect and dispose of garbage, provide clean water and electricity et al. The areas beyond the Municipality do not have a system in place because although they fall under the jurisdiction of the Sixth Schedule, the District Council does not have the human resource or the capital to double up as a suburban civic body. Every time the issue of cleaning up the city and its main rivers the Umkhrah and Umshyrpi comes up we hit a roadblock because the two rivers cannot be divided into jurisdictions. They both originate in places beyond the Municipality's jurisdiction and then flow through areas within the Shillong Municipality where they are heavily polluted. So how do we build that convergence? How do we reach that turning point in our history?

The Shillong Municipal Board is not an elected body hence the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is accountable to the Urban Affairs Minister and not to Ward Commissioners who would have taken up the responsibility of fixing up things down to the last mile. And why don't we have elected Ward Commissioners? Because we are paranoid that some non-tribal would be elected from some of the wards and the Dorbar Shnong would lose traction. As usual no government has had the spine to see that elections are held,

not for the purpose of wielding political power but to deliver civic governance. The complete failure of civic governance is there for all to see. You have hawkers setting up shop wherever they want to and without as much as a permission from anyone. We are witnessing the collapse of governance at the cutting edge because if garbage is piling up everywhere; if septic tanks empty themselves into rivers; if viewpoints across the state become markets where garbage is left to rot and no one takes responsibility then we don't have basic governance. How can we expect government to deliver on bigger issues?

We are at a point when society needs coping methods. But how does society interface with the state? What are the societal institutions that have been created over the decades? At one time the Dorbar Shnong was supposed to be that social institution, (albeit male-centric) where politics was kept at bay and all, no matter how poor had an equal voice. This has now changed. Despite the march of time women are still not allowed to contest elections to the Dorbar Shnong. But this institution has also been appropriated by the political system since the MLA implements the MLA schemes through the Dorbar Shnong. Over time the poor are alienated from the Dorbar and have lost a valuable platform to air their grievances against the state. We have not developed a robust civil society to engage on an equal footing with the state, hence the state continues to implement development schemes that exacerbate our anxieties instead of alleviating them.

Let's also not pretend that the tribes today are as cohesive as before. We are divided by social classes and the sense of community is therefore a fallacy. There is urgent need to build social institutions that can continuously give feedback to the state and which transcend partisan politics. Failing this we will sink into a deep morass of governance failure at the grassroots instead of rising to the occasion and building coping mechanisms to deal with the crisis.

Local government reforms are crucial for Swachh Bharat

By Sanjeev Sabhlok

Melbourne has been ranked the most liveable city in the world for seven out of the past eight years by the Economist Intelligence Unit. Currently it is ranked second. Much of this liveability can be attributed to Melbourne's efficient local governments (38 of them in all) which ensure high quality local infrastructure.

On the other hand, the Swachh Bharat campaign has been a comprehensive failure. Even thinking about the sights that I came across during my travels earlier this year across India causes my stomach to churn. India is disgustingly dirty and polluted. And local roads and footpaths are in shambles.

In my official work-related role in a Victorian government department in Melbourne, I have been closely involved with the development of local government policy over recent years. Basically, the focus of Victoria's local government system is on alignment of incentives and achieving accountability.

First, local governments in Victoria are almost fully independent, with strong taxation powers (rates and fees). Second, the elected representatives have complete powers to hire (and fire) the CEO of the municipality. These CEOs are hired from the open market on a time-limited contract and paid a significant salary. The CEOs, in turn, have full powers to hire and fire down the line. Elected councillors do not interfere in how the CEO carries out his job. Only if he fails does

districts and only have councils. Cities like Delhi would have around 80 councils. Some functions currently performed by deputy commissioners should be given to councils, such as parts of land management. The other functions should be hived off to state departments.

Second, there is no ability of elected representatives in India's municipalities and parishes to appoint their own CEOs, who are appointed by State governments. Even more problematically (and this is known to very few Indians), even the State governments' powers in this regard are very limited. All senior posts in major municipal corporations are reserved by the Government of India purely for IAS officers in compliance with Part 14 of the Constitution - as implemented through IAS cadre rules. This means that IAS officers are helicoptered on to large municipal corporations (via State governments). These officers are completely unaccountable to the local elected representatives.

Third, Part 14 of the Constitution makes it next to impossible to dismiss the corrupt, leave alone incompetent, municipal employees. Even good IAS municipal commissioners can do virtually nothing if a municipal employee is corrupt or is incapable of performing his job. Fourth, wages of council staff in India are regulated by the State governments. These wages are

"There is also no reward for performance. Instead, there are huge rewards for corruption. India's level of municipal corruption is therefore the highest in the world."

the council hold him to account. Third, councils are manageable in size and there is no distinction in the legislation that applies to rural and urban councils.

In this manner the local governments of Victoria (and the West, more generally) operate on best-practice principles of subsidiarity, democracy and new public administration with a clear line of sight of accountability for delivery.

Consider the council in which I live, the Manningham Council - one of 38 councils in Greater Melbourne. It has a population of 1,23,000 (around the size of a block in India), 9 councillors, one mayor (on rotation), 520 full time equivalent staff (many are part time, so this would mean around 650 staff in all), and a total annual expenditure of \$125 million. The CEO (on a contract) is paid around \$350,000 per year. The CEOs of bigger councils like the Melbourne City Council get much more, around \$460,000.

In India, on the other hand, utter confusion prevails in the local government sector. First, there is a thing called district in India with its own set of officials who are accountable to no one locally. The British set up a system of divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners as the eyes and ears of the imperial government in London. This system is completely inimical to subsidiarity and accountability in an independent democratic nation. (A digression: a number of reports by British deputy commissioners are available in British government archives in London and provide insights into life in India in those days. James Tooley used these records to discover amazing insights into India's ancient school system.) We must abolish

generally very low and insufficient to attract competent staff. There is also no reward for performance. Instead, there are huge rewards for corruption. India's level of municipal corruption is therefore the highest in the world.

Our local government system is dysfunctional by design. Even the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution are very poorly drafted and have no focus on accountability and results. There is no prospect of any competent work being done by India's municipalities under such a system. The idea of Swachh Bharat can be ruled out. Even the incentives of elected representatives are skewed, without meaningful compensation for their time and effort. As a result, they too are complicit in large-scale corruption.

If India has to succeed, we need a complete shakeup of our local government system. We need small local governments that are professionally run and directly supervised by citizens. An incentives-based governance model is needed that gives full control to elected representatives over the outcomes of their council.

In this process of total transformation of local governments in India, a vast number of new jobs will be created, particularly to clean up the country and to build footpaths and roads. India will finally stop stinking like an open urinal. We will then be able to attract millions of additional foreign tourists and billions of dollars in new investment.

(Views expressed above are the author's own).

Published by arrangement with The Times of India

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 are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the Universe. That makes us something very special.”

--- Stephen Hawking

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.338

SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 20, 2019

Congress attrition begins

The Karnataka crisis seems to have had a snowball effect. It spread to Goa and Maharashtra and now West Bengal. But it has not stopped there. Meghalaya also seems to be suffering from the ripple effects of the BJP-Modi wave. According to Mr AL Hek, some Congress MLAs have made overtures to the BJP but they do not as yet have the numbers to affect the two-thirds majority breakaway group. The problem is with the Congress leadership itself which is now in a crisis. With Rahul Gandhi the Congress President having put in his papers and a number of Congress leaders holding offices in different states also joining the chorus and resigning, the Congress does look like a party that is leaderless. The fact that some senior Congress leaders who should know better, have now suggested that Priyanka Gandhi should take on the baton of leading the Party, tells us that there are many who still owe their loyalty to the Nehru Gandhi family.

The very fact that Modi has been attacking the Congress of being led by the “namdaar,” or the elite whereas, the BJP is led by leaders with grass-roots connection, who have risen to the ranks by the process of democratic elections (kamdaar), with himself and Amit Shah as prime examples should make the Congress Party analyse its faultlines. There are grassroots members of the Congress who understand that the Party needs to seriously introspect and have a “chintan baithak” but those at the higher rungs don’t seem to get this drift. The dream of the BJP for a Congress mukht Bharat seems to present itself without much effort from the Party except that the recent Lok Sabha elections seems to have caught the imagination of all those who see the BJP as some sort of a juggernaut out to conquer all rivals and to win their loyalty. In a democracy we need a strong opposition to keep the ruling party in check. That dictum seems to have eroded since everyone wants to be on the winning side. It is nobody’s case that the present set of Congressmen and women who have been sending feelers to the BJP want to be on the ruling side because it is cold and lonely to be sitting in the opposition when you are used to being on the ruling side. The shifting of allegiances is not mandated by the people and actually people who change political sides should fight elections afresh. The 10th Schedule of the Constitution does need urgent amendments.

TO THE EDITOR

The Behdienkhlam imbroglio

Editor,
Regarding the news item on the boy who was arrested yesterday due to his holding of the Jesus poster at Behdienkhlam, the question that arises is whether he was a juvenile and if so were the police right in arresting him. Someone asked the question “Is Behdienkhlam a cultural or religious event?” If religious, then how could the CM inaugurate it? Their idea of secularism is that the head of state must keep away from anything religious. Not necessarily so. Secularism does not mean being “anti-religious” or “areligious” but rather being fair and equal in treatment of all religions. But then again the provisions of article 25 of the Constitution, apart from every citizen’s “right to profess, practice and propagate their religion”, that we often miss is the “freedom of conscience” part attached to it. Meaning that if anything bothers your conscience, you are free to leave it. Don’t go to an event if it is against your conscience. Does this apply even to those who occupy high offices? I think so. They are citizens first. My personal wish though, has always been to see cultural festivals not morphed into religious events. Khlam(famine) is something that all people must be against, not just members of a particular group. Shad Suk Mynsiem too is meant to be a purely

joyful occasion for all, that even I as Christian should be able to participate in. The mistake of past missionaries, who failed to distinguish between the cultural and religious is not the intention here. In Kerala, there is a festival called “Onam” and although it has its own mythical nonsense, such as the dead good king visiting his beloved subjects again and again each year, but the crux of the matter is the ‘goodness’ of a king, and it became a rallying point for all, and all Keralites celebrate it each year with much fervour, Christians and all.

About the boy again, “did the police do right in arresting him?” On what basis? Is any case filed against him? We would like to know. Was it preventative since it was seen as being provocative? Then the action is valid. Now there is need to mention that the ‘Rights’ of Article 25 of the Constitution, come with a rider ‘subject to public order, morality and health’. The ‘public order’ part may have relevance here. Did the boy disturb ‘public order’? If so how? Was he seen as a threat? Did he come with weapons or had bombs strapped to his body? Or were there many more with him? Or was he alone? I don’t think the above questions need serious answer. The only obvious truths that would arise, if investigation is done which I am sure is his

The Central budget needs to relook at taxes and other provisions for attracting investments and steps to fight global trade tensions. The NDA-II government has none so far to fight it at home. Thus, it must strategise to increase trade, merchandise and exports amid the not-so-friendly approach of US President Donald Trump and an aggressive China. Importantly, allocating lower sums, i.e. Rs 45,000 crore, for Chabahar port in Iran has its strategic cost. Tehran today needs support at a critical juncture and it cannot be allowed to drift towards Pakistan. Undeniably, Iran is a critical ally and downgrading relations with it, ostensibly under US pressure, may pose problems. As it is, it is hitting exports and making imports expensive.

More imagination is needed to make the budget provisions boost growth. The steep provisions on taxes are more socialistic that can cause contraction of economy. Increase in income tax, not giving relief to corporate, and applying various tolls and fees may prove to be a dampener for an economy, which is projected to grow at 7 per cent.

The growth rate is needed at a much higher rate. In fact, to make India a \$5 trillion economy it must grow at over 11 per cent. And, even the most optimists say this requires a rate at over 8 per cent.

At the same time, the nation is finding it difficult to fund its programmes. More so as higher tax rate of 42.7 per cent would put more individual earners away from the market. In comparison the rate is much higher than in many competing countries in Asia and elsewhere. This would put off foreign investors as they wouldn’t like to give more in taxes as it would hit their capacity to repatriate.

Additionally, even Indian billionaires may move to low tax destinations be it Dubai or Singapore. And it is no secret that many have already left the country. An estimate suggests that as many as 7000 desi billionaires have gone looking for greener pastures.

Further, the concept of

religious conviction. He came with religious convictions and was prepared to pay the price for his beliefs.

Neither the police nor anyone can fault him on that. They can counsel him, but not impound him.

Yours etc.,
Edelbert Kharsyntiew,
Via email

Trinamool Congress disintegrating

Editor,
The saga of desertion of high and low-profile members belonging to the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal continues unabated. The latest being the case of 12 movie and TV stars joining the BJP, which has sent shivers down the spine of the TMC. Why has the Mamata’s party lost its charm and is unable to retain its members? Ever since the last Lok Sabha election, the sway of the TMC party has been petering out, and it is taking a nosedive.

There may be a dozen reasons for the mass exodus from the TMC party. According to West Bengal BJP President, the people of the state are inspired by the leadership and development work of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But he alleged that many councillors who had quit the TMC to join the BJP

calling someone rich or super rich also calls for a review. This should be done not only on the basis of the total money one is getting, but it must be weighed in terms of erosion for continuous inflation. This has been recognised for those earning up to Rs 5 lakh, and have been given a waiver. But the benefit has not been extended beyond.

The tax burden is becoming unbearable. Despite GST, Indians are the highest tax payers! The total taxes paid by a taxpayer remain at 70 per cent and even those not under the I-T bracket have to shell out over 40 per cent as taxes. It will sound to reason that the highest I-T should not be over 20 per cent. For just imagine if someone having an

The tax burden is becoming unbearable. Despite GST, Indians are the highest tax payers! The total taxes paid by a taxpayer remain at 70 per cent and even those not under the I-T bracket have to shell out over 40 per cent as taxes. It will sound to reason that the highest I-T should not be over 20 per cent.

earning of Rs 25 lakh is forced to shell out about Rs 8 lakh as taxes, would he have the capacity to do other expenditures that are necessary to lubricate the market? This is an immediate correction that is required.

Worse, the government has also continued with taxing the savings. This is plain simple illogical as it is a disincentive towards savings. Let us remember that Indian families are born savers, but as a policy these are now being discouraged to save.

This forces the government to borrow at higher rates. And thus its latest decision to borrow from foreign markets might cause severe problems in due course of time. In fact, it may even hurt sovereign ratings. For a government that has revenue worries, domestic borrowing is

were being harassed. The moot question is how long the TMC can retain its members by using force or violence. Therefore, the best policy for the TMC party to pursue in order to survive is to democratize it rather than tyrannize.

The BJP is over the moon now. Unexpected gains for the BJP in the last Lok Sabha election was a great impetus and indeed a game changer in the otherwise placid politics in West Bengal. Just as the coming events cast their shadows before, people are leaving the TMC for a new emergence of political dispensation under the BJP. Come Assembly elections and the BJP has buckled up. Further, BJP is expected to gain more than it is expected to lose as the people seem to be intrinsically oriented to the saffron color. So, the inexorable egress has already set into the TMC, and soon the party may disappear into oblivion unless some drastic changes are made in the policies of the party.

Your etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Guwahati floods

Editor,
I am a school student, and I am very sad that in this year’s floods in Assam, many people are

cheaper and it therefore must study the market as well as some of the earlier practices. Burning the boat of savings is a costly experiment, and the nation is paying a heavy price for it.

Besides, the external borrowings suffer twin shocks. As soon as a sovereign government enters the external debt market, not only do the rates go up but it also hits the rupee. This means that repayments could be doubly expensive. There are other risks as well, which needs the government’s attention. The logic is of now that if the government borrows from abroad, it would leave more with the financial institutions for corporate borrowers, needs a serious re-checking.

Figures reveal that exports in June suffered.

Sitharaman can take steps to announce withdrawal of taxes on savings, as domestic savers are dealing with a twin problem. Their savings are being virtually robbed by taxes and the repo rate benefits have never been given to them. The nation may remember that domestic savings and organisations such as the LIC have been major contributors for growth and it the lopsided taxes which are causing the anxiety.

Interestingly, the Economic Survey is eloquent on the growth path. It says that no country had ever grown fast without buoyant exports and has called for policies to boost exports, GDP, savings and investment. Those blaming the advisers need to be cautious, as at the end the advisers are right, but were not paid heed to. So neither exports have grown for five years nor have the Indian products competitive prices.

Despite boasting of inching towards becoming a super power, it is a high cost, high taxed economy. Capital, land, labour, electricity, railway and air freight, road tolls and I-T are at the highest non-competitive rates. This eases inroad by countries like China, which eventually hurts the local “Make in India” initiative.

Besides, as dividends are taxed high, it would be ideal recipe for the corporate to avoid its major announcements. Several other tax measures would invite tax avoidance and more stringent the laws, more would be the unfair means. And let us note that all such measures lead to reduction of money circulation. Digitisation is becoming difficult with the BSNL backbone failing, which causes a further crunch. It hits the initiative of boosting both rural and farm economy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi needs to intervene. He needs to straighten the crooked lines in the budget. To make the economy competitive, he must cut down many taxes and tolls so that prices are internationally attractive for competing with the rest of the world. --- INFA

National Cricket Academy appointed by BCCI. Mr Rahul Dravid is a highly talented professional while also being successful as Team India A Coach and is perhaps the best choice for the role. India ‘A’ has already won U-19 World Cup owing to Dravid’s mentoring capabilities and thus the youngsters have tasted success under his leadership as a coach.

Apart from coaching young Indian cricketers at NCA, Dravid also has an additional responsibility of mentoring women’s cricket team, India U-19, U-23, Head Coaches and Support staff in order to prepare stronger and better products from the Academy. The Committee of Administrators (CoA) should also be appreciated for taking a stand on possible conflict of interest in Dravid’s appointment to head NCA by strictly asking him to demit the previously held role. One hopes that under Dravid’s leadership mature and highly skilled cricketers talents will emerge through effective key learnings under NCA as an umbrella body.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Bangalore -72

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Rahil Nora Chopra

NOW RAJASTHAN, MADHYA PRADESH CONGRESS GOES ON SLIPPERY SLOPE

After Karnataka and Goa, now the BJP is trying to destabilise the Congress government in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. With the induction of three Congress defectors in Goa Cabinet, the ambitious Congress MLAs of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are creating pressure on Ashok Gehlot and Kamal Nath respectively to induct them into the Cabinet, even as the governments in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are depending on the support of BSP and independent MLAs. On the other hand, BSP chief Mayawati is now pressuring both the Congress chief ministers for inducting her MLAs in the Cabinet. The Congress party is trying their best to hold their MLAs in both the states. With Rahul Gandhi leaving the all India party presidentship and until a new party president comes along, it would be difficult for Ashok Gehlot and Kamal Nath to hold on to the Congress MLAs. Needless to say that BJP state leaders of both the states are watching the development closely. With the Congress defeat in the Lok Sabha election in both the states, the rival tribes of former and potential chief ministers are waiting for the time to stage a rebellion-cum-exit from the Congress.

CAN DIDI PUT A STOP TO TMC MLA EXODUS TO BJP?

After the Lok Sabha election, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is

whether Prashant Kishore would help TMC in winning the local body elections.

CENTRE LOOKING AT ‘MINING SCAM’ DURING AKHILESH’S RULE IN UP

After the breaking of SP-BSP alliance, Mayawati is blaming SP for the defeat of her party in the Lok Sabha election. This is despite the BSP winning 10 seats this time against no seat in 2014 Lok Sabha election, while the SP has won only 5 seats. Even Dimple Yadav, the wife of Akhilesh Yadav, has lost the Lok Sabha election. It may be due to Modi wave, or due to Akhilesh’s uncle Shivpal Yadav, but the BJP government in the Centre is now inquiring about the mines scam in Uttar Pradesh during the tenure of Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav. The CBI has raided in many places of Lucknow and Sultanpur and are going about in the same way as they had done in fodder scam of Bihar, in which Lalu Prasad Yadav was the main accused. According to Senior SP leaders, this is the time for unity in the family to save the party and Akhilesh Yadav.

CONGRESS, BJP TRADE BARBS OVER KARNATAKA CRISIS

After the rebellion, Congress MLAs travelled from Bengaluru to Mumbai in a chartered aircraft. The Congress party is blaming the BJP for taking the MLAs to Mumbai because the Jupiter aviation company belongs to BJP MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar. However, Chandrasekhar tweeted that he should not be blamed because the chartered flight service is

The CBI has raided in many places of Lucknow and Sultanpur and are going about in the same way as they had done in fodder scam of Bihar, in which Lalu Prasad Yadav was the main accused. According to Senior SP leaders, this is the time for unity in the family to save the party and Akhilesh Yadav.

worried about the unity within her party TMC. Many of the MLAs and municipal councillors have left the TMC and joined the BJP, even as the election of Kolkata Municipal Corporation is going to be held next year, 2020, and after that in 2021, the West Bengal assembly election will be held. To mitigate the attrition of TMC legislators, Mamata Banerjee has taken the advice of election strategy expert Prashant Kishore; yet, every week, about two to four TMC leaders are joining the BJP. At present, the Bidhannagar Mayor and the MLA Sabyasachi Dutta are ready to join the BJP. According to BJP leader Mukul Roy, MLA Sabyasachi Dutta has recently met him. Meanwhile, in a major boost, several TMC councillors who had joined the BJP last month have returned to the TMC fold. This is definitely going to help the TMC regain Kanchrapara and Halisahar municipalities in North 24 Pargana district and South Dinajpur Zila Parishad. According to TMC leader and MP Abhishek Banerjee, many TMC leaders had joined BJP after the Lok Sabha polls and out of total 23 councillors in Halisahar, many of the TMC councillors had gone to BJP, but 13 of them came back to TMC again on 9 July. So TMC has the support of 13 councillors out of 23, but Mukul Roy responded that this was nothing but a political strategy, and that the returnee MPs will work for the BJP, not TMC! In the same way, the members of South Dinajpur Zila Parishad had gone to BJP and they too returned to TMC, but the local BJP leaders are blaming TMC that they are using police and administration to force them to go back to TMC. It remains to be seen

available to everyone and there is no relation between the BJP and hiring the chartered plane. Karnataka Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy was advised by his well-wishers before going abroad last week that his rival and former CM Siddaramaiah was up to mischief, so he should not travel abroad at this juncture. Meanwhile, BJP MP Umesh Jadhav who defeated Mallikarjun Kharge in the Lok Sabha election from Gulbarga, has suggested that if Dalit leader Mallikarjun Kharge is made the Chief Minister in place of HD Kumaraswamy, it would unite the party and will bring back all the Congress-JD(S) MLAs.

EMBARRASSMENT FOR SITHARAMAN AS JOURNALISTS BOYCOTT DINNER

Around 16 reporters and editors attended the post-budget dinner, while rest of the journalists boycotted the event, causing a huge embarrassment for the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. In an unprecedented show of unity and in an effort to safeguard journalistic freedom, over 100 journalists covering Finance Ministry decided not to attend the post-budget dinner party hosted by Sitharaman at the Taj Mahal hotel in Delhi on Friday last. Journalists unanimously decided to boycott the post-budget dinner because the Finance Ministry has put in place restrictions on the entry of media persons into North Block allowing access to only those accredited journalists who have a prior appointment with an official. Journalists have requested the Finance Minister to revoke the ban. (IPA)

Thoughts on architecture

By Sujoy Dhar

We are looking at architecture in a form of advocacy," says Todd Palmer, Executive Director, Chicago Architecture Biennial, sitting for this interview in a sprawling hallway of the city's centrepiece building, Chicago Cultural Center, overlooking the iconic Millennium Park that now boasts of the 200-steel plate sculpture Cloud Gate, a selfie darling and new age symbol of Chicago, designed by India-born British sculptor Anish Kapoor.

As he speaks — with the writer's eyes inevitably travelling outside the window panes to catch glimpses of the park with mind-blowing public arts — Todd exudes pride to be part of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, the largest architecture and design exhibition in North America. It is returning to the city on September 19, to continue till January 5, 2020.

The third edition of the biennial is particularly inspired by Chicago, moving beyond the grand narratives of the city's architectural heritage to explore its history and the journey of urban development.

"Biennial is North America's largest exposition of architecture. You look beyond the famous and discover the ordinary and unsung who influenced architecture. The focus is on housing and public space," he says.

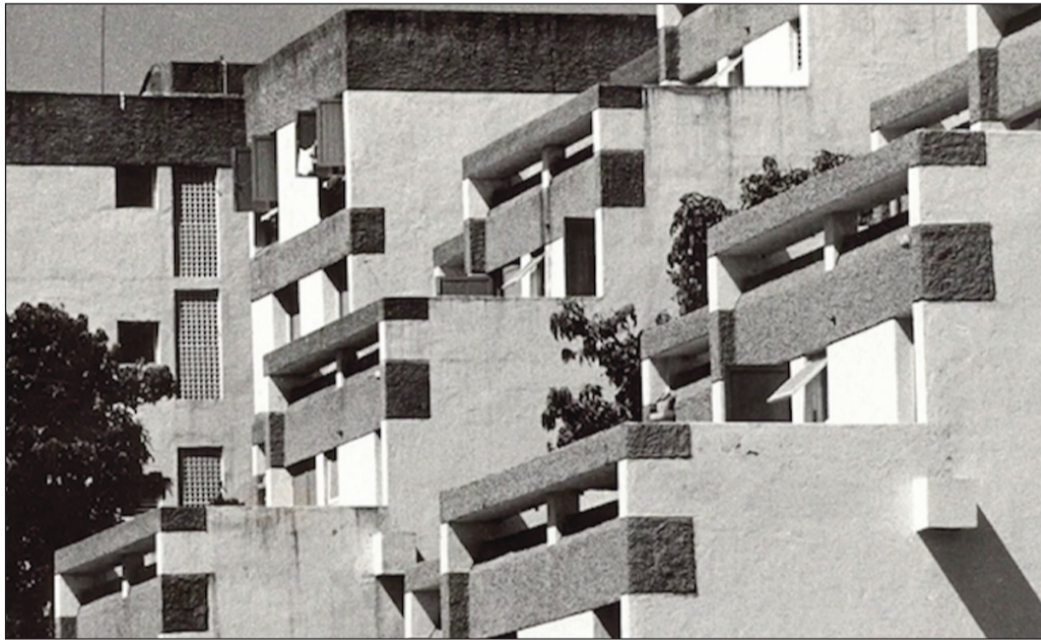
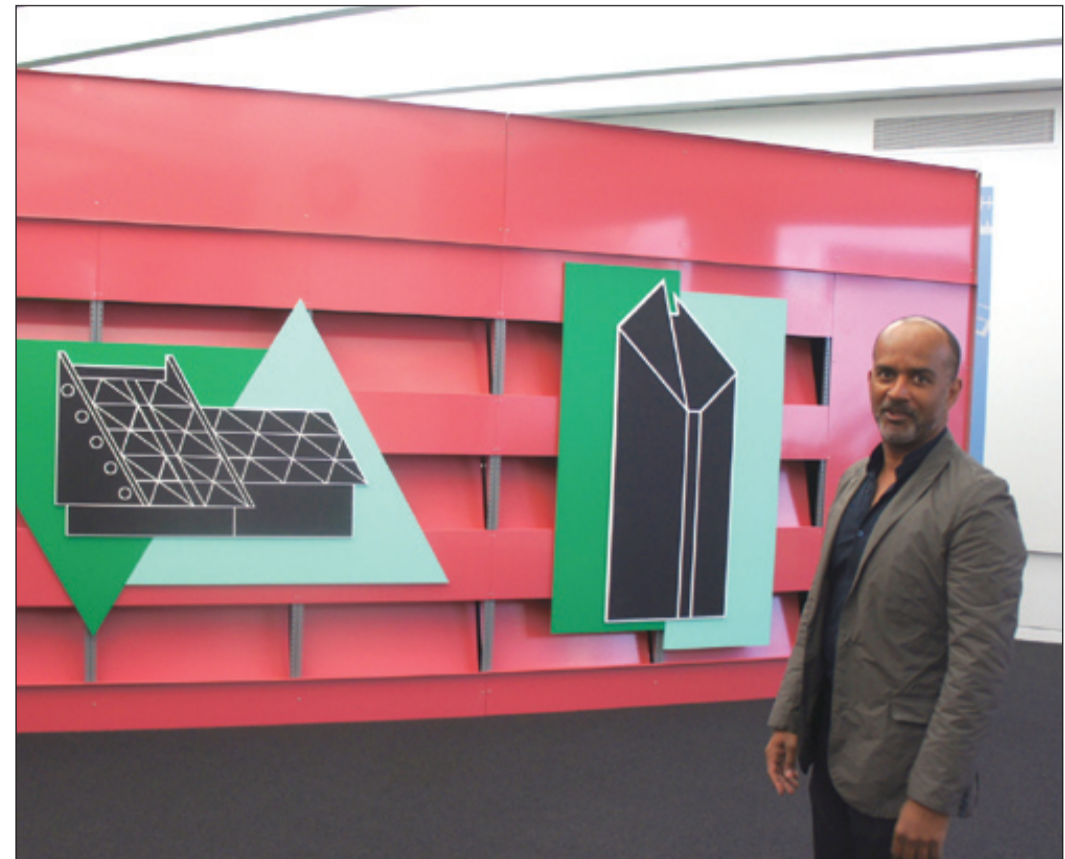
"We invite practitioners of sanitation and clean cities from India, Africa and Europe," informs Todd assuring that the biennial is going to be a public spectacle.

Developed through a researched approach, the biennial will address the potency of space, architecture and the natural world as they relate to four areas of inquiry: (1) No Land Beyond, which draws inspiration from indigenous approaches to nature, ecology, and landscape that transcend property ownership; (2) Appearances and Erasures, which explores both shared and contested memories in consideration of monuments, memorials, and social histories; (3) Rights and Reclamations and (4) Common Ground, which foreground aspects of rights, advocacy, and civic purpose in architectural practice, including affordable and equitable housing.

India connect in 2019

This year, India's Mumbai-based architect and urban designer Rohan Shivkumar and filmmaker-cinematographer Avijit Mukul Kishore are among the invitees in the discipline of

Chicago Architecture Biennial is returning to the city in September for over three months & this year, India too has a significant presence



"Film" at the biennial.

"We are going to be part of the biennial and share our works on architecture and modernity. I can only share this much now," says Rohan, who is the co-editor of the publication on an interdisciplinary research and art collaboration — 'Project Cinema City'.

The duo are makers of 'Lovely Villa — Architecture as Autobiography', a 30-minute documentary on famous architect Charles Correa's LIC Colony in Mumbai's coastal suburb of Borivali.

While one of the makers of the film, Rohan Shivkumar, grew up in Lovely Villa, the name of the apartment building or the LIC colony designed by Charles Correa to represent an imagination of the ideal community for a modern India back in early 1970s, the film is about the relationship between architecture, everyday life, family, coming of age, desire, and the memory of 'home'.

Another participant this year is Mumbai-based studio CAMP in the discipline Architecture. CAMP was founded in No-

vember 2007 by Shaina Anand, Sanjay Bhangar and Ashok Sukumaran. CAMP is a studio, in which ideas and energies gather and become interests and forms.

In the discipline of Art-Video/New Media, the participant is RMA Architects (Boston-Mumbai), founded by Rahul Mehrotra, who is an architect, urbanist and professor of Urban Design and Planning and Chair of the Department of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

(Clockwise from top left) Chicago city through the lens of Iwan Baan; Todd Palmer at the venue of the biennial inside Chicago Cultural Centre; and a still from the documentary Lovely Villa

Mehrotra has designed projects that range from recycling urban land and master planning in Mumbai to the design of art spaces, boutiques, weekend houses, factories, social institutes and office buildings across India — encompassing interior design and architecture to urban design, conservation and planning.

According to Todd, performances and symposiums would mark the biennial which is committed to providing a platform to unite the global vanguard of architectural thought and practice with the city of Chicago's unique legacy of architectural innovation.

In addition to its biennial constellation of exhibitions, full-scale installations, programming, and educational initiatives, the organization stewards and promotes an ongoing dialogue on architecture in and around the city. Each edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial takes as its core a theme that addresses the most compelling issues in contemporary architectural practice.

"Here we try to reach out to decision makers. At the 3rd biennial there is also a forum for leaders," he says, adding

that Chicago's mayor is also involved in the event in a big way.

"We invite the architects, research architects and educators, looking at architecture as a form of advocacy," he says.

Chicago as inspiration

The third edition of the biennial is particularly inspired by Chicago but moving beyond its grand narratives of the architectural glory. This approach has inspired a broader view on the field of architecture to embrace practices that span building, design, planning, visual art, policymaking, education and activism.

Emanating from the central exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center and extending into the city, the 2019 biennial will feature a series of new commissions, residencies, partner projects and public programmes.

"Our approach to this edition of the biennial has evolved through conversations with architects, spatial practitioners and everyday people in Chicago and other global locations, including through partnerships fostered in our research initiatives in the cities of Sao Paulo,

Johannesburg, and Vancouver," says artistic director Yesomi Umolu.

"Through these engagements, we have drawn out a myriad of stories about how lived experiences across global communities, cities, territories, and ecologies resonate with architectural and space-making practices."

The central focus of the exhibition is to create reciprocal space for the exchange of ideas and strategies that open the field of architecture to new viewpoints, addressing the urgent and shifting conditions of our societies and imagining the built environment anew.

As Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel sums up, "The biennial is a centerpiece of the Chicago cultural landscape, bringing the entire city together to celebrate, explore, and understand the legacy and impact of architecture. As a city with an architectural history that forms such a strong foundation of our identity, we are thrilled that this year's team will shine a light on Chicago as a global convener for leading architectural thought."

(IBNS-TWF)

(Image courtesy: Chicago Architecture Biennial)

Let there be pets at home for your kids' benefit

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



I meet so many mothers who won't let their children walk barefoot in the house or the park, won't let them touch snails, won't let them grasp mud or go out in the hot rain of the monsoon, won't let them go near any animals and refuse to keep a pet because it might bring in bacteria. Their children wear socks throughout the year, have no idea what a plant is, apart from the cut flowers they see in vases at home. And they are sicker than most children.

For decades, paediatricians warned mothers that if they wanted their children allergy-free they should keep animals out of the house.

By the early 2000s, a number of studies showed the opposite — that exposure to pets in the very early stages of life confers protective benefits and prevents the development of allergic rhinitis, asthma and eczema. Of the nine studies analyzed in 2011, six detected lower levels of IgE antibodies and 15 to 21 per cent less eczema in children who had been exposed to cats or dogs as soon as they were born.

Allergies have been on the rise since the 20th century. Even in a country where nutrition levels are higher, like the US, 8-10 per cent of children have asthma, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows the

airways. It causes recurring bouts of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing. Conventional wisdom says reducing allergenic substances at home will help lessen asthma symptoms.

However, the Urban Environment and Childhood Asthma (URECA) study, funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), points in the opposite direction: that exposure to certain allergens and bacteria early in life, before asthma develops, may protect children from asthma.

Since 2005, URECA has tracked newborns who are at high risk of developing asthma because at least one parent has asthma or allergies, for seven years. Their findings were published in 2017, in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

Of the 442 children, 130 (29 per cent) had asthma at the age of seven. The children who didn't have it had, strangely enough, higher levels of cockroach, mouse, and cat/dog bacteria in the dust samples, collected from the children's homes, during the first three years of life starting at three months. "Our observations imply that exposure to a broad variety of indoor allergens, bacteria early in life may reduce the risk of developing asthma," says URECA principal investigator. The microbes that pets carry into the home from outdoors, could mature baby's developing immune system and train it to fend off assaults from allergens.

Researchers at Kuopio University Hospital in Finland, writing in the journal Pediatrics, say babies who grow up in homes with a dog or a cat have a lower risk of allergies than



children who live pet-free. Their study found that living with household dust from homes with a dog, prevented infection with a common respiratory virus that is thought to increase the risk of childhood asthma.

Research at the University of Alberta, published in the journal Microbiome, shows infants exposed to dirt and bacteria from furry family pets, especially dogs, showed much higher levels of two types of gut microbes associated with lower risks of obesity and allergic disease.

Over 700 infants, in the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development Study between 2009-2012, also showed that those who grew up with dogs had lower rates of asthma and more diverse groups of microbes in their guts. The study also suggests having pets in the house could reduce the chances of a mother passing on a strep infection during birth, which can cause pneumonia in newborns.

Scientists at the University of San Diego Knight Lab, which is doing one of the largest studies on microbes in humans, has found that living with dogs provides the body protective benefit.

Each species has a different impact and, without exposure to a diversity of bacteria, the body doesn't learn how to differentiate between dangerous and harmless bacteria. This theory has emerged after more than a dozen studies showed that children born into families with significant farm animal exposure had fewer instances of asthma and allergies, compared with those that had no exposure to farm animals.

In a 2010 study, done in the University of California, researchers

discovered that homes with dogs had a far greater abundance of bacteria than those with no pets. The scientists then researched on whether the dog microbe-rich house dust would protect mice against allergens. It did.

In the latest study, scientists from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden looked at another angle: if having more than one pet would increase the benefit. They looked at data from two previous studies. One of them had tracked 1,029 children from infancy to age 8. Forty-nine per cent children, who had not had pets at home during their first 12 months of life, had allergies. This fell to 43 per cent in children who, as babies, had lived with one pet and 24 per cent for children who had lived with three pets. Two of the children had lived with five pets — neither of them had allergies.

Can exposure to animals help pregnant women's growing babies? A 2009 study in Europe showed that the umbilical cord blood in pregnant women with farm exposure had more active neonatal immune cells. This means that the microbes in the pregnant mother are doing something positive for the child.

We've known for years that dogs were good for our mental health. Now there is clear proof that those health benefits go even deeper. Pets prevent allergies. Exposure to an animal increases the baby's immunity. The more cats or dogs you live with as an infant, the less your chances of getting asthma, hay fever and eczema, to name a few diseases.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@ntic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

Make big in media

By Ranjan K Baruah

There have been changes and development in the media industry in recent years. Apart from traditionally famous print media, now the focus is more on electronic media. There were few channels some decades back as the media was mostly controlled. But now there are many television channels and FM stations in our country. This industry brings more opportunity for broadcast engineers.

Broadcast engineering is the field of electrical engineering and now to some extent computer engineering and information technology, which deal with radio and television broadcasting. Audio engineering and RF engineering are also essential parts of broadcast engineering, being their own subsets of electrical engineering. Broadcast engineering involves both the studio end and the transmitter end (the entire air chain) as well as remote broadcasts. Every station has a broadcast engineer though one may now serve an entire station group in a city or be a contract engineer who essentially freelances his or her services to several stations (often in small media markets) as needed.

There is no direct course in degree level but it is part of other engineering and IT courses. Some degrees under broadcast engineering are Electronic Engineering, Telecommunications Engineering, Computer Engineering, Information Technology and Broadcast Technology. It is not offered as a main discipline in undergraduate engineering courses. Candidates with four-year bachelors' course in electrical engineering, electronics and communication engineering, computer engineering, information technology and audio engineering can pursue a career in broadcast engineering.

Aspirants may go for some special course after their basic degree or diploma in engineering. Diploma, post graduate and certificate level courses in broadcast technology are offered by several institutes in India. Students must be from science stream to study courses related to broadcast engineering.

Due to the growth in the entertainment industry, broadcast engineering is be-

coming a lucrative career option.

Broadcast engineers may have varying titles depending on their level of expertise and field specialty. Some widely used titles include broadcast design engineer, broadcast integration engineer, broadcast systems engineer, broadcast IT engineer, broadcast IT systems engineer, broadcast network engineer, broadcast maintenance engineer, video broadcast engineer, TV studio broadcast engineer, outside broadcast engineer and remote broadcast engineer.

Apart from having technical qualification, the aspirant must be hard working and ready to work in different situations and time. As most of the channels are 24x7, one must be prepared to work even in night shift. Initially there might be more struggle and challenges but with experience one may earn more name and fame. One must have patience, good communication skills and other required skills to be successful as broadcast engineer. Some people might gain experience without a formal engineering degree but as the field is challenging it is preferable to have formal engineering degree to become a broadcast engineer.

One must prepare an attractive CV and post it in different job sites to get short-listed for interviews. There are advertisements related to broadcast engineers. Knowledge of different Indian languages is another added skill as one might get the opportunity in different parts of the country. Like private channels or media houses, government also engages broadcast engineers in Prasar Bharati as it is

one of the largest networks in India managed by the government. There are limited private channels in the North East. We have seen private TV channels and FM stations in a few states in the region. More channels will bring more opportunity for new and experienced individuals associated with broadcast engineering. There are individuals from the North East who are working as broadcast engineers with leading channels.

(The author is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at bkrjanjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)



An awakening of the soul

By Lopamudra Gogoi Bora

Has it ever occurred to you that the things you have not counted as important have become most precious possessions later? Well, it has happened to me lately when I had an opportunity to visit Tripura, one of the most graceful states in the North East.

As I landed in Agartala airport, I was welcomed with a gust of monsoon wind and while heading towards my hotel in the car, season's rain followed, soothing the air around and I could not help but thank God for it. I was little sceptical as to what awaited me in my maiden visit to this state. But my qualms were soon rested to peace as a whole new world unbolted ahead of me. The car gently passed by the seemingly pleasant but scanty dwellings towards the city that surprisingly had a very welcoming and warm approach. As we headed towards the city, the atmosphere grew vivid and vibrant with a fresh splash of youthfulness and gracefulness. That moment the traveller within me knew that at a perfect time I was right at the perfect place.

The dreams lay ahead

After freshening up, the temptation of hitting the city to explore its treasures was such that I could not help but move out in spite of being a little haggard. I asked the chauffeur where he would take me first and his answer was so prompt as though he had already planned it for me. He then drove me to the grandest attraction of the state that is the Ujjayanta palace, popularly known as the Rajbari. We were still on our way when with a tad of pride he briefed me about this beautiful palace that was built in 1901 and was once the residence of the king of Tripura. But now the palace has been transformed into a state museum that treasures the history, art and culture of the entire North East.

It was almost late afternoon when we entered the premise of the palace and I could not take my eyes off the stupendous architecture as it stood in front of me in all its glory. The garden in the frontyard of the palace magnified the ambience of the entire area. Gradually the evening set in the western sky, radiating a dark saf-



TRAVELLER'S DIARY

from mask, casting a magical spell all around. The palace glittered with lights and with it the beauty of Rajbari was enhanced manifold.

This palace is one of the most beautiful and elegant structures of pre-independence architecture that our country has to offer but it has not gained the desired popularity that it truly deserves.

A new morning

I started the next morning with renewed excitement as I was supposed to visit the Neermahal in Melaghar, approximately 50 km from Agartala. Located amidst the grand Rudrasagar lake, Neermahal is nothing less than a paradise unfolding in front of my eyes. The 10-minute boat ride to the palace will be always etched in my heart as the view of this Palace (which was once the summer palace of the King of Tripura).

Neermahal stands out to be one of the two water palaces in India, the other one being the Jal Mahal in Rajasthan. At that moment, I wondered where I was all these years and why I did not consider Agartala in my travel list. The grandness and magnanimity can be best filled when you stand on the terrace of Neermahal and you are sure to get overwhelmed by its sheer beauty all around.

Still occupied and awestruck by the elegance and magnitude of Neermahal, I headed towards 'Tripureshwari' temple, the most revered temple of the state. It is one of the 51st Shakti peeths in India and is a widely visited temple by the devotees from all over the state. The huge friendly turtles in the pond on the temple premises are a wonderful sight to behold.

I even had the good fortune of dining with one of the Kokborok families in Agartala (Kokborok is one of the tribes of Tripura) and they made sure my plate was full of local cuisines of which I had never heard of. Tripuri cuisine is an awesome combination of herbs, veggies and of course non-vegetarian dishes which distinctly represent the uniqueness of their food habits and food culture. The bamboo shoot curry prepared without oil was something that just melts in the mouth blasting an array of tastes and flavors. The love, hospitality and simplicity of our host made the entire milieu even more palatable.

History unfolds at Unakoti

At a distance of approximately five hours from Agartala, there lies the ancient rock sculpture site called Unakoti (in picture) that belongs to

the 11th century. Standing there and looking at the stone curving as tall as 30 feet will definitely leave you amazed and startled as to how they were curved out in those days. The entire area is scattered with rock relics and sculptures which speak of the legacy of the richness of Indian art. The sight of huge Shiva faces, Durga, Ganesha and other Gods and Goddesses set against the lush greenery and trickling rivulet is a treat to the eyes. The nearest railway stations to reach Unakoti are Dharmanagar and Kumarghat having well connectivity from Agartala. Carrying some packed lunch would be advisable if you are visiting Unakoti as there are no proper restaurants nearby.

Memories never leave you behind

Ever since I left Agartala, the memories have been a part of me like a shadow. The royal aura that this city has is unmatched and unrivalled. This is a destination that will completely fill a traveller's inquisitive and ever wandering soul. So if you have not yet planned your next trip, it is time you pack your bags to Tripura. The best time to travel to Agartala is from October to March. Agartala is well connected with flights from Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Guwahati and have good railway connectivity.

(The author is a Mumbai-based travel blogger and costume stylist)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambani

Sunday, JULY 21, 2019

Moon square Jupiter on your solar return chart ensures an exceptional year ahead. Those who are in academics field will excel. They will be rewarded for their efforts. Those in research field or undertaking higher studies too will get success. Students will clear important exams and also get admission in courses of their choice. You will get a chance to make your creative skill shine at your workplace. You will be showing a novel approach for getting things done. You will be having a lot of one-to-one level interaction with colleagues. There would be ample business opportunities. Profits and income will grow. Relations between family members will remain cordial. You will be involved in religious activities and also visiting temples and holy places.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

There would be a lot of traveling, communications and conversation to keep you busy. Arguments with a lover may be blown out of proportion far too easily. Professionally it might seem like stagnation, but it's actually a period of review and rest. Speculation and gambling are not advised right now. It would be wise to be especially clear when it comes to communicating with romantic partners, and children; or take this time to re-examine issues rather than communicating prematurely.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your work status will change for the better. There could be a promotion or new job opportunity that enables you to come into the limelight in a positive way. Authority figures, elders, parents in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you move ahead 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 dealing with the assignment at hand. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would admire and adapt new styles, unconventional ideas, and unfamiliar situations. It is a good time to expand your circle of influence. You take an 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 of the little things that contribute to a feeling of efficiency and competency. Laying down a strategy would keep you on track. Some travel is imminent and will be beneficial.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider audience is possible during this period. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider your priorities. Re-thinking the suitability of your romantic relationships is possible now, but you should avoid jumping to any premature decisions. There may be the need to revisit old issues with your children or lover else there could be some communication problems with them.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your professional skills, wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain an exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. Surprises surrounding the compassionate care and attention you give others, as well as the work and service you render, may be in store. This could manifest into finding a balance between practical concerns and spiritual or non-material matters.

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)

It's easier for you to approach sensitive, intimate, and personal matters with rationality and logic in this period. As such, this is a great time to open up conversations about topics that normally might cause waves, such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. You know how to relate to others and you do so with warmth and affection. You will seek out the company of close friends who stimulate your thoughts and ideas. You may attract a younger person into your life.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Essentially, you are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or simply new subjects during this period. Negative potentials include being excessively opinionated or getting easily fired up over differences in points of view, or legal fights. You may be drawn into some form of service that will bring deep personal satisfaction. You seek perfection and distinction in your work and this quality brings you a more responsible position.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

People see you as a responsible, sincere, 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 you in working towards your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long term investments and speculations for financial gains. It would be wiser to face turbulent matters and issues in professional ventures rather than sleeping them under the carpet. Don't take the one you love for granted but show your love and appreciation.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delays that could hold up your work. You succeed by adopting a new approach and exhibiting a willingness to take risks. You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. Your maturity and objectivity places you in the role of the dependable and someone your family and friends can turn to for advice and guidance. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and they would be profitable. This is a good time to belong with a friend or a group who shares your own ideas and thoughts. You would attach yourself to more spiritual friends. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities come your way. This is an excellent period for starting new regimens to better your health and well being, such as a structured exercise program and more structured and productive use of your time.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This is an excellent time in which you do some financial planning and strategizing. A financial boost is possible, or you may gain financially through your business partner. Research uncovers new material that allows you to develop a better overall picture of the period's events. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the need for someone significant to rely on. You would find a balance between autonomy and dependence in personal relationships. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work.

Survival is a daily struggle

By Mishmi C Chakraborty

Holding the mirror up to the society is nothing short of a challenge and especially for him who has taken upon himself, with a firm determination, to initiate the task. Challenging are his ways because he needs to have an unflinching belief in the strength of his perceptions and a healthy coordination of his sincere and persistent efforts in manoeuvring the society to see the reality as it is.

In an effort to avoid specific mentioning of the instances about what I seek to emphasise, generalisations can always be derived and being a parent, I find unanimous voice of other parents in my conviction to the truth. We are in a constant state of flux in deciding for our children the best of everything of what they receive.

Education, no wonder, comes on the top of our priority lists and there are no contradictions when I say that we have been emphasising on building the moral character of our children. But there is a different side to the story. Children belonging to the deprived sections of the society, rather hailing from the houses of the domestic workers have different takes on their assimilation to the truth. In a word they form the underprivileged group, sometimes being denied the basic amenities of life.

Most of us, I am sure, are unaware of the fact that this section of people are struggling everyday to make both ends meet, in affording two square meals a day, in educating their children and in trying to ensure at the same time that their future is secured.

Beginning with the confession that unable to limit my urge, I undertook to proceed with a kind of personal interaction with some of the domestic workers and in my endeavour to go deep into their reality, I was amazed at their revelations when they concurrently agreed that they make it a point to educate their children. In securing a proper future for their children would certainly entail them to cut down even some of their basic expenditures. But they are holding onto the ground with the firm determination that compromising with certain necessities of life would not bother them but would bring the optimism in them that whatever bit

they are doing on their part for their children would certainly yield results.

Notwithstanding the fact that though education is able to dispel the ignorance in their homes considerably, what has been the constant concern of anxiety is the problem of many youths of not being able to get into fruitful employment. This overriding concern has also in its all practicalities been the cause of miseries of some parents. In such a case the youths have receded with the least hope that the administration or governments on their part would not be able to restore them into fruitful employment. The consequences can be misleading and perilous.



It has also been found in many cases that these youths are more viable to get themselves trapped into the viciousness of drug addiction, alcoholism and many other deviant activities. In course of the interrogation of many parents, certain revelations have been important in this context because in many cases parents have failed in restoring and rehabilitating their children from such viciousness.

Perhaps the most pertinent factor contributing to such moral degeneration among the youths is the onslaught of internet. Inevitably the result follows and as such it has been felt in several instances. They have held the opinion that easy access to internet is responsible in larger share in perpetuation of crimes against women in our society as unrestricted use of internet has failed to inculcate in them the wisdom to use these technologies judiciously.

This section of people often remain

frustrated because they sometimes feel that their voices are not being channelised in the proper direction so as to reach out to a larger number of ears. But they have proposed a quite feasible remedy for the ills happening that would simultaneously regenerate a new hope in their children. They have proposed that government should impose restrictions on the use of gadgets, particularly mobile phones below 18 years of age. Parents' supervision must be there in accessing the modern technologies. But contradictions in this regard would certainly be there because imposing restrictions or parental supervision needs orientation courses to be conducted, especially for those deprived and downtrodden section of people.

Generating awareness at their level needs a different level of mental make-up. An instance although not directly connected to whatever I have stated but still holds relevance in explaining their predicaments of life which any theory or a chapter would fail to evoke emotional oneness in us with them.

A girl of merely 12 years of age feeble and frail in her constitution is neither unable to participate wholly in play and fun related activities with her brother nor she is able to attend school properly. The sole earner of the family, her grandmother who is one of the many domestic workers in Shillong, is unable to bear the medical expenditures required for her. They went to a government hospital but the doctors were unable to treat her and they recommended that she should immediately move out of her town for better treatment.

Being in such a helpless state this particular family, which probably has an income of less than Rs 5,000 a month, cannot afford expensive medical expenditures. There are many cases where we can witness these people reeling from abject poverty and in many cases educated youths amongst them are denied suitable opportunity.

Agreed there are issues but finding even a single generous voice in their cause would resurrect their stand in fighting against all odds.

(The author holds masters degrees in Sociology and English)

“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”

--- Marie Curie

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.340

SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 22, 2019

Puppet show in the US

PRIME Minister Imran Khan is in the US on an official visit. His discussions will centre around topics like Afghanistan, Pakistan's anti-terror campaign, and restoration of suspended US military aid to its Asian ally in the fight against terror. Notably, Khan took along with him two military generals—the army chief and the head of the ISI military intelligence. This is the first time a Pakistani leader did so during his US visit, and this might be proof of how elected leaders are progressively on a weak wicket in Pakistan. Notably, the US interacts with Pakistan at both political and military levels, unlike India which refuses to have any dialogue with the Pakistani generals. India need not expect much from the meeting Khan will have with President Donald Trump on Monday, more so on the issue of terror. The US is neither a friend of Pakistan nor of India. It rather engages in a puppet show to further its economic and strategic interests. Both India and Pakistan are major purchasers of military ware. They come from either the US or Europe. The more these two Asian nations fight, the more the sale of military ware from the West. No serious issues exist between India and Pakistan other than Kashmir. Pakistan occupies a part of Kashmir and India another. The matter could as well be left at that. It would mean both India and Pakistan being able to set apart more of their funds for their economic development. PM Modi had famously suggested to the Pakistani leadership, “Let us rather join hands and fight poverty.”

Chances are that the powerful clique of western powers would laugh away such proposals. Pakistan is straining every nerve to feed its military with modern weapons. The result is a major economic crisis hurting its people. Imran Khan has no money to check into a luxury hotel in the US due to its season of austerity and opted to stay in the ambassador's residence. But, his military generals would keep asking for more. China too is engaged in a major arms build-up, but it can afford to do so because of its success on the economic front. Faced with these two sides, India has less money for defence acquisitions, and our jawans make do with outdated guns, set as they are against the hi-tech firepower of the two rivals. By arms build-up, Pakistan scores a point over India, but this could be an invitation to trouble for the Islamic nation in the long run, as people are hit badly.

Traditional rice-fish farming in Jaintia Hills

By H H Mohrmen

Many of us would think that paddy fields only grow rice. It is also true that the major crop produced from the field is rice, but it is also true that the rice eco-system has much to offer to the farmers than just rice. During the rice growing season, farmers not only get rice from the rice fields but they also harvest many things apart from rice.

The bunds or stretch of land about one foot wide in between the paddy fields which divide the field into sections of equal levels which also help keep the water required for growing rice are called 'stiar hali'. The 'stiar hali' not only go into making the terrace, but are also responsible for making the different patterns that gives the paddy field its uniform and orderly and which adds to the beauty of the fields when seen from afar. The dividers also make it convenient for the farmers to manage the fields. Rice fields and particularly irrigation canals, dams and check dams are also an example of the marvel of indigenous engineering employed in wetland cultivation.

And apart from grass, the 'stiar hali' also grows herbs call 'famyrdoh', Iali Stiar and 'Tyngkhieh/khliang syiar' which are greens that people eat raw. People of the area have been consuming these three green leafy vegetables which they believe to be good for their health and they have been doing so since time immemorial. And because these vegetables grow naturally, the vegetables are also part of the Indigenous Food System of the community which supplement their nutritional requirements. Also because they grow in abundance, farmers are also selling them in the market now and collecting the vegetables becomes an income generating activity for them.

But another food which is available in the rice ecosystem is a kind of fish locally known as 'dathli' or 'dohthli' in Khasi. In English it is called the snakehead fish. The fish looks like a snake. Its scientific name is Channa Pardalis and its size varies between two to five inches depending on the variety that one catches. The fish is a dark brown colour and it has small fins and a tail. It is a kind of fish which lives in wetlands or mud and during winter when there is no water, the snake fish lives in the swamp. It can survive in wet

and damp places even if there is no water. It remains alive in that condition till the rains start falling in the hills again.

Therefore at the onset of summer when farmers begin tilling and collecting water in their fields, the fish also starts to come out of its dormant stage in the mud and fills the paddy fields. Rice is a plant which requires maximum water to grow, hence farmers ensure that water covers the paddy fields much of the time and this is good for the fish too. The fish helps the farmers by eating up the insects which damage the rice plant and its waste also helps in fertilising the soil.

This traditional practice of the Pnar people is perhaps the first rice-fish

of the Khnaam, to enable the fish to enter the basket. The shape of the 'kyrchiap' or cover is like a funnel and it is made in such a way that it has spikes at the end when the cover is put inside the head of the basket. The spike faces towards the inside of the basket and is made in such a way that it becomes easy for the fish to enter the basket from the opening. Once the fish is trapped inside and because the cover is cone-shaped, the spikes prevent the fish from getting out of the basket. Snake-head fish like worms so the farmers place worms inside the basket which act like a bait to attract the snakehead fish and once it enters the basket then it gets trapped there.

In a single basket the

The spike faces towards the inside of the basket and is made in such a way that it becomes easy for the fish to enter the basket from the opening. Once the fish is trapped inside and because the cover is cone-shaped, the spikes prevent the fish from getting out of the basket.

farming system which people have been practicing for ages. At the end of the season, the farmers not only harvest rice from the fields but they also catch snakehead fish and collect herbs throughout the year. In a year, the rice ecosystem therefore provides farmers more than just rice but other nutritional food too and that helps enhance their income.

To catch these fish, farmers make a small basket known as 'Khnaam' which is about 12 inches long and which looks like a flower vase with a pointed end at the bottom. It is open only on one side which is considered to be the head of the 'khnaam' while the other end is closed. In fact 'khnaam' is made from a single bamboo which is then sliced perpendicularly into many pieces. It is made by using another sliced bamboo to horizontally weave these perpendicularly sliced bamboos.

The top or the head of 'Khnaam' is where the trick lies, it is open and it is much bigger than the body

farmers can catch between eight and ten fishes. They are caught alive with no harm whatsoever done to the fish. This has another advantage for the farmers. They can keep the fish for future consumption by keeping them in a container and only changing the water in the container every day. In this way they get a regular supply of fish every day as long as the fish lasts. It is like having a fish pond where you can also have a fresh supply of fish any time. In case they catch more than they need for consumption, farmers will dry it over the fire place and by doing so they are able to preserve the fish for a longer period of time and consume it as and when required.

How is the fish cooked then? The most popular dish made of the snake fish is call 'Dathli chet sngad', where the fish is cooked without gravy. 'Chet sngad' is not a curry and it is not fried either, it is in between where a paste which is made from grinding onion, garlic, turmeric and nai-iong or black sesame seeds (sesanum indicum). This is then fried in a little oil for a

few minutes and the fish is then added to the fried paste. A little water is added to the mixture and after cooking for about twenty minutes the dish is ready. This is the most popular dish made of dathli, but some people would also add finely chopped wild Sohphoh Khasi/saphoh pter (Docynia indica khasiana), with its water extracted so as to make it taste, less sour. This is the dish which is popular amongst the urban people of Jaintia hills.

The fish can also be fried but before that the fish is mixed with turmeric and salt and then fried (not deep fried) in a pan. The popular way of eating the fish is by inserting a sliced bamboo or a thin iron (nar thangkung uses for roasting dry fish in the fire place) through the centre of the fish, lengthwise and allow it to be smoked near the fireplace. The fish are kept around the fire place until it is cooked. This is easy and convenient especially when you are in the field where you don't have oil, spices and even pots and pans. After heating it till it is cooked, farmers sometime mix it with salt, onion and few drops of lemon to taste.

There is no specific time when the trap is laid, but generally farmers put it in the evening and collect the same in the morning. Setting of Khnaam to catch Dathli starts soon after rice saplings are transplanted in the fields, but the peak time to catch Dathli is from September till before harvest.

It is rather amusing to read in the news recently that the minister in charge of fisheries announced that the government is encourage farmers to start rice-fish farming vide an idea borrowed from somewhere else when we already have our own methods which were practiced since ancient times. The North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) embarked on a project which is being supported by REC (Rural Electrification Corporation) to help people get access to nutritional food available in the Indigenous food systems. This project has many components and this write-up is the outcome of Agrobiodiversity walk, in which farmers, youth and students participated to understand the biodiversity or food diversity that exists in the rice ecosystem.

Budget Review Competitive spirit vital

By Shivaji Sarkar

The Central budget needs to relook at taxes and other provisions for attracting investments and steps to fight global trade tensions. The NDA-II government has none so far to fight it at home. Thus, it must strategise to increase trade, merchandise and exports amid the not-so-friendly approach of US President Donald Trump and an aggressive China.

Importantly, allocating lower sums, i.e. Rs 45,000 crore, for Chabahar port in Iran has its strategic cost. Tehran today needs support at a critical juncture and it cannot be allowed to drift towards Pakistan. Undeniably, Iran is a critical ally and downgrading relations with it, ostensibly under US pressure, may pose problems. As it is, it is hitting exports and making imports expensive.

More imagination is needed to make the budget provisions boost growth. The steep provisions on taxes are more socialistic that can cause contraction of economy. Increase in income tax, not giving relief to corporate, and applying various tolls and fees may prove to be a dampener for an economy, which is projected to grow at 7 per cent.

The growth rate is needed at a much higher rate. In fact, to make India a \$5 trillion economy it must grow at over 11 per cent. And, even the most optimists say this requires a rate at over 8 per cent.

At the same time, the nation is finding it difficult to fund its programmes. More so as higher tax rate of 42.7 per cent would put more individual earners away from the market. In comparison the rate is much higher than in many competing countries in Asia and elsewhere. This would put off foreign investors as they wouldn't like to give more in taxes as it would hit their capacity to repatriate.

Additionally, even Indian billionaires may move to low tax destinations be it Dubai or Singapore. And it is no secret that many have already left the country. An estimate suggests that as many as 7000 desi billionaires have gone looking for greener pastures.

Further, the concept of calling someone rich or super rich also calls for a review. This should be done not only on the basis of the total money one is getting, but it must be weighed in terms of erosion for continuous inflation. This has been recognised for those earning up to Rs 5 lakh, and have been given a waiver. But the benefit has not been extended beyond.

The tax burden is becoming unbearable. Despite GST, Indians are the highest tax payers! The total taxes paid by a taxpayer remain at 70 per cent and even those not under the I-T bracket have to shell out over 40 per cent as taxes. It will sound to reason that the highest I-T should not be over 20 per cent. For just imagine if someone having an earning of Rs 25 lakh is forced to shell out about Rs 8 lakh as taxes, would he have the capacity to do other expenditures that are necessary to lubricate the market? This is an immediate correction that is required.

Worse, the government has also continued with taxing the savings. This is plain simple illogical as it is a disincentive towards savings. Let us remember that Indian families are born savers, but as a policy these are now being discouraged to save.

This forces the government to borrow at higher rates. And thus its latest decision to borrow from foreign markets might cause severe problems in due course of time. In fact, it may even hurt sovereign ratings. For a government that has revenue worries, domestic borrowing is cheaper and it therefore must study the market as well as some of the earlier practices. Burning the

boat of savings is a costly experiment, and the nation is paying a heavy price for it.

Besides, the external borrowings suffer twin shocks. As soon as a sovereign government enters the external debt market, not only do the rates go up but it also hits the rupee. This means that repayments could be doubly expensive. There are other risks as well, which needs the government's attention. The logic is of now that if the government borrows from abroad, it would leave more with the financial institutions for corporate borrowers, needs a serious re-checking.

Figures reveal that exports in June suffered. These fell by 10 per cent in June to \$25 billion from \$28 billion in June 2018. In rupee terms these slid to Rs 173,682 crore from Rs 187,800 in June last year. Even imports contracted to \$40 billion (Rs 279, 771 crore) from \$44 billion (Rs 300,352 crore), with the fall being 9 per cent. Clearly, either of this can lead to a forex crunch.

The government must make note that more protectionists the policies are, more would be the retribution. The US has started it and Europe is likely to follow. Fortunately, ASEAN remains lukewarm. Unless institutions such as National Savings Organisation are strengthened and bank coffers fattened with incentives for savings, the government's revenue worries would remain.

Finance Minister Sitharaman can take steps to announce withdrawal of taxes on savings, as domestic savers are dealing with a twin problem. Their savings are being virtually robbed by taxes and the repo rate benefits have never been given to them. The nation may remember that domestic savings and organisations such as the LIC have been major contributors for growth and it the lopsided taxes which are causing the anxiety.

Interestingly, the Economic Survey is eloquent on the growth path. It says that no country had ever grown fast without buoyant exports and has called for policies to boost exports, GDP, savings and investment. Those blaming the advisers need to be cautious, as at the end the advisers are right, but were not paid heed to. So neither exports have grown for five years nor have the Indian products competitive prices.

Despite boasting of inching towards becoming a super power, it is a high cost, high taxed economy. Capital, land, labour, electricity, railway and air freight, road tolls and I-T are at the highest non-competitive rates. This eases inroad by countries like China, which eventually hurts the local 'Make in India' initiative.

Besides, as dividends are taxed high, it would be ideal recipe for the corporate to avoid its major announcements. Several other tax measures would invite tax avoidance and more stringent the laws, more would be the unfair means. And let us note that all such measures lead to reduction of money circulation. Digitisation is becoming difficult with the BSNL backbone failing, which causes a further crunch. It hits the initiative of boosting both rural and farm economy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi needs to intervene. He needs to straighten the crooked lines in the budget. To make the economy competitive, he must cut down many taxes and tolls so that prices are internationally attractive for competing with the rest of the world. --- INFRA

TO THE EDITOR

Enslaved by erroneous education

Editor,

A picture which I think has a multidimensional meaning has lately struck my mind. It shows a horse that has been tied to a small plastic chair with a rope. But strangely the horse is standing and still behaving as though the chair is too heavy for it to run with! Why? The caption of the picture rightly gives the answer - "When slavery becomes a habit, it makes one forget about one's own power." Indeed, the habit of the horse of not running when it is tied down to something makes it oblivious to the fact that it is now being tied to as light an object as that of a small plastic chair!

There is another dimension of the picture. A closer look reveals that the chair has been tied in a way that makes it difficult for the horse to run without hindrance. The chair is tied on the left side of the horse with a short rope. So, whenever the horse tries to run with it, the chair will start

hitting the front left leg of the horse causing it much annoyance.

A horse can pull a heavy burden like a cart provided the cart is properly tied behind the horse. We can recall the meaning of, "putting the cart before the horse." The wrong order of putting the cart in the front, makes it almost impossible for a horse to run whereas running becomes easy when the cart is behind.

Information and knowledge can move forward towards wisdom when the consciousness is foregrounded. But when information prejudices our minds then they stop the movement of our free thinking. Here lies the danger of the mechanical education system. When teachers give information to students and ask them to be "normal" and not to question those axioms, the students get programmed not to think outside the box and not to challenge the static knowledge.

The vertical "stand and deliver" teaching model discourages students from asking questions. Students are supposed to put the

information in the front of them and remain confined within the boundary of that information. This makes them behave like the horse that does not dare to pull an object that has intentionally been put not behind it but in the wrong order.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Aggressive Iran

Editor,

Reprobate Iran flouting the international maritime rules seized on Friday a Britain-flagged tanker in the Strait of Hormuz. Eighteen Indian nationals are among the 23 crew members of the tanker named 'Stena Impero'. The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow sea route leading to the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman in the Indian Ocean. Many ships/tankers will have to visit ports of different countries lying along the Persian Gulf like UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq and the eastern ports of Saudi Arabia and the western ports of Iran. Iran's

accusation is that the tanker has violated the international maritime rules and it collided with an Iranian fishing boat.

It is a fact that the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf are bounded on east by the sovereign state of Iran and they have been enjoying the sea from time immemorial. At the same time, this narrow strip of sea is highly important and it is the only sea route to more than half a dozen countries. So this sea route must not be lorded over by a domineering Iran.

The seized tanker has other crew members from Russia, Philippines, and Latvia. The captain of the tanker is an Indian. It is indeed good that the Indian government has reached out to the Iranian authorities in a bid to help release the Indian crew members on board. However, the seizure of the tanker has ramped up tensions in the Gulf regions with Britain and its western allies having called for the release of the vessel. So, it is better for Iran to shed their hostile and aggressive mentality

towards others especially the western countries and they must look to the world with an optimistic approach. After all, nobody is going to annex or defeat it by sending a ship or tanker

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

The air we breathe

Editor,

I had the privilege of being part of the launch of, 'Doctors for Clean Air'- Assam & North-East India Chapter on July 21, 2019 at the NEDFi House, Guwahati. Dr. Rashna Dass Hazarika, Director, Paediatrics, Health City Hospital Guwahati, is the Assam State Clean Air Champion. Air pollution is a silent killer, claiming the lives of millions of people in the country and causing many chronic health issues.

We are paying the price of rapid unplanned urbanization and industrialization in the form of rapidly deteriorating Air Quality Index. The recent report by WHO ranks 14

Indian cities in the list of most polluted cities in the world.

North East India in general and Meghalaya in particular are blessed with natural green cover and pleasant weather. It is the duty of citizens to preserve and protect natural resources for our own well being and that of the future generation. We also need to be concerned about indoor air pollution at homes, work places and schools. I would urge the State Pollution Control Board to be proactive towards continuous monitoring of the Air Quality Index (AQI) in various parts of the state and Shillong city in particular. It would be helpful for citizens if the AQI is displayed at prominent locations in the city. Let us all work towards a greener and cleaner Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Dr Sonali Shinde,
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

"We need to reject any politics that targets people because of race or religion. This isn't a matter of political correctness. It's a matter of understanding what makes us strong. The world respects us not just for our arsenal; it respects us for our diversity and our openness and the way we respect every faith."

--- Barack Obama

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.341 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2019

Priyanka to the fore

LOOKS like it's a shift from stage one to stage two in the Congress party's leadership countdown. Priyanka Gandhi has recoiled from the drubbing the party, her brother Rahul Gandhi and she herself got in the Lok Sabha polls, and is seemingly edging her way up. Priyanka made a mark in Sonbhadra in Uttar Pradesh, where she successfully resisted the administration's attempt to thwart her visit to the families of 10 persons gunned down by the village headman and his gang in a land-grab attempt. Her "success" impressed many, and a clamour has started, again, that she be made the Congress president. As Rahul Gandhi is reticent about being the party chief for now, this might be the only way forward for the party.

Former Union minister K Natwar Singh who was a confidante of the Nehru family for years has stated only the obvious when he said the Congress party will split if no one from the Nehru family headed it. He informally proposed the name of Priyanka, setting the stage for a fresh round of discussion both within and outside the party. The likes of loud-mouth Shatrughan Sinha, who recently left the BJP and cozied up to the Congress, were quick to catch on it. This is likely to gain traction for the reason that not many Congressmen think Rahul Gandhi can effectively take on a behemoth like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose image was seen growing by the day.

Priyanka Gandhi has given out hints in the past that she was willing to take the fight forward. This, after she was introduced as the general secretary in charge of eastern UP. She was even ready to stand against Modi in Varanasi, but saner judgment on the part of the party leadership prevented such a misadventure in the Lok Sabha polls.

There is unanimity that the Congress party would fight to the finish if it is left in the hands of someone outside the "first family." For one, there is hardly any leader of stature and credibility in the party today, due to the absolute domination by the family in running the party and its governments for decades. While calls were made by those like Captain Amarinder Singh to introduce new and young faces to the leadership, his obvious references were to those like Sachin Pilot or Jyotiraditya Scindia. What he failed to fathom is the facelessness of these young leaders at the national level. A leader should be capable of drumming up support for the party.

Politics sans principles

By Albert Thyruniang

Fifteen years ago our political science teacher announced in class, "Today we shall start a new lesson, 'Political Ethics'." Immediately giggles were heard. Detecting the sense of the class, the good teacher said, "Yes I understood your pessimism on the political class," and spent the whole hour critiquing the subject. Of course, in the following days he did justice to the topic.

The teacher quoted Vladimir Lenin to make his point, "There are no morals in politics; there is only expedience. A scoundrel may be of use to us just because he is a scoundrel." This quotation is apt in the current political scenario. As the editorial of July 15, 2019, Politics sans Principles emphasises, politics today is devoid of principles. There is only expedience. Expedience is a favourable and advantageous situation that is not necessarily morally acceptable. In an expedient political situation the right and just is ignored for self-interest.

Today politicians operate on the basis of expediency. Expediency is the guiding principle, not ethics and morality. Otherwise how do you explain the situation in Goa, Karnataka and elsewhere in the country? Last week 10 out of 15 Congress MLAs, engineered by the Leader of Opposition, unscrupulously defected to the BJP. Just over two years ago nine of the now saffron MLAs won on Congress tickets and one, namely, Atanasio Monserrate defeated the BJP candidate in the Panjim by-election as late as last March.

It is self-evident that the defectors changed their political colours for personal gain. This is a view of the vast majority, many of whom have expressed total dismay at the objectionable decision of the 10 lawmakers. Congress supporters were baffled and 'demoralised' BJP workers also disapproved of the backdoor entry of the 'self-interested' ex legislators. Three of the 10 MLAs have been sworn in as ministers, including the former Leader of Opposition, Chandrakant Kavlekar, who was given plum portfolios.

Impropriety is raised against the BJP leadership too. One of the 10 MLAs is Atanasio Monserrate. Monserrate faces charges of extortion and rape of a minor. Yet he was welcomed into the BJP fold with open arms. Monserrate had won the Panjim by-election, necessitated by the death of former Chief Minister, Manohar Parrikar. The BJP had aggressively attacked

him during the campaigns for being a rape accused. But now for the BJP he is a saint.

As soon as the majority in the house of 40 was achieved, the BJP threw its allies, the Goa Forward Party, out without any qualms. Faced with humiliation of being forced to resign, Vijai Sardesai, the head of Goa Forward Party had to learn the hard way of the BJP's unprincipled style. His "promise" to the late CM that his party would not destabilise the BJP led coalition government, meant nothing as he and his colleagues were unceremoniously forced out of the ministry. Clearly, loyalty and 'coalition dharma' is not in the BJP's DNA.

Eight of the ten deserters in the former Portuguese colony are Chris-

unholy but it is breaking the alliance by enticing members of the other parties to resign; not more unholy?

The MLAs are free to resign and seek re-election but the manner of their resignation and the drama created is questionable. Why did they not meet the Speaker to hand over their resignations personally? Why had they to move to a five fortress star hotel in Mumbai? Why could they not remain in Bangalore and be firm with their decision? Why did they have to have take recourse to resort politics?

The whole political circus is very murky. A Congress MLA alleged in the Assembly that he was offered Rs 5 crore from the BJP to switch sides. The Chief Minister, HD Kumaraswamy, himself alleged in his speech in

"This is a view of the vast majority, many of whom have expressed total dismay at the objectionable decision of the 10 lawmakers. Congress supporters were baffled and 'demoralised' BJP workers also disapproved of the backdoor entry of the 'self-interested' ex legislators."

tians. Christians claim to possess a higher degree of ethics. But is the perception unnecessary? The ten 'valuable' men have preferred position and power, financial and material gains to values, ethics and royalty. They have been trapped by the BJP's tricks of portraying itself as a non-anti-Christian and minority political outfit. They have now strengthened the rightist forces.

By the time you read this essay, the stalemate in Karnataka might have already been over. Whatever happens on Monday only the headlines will change. The 13 month old JDS-Congress government might collapse or survive but the true character of the rebel MLAs and the party that solicits them, has already been revealed. The on-going Karnataka crisis was triggered by politicians sans principles. Of course, the JDS-Congress government has been on a slippery wicket ever since its formation, yet the crisis started with the resignation of 15 Congress and JDS members effectively reducing the strength of the House from 224 members to 209 necessitating in the trial of strength. The JDS-Congress alliance must be

Vidhan Sabha that each rebel legislator was offered Rs 30 to 40 crore by the cash rich BJP. So it is not because of a new found love for saffron ideology that prompted rebels to end their membership in the Legislative Assembly. Common sense says that a public representatives don't risk defeat in a re-elections. So far cash, outweighing even electoral defeats must be the reason for them to put in their papers.

There is no doubt that BS Yeddyurappa in Karnataka and other BJP leaders in Delhi and other states are keen to 'saffronise' any one from opposition parties looking for greener pastures. The leadership of the biggest national party in the country is hell bent on weakening and decimating opposition parties in their desire to rule the length and breadth of this country for ever, if possible. To achieve this objective fair and unfair means are readily adopted.

Other states too are in the list of BJP's plans for horse trading. West Bengal might be next. A BJP leader recently openly claimed that he could take more than 100 Trinamool MLAs to the BJP's net. Even the firebrand Mamata Banerjee who ended the 34

year old rule of the Left might not be able to save West Bengal from the saffron party's financial clout. Upbeat by Goa and Karnataka, Maharashtra's new BJP boss, Chandrakant Patil jumped in to claim that many Congress-NCP MLAs will quit and join his party very soon. Given the prevailing fluid environment where political activities are totally steered by expediency we are likely to witness more Goas and Karnatakas.

In Meghalaya political simmering has been going on ever since the MDA government was formed in March 2018. Claims and counter claims of new political arrangements are the order of the day. The Congress has been going public in its attempts to convince UDP and other regional parties to dump its leader ally, the NPP and form a new government with the grand old party. The UDP on its part has claimed that 8 to 10 MLAs are ready to part ways with the leaderless Congress and join forces with it. Not to be left behind the NPP also asserted that an equal number of Congress legislators are willing embrace the only party from North East to have gained national status. Now, Alexander L Hek, BJP legislator and Health minister has made a claim of his own stating that few Congressmen will join the ruling party at the centre. Frankly, there is an inner war going on between the MDA partners. But yes the 19 Congress MLAs are vulnerable, especially those who are in public life for personal benefit rather than service.

At this rate democracy will not service. The BJP is more than willing to convert non-BJP members into the lotus family. The right wing party is determined to eliminate all opposition. It looks as if they are on a mission to realise the agenda of a single party nation. To prevent such a dangerous eventuality the anti-defection law must be made stringent to the point of ruling out any form of defection. Those who resign should not be allowed to see seek re-election immediately. Those who resign should, by law, be banned from becoming ministers for five years after being re-elected. But who will do it? The BJP, the present beneficiary won't entertain such a thought. The other parties are too weak to effect a strengthening amendment in the anti-defection law. The civil society, with a mass movement can bring about the desired change. A PIL in this regard can also be tool to save Indian democracy.

Drive for India's energy security faces new challenge

Growing shortage of fossil fuels a big concern

By Nantoo Banerjee

The centuries old Scottish proverb that "if wishes were horses, beggars would ride" is so true about India's wish to become a major producer of fossil fuels. The truth is: it is becoming increasingly dependent on imports. Coal, oil and gas are three main components of fossil fuels. India ranks fifth in the world in coal reserves. It is also the world's third largest coal consumer after China and the USA. India's coal reserve is around 301.6 billion tonnes. Out of which over 260 billion tonnes are non-cooking coal - mainly used for power generation, cement and fertilizer production. Despite this, the country is becoming increasingly dependent on import.

Coal India, which enjoys a near monopoly in the country's coal production, mined only 607 million tonnes of coal in 2018-19, marginally missing its modest annual

target of 610 million tonnes.

In contrast, China produced four billion tonnes of coal in 2018. India's current coal demand is close to only around 900 million tonnes. The country ended last year with a record import of 234 million tonnes of coal, about nine percent more than in 2017-18. It imported 52 million tonnes of coking coal. Going by the trend, this year's coal import may set yet another new record.

The money spent on prospecting and exploration is a pittance compared to the world standards. India possesses over three million Sq. Kms. of sedimentary basins. The number of exploration wells drilled in India in any year is less than 500 against several thousands of wells drilled in North America.

While sitting on large reserves and not exploiting them enough to force import may appear to be one kind of crime, costing the country billions of precious dollars annually, not trying enough to prospect, explore and exploit vital energy resources like oil and gas could be even worse. Four years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at an energy conference - Urja Sangam 2015 - that India needs to bring down its import dependence on oil and gas to 67 percent of its requirement by 2022. "We currently import around 77 percent in energy sector, in oil and gas. We can reduce this import by at least 10 percent by 2022. This 10 percent we will produce ourselves and this should be our dream," he said. India will be celebrating its 75th year of independence in 2022 and lowering imports will be a tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for our freedom, the prime minister said. "If we become successful in reducing import by 10 percent in 2022, by achieving 10 percent growth in domestic production, then I can assure you that by 2030 we can reduce this import to 50 percent," he added.

However, in the intervening four years, the prime minister's wishes seem to have fallen wayside as India's import dependency out of the total crude oil consumption increased from 77 percent in 2014-15 to 84.7 percent in the last quarter of 2018-19. The prime minister may, in fact, be upset to witness that production of both oil and gas in India is actually dropping. Official figures show that the country's crude oil production dropped 4.15 percent, in last year alone, to only 34.2 million tonnes. According to the government's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), India spent US\$ 111.9 billion on oil imports in 2018-19, up from US\$ 87.8 bil-

lion in the previous fiscal. In terms of natural gas, too, the numbers are disappointing, with the production figures showing only a 0.7 percent rise in the past 10 years, from 32,416.97 million metric standard cubic meter in 2007-08 to 32,649.31 in 2017-18. What is more alarming is that crude oil production has declined 4.7 percent and natural gas by 2.9 percent since 2014-15 despite their consumption increasing at a healthy annual rate. What is the main reason behind the declining trend in the country's oil and gas production? Does India have enough oil and gas reserves? Is the country spending enough in oil and gas exploration? Few know definitively about India's true potential oil and gas reserves. The money spent on prospecting and explo-

ration is a pittance compared to the world standards. India possesses over three million Sq. Kms. of sedimentary basins. The number of exploration wells drilled in India in any year is less than 500 against several thousands of wells drilled in North America. Few will disagree that the country's hydrocarbons basins are highly under explored? An estimated 75 percent of India's sedimentary basins have yet to be adequately explored. Of the 26 known sedimentary basins in the country, less than 10 may be currently producing some quantities of oil and gas.

The current production trend in India of fossil fuels should be a major energy security concern for the government and the nation. West Asian exporters of oil and gas and south east Asian and Australian suppliers of coal do not want India to achieve higher production of these fossil fuels. West Asian oil firms propose to spend billions of dollars in India to set up refineries, instead. What is really going on? Maybe, it is time for the prime minister's office (PMO) to get into the act to see that concrete steps are taken in the oil and gas sector to fulfil the dream of the prime minister at least for the sake of the country's energy security.

The 2019 Lok Sabha election delivered an undeniable mandate for Prime Minister Modi to continue with his structural and financial reform agenda, underpinned by a litany of so-called energy sector improvements that have already secured billions of dollars in U.S. investment. The International Energy Agency said in its World Energy Investment 2019 report that foreign energy investments in India grew to \$85 billion under Modi's leadership, a record 12 percent increase, reflecting the highest growth of energy investments anywhere in the world. Where did those billions go? At least, they did not help check India's falling production and growing import dependence of oil, gas and coal? Paradoxically, the US oil embargo on Iran for an indefinite period threatens to further increase India's oil and gas import bills. (IPA Service)

To the Editor

Regional parties need a revamp

Editor, The regional parties of Meghalaya are not better than the monolithic Congress Party that has relied on the Nehru-Gandhi family for leadership. Even today when Rahul Gandhi is form on quitting, there are the entrenched loyalists that want Priyanka Gandhi to take over the leadership of the Congress as if there is no one else who is competent to lead the grand old Party. In many ways the regional parties in Meghalaya too have suffered from this syndrome. Mr Hopingstone Lyngdoh led the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) for decades. No one could challenge him as long as he was alive. The United Democratic Party (UDP) has been led by Dr Donkumar Roy after Mr EK

Mawlong. There is no sign at all that the younger members of the UDP would like to see a more dynamic leader at the helm, especially since over 50% of Meghalaya's population is under 35 years of age.

The regional parties in Meghalaya have always played second fiddle to the national parties. They can never form a government on their own and they seem to be quite satisfied with this fact. The UDP has only a thin presence in Garo Hills so it does not hold sway even in the entire state of Meghalaya. Till date we are yet to see any statewide mobilisation to enrol members as the BJP is doing right now. Even the Congress Party seems to have given up on the membership drive.

So what is the future of the regional parties in Meghalaya? Under unin-

spiring leaders that do not seem to have grasped the vision for a progressive state where the aspirations of the young find a place in the policy making of the state. None of the regional parties even care enough to have a think-tank that can assist them in understanding the priorities of the State today. The BJP, whatever its credentials has a think tank in the Vivekananda Foundation where party loyalists and intellectuals spar out to understand the key policy imperatives.

In fact Meghalaya suffers precisely from this lacuna - the complete absence of thinking about a shared future where the interests of all are being looked after. This is because the regional parties which have consistently proclaimed that they care for the "jaidbynriew" during elections seem to for-

get that slogan the moment elections are done and dusted.

It is amusing that the younger leaders with the capability to lead are happy to sit in the sidelines and not demand a change in leadership. Not very different from the Congress, are they?

Yours etc.,
PK Nongrum,
Via email

Mamata living in a fool's paradise

Editor, The statement of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee that BJP's second consecutive Lok Sabha poll victory still remained a mystery, not a history to her is highly intriguing though uninspiring. She even said that she utterly

failed to unearth this mystery of BJP's second consecutive win in the Lok Sabha polls. As the Trinamool Congress supreme and as the Chief Minister of the mighty state of West Bengal, it is very shocking to learn that she has not been able to comprehend the direct and clear writing on the wall that led to the BJP's win. When we read between the lines of her statement, it can be inferred that through that statement she wanted to expose some hard truths regarding the BJP's short cut to victory.

What is so esoteric with the victory of the BJP that Mamata cannot decipher it at all? Did she mean that BJP had won by rigging the ballot? In all probability she did mean that the BJP won the elections by resorting to some dishonest practices. Such attitude being harboured

months after the Lok Sabha election is not a healthy attitude. Billions of people voted in favour of the BJP and brought them back to power for the second consecutive time and if Mamata is not able to admit this fact, then how can she bring order within her party? Charity begins at home. First of all, she has to accept the people's verdict and then she has to start purging her party. A person's adamant nature neither brings any good to him nor does a prejudiced mind leads one to truth.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
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.

“Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.”

--- Isaac Asimov

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.342

SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 2019

India's Moon Mission

FINALLY Chandrayaan2 has taken flight and the world watched in awe as India makes this giant leap in space technology. For the first time all top media houses reported the news with many making it their headline news. The credit for this success goes to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) which has been working with single-minded dedication, silently yet steadily to make a place for India among the superpowers of the world. Indians across the world too have been upbeat about the success of Chandrayaan2. In many ways this mission has managed to unite a discordant nation whose diverse population can hardly see eye to eye on any issue. ISRO chief K Sivan thanked his team for the successful launch of Chandrayaan after an aborted mission last week. The team worked round the clock to avoid last minute glitches. Such excellent team work and space engineering is sure to fire up the imagination of several aspiring space scientists in this country. The ambition in many young Indian scientists is to finally land up at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) USA, which is considered the ultimate in space research technology. Now perhaps they will reconsider and stay back in their country to add value to its space research programmes. It is a fact that the USA is a great place for all forms of exploratory research but India too must join this race and refurbish its research institutions so as to attract the best human resource. That's what a successful nation does!

True there are many subject matters of concern that need to be taken up in this country of 1.3 billion people with a huge chunk of its population living in stark poverty, without access to basic health care and sanitation and some even dying of starvation. At the root of these problems lie an insensitive bureaucracy and an incompetent public delivery system. It is true that food grains rot in the Food Corporation of India godowns because of some breakdown in the distribution system. These impediments to smooth public service delivery need to be plugged and taken seriously. ISRO has proven that if the Indian workforce takes things seriously and wishes to deliver it can do so without a glitch.

While there is a certain sense of anxiety that India has misplaced priorities and that launching a space mission when basic problems on its earth are crying out for solutions, this is to be expected in a noisy democracy where people believe that the very purpose of democracy is to have a million dissenting voices speak out their angst. Perhaps this ambition of aspiring for excellence is what will help strengthen the other areas of India's development which are still lagging behind.

When gold speaks all tongues are silent. This adage was brutally reinforced by the revolving door politics witnessed in the last fortnight across the country. New Delhi to Karnataka and Andhra-Telangana to Goa. Undeniably turncoats are the flavour of the season as power at all costs is the new normal of political morality to the exclusion of ethical considerations. Money hai to power hai!

Nothing underscores this than the brazen tug-of-war between the Kumaraswamy led JD(S)-Congress Government and BJP in Bengaluru's Vidhan Souda. While the former accused the latter of bribing 15 of its "absconding" MLAs by holding them in a Mumbai hotel, thereby whittling down its strength from 117 to 102 in a 224 member House, the BJP readies itself for the kill. Big deal if it further rips the facade of our democratic norms and functioning.

Another ring-a-ring-roses game was played in New Delhi last week when four TDP Rajya Sabha MPs joined the BJP, thereby shoring up its strength. In Goa 10 Congress MLAs jumped ship to the Saffron brigade with three being sworn-in as Ministers taking the total to a comfortable 27 in a 40 MLAs Assembly. In Andhra TDP MLAs are queuing up to board the BJP bandwagon.

Today, the BJP controls a major chunk of India's political landscape with its 'mahagathbandhan' of turncoats with the Congress's stocks crashing to a handful of States. Certainly, some are serving the Party's purpose of getting new States and constituencies where it has little presence, like the North East, West Bengal and Andhra. But the changeover comes without any guarantee and for a few it is turning out to be a one-way ticket to obscurity. Plainly, rajneeti is all about depleting the strength of the rival. Once that purpose is fulfilled, they discard you.

A sense of de ja vu overwhelms. Reminiscent of the 1967 Aaya Ram Gaya Ram culture when Gaya Lal an Independent MLA in Haryana switched three Parties in 15 days. Followed by Bhajan Lal who hijacked his Janata Party Government to the Congress, thereby opening

Era Of Aya Ram Gaya Ram

Money hai to power hai!

By Poonam I Kaushish

the floodgates of defection and institutionalizing it through Indira Gandhi's 60s-80s. Elucidated by JMM Suraj Mandal in the Lok Sabha in 1993, "Paisa boriyoin mein atta hai...Do saandh ke beech ek bachra kya kare?"

Politicians girgit-like transfer their loyalties from one Party to another based on winnability. The modus operandi is simple: Paisa and satta bargains are struck, depending on the value of legislators, who switch sides, are 'guarded' at luxury hotels therein a Government is toppled and another formed. All executed with clinical precision, devoid of 'meeting of minds' pretensions, common ideology, principles or personal fondness.

Patronage, opportunism and a share of the power pie is the glue that keeps the swarm of

True, the 1985 Anti-Defection law did act as a speed-breaker but only temporarily, as the ruling Party allowed it to be violated by anointing its MP or MLA as Speaker. The law says a defector can either resign or be disqualified by the Speaker on the basis of a petition by another member of the House. So if the defection suits the ruling Party then the Speaker accepts the MLA's resignation without looking into the motive behind it, obversely disqualifies him if it runs contrary to the Party's wishes.

Bluntly, this lacuna opened the floodgates for revolving door politics. Thereby, making it hard to keep pace with who is ensconced in which Party and who has drifted to greener pastures. Bringing things to farcical charades where defecting legislators switch sides with some

behind a toxic residue of hatred long after polls are over.

In the moral desert of politics and barren discourse the BJP has only perfected the art of defection and political over-reach from the Congress which holds the copyright. Consequently, such behaviour is likely to be commended as a sign of political ambition than censured as opportunism. Wherein Modi's incantation of "na khaonga na khane doonga", flies in the face of rajneeti nehtektha.

Alas, political discourse is so quick to justify a net's right to trample ideology and ethics to serve his selfish ends that questions about public service are seldom raised as all are trying to out-maneuver the other dus numberis! Thus, this game of lies, deceit and deception reflects the emerging truth of today's India. Power is all.

Raising a moot point: Are short term gains worth the long-term costs? Can one brush away this display of naked careerism as admiration worthy of a political cause or cynically accept it?

Of course, one can say this is what democracy is all about. Sadly, however, the basic postulates of democracy have got botched over the years. Few care to remember today that democracy is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end, namely, the greater well-being and happiness of the people. Which is possible only through a clean and stable Government run by dedicated leaders committed to putting country above self and all else. Not through ramshackled fair-weather partners in corruption and crime.

Where do we go from here? It is a long trudge as there seems to be no one who will dare to bite the defection hand that feeds it. Politics without ethics is dangerous for democracy as it produces distrust at all levels where-under even the gutter seems cleaner than the politics of today. Hence the battle for democracy continues. It remains to be seen if in the bheed of opportunistic turncoats, the murmur of ideology, beliefs and honesty will find favour. ---INFA

The modus operandi is simple: Paisa and satta bargains are struck, depending on the value of legislators, who switch sides, are 'guarded' at luxury hotels therein a Government is toppled and another formed.

hoppers together with its new benefactors and makes incongruent Parties come together whereby poaching of legislators is extolled as smart political management: money for allurements, use of state machinery for intimidation etc are commended as resourcefulness. The winner can commit no sin; a defector crossing to the ruling camp stands cleansed of all guilt and criminality. The friends and enemies are all rolled into one to fulfil their lust for power.

Shockingly, between 1967 and 1983 there were 162 defections in Parliament and 2,700 in State Assemblies with 212 defectors being rewarded with Ministerial positions and 15 becoming Chief Ministers, according to a PRS Legislative Research. Politicians have made it abundantly clear that they have no strong, single-Party preference and are willing to switch sides to the highest bidder. A testimony to the influence of paisa and kursi!

being anointed "Opposition Ministers in Government" even before they officially changed Parties with Speakers looking the other way. Worse, nobody queries them of what happened to the commitments they promised to abide and uphold, serve society and work for peoples' upliftment. Were they merely posturing?

Arguably, one can quibble that elections are won by Parties not individuals. In this market model of democracy it is a misnomer to believe that Parties are governed by ideology. Instead, there is a tendency to capture the imagination of the people by creating a spectacle alongside money which makes the clogged, polluted and corrupt political mare go around.

Questionably, in a milieu where defections undermine the foundations of democracy and where 'stable' Governments are formed through barefaced political immorality, no Party can claim the high moral ground. In this process, our leaders forget that they leave

Will Kejriwal be next target of BJP

By Lalit Sethi

While the toppling games in Karnataka continue, similar efforts are being intensified in Delhi against Kejriwal. He has been facing the heat from the Centre and the Delhi BJP who are leaving no stone unturned to capture the Delhi Assembly next year.

In Kolkata on Martyrs Day celebrations on July 21 were marked by intensified BJP moves to topple Ms Mamata Banerjee and the Chief Minister paid back in coin in her criticism of the Prime Minister and BJP.

Could this be followed by new ouster moves against the Delhi Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, who is hot under the collar and has somewhat muted his war of words with the BJP. Does he realize that his days are numbered as Delhi goes to the polls next year to elect a new Assembly?

Has the prolonged heat wave since April this year, with occasional and rare rains for almost a year, aggravated the miserable plight of millions who live in Delhi, giving Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of the National Capital Region, the jitters that he would have to face the rap for his failures to alleviate the sufferings of the people? Is he wondering whether his days in office are numbered as the Delhi Assembly goes to the polls next year and the BJP is gunning for him and

"mischief" was to go on fast outside Rail Bhavan before the Republic Day Parade in the flush and euphoria over demands like full Statehood for Delhi. That crisis was defused by the then Lt.-Governor.

Would the Governor or the Union Home Ministry start demanding or asking that does he not have to answer many queries on several issues? Is it his style to start his own brand of criticism of the BJP and the Centre, and thus aggravate his "offensive attitude" by shifting the blame to his detractors? In the BJP's opinion he does not believe in paying the dues Delhi Government owes to the three BJP-ruled Municipal Corporations to help them overcome their huge deficits.

He used to blow hot and cold at the Delhi Development Authority for refusal to let him have a huge slice of DDA's control over land in the capital and rule independently from his Secretariat. But has he mellowed and have his camp followers tried to go slow with their own brand of anti-BJP rhetoric?

He has announced that he has allocated Rs.500 crores for ownership rights of houses to residents of a number of unauthorized colonies, but the Union

Is it the Centre's perception that his arrogance needs a lesson or two over failures to govern Delhi and blame the Centre rather than introspect over his own governance issues? The Governor or the Centre has detailed dossiers on his numerous antics. His first "mischief" was to go on fast outside Rail Bhavan before the Republic Day Parade in the flush and euphoria over demands like full Statehood for Delhi. That crisis was defused by the then Lt.-Governor.

has raised the spectre of Kejriwal Mukh (free of him) Delhi?

He might have blown hot and cold for more than five years against the Congress and the BJP over Statehood for Delhi, but does he realize that he could not win a single seat in the elections to the Lok Sabha in May this year and his party lost in all the seven Delhi constituencies. Even the Congress had refused to join hands with him and have adjustments over a few seats to avoid division of votes between the two. He tried to talk about adjustments in Haryana and elsewhere, but there was no agreement. He was simply turned away. He might have defeated Mrs. Shiela Dikshit more than five years ago in the New Delhi constituency, but the wounds he inflicted on her and her party could not be healed.

With the Amit Shah juggernaut, likely to roll out sooner than later, is the game of ticking him off in the works, with Parliament's Budget Session, about to end? Will the BJP and the Centre target him for what it considers Kejriwal's "misdeemeanours" for six years? Is it their belief that Kejriwal deserves punishment, not only at the voters' level but even the Lieutenant-Governor's level?

Is it the Centre's perception that his arrogance needs a lesson or two over failures to govern Delhi and blame the Centre rather than introspect over his own governance issues? The Governor or the Centre has detailed dossiers on his numerous antics. His first

Urban Development Minister, Mr. HS Puri, says that this is a Kejriwal bluff because the Centre or DDA has already planned to do so without the Kejriwal government and called his antics sheer bluster. DDA is independent of Kejriwal and has planned to hold a draw of lots for the ownership rights for 18,000 new flats in Narela and Vasant Kunj to insist that it is trying to solve housing problems in the capital. It has received 45,000 applications for this scheme.

Kejriwal is now planning to install thousands of CCTVs all over Delhi in an effort to protect women who might be harassed and threatened, although the police and Delhi government already have many thousands of CCTVs in most localities. Is it a move to woo the voters and assure women that Aam Aadmi Party seeks to protect them?

Most of the Delhi's 28 colleges are starved of mandatory assistance to pay the salaries of teachers or hire the full strength of staff because he says that the colleges do not have management committees, though the Delhi University has sent lists of new members of the committees. Higher education beyond the school level suffers as a result. He insists that 85 per cent of college seats should be reserved for residents of Delhi, but this just cannot be done under any rule.

Lalit Sethi is a Journalist of long standing and a commentator on Political and Social Issues.

TO THE EDITOR

Read to comprehend

Editor,
Apropos the letter, "Learn to respect electoral verdict" (ST July 03, 2019) by N.K. Kehar, I'm much obliged to this rejoinder which brings into focus my letter: "How Kerala failed the BJP?" (ST June 24, 2019). However, it is unfortunate that Mr Kehar has failed to grasp the core content of my said write up. I have never ever in my said letter trivialized or cast aspersions on the other North Indian States like U.P, Bihar and Rajasthan for their being less literate than Kerala, since I have not in any way singled out these states as highlighted by Mr. Kehar himself. If this aggrieved writer has tried to comprehend my letter he would have noted that I used the term, 'Perhaps' not less than three times where I implied at the high literacy rate of Kerala which is by far much higher than the pan-Indian literacy. The sum total average might have had yielded altogether different electoral results. And by which context I have discreetly used the phrase 'Perhaps' inferring that it was not my full-throated protestation that the literacy of Kerala has been literally instrumental in rejecting the BJP lock, stock and barrel. I

have never quoted that the states with low literacy like Rajasthan, UP and even Meghalaya are by far more illiterate than Kerala and hence followed a different voting pattern in the last Lok Sabha polls. Hence the concept of: 'perhaps' is the pivotal expression I have applied here.

As to the reference to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre which no patriotic Indian can ever forget and which has become a blot in the history of the Raj in India, following the heinous atrocities committed by the British Rulers, Mr Kehar ought to know that because of this condemnable action of General Reginald Dyer, every English person cannot be painted with the same brush. In fact, in the aftermath of such a massacre, General Dyer was unreservedly denounced by the British House of Commons for the unimaginable misdeed. That April 13, 1919 blood-bath had indeed cast a shadow on the British Empire where the sun it is said can never set. And to add insult to injury, General Dyer was stripped of all entitled powers and ordered to leave India forthwith.

Coincidentally, during the Vietnam conflict on that fateful day of March 3, 1968

the villagers of My Lai in Vietnam too met with similar monstrosities where more than 500 innocent men, women and even children where mowed down by American soldiers. For such irrevocable crimes on humanity committed by some Americans, the entire population of the USA cannot be universally condemned. And, markedly, in terms of latest geopolitical scenario, USA and India have maintained good bonhomie; the former is also invariably standing by India in a fight against global terrorism at every forum. In fine, Mr. Kehar, therefore must in the first place dispassionately read the entire essence of a write-up before arriving at a final conclusion and to read well between the lines as he may miss the woods for the trees?

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Via email

MBOSE Physics text books

Editor,
Apropos Sujit De's letter, "Enslaved by erroneous education", (ST July 22, 2019), I am very much thankful to Mr De for the letter. It has come at the right time when I was

halfway through reading, "Enslaved by un-logical education". I had the privilege to have read the CBSE texts for Physics by NCERT compiled by 14 professors of renown in our country and I am astonished as to why MBOSE did not use the above texts. In my earlier letter to the editor, I had pointed out grave gross errors in the Physics text books of Classes IX and X. I have also met five physics MBOSE teachers who complained that they find the books difficult to explain to students. They had omitted many pages, which according to me is not wise and what would students write if examination questions are set from the portions omitted? I wonder how Physics teachers who are Post Graduates fail to discover the grave errors in MBOSE texts. About the experiments described, I would say without doubt that the authors had not done the experiments themselves. Archimedes is laughable and so too the Glass Bell Jar experiment with the electric bell.

Why logic is dead is because we ignore the unitary method and preliminary algebraic formula. Selling of oranges and the men painting a wall have the same system of direct proportion. The

child fails to realize that more oranges mean more money and more men doing the job means less number of days. Formulae which should not be memorized are committed to memory and this is the reason why as an invigilator in colleges, I found that many students suffer from loose motion only between 9 am to 12 am and run not to the toilets but to corners where their text books are kept.

If MBOSE could also scrutinize the above CBSE books on Physics from IX to XII, with down to earth explanations and correct and clear diagrams in one dimension or in three dimensions, it would be a great service to students of MBOSE. Lastly let me ask one frank question. "Who went through these four texts of Physics and how were they approved"? Finally let us pay homage to Aryabhata of many centuries ago, without whom the zero would not find place in Mathematics and subsequently Boolean's Algebra of 0 and 1 and True or False would also not have come, which would have meant no laptop, no 2G, 3G, 4G small phones and parents would not worry about PUBG.

Yours etc.,
Ex H.O.D Electronics Department,
St Edmund's College, Shillong.

Need to reinvent the Fire Service Dept

Editor,
I had earlier pointed out the need for the State Government to sanction and create more manpower and hi-end training for the fire service department. The reality of an unfortunate natural calamity even a man-made one, anytime soon cannot be ruled out. This is why the state government should create additional fire service stations at every block or have a cluster hub that could integrate both fire, ambulance, para-medical into an integrated disaster command structure to handle any situation. We need to have such a command and control structure which I strongly feel the state government should pay heed to. It must go for a complete up-gradation, refurbishment and upscaling of our firemen and also have fire-women too in service. The fire service department is one that goes unnoticed.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong

Articles on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

“All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope.”

--- Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.343

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 25, 2019

Education Minister on a learning curve

THERE may be many things wrong with governance in general in Meghalaya with a spill-over effect but positive developments ought to be acknowledged. The national media reported the presence of Meghalaya's Education Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui at a school in Delhi along with the Education Minister of Delhi, Manish Sisodia on July 17 last. Mr Rymbui's visit to the Delhi Government run school - Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya was to experience a Happiness class session and to interact with the students there. Rymbui wishes to replicate the initiative in Meghalaya since he believes that finding Happiness lies not in the material but in making education more conscious and meaningful through cooperation and collaboration. Happiness itself is an intangible element that relates to a child's feelings hence it would be difficult to measure it in educational outcomes. But perhaps one measurable entity is whether children enjoy their classes or see it as a drudgery that robs them of their Happiness by pushing them into a dog eat dog competitive world. Perhaps the Happiness Class intends to make students search their souls and introspect as to whether instant gratification is preferable to lasting happiness.

The educational curriculum today is loaded with what must be learnt to be on top of the class and parents have become so over-ambitious that they too must understand what makes their kids happy. Is pushing the child beyond his/her ability not creating conditions for unhappiness? Is conformity to a curriculum that is not suited to a child's temperament not the reason why so many young people take their own lives in the IITs and IIMs of this country? Why are students unable to accept failure and take it as an opportunity to try better the next time? It's because they are conditioned to believe that their parent's love is conditional to their doing well in the examinations. This must put our young kids under so much stress and depriving them of the joys of learning and of Happiness which is their due. Hence while crafting out a Happiness Curriculum is an imperative, transferring some of that learning to parents would also be very helpful because while children may be practicing happiness and contentment in school, by evening they are back to the grind where parents expect them to be toppers. Most parents have already imagined a future for their kids and neatly defined how that future should be without understanding the child's aptitude. The need to fit into a mould is what is taking away the Happiness out of Education today. What we need is a more creative curriculum that does not put the child in a trap but leaves him free to learn from life experiences. Indeed experiential learning is the key to all educational pursuits.

Reflections on NEC

By W. Synrem

Another plenary session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) is just round the corner. It is, therefore, time for the people of this region to reflect on the extent to which the NEC has been able to realize the goals and objectives for which it has been set up and what more needs to be done in the context of reverberating socio-political and economic changes affecting everybody in our present-day globalised world. The North Eastern Council was born out of political expediency as well as necessity consequent upon the reorganization of the North Eastern States in 1971. The then composite State of Assam failed to effectively meet the growing aspirations of ethnic and linguistic groups especially those of the Khasis, the Jaintias, the Garos and the Mizos and taking into account the then prevailing circumstances, the Govt. of India deemed it propitious to reorganize the region basically on linguistic considerations into five States and two Union Territories. The five States were Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura while the two Union Territories were Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Later on, both Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram also became full-fledged States and now an eighth State has also been added, viz. Sikkim.

Although politically the region was split into seven units, economically it was felt that the region should be looked at as a single unit from the point of view of economic viability. This led to the creation of the North Eastern Council (NEC) which was supposed to deal with matters of common economic interests of two or more States of the region. For instance it was not considered feasible at that time for each State of the region to have its own medical college or its own engineering college. Hence a Regional Medical College (subsequently renamed as Regional Institute of Medical Sciences) was set up at Imphal and the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) was set up at Nirjuli in Arunachal Pradesh and the total number of seats was divided among the States as per mutually agreed laid down criteria. A number of other regional institutes also came up over the years which served more or less satisfactorily well the interest of these economically unviable States of this region. The construction of inter-State roads and inter-State power transmission lines was also an area of commendable achievement by NEC. Power generation projects and airports were other critical infrastructure projects that were taken up by the NEC as per its broad mandate to bring about balanced development of the region.

It can thus be seen that NEC is supposed to look at things from a macro-level perspective and ensure that all States of the region get their due and fair share of benefit out of NEC funded projects. However, problems started cropping up when NEC took up some micro-level beneficiary-oriented schemes and projects which considerably diluted its original mandate. It should have been understood that NEC's entry into activities that State Governments are better placed to undertake could lead to not only frittering of scarce resources but also to lack of effective supervision over those small and widely scattered projects located in remote and inaccessible areas resulting in negligible outcomes and impacts. NEC has neither unlimited resources nor adequate manpower to embark upon activities which the States themselves are better qualified to take up.

In course of time, it looked like NEC started to increasingly lose sight of the big picture and the distinctive nature of its activities got considerably eroded to such an extent that NEC projects became just add-ons and appendages to State plans and programmes. As a result, most of NEC's notable achievements were pre-1999-2000 when NEC was under MHA whereas after 2000-2001 with the coming into existence of the M/o DoNER very few projects came up that could be called iconic for which NEC can justifiably claim due credit. Hence, this calls for sincere introspection on the part of all concerned because scarce resources of the region have to be put to their most productive uses and should not be just squandered irresponsibly and injudiciously without due regard for long term outcomes. There has been a lot of talk on infrastructure deficit, lack of quality education, skill development and employment generation, Act East Policy and what not. These should be followed up logically by concrete action plans as otherwise this region cannot hope to catch up with the rest of the country and socio-economic imbalances are, therefore, bound to persist and aggravate.

One important issue over which there is absolutely no scope for disagreement even from NEC's side is that the NEC Secretariat is presently suffering from an acute shortage of officers. In the absence of such officers who are supposed to be technically highly qualified since both the line Ministries of the Govt. of India and the State Governments are supposed to give due regard to their expert views and advice, the functional ef-

fectiveness of the NEC Secretariat has naturally become an area of grave concern. It should be noted that the number of sanctioned technical posts in the NEC Secretariat is very small. In spite of that, there has hardly been a time when all the posts were filled up. Besides, most of the officers are stand-alone officers with nobody to assist them at the middle level except for ministerial staff. Whenever vacancies occur, these were given as additional charge to whoever the head of the organization may like simply because he or she may be the only one available notwithstanding his or her lack of domain expertise.

Given this state of affairs, it is felt that the NEC secretariat is really ill-equipped to absorb more funds or to take up additional responsibilities for ensuring the accelerated development of this region. Under these circumstances, there is a veritable limit to what NEC can do. It should be noted, however, that NEC does not directly implement any project. NEC projects are implemented mainly by either State Governments or Central Govt. agencies but they have to be first technically scrutinized and vetted by the NEC domain experts who also have to provide technical inputs from time to time during their various phases of implementation. Hence, it should be understood that most of the NEC's officers are already overburdened as of now and their capacity to cope with additional responsibilities is, humanly speaking, justifiably questionable.

There is an internal Staffing Needs Committee under the chairmanship of the Secretary, M/o DoNER which was charged with the task of looking into the actual manpower requirements of NEC Secretariat but so far the Committee has not met even once and it is, therefore, questionable if the Govt. of India is really seriously interested in effectively strengthening the NEC Secretariat for enabling it to take up more responsibilities as clamoured and articulated from time to time. Talking about the organizational structure of NEC Secretariat, it should be borne in mind that NEC was originally envisaged to be an advisory body as per the NEC Act of 1971 but in the NEC (Amendment) Act of 2002 its role was changed into that of a regional planning body. It should be apparent that with the change of role, more manpower is needed. Besides, the NEC Secretariat had also been taking up a number of incidental activities in furtherance of its aims and objectives for which necessary budgetary allocations had been placed at its disposal. While opinions may differ on whether the NEC had

been able to effectively discharge its assigned role as mandated by the original Act and the amendment Act, the fact remains that it is a unique entity for which a new vision has been envisaged by the Prime Minister himself during his address to the 65th NEC Plenary in May 2016. Hence, everything has to be worked out accordingly and the organization should be empowered to fulfill its mandated role.

Another problem of serious proportion confronting the NEC Secretariat is the inordinately large number of on-going projects vis-à-vis its meager annual budgetary allocation. This problem was sought to be circumvented by resorting to closure of projects with time overrun of more than two years on an "as is where is" basis with a stipulation that the concerned implementing agencies should complete the projects out of their own resources. There is, however, no concrete or fool-proof mechanism to ensure that such projects would be eventually completed within reasonable timeframe. Hence, the likelihood is that investment already made may just become infructuous with nobody being held accountable for the likely colossal waste of public funds. This is especially true of non-infrastructure projects about which even the percentage of achievement cannot be determined with any degree of precision or accuracy.

Whether this state of affairs can be attributed to NEC's trying to bite more than it can chew given its skeletal manpower strength and meager budgetary resources is a moot point but it undeniably reflects poorly on the quality of project scrutiny, the quality of project implementation and the present capacity of the organization to really come up to the level of expectation of the people who may still be looking at it as an organization that can do wonders notwithstanding its uninspiring performance of late which belies that kind of expectation unless its present malady is correctly diagnosed and effectively remedied. Taking everything into consideration, proper coordination among the line Ministries, the NEC and the State Governments is, therefore, the supreme need of the hour for taking the region forward. The resultant better synergy of efforts should help in accelerating the actualization of the goals of balanced regional development and enabling the States of the region to play a more significant role especially in the context of the Govt. of India's Act East Policy.

(The writer is a retired Additional Secretary level officer of the Govt. of India)

Vidhan Soudha Court of defection justice

By Dr S. Saraswathi

The architect of Vidhan Soudha, the iconic building that houses Karnataka legislature in Bengaluru, K. Hanumanthiah and his team would not have foreseen that the construction they were erecting would not remain just the most beautiful structure of bricks and mortar in India to house post-independence law-making body, but become the venue for nationally significant political/constitutional decisions.

The reference is to determination of majority and formation of government and particularly to the impact of the Anti-Defection Law, which is an addition to the original Constitution as 10th Schedule in 1985. This law has received a very crucial judicial interpretation in a verdict in the Supreme Court on this august Assembly in the famous SR Bommai case that the test of majority should be conducted on the floor of the House. Vidhan Soudha has come to be linked with the law and politics of defection.

The disputes under the Anti-Defection Law have also centred round the powers of the Speaker and the Governor who are the key concerned constitutional authorities.

From Bommai case in 1994 to the triangular politics between JD(S), Congress, and the BJP presently going on in Karnataka, several issues surrounding government formation and its continuance, proceedings in the Assembly, role of political parties and their members, powers of the Speaker, Governor, and the Supreme Court, and the rights of the MLAs have arisen in the precincts of Vidhan Soudha.

The moves and counter-moves by members and parties expose the weakness of the Anti-Defection Law and the immense possibilities for manipulating and dodging the law by parties. Recent political events in Karnataka are a naked struggle for power totally eliminating ethics in politics. They prove that law alone cannot shape institutions and individuals in the absence of the will of individuals to honour the letter and spirit of the law.

Karnataka government formed in 2018 was itself a weak formation of a coalition of two parties that bitterly fought each other in the election and joined hands after the election -- Congress with 78 members and JD(S) with 37 members -- claiming majority in a House of 224 members. The BJP winning high-seat number of seats had 105 members and was first invited to form the government. Since it failed to get majority support, the rivals turned partners got the chance with the smaller of the two as the head. However, 14 months later, the Opposition BJP tasted success and defeated the confidence motion moved by the CM on Tuesday last.

The current episode started with the resignations of 13 MLAs (10 Congress and 3 JDS) on 6th July, and the Speaker wanted at least six days to decide whether they were voluntary and genuine. Speaker also raised a question about the format of the resignation letters of eight of them. The Congress party filed a petition to disqualify the rebel members who stayed away from the Legislature Party meeting convened by the party.

Number of resignations increased and some members moved the Supreme Court seeking its direction to the Speaker to accept the resignations.

Two issues were before the Speaker - resignations and disqualification of the members by their parties. The Supreme Court gave time till 11th July to the Speaker to decide on the resignations which raised the first constitutional issue in the episode whether the Speaker - a constitutional authority - could

be given a time frame by the court to decide the matter of resignation. The court asked the Speaker to maintain status quo till 16th July. No decision could be taken by the Speaker on questions of disqualification or resignation. The Speaker asked the rebel members to appear before him in two batches on July 12 and 15.

Converting resignation into disqualification issue virtually denies concerned legislators the right to quit their seats in the legislature. A disqualified member cannot hold a parliamentary office or become a minister without getting reelected - a situation that would prevent the rebels from joining opposition for positions whereas a person who resigns may be inducted into an alternative ministry. But, disqualification cannot be effected without establishing its ground while resignation is a simple question of acceptance by the competent authority.

The power of the Speaker is substantial in applying Anti-Defection Law, but Speakers are generally reluctant to disqualify a member. The question whether the Speaker's inaction can be challenged in court is already pending before a Constitution bench. Such inaction happened in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Karnataka is now exposing another dimension of the problem.

Meanwhile, further resignations followed and five more of the rebels moved the Supreme Court complaining of threat and intimidation by their party. Their contention is that the right to resign from their office is a "fundamental right of a citizen as well as a public representative". They disputed the need to verify the genuineness of their resignations as they submitted letters personally to the Speaker and also submitted sworn affidavits in the apex court.

Supreme Court order while upholding the Speaker's right to decide issues of disqualification and resignation, provided exemption to the 15 rebels from attending the on-going Assembly session where a trust vote was in process. It was to "strike a balance" as the Speaker was delaying acceptance of their resignations. Both JD(S) and the Congress filed a petition seeking clarification of the Supreme Court on this order.

On July 23, the game was finally over for the coalition. When the trust vote was taken, the coalition government had 99 members against BJP's 105. The reason to prolong the debate and gain time for negotiations with the rebels, simply didn't work for it and the government fell.

In this story that is rather confusing and boring to onlookers, the Governor set "deadlines" for trust vote thrice, but they were not complied with. On the contrary, the CM asked the Speaker to decide whether the Governor can give a deadline. Thus, every move of Constitutional functionaries is being subjected to questioning by the affected making the tale one of mutual check to fix limits of authorities.

Obviously, there are many defects in the existing system and procedures which can lead to collapse of orderly governance in the hands of politicians. The country is going through testing times and requires cleansing of institutions by well-meaning politicians.

Faced with possibilities of more resignations rather than return of the rebels, the CM moved Trust Vote on July 18. --- *INFA*
(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

To the Editor

Why is MCTA biased?

Editor,

I am deeply appalled at the functioning of the Meghalaya College Teachers' Association (MCTA) and how they are fighting with so much passion in Jefferson Wallang's case, seeking his reinstatement, even while forgetting the many issues that other teachers face. We as Ad-Hoc teachers have approached the MCTA innumerable times to help us meet our demands and to approach the Education Minister and Chief Minister but they have always keep our request in abeyance. But since Jefferson Wallang is a well to do person with political back-up they are so eager to help him. This Association is biased because the moment they take up posts of President or General Secretary, the next thing they do is contest the Assembly Elections making MCTA a springboard. They are not serious about the teachers' grievances.

Other teachers in colleges also say that their allowances have been stripped off and their pension is a distant dream. For those of us teaching in rural colleges, the MCTA will never take up our issues seriously. They are an Association that will only fight for those with status in society.

Also the Head of Department (HOD) in the colleges are benefitting in terms of the classes they take and the number of off days they take for themselves. The juniors are the most tortured lot. Why can't there be rotation of headship as happens in other states, now that the semester system has been introduced? Most of the heads are not even qualified to be labeled so since some of them do not have NET or PhD or even publications and have never presented papers nor have they been resource persons in any seminar/workshop/academic discussion. Yet they pose as if they have everything by virtue of being older. Now

what does age have to do with being the HOD when they are lacking the necessary qualifications? Also in most colleges there are teachers who take leave at their whim and fancy because they are close to the management. The teachers are also fed up with the corrupt system of recruitment in the colleges. Some teachers are not NET qualified yet they are given college teaching posts while they are being told to prepare for NET alongside and given a two year duration to complete the same. Some of us are NET qualified yet we are left in the lurch.

MCTA should fight for such grievances and not on matters that the management and the terminated teacher can very well resolve mutually. Also please let the MCTA be enlightened that Jefferson Wallang has not attained 'professorship' to be addressed as one. He is a mere Assistant Professor who does not even hold a PhD degree leave alone being qualified

to be called a professor. Also Jefferson violated the norms and principles of the management that whilst he is on probation he joined in a protest by wearing a black flag. If he is not conforming to the norms it is only right for him to get terminated.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
West Jaintia Hills

Storm in a teacup!

Editor,

The hue and cry over Trump's offer to mediate between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue is only a storm in a tea cup. It is alleged that Narendra Modi, during his recent visit to the US, had asked President Donald Trump to mediate on the Kashmir issue. However, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar made a statement on the floor of both Houses of Parliament to

strongly reject Trump's comment during a meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan in Washington. Things have become even more confounding when a top presidential advisor said on Tuesday that President Donald Trump 'does not make up things.'

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "If what Trump claims is true, Modi has betrayed India's interests." It was a sentiment backed by several Opposition leaders who spoke out in Parliament and outside.

Why should the Opposition blow the issue out of proportion? Admittedly, it has been India's consistent position that all outstanding issues with Pakistan are discussed only bilaterally. My question now is, 'How long have the two countries engaged in bilateral discussion to solve the Kashmir issue? Has there been any breakthrough so far?'

Practically speaking, nothing conclusive has been achieved so far. The Kashmir issue is complex and too labyrinthine to be

solved. Does anyone believe that Kashmir issue can be solved through bilateral discussions? It is just a pie in the sky for those who choose to believe that a solution is possible. So, what transpired between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on this issue is immaterial considering the practical side of the issue.

I presume that Modi might have shared with the US President the vexatious issue of Kashmir and how intractable it is at present. What happens if the US too comes to the negotiating table as a mediator on the Kashmir issue? In the event of finalising and solving the issue, Modi would emerge as one of the most powerful and influential Prime Ministers of India. Perhaps the Opposition parties do not like this to happen; hence this hue and cry.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

“That which can be asserted without evidence, can be dismissed without evidence.”

--- Christopher Hitchens

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.344

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2019

Local mania in AP

THE southern state of Andhra Pradesh has become the first state to pass legislation, this week, reserving 75 per cent of jobs for locals - meaning sons of the soil - in industrial units in both private and public sector. Notably, a similar offer from the present Congress government in Madhya Pradesh has not been acted upon. Prima facie, this is seen as a populist measure by the YSR government led by Jagan Mohan Reddy who assumed office just two months ago. Its implications are far-reaching and harmful. For one, the state that came into being five years ago and is still struggling to survive does not have too many industries. What it boasts of are the entities in Visakhapatnam, like a steel plant, a refinery and a port. Fact is also that large numbers of youths from the state are finding employment in big cities like Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad. There is virtually no such reservation for locals in these big cities. Nor is there a reservation system in other mega cities like Mumbai or Delhi.

In the era of Liberalization and Globalization, what is encouraged is free movement of people. India's big cities today have large throngs of people who were born and brought up in other states but have moved into big cities where opportunities are more. Even in Maharashtra, where pro-Marathi Shiv Sena roared for long years, there is no law like what AP has now introduced. The Sena imposed its will on industries through muscle-flexing, though. The fear is that if Andhra Pradesh gets away with its act, other states too would be tempted to follow suit. This does not bode well for the spirit of unity and integrity of the nation. Integration today is the watchword. Formerly alienated societies like those from the South and the North-East have progressively overcome their sense of isolation and are increasingly making their presence felt in big cities like capital Delhi, or NCR. So too with tech-savvy Bengaluru! The workforce there comprises a happy mosaic of youths from across India. The effort on the part of a government should be to encourage industrialization on a faster mode. That creates more job opportunities. The AP government might unwittingly be showing a red signal to industrialists who would like to make forays into the state; just as Shiv Sena had hurt Mumbai by its muscle-flexing and the Communists in West Bengal closed down Kolkata's factories. States in the vicinity benefited. The newly introduced AP legislation should be challenged in court.

The visit by our Education Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui to the Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya School in New Delhi to get a feel of what the Happiness Curriculum looks like, made it to the national media. Delhi's Education Minister Manish Sisodia accompanied Mr Rymbui. Indeed, this is the need of the hour and our young ones should get out of the fear syndrome that has been the narrative of Meghalaya ever since it was created. There is the fear of the outsider who is seen as more enterprising and might therefore snatch away our rice plate; the fear of competition, so hang on to reservation and just get by in life by riding on the tribal quota; fear of losing jobs and business to the outsider and so many other unfounded fears. These fears have not been analyzed and are not allowed a rational analyses lest the lie is called out. And guess who has made a killing out of this fear psychosis? You guessed it! Our politicians have hidden their inability to deliver the public goods and their diversion of public money to private projects by raising the bogey of fear before and during every election since 1979. They have never addressed issues of landlessness, growing poverty, malnutrition (51% of women in Meghalaya suffer from anemia), poor road communications, farmer's plight and even the quality of health and education in Meghalaya because they have failed on all fronts.

It is said that a free and fearless press is the greatest ally to a free and prosperous people. So what is the media actually writing and covering? What sort of intellectual inputs does media have, particularly the vernacular media, other than the lengthy sermons on Christianity which occupy the edit pages of the local papers. As a reminder I wish to quote Christopher Hitchens who says, "Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it." The media has seldom challenged this attempt of politicians to create needless paranoia without offering any solutions. Rather the media has fed on

Fear and Happiness are incongruous

By Patricia Mukhim

the politicians' rhetoric and only amplified the fear psychosis and helped to create the enemy. The enemy naturally is the outsider (mynder) and never our own people even though the major looting of resources has been by local politicians, big business and the coal and limestone mine owners.

Over the years politicians have built walls in the minds of the youth and supplied the raw material of hate and exclusivism. As children who joined schools in all innocence they had images of a world without borders. In the classroom kids are not defined or judged by their races. But by the time they are eighteen years, and have the potent weapon of a vote they have also acquired attitudes that tend to make the world a battleground of false ideas which are deeply ingrained in their psyche. Fired by a hatred for the other they are easily manipulated and have been emotionally brainwashed since 1979. Not much has been done to redeem their fragile emotions from such mindless manipulation of their thought processes. Today outrage is quickly sourced and social media allows traffic of thoughts and ideas that appeal to the worst in us.

Across the world today politicians are stoking fear and presenting themselves as some kind of saviours of the human race. But fear only generates more fear and we feel besieged. Somehow we feel powerless against those forces that are outside of us and the source of our fear. As a result our media is awash with bad news because good news tends to drive out fear. Or that is what we think as media persons - that there's not much good happening anyway so why report on anything good? And if politicians are feeding us so much fear surely the world must be coming to an end soon! As a community and people who have lost the will to be pro-active and to reason whether these

infectious! So too is the fear psychosis. Happy children will not have reason to hate anyone and I suspect they will also begin to learn by collaboration and co-operation rather than the present cut-throat competition.

It is heartening that we have now an Education Minister who is concerned enough about education in Meghalaya and who is open to learning from other states. Here is a Minister who drives his own daughter to school using a nondescript car. He is a good example!

Our education system has become obsolete for this new world of Artificial Intelligence. There is need to overhaul the system but instilling of human values is the first priority. The second is to help our kids question what the learned and the powerful say; to analyze political speeches and to invite politicians to school and subject then to intense questioning. There is no need to treat politicians like our patrons and ourselves as clients. Why should public representatives operate in a separate space and only come down to earth during elections? Why should they speak to us only through the media? Times have changed and this is a democracy not a monarchy or an oligarchy. The use of the word, "rulers" has only reinforced a slavish mentality in the voters who see themselves as the "ruled" instead of the real rulers which is what democracy promises. People even in this tribal society have become so disempowered because of the system created by politics that they now have no shame to beg for morsels from the MLAs/MDCs and to queue up at their homes from early morning. The education system with its Happiness content has to help redeem the self esteem of a tribe that once was proud and independent.

However there is a rider here: The teachers have to first exorcise all fear from the classroom; from the child's tender psyche and from daily conversations because Happiness cannot reside where Fear does. The two are incongruous!

KHADC: Ready for Change?

By Sumarbin Umdor

Representatives of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) have often positioned the Council as the ultimate bulwark against erosion of rights and customs of the indigenous population of the state and have championed new laws such as the Village Administration Bill (VAB) to safeguard the interests of the local people and their institutions. In fact, the tenure of some of the prominent leaders of KHADC can be closely associated with such new legislations. For example, Mr. P.N. Syiem was a vocal proponent of VAB of 2014. Mr. H. S. Shylla will be remembered for his unwavering support to the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill, 2018, and similarly Mr. Ardent Basaiawmoit for his passionate appeal for extending Article 371 of the Constitution to the state of Meghalaya.

While these proposed new laws do generate a lot of euphoria in the community at the beginning, such affairs are short lived as these legislations have met a quiet death. The movers of such legislation in the recent past have themselves failed to reap any political benefits from these events despite having invested much resources, energy and time leaving them like their legislations in the cold.

Mr. Paul Lyngdoh, a new entrant to the KHADC, has taken a different approach in his new avatar as an Executive Member (EM) of the present Executive Committee (EC) of the Council. A well-read man with vast administrative experience having been a Cabinet Minister in the government of Meghalaya and also Chairman of the Meghalaya Public Accounts Committee in the past years, he has created quite a stir in his new role as the EM in charge of Trade, Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Land Development and Building) Regulation, 2015, Town Committees and Education. Rather than advocating for new laws to empower the KHADC, he has set about rigorously exercising the existing powers of the Council to regulate trading by non tribals as contained in para 10 of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

A closer examination of para 10 of the said Schedule clearly show the powers that autonomous councils enjoys in regulating trade as non-tribal residents of the State must obtain license from for the Councils to carry any business activity and new license can be refused in the interest of the local population. This power of the Councils is unparalleled as I'm not so sure if local authority in any part of the country can refuse the grant of a trade license on the basis of the son of the soil argument.

In fact, under the present the United Khasi Jaintia Hills District (Trading By Non-tribals) Rules, 1959, useful information can be obtained on details of workers employed by existing trading license holders simply by mandating the filing for additional information at the time of renewal of licenses. This information would reveal employment pattern in these enterprises and whether any intervention is needed to ensure license holders employ the locals.

Other policy intervention introduced by Mr. Lyngdoh is in the form of increasing of trade license fee, identifying of 31 new trade activities to be brought under the Act and revamping and modernization of process of revenue collection to ensure better supervision and compliance of rules. The hike in trade license is long overdue as the last time it was done so was in 2005. In the last 20 years the percentage contribution of this source to own revenue of KHADC has doubled and at present about 12 per cent to Council's own revenue comes from this source. Along with revenue collected from Professional

tax and royalty from Forest, these three sources bring in close to about 90 per cent of own revenue to KHADC. Therefore, the implementation of revenue augmentation initiatives covering the three revenue sources will lead to substantial reduction in high revenue volatility and bring in much needed financial resources to the Council.

Besides fully utilizing its powers to raise tax and non-tax revenue, KHADC should also explore new avenues to expand its revenue base. For example, a recent Supreme Court ruling allows for local bodies to impose property tax on telecommunication service providers for towers erected on private land and not the owner of land and building on which the tower is situated. Panchayats in some states have started imposing such tax on telecommunication companies.

It is heartening to see that the process of reformation in KHADC is not limited to one department alone but that other initiatives such as administrative reforms is also on the anvil. One area that requires urgent attention of the present leadership of the KHADC is on its financial management to bring about transparency and accountability in sources of revenue and expenditure of the Council.

At present, the accounts of KHADC are not systematically maintained as a result of which there is ambiguity in the inflow and outflow of financial resources. For instance, recording of source of revenue is not as per origin as can be seen from the way receipt under Land revenue is reported which include both own mobilized revenue (income from fisheries, mortgage fee) as well as grants for state government (land reforms and records). Similarly, recording and reporting of expenditure do not follow any standardized codes as a result of which it is often difficult to properly classifying the type and nature of expenditure incurred by the Council.

It is important to emphasize here that the demand of the ten autonomous councils under Sixth Schedule for direct funding from the government of India will not be possible without the implementation of standardized accounting system as this is a prerequisite to access funds from the government. This is the condition put forward by the Thirteenth Finance Commission for PRIs to avail funds from the Commission.

Another area that needs attention of the Council is with regard to clarity on the type of services that it is empowered to provide to citizens and to revamp the provisioning of such services to make them citizen friendly. One such model of citizen friendly services offered by local bodies in the country is the Bengaluru Municipality which I'm sure can be replicated here.

As Japan is keen to widen its engagement in the northeastern region, KHADC could explore the possibility of partnering with Japan International Cooperation Agency to strengthen the institutional capacities of the Council as the Agency has experienced and has provided assistance for such programme in many countries.

There is something refreshing about the current EC of the KHADC as they seem to be open to new ideas and aware that much needs to be done internally to revamp and reform the functioning of this body. This bodes well for the State as the Council can provide a valuable training ground for nurturing future political leaders who are administratively efficient and forward looking.

TO THE EDITOR

Unsavory incidents at KJP Girls School

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily we would like to bring to the notice of the Education Department about the shoddy and suspicious appointment of teachers in one of the oldest missionary schools in Shillong, the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian (KJP) girls school, Mawkhar. Before the end of March 2019 the school had advertised for a post in the local dailies and the school notice board for 'Assistant teacher with the prescribed qualifications being BA Economics Honours with B.Ed and Geography as one of the subjects in Class 12. However to our utter surprise when the result was declared, the candidate selected for this post was actually a Geography honours candidate, not Economics honours! What's going on here? Something fishy is definitely going on! The school advertised for an Economics teacher but appoints someone qualified in Geography.

Now imagine if a hospital wanted a Cardiologist but appointed a Psychiatrist

instead, what would happen? Where is the logic? Why has the school then rejected and returned all applications of Geography (Hons) candidates in the first place if they actually wanted a Geography teacher? We would also like to ask a few questions to the school authorities. Why did the advertisement not mention that this was a Deficit post? As far as we are concerned the selected candidate did not meet the requisite requirements as per advertisement (BA Economics honours) and her application should have been rejected forthwith just like other applicants since she is also a Geography (Hons) graduate. Didn't the interview panel (which included an expert in Economics) notice that a Geography (Hons) candidate is being interviewed for the post of Economics teacher? Or was the interview just a formality? Wasn't there any Economics (Hons) candidate who appear for the interview?

The KJP Girls' Higher Secondary School was established in 1892 by the Welsh Missionaries with

the sole purpose of educating girl children. The school has produced many distinguished women personalities in our state over the years and the school is shouldered by the KJP Synod (a church) as the sponsoring body. However, if the school indulges in unethical practices especially in recruitment of teachers then the quality of education of this school is in jeopardy and at the end of the day the biggest losers are the students. Moreover the reputation and credibility of the KJP Synod (a church) and its different institutions is at stake. Therefore the school should have the guts to answer all the above questions otherwise it will compel the eligible disappointed candidates to file an RTI or even go to the court of law. This letter does not intend to malign any individual but to correct the injustices and evil practices prevailing in our society and system which have now intruded into church run institutions and hence as young citizens we should not be mere spectator but try to stop this menace once and for all. As Napoleon stated, "The world suffers a lot, not because of the violence of

bad people, but because of the silence of good people".

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Imran's startling revelations

Editor,
Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday made a startling revelation that his country still has about 30,000 to 40,000 militants who were trained and fought in parts of Afghanistan or Kashmir. Imran Khan made these comments at the US Institute of Peace during his three-day visit to the US, and he looked relieved spilling the beans. Imran even stated that past Pak governments only lied to the US over terror and did not give the US the correct and genuine reports.

India had been trying to convince the world of Pakistan's clandestine attempts to hide the militant groups' activities in the country. It may be recalled that India and Afghanistan have been accusing Pakistan of providing a safe haven to

the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other militant groups, which carry out attacks in the two countries.

It is an eye-opening experience for India that Khan, who is on a three-day official visit to the US, also admitted to American legislators that successive governments in Pakistan did not tell the truth to the United States, in particular in the last 15 years, that there were 40 different groups operating in his country. Now Khan categorically stated his country has taken practical steps to weed out militant groups. Will this be a sign of policy-shift on the part of Pakistan? If so, it will indeed be a shot in the arm of India's efforts for maintaining peace between the two countries.

After Imran Khan took over as Pakistan's Prime Minister's he has brought about a qualitative change in the administration and a change in the government's outlook. This is evident in the handling of the militant problems. Mr. Khan said, "There was a watershed in Pakistani politics. In 2014, the Pakistani Taliban slaughtered 150 school

children at Army Public School in Peshwar. All the political parties signed the National Action Plan and we all decided after that, that we will not allow any militant groups to operate inside Pakistan." Mr. Khan also said, "We are the first government that has started disarming militant groups. This is the first time it is happening. We have taken over their institutes, their seminaries, etc." This statement of Khan shows he is fighting tooth and nail against terrorism.

In the past Pakistan was a breeding ground for terrorism. Now if we take Khan's statement at face value, India can have a sigh of relief, and once the militant groups are eliminated completely from the Pakistani soil, Pakistan will no more become a monster to frighten other countries. If Imran Khan remains integrated, then surely an incredible miracle of solving the Kashmir issue will happen. Wonders will never cease!

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

*"Science and religion are not at odds.
Science is simply too young to understand."*

--- Dan Brown, Angels & Demons

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.345

SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 27, 2019

RTI Amendment Bill passed without debate

THE absence of a strong opposition both in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha has led to the passing of a Bill that curtails the powers of the Chief Information Commissioner whose powers are considered to be not equal to that of the Chief Election Commissioner. Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh defended the amendment saying it was not meant to curtail the independence of the RTI Act (2005) and that the CICs would not be changed every two years as alleged by the Opposition. Singh also reiterated that Government does not have unbridled powers to amend the rules of the RTI. He said that Government is open to suggestions and the amendments are being made with a clean intention. The problem it appears is because several RTI queries had gone to the CIC on the manner in which decisions were taken by the Election Commission of India (ECI) during the recent Lok Sabha elections. The Government's defence is that the ECI is a Constitutional body whereas the CIC is a statutory body. Dr Singh stoutly defended the Government saying that it had followed the principle of 'maximum governance and minimum government' and had therefore abolished interviews for many jobs and allowed self attestation of documents which he said were citizen-centric approaches. Even the Mobile App was introduced to enable citizens to file RTI's online. While the Modi government has put up a lot of information from different ministries in the public domain but the most important question on which RTI was sought was on the issue of electoral bonds and the names of the companies/corporate houses/individuals that purchased those bonds for which money went into the BJP kitty and advantaged it vis-à-vis its rivals. This is what the Government does not want revealed and the ECI seems to think that the CIC should have no remit over such issues which are within its jurisdiction.

The RTI Amendment Bill was not referred to a Select Committee since 117 members voted against that motion and only 75 members voted for it. The RTI (Amendment) Bill, 2019 amendment ostensibly relates to the term of office of, and the salaries, allowances and other terms and conditions of service of, the Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commissioners, State Chief Information Commissioner and State Information Commissioners. There is no doubt at all that there are attempts to dilute the powers of the CICs and the SICs on the alibi that the Government is putting up all information on the public domain. But that is hardly the case. There are ministries with very sketchy information. This is where the problem arises. It is unfortunate that a weak opposition has allowed the RTI Amendment Bill to be passed without discussion.

Culture of rejecting "not in my backyard" mindset needed

By Maitphang Syiem

The Earth is 4.6 billion years old and we humans have existed million of years as well and we have traversed through different era from the ice age, Stone Age, Iron Age and now we are in the era of information engrossed with the virtual world of gadgets. The digital world has taken us by storm and all of us are happy with the transition and we have to adapt to the transitions accordingly. We will be doing so in the future years to come. On the other hand we should also not forget that we are also living in the so called plastic age. We humans have ourselves invented plastics and the plastic products indeed have in a way revolutionized the entire aspects of human needs and wants. They are flexible, robust, handy to use and easy to transport. There are wide varieties of plastic products ranging from bags to heavy plastics used for various purposes. We all know plastic are a very important much used commodity. But what actually is plastic? How did it come into existence?

Ironically plastic was discovered by fluke 75 years ago in the late 1930's when scientists who were working for a chemical based company ICI in the UK back then had heated chemical compounds ethylene and benzaldehyde which unknowingly led to the formation of a waxy solid which is malleable and which can be molded into any desired shape. Just as we humans have transited through many ages, plastics too have undergone changes from time to time and in due course of evolution a German Scientist by the name Karl Ziegler found a way to polymerize ethylene by using a catalytic substance to enhance the process which also led to the improvement and production of better plastic products such as the ones that are commonly used today which are known as LDPE or low density polyethylene. So plastics are technically chemical products with Polyethylene (PE) as the main component and from this component numerous products have come up. One of them is the polyethylene bags the most common commodity that we humans cannot avoid and have perhaps become

an inevitable part of our existence.

Even as we speak there are more polyethylene bags being produced and also used by humans to meet their requirements but these are irresponsibly and recklessly dumped everywhere - in public places, rivers, drains, streams and thereby pollute the environment as a whole. Before we proceed further let us go back and ask who invented the most robust and easy to use commodity called "Polyethylene bags". In the 1960's a Swedish Engineer Sten Gustaf Thulin invented the most popular shopping bag that we all use and the purpose was for ease of packaging. In recent times, we cannot deny the fact that plastic bags are of great use as carry bags and have become part and parcel of our daily lives but are we using them with a clear conscience and with proper management of their disposal? Let us ethically answer this question ourselves. When we go by the narrative that we are people who love cleanliness (ka jingkhuid ka jing suba) where is our ethics of cleanliness when we still have the concept of, "not in my backyard," meaning that we can throw and dump plastic waste into the environment because its free and open but not in our own premises because we only care about ourselves. Isn't the environment our home as well? Can't we love and care for the environment just as we do our homes? Let us not be hypocritical with our ethics in this aspect. The, "not in my backyard" mindset needs a serious change. So let us start by taking small measures individually.

It is estimated that 8.3 billion metric tonnes of plastic have been produced and the amount of plastic that had been produced in the recent past has surpassed the amount that was in the entire last century. Now we can understand that we are indeed living in the Plastic age. And the rate at which plastic waste is being produced is 300 million metric tonnes

yearly which is equivalently to the total weight of the human population. Is this not frightening? Let us answer and introspect on this matter. Above all, the major crises of plastic pollution are with the one-time use plastic commodities or single-use disposable plastics which we have become addictive to. Ironically the biggest chunk of plastics is designed to be used only once. Researchers have estimated that out of the total percentage of plastics produced 60% of them are mostly disposed off and land up in our landfills or the environment. To be specific most of the plastic waste makes it way to the rivers, streams, oceans etc. We can see the bitter truth in our own homeland waters, Umshyrpi, Wah Umkhrah and in particular the recent episode of Wah Umiam which is a major catchment area.

According to rough estimates by researchers about 8 million tonnes of plastics wastes make their way into water bodies every year and in particular into the oceans. From this we can conclude that the rivers and streams are the major carriers of plastic wastes and we humans are their major contributors. For decades our homeland waters have been carrying all the garbage and plastic wastes. We forget that these water bodies do have a life too and are supporting other important lives as well. In fact as we speak these once pristine waters are dying slowly but the plastics wastes they are carrying will perhaps remain for centuries and will not degrade. We certainly understand that plastics products are a boon and a bane as well but what are we actually doing to reduce the harmful side of plastics? It is time that we start introspecting our own ethics of using plastics. The need of the hour is to beat plastic pollution.

Going by the famous quote of Gandhi "Be the change you want to see in the world," we can beat the menace of plastic if we work as a community but this should start at the individual level. It is time that we ponder on our ethics and start to imbibe the spirit of earth stewardship. This is

what we need to do in order to stop polluting our environment by the way in which we use plastics. No doubt the controlling authorities are working hard and have begun to act eventually and are driving in the right direction, however there is a need on their part to also drive with a spirit of earth stewardship. Policies on such matters should incorporate principles of earth stewardship by making the public aware so that process of reducing plastics use becomes participatory. The Government alone cannot bring the change. They will need the support of all of us. As a matter of fact environmental pollution itself is a subject of concern of every human being in existence. Let the authorities do their part and we the common public should by and large focus on our individual roles in curbing this menace. To curb plastic pollution we need to reduce the flow of plastics wastes at source. We need to ethically improve on the aspects of managing our plastic wastes.

The recent quick initiative taken up by the controlling authorities to look into the matter of the Wah Umiam pollution is laudable. This time there should be a shift in the approach of tackling the burning issue of plastic pollution. The approach should be a participatory one. It may be suggested that point-source pollution or the point at which the plastic wastes enters the water bodies be identified. There will be many places which will be the point source. Environmental laws may also be invoked to declare such zones as 'no plastic zones.' Perhaps this will cut down the reckless dumping of wastes.

To conclude, the environment today has become a case of, "Water water everywhere and plastics in water everywhere." Let us ask ourselves if we really want to enjoy the value of water bodies dumped and filled with dirty plastics? Everything rests on us and our intuitions to take the best decision. Let us participate and collaborate to defeat and beat plastic pollution and of course let us take a different path and not follow "the not in my backyard" mindset.

(The writer is a Geospatial expert)

A new low in turncoat politics in India Karnataka replaces Haryana in dubious record

By K Raveendran

Karnataka is the story of a beautiful dream gone sour. Over a year ago, when HD Kumaraswamy's Janata Dal (Secular) and Congress came together to thwart the BJP bid to form a government as the saffron party failed to secure a majority, it was as though all the parties opposed to Modi had joined hands. The grand photograph, taken at the swearing in of Kumaraswamy as the chief minister, showed Sonia Gandhi, Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, Sitaram Yechury holding hands in a rare camaraderie, and it soon became the mascot of opposition unity. The optics from Bengaluru suggested imageries of a cornered Narendra Modi, with no chance of making it for a second time in 2019.

The results of the by-elections that followed proved to be the icing on the cake, with the Modi party taking big hits in almost every constituency. That was confirmation of the potential of the new-found opposition unity and the assembly elections to follow more or less reflected the same trend. So, Modi's fate appeared sealed.

But as the Lok Sabha elections approached, unity floundered on the personal

ambitions of the leaders, who had conjured up their own grand visions. And it was evident that the much-hyped unity of mind and purpose was going nowhere. As campaigning picked up steam, the opposition seemed to lose it way and its balance, failing to read the changing public mood. Meanwhile, the stories emanating from Bengaluru were not that reassuring. Kumaraswamy gave the impression of being a chief minister in distress, often complaining about the bigger partner Congress breathing down his neck. He even threw tantrums in public, protesting to the voters for not giving his party a clear mandate to rule, thereby putting him at the mercy of the senior partner while he took all the flak for government failures.

Whatever has transpired between the declaration of assembly election results and the latest episode of Yeddyurappa staking claim to form the next government overwrites the 'claim to fame' of Haryana as the stage for the worst form of 'Aya Ram, Gaya Ram' politics. That honour now goes to Karnataka lock, stock and barrel.

The Karnataka sequence

The grand photograph, taken at the swearing in of Kumaraswamy as the chief minister, showed Sonia Gandhi, Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, Sitaram Yechury holding hands in a rare camaraderie, and it soon became the mascot of opposition unity. The optics from Bengaluru suggested imageries of a cornered Narendra Modi, with no chance of making it for a second time in 2019.

minister Bhajan Lal setting a new low in wholesale turncoat politics, was supposed to deal with all such future scenarios by providing for the disqualification of deviant legislators. But the Karnataka developments have shown that even the draconian provisions of the law are not biting enough to deal with the new version of 'Aya Ram, Gaya Ram' syndrome, in which no incentive is large enough to keep legislators within the flock. And money these days has no smell or colour.

While Karnataka has replaced Haryana in the roll of 'honours' as topper, the longevity of its record may not be all that reassuring. It is only a matter of time before the new incumbent gives way to yet another record-breaker. The next in line may be Madhya Pradesh, followed by Rajasthan and even Chhattisgarh.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan has already taken 'anticipatory bail' by claiming that the BJP will not be responsible if the Kamal Nath government falls due to 'Congress infighting'. "We are not dislodging anyone, but whatever is going on there is not good," Chauhan is reported to have said in an interview.

With 'infighting' being one of the easiest things that can be engineered from outside, provided there is enough in terms of resources and political clout, any legislator or a group of them is a potential target. All one can say with certainty is that we are headed for very exciting times, just waiting to unfold. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Let's stop the plastic menace

Editor,
Two articles in your esteemed daily by Toki Blah and Barnes Mawrie are eye openers about the pollution of rivers in Meghalaya especially about the pathetic condition of two rivers - Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyrpi which have lost their glory and are now actually on the verge of 'dying.' And now lo and behold! Wah Umiam is also crying and in pain because of human greed and recklessness and because of the poor maintenance of waste generated from the View Point at Mawiong. Now with the ever flowing waste from Wah Umkhrah one wonders what will happen to Umiam. The Facebook post titled, "PLASTIC TSUNAMI HITS UMIAM LAKE - SHILLONG POST", is a very strong reminder about the deleterious effects of plastic waste. The irony is that we call ourselves a civilized society with no civic sense. So we throw plastic anywhere we want and forget that there is no other planet that we live in but mother Earth! It is high time that we do our share and join hands in reviving nature so that the future generations can still achieve the bliss that we enjoyed in this beautiful

place called 'home.'
Yours etc.,
Christine Nongbet,
Via email

MBOSE must revisit its Science curriculum

Editor,
The editorial "Education Minister on a learning curve", (ST July 25, 2019) which revealed the Education Minister's interest to experience a Happiness class session and interact with students of Sarvada Bal Vidyalaya Government School, Delhi made for delightful reading. At the same time the article "Fear and happiness are incongruous" (ST July 26, 2019) by Patricia Mukhim does send a message loud and clear about the need to remove fear from among students of all schools. Let us not forget that it is the fear psychosis of influx of scientists' and influx of bureaucrats that had made us lose the golden opportunity to establish the Central Agricultural University (CAU) in Meghalaya. The first line of para 2 of the previous editorial is very true, in which over ambitious parents overleap their expectation from their children in spite of fully

knowing the child's inability to meet those ambitions. We have many students for whom Mathematics is Greek to them. During our time, those 'strong' in Maths were separated from the weak ones right from class VII. Class VI was the last class to scare the weak. Boys took typewriting and girls Domestic Science and those days there was no dearth of jobs in both the subjects. Now we are blessed with umpteen professional courses which would help our students earn a living. We should know that Steve Jobs, who had made us happy with smart phones, was not a scientist.

One very critical aspect is the generous 20% internal assessments that have sent a wrong signal to parents and children. They venture into class XI Science and in one month three tutors are sought for, and after one year, the students switch over to Arts. The curriculum for Classes XI and XII is vast. For MBOSE, compounded with gross errors, it simply becomes problematic. This is for Physics on which I can have a say. CBSE texts of three books cover almost three times the topics covered by MBOSE, besides down to earth explanations and diagrams to help students grasp the

meaning. It is also true that teachers need refresher courses aided by HOD's of colleges of respective subjects to be able to create interest and sound understanding of science subjects. One reason why the CBSE students perform very well in J.E.E., NEET is because of the texts they follow. And if all over India, CBSE texts prescribed by NCERT are followed, there is no reason whatsoever to do differently here, for our students would suffer at the all India level.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Ex-H.O.D,
Electronics Dept.
St Edmund's College

Times to give up reservations

Editor,
Whenever the central or state government advertises on various vacancies there are different sets of categories and in those categories there are sub-categories enveloped inside this scheme of things. It is time that this system of reservation be stopped or minimised for only those with physical disabilities who are competent and capable to take up the job. The more we tend to have the "reservation" mentality the less is our ability of

being one step ahead. Reservation takes away the spirit of universal competition, which is why as a nation we cannot compete with a country like China. I wonder if other countries have this kind of appeasement policy. This is what destroys the mindsets of the youth and tends to make people crave for political support which also results in corruption. Time to rethink whether or not we still need to hold on to reservations.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong- 3

Mockery of strong battling line-up

Editor,
The BCCI and the media in the recent past have been found to be confident in their statements that the Indian cricket team has a strong batting line-up. Of course the Indian team has proved how 'strong' they are. One cannot forget that they were about to be defeated in the hands of Afghanistan which entered the world cricket very recently. Secondly, the Indians were about to lose to Bangladesh too. They lost miserably to England and were no match for New Zealand. The cricket lovers

of India may remember that the Indian cricket took a re-birth and was pulled out of slush by none other than Vijay Merchant when he was the Chairman of the selection committee way back in 1969-70 when Ajit Wadekar was preferred to MAK Pataudi as the captain. It brought a sea change in Indian cricket. Since then Indian cricket started to taste the joy of winning test matches both at home and abroad. Now again grimy politics has entered and as a proof players like Ajinkye Rahane, Ambati Rayudu, who resigned from the game out of frustration, and many other promising cricketers have been ignored. It is time that Ravi Shastri should feel the pulse of the general masses and gracefully approach the BCCI to relieve him of the post. In the same way the current selection committee members should also resign. To salvage Indian cricket the new selection committee members should be men of integrity and truth. They should keep out of politics and personal preferences. Only this will save the game from the misfortune that seems imminent.

Yours etc.,
Bibhash Dhar,
Via email

“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science.”

--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.347

SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 29, 2019

A gentleman - politician passes on

MEGHALAYA Speaker and former Chief Minister, Dr Donkumar Roy passed away after a brief illness, leaving behind a political vacuum in the Party – the United Democratic Party (UDP) which he headed for over a decade. It was Dr Roy who made way for the National Peoples' Party (NPP) to form the Government after the Assembly elections in 2018. The UDP refused to team up with the Congress Party which had ruled the state for seven years from 2010-2017, to form the next government in March 2018. Dr Roy understood that people of Meghalaya had voted for change and aligning with the Congress would have belied those popular aspirations. The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) comprised 19 MLAs of the NPP, 6 of the UDP, 4 of the People's Democratic Front (PDF), 2 of Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP), 2 of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and 1 Independent.

Earlier in 2008, the UDP and other regional parties teamed up with PA Sangma's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) to form the Meghalaya Progressive Alliance (MPA) Government. The NCP then had 14 MLAs, UDP - 11 MLAs, HSPDP - 2 BJP -1, KHNAM- 1 and Independents - 2. Although the NCP had more MLAs, Mr PA Sangma requested Dr Donkumar Roy, the UDP President to take over the mantle of Chief Minister for stability. That government lasted only a year. The political turmoil led to President's Rule in Meghalaya after which the UDP left the MPA coalition. By May 2009 the UDP had teamed up with the Congress to form the Meghalaya United Alliance (MUA) Government. Tremors in the MPA Government started when the UDP sensed that the NCP was trying to strike a deal with the Congress to form a government in Meghalaya without the UDP. This attempt to betray a trust was what drove the UDP to the Congress. The MUA Government saw DD Lapang of the Congress as Chief Minister, and BM Lanong of the UDP as Deputy Chief Minister. Dr Donkumar Roy was appointed Chairman, State Planning Board with the rank of Chief Minister. A man of few words with a doctorate in Economics from NEHU, Dr Roy taught at NEHU for a few years before entering politics in 1987. His hobbies were playing chess, fishing and reading. He never courted controversy and kept away from media glare. Dr Roy had once said that he believed in value-based politics but the harsh realities of this dodgy world must have dawned on him too late. Always respectful and never given to harsh language, Dr Donkumar Roy was the perfect gentleman and perhaps a misfit for the murky world of politics.

School Gardens: Lessons we can teach

By H H Mohrmen

It is heartening to read the news that Lakhmen Rymbui our Education Minister visited schools run by Delhi government to learn about their innovative idea of starting a Happiness class in their schools. Rymbui deserves a pat on the back because it is takes courage to accept good ideas from others and to try and replicate those in the state. Hopefully this expectation sees the light sooner than later.

In fact we should not only have Happiness classes; instead we should ensure that the entire learning process should be fun for all the students in the state. But before trying to copy good lessons from others, the Education minister should ensure that his earlier orders were implemented in letter and spirit. If one may ask, are schools in the state implementing the government's order with regard to the weight of school bags that kids have to carry to school? The other order that Education department came up with was with regards to teachers giving home works for kids in a certain age group. Are these orders being carried out by the schools in the State?

What the minister did not realize is that there are some innovative ideas started in some schools in the state which the government of Meghalaya can be proud of. This one idea is not only relevant to Meghalaya, but it is an idea worth sharing with other states too, because accessing nutritious food with adequate diet is a challenge for children all over the country. It is also one project which the State Government can claim that it was successfully implemented in some schools in Meghalaya.

School Gardens is a very important component of the North East Slow Food and Agro-biodiversity Society (NESFAS). "No one shall be left behind," project sponsored by the Regional Electricity Corporation (REC). It is an outgrowth of regular school work, but it also serves many purposes. The main objective of this element of the project is to get children out of doors and away from books and connect them with the natural world. It not only connects them with the nature but it also helps them understand the true source of their food. It may be mentioned that the outcome of the present school system is that it disconnects the kids from

how their food is produced and more importantly it disconnects them from nature. Many a time kids were advised to avoid touching the soil because it is considered to be dirty and to contain harmful germs which could make them sick. This is a very serious concern because it disconnects them from nature and its mysteries, the ground of their being and it also disconnects them from their food system.

School gardens help children learn how to grow crops from the beginning till they are harvested and how the same is finally brought to their plates. Under this project which is implemented by NESFAS and supported by partner NGOs, the hope is that school gardens can help in achieving the production of micro nutrients-rich and climate resilient species. But the most important contribution that school gardens can have is to improve the children's mid-day meal – a Scheme to provide a better diet for the children.

It was also found that, not only students, but even teachers and parents lack awareness about the importance of having food which provides adequate diet for our wellbeing. In fact the food that we consume every day consists of the same ingredients which belong to the same food groups.

In this project the importance of the ten food groups was emphasised and people were encouraged to keep their own dietary diversity score. In schools where there are school garden, the management does not have to spend any money to provide nutritious green leafy vegetables to the students, because they are available in the school gardens. At the same time they can also have fresh and chemical-free food too.

For achieving this important goal, gardening is taught to children right from their school life with a hope that this will help develop the concept of gardening amongst the kids. Teachers and students in schools which have started school gardens were also made aware about the different food groups as prescribed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and how it is

important to take care of our diet. FAO defines Dietary Diversity as a qualitative measure of food consumption that reflects household access to a variety of foods, and is also a proxy for nutrient adequacy of the diet of individuals.

According to FAO there are a total of 10 food groups that people generally consume and in a day individuals should consume a minimum of at least 5 food groups to enable them to have a complete and balanced diet. The ten food groups are meat, poultry and fish in one category, nuts and seeds in another, grains, white roots, tuber and plantains in another. The next group includes vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables, eggs and dairy products which are categorized in two separate groups, pulses which include beans, peas and lentils in another group, then there is a group which includes only dark green leafy vegetables, other fruits and vegetables which are not included in the above mentioned groups are in another two separate groups. In making the SG project, students, teachers and even the cooks were asked to ensure that the food plants belonging to different food categories are not missed out when selecting seeds for plantation.

NESFAS has initiated the School Garden concept since the time the International Terra Madre (ITM) was organized in the state, but it was introduced only in the few villages which were selected as visiting villages for the visitors during the festival. The few schools which have implemented school gardens and continued with the project have seen the difference; some of these schools have even managed to get the support of their respective village employment committees (VECs) to get the school garden a proper fencing using the MGNREGA scheme.

In some cases school gardens have also become a demonstration plot for government officials to teach the farmers the different farming techniques. But the most important achievements in the introduction of this project, is that students, teachers and even parents were able to understand the importance of planting the 10 food crops in their school

gardens. In some schools, children have cultivated green leafy vegetables, garlic, cucumber, pumpkin, mustard leaves, beans, radish, peas, chilly, coriander, bitter tomato, onion leaves, maize and other vegetables which will help supplement their diet when these items are consumed as part of their mid-day meal.

However, there are challenges in the implementation of this project. For convenience sake it is important that the school garden should be adjacent to the school. But there are schools which do not have space to start their own school gardens, and in some cases the soil near the school is either rocky or sandy hence not suitable for starting a garden, or cultivation of any plants. In such case the Organisation has come up with an innovative idea of starting terrace gardening. Schools were provided with Thermocol boxes and this helped the schools to plant vegetables in the throwaway fish boxes. Pynthor Langtein U.P Schools have adopted this method where 5 boxes have been used for starting the school garden.

Teachers are in consensus that the idea of School Gardens is very important as it helps the children involve in gardening and connects them with nature. Some suggested that there should be one period every day for students of all classes where they should be taught gardening. It may be mentioned that in all the school gardens, the teachers, students, midday meal (MDM) cooks, participatory guarantee scheme (PGS) groups and event parents actively participate in the land preparation and sowing of seeds. But the most important outcome of the project is the that students were happy to have their own school garden.

School Gardens are therefore an idea and now a 'best practice' that was implemented by some schools that Meghalaya can showcase to others. We not only need to look to other for bright ideas, but we also need to look inward and discover that there are good ideas and best practices that are within. Hopefully the Government will study the success of the 'School Garden' concept and practice and encourage others schools and encourage others schools too to start their own gardens.

BSNL & MTNL Business crawls, revival critical

By Shivaji Sarkar

Digital India's backbone is in severe crisis. The worst BSNL crisis is hitting trade and business all over the country and has also exposed the private telecoms. They are not as efficient as the crisis-ridden government backbone and most of these are deficient in services.

In three quarters Rs 2.6 crore fine has been slapped on telcos by TRAI since October 1, 2017. Vodafone had the highest penalty of Rs 1.6 crore, Rs 50 lakh on Aircel, Rs 29.5 lakh on Tata Teleservices, Rs 13 lakh each on state-run BSNL and Norwegian-run Telenor, according to a recent answer in Rajya Sabha.

The BSNL, despite government's effort to revive, remains in a difficult situation. Both phone and internet lines are either not operating or operating at such low speed that banking, financial and data transactions are hit all over the country. Losses to businesses are thus huge.

Though the department of telecom has asked State power bodies not to disconnect its connections, the State bureaucrats are not heeding to the advice. They say that pending payments are marked against their individual performances and they need to act.

All over the country, starting from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the rural hinterland exchanges are either not operating or only

obligation to support the private companies.

This helped the private operators. But all of them tried to hit the government-run organisations' business through unfair means. The two companies headed by bureaucrats were slow to take remedial actions. The employees alleged at different times that BSNL and MTNL were being weakened to help the private players.

The numbers suggest that all the faults are not of the employees, as it is often alleged. It is also true that BSNL and MTNL employees and their exchanges did not give proper service to the customers. The government also ignored it. Despite this, the companies were not in losses till 2010. But a decision to ask them to pay spectrum charges in all the circles they operated changed the dynamics. These started having losses.

It was a TRAI decision to create a "level-playing field". It forgot that the BSNL and MTNL were created to give a service to the people and it had a heavy cost. The decision helped private companies rake in profits, while it was the BSNL with 20 telecom circles and MTNL too, were the telecom backbone not only in terms of voice services but also data

The staff salary remained unpaid since February. It was paid only in June. Currently, over 60 per cent of BSNL's revenues and 90 per cent of MTNL's revenues are used to pay salaries.

partially functional. This has put India's businesses at stake as over the years much of it is through digital transactions, which none other than the Government is pushing for.

Non-payment of energy bills closed down 1083 mobile towers and 524 telephone exchanges. Union Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has told Parliament recently. Besides, 258 BSNL mobile towers are not functional on account of non-payment of dues to land owners. The BSNL says that they are pursuing land owners telling them that the payments would be made in due course. It is not only reeling under debt of more than Rs 30,000 crore, but its costs and expenses are ever increasing. Worse, it is even mulling firing 35,000 employees, as their allowances and perks are already being denied.

The staff salary remained unpaid since February. It was paid only in June. Currently, over 60 per cent of BSNL's revenues and 90 per cent of MTNL's revenues are used to pay salaries. The government is preparing a 'revival plan' for both BSNL and MTNL. It is exploring options to provide long-term stability for their revival. The plan may include measures such as salary cuts, and accountability of staff, in which employees have to either perform or perish.

It is a sheer irony that despite crisis, the total market share of BSNL rose between March 2017 and March 2019. During the period 53.64 lakh subscribers joined BSNL and 28.27 exited. The MTNL has 1.35 lakh subscriber exits and a mere 10,195 joining it. The numbers suggest that all the faults are not of the employees, as it is often alleged.

An analysis shows that the encouragement to private players started some of the BSNL woes. Though most of the private players were allowed to use BSNL and MTNL ports to start their operations, the two companies were never properly compensated for it. It was believed that the government-run organisations had the

transfer. Four years later, the decision dumped the companies with huge losses. The Union Cabinet on January 9, 2014 decided to wave off spectrum charges and refund upfront charges of about Rs 14,000 crore - Rs 6,724.51 crore, MTNL will get back Rs 4,533.97 crore plus some more. Till date the amount has not been refunded. The objective of the decision was to provide financial support and create conditions for their smooth functioning.

Revising the national backbone with accumulated losses, debts and interest payments is not easy. Apart from boosting the morale of the employees is a more difficult task. And it is often touted that the government is doling out the finances as aid. But it is not the case. It belonged to the company and a wrong decision pushed them to penalty.

Indeed, there is need for a thorough probe. There are similarities in pushing the voice and digital backbone to losses and forcing the profit-making Air India and Indian Airlines to merge and be damned. In both sectors, the immediate beneficiaries were the private companies. In the case of Air India, it is now almost clear that it was part of a conspiracy. Suspicions are there for BSNL and MTNL too. A detailed investigation may lead to appropriate findings. It is a wake-up call for the Narendra Modi government, which is striving to ensure probity and propriety in functioning of government undertakings. It ought to scrutinise many divestment programmes. Even the best private telco remains unstable. Some of their promoters are in heavy debt.

The government has, possibly realising the importance of government telcos, decided to revive the companies. The digital backbone has led the country to growth and now it yearns for support. The Modi government has taken the right decision. The results need a watch.---- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Derelict condition of State Library

Editor,
While we were growing up, the library whether in school or the public library, was nothing short of magical. The quiet, neat rows of books when opened took one on myriad adventures. But a trip to our State Central Library these days is less magical though the adventure remains. Dodge a pack of stray dogs that have made the grounds there their home; jump over trash strewn all over, particularly bottle pieces hidden under the grass; watch out for the sly rats that run the corridors and then investigate the case of the missing librarian. I once found the librarian in deep sleep lying on the couch. And don't forget, every investigator needs his gloves - to prevent the hands from turning black from the dust gathered on the books. And look you must, because, the librarian is of little help when it comes to knowing where to find a particular book or author.
I appeal to the Department

of Arts and Culture to please bring the magic back to our library. Our town has a beautiful library with a collection of wonderful books that could work as a lovely community centre, where children can spend quality time to discover books, where reading sessions can be organised on weekends for children and adults alike and where writers engage. It just needs caring for in order to bring back to life to this valuable intellectual asset.
Yours etc.,
Name held on request.

Recruitment of EI's in Transport Dept

Editor,
Recently the Transport Department invited applications for filling up 6 posts of Enforcement Inspector and 15 (fifteen) posts of Enforcement checkers on contractual basis. It is shocking and mysterious as to why the government has decided that recruitment to the above mentioned posts

should be done on contractual basis and that the process of recruitment should be done internally by the concerned department. It could not possibly be because of the financial constraints faced by the Government, since the MPSC had recently published advertisements for various posts on behalf of different government departments numbering 30 departments in all via MPSC /ADVT-38/1/2019-2020/31 dated July 22, 2019 for a total of 306 posts. If it is because of financial constraints the Government would have also advertised the said 306 posts on contractual basis but that is not the case.

Then the question arises as to what is so special about the posts of Enforcement Inspectors under the Transport Department? Is it because these are posts for manning the weigh bridges and there is a sinister game afoot by someone at the uppermost helm of the Transport department? Is the advertisement issued by the Transport Department a mere facade with the real intention being to recruit

their own people for manning weigh bridges who would then act as the collecting agents of those in power? It would not be that easy to manipulate the recruitment process to ensure that their own people get through if it is done through the MPSC. An ingenious plan is therefore at work to conduct the same internally and on contractual basis whereby manipulating the process would be child's play. Are those in power so arrogant to believe that the intellect of the general public is that low that they will not see through their sinister plan and that they will simply believe that the Transport Department would conduct the recruitment of the advertised posts, especially of the Enforcement Inspectors (an officers' level post) in a fair and transparent manner?

Conducting a competitive examination especially for an officers post is no joke and requires a well established process, which includes setting of question papers from a wide pool of resources

such as college/university professors etc., from across the country so that the same remains highly confidential. Does the Transport Department have the resources or the expertise to do so in a fair and transparent manner? Or is the question paper to be set by the Commissioner of Transport and then corrected by the Transport Minister?

The job of an Enforcement Inspector is to enforce the Motor Vehicles Act (MV Act), which involves penalizing of errant drivers who drive in contravention of the MV Act and realisation of fines from overloaded vehicles and even offloading of the excess materials from the trucks etc., as per the MV Act. Surely the Transport Department is aware that a 'contractual worker' is not empowered by law to do so. Or does it simply not care? Or perhaps the Government thinks that the post of Enforcement Inspector is such a high profile post that even the MPSC is not competent enough to conduct the examination for it! Or maybe the Meghalaya

Transport Department has drawn inspiration from the "lateral entry" system in government service as introduced by the Union government? In the lateral entry system through the UPSC the Union government has sought to draw in the brightest, most qualified minds from the corporate sector to infuse fresh ideas in the government. Here it seems like there is a plan cooked up for lateral entry of Enforcement Inspectors to infuse fresh ideas for collection at the weighbridges. Have some shame! Paraphrasing what Jefferson once said - If those in power fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear those in power, there is tyranny. Through this letter, I appeal to all right thinking people to stand up and not allow such tyranny in the governance of our state.

Yours etc,
Wansuklang Nongsiej,
Shillong- 17

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

“Men know that women are an overmatch for them, and therefore they choose the weakest or the most ignorant. If they did not think so, they never could be afraid of women knowing as much as themselves.”

--- Samuel Johnson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.348 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 30, 2019

Unpredictable Karnataka

THE BJP in Karnataka can smile only for a while now. The political crisis in the state has passed only the first post in a long and arduous journey ahead. The Speaker's disqualification of 11 MLAs on Sunday, in a follow-up to a similar action on three legislators, came after these elected representatives succeeded in toppling the JDS-Congress government led by HD Kumaraswamy. While the heat is turned on the errant legislators, and the BJP is set to run an alternative government there, no one is sure as to how long this new attempt would last.

New chief minister BS Yeddiyurappa is gripped by a sense of political uncertainty. With the disqualification of 14 MLAs from the ruling side, the assembly is left with a strength of 208. Yeddiyurappa commands the support of 105 BJP legislators, which provides him the majority to win the confidence vote Monday and also the leeway to run the government without hassles in the assembly. Yet, his path ahead is paved with thorns.

The Speaker's action has invited trouble for the CM in the immediate future itself. If the disqualifications were done on legally tenable grounds, it would necessitate by-elections to these seats. This throws the ball again in the people's court. They are the masters in deciding who should govern them. Democracy gives them as much of strength and importance. BSY cannot laugh his heart out with the wafer-thin majority of one seat in the assembly. The by-elections will remain a Damocles' Sword over his head. If the JDS-Congress combine manages to win more seats than the BJP, the game is over. BSY can climb down the steps with the same pace with which he climbed it up to grab power.

A possibility is that after running the government for a brief while, the CM would advise the governor to dissolve the assembly. As long as he enjoys majority support in the house, his advice will need be heeded by the governor. The only good thing for the CM and BJP is that elections to the new assembly can be held while the BJP is in power. This is not to say being in power helps a party win the polls. At best, it gives minor comfort to the BJP there. BJP has played its cards with great care this time, giving out an impression that this defection game was a problem of contradictions within the JDS-Congress alliance itself. Still, voters are by their very nature unpredictable. This is the time to wait and watch.

Jainsem news from the least developed district

By Albert Thyrniang

There was someone who pointed out that it's only once a week. This argument is unconvincing. Does it mean that girls be limited, discouraged, and denied the opportunity to perform physical activities that boys do without any hindrance, once a week? Should girls be discriminated against once a week? We may not acknowledge it but that is what it actually means. In this light the discriminatory uniform could even be illegal.

Others opine that the introduction of 'cultural

is actually subjugation of girls at the tender age in the name of promoting culture. We don't mind it happening here as well.

In praxis men insist that women be the torch bearers of culture. It happens everywhere - in Nagaland, in Mizoram, in Arunachal, in all the indigenous pockets in the North East, in India and probably all over the world. Should the same be happening here in Khasi Hills at well? Should cultural imposition of culture on women alone take place here in Ri Khasi Jaintia too? Patriar-

Shillong-Mawkyrwat road can compete with one another as the worst roads in the district. Roads in West Khasi Hills like the Nongstoin-Maweit road can join the contest. We have acquired a culture of accepting biased treatment from the government. We don't mind travelling on rough, bumpy, muddy and dusty roads.

NGOs and pressure groups of the areas are actually obstacles for development. In 2016 a major road project from Weilo to Rangblang was sanctioned. However, the much needed project was allegedly diverted elsewhere. A student union and other pressure groups protested 'vehemently' and threatened not to halt the agitation until the project was reinstated. Contrary to popular expectation the agitation was abruptly stopped without the demand being met. Suspiciously, the agitators were paid off to give up the demand. The protests were only a camouflage to fool the public that the organisation works for the welfare of the area.

Another two lane road from Nongstoin to Wahkaji was to be carried out by the centre. Materials were stocked and machinery readied. The same student body opposed its construction on suspicion that the centre could use the road for uranium mining. Stupidly, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) refused to issue NOC. The pressure groups and KHADC have denied people of the area the right to travel more comfortably on the only lifeline to the outside world. They don't mind seeing the sick, the unwell, and the pregnant women travelling on this horrible and pathetic road for up to eight hours before reaching a medical facility.

These insensitive, insensitive, unconcerned and even anti-development, anti-people groups have proven that a deal was struck that instead of the two lane road 100 crore rupees would be spent to make it motorable. Where is that 100 crore? No repairs have been carried out. Did the opposing NGOs care that the road is repaired? That they work for common good is a joke!

One of the most regular travellers on this road are women who are petty traders. They travel on a weekly basis to and from Umdohlung market. Out of compulsion they may not be articulate but they badly want a better road to ease their hard work to sustain their families. We ignore their needs but we want them to don the Jainsem. Fine argument indeed!

“In addition to the practical inconveniences, this is gender discrimination. It is an expression of inequality. It is, in fact, an imposition of culture on girls and women. This implies that women alone are to promote, preserve and conserve the Khasi culture. Why should it be so? This is an extension of the usual practice.”

uniform' began with girls. For boys it might be later. But why do you begin with girls? Does anyone doubt that those girls will not wear Jainsem after their student life? Can anyone be even one per cent sure that the girls' counterparts will ever be spotted with Jainsem and Jainboh? We know that when girls go outside their village, town, city, state or country, they make sure that they take along with them cultural dresses and use them when required? How many boys do likewise? Then who should be taught to love one's culture? On whom is cultural identity being instilled?

Some others said that it is difficult for boys to wear traditional dresses? So then, when it is difficult for girls to wear traditional dresses? Culture should be practised when easy and convenient. By the way, why and how do we take for granted that it is easy for girls and women to wear cultural dresses? If boys and men find it uncomfortable and inconvenient it could be so for girls and women too. Another one almost angrily asked, "Do you see boys in cultural dress in other states?" He is right. I have personally seen in Assam and elsewhere girls of primary and high school level being made to wear sari as uniform while boys are with shirts and trousers. Unpleasant, but this

challenging mentality continues to thrive in this matrilineal society.

Now and then we see images of girls in Facebook, group Whatsapp, etc - one set with traditional dress and the other with modern dress like jeans and T-shirts. The poster/sender asks viewers to compare and judge the images. Why are only girls judged? Why are boys and men not judged? Do not males wear jeans and T-shirts? Why should girls with short hair styles and fashionable make-up not be appreciated while we don't mind boys with the funkier look of the European, American and African heroes?

One of the proud sharers of the news report was an influential NGO. It probably feels culture is limited to dress. South West Khasi Hills is arguably the most backward district in Meghalaya. The handful of hospitals in the district, health centres have hardly any doctors, nurses and medicines? These 'Seng Bhalang' don't seem to care. The rampant teacher absenteeism in villages in the district does not seem to concern the 'community NGOs'. The culture of negligence of duty is okay.

The South West Khasi Hills roads are a record of sorts. The Nongstoin-Mawkyrwat road, the Mawkyrwat-Nonghyllam road, the Mawkyrwat-Phlangdolun road, even the

Happiness class

Editor,
I must congratulate the Meghalaya Education Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui, for undergoing the experience of a Happiness Class in a school in Delhi and to replicate the experience in Meghalaya schools. I hope his experience will be replicated in our schools here very soon. How to do it is his job because he has experienced it but my main concern here is for Bah Rymbui to make the classrooms here in Meghalaya more cheerful and which promote learning with loving kindness and more learner-friendly. One of the things is not to give home work to children of younger classes and not to burden school going children with heavy school bags. After all, children should not become the beasts of burden.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Marwein.

Labour reforms

Positive, gaps remain

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Employment generation has been a big problem as also the inflexible labour markets. In fact, the economy has been slow to create well-paid jobs for the masses. Both in the realm of skilled and unskilled labour, those working in the organised sector are paid well but those engaged in the informal sector get poor remuneration. It is agreed by economists that the protection extended to organised labour and their families, which constitutes around 7-8 per cent of the population, may not fully reach their counterparts in the informal sector and at least 70 per cent should be extended to them.

It is in this connection that labour reforms are needed as also a minimum wage in all parts of the country. The recent decision of the Cabinet to approve four Labour codes by merging 13 Central labour laws which will apply to all establishments employing 10 or more workers is a step in the right direction. This consolidation can potentially benefit large sections of the 40-crore workforce. The Code on 'Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2019', drafted in consultation with 13 workers' organisations, is expected to enhance coverage of workers manifold. The rules state that workers will have to be given an employment letter besides an annual medical check-up, the labour minister, Santosh Gangwar stated in the Lok Sabha while introducing it last week. The code will be applicable to all business entities dealing in the port and mining sectors, even if they have only one employee.

Another important action the government taken is to introduce The Codes on Wages, 2019, prescribing a nation-wide daily minimum wage of around Rs 178-180, rejecting the Anoop Satpathy panel recommendation for at least Rs 375 a day. Though independent analysts and trade union leaders described the move as 'anti-labour', in reality, 90 per cent of labourers do not get this amount today. As is well known, there is variance in daily wage amongst the States and a uniform rate would probably be better. There are some who feel that minimum wage should be fixed depending on the cost of living in different geographies. But the point to mention here is that State governments are free to give more than the official minimum wage.

However, as per the bill, the minimum wage will regularly be adjusted against rising prices with the appropriate government (Central or State) consulting experts, employers and employees. A very pertinent point is made by well-known social activist, Nikhil Dey, who criticised the decision to leave the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act, which provides up to 100 days' unskilled work for every rural household a year, out of the bill's purview.

If the Code on Wages Bill fixes Rs 178 as the minimum wage, it would become binding across the country. One may mention here that in 2017 it was notified that floor-level minimum wage would be Rs 176. However, the rate would be too little and fixing the rate at around Rs 200-220 would have been more realistic, keeping in view the inflationary conditions and the rising cost of living. The code has clearly stated higher wages for higher levels of skills. There is also a need to review the minimum wage after a year to ensure that it is in tune with inflationary conditions in the economy.

The decision to replace the existing labour laws by four codes on wages, social security, industrial relations and workers safety is clearly indicative of the fact that the government, after a long time, is focussing its attention on

labour reforms. But even after fixing the minimum wage and giving more benefits to labour, the problems still remain.

Some analysts are quite confused about the minimum wage which, in certain parts, looks less while in others may be quite adequate. There is hardly any mechanism in the hands of the panchayats or the sub-divisional offices to ensure that minimum wages are being received by the labourer. Even in small enterprises, the minimum wage is not given to unskilled workers while their skilled counterparts may just get around Rs 20-25 more. What is the role of trade unionists in ensuring that justice is meted to workers at the grass-root levels?

The economic condition prevailing in backward districts of the country is such that a labour would accept whatever he is paid which may be 25 per cent less than the prescribed minimum wage. In fact, most of them do not know the minimum wage amount and thus have no alternative but to accept whatever is given to him. Political leaders at the grass-root level are usually found to back the businessmen and would mediate for the labour. An important question that arises here is how many labourers can read, write and sign?

The next question is the hours of work, which is normally found to be not less than 8-9 hours. Again there is no monitoring and businessmen are allowed to exploit their workers, both in big and small establishments. In this connection, one may refer to the Factory Act 1948, which mandated overtime pay for any factory worker beyond 9 hours a day or 48 hours a week, at twice his ordinary wage rate. But the code is silent on overtime pay, leaving it to the 'appropriate government'. What to speak of such workers in the unorganised sector; even in organised counterparts, one has to work, say from 10 a.m. to 7/8 p.m. every day and sometime even more. If the government is serious towards the whole question of labour reforms, the true picture needs to be revealed and transparency brought about regarding conditions of work.

Economists agree that the long working hours in most private sector units - even in big ones - have resulted in curtailment of employment. Added to this, people above 62-65 years of age are retained to work in a Consultant's capacity with reduced pay, thereby blocking the employment opportunities of a fresher.

There are virtually no health facilities in most establishments but this is an important aspect that needs to be seriously considered. The proposal of setting up a National Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board with representation of employers, employees and the government is, no doubt, a step in the right direction, if it acts judiciously on matters of health, safety and working conditions.

Thus, it can be concluded that the two bills have positive points though in certain matters decision have not been taken and left to the 'appropriate authority'. Moreover, it would have been suitable if MGNREA too would have been brought within the purview of applicability of national minimum wage. As the bills are introduced in the Lok Sabha, it needs to be seen how the Opposition views these and whether the government will relent to their demand that these be sent to Parliamentary Standing committee.--- INFA

To the Editor

Better crisis management needed

Editor,
Mumbai has witnessed heavy rainfall in 12 years since the 2005 deluge. The brave and heroic rescue effort of Mahalakshmi Express train passengers stuck in flood waters near Badlapur, Thane is a rare and commendable feat. Efforts by the District Administration, NDRF, Railways, Police, Indian Air force, Army and other teams involved in rescue work is highly appreciated. Rescue work was successful owing to co-operation received by the locals and the affected passengers also. It is also highly appreciable that the successful rescue operation was monitored directly by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and the Chief Secretary, Ajoy Mehta.

As over thousand passengers had a miraculous escape from the train owing to threatening water levels, Central

Railways should now be proactive to cancel the trains in flood affected regions in the best interest of passenger safety. Timely communication to rescue the passengers thus resulted in the over 13 hour rescue operation. Such an effort by rescue agencies deserves worthy appreciation and the government should do the needful to reward the teams in this successful mission.

Further the railways should introduce the Public Announcement System (PA System) in all the trains to communicate to the passengers effectively during any emergency or crisis. Railway staff should be equipped to handle emergency response situations in order to expedite rescue efforts without affecting the lives of the passengers. Railways should further take necessary steps to avoid such crisis arising due to excessive flooding of railway tracks by implementing an innovative warning system during

rains or bad weather.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal
Bangalore - 72

Floating sovereign bonds

Editor,
Floating of Sovereign Bonds is a controversial move of the present Government. The current controversy relates to India's sovereign bonds that will be floated in foreign countries and will be denominated in foreign currencies. In other words, both the initial loan amount and the final payment will be either in US dollars or some other comparable currency. Some best known sovereign bonds are the treasuries of the United States, the Gilts of Britain, the OATS of France, Bonds of Germany and the JGBS of Japan. Now India will soon join the best known Sovereign Bond.

The difference between

issuing a bond denominated in rupees and issuing it in a foreign currency (say US dollar) is the incidence of exchange rate risk. We have experienced that rupees position against the dollar is weak and that could pose grave risks to the country's economy. While citing the economic turmoil that had engulfed Argentina and Turkey in past over such floating of such bonds, Economist Rathin Roy has expressed grave concerns. He said in the history of this country in the last 70 years India had never chosen to walk this path despite huge provocation to do so. Whereas former RBI governor YV Reddy said that these are sovereign liabilities in perpetuity. Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan has said flotation of sovereign bond could lead to risks and infect the domestic markets.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Budget 2019-20 an-

nounced that the government would start raising a part of its gross borrowing programme from external markets in foreign currencies. She added that India's sovereign external debt-to-GDP level is among the lowest globally at less than 5 per cent. The 2019-20 Union Budget has made one drastic deviation from the past by proposing to finance the fiscal deficit by borrowing foreign savings through floating of sovereign bonds. While this by itself is not new, as right now up to 6 per cent of public debt is held by FPIs (foreign portfolio investors), what is of concern is issuing bonds in foreign currency.

However if something has not happened in the last 70 years it does not mean that India should not try it. Sitharaman has taken a very bold step to float sovereign bonds. Let's hope for the best and hope for a bright future ahead.

Yours etc.,
Tapan Palit,
Via email

“ Today when we say the West we are already referring to the West and to Russia. We could use the word 'modernity' if we exclude Africa, and the Islamic world, and partially China. ”

--- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.349 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2019

Tharoor misunderstood

On Monday, Shashi Tharoor while speaking to the media said that the vacuum created by Rahul Gandhi's resignation as Congress Party Chief should be filled up because the inordinate delay in naming Rahul's successor is harming the Party even as people are deserting it for greener pastures. The pragmatic Tharoor said what everyone would readily agree with which is that even if Priyanka Gandhi takes over the reins she should be elected, not selected to the top post. The Congress Party which has, for decades, disallowed free expression has naturally taken umbrage. Senior Congress leaders feel that Tharoor should not have gone public with his statement about the Party's internal affairs. But what Tharoor stated is a fact! The Congress has become a rudderless ship today.

Anyone who listened to Tharoor speak will agree that he meant well. It must be frustrating for every Congress worker to live in this vacuum for over eight weeks now. The recent Karnataka drama which might well be replicated in other Congress-ruled states all reflect the Congress Party's inability to rein in its MLAs because of the absence of any leader of stature to stem the attrition. The Congress party has been known to ride the wave of sycophancy. No one is willing to do a serious introspection on why the Party has failed to steer the electoral ship and what is needed for the Party to pull itself out of the morass after its second humiliation in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The absence of a strong opposition in Parliament today is also attributed to the inability of the Congress to pull its weight and reinvent itself. It is failing the people of India by its inability to counter the ruling party even in the passage of the amendments to the Right to Information Act.

That Tharoor is isolated after he made that statement shows that the Congress is light miles away from reforming itself and encouraging inner-party democracy, although a small section of those who stand with Tharoor say that he is only reflecting the overwhelming sentiment felt by Congress's rank and file. The most serious challenge the Congress has to face is the six assembly by-elections to be held soon, as a result of some MLAs contesting the Lok Sabha polls.

Shashi Tharoor is one of the few free-thinkers in the Congress who is not given to sycophancy. Perhaps he is also disillusioned by the fact that during the Lok Sabha election campaign he received little or no support from his Party. Tharoor had in fact complained to the High Command about this. This does not speak too well about the general health of the Congress Party.

Tradition in a fast changing 21st Century

By Toki Blah

For us tribals, tradition and culture are integral to our perception and understanding of ourselves and our own identity. It is something that differentiates us from others and identity is something we can call our very own. We speak with great reverence and pride about aspects of identity such as our way of life, the matrilineal system followed by the tribal communities of these hills; how lineage flows down from the mother's side; the land tenure system we practice; the strong social bonds and the influence that the clan system has on our day to day life; the language we speak, the apparel we wear, the dances we perform. These are tangible aspects of indigenous behaviour that we love to showcase on stage performances, writings and our interactions with others. They win us national as well as international accolades. Yet in all of this, the uneasy feeling that there is something we have somehow missed out, refuses to go away. Perhaps it's something we overlooked, forgot or just something else that need to be done relating to our cherished tradition, customs, culture and identity? Question is, is there?

Let me try and speak out for the tribe I belong to, the Khasi Pnars. When one tries to converse with wise elders of the tribe and attempt to bring to light their views on the current state of affairs we find ourselves in, their usual response is that the present generation seems to have lost ownership over, "Ka Tip Brieu Ka Tip Blei". It literally means that we have lost both our social as well as our moral moorings, and Khasis are deeply concerned over this cultural deficit. Socially we have discarded long cherished traditional practices on how to interact with our fellow human beings. Till about 50 to 60 years ago, social etiquette; the way we conduct ourselves in public as well as in private; good manners and social protocol were considered as hall marks of belonging to the Hynniewtrep family. People took pride in our traditional value systems and took pains to cultivate them. In clan (Kur) meetings this aspect was always flagged. In the Shnongs and in governance, rationale, logic and common sense were key on how we interacted with and governed each other. Common sense based decisions on the welfare of the whole community were usually the outcome of democratic debates and deliberations. Tolerance and respect for each other was important.

Today disparate voices of constituency politics, religion, race and blatant self interest has vanquished the sense of collective responsibility the Khasis once upheld. 'Ka leh Tip Brieu' which means to act sensibly and reasonably no longer reigns in our mental make-up. We call ourselves, "modern, democratic and academically educated" and then come up with the interpretation that Freedom means licence to do whatever we want. The fact remains that

outings and picnics; for coming together on any pretext; for regular visits to friends and relatives; forever revitalising social bonds and relationships; continuously strengthening the fabric of our identity as children of U Hynniewtrep. Traditionally we always found time and also were adept in managing it. Today, "Time" manages us instead. We have lost the skill of Time management and as a community we are poorer for this loss.

These are tangible aspects of indigenous behaviour that we love to showcase on stage performances, writings and our interactions with others. They win us national as well as international accolades. Yet in all of this, the uneasy feeling that there is something we have somehow missed out, refuses to go away.

the quality of sensible social responsibility, the forte of U Hynniewtrep, has been jettisoned and lost. These need to be rediscovered and reclaimed if we are serious about preserving culture and tradition.

My forefathers and their generations, tucked away in the pine clad isolation of these hills, were bestowed with and in possession of a wealth that those of us in the 21st century can only envy and be jealous of. They had "Time" and plenty of it. For them time literally stood still! For us of this generation, time is an ever dwindling resource and ever waning and the saying "Ym don por phi" (I've no time, dear) the most fashionable maxim used by Khasis today. Used within the context of the clan, its devastating impact on the psychological well-being of the poor or marginalised clan members is yet to be assessed. Hard to believe but in my childhood I never could recall anyone ever using this phrase. My parents always had time for me, for the family, for being together. 60 years ago everyone had time for everything. We found time as a family to have our meals together. We found time to pray together. We had time in the evening to sit around the fireplace and talk. We had time while a lazy afternoon by the riverside with a rod and a line. We had time for social gatherings like community

There is no shame in admitting that as a society we are beset with challenges and problems that basically spring from our inability to cope with change. Perhaps societal change has come too fast but one of the biggest challenges faced by the tribe today is its decreasing ability to identify leaders endowed with vision, foresight and the gift to lead. This is especially true within the context of political leadership; the format from which we are constitutionally ordained to elect our cadre of leaders. As a community we really struggle to identify traditional qualities of leadership with the political candidates we usually end up with. On the other hand we are quite comfortable and at ease when it comes to electing leaders for our traditional institutions. Antecedents on social service; the respect one commands; the social credibility one carries, are aspects easily recognisable when we decide on a Rangbah Shnong/ Waheh Chnong and on members of the Executive Committee of the Dorbar. The ability to serve is the criteria and the 'synshar khadar' or governance and the security of the shnong is then left safely in their hands. Ironically we don't exhibit the same level of confidence, trust and reliance on the MLAs or MDCs we periodically elect. This has resulted in a new class of elected political leaders profiled not so

much by the ability to serve through appreciation of merit and worth but for their promptness to bend and succumb to applied pressure. Money also usually plays a dominating role in their election to office. This has played havoc with our tribal sense of priority on leadership issues. No wonder the common man turns to Pressure Groups for redressal of his grievances. No wonder that we prefer to confront Government rather than engage with it. No wonder that we fail to equate Government with the delivery of social services and good governance. No wonder the search for leaders who can lead the Hynniewtrep people is now as good as searching for a needle in a haystack.

In the absence of leaders endowed with the vision to lead and the wisdom to counsel, the Jaitbynriew views with trepidation the future that awaits us. The future will undoubtedly usher in new challenges; new things will start happening; the future will definitely introduce change in our ways of life. But Change for a leaderless society is traumatic; easily seen as a threat; it is taboo; something to be resisted at all costs. In such a situation tradition becomes the only buoy to cling on to irrespective whether it still has relevance or not. All of us are familiar with and accustomed to such a scenario. It happens in Meghalaya every day. It's happening to all of us. No railways for Meghalaya please. The rest of the World might see it as development but for us it's a threat, so No thank You! No Municipal elections. Elected Municipalities might serve with distinction every town and city in the entire World, but it's not for us. We have tradition. Let our traditional bodies serve our civic requirements and even if they are not equipped for it, it doesn't matter. Better to be buried in garbage and filth than to yield to change! A typical reaction of a headless society! No doubt tradition is important but only up to a point. It also has to be applicable and pertinent to the requirements of the present. Someone has to drum this bitter truth into our heads.

We are now in the 21st century. The call is for leaders who can blend the technology of the present with the vigour of Tradition. The need of the hour is to bring forth such leaders. Can we do it? Or to be more precise, do we have the will and determination to do it?

Attack on secular ideas and voices of protest continues Saffron 62 against 49's letter on lynching mock democracy

By Arun Srivastava

It was part of a strategic move of the BJP to stifle the voice of secular and nationalist forces that a group of 62 individuals, all members of the saffron party, launched blistering attack on the group of 49 eminent persons of indulging in 'selective outrage and false narratives' on mob lynching.

After the 49 celebrities, like Shyam Benegal, Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Aparna Sen, conveyed their views to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the form of a letter, the BJP leadership got scared of the looming threat that it may acquire a major dimension and more celebrities may join the chorus for protecting the character and ethos of the liberal and democratic India. Any such flaring of the issue would have created political embarrassment for Modi who has been ready with many anti-people Bills to place before Parliament for its approval. Obviously, for BJP the best design was to gag these voices.

Titled 'Against Selective Outrage & False Narratives', the letter written by 62 indi-

viduals charges the 49 celebrities as self-styled guardians and self-proclaimed "conscience keepers of the nation and of democratic values" and charges them of political bias.

What was really shocking was these individuals accused the celebrities of attempting to "foist a FALSE NARRATIVE with the intention of denigrating the democratic ethos and norms of our collective functioning as a nation and people. It also aimed at tarnishing India's international standing and to negatively portray Modi's untiring efforts to effectuate governance on the foundations of positive nationalism and humanism which is the core of INDIANNESS".

These saffron personalities ought to have been aware of the fact that the PM Narendra Modi had condemned lynching. It was something else that he did force his men to be strict. In June he condemned in Parliament the lynching of a 24-year-old man in Jharkhand, and asserted that whether it is Jharkhand, or West Bengal or Kerala, incidents of violence should be treated in the same manner and perpetrators of violence get a lesson that the entire country is one on this issue.

" Their move is nothing but an attempt to keep the king happy by furnishing wrong information and pledging their loyalty. "

They also mentioned: "The name of Ram is sacred to many in the majority community of India. As the highest Executive of this country, you must put a stop to the name of Ram being defiled in this manner."

Their request to Modi - "The lynching of Muslims, Dalits and other minorities must be stopped immediately. We were shocked to learn from the NCRB that there have been no less than 840 instances of atrocities against Dalits in the year 2016, and a definite decline in the percentage of convictions" - is certainly not an anti national act. It's a plea for making peace. (IPA Service)

with Modi cannot at all be described as their move to try and break India apart. Do they want the people to be passive spectators? Their move is nothing but an attempt to keep the king happy by furnishing wrong information and pledging their loyalty. No doubt "the need of the hour is to play a constructive role, not take advantage of the vulnerabilities of your own people and your own system."

Actually the 49 celebrities had not written anything that could be construed as anti-India. The letter simply read: "You have criticised such lynchings in Parliament Mr Prime Minister, but that is not enough... We strongly feel that such offences should be declared non-bailable..." They also mentioned: "The name of Ram is sacred to many in the majority community of India. As the highest Executive of this country, you must put a stop to the name of Ram being defiled in this manner."

Their request to Modi - "The lynching of Muslims, Dalits and other minorities must be stopped immediately. We were shocked to learn from the NCRB that there have been no less than 840 instances of atrocities against Dalits in the year 2016, and a definite decline in the percentage of convictions" - is certainly not an anti national act. It's a plea for making peace. (IPA Service)

These saffron personalities should have taken lessons from him and must have refrained from indulging in catering misinformation. How can these worthy intellectuals deny that the slogan of Jai Sri Ram, which has been dear to all the Hindus, was being denigrated by the saffron vigilantes and today has become a provocative 'war-cry'. It is a matter of shame that the name of Ram, the supreme deity of Hindus, was being used to commit the heinous crime of killing innocent persons. I would not hesitate to say that these vigilantes were disparaging the name of Lord Ram under a well-planned conspiracy.

One feels ashamed and prefers to put his head down at these 62 individuals questioning the personal credibility of the 49 celebrities. Most of the 62 persons have been following in the footsteps of these celebrities to attain eminence. In their open letter they accused them of

and living in harmony with nature. It was a great experience spending time in the jungle once again, this time with Bear, who is blessed with indefatigable energy and quest to experience nature at its purest."

On Monday, the PM released the All India Tiger Estimation Report 2018 saying the country had emerged as one of the biggest and safest habitats for tigers in the world. Government data show a 33 per cent rise in the number of big cats from 2226 in 2014 to 2967 in 2018.

People across 180 countries will get to see the unknown side of the Prime Minister, and it will be a great honour for India that our Prime Minister is featuring in the most widely watched show Man Vs Wild being telecast by the Discovery Channel.

Your etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

To the Editor

Will we ever grow?

Editor,
While picking up my daughter from school, it is normal to have conversations with other parents or to eavesdrop on conversations of people standing nearby. The conversations usually revolve around what most bored parents gripe about while impatiently waiting for their children to come out of the school gate. The topics range from global issues such as world food shortage to a topic as mundane as a neighbour's dog's funeral. However, the topic for that particular day was the latest traffic arrangement being made to help ease some of the humungous traffic problem constantly occurring in and around the city. The first and natural reaction that came out was an instant revolt to the changes being made, as such changes are in direct conflict with the rights and privileges of being a law abiding citizen of the state. The second reaction was to come to an obvious conclusion that any change being experimented with will not

make any difference whatsoever. So, is there really any solution to this traffic problem?

Looking at it from the negative aspect, firstly the government does not have any space to expand the size of the road. Secondly, it is doubtful if government really has the funds to invest in any latest form of public transportation, that can become so attractive to the public as to make them want to give up commuting in their own vehicles. Thirdly being a democratic country, can the government really come out with any new law which contains a set of parameters to act as a qualifier for citizens to own a vehicle. The one possible option would be only if the present local market like Iewduh and the existing commercial areas like Police Bazar be set up in the different zones outside the city.

Maybe Shillong is just screaming out loud that it needs to grow. However, if a small project like the Hotel Crowborough has taken us decades to see completion, it is no exaggeration for us to expect that a big,

hairy, audacious goal like getting a new Shillong might just take us a couple of centuries before anyone sees the light of day. However let us not be too pessimistic in our thinking for if the present government should somehow take an extremely bold decision to be determined, dedicated and committed enough to do what all of the previous government's have never even dared to dream, we might see both growth and change!

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri
Shillong-2

Water harvesting!

Editor,
The recent news item that the government is serious about harvesting roof top water is most welcoming as this will help alleviate the serious water shortage in the town. While this is a step in the right direction, the government should also take steps to harvest water for recharging the aquifers which, in

the long term, will be more useful than roof top harvesting. With so much rainfall the recharging of aquifers can easily be done so that the underground water table is raised and once this happens, water will be more easily available for tapping. Therefore, setting up of recharge pits to where all the roof top water will be directed to, is of utmost importance. The project can be set up initially at all government offices, multi storied flats and other big buildings. With the abundant rainfall that we have, it should not take too long to improve the water table especially if most residents also set up recharging pits.

Can we request the minister in charge to take a serious look at this proposal?
Yours etc.,
D M Pariat,
Aberystwyth, Wales

Modi's different moods

Editor,
While most of our poli-

ticians have become resigned to 'all work and no play', our Prime Minister, seems to have cracked this monotonous condition and is reported to have done some adventurous feats along with the world renowned survivalist and adventurer Bear Grylls in India's Jim Corbett National Park. The whole episode was shot by Discovery Channel, and will be telecast on August 12.

The show would be a frank and free-wheeling journey which will throw light on wildlife conservation. At this, Prime Minister is on cloud nine and he says, "For years, I have lived among nature, in the mountains and the forests. These years have a lasting impact on my life. So when I was asked about a special programme focusing on life beyond politics and that too in the midst of nature, I was both intrigued and inclined to take part in it."