

Life is like one big Mardi Gras. But instead of showing your boobs, show people your brain, and if they like what they'll, you'll have more beads than you know what to do with.

--- Ellen DeGeneres

The Shillong Times

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Modified Ministry

The portfolio allocations after the swearing-in of the Modi 2.0 ministry saw two top portfolios going into strong hands – home to Amit Shah and defence to Rajnath Singh who acquitted himself well as home minister in the previous government. Former foreign secretary S Jaishankar knows his subject well and hence fits in well as external affairs minister. Notably, Prime Minister Modi, riding the crest of a popular support, has chosen to retain most of the ministers from his first term. He is a pro-establishment figure and not given to acts of disruptions. Both styles have their strengths. Continuity meant treading a familiar path, wherein pitfalls are more easily identified, clarity is a given, and a safe course ensured. On the debit side, chances of a minister developing vested interests in the course of a long innings are there too. Arun Jaitley was a tower of strength to the Prime Minister in his first term. He did a job, stood by the side of the PM through thick and thin, and advised the government in matters of legal frameworks when faced with tricky situations. Health is a serious problem to him, and it must first be attended to. His absence will be felt not only by the PM but by others too.

Sushma Swaraj, also faced with some health problems, will be missed by all. She managed the external affairs ministry with considerable PR skills though the PM was by her side to take matters forward. As for Maneka Gandhi, who missed the bus this time, something else might be in store. Amit Shah is bound to rock the ministry in positive ways. Rajnath Singh as PM's second-in-command would be a reassuring presence. Nitin Gadkari, despite some disquiet, is back, but General VK Singh seems to have been demoted and will serve under Gadkari. Uma Bharti has volunteered to step aside. Most senior ministers, as also juniors, found themselves in the reckoning. The team spirit they displayed during Modi's first innings would be to the PM's great advantage again. The new Modi team has space for only one berth for each BJP ally. This might be a conscious attempt to reduce importance of regional leaders and their turfs. Many of them have a tag of corruption. Bihar's Nitish Kumar has registered dissent and kept his JDU out of the new ministry. It is worth watching how the Shiv Sena starts roaring again. More inductions are likely as team Modi moves forward.

Agroecology and Indigenous Farmers of Meghalaya

By Deadiakami Mohrmen, Coriniki Slong and Bhogtoram Mawroh

Like for many parts of the country Meghalaya's economy is still highly dependent on agriculture. The primary sector (which includes agriculture and other natural resources extraction activities) contributes around 30% of the state's GDP i.e., Rs.8,168 crore out of the Rs. 27,228 crore economy. With over half of the population still connected to agriculture the state cannot expect to achieve sustainable economic growth by neglecting people who are working in this sector, i.e., the farmers. But when it comes to enjoying the share of the economic pie theirs is the smallest share. Average annual income of farmers in India is just over Rs 37,000 or only Rs 3000 per month. The same is the case with Meghalaya (see discussion below). This means that in spite of farmers making huge contributions to the state's economy they are mostly ignored. Who are these farmers who form the backbone of the state's economy? What is their story? This article will tell the story of an indigenous farmer who epitomises the struggles of other farmers in the state. In spite of the immense difficulties they face consistently, these farmers have the common good as their raison d'être.

Phron Kassar is a 51 year old farmer from Shkenpyrsit village which falls under Amlarem C & RD Block, West Jaintia Hills. Her mother was (L) Shida Kassar who arrived from Umladkhar village to Shkenpyrsit in search of livelihood. Phron studied only till Class III at the Shkenpyrsit LP school, unable to continue because of financial difficulties. By the time she was 12 years old she started helping her mother in the farm. In time, like her mother (who was also a cow trader) she managed to own 10 cows. But 13 years ago she sold them for Rs 45,000 to educate her children, determined not to allow her fate to befall her children.

Presently Phron Kassar cultivates a variety of crops, viz., ginger, pumpkin, garlic, beans, mustard, peas, rice, radish, potato, sweet potato, cauliflower, cabbage, spinach, carrot, cucumber, coriander, etc. In her garden she also has local fruit trees like sohiong, salangi and peach. She also keeps poultry, piggery and practises apiculture (bee keeping). According to her, the average annual earnings from her farm comes to Rs.20,000 to 25,000 from vegetables, Rs 8000-9000 from piggery, Rs 4000-5000 from poultry rearing. Curiously, when the upper range is combined it gives total annual earnings of Rs 39,000 which when

divided by twelve months give a monthly income of Rs 3250 or Rs. 110 per day, similar to the national average. What needs to be borne in mind is that this is lower than the prescribed minimum daily wage of a highly skilled worker in agriculture in Meghalaya which is Rs. 420.

For a time, in order to boost her income Phron Kassar used chemical fertilizers like DAP for increased production. One day the chemical spilled on her leg and the skin started itching. Struck by this she was horrified by the thought of how the chemicals might be affecting the crops, soil and the people. Appalled by the realisation she vowed to never use any more chemicals in her farm and practise only organic farming. Concern for common good was more important for her than personal gains. Currently, she and many other farmers from Jaintia Hills are working with SURE (Society for Urban and Rural Empowerment) and NESFAS (North East Society for Agro-biodiversity and Slow Food) on adoption of agro-ecological methods for food production.

The 2018 IPES (International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems) Food, publication, "Breaking away from industrial food and farming systems" states that Agro-ecology is an umbrella term for various alternatives to industrial agriculture viz., organic, bio-dynamic, permaculture, alternative, sustainable, regenerative, community supported agriculture (CSA), cooperative food system initiatives, or urban food transitions. A growing archive of case studies from around the world demonstrates that Agro-ecology is providing immense benefits (economic, social and food security) while ensuring climate justice and restoring soils and the environment. In April 2018, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also underlined the potential of Agro-ecology to underpin sustainable food system transitions at the 2nd FAO International Symposium on Agro-ecology: Scaling up Agro-ecology to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Coming back to Phron Kassar, she explained that when she started engaging in organic farming she used eit masi (cow dung), eit sniang (pig waste), eit syiar (chicken waste) and skum kba (rice husk) for making compost. A pit would be dug on the ground and filled with animal wastes.

Later skum kba and ashes are added and left to decompose. When the compost is ready it is dug up and applied to the plot. In the past SURE had also assisted her with trainings on composting.

Furthermore, determined not to use any chemicals, Phron Kassar invented her own organic pesticide by using a local plant called chyrmit kyndeh (Acmella alba also commonly known as toothache plant). She grinds the plant and mixes it with water. This concoction is then sprayed on the cabbages. According to her, it is best to apply before the leaves begin to fold and it has been very effective in preventing pest attacks on the crop. Phron Kassar informed that the vegetables grown without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides are not only very tasty but also keep the soil healthy.

Kassar got the idea of using the plant as a pesticide by noticing that the local community has been using the plant as a traditional cure for toothache since time immemorial. Acmella Alba actually has local anaesthetic properties. She surmised that since it already has medicinal properties, it must also have pest repellent properties. It should be mentioned that Phron Kassar is also a traditional healer. She is proficient in traditional massage therapy using mustard oil to cure people's ailments and has revealed that she also is experimenting with the bio-pesticide on other crops as well to gauge its effectiveness.

Change in production practises from dependence on external inputs to agro-ecological methods which consisted of adopting biological pest and disease-management solutions including predators, insect pathogens and disease antagonists, plants with insecticidal, fungicidal, bactericidal and herbicidal qualities (practised by Phron Kassar), and parasitic nematodes was one of the main outcomes of the transition in the seven case studies, viz., USA, Nicaragua and Mexico, Tanzania, France, China, Spain and Cuba, reported in "Breaking away from industrial food and farming systems". To achieve change in production practises NESFAS and SURE are promoting Agro-ecology Learning Circles (ALC). These are farmer groups aimed at empowering local communities to recognize, revive, practice, and eventually further develop traditional agro-ecology practices and stimulate local innovations for sustainable local food

systems. Six participatory researches developed and implemented by farmers on pest management and soil improvement across six different locations are currently in progress. In total 38 farmers, 28 female and 10 male from the Khasi and Garo indigenous communities are taking part in the experiments.

Phron Kassar gave an interesting insight of how during elections ginger is in great demand. She therefore decided to plant more of it in the following year. The seeds are those that she got from her grandmother. She is determined to adhere to the principles of Agro-ecology which are not only about food security but achieving food sovereignty as well. "Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" - La Via Campesina.

Phron Kassar sells her produce in the local market of Shkentalang. Sometimes, customers visit the village to buy produce directly as well. In the past farmers from Shkenpyrsit grew only for self-consumption. Now production for the market is increasing. To supplement her income Phron has been working as a mid day meal cook at Dongwah SSA School Shkenpyrsit since 2006. She was one of the first people from the village to be appointed as a cook. Initially she was paid a paltry sum of Rs.150 per day; now she gets Rs. 1000 per month.

Farmers like Phron Kassar's contribution to the local as well state economy cannot be understated. Without improving their lot the resulting economic model of the state will be one of instability and high inequality. Instead Agro-ecology provides a framework for a transition towards sustainable food and farming systems. Only when indigenous farmers like Phron Kassar are supported will a truly prosperous, sustainable, fair and healthy society will be created.

About the authors:
Deadiakami Mohrmen is a Field Coordinator in Society for Urban and Rural & Rural Empowerment (SURE) and can be reached at damimohrmen@gmail.com
Coriniki Slong is a Field Coordinator in Society for Urban and Rural & Rural Empowerment (SURE) and can be reached at corinikislong31@gmail.com
Bhogtoram Mawroh is a Senior Associate in NESFAS and can be reached at bhogtoram.nesfas@gmail.com

Modi's NDA-II Will it heed to sulking partners?

By Insaq

ROUND THE STATES

Notwithstanding the grand oath-taking ceremony in the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the NDA may already have teething problems in round two, where none were expected. With the BJP having got a majority on its own, there was fear that the regional allies importance would wane further. Remember, murmurings of not being consulted even at the time of NDA-1. For starters the JD(U) in Bihar has already thrown a googy as it is sulking with the offer of only one Cabinet berth for it. Chief Nitish Kumar chose not to mince his words and refused categorically to join the Modi-led Ministry. He said: "we don't want a token participation." With 16 MPs the JD(U) is the third largest party in the NDA in this Lok Sabha. And so was eyeing at least two Cabinet and one Minister of State berths. So as of now it's a no-go between the partners. Besides, Apna dal, from Uttar Pradesh has been kept out of this time from the government but so far it is not heard complaining, as the State has got 9 berths. How Modi and Amit overcome the Bihar problem is anybody's guess. However, they can well argue that 20 of the 29 States are represented and that even its Shiv Sena partner from Maharashtra, which is in second number in the tally of seats in the lower House has got just one Cabinet berth. Importantly, Modi has not given a single berth to the three southern States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra. And why would he, as the BJP got a harsh beating there.

The NDA-II is being described as "a blend of energy and experience", let us keep our fingers crossed that the two are not wasted on squabbling within.

3 CMs Take Oath

The leadership of three States—Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh took its oath too to work for and fulfill aspirations of their people. While for 72-year-old Naveen Patnaik it is the 5th consecutive term overcoming a Modi wave with a decisive victory, 46-year-old Jagan Mohan Reddy will start a new innings after a long wait of 10 years, and for Pema Khandu it is a more comfortable start since the BJP will install the government on its own having won 41 of 60 Assembly seats. He was CM since July 2016, but as is normal in the North-east there were twists and turns.

Importantly, this time round all the three Chief Ministers shunned the Raj Bhavan's for their oath taking ceremony and instead did so at convention centres/stadium among the aam janata, which is a growing 'populist' trend. And, while they had counterparts from other States in attendance at the solemn occasion, where the team of Cabinet and MoS were also inducted, what stood out Chandrababu's absence, as he turned down Jagan's invite! It goes without saying while it will be easy for Khandu with BJP at the Centre the same cannot be said for Naveen and Jagan. Both require special attention of the Centre's given the recent Fani cyclone in Odisha and long pending demand for Special Status in Andhra. The latter it is learnt is non-negotiable. Jagan is said to have turned down 2 Cabinet berths offered by Modi on his visit to Delhi. Developments are worth a close watch.

Karnataka, WB On Edge
Karnataka and West Bengal are on tenterhooks. The Lok Sabha results have stumped Chief Ministers Kumaraswamy and Mamata Banerjee respectively,

forcing them to rejig their respective Cabinets. And while the former did it on Saturday last by dropping two ministers and bringing on 8 others from coalition partner Congress, the latter made a major reshuffle on Tuesday last. The situation in Vidhan Souda is more worrisome after the Lok Sabha verdict for the JDS-Congress combine as the BJP has been waiting in the wings to topple the six-month-old government at the earliest opportunity available. Such is the fear that Kumaraswamy dropped a minister, who did not attend the Cabinet meeting and replaced him with his brother! The ruling combine is making all efforts to keep its flock together as the nagging fear that some of its MLAs may cross over is not just a hallucination.

Likewise, not just the drubbing in the Lok Sabha polls, but that her flock is deserting her (3 MLAs and 50 councillors so far who have crossed over to the BJP), Mamata is worried for the future – the 2021 Assembly elections. However, it chooses to dismiss the developments and put up a brave face. Its leaders proclaim that one or two MLAs joining the BJP will not impact it. "State elections will prove whether the people are with us or not," and insist that "people are with Didi and they will continue to remain irrespective of the fact that some leaders are switching sides." This only time will tell, as the BJP has made major inroads into her bastion and she would need a miracle to retain her hold. At the same time, Didi showed signs of her annoyance by doing a flip-flop for Modi's swearing-in. First she accepted the invite and later, just hours after the BJP invited the families of 54 party workers allegedly killed in political violence across the State, Mamata said she won't go. Instead she decided to visit North 24 Parganas to protest against attacks on TMC cadres by the BJP after the polls! She went a step further and in a message to Modi said the swearing-in ceremony was an "august occasion to celebrate democracy" and not one that should be "devalued" by any political party which uses it as an opportunity to score political points." Indeed, let's be prepared to see a lot more of it.

Mizo Goes 'Dry'
Is controlled sale of liquor better than a complete ban? Mizoram perhaps has an answer as it opts for the latter. On Tuesday last, the Mizo National Front government decided it was time to act to turn the State 'dry', after four years of controlled sale of liquor. The Assembly had in fact passed the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Bill 2019 on March 20, but it couldn't be implemented as the model code of conduct was already in place for General elections. Also, the High Court had granted time to liquor sellers till May 27 to dispose of existing stock. Apparently, the government is not only fulfilling its poll promise made last year but hopes that alcohol-related deaths would not continue to rise since 2015, when prohibition was lifted. As per the State Excise and Narcotics dept 9 such deaths happened in 2015, with the number going up to 22 in 2016 and to 59 in 2017. Figures are unavailable for 2018. Former Chief Minister, Lal Thanhawla, who was instrumental in introducing regulated sale of liquor in 2015 has his doubts whether the ban will help "as prohibition has never been successful anywhere in the world." Will he be proved wrong eventually? ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Post-mortem on EVMs

Editor,
On reading this headline readers would ask, "Why restore an old car?" I have great responsibility as a citizen to point out a few things to enlighten those members of the public who enjoy the breakthrough in electronics engineering but do not want to ask how things actually work in the long run. The EVM is not a smart phone, it is not your digibox for satellite link, it is not your scientific calculator, and it is not even a trader's calculator. It is too easy a circuit that I am at my wits end as to what to compare it to. The CEC has given the excuse about paper jamming. In 2014 it was found that humidity of a place might have been the cause for paper jamming. Then why not rectify the fault? Forget GPS, forget weather forecast software, if a mango trader selling mangoes at Rs 51 per kg for what he bought at Rs 34 per kg, then with a movement of his finger he

would smile when his cheap calculator (Orpat say) shows 50 percent gain. If it shows 50% loss he cannot file a case against Orpat the company but just throw away the machine. The only discrepancy of the calculator is the buy one mango and get one free mantra. It's like loading your truck with fourteen tons and getting fourteen tons free as used to be done in the 80's. I consulted leading economists and Arithmetic teachers of class X but none of them could understand this logic. I believe it is in the DNA of business to defy Balakot like tsunami and all laws of diminishing returns, or I.C. curves (indifference curve). Jobs or no jobs, no difference. Economic slowdown or flow high no difference; RBI regulations or not it makes no difference; CBI cleansed or not it makes no difference.

Assuming we commit mistakes in soldering or linking fuses, then some questions to answer would be (1) Why confuse

challenge votes with deviant behaviour? (2) When EVM was to be introduced, why did we forget to create rules or laws to deal with deviant behaviour? (3) Which elector would be foolish enough to depend on a machine as a judge and challenge it at the risk of having to pay Rs 10,000 as fine and six months imprisonment? (4) SC has categorically ordered that EC should respond to the three complainants against EVMs. What have they done? If yes, were the findings made public? (5) What is the use of EC finding anything when 23rd May has come and gone and a new Government is already in place? (6) In future will the EC pronounce that any elector, say in Leh, Ladakh who has a complaint should bring Rs 10,000 and a blanket?

We should accept our limitations. Before ASAT test there was a failed attempt to shoot Micro SAT R on February 12 this year. No man is free from failures.

The ballot paper is the best bet.

Yours etc.,
M.Khyriem
Via email.

Humanity above all else

Editor,
The news item, "Hindu, Muslim couples undergo kidney swap in Punjab" (ST, May 30 2019), immediately gave me a sense of gladness. At the end of the day we are all human beings of flesh and blood. We are all creations of the One above. We may be defined by our birth, our religion, our race, our community but the colour of our blood that runs in each one of us is the same. The numerous faiths and religions that we are born into or a faith that we believe in are but different routes that will lead us to only one destination. While no religion, no faith will teach us the wrong tenets can we not be more Godly in our actions here

on earth? To love one another and treat one another with love and respect is the greatest religion that humankind must follow. We don't need wars, we don't need violence, and we don't need enmity! All that we need is love, adoration and reverence for one another. When we love one another we love God!

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Modi starts on a sour note

Editor,
The new Modi ministry began its second term journey with a bumpy start. One of the alliance partners of the NDA, namely the Janata Dal (United) led by Nitish Kumar is sulking and has decided to opt out of the Cabinet. The JD (U) was offered one ministerial berth but the party turned it down saying it is not interested in having a symbolic presence in the

new government. Nitish Kumar has stated that it is not necessary to be in the Cabinet but that the JD (U) will continue to be in the NDA and the alliance is united. The party had demanded three berths in the central Cabinet but Modi was prepared to give only one berth, which made the JD (U) take a decision to opt out of the Cabinet. Thus, a shaky start for the ministry on the first day itself does not augur well for the Government, though there is nothing for Modi to fear. But this distasteful experience on the first day has given a chance to the Opposition to cast aspersions on Modi's government. At the same time, this incident is expected to peter out without gaining much traction.

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.

To become an Drone explorer the empty page

By Jason Chiang

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation relationship with the existence and with the creation of the universe here relationship of which ever however way, you have to hold a relationship small or big, ship; you cannot help it. continually sit here not connected with a relationship aspect of creation of creator? with the rest may be unaware of it, but the of creation and no way - unless you transcend that which is physical. There already is an inevitable relationship, what is there to understand, or sleep, change the quality of the relationship. You can sit here cursing and try to hold a relationship planet or you can sit here smiling at the problem this planet because it is only the other half is a piece of place to sit down. You do not make it. It is a relationship in the way of yourself. you hold the relationship. I am not giving a teaching. It is about changing the way of giving a method. Do you know ship. If the relationship the distinction between the physical, you will know certain things can be analyzed and things. If it is mental, you will know other things. It cannot be analyzed. If it is emotional, you will know other things. It is just a method. Different kinds of things. But you not take it as just a method. You will still not know what it is. You see how small you are, many things about your body. Look at the mountain and have changed and are continuing to change. Similarly, things and see how small you are. about your mind and emotion. The distance into the sky and see are changing and continuing to change. Even if you have it, still it is changing. am not saying depreciate it. In a way the whole spiritual process is just this - changing your relationship with the world. You do not have to appreciate from being just of it. Simply see what your place in the existence. ing comes just from this. constantly keep reminding you. It is about moving your relationship with the existence. that which is physical, and emotional - which will never allow you to have an empty page - into etheric state, where your ship is far deeper and much profound, but subtle in way that you can play any cinema on the moment it is of a trailer. The movie, if it left even a trace upon the screen, the next movie would be a disaster. (Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, is all that is happening in the previous movies have impressions. You just have to change your

W usual associations with smart machines that fly in the sky. Hydro-swarm, a Boston-based start-up founded by Sampriya Bhattacharya, is introducing a world of completed drones for underwater work. The company is working on developing approaches for marine conservation and preservation. Bhattacharya developed a football-sized autonomous underwater drone while pursuing her Ph.D. in mechanical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). These drones are expected to open new possibilities for ocean exploration and maritime data. She is also the co-founder of Lab-X Foundation, a Boston-based nonprofit organization committed to providing hands-on opportunities for students in STEM fields. Excerpts from an interview with her.

Q: Growing up in India, what were your earliest interests?

A: When I lived in Kolkata, I had access to the discovery channel TV for couple of hours. I was fascinated by the Mars rovers. I was all in on space and robotics. I wanted to be an astronaut. There were very limited options to see like this.

Q: What led you to the US and what do you see as the biggest difference between Indian and US colleges?

A: As the majority of undergraduates in America get hands-on experience in their labs and resources are in short supply. In India, we had to take a US university lab because searching for a similar one in India was a challenge. I was in a summer internship with Fermilab, one of America's premier particle physics laboratories. That was my first hands-on experience in cutting-edge engineering. I knew there was no going back.

Q: How did the idea for HydroSwarm come together?

A: My doctor at MIT, I started working with Professor of Engineering Harry Asada on an underwater robot designed to look for cracks in nuclear reactor water tanks. One day I was reading about contraband ships. I thought robots could search for contraband in these chambers. I was on a flight with Malaysia Airlines



Light MH370 went missing in 2014 that I realized I didn't know about the oceans. What excited me, in so many ways, was that the challenges involved in this were much more than in space. I think I suspected it might be able to work together on larger areas and assist in the search.

Q: What are some of the practical applications of your underwater drones?

A: HydroSwarm has a lot of potential for the future - from monitoring coral reefs to assisting in search and rescue operations. I would be thrilled to contribute something to make ocean and port security and safe incidents like MH370 have

made me realize we need to step up our technology to enable faster and effective rescue operations. In deep water, what inspired you to start your nonprofit organization, Lab-X Foundation, and what are its goals?

A: The co-founder of Lab-X met at The Ohio State University. We all came from small engineering schools. Why couldn't we have stayed in India and built great startups? Everybody would have given me an opportunity to do something. I think we are investing a huge amount of money in our source of talent. I could go toward something much more innovative. Why we started Lab-X to help the engineering get the chance to shine

Our goal with Lab-X is to create a community of hands-on learning through internships, opportunities, research, demonstration workshops, student posters and exhibitions. Presentations from diverse speakers, and more.

Do you have any advice for future engineers or students who share your interests?

A: Believe in yourself. The world is full of new things. Do something truly. Enjoy. Don't say "I'm terrible at math." I can never do engineering. I'm giving up. Don't be scared. I don't give up. I'm relevant. Grades are just a number. There's really what you create with your hands and your mind that matters. (S/T/W)

'Stargazing'

By Pt Aja Khambi

Mercus (June 21 - April 20) You are a very adventurous head. You will be very successful in your family and professional life. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Taurus (April 21 - May 21) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Gemini (May 22 - June 21) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Cancer (June 22 - July 22) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Leo (July 23 - August 23) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Virgo (August 24 - September 24) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Libra (September 25 - October 25) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Scorpio (October 26 - November 26) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Sagittarius (November 27 - December 27) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Capricorn (December 28 - January 28) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Aquarius (January 29 - February 29) You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader. You will be a great leader.

Love animals? Be the

By Ranjan K Baruah

During the recent career counselling programmes I had come across many students asking about career options in the field of animal husbandry. There are many opportunities available in this field. You can work in government or private sectors. You can work in research or in the field of animal husbandry. You can work in the field of animal husbandry. You can work in the field of animal husbandry.

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CAREER GUIDE Veterinary Science

There are emerging scopes in the field of wildlife conservation and animal husbandry. You can work in government or private sectors. You can work in research or in the field of animal husbandry. You can work in the field of animal husbandry.

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“Scandal is gossip made tedious by morality.”

--- Oscar Wilde

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Much ado about Rahul

POLITICAL pundits in the media are falling over themselves in trying to prevail upon Rahul Gandhi to quit the post of Party President. One suggestion is that he should give an opportunity for someone outside the Nehru family to lead the Congress from the front. This would seem illogical and an affront to history. Long ago, Indira Gandhi had turned the Indian National Congress into a family enterprise. Having split the INC in 1969, she headed what was then called the Indira Congress, which later became Congress (I) and then the Congress. The other Congress factions perished, but offshoots led by new-age leaders appeared in the form of Nationalist Congress Party and Trinamool Congress. The central Congress edifice today is the Congress led by Rahul Gandhi with able support from mother Sonia Gandhi. Priyanka Gandhi too was brought into a position of leadership a while ago, it remains a family enterprise, and Indians repeatedly kept reposing faith in this family-centric party. Elections by their very nature spell both success and defeat. An electoral defeat often proved a stepping stone to a landslide win.

Almost every Indian political outfit today, with the exception of the BJP and the Left, is a family enterprise. New dynasties are springing up with the ease of mushrooms and laughing their way through power and pelf, as election affidavits prove year after year. The families of Sharad Pawar, Praful Patel, Kamal Nath and Chandrababu Naidu are sitting plum on hundreds of crores of wealth. Or even Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Thackerays, the Badals, or the Stalins and Marans. They lead politics in India from the front. Under the circumstances, Rahul Gandhi's right to lead the Congress cannot be questioned. This is not an advocacy for dynastic politics. Such a situation is the anti-thesis of democracy. Yet, if people vote for such leaders and parties, their legitimacy cannot be overlooked. Rahul Gandhi might have lost Amethi, but he is MP from Wayanad. He has the legitimacy of an elected representative of the people, unlike, say, a Sitaram Yechury. Pundits' advice apart, the Congress party will not survive without a Nehru family member at its head. Like it or not, the legacy of the Nehrus now rests with Sonia Gandhi and her family and does not reach up to Maneka Gandhi or her son. That's the way life is. If there is no "first family," the Congress will be as dead as dodo; leaders will fight to its finish.

One million trees and more...

By H H Mohrmen

The state government deserves a pat on the back for its move to plant more than one million tree saplings on World Environment Day (June 5), but some are questioning the sincerity of the MDA in the entire act. There are people who are of the opinion that the government's call to plant a million trees on this auspicious day is just hype and for the sake of record only. It is argued that everything will end the next day after the news is carried by the media. Then, considering the situation we are in now, the other pertinent question to ask is: Is mere planting of tree saplings enough to save the earth?

Trees were planted since the World Environment Day was first celebrated and trees were planted after that too, and, if the records of all the saplings that were planted were to have been maintained, the numbers would surely have crossed the million mark. But the big question is how many of those plants which were planted to celebrate the Day actually survived? The reason that most of the trees planted did not survive is because there is no follow up on the growth of the trees after they were planted. The government may, of course, argue that this time around it is different because they are ensuring community participation to take care of the saplings after they are planted.

The success of this arrangement is also questionable because of the kind of local grass roots administration that we have in the state. We have several instances where trees were planted and communities were involved to protect the saplings but when the new Rangbah Shnong takes over from the previous one, the whole focus shifted because his priorities are different. The survival of the saplings is crucial because we have too many instances where plantations become a waste of time and energy.

Take for instance the different afforestation projects executed by both the Soil and Water Conservation Department and the different branches of the Forest Department and even by the Forest Departments of the Autonomous District

Councils. The question is - what the status of these re-afforestation projects? What is the survival rate of the trees planted vide these projects in the entire state? All those who are engaged in these activities know very well that the main culprit which is the major cause for the failure of these projects are forest fires. People in the state and the Khasi Pnar people in particular have this penchant to start forest fires and burn the whole hill and sometime the entire mountain range for no reason at all.

Earlier the argument was that forest fires were deliberately started to help grass sprout faster for the animals to graze on. After the dry winter spell animals long for fresh saps

The success of this arrangement is also questionable because of the kind of local grass roots administration that we have in the state. We have several instances where trees were planted and communities were involved to protect the saplings but when the new Rangbah Shnong takes over from the previous one, the whole focus shifted because his priorities are different.

of grass but the fact is even without intervention too, nature will continue with its cycle and grass will bud in time. Hence if the government is serious in its effort to see that the trees planted really grow, it needs to find out ways and means to control forest fires. Until and unless people see the grave damage of starting forest fires, chances of the survival of the saplings will also be very less. In fact if there are no forest fires, there is no need to plant trees at all, nature in its own unique way has its own means of regenerating and replenishing itself in the miraculous cycle of life and death.

Greta Thunberg the teenage climate activist said that we have reached a situation where we are no longer fighting against climate change but we

have reached a stage of climate emergency. We do not have much time anymore and we must act now. Surely planting trees is one step which will help mitigate climate change, but since we are in an emergency situation we need to think of other ways which would help stop climate change. Time warrants that we stop this mad leap to self destruction and the time to act is now. One important and effective way to stop climate change which can have immediate impact is by reducing the use of fossil fuels which is the major cause of the increase in the earth's temperature. We need to think of alternative ways to replace coal and also to look for ways to reduce the use of gasoline. But what has

the government done on this front?

If the Chief Minister is really serious in his desire to protect the environment he should first reduce the numbers of vehicles following him as part of his cavalcade and more importantly he himself should refrain from using SUVs which guzzle gasoline like a water running down the pipe. He should also discourage his colleagues in the Government from buying those fancy sport cars for government use which consume petrol like 'u Thlen' and in turn cause damage to the environment. The Government should reduce the numbers of vehicles used by ministers and high ranking bureaucrats. We therefore hope that we will not only see many trees in the near future, but we will also see less number of vehicles in the CM's entourage the next

time he moves in our neighbourhood.

But the most important point that makes one question the Government's attitude or question the seriousness of its approach towards protecting the environment is when it comes to the mining issue. When we talk about mining be it coal or limestone mining, it is obvious that Conrad Sangma's heart is in two places. He has a strong desire to protect the environment but he also wants mining (particularly of coal) to continue as usual. He is in a Catch-22 situation and people sympathise with him. Protecting the environment and extraction of minerals are diametrically different things and like they say the twain shall never meet. Conrad must decide which side he is on. Is he for extracting fossil fuels or for protecting the environment? Unfortunately, he can only choose one option because he cannot have the cake and eat it too.

If the same Government which is organising the planting of more than a million trees is also fighting a court case to allow coal mining to continue in the state, then it is in a situation where it has misplaced priorities or it does not know where its priorities lie. The government should set its priorities right and come clear on this and help the citizens of this state understand where it stands in matters relating to the environment and mining.

Another important question is - What has the Government done throughout the year? Saving the environment is not a one day affair; it should also reflect on the government's attitude towards the vital issues in the entire year. Is there any endeavour on the part of the government to control the use of electricity and paper? What happened to the Government's plastic ban? Or what about the waste management project introduced in certain areas of Shillong?

Ultimately Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has to decide whether he wants to count how many of the trees he plans to grow or how many coal and limestone trucks pass through the check gates in the state. No doubt it is a tough decision to make, but the decision has to be made. It's now or never!

What's in store for Indian Youth in next five years

Economy needs credible and timely data on growth and jobs

By Gyan Pathak

The General Election results show that Modi is particularly popular among the Hindu youths with their ideas of a hero of medieval romance. They wanted an authoritative commanding personality as their leader primarily for political dominance. Though the level of joblessness had become worst in the last 45 years, they did not find any fault in him or in his policies in spite of his failure in delivering his 5-year old promise of 'work with dignity for every hand'. Rather, they believed that only a strong leader like Modi can overcome this crisis.

Nevertheless, nothing can be said with certainty about what is in store for our young population in the next five years of the Modi rule, except that they will be in great trouble on account of joblessness. Government does not seem to be serious in solving this problem on priority basis. It is not even serious about restoring the credibility of the Indian data on growth and employment. They hid the data on unemployment with an assurance of sharing it by March end this year which proved to be false. When the election results were being declared on May 23 and the trends clearly showed Modi's win, his government came with a nasty proposal to merge NSSO with CSO, which will be the end of autonomy of NSSO.

It may be mentioned here that it was the NSSO leaked data which claimed joblessness 45 years high after 1973-74. The leaked data had come out on the eve of Lok Sabha elections. Towards the end of election, NSSO had come out with another data putting the government claim on growth and development questionable. NSSO had found that 36 per cent of the companies were not traceable whose data were used to calculate GDP.

In this backdrop, the decision of the Modi government to merge NSSO with CSO to create a new entity named NSS betrays his intention of keeping the neutral data hidden from the public, and to release only those data which his government wants to give at their own convenient time. Only a few days after the election results were out, OECD has mentioned in its economic outlook relating to India that the country needs to release credible and timely data on economic growth, particularly regarding jobs, so that the planners may properly plan for the greatest benefit of the people.

However, what the medieval hero of modern times wants to do is obviously dangerous for the country in general and the youths in particular. He seems to be more interested in dividing the jobless youths on communal and sectarian grounds for his own lust of political dominance bordering around authoritarianism pushing democracy under his feet. Youths are being misled and driven to jingoism and communalism in place of providing them with quality jobs apart from rescuing them from increasingly costly higher education and professional skills. It is an open secret that Modi government has been adopting such policies that made higher education and professional courses too costly for the poor and the lower middle class.

Suppression of data cannot help improve the status of joblessness or our ailing economy. Presently, two-thirds of India is below the age of 35. Around 16

million young attain adulthood every year and become aspirants for a good job. They obviously look for a strong leadership to fulfill their aspirations. However, given the present economic scenario of the country, almost 20 per cent of urban males and 25 per cent of urban female are most likely to find no job at all, not to talk about any quality job. Additionally, with dwindling agricultural income as against the Modi's promise of doubling farm income in five years by 2022, around 7 million youths leave farm sector and migrate in search of employment in other sectors every year. Almost 13 million people join the country's workforce annually. If India is to give work for every hand it would need to create about 20 million new jobs every year, which will be a daunting challenge for the Modi government in its second term. The dismal track record in the last five years of this government suggests that our youth have to struggle a lot to find a suitable and a good job. Disenchantment and frustration awaits majority of them.

Only ten months ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had told parliament that nearly a crore or 10 million jobs were generated in a year if both formal and informal sectors were taken into consideration. Since no authentic data on job were available, he cited a study from an "independent institute" in support of his claim. He cited EPF and National Pension Scheme data along with the number of new professionals such as CAs and doctors to calculate formal jobs. The idea was that when professionals start their own practice they create jobs. For informal sector, commercial and passenger vehicles sold were cited as a proxy since vehicle need drivers and helpers. Even if we believe his claim to be true, there was a shortfall of around 10 million in job creation every year indicating that at least 50 per cent of the job aspirants did not find work in his first tenure as Prime Minister. Moreover, this 10 million figure given by the Prime Minister was not necessarily of new jobs, because he cited EPF and Pension Scheme which could also reflect higher formalization, while new vehicle may not have new drivers and helpers.

In absence of the reliable government data on job, some private data can be quoted here, such as of the Centre of Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). Their survey indicated that the number of people employed had shrunk by nearly 10 million in 2018. The unemployment rate in February 2019 was estimated at 7.23 per cent higher than the 5.87 per cent one year ago. The leaked NSSO data for 2017-18 revealed an unemployment rate of 6.1 per cent. According to a World Bank data, India's working age population above the age of 15 will be expanding by 1.3 million a month.

All these numbers point out the economic stress our country is undergoing which cannot be solved in the near future because economic activity has already slowed down with consumption showing signs of stagnating and a prolonged investment inertia has stifled both growth impulses and new job creation. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Modi Govt hits the ground running

Editor,
The BJP's real mascot, the effervescent man in his late sixties Mr. Narendra Modi is the numero uno in the BJP party. His charismatic personality pulled the crowd and earned him and his party a landslide victory, thereby enabling him to stake claim for government formation for the second consecutive time. And now the question as to who is the next important man after Narendra Modi in the Cabinet is over. Modi has entrusted the number two Cabinet position of Home Minister to Amit Shah the think-tank and the mastermind behind the poll strategies of the recent Lok Sabha elections. Moreover, Modi distributed crucial portfolios to debutants and several of his previous ministers including Nirmala Sitharaman, thereby reposing his trust in them for an excellent performance of his ministry.

Among the debutants, Amit Shah and S Jaishankar are the notable ministers who hold key portfolios and Modi perhaps would be happier to have his man Friday Amit Shah in the Cabinet as Shah is capable of handling the government with as much

expertise as Modi himself. So, Modi's responsibility and burden of work has just reduced to half while Shah would be carrying out important policy matters in place of Modi. The duo seems to be in perfect sync as far as their work in the Party and in the Government is concerned.

In the first Cabinet meeting on Friday, the Government announced two key decisions. The first being the government's decision to extend PM KISAN scheme to all 14.5 crore farmers costing Rs.87,000 crore a year and another being the Rs.10,000 crore pension scheme for 5 crore farmers, thereby fulfilling the BJP's poll promise.

The farmers in the country are in distress especially those whose crops were damaged due to inclement weather and the decision of the Cabinet to immediately address the farmers' woes and immediate announcement of relief is indeed praiseworthy. Equally important is the decision of the Cabinet to approve a new scheme, which assures minimum monthly pension of Rs 3,000 to all shopkeepers, retail traders and self-employed persons after attaining the age of 60 years; here too fulfilling its poll promise. Thus, Modi seriously started from

walking the talk from day one.

Modi's magic invoking a blend of youthful energy and experience into his Cabinet is superb and the induction of the youngest minister Smriti Irani aged only 43 is a proof of Modi's appreciation for youthful energy. The fact that some old retirees who tasted plum posts earlier have been kept out of his ministry to give room for new ones is indeed heartening. In short, every Indian can expect this Modi Government to deliver.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Viaemail

Robert Vadra's foreign travel

Editor,
A Delhi Court on May 29, reserved for June 3 its order on the application of Robert Vadra, an accused in a money laundering case to travel abroad. Vadra sought permission to travel to the UK and other countries apparently for removal of a small tumour in his large intestine. Why can't Vadra take a second opinion from AIIMS, Delhi or any other Government hospital where world-class quality treatment are available? In today's India

transplantation of organs like heart, liver and kidney are being successfully and routinely made by specialist surgeons accompanied by neurologists and oncologists if necessary, both in New Delhi and in Kolkata. World-class general surgeons for treatment of such an ailment, namely a 'small tumour' regularly come as visiting surgeons in scores of multi-specialty hospitals all over India and the surgeons are very capable on advising post-operative management procedures.

Facing charges of money-laundering linked to purchase of alleged illegal assets abroad Mr Vadra, with his present health condition has often failed to appear before the ED. But he need not take the pain of visiting the UK and other countries. Mr Vadra possibly needs admission to a hospital for prompt surgical operation for healing from the ailment he is suffering from.

Otherwise also no political leader, MLA and MP of the country deserves the right to go abroad for medical treatment at the cost of public exchequer. If they, who are supposed to be the elected representatives of the people, make improvements on the

quality of treatment presently available in the country and bring them to the standard of treatment they receive abroad and make it available to the common people of the country, then nothing will change. We deserve quality treatment at an affordable cost.

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

Sufferings of common people

Editor
The basic sufferings of the common people are in the area of health and education. Both the sectors have at present become money making businesses hence I fail to understand why government has not come out with strong laws in both the sectors.

Today we see private hospitals and doctors have a monopoly and are sending patients for unnecessary tests and prescribing medicines even while charging very high fees for treatment. Recently two incidents have shaken my faith in the medical profession. I went to a doctor near Guwahati for

some complaint. He immediately advised me to go for some tests but said that I should do them at his clinic. My question is - why should I do the tests in his clinic when I can do them elsewhere and get them done at a cheaper rate? But if I do my tests outside the doctor may not see the report or agree to treat me. This type of malpractice has destroyed the entire medical system in the state and country.

According to a study done three years ago 27 % of deaths occur due to medical negligence. Government should fix the rates for all diagnostic tests and also the school fees should be standardised. People of this country have voted for the NDA Govt with the hope that it will look into the plight of the middle class. The media too should raise these basic problems of common people instead of giving undue publicity to politicians and political parties.

I request both the state and central government to intervene and stop the monopoly that exists in the health and education sectors and relieve the common people of their plight.

Yours etc.,
Samar Deb,
Viaemail

"All the money in the world can't buy you back good health."

—Reba McEntire

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Health sector in distress

MEDIA reports that a woman in labour was turned away from the Government's premier maternity hospital - Ganesh Das - for want of basic amenities is very disconcerting. It is reported that the hospital ran out of sterilized sheets to use after a Caesarian section is performed on a pregnant woman. The Medical Superintendent explained to the media in a nonchalant manner that the operation could not be performed because of the shortage of sterilized sheets, as if, that was a routine occurrence and not a matter of concern. The hospital must be having a record of the number of deliveries per day and should have had a stock of sterilized sheets for exigencies such as the one occurring on Sunday. True that Government run hospitals, especially Ganesh Das, is the go-to maternity hospital for those who cannot afford private healthcare. It is also a fact that pregnant women from distant villages of Khasi and Jaintia Hills who go into labour have to be brought to Shillong even for slight complications because the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) at the block levels and Community Health Centres (CHCs) at the sub-divisional levels don't function optimally.

PHCs are supposed to provide services such as maternal-child health including family planning and training of health guides, health workers, local dais (birth attendants) and health assistants. The next level of health care facility is a CHC. It is to be manned by four medical specialists i.e. surgeon, physician, gynecologist and pediatrician supported by 21 paramedical and other staff. It has 30 in-door beds with one OT, X-ray, labour room and laboratory facilities. CHCs serve as a referral centre for 4 PHCs and also provide facilities for obstetric care and specialist consultations. If the CHCs have all of the above facilities then why are pregnant mostly sent to Shillong for delivery? The CHC with a gynecologist in attendance should be able to handle even a complicated delivery case but that is not happening. All this is due to a lackadaisical attitude of government doctors who refuse to go beyond the call of duty and treat their jobs as 9 to 5 one. Lack of supervision and inspections has turned the PHCs and CHCs into spaces where doctors only work part time while they are busy with their private practices. Most doctors attend to their duties at the PHC only on market days and remain absent throughout the week. Many do not reside in the quarters provided. Unless the Government takes a stern view of this dereliction of duty by its doctors, health care will continue to be in a crisis in Meghalaya and maternal and infant mortality will continue to rise.

TO THE EDITOR

NDA ministers overburdened

Editor,
The recent newly inducted 57 cabinet members are a combination of experienced and newly elected members. It was obvious that one didn't expect any major reshuffles within the incumbents vying for top cabinet rank portfolios. The appointment of the experienced diplomat Mr S Jaishankar as Minister for External Affairs comes at a crucial stage as India now looks forward to strengthen and renew diplomatic relations and chart out strategic foreign policy matters, especially related to oil imports sanctions imposed by Iran amongst other issues which require a prime focus now.

Also the creation of the new Jal Shakti (Water Resources) ministry and allocation of an experienced minister to look after the newly formed Ministry in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is a surprise move. The PMO until now was headed by the Hon'ble PM and the day to day affairs was looked after by the Ministry's senior bureaucrat. With the allocation of a minister to PMO, it needs to be seen as to how matters

amongst the various ministries will taken care of through active co-ordination.

While it is good to know that the most of incumbents have retained their earlier portfolios it is surprising that many key portfolios like Civil Aviation, Women and Child Development, Communications, Law, I&B etc have been allotted as additional responsibilities to several ministers. Some of the portfolios will now see up to four ministries being handled by one incumbent with an average of two portfolios allotted to every minister.

The size of a jumbo cabinet may have shrunk by giving additional portfolios to one person but it is high time to follow the principle of one man one portfolio aided by Independent/MoS rank ministers. Such a move will help in speedy delivery of day to day services of the respective Ministries and Departments and may also help quick disposal of cases. It may further help the Ministries to function in an effective manner under a single functioning minister with the support of at least 2 Independent/MoS ministers respectively, if reduction of

We get the Government we deserve

By Albert Thyniang

Joseph-Marie, Comte de Maistre (1753-1821) was a French philosopher and writer who disliked the French Revolution and advocated restoration of hierarchy and monarchy and favoured authority of the Pope over temporal matters. Obviously the 19th century thinker was no democrat. He was an exponent of anti-democratic ideals. But we know that democracy is not a perfect political system. It has its defects. One of the glaring outcomes of democracy is precisely that we get undeserving representatives and governments because the best, the most meritorious are often not elected. The reason is because the electors are not up to the democratic principles and ideals. It can turn out that even the worst are elected thus making a mockery of democracy itself.

Many in the US are of the opinion that they have to bear the consequence for electing Donald Trump as president four year ago. Racists taunts, rants and assaults on religious and coloured minorities and an element of the prevailing white supremacy are by-products of Trump's 'political philosophy'. A writer says that Americans may consider themselves a nation of generous, selfless, noble, intellectually and morally superior people but in fact it is a home of small-minded, cruel, racist and completely self-absorbed citizens. The model is the President himself.

In India the return of the Modi government with an even bigger mandate than 2014 was a shock to some and a foregone conclusion to many. The question is what kind of government will the NDA II be? Many fear that India will turn into a totalitarian state. Others think the very soul of India is in grave danger. Still others are apprehensive that democracy itself might not survive. Secularism, inclusiveness, religious pluralism, linguistic diversity might be in dire stress. As the new government has just assumed office, the course it takes will be known but one thing is certain: we have a government we have elected. No gods have gifted us this government.

Some pointers we can safely speculate based on the experience of the last five years. Modi (NDA) has returned for the second term based not on performance. Throughout the campaign the BJP and its un-

matched campaigner made no mention of the lofty promises of 2014 - 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas', of uprooting corruption, of returning black money stashed abroad, of 'Acche Din', etc. Not once were demonetisation and GST claimed to be successful reforms. The mandate was not based on economics either. Now it is official but it was known before the commencement of the 2019 elections that joblessness was highest in 45 years.

Modi 2.0, as the media calls it, has come back to power much less because of social and religious harmony. We saw some of the ugliest lynching cases, assaults and crimes against minorities. We saw re-conversion to Hinduism. We saw anti-'Love Jihad' operations. We heard statements and sound bites propagating Hindu Rashtra and Hindutva. We saw democratic institutions like the CBI, RBI, ECI and even the judiciary losing their independence. In the next five years if we witness economic, social, religious breakdowns and undermining of democracy it will be no surprise because we have elected a government capable of them.

The BJP, the leader of NDA, has secured a massive majority mainly because of the personal charisma of its Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Extremely unfortunate, but once again he appealed to the masses on the basis of religious polarisation. Unapologetically, he completely polarised the electorate in the North and extended it to West Bengal and the southern states. It is another matter that the wiser Southern states and Punjab did not fall prey to the dangerous design. Anti-Muslim and anti-minority sentiments were exploited to the extreme to gain maximum political mileage. As we have once again reposed our faith in a divisive, communal and majoritarian government, we have to pay the price if the society is further fragmented on religious lines leading to more insecurity and anxiety, persecution and harassment of the minorities.

Unlike his predecessors, the PM unscrupulously politicised the armed forces too. With telling effect he ruthlessly took advantage

of the Pulwama tragedy and the Balakot strike. He masterfully made use of the uniform of the armed forces, figures of 'dead terrorists', imagery and other tools to rig the minds of the voters portraying himself the one strong nationalist leader. In spite of the non-envious record during his tenure by allowing Pathankot, Uri and Pulwama terrorist attacks the PM succeeded in imprinting the perception in people's mind that he is the best man for national security. Anti-Pakistan sentiments were also cunningly made one among the top election issues. The implication is that real issues which dictate the government's main occupation don't matter anymore. If the pressing issues of jobs, health, education, communication, social harmony, corruption get side-tracked in the next five years we have only ourselves to blame.

The Indian electorate voted for one man. In a parliamentary government if we vote for one man ignoring the abilities, capabilities, education and experience of candidates who will represent each constituency we are in for serious troubles. With all respect, Modi is not going to be of help if a parliamentarian is inefficient. To a large extent the last election was a Modi election. Each of the 303 BJP MPs won mainly on Modi's name. A blind choice for the BJP seems to have happened. Side effects are therefore seen and felt. We have 116 MPs (39%) of the saffron party's winning candidates with criminal cases. The leader of them all is the Bhopal MP, Pragma Singh Thakur who faces terror charges in the 2008 Malegaon blast case. Not that elected law makers from other parties are saints but the focus here is on the ruling party which prides itself as a party with a difference. One of the effects Modi's popularity is that his 'sarkar' has 22 of the 57 ministers (38.60%) with criminal cases, including 16 ministers who have serious criminal cases like terrorism, treason, arson, murder, rape, robbery, burglary and communal disharmony. One person who is in the media glare is Pratap Sarangi. This man was involved in the murder of Graham Staines. The Sangh Parivar has got its way as the austere man who possesses only a thatched home in white kurta-pyjama, travelling on a bicycle was appointed Minister of State. If we have par-

liamentarians and ministers with criminal records we don't expect them to enact laws to punish themselves and implement policies detrimental to themselves. Modi did not send them to Lok Sabha nor did he make them union ministers. You and I did.

One stark deficiency in Modi's Council of Ministers is talent. There is also an obvious lack of experience in the team of 57. The 24 Cabinet Ministers include only Rajnath Singh (Defence), Nitin Gadkari (Road Transport and Highways), Nirmala Sitharaman (Finance), Ram Vilas Paswan (Consumer Affairs), Ravi Shankar Prasad (Law and Justice), Prakash Javdekar (Environment), Piyush Goyal (Railways) and Smriti Irani (Women and Child Development) as experienced faces. Absence of an economist meant that the technical portfolio of Finance will be maidenly handled by Nirmala Sitharaman, who of course is a Masters in Economics from JNU. As there is no one, the important HRD minister has to be an unknown and alleged fake degree holder, Ramesh Pokhriyal who bizarrely claimed in Lok Sabha that to astrology science is a dwarf and that ancient India had knowledge about nuclear tests and head transplants.

One has to take note of Amit Shah's elevation as Home Minister. The Modi-Shah team in Gujarat is replicated in the national capital. With little option, the hardliner is made number 2 in the government. His stint as the Home minister of Gujarat was marked by extra-judicial killings and encounters. Jammu and Kashmir and the North East are concerned since Shah himself was vocal on scrapping article 370 and passing the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in Parliament.

Both the newly constituted Lok Sabha (43 % with criminal cases) and the Modi 2.0 government (38.60 % with criminal cases) do not instil confidence. Moreover, many of the MPs and ministers do not appear to have been elected and appointed on merit. The blame stops at the voters' doorstep. As the French say, "Toute Nation A Le Gouvernement Qu'elle Mérite." (We get the government we deserve).

the size of the cabinet is otherwise is not possible.

Yours etc.,
Varun SD
Bangalore -72

Is BSNL folding up?

Editor,

Can we repose our trust in BSNL now? No, not at all. It has fallen from grace in many respects. Perhaps every six in ten customers have one way or other been left in the lurch. With broadband connectivity terribly low, the countless subscribers in several areas might make up their mind to say goodbye to this snobbish company and shake hand with JIO Reliance. JIO is about to kick off its new GigaFiber with a bang. Frankly speaking, when JIO starts to break in with its rock-n-roll, many things could happen. Last time JIO had virtually demolished the castles of both -- Reliance Communication (belonging his own brother - Anil Ambani) and Aircel. Almost 95% of the customers were taken over by JIO.

Moreover, when advanced technology itself supports the cut-throat market, no rival company should lag behind, particu-

larly in keeping their esteemed customers happy. Even minor shortcomings will then be "blameworthy." What is frustrating with BSNL is that the customer care service is abysmal. Customers' grievances are hardly attended to. I have my share of bitter experiences which haunt me and touch a raw nerve even now.

For over one and half the broadband network was erratic for many months. I filed several complaints but the problem was not resolved. Since the Jio mobile internet service was very efficient during that time and it served all my purposes, I almost forgot to "follow up" my complaint with BSNL. But I remembered my last complaint only after about eight months when the Jio service was down for about a week. As I had no other option but to fall back on BSNL broadband, I finally took the case directly to the Chief General Manager (CGM).

A great man has a great personal secretary. My call was picked up by a very humble and soft-spoken secretary of CGM - Ms Annaple Wanswett. She patiently listened to my

grievances. After critically evaluating the case she consoled me and assured to restore the service at the earliest possible. Since the CGM was out of station Ms Wanswett sent a troop of linemen and technicians to fix my problem the very same day. No kidding, it took over twenty days to restore the service. The case was not simple. At various places, the cables were almost worn out and had to be replaced. This only goes to show how unprofessional BSNL is. I realized then that until that time I was just paying my bill amount for not using the services to the "optimum" - though I had opted for the unlimited high-speed data plan. Then one BSNL employee suggested that I write an application for waiving the bill. I found it logical too. I took this advice and emailed the letter on August 10, 2018 with a humble request for waiving the bill for some months. Since then I have sent four reminders and made several phone calls but have got no favorable response as yet.

No wonder, there are several complaints like mine. Cell phone users are having a tough time since the network is highly unstable. Sometimes it's ridicu-

lous that one has to move around or rush to the terrace for better connectivity. The callous and lackadaisical officials, hardly take notice of the complaints, much less to resolve them at the earliest as happens with private service providers. Clearly BSNL's administration is not at all geared up for the competition. One wonders, when the top administrators will realize that inefficiency, incompetence, and procrastination have reduced the PSU to an old and shabby unit. Hence instead of attracting new customers, it is fast losing its old customers too.

Can BSNL, rise up from its slumber and compete with its rivals at least to retain at least its old customers? These days people have no patience for non-performers and will quickly shift to digitally smart service providers.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong -2

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Rethink about selling AI, BSNL and MTNL

Strategic assets must be in Indian hands

By Nantoo Banerjee

The mounting debts of three of the countries state-owned enterprises - two in telecommunications and one in civil aviation - are a matter of great concern. There have been several plans since 2017 on how to reduce the government's financial liability in these enterprises. Two public sector telecom companies - BSNL and MTNL - appear to be in a debt trap. Their future business prospect looks rather dim due to lack of 4G spectrum. They have few new customers. Many of the existing customers are changing to private sector Vodafone, Reliance Jio and Airtel. Yet, the fact is: BSNL and MTNL have the lowest debt among all telecom operators. BSNL, which has a debt of Rs 14,000 crore, has sought 4G spectrum across India through equity infusion of Rs 7,000 crore. The total cost of the spectrum will be Rs 14,000 crore. Both firms have asked for a VRS for employees similar to the Gujarat model. The VRS scheme for BSNL and MTNL will have a respective revenue impact of Rs 6,365 crore

in its second term, does to tackle the financial problem of BSNL and MTNL. The best thing the government can do is to merge the two companies and run the outfit itself.

The story of Air India, also a major national strategic asset, is even more alarming. The government appears to be prepared to sell the country's key domestic and international operator even to an Arab buyer. Air India's sale to a foreign buyer will be like the sale of India's skies. The Congress government's policy of privatisation of the civil aviation sector in the 1990s did not help create any major private Indian airline. Instead, the then government doggedly fought against a Tata proposal to re-enter civil aviation operation for unknown reasons. The Tata group was the original owners of Air-India before it was nationalised by the Nehru government in 1953 under the Air Corporations Act though its founder JRD Tata was allowed to continue as a non-executive chairman till 1977. The government's civil aviation policy brought

"It is also the country's only telecom company to have an integrated process between fixed and mobile telephone services and the Internet."

and Rs 2,120 crore.

Historically, BSNL, once part of the government's telecom department, carries a large strength of employees. Jammu and Kashmir and the North East are concerned since Shah himself was vocal on scrapping article 370 and passing the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in Parliament.

Both the newly constituted Lok Sabha (43 % with criminal cases) and the Modi 2.0 government (38.60 % with criminal cases) do not instil confidence. Moreover, many of the MPs and ministers do not appear to have been elected and appointed on merit. The blame stops at the voters' doorstep. As the French say, "Toute Nation A Le Gouvernement Qu'elle Mérite." (We get the government we deserve).

most fictitious NRI investors to make quick bucks from India's fast growing civil aviation market. Barring the case of Indigo, currently the country's No. 1 airline, most NRI investors collapsed and dumped their airlines, but not before inflicting heavy debt burdens on India's public sector banks and local stakeholders. The latest collapse of Jet Airways has sent the country's civil aviation business almost topsy turvy. Should Air India go to such a foreign buyer, who chooses to dump the airline, India's civil aviation sector may collapse leading to a major security implication. The foreign buyer can transfer its stake to anyone abroad, which may have indirect link with an unfriendly neighbour. What will India do then?

Airlines business has its ups and downs. And, as in the case of BSNL, Air India is also not the world's most debt-trapped airline. Only last year, Norwegian Airline faced an "unsustainable level of debt." This is despite the fact that Norwegian became the largest non-US airline on transatlantic routes in the New York market. By carrying 1.67 million passengers, it surpassed British Airways, Emirates, Lufthansa, Air France and many others in the populous market. Few countries have dumped their domestic or national carriers on account of debt burden to benefit foreign operators.

Like Air India, American Airlines resorted to heavy borrowing to upgrade its fleet. This strategy caused Americans' debt burden to balloon to \$16.8 billion. The vast majority of that spending went toward new planes. However, America is not on sale. The most amazing recovery story is that of Indonesian airline Garuda, which suffered a loss of \$64.2 billion in 2017. On April 1, 2018 Garuda's financial report to the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) showed a net profit of US \$ 809,846. This is to suggest that the Modi government must have patience with the current Air India management for the airline's recovery instead of rushing to find a foreign buyer for the country's strategic asset. (IPA Service)

Life is something that happens when you can't get to sleep.

--- Fran Lebowitz

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2019

World Environment Day: Cut the Symbolism

JUNE 5, has been observed as World Environment Day (WED) since 1972. This is the 47th year of its observance. Has anything changed? Far from it! Instead the world is heading for a climate catastrophe because of our pursuit of unsustainable development paradigms. The thirst for fossil fuels to meet the growing need for propelling vehicles, railways and for aviation purposes has pushed governments to bring down the strict norms for extracting them. Last year the theme for (WED) was 'Beat plastic pollution,' and India was the host country for this slogan. Alas! The theme had no impact in the host country. While many states have already banned plastics (carry bags and wrappers), Meghalaya remains nonchalant on this issue. This despite the fact that rivers, streams and drains are littered with plastic and with the potential for generating methane gas when clogged in drains for a long time. Plastics will be the disaster that Meghalaya is waiting to see happen. Yet it is ironic that neither government nor society, nor school children have given a call to end the use of plastics in the state. This would have been one effective movement to reduce pollution and toxins that leach especially in the cheap black coloured plastics bags that are used to carry food substances like meat, fish and vegetables.

India should have been the country to lead the world in ending the use of disposable plastics but that is a far cry. It only goes to show how WED is observed merely as a symbolic gesture. This year the theme is, 'Air Pollution,' and the host country for this observance is China. In Meghalaya, we have seen advertisements on social media about how one million trees will be planted on WED. This only has the potential to shock and awe and will go into the government's records. Yet again it will be a symbolic gesture unless the name of every person who is given a sapling to plant is listed out and he/she is given the responsibility to tend to the sapling until it grows to its full potential. While the initiative to involve the communities is commendable but a one-off engagement is not enough. The community must feel a sense of responsibility to tend to the saplings regularly and to protect them from grazing animals. The Dorbar Shnong should guard against forest fires and ensure that deviants who indulge in such pernicious activities are heavily penalized. One ray of hope is the creation of the Green Volunteers Conclave by some well meaning individuals. They have been cleaning rivers and other commonly polluted areas in their respective localities. This group of nature volunteers should be given recognition and encouragement.

Meghalaya's endangered water resources

By K L Tariang

As in other parts of the world, the thirst for water is likely to become one of the most pressing issues in Meghalaya in the coming decades as water consumption will continue to grow rapidly with more demand for agricultural, industrial and domestic uses. Presently, a significant percentage of the State population is already experiencing "water stress."

Water is a finite resource and vulnerable to loss and depletion though it is also renewable. It is not always available perennially and is also not available everywhere. While Meghalaya is endowed with high intensity and long duration rainfall and with plenty of natural water resources, however, there is no major improvement in the way water is protected, conserved, allocated and used. Moreover, many water resources are already adversely affected by detrimental human interferences. Consequently, the protection, efficient utilization and proper management of water resources are the core issue in the State and not so much of water availability.

The quantity and quality of water resources in the State depends much on how the catchments of these resources are treated. However, the catchments of many river and streams in the state are deteriorating due to deforestation, faulty and intensive agriculture, mining and quarrying. These further deteriorate the water resources thereby affecting their beneficial natural role and have also caused siltation of important water reservoirs which affect their life span. The Umiam reservoir, which is the major source of power supply in Meghalaya, the reservoir of the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS) and many water reservoirs meant for drinking and irrigation purpose are already affected by high siltation rate and by progressive contamination. Apparently, there is not much focus for the upkeep and protection of the natural watersheds and catchments to assure safe and sustained water supplies though huge financial expenditures have been incurred for building expensive dams

for impounding water, for filtration plants and for distribution works. On the other hand, proper catchments protection will not only assure bountiful supply of pure water but also enhance recreation, wildlife and other ecological benefits.

It may not be possible always to have an integrated approach for the protection of many catchments or to use the land within according to its capability due to the complex land tenure system especially in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts. Nevertheless, it may be necessary to declare certain areas within important catchments as "Critical Areas" and Government may take steps to own such areas and bring them under protective measures. This will certainly pay dividends in the long run. The streams from within the Laitkor Protected Forests are the sources of drinking water to many Shillong localities nearby till date because of the farsightedness to bring the areas around the sources of these streams under government protection and converting them into forest land during the British rule.

Some rivers with their tributaries in the State are affected by settlements which extended up to their banks. Due to poor waste treatment facilities, pollutants from the settlements find their way into these rivers which are also used as dumping grounds. These rivers, which are supposed to be lifelines and could be sources of water for drinking and domestic uses and even for irrigation, are now deadweights instead. There have been voluntary initiatives to clean the rivers and other water bodies around settlements albeit lately though without the continued desirable impact. Schemes and projects for reclamation of the much affected Umkhrah River which is well within the state capital itself have been brought forward though hurdles for their implementation would be tremendous if feasible at all. Evacuating well dug in

out and their functions are limited to such tasks only. However, by virtue of its name, the State Water Resources Department perhaps would be better defined not only to carry out the comprehensive survey but to play a pivotal role in the whole gamut of water resources protection and conservation initiatives and efforts much more than its present role in the implementation of irrigation projects. Public awareness and encouraging people's participation are however pre-requisites for successful results.

Though Meghalaya receives very high rainfall annually, yet many areas in the state face acute shortage of water during the dry seasons. It is necessary therefore to encourage water harvesting by capturing rainfall runoff from rooftops, from local catchments and from seasonal floodwaters from local streams. Community-based water harvesting through micro level storage structures not only provide solution to curb various ills in resource-degraded regions but also brings about cohesiveness in the society for focusing on issues that go far beyond water.

The conventional notion where water is regarded as a free commodity to be squandered at will needs to change. It will be necessary, therefore, to motivate people and make endeavors to effect a mind-shift towards proper utilization and conservation of water. For this, there is a need for social mobilization and an enabling environment for water management. This would also mean decentralization with more community empowerment where local institutions have a vital role to bring this up.

The water resources of Meghalaya deserve attention. Hydrological and natural advantage on one hand and insufficiency, unavailability and deterioration of water on the other for lack of proper attention should not co-exist. Conversely, the social, economical and environmental health of Meghalaya will also depend much on the protection, efficient utilization and proper management of this vital natural resource.

burns, and most wonderfully the orthopedic treatment using herbs are standing testimony of the memorizing capability of our people. The tale of 1897 passed on by our grandparents about the quake and people's response is very encouraging. Cottages of masonry were flattened to the ground. Expert masons, who were few in number could no longer cope with the rebuilding work. Farmers with expertise in ploughing with the hoe emerged in large numbers to hold the hammer - a new tool for them to help meet urgent needs. Till today any mason who could not make a wall orthogonally with tilting left, right, north and south is coined a quake mason (in Khasi they are called 'misteri khynniuh jumai).

With Meghalaya listed at Seismic Zone 5 and in the light of 1897 we have some points to ponder. The scenario of 1897 was that of a hamlet of cottages distant from one another. There were no hospitals or dispensaries. Malaria was seen as a divine punishment to make people shift their hamlets elsewhere. Schools would have few cowherds and shepherds who would run to the grazing fields when the bell rang. Pebbles drawn from rivulets were

their chalk and the ground was their slate. Dams most vulnerable to quake were yet to be built since Michael Faraday was yet to invent the Laws of Magnetic Induction. There were no mines to be badly raked and no high rise buildings since cement was yet to be discovered. Even the arch bridge at Sohbar built by David Scott (as seen on TV by Ian Lyngdoh), was made of lime and sand and it remains till date.

Today with Shillong in the mess we are in at present, an earthquake would be cataclysmic. But we can minimize the casualty. For instance removing the boulders on our rooftops and using nails to fix them and being prepared with a torch at home, checking the expiry date of fire extinguishers and making sure someone knows how to use it, doing away (except metal box) with kit-kats, using Miniature Circuit Breakers (MCB) in our electrical distribution system and for those in government prepare for a good number of walkie-talkies as towers may get tilted. Finally, let everyone not panic.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Via-email

World Environment Day & Green Economy

By Naba Bhattacharjee

World Environment Day was established by the UN General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The day is one of the principal avenue through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness on environment and enhances global political attention and action. The approach is to provide human face to environmental issues by empowering people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development and develop a synergy among nations to foster awareness & political attention on environment.

World Environment Day 2019 theme is on "Air Pollution". We can't stop breathing, but we can do something about the quality of air that we breathe. The day shall be celebrated and observed with a slew of activities including specific pledge and promise for maintaining pollution free pristine environment. So are all these celebration & observance once a year, sufficient to educate any tangible result to breathe new life into our endangered environment? A definite no, if all such exercise is not backed by practical action on a sustained basis aimed at healing the ailing

gaining momentum. It has acquired the potential to culminate into serious ecological aftermath.

In order to undertake measures aimed at ameliorating the ongoing process of environment degradation, concept of green economy has to be adopted on priority to ensure a structured approach. Green Economy is basically aimed at attaining an economic environment that achieves low carbon emissions, resource efficiency and at the same time is socially inclusive. The UNEP-led programme, provides a comprehensive and practical working mechanism, through analysis and policy support for investing in green sectors and in greening environmental unfriendly sectors. The model also speaks of involvement and influence on individuals. Green finance, or investments that contribute towards a sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, has been deduced by experts as a way to drive carbon reduction strategies and achieve sustainable development goals.

Simply put, green finance covers the financing of investments that generate environmental benefits as

The threat of climate change and global warming, fuelled by relentless commercialization and excessive consumption, has turned into a fighting ground for both policymakers and concerned citizens. The coming decade is set to determine not only a collective response to reducing carbon emissions, but the entire future direction for international development and the global justice movement. Our state, with rest of the world is on the threshold of a perceptible variation in climatic conditions.

environment. All the pledge and promise for maintaining pollution free pristine environment is usually forgotten earlier than it took to read out. The realization has to be spontaneous and start as a grass root initiative, commencing at our individual homes.

The initiative of Meghalaya government to plant one million saplings/seedlings during WED this year, conceived and driven by the green & environment benign Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, is definitely laudable. The baton of subsequent responsibility passes on to concerned department, mission and primarily all citizens to ensure survival and onward sustenance of each plant. This is one of the few tangible interventions towards genuine healing touch. Will it be too farfetched to delegate each citizen by name to adopt one plant for next three years?

The threat of climate change and global warming, fuelled by relentless commercialization and excessive consumption, has turned into a fighting ground for both policymakers and concerned citizens. The coming decade is set to determine not only a collective response to reducing carbon emissions, but the entire future direction for international development and the global justice movement. Our state, with rest of the world is on the threshold of a perceptible variation in climatic conditions. In fact people are actually experiencing the alteration which is slowly but surely

part of the broader strategy to achieve inclusive, resilient and sustainable development. One of the key insights from the G20's work on green finance on 2016 was that governments need to be clearer about the policy signals they send to financiers about their plans for climate action and sustainable development.

The transition to a Green Economy requires long-term investment and sustained financing. Public budgets have traditionally been an important source of green infrastructure financing. In India neither the Union nor state annual budget provides for specific allocation against this important sector. But given the strains on public finances, large-scale private investment will be needed for the transition towards a green economy. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environment Social Responsibility (ESR) have a key role to play in strengthening state policy frameworks to catalyse and mobilise private finance and investment in support of green growth. It is necessary to better align and reform policies across the regulatory spectrum to overcome barriers to green investment, and to provide an enabling environment that can attract both domestic and international investment. Understanding that Agriculture and Tourism forms a strong basis of the economy of Meghalaya, it would be more fruitful to tap the prospect of implementing the Green Economy in these two sectors.

TO THE EDITOR

Where is the MLA?

Editor,

A cemented covering slab on the footpath at Rynjah, opposite to BSNL colony, poses a big threat to the lives of pedestrians as it is lying in a broken condition for the past few weeks. Somehow, someone has done a yeoman service by placing a bamboo network to alert pedestrians not to use this part of the footpath which might become fatal.

Now, the question is, where are those who, only a few months back shouted at the top of their voices for development of their constituency? Why are they not taking notice of this hazard? Is it because it needs repairs that could not be attended to because of fund constraints? Or is the work too small that it can be left unattended?

I hope that this will alert the public representative to carry out his public duties.

Yours etc.,

R.Giri

Nongrah

English as the link language

Editor,

It is indeed heartening to learn that the Centre had on

Monday dropped the contentious provision of compulsory teaching of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states after the three-language proposal sparked outrage, mainly in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu was in the forefront of opposing the proposal in the 484-page draft National Education Policy (NEP) to make Hindi a mandatory third language to be taught in schools across the country. Non-Hindi speaking states often felt that the Centre's move to thrust the Hindi language on them is against the spirit of federalism, and further it would be like forcing a particular type of food on a person who does not like it.

Perhaps in the entire world, Indian students are forced to learn as many as three languages, which is overburdening them. In my earnest estimation, this practice can be done away with and what is to be done instead is to make English mandatory. The government must promote it from the primary level. As English is the lingua franca of the world, every Indian must learn it especially from childhood so that he can communicate fluently within and outside India. Most of the African countries have two languages native as well as

English. As everyone, irrespective of being rich or poor knows it, there is no problem of communication. Furthermore, to Africa's ecstasy, an exclusive African English language was born to offer something to the English speaking world as well.

Admittedly, Hindi is a language spoken mainly in the heartland of India. If a non-Hindi speaking man wants to learn it out of his love for the language let him learn it. Every language has its own beauty in terms of its relevance and appeal, but certain languages have even more beauty inherent in them. English is one such. Moreover, it is a language spoken everywhere in the world. Why do we then labour and toil to learn more languages to speak one inside India and another one for the world?

As India is like a continent having different religions and languages, a unifying language is the sine-qua-non for our country and if that is being fulfilled by English, then we had better go for it. It would be more satisfying for the majority of Indians.

Yours etc.,

TK Nandanam,

Kocki-15

Preparing for the Big One

Editor,

After the month long hype of jingoism and nationalism which is unprecedented and the Balakot strike which many, relying on satellite imagery of World View-2 taken a day after, see as the Balakot that never was, and after a long spell of ugly load shedding our youth can run their machines in full swing. We can now watch with a vengeance the India vs Pakistan cricket match (both teams involved in the Pulwama incident) and with the assurance that the dreaded CAB will not be implemented now, it is high time that we now prepare for an earthquake. The elections that stretched endlessly had robbed us of our focus on earthquakes but even then it is never too late. It is not wise to rely on foreign media as far as the 1897 quake is concerned. We are extremely lucky that tales of any kind were passed from one generation to the other with no missing text. The story of our Khasi survivors in the great flood; of swallowing the book of knowledge is true. The flourishing of herbals treatment, the herbs for

“Sooner or later, we will have to recognise that the Earth has rights, too, to live without pollution. What mankind must know is that human beings cannot live without Mother Earth, but the planet can live without humans.”

—Evo Morales

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 2019

BJP's next big test

WHILE the last word is not heard yet from Rahul Gandhi who mostly remained indoors for over a week now, several Modi-baiters have stopped in their tracks, albeit temporarily. Also, the likes of Mamata Banerjee and Sitaram Yechury who tried to harvest the anti-Modi sentiments and translate this into a new power equation in Delhi have found the reverse happening in the LS Polls 2019. The groundswell of support for Modi was unprecedented. People clearly preferred a second term for him. This however does not mean the people have given their stamp of approval for the BJP in states too. The game at the assembly hustings there, like in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Delhi and Haryana in the immediate future will be worth a watch.

Arvind Kejriwal, still nursing the wounds he suffered in the LS polls, is making a clever bid to retain power even in the face of a massive BJP sweep in the parliamentary polls - where, he says, the fight was principally between Modi and Rahul Gandhi. The offer of free travel facility to women across the board in both Delhi Metro and road transport buses in the run-up to the January-February assembly polls in Delhi might involve a hefty financial liability to the state government, but his AAP might likely reap the benefits by way of women's support. AAP's vote share in the LS polls was just 18 per cent, and the BJP won all seats by hefty margins. Out of the seven seats, AAP was runners up in only two. Doles will now be the only way forward for Kejriwal to remain afloat.

In Maharashtra, it will be worth watching how the scenario builds up. Learning a lesson from the LS polls, the Congress party will have a tie-up with Maratha strongman Sharad Pawar. The BJP, though it has a larger clout in the state, has offered the Shiv Sena half the assembly constituencies, meaning the alliance has avoided any squabbles for now. Together, they won just five LS seats - four by NCP and one by the grand old party. Yet, Pawar is still capable of leading a big fight at the assembly segments level.

How the scenario builds up in the coming few months will be crucial for both the BJP and the Opposition parties. People's mood is unpredictable. Haryana and Jharkhand stood by the BJP in LS polls, but there could be an anti-incumbency mood by the time the assembly polls arrive.

The old order has yielded to the 'new normal'. A power paradigm of baggage-free governance, growth and development. With both Swaraj and Jaitley bowing out of Government on health grounds, lateral entry of career diplomat and ex Foreign Secretary Jaishankar and axing of 40% 2014 Ministers Modi has set the tone and tenor and style of functioning and sent a powerful statement of change and evolution. Of national ambition and rural aspirations, the new NARA.

Of course, there are greater expectations than 2014. To fulfil his vote of faith, NaMo will need to reach out and tap the best resources, enlarge his catchment area to defend the interests of the Indian State, advance goals of growth, development, national security and stability.

Clearly, the Prime Minister who values specialised skill, knowledge and hard work has brought in fresh talent on his terms, rewarded performance and sought to achieve the right political balance without compromising on key target areas with representation from all States in his 58-strong Ministerial Council which is a combination of political gladiators who have recently proved their mettle in battle, expertise, experience and committed to his cause and will help BJP expand its base.

The five takeaways from Election 2019: One, we have entered the 'Fourth Party System' or Progressive Era (domination of the Republican Party from 1890-1920 in US which saw political reform, ended political corruption and widespread social activism) in Indian electoral politics whereby the post-1989 era of political fragmentation has ended as 2019 reconfirms the trends we saw in 2014. The BJP has replaced the Congress as the central pillar around which politics revolves, a ruthless machine with an aggressive take-no-prisoners style of politicking in a permanent political campaign mode.

Two, a new dynamic has been set in motion with the induction of BJP President Amit Shah from the backroom to political centre-stage. The Home Ministry is raw power --- something Shah has been enjoying since he and Modi formed a formidable force in Gujarat since 2002. Questionably, what will be the power dynamics between him and the Prime Minister vis-a-vis centralisation and concentration of power? What will it do to the lines

Modi's 'new normal'

Yes I can and will

By Poonam I Kaushish

of accountability that run between Government and the people?

India badly needs administrative reforms, namely drastic makeover of bureaucracy, police and rule of law functions. As things stands, the Indian State lacks Iqbal resulting in a free-for-all and rule by law. Another vexatious issue is strife torn Kashmir where terror rules the roost despite many militants being eliminated. Elections will need to be held soon to restore normalcy. Alongside all eyes are on whether the BJP Government will fulfil its poll promise with regard to Articles 370 and 35(A).

Three, the Prime Minister

and direct money transfers. Today, he needs to give more impetus to see these projects through. Recently a Harvard economist asked why, despite the complete absence of democracy, China does well economically while India, with its all its democratic credentials, has done so poorly. He seemed to be echoing Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal's words who had called India a 'soft' State and attributed the difference to a strong Chinese State alongside a weak Indian State. The Dragon country has been a rising power since the seventies due to its discipline, hard work and no-nonsense approach, while our nation is no match in any of the above.

Five, the composition of the new Cabinet shows that Modi has not only ensured a regional balance, with a focus on states where BJP did well in the polls but also intends continuing the winning spree by inducting Ministers. In UP where the Party won 62 seats, the State is represented by eight ministers apart from the Prime Minister while three States --- Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand which are scheduled to go to the polls later this year have got 11 ministerial berths.

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Pertinently, the six month honeymoon of Modi's new term will be closely watched for how he tries to balance the confidence of his largely Hindu base, some of whom want to further nudge India into a more Hindu state, with the fears of India's minority groups, even as he reached out to them by espousing sabka vishwas. And the want-instant-result Gen X which want jobs and a better quality of life.

Undeniably, Modi's task is not enviable. The burden on him is enormous given our fickle and unforgiving voters. Much is expected of him. Will this ordinary-chaiwallah-turned extraordinary Prime Minister be able to rise from being a good leader to a statesman? Redefine politics and deliver? His track record shows that he can and will.

In sum by the term Modi's term ends in 2024, a quarter of the 21st century will already have gone by. The electorate has presented him a historic opportunity. Will he make India a Ram Rajya? Come out smelling of roses? Time will tell. ----- INFA

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ter will have wide latitude to reshape relations between his Party's politics and Hindutva moorings as elucidated in its manifesto. Some analysts wonder whether NaMo's India would inch towards a more "ethnic democracy", which requires the mobilisation of the majority in order to preserve the ethnic nation. Towards that end will it replicate the contentious National Register of Citizens outside of Assam, pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill or implement its project of rewriting textbooks etc in the second term as desired by the larger Sangh Parivar, only Modi can answer.

Politically, there are several strands of nationalism operating in India at the moment. The first is Hindutva or a majoritarian stance on how Indian society should be governed in the future. The second is a more abstract nationalism that emphasises India's sovereign territory, patriotism, and loyalty above all. The third is a muscular, outwardly-focused nationalism which centers on India's role abroad.

Will Hindu nationalism

back. Four, growth and development. Modi cannot afford to get off to a slow start and has hit the ground running. In his first Cabinet meeting he extended the Rs 6000 PM-KISAN scheme to all farmers across the country and enhanced scholarships for wards of police personnel martyred in terror or Maoist attacks under the National Defence Fund including PM's Scholarship Scheme.

His first challenge is a course correction of the economy. Be it job creation, inflation or farmers distress. So far NDA1 adopted a cautious approach as it did not enjoy a majority in the Rajya Sabha, with the status quo remaining the same one has to wait and watch how Modi proceeds. Undoubtedly he will continue his pro-business agenda, but the real question is whether it will be pro-business or pro-market?

Besides, the next five years need to be spent addressing very basic problems. Roti, paani, kapada, makaan, sadak aur naukri. In his first term Modi ably used Government resources to provide basic amenities, toilets, electricity connections, gas cylinders

ment of Meghalaya should come up with patient-friendly facilities along with generic medicines and also ensure that hospitals have doctors round the clock.

Yours etc...
RK Sarki,
Via email

IAF's missing aircraft

Editor,
This has reference to media reports that massive search operations are still going on to trace the AN-32 transport plane of the Indian Air Force which went missing near the thickly forested Mechuka in Arunachal Pradesh. Many well-equipped aircrafts including C-130J, AN-32 and Indian Navy's long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft P81 were deployed besides Mi-17 and ALH helicopters of the Army to locate the missing plane.

It may be recalled that the Russian-origin transport aircraft with 13 people on board went missing on Monday afternoon around 33 minutes after taking off from Jorhat in Assam for Mechuka near the border with China. It is very shocking that the aircraft with 13 people on board went miss-

ing with no trace at all. What is even more shocking is that the Army has not been able to make sense as to how the plane had gone missing. What compounds the fear of everyone is that the plane went missing near the border with China and that the rescuers never received any signal from the emergency locator beacon in the missing plane.

What happened to the aircraft is still a mystery. Is it an attempt of sabotage by some unscrupulous elements? Or is it a case of inadvertent shooting down by China? The government should expedite steps to trace it at the earliest and bring relief and consolation to the families who have been waiting inordinately from Monday.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Via email

Why the unwarranted anger?

Editor,
If a leader loses his cool at the drop of a hat then he is not a real leader. Anger and leadership scarcely go together. The recent number of video clippings

that went viral have further dented the credibility of Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee. It all looks like a comical drama of fury --- obviously unbecoming of any leader. What is strange is that a phrase dedicated to God could bring out a load of nasty abuses!

The Bengal CM immediately stopped her car and got down to scold the people around who chanted "Jai Shri Ram". She went further and got them arrested. One wonders how sane citizens of India look at this. Would the Bengal CM do the same with people of other faiths? Much can be said about this in Mamata's Bengal which is an epitome of "discrimination and injustice". While it is not proper to provoke anyone but why on earth does the Bengal CM get so easily provoked when she herself has "provoked" the majority of the population in the state?

The natives of Bengal have done this out of sheer frustration - which is their way of expressing their pent-up anger towards their maverick CM. The present Lok Sabha election results have emboldened people to speak up. Needless to say, Didi's hands are stained with the blood. Her government witnessed a number of vio-

lent massacres. She is responsible for ruining countless households. She is also responsible for breaking the hearts of innumerable women who have become widows, and their children orphans. The ground realities and the condition of those bereaved families is pathetic with practically no one to support them.

On the other hand, why does this sacred Hindu phrase of a holy name set off anger in someone? Being the head of a state and showing direct contempt for a particular faith only has sent out the wrong message. It's totally unwarranted and unconstitutional. Why are the custodians of the Constitution silent and not taking step? Is this not an acceptance of the brutish "might is right" aphorism of olden days? How much bloodshed and terror will Mamata indulge in before the Centre takes decisive action? No CM can take the natives and their culture hostage and arrogantly live off the country's resources.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong -2

Educational System - Process needs radical reinvention

By Ananya S Guha

Can we think of a composite system of education instead of fragmenting it? This will radicalise educational systems. It is true that school provides basic education. But is it an absolute necessity that one must compulsively pursue what is called higher education? In other words, a degree must preclude employment opportunities! What if we lay a solid foundation till the K 12 level integrating education with basic foundations of language, science, social sciences with core competences in skills such as verbal and written, aesthetics such as media and films and also technical vocational education such as design, crafts and say the more rudimentary but necessary in the unorganised sectors, such as repairing of equipments to cite an example. We need education which is holistic at these levels keeping in mind basic employability potential. At the same time we need to narrow the degree bias or obsession and at the intermediary level prior to joining collegiate or university education there is a necessity to introduce also short term diploma and courses of certification. This can either be integrated with school education or could be an alternate extension of it.

Education is mediated. It mediates between the world of work and the world of learning. In that sense it is a continuing and continuous process but the basics, the foundations have to be well grounded in school education. The continuity or the higher echelons of learning can come as a choice driven by academic and research interests. Adult learning is an imperative but it may not always be compulsory. The fetish to pursue a degree or a masters degree can be obviated if at the college level advanced diplomas are introduced which are of quality and exceptional standards. This will also impede the growth of private universities and coaching classes. A diploma or certification skills will stand on their own right, not meant to be compared to a degree, with employability in mind.

Unless we radicalise our views on education there will be no change or innovation in a system. The rat race for hundred percent marks will continue. At the school level more emphasis should be given to aesthetic vocational skills such as music and performing arts. We have created hierarchies in the system, preferences egregiously given to science and commerce students in the battle for wits. This is misplaced. Intelligence varies according to sensibilities and the spirit of communication and its aesthetics.

Again in school education we can have home schooling a kind of adjunct to distance and open learning. Our methodologies must be clear, not only our pedagogies. Anyway we have not evinced much change from the learning by rote method.

Radicalising education is all about aptitude markers. What the student feels, knows and wants - to study. It is essentially learner centric and not so much teacher centric. The teacher is a facilitator and motivator.

Once education is connected to talent and skill then the fear of failing or one time failure will be suitably addressed, by flexibility, giving more time to complete courses. Why only twelve years in school? Make it up to fourteen as an upper limit.

Segregating education as school, college and university is compartmentalising it. Education is a holistic world

view not to be learnt in segments. Yes we can have higher echelons of learning but the mismatch between employment and education must go. And this can go by radicalising it, having alternate modes in terms of course content and pedagogy at a solid foundational level at school. Regarding the latter technology must play a vital and catalytic role. We must extend the classroom and create more classrooms vide technological abetment. It is the visual and the aural which appeals to a child's senses and hands on work to many.

Synergising the classroom with the world of applications is another factor. Some students have cerebral skills, some do not, they have practical skills. In this manner education will be demystified and we will have no student elites.

Once the fundamentals of a solid school education are worked out we can contiguously think of adult and continuing/ professional education.

My point in this essay is that employability, self employability, adjudicating finer senses, giving equal opportunities to the talented must all go into the making of a holistic and robust educational system. Not to create hierarchies and a preferential system. Not to address failures but successes. The latter can be gauged by aptitude and self interest of the learner, also an innate flair for things around her world and her observations. It is sensitivity in education which matters not tautological expressions and commercial iconoclasm. If at all it has to be iconoclastic it has to reshape typical models and introduce atypicality with guts overthrowing inhibitions even of grades and marks. It must impose new challenges from within and without and rework status of courses and the four walls of a classroom.

The fault lines in the education system have led to exploitation in the form of private tuition, coaching classes and capitation fees. School education is the foundation for other continuities of education such as college, university and research education but it must be made self sufficient and autonomous so that choices for the future can be made easily and transition to it is smooth. At the same time it can be made stand alone with particular emphasis on skills and aptitude. Simply making the echelons of education interdependent and hierarchical is to invest education and its bearings a caste and class status. What about those who cannot afford higher education? So structurally, education is a pyramid and those who complete only school education are unwanted. So when we refer to categorisation of education above we mean that the super imposition of educational structures for employment is a myth which must be dispelled and unplugged. Otherwise how do we explain doctoral degree holders working in schools and engineers working in banks? This lopsided aspect has created serious schisms in our learning systems. We must reinvent the process radically. The symbiotic essence of education is undoubtedly important but it must work as a stand-alone method especially after school, 12 plus to generate work and giving an opportunity to alternate between work and education. The world of work and the world of education are intricate layers of connection. Part time or 'sandwich' courses must be introduced at collegiate levels in off campus modes initiated by e-learning or technology aided learning.

TO THE EDITOR

Ward's Lake extravaganza

Editor,
Wards Lake is famous as a tourist destination since there is no other tourist spot within the town that is well maintained, and appreciated. The latest attraction is the light and sound show, which is the initiative of the Government. But the fact remains that Wards Lake is too small to accommodate all the visitors at once during the light and sound show. This instead poses a threat to the people because of the narrow path along the lane which is without fencing. The lake bridge is also posing great danger to the lives of the visitors since the bridge is an old structure which can no longer support the weight of all the visitors at one time during the show. It is expedient to first locate another spot for the light and sound show which will be convenient and safe for the visitors as is experienced in the Brindavan Gardens in Mysore, Karnataka.

Yours etc.,
Pynshai M. Syiem,
Via email

When doctors turn mercenaries

Editor,
Private doctors are making a business out of their medical practice. This when medicine is supposed to be a noble profession! On a daily basis poor patients have to shell out Rs 400 for examination, followed by amounts ranging from Rs 2000 and above for medicines. Then they send the patients for further tests in their desired lab which will cost a minimum of Rs 4000. At the time of showing the report the patients again have to pay Rs 400 plus medicine charges. That's only the first installment. The case is repeated with each subsequent visit. This is actually a case of rampant corruption. The nexus between doctors and pharmacy owners and diagnostic centres is a symbiotic one because it is mutually beneficial. Usually doctors prescribe medicines from certain companies and in turn are compensated with foreign trips and other gifts. Hence they will recommend only drugs of certain companies and not generic drugs. The Govern-

Nobody believes the official spokesman... but everybody trusts an unidentified source.

--- Ron Nesen

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Finance Commission Observations

THE Finance Commission headed by former bureaucrat turned politician and senior member of the BJP, Mr NK Singh which visited Meghalaya recently has indicted the State Government on several counts. The State can ignore these observations at its peril. Meghalaya has been riding on the facade of a performing state which maintains fiscal discipline. The Finance Commission has pointed to the debt burden of the state and the loss making public sector undertakings. A prime example is the Meghalaya Electrical Power Distribution Company Ltd (MePDCL) which is a major money guzzler and requires regular funds infusion. When consumers are paying their bills regularly and the cost per unit of electricity is not subsidised it is difficult to fathom why this PSU continues to run into debts. Its payments to NEEPCo for drawing power from it during the lean months have remained unpaid. This actually speaks volumes about the mismanagement of the PSU. Time has come to disinvest such loss making PSUs instead of keeping them on life support systems perennially. The Commission has also pointed at the poor performing health care sector where investments don't match up with outcomes in Government run hospitals. In fact the incident at Ganesh Das Hospital on Sunday where a pregnant woman needing emergency Caesarean section was not accommodated because the Hospital had run out of sterilised sheets reeks of medical irresponsibility and should actually be a case for suo- moto action by the courts.

The Commission also pointed to the low Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) which at 4.38% is lower than most other North Eastern states which are at 5.02. Clearly, Meghalaya has been hiding these financial deficits through window dressing. Now the State has been asked to come up with GSDP that runs into two figures and should touch at least 10.5%. But the worst argument peddled by the Government to the Finance Commission is that there has been an increase in crime due to the ban on coal mining. Has the present government carried out a ground survey and conducted a qualitative and quantitative research to link crime to the ban on coal mining? What was the crime rate prior to the ban and after that? It is unbelievable that a Government would go to this extent to persuade the Centre to lift the ban on coal mining. But this is a Government that works on assumptions and is now demanding Rs 82,815 crore from the Finance Commission to meet shortfalls across departments. Does anyone even know how many zeroes there are in this figure?

Meghalaya: Of overheated tourism destinations

By Patricia Mukhim

Those interested in reading up on Tourism, particularly students and teachers of Tourism Departments in colleges and universities would have come across the terms "overcrowding", "overtourism" or "tourismphobia". These terms will be unbundled a little later but I am sure readers would already know what I am alluding to. Those who have visited Mawlynnong, the famed cleanest village and Nohwet where the Living Root Bridge is located know these are tiny hamlets that have now become overcrowded with too many footfalls and uncaring tourists. They are loud and disrespectful of the ambiance which is otherwise a paradise of serenity. In the daytime the village descends into tranquility as mothers put their babies to sleep. The little huts are not sound proof hence loud tourists are like irritants. The villagers feel the intrusion into their peace and sanctity.

Mawlynnong is now over-heated and there is no way to reverse the cycle. Day travelers from Assam now land up in those Winger buses, spend a few hours and return. There is very little that is available at Mawlynnong which tourists can buy and carry back with them. Mawlynnong as a tourism product is under-priced; hence it does not attract high paying tourists who look for more undiscovered, offbeat destinations. There are tour promoters for such locations and they do good business even while the tourist feels she has had a great time. I have several friends that are tour promoters but who also believe in responsible tourism. Even they are wondering how long tourism in Meghalaya can hold out.

Take for instance the Mawphlang Sacred Grove. I visited the grove last week just to spend some precious time with nature but that was not possible. There were strings of visitors and of course the tour guides did a fabulous job of explaining every aspect of the grove such as the tree that bears the rudraksh seeds and the name of the other trees inside the forest. But one does not enter a forest to chatter. You can do that in some café. But the bulk of Indian tourist who has probably never seen a forest does not know that a respectfully silence is what forests demand - more so a sacred forest. The sound of birds chirping each producing their own tunes were lost on the garrulous tourists. What's

the point of coming to a forest and miss out the sounds of nature. The reason is because there is no pamphlet that explains how tourists should behave when they enter such a place. They are only told that they cannot carry back anything from the forest. That really does not explain the sacredness of the Mawphlang forest. And on New Year's Day or other such occasions there are locals who come from the city and drink and make merry just outside the forest and leave their junk behind. I am surprised that the Shnong and the Sordar have not made this place out of bounds for bibulous persons because they actually destroy the sanctity of this sacred grove, even though they may be paying Rs 300 to be there. Tourism is just not about making money; it's about conserving culture and retaining what nature has bestowed without choking it to death.

There are do's and don'ts followed by people in countries like Norway for instance. They encourage tourists to come outside of peak times of the day, and the season to lessen the footfalls. Alex Dichter, a senior partner of McKinsey & Company consultancy, had produced a report on managing overcrowded tourist destinations. He says curtail the arrival limits and adjust the pricing so that destinations get quality tourists without being overburdened. Those that come would be people interested in the culture and customs of people here and not the type who just want to fill their smart phones with pictures of exotic locations without taking back any learning.

Dichter proposes one solution to the problem of too many tourists. He says, "spread them over a larger area." Meghalaya is not the only state reeling from overcrowding of tourists. Other countries too face similar challenges. The Niagara Falls on both sides of the borders (US and Canada) is choc-a-bloc with visitors. Barcelona is at breaking point too. So Dichter says that while there are neighbourhoods that are overwhelmed, there are others that can handle more tourists. The problem is with our own promotion campaigns. We promote only a few sites and the most obvious ones. Tourists should be dispersed by trying to pull them to less popular yet attractive destinations. If such destinations are not

there then it's important to develop one. For now even Laitlum is overcrowded and the locals now avoid these crowded destinations. A time will come when nothing will be available even for a quiet family picnic. We would have sold every inch of nature as if it belongs to us.

Alex Dichter's report on managing overcrowded tourist destinations, produced by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC) and McKinsey & Company attempts to understand the nature of the problems at hand, and to identify specific solutions which can make a real difference. The report highlights five types of problems (a) alienation of local residents (b) constrained infrastructure (c) diminished tourist experience (d) damage to natural resources (e) threat to cultural heritage. The solutions proposed are practical. They include smoothing the visitor numbers over time, spreading visitors across sites, and adjusting pricing to balance supply and demand, regulating accommodation supply and limiting access and activities. This helps develop a system to enable destinations to understand their specific situations and early warning signs. The problem is that there is no one here to read the signs and respond accordingly.

It is time for the Government to rope in an independent agency to make a heat map data and study which destinations in Meghalaya need to pull back. The problem of overcrowding should be based on an analysis of tourism data as well as research on specific destinations and interviews with tour operators, tourism authorities, hospitality providers, transport managers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), universities, and think tanks. It is imperative that local tourism managers work with all public and private stakeholders to develop a coherent plan to create and manage tourism growth that puts people and communities at its heart. This is the only way to sustainable tourism and it will have positive impacts not only for those who host tourists but also provide memorable experiences for the travelers who choose to come here.

An example of a European country that is overheated is Venice. The locals complain that its capital is being overrun by visitors. In May 2018, the city council erected pedestrian gates across main entrances. When the

crowds get too thick, the police close them down and limit access to locals who possess a special pass.

Amsterdam is facing a similar problem in having to deal with curious, noisy tourists. The locals are fatigued by having to put up with stag parties where tourists mix alcohol and cannabis and leave their litter behind. In fact, tourism in Europe has taken an ugly turn. In July 2018, protesters attacked tourist buses in Valencia, Palma de Mallorca and Barcelona (where one piece of graffiti read: "tourists go home, refugees welcome"). Hence the word, "overtourism", is coined to describe the consequences of having too many visitors.

I had said this before but it bears repetition. The double decker living root bridge at Nongriat is already feeling the heat. So too the living root bridge at Nohwet. The roots that are plaited to form the bridge are all frayed and stones and cement are being used to hold the roots together. Obviously this is a bad practice.

Thankfully a young man - Morningstar Khongthaw has emerged as the saviour of these bridges. In 2016 he started rounding up a few volunteers to safeguard these root bridges. He has very aptly stated that the root bridges conceived by his Khasi ancestors should not be reduced to mere tourist attractions. He explained that the ancestors made these bridges for practical needs to cross streams and rivers. Now they are just a spectacle with people trampling all over them with their shoes on. Khongthaw has been working to preserve the bridges by fixing the old ones and building new ones. Working under the banner of Living Root Foundation, since 2018, Khongthaw is a glimmer of hope in a society where greed has overtaken need and where only a few tour promoters actually understand and practice responsible tourism. A good number of destinations run by the locals have now lost their character.

But this is bound to happen when the State has no Tourism Policy worth its names and no guidelines on conserving tourism sites. Also, Meghalaya should learn from Sikkim where West Bengal taxis are not allowed into the State. This would help the transport operators of Meghalaya to also earn their livelihoods from transporting tourists.

We still have a long way to go but by the time we understand what tourism actually means we would have lost out.

Tragedy befalling Bengali, Malayali societies Degeneration explodes myth of political maturity

By K Raveendran

Bengalis and Malayalis have always prided themselves for their so-called 'intellectual superiority' and political maturity. Both societies have shared a past that brought them wholesome praise for their achievements in social, cultural and political spheres. The left-leaning of the two societies and their respect for democratic values is almost legendary. In fact, Kerala has had the unique distinction of voting the world's first communist ministry to power through the ballot.

The people of Kerala and Bengal never made a secret of their condescending attitude when they heard about rigging and booth capturing in the rest of India, particularly in the Hindi heartland, where such malpractices had become routine.

But fast forward to the current times, both Kerala and Bengal have become the graveyard of democratic values and traditions that they once defended with their lives. Now there is hardly anything that distinguishes them from the rest of India. It is as though the two states are desperate to outdo each other in denigrating their past and matching 'their kind of democracy' with its worst forms.

Reports about the conduct of campaigning and polling in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections indicate the abysmal depth to which the two societies have sunk.

In Mamata's Bengal, for

violence, which she is now using against the communists in good measure. In a quid pro quo-like situation, the CPI-M is doing in Kerala whatever Mamata has been doing to them in Bengal, and now the radar has been turned to BJP because the Marxists have ceased to be of any consequence.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's Kannur has become synonymous for whatever was once considered alien to respectable political activity. The so-called 'party villages' in the area are out of bounds for anyone other than a CPI-M worker or sympathiser. Even law enforcement authorities don't dare to go there. Political murders have become a routine affair and the CPI-M apparently has an elaborate system in place to protect the perpetrators. It is alleged that the party 'supplies' the 'culprits' to the investigating agencies. When the matter goes to court, the accused mostly escape punishment as the prosecution can't prove a crime they haven't committed. The real culprits remain in the background and are ever ready to strike again. Shocking details have emerged as to how the CPI-M-led ruling Left Front in Kerala manipulated the electoral process, right from the stage of voter registration to the day of polling in the Lok Sabha elections. Opposition UDF has accused the CPI-M of

TMC's scant respect for electoral process was on full show in the 2018 panchayat elections, when a large number of seats were won uncontested by the ruling party as it thwarted attempts by BJP and CPI-M candidates even to file nominations.

instance, there is zero tolerance for the opposing views, let alone the freedom to practice divergent political activity. The Trinamool government has had no qualms about denying permission for opposition parties to hold rallies and road shows on one pretext or the other.

BJP president Amit Shah was denied permission several times to hold rallies in the state and was not even allowed to land his chopper. It is a different matter that now she will have to roll out the red carpet to him because he has become the Union home minister. The state government had also turned down requests by UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath and Union minister Smriti Irani to hold election meetings in Kolkata.

The bad blood between TMC and BJP obviously got reflected in different phases of polling, all of which witnessed widespread violence as each party chased away supporters of the other, alleging attempts to rig the poll. The cold war between Mamata and Modi had its shadow even on the swearing ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, which is generally attended by friends and foes alike.

TMC's scant respect for electoral process was on full show in the 2018 panchayat elections, when a large number of seats were won uncontested by the ruling party as it thwarted attempts by BJP and CPI-M candidates even to file nominations. Even before a single vote was cast, the fate of 34.2 percent seats in the three-tier rural bodies was decided without a contest as TMC was the only party which had candidates in those seats. It is ironic that Mamata Banerjee often speaks in defence of democracy.

Mamata graduated with flying colours from the great CPI-M university that taught its own brand of politics and

a systematic drive to remove the names of Congress sympathisers from the voters' list. According to Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala, the names were removed en masse, with the help of government officials handpicked by the ruling party for the purpose.

Bringing further embarrassment to the state's people is the postal ballot scam, under which widespread abuse of the postal ballots by the CPI-M affiliated Police Association, a union-like outfit for police officials, had taken place. State Chief Electoral Officer, who is known to be a stickler for the rules, has ordered a detailed probe into the issue.

The CPI-M leadership has been at logger heads with the Election Commission after its prying eyes landed on several questionable practices indulged in by party workers, including bogus voting, which attracted national attention and brought much embarrassment to the self-styled God's own country. At one point of time, the CPI-M even threatened to take the chief electoral officer to court for allegedly exceeding his brief.

The degeneration of the Kerala society has spread like cancer to all aspects of life, with some spine-chilling stories of atrocities committed against fellow human beings coming to light. Crimes against women and girls have reached such alarming rates that mothers and parents are scared to let their daughters go out alone. Sometimes, even when accompanied by male relatives or acquaintances, so-called moral policing is baring its fangs, making it another leveller that threatens to neutralise all the state's positive attributes. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Whither pollution testing centres!

Editor,
World environment Day is celebrated every year on June 5 and the theme for this year, set by UN is 'Beat Air Pollution'- a much needed theme for awareness and action in India. How serious are we in dealing with the rising level of air pollutants in the atmosphere in our state in general and Garo Hills in particular? All motor vehicles release smoke which has the potential to pollute the environment, if left unchecked. There comes the role of PUC or Pollution Under Control Certificate. As per Central Motor Vehicle Rules 1989, it is mandatory to get a PUC certificate for every vehicle. PUC certificates are issued by the emission testing Centers and the fee to obtain this certificate is Rs 110 (as it is charged in

different emission testing centers in Assam). Is there any vehicle emission testing center in entire Garo Hills or in Tura, (not aware of any such center in Shillong) which is the second largest city of Meghalaya? The answer is 'NO'. Courtesy, Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board, who don't even have a full fledged office in Tura! Very often, vehicles with excessive and uncontrolled exhausts are seen plying on the roads of Tura and common people, students, aged, pregnant women are forced to inhale those toxic gases.

Where are the law enforcement agencies to keep an eye on these vehicles? Due to non-availability of vehicle Emission Testing Center to issue PUC Certificate in Garo Hills, vehicle owners are left with no option but to travel down to Assam, our neighbouring state, to

obtain this clearance certificate. There are reports of undue harassment by Assam/ West Bengal Police to vehicles bearing Meghalaya registration numbers. They ask for PUC certificates from these vehicles knowing that there is no emission testing Center in this part of Meghalaya. Failure to produce the paper gives an opportunity to these law enforcement personnel to impose fines with/without issuing any money receipt which may sometimes exceed the prescribed fine rate. As we are celebrating World Environment Day with the theme, 'Beat Air Pollution,' it's time to act. Wake up, Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board and ensure that an emission testing center is established in Tura which will sincerely test the emission levels and issue certificates. I think, West Garo Hills District Administration have to ring

the bell loud to make Meghalaya Pollution Control Board wake up.

Yours etc.,
Sanjib Das
Lower Babupara, Tura

Fruit of corruption

Editor,
The book of proverb states, "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children." It is no longer a secret that corruption is rampant in our state. It would be interesting to see if a research should possibly be conducted as comparative analyses, giving us the accurate amount and difference in corruption being indulged in by men and women. It is just an assumption, but most probably men might rank much higher than women. Having also travelled in a lot of Khasi villages, women seem to be

more committed to their work and family, whereas men seem to be irresponsible and do not appear to have any sense of worth and purpose in their individual or community life. Sometimes rightly so, it would be easy to put all of the blame on the men. However let us consider why is it that the first thing an educated man thinks about is in finding ways and means to amass wealth? Granted that a lot of times this can only be achieved by being corrupt. For some it is a matter of choice, while a lot fall into the trap of being a good man by leaving behind an inheritance for their children. Having done this and bound by tradition, it is likely that the children too will follow in their father's footsteps. What does this leave us with then? Most probably irresponsible, hopeless men hanging around in village corners drowning their troubles in a

bottle of country liquor while the educated, successful, well-respected men of the city, will most probably be found hanging out in the bar's, club's or even their own homes also drowning away their guilt and sorrow with a bottle of whisky. While we must always be proud of our culture, every now and again it would be good to introspect, and maybe, just maybe, find out that some of our traditional practices might be hindering us from doing the right thing. If this is not dealt with, we will continue to raise up boys whose view of strangers, outsiders and even worse their own family members will always remain as a threat and enemy.

Yours etc.,
Pyndap Warjri
Via email

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Disaster for Democracy

How the Modi wave has flooded India with fascism, writes Pieter Friedrich

In the west, we have labels," commented journalist François Gautier on WION TV, during a panel about the results of India's 2019 general election. "Right, left. Far-right, far-left. We keep applying them to India, where they're not applicable. We cannot apply to India labels we use in the West. To say that the BJP is far-right is completely wrong."

The election was over. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had won a resounding victory, seizing power once again, with a seat-count in India's Lok Sabha that surpassed even its decisive showing in the 2014 elections. Meanwhile, Gautier—described by India's National Herald as a French-born "BJP cheerleader"—was speaking truth. The BJP is not far-right. But it is authoritarian and fascist.

Moments after Gautier spoke, WION's political editor Kartikeya Sharma shed some light on how the BJP may have defeated the opposition: it has infrastructural strength. It is backed by hordes of apparatchiks.

Indeed, fuelled by such fanaticism, the organisational power of the Modi wave (a term coined to describe the tsunami of support for BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi) has floated a second BJP victory. India is now on the brink of another five years of subjugation to an authoritarian regime. By 2024, the country will have endured a full decade of BJP rule.

I joined Sharma, Gautier and others on WION to offer my take on the election. "This is a disaster for democracy," I began. "We have to remember that democracy doesn't just mean taking two seconds to push a button once every five years and pick somebody to rule the country. Democracy's actually about the society. It's more than the act of voting. It's about democratic rights, and those democratic rights are in short supply in India today. We can see that India is fast becoming what it has already progressed far along the path towards becoming, which is an organized, centralized, authoritarian democracy—which is fascism."

That's when WION cut my mike and severed the interview. "This is not even acceptable that India is becoming an authoritarian state," responded Sharma. "India is one postcolonial nation which has very successfully demonstrated its ability to transition from one regime to another regime through peaceful elections. I think this comment is unacceptable."

The irony that fascism involves restricting free speech only to "acceptable" answers was lost on him. However, Sharma's choice of the word regime — which is generally defined as an authoritarian government — was deeply appropriate.

"India's claim to democracy, rather as the world's largest functional democracy, solely rests on its record of regularly held elections," notes jailed Dalit activist Anand Teltumbde. "Although they are more of a ritual observed with massive money and muscle power than the expression of the will of the people, they have sustained the illusion of democracy." Teltumbde argues that "the de jure democracy has always been de facto plutocracy, the rule of the money bags."

The emergence of India as a fascist nation ruled by the BJP



with Modi as its figurehead is no surprise considering the origins of the BJP. Nor is it a surprise considering the identity of those unmarried, fanatically devoted party workers and their army of youngsters who provide the BJP's infrastructural base. Nor is it a surprise considering the history of Modi himself.

RSS Pracharak to PM

Milestones marking the route to the May 23, 2019 results were laid both a century and a half-century ago.

In 1925, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was formed. A paramilitary force, uniformed and armed, it was dedicated to the idea that all Indians collectively constitute a Hindu race; committed to basing the entirety of Indian society, culture and politics on religion; devoted to the notion that only a race traitor would vote for anyone but a Hindu nationalist; and convinced that it was treason against the mother nation for an Indian to be anything but a Hindu.

The second milestone happened in 1971, when Narendra Modi joined the RSS as a pracharak—a full-time worker sworn to celibacy.

Modi joined in Ahmedabad, the largest city (and then capital) of Gujarat. Modi's home state, Gujarat, lies just north of Maharashtra, the state in which the RSS was founded and in which it maintains its headquarters. At the time, M. S. Golwalkar was nearing the end of his tenure as the RSS's longest-serving and most influential leader. Golwalkar had just excited controversy with a keynote speech at a 1968 RSS rally in Ahmedabad, in which he demanded that India be declared a Hindu rashtira (nation). The following year, his petition was sealed in blood when the RSS led riots that left over 400 Muslims dead.

In the early 1990s, Modi began to validate the party's religious nationalist credentials and

emerged as a key organizer of its Ram jannabhoomi (Ram's birthplace) campaign.

In 1990, the then BJP president LK Advani began a Ram rath yatra (Ram chariot procession), crisscrossing India in a minibus decked out as a chariot. He was trailed by thousands of kar sevaks (volunteers) from the RSS, VHP and other affiliated groups.

Violence, unsurprisingly, plagued the procession. When India's central government briefly banned both the VHP and the RSS, Modi joined Murli Manohar Joshi on a trip to the US. They were greeted on arrival by Suresh Jani of New Jersey, who had in 1991—on Advani's orders—co-founded the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP).

Back in India, Modi swiftly advanced up the BJP hierarchy. By 1995, he was working out of the national party headquarters in New Delhi. He did not, however, forget his friends in the OFBJP, returning to the US for another tour in 1997.

Then he got his hands on real political power. In October 2001, Gujarat's chief minister Keshubhai Patel was in failing health and had lost his party's political confidence. He resigned. Modi was appointed as his replacement. Three days after the election, carnage engulfed Gujarat. By the end, up to 2,000 (or more) Muslims lay dead. Ten years later, a special investigation team (SIT) submitted a report to the Supreme Court. It concluded that there was "not enough evidence" to prosecute Modi for involvement in the pogrom. There was, however, a mountain of circumstantial evidence.

By 2011, Modi was rumoured to be the BJP's candidate for prime minister in the 2014 general election. His name was floated at least a year before the Supreme Court's SIT supposedly cleared him of guilt for the 2002 pogrom.

Authoritarian democracy

Modi was elected in May 2014. His election followed a three-

year campaign by OFBJP operatives in America, which began with training camps in 2011, followed by tours of the US by RSS and BJP executives in 2012. In 2013, then BJP president Rajnath Singh toured the US and Modi gave three video conferences. OFBJP sent activists to India to canvass for the BJP in the state elections. Their campaign culminated in 2014, when thousands of volunteers staffed US-based phone banks, while nearly 2,000 activists—including a team of 650 led by Barai in person—traveled to India.

After floating to power on a Modi wave for the first time, the BJP wasted no time implementing its agenda to saffronise the country.

2014 witnessed joint strategy sessions between the BJP and the RSS as they sought to rewrite the history taught in the Indian school curriculum.

2015 saw the lynching of Mohammed Akhlaq, a Muslim man, who was dragged from his home at night and beaten to death on the suspicion that he had slaughtered a cow. Local BJP activists were implicated in Akhlaq's murder. This was one of the earliest and highest profile of what were to be many beef-related mob lynchings.

2016 opened with the suicide of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit PhD student at the University of Hyderabad, who took his own life after he was suspended for protesting an RSS-affiliated event.

In 2017, Yogi Adityanath was appointed chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. While previously serving as a Member of Parliament in 2015, he had promised to install statues of Hindu deities in "every mosque".

Meanwhile, dissenting voices were being stifled. Gauri Lankesh, a journalist known for her candid criticism of the RSS and BJP, was assassinated in Karnataka. The investigation implicated an RSS-affiliated activist. It also connected her murder to the 2015 killings of rationalists Govind Pansare and MM Kalburgi.

2018 began with a rally of hundreds of thousands of Dalits in Bhima Koregaon, Maharashtra. The gathering devolved into chaos as Hindu nationalist outfits launched an attack. In response, Dalits called a bandh (shutdown), blocking roads and railways.

The unrest, asserted attorneys Arun Ferreira and Colin Gonсалves, was the result of "three and a half years of belligerent Hindutva rule at the Centre and in various states". They argued that Modi's regime bore "similarities with Nazi Germany" and "more and more people are coming around to identify it as a form of fascism."

Then, in Jammu and Kashmir, an eight-year-old Muslim girl was abducted, held for a week, and repeatedly gang-raped before she was murdered. When her killers were arrested, Hindu nationalist outfits staged rallies in their support. Two BJP state ministers joined one of the rallies: they later claimed that their party had instructed them to do so.

Meanwhile, unrest expanded across India as Dalits launched a Bharat bandh (national shutdown) later that year. There were staggered waves of arrests of prominent activists, writers and attorneys in multiple Indian states.

In 2019, Swami Aseemanand, the pracharak who had confessed to a string of terrorist attacks in the mid-2000s, was acquitted. Sadhvi Pragya Thakur was nominated for a seat in Parliament. BJP President Amit Shah sparked outrage when he referred to illegal immigrants from Bangladesh as "termites", while Adityanath accused the opposition of being "infected" by a "green virus" (a reference to Muslims).

Dictatorship vs democracy

On May 23, 2019, after a month-long election process, in which the OFBJP again played an instrumental role, the BJP emerged victorious with 38.5 per cent of the total vote.

"It's not a victory of BJP," comments Dr Ashok Swain, professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University. "It's a victory of Modi and Modi's politics... After Modi came to power in the last five years, this has been turned into a personality cult. BJP is now a one-man party."

Modi's rise from obscurity was no accident. He is the result of a 50-year project on the part of the RSS, a man who was groomed to be prime minister. He rode to victory on the backs of gangs of apparatchiks who are unmarried and completely dedicated to the party—pracharaks from the RSS, among whose ranks he got his own start in public life.

Modi's re-election was a referendum on fascism, lynching, and the unrestrained violence against minorities, dissidents and the marginalized which has been repeatedly perpetrated with impunity by the troops of the RSS and BJP.

The 2019 Indian general election demonstrated that democracy is about more than the simple act of voting or the peaceful transfer of power from one regime to another. It illustrated the truth of the words penned by Ambedkar in 1949: "It is quite possible for this newborn democracy to retain its form but give place to dictatorship in fact."

BR Ambedkar defined social democracy as "a way of life which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life." He warned, "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy." Quoting John Stuart Mill, he admonished India that maintaining democracy necessitates that the people refuse to "lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man." His words, written the year before Modi was born, were perhaps never more prescient than today. "In politics, bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship," he declared. Modi epitomises Ambedkar's prophecy.

Author shares 'most painful moment'

Author Bhaavna Arora spent six months in dire situation of Kashmir for her research work to write Undaunted: Lt Ummer Fayaz of Kashmir, a book on the life of Lt. Ummer Fayaz who was abducted and killed by militants in 2017. Being the guest at An Author's Afternoon in Kolkata recently, Arora spoke about her roller coaster ride in writing the book. Souvik Ghosh speaks to the author...

Tell us a little about your latest book. How did you come to such a theme?

Undaunted: Lt Ummer Fayaz of Kashmir is my first non-fiction. As a person, I think I get bored very easily. The book was started as a request from a few army officers. In Kashmir, the army is looked down upon but Ummer Fayaz at the age of 18 had decided to join the army. But it was very unfortunate because he was kidnapped and killed by the terrorists on May 9, 2017, when he went on leave from a post at the border. I wrote this book because not many people from Kashmir used to join the army. I had a very emotional roller coaster ride for two years.

What was your feeling when you had visited Fayaz's family members?

There is a huge difference between deaths and deaths of martyrs. I realised this when I had visited the martyr's family for the first time though I come from an army

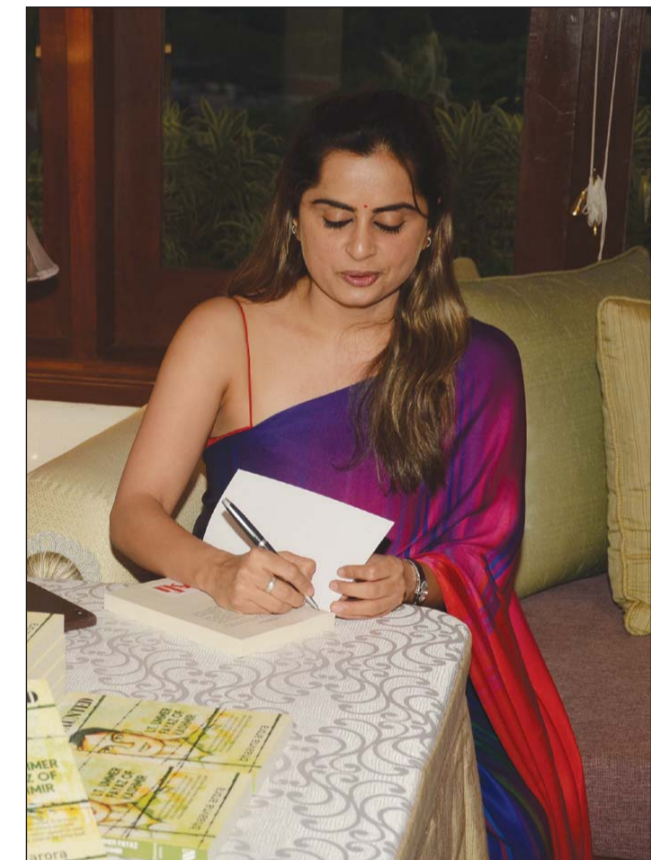
one wants to write anything about the army, he has to go through permissions. I was concerned about my security aspects. First I went to pay condolences to the family. The situation in Kashmir is very different from Delhi. So even after getting clearances, the Commanding Officer, who is aware of the situation in Kashmir, may stop me. So initially the army had stopped me and I thought my book won't come up. Then the army invited me to their house as the Commanding Officer's birthday was being celebrated. Later, I had managed to get the nod from the Commanding Officer.

Since you have done a lot of research, can you tell us why Lt Ummer Fayaz went to cousin's wedding despite knowing he is in danger?

I kept asking everyone whether the situation could have been averted. I had asked the Commanding Officer why he was sent on leave? But the Commanding Officer said for how long a person can be stopped from going to his own house. I think he never thought that there is a threat though his girlfriend kept on telling him that he should not (go).

Did you feel like giving up the project midway due to the struggle in Kashmir?

At multiple times. One can be brave (in writing such a book) but also he will have to be pragmatic. I also weighed the support that I



background. I have heard about Kargil war and martyrdom. But paying condolence to a martyr's family was the most painful moment of my life. Trust me, it is not easy. I could relate to Fayaz's family because of my Army background. Visiting the family was a different experience which I can't express in words.

Was your family very supportive while writing this book because visiting and staying in Kashmir is not easy?

My family was holidaying in Srinagar when I went for the research. Then my car was pelted with stones. After my family came to know about the incident, they completely stood against writing this book. They were thinking about my safety actually. At one point, I had even thought of giving up writing the book, particularly when I saw my sister-in-law crying. Then my brother, who is also in the army, came up to me and encouraged me to write the book. My brother said he should resign from his job if his sister can't write a book on the bravery of a fellow officer.

For how long did you research for the book?

It took two years to write this book. I had stayed in Kashmir for six months. If

was getting, I had got a number of threat calls from some unknown phone numbers. I had registered an FIR for it but nothing came out of it.

Eight to nine years ago, Kashmir's situation was more stable. But in the last few years, the things have changed. What did you make out of that?

The situation had improved in Kashmir. But now the bigger fight in Kashmir is with the intelligence and not arms and ammunition. The flow of intelligence by Pakistan is now very strong. The youth of Kashmir do not get funny or inspirational videos over Whatsapp like we do. They get the doctored and half-true videos. The Pakistani army always pose that they are under threat by India. The kind of pay packages the Pakistani Army used to get is much higher than the Indians. So they (Pakistan army) keep doing one thing or the other. I don't know when the crisis is going to end. In another aspect, the Kashmiri youth do not get opportunities because of this crisis. Internet gets de-activated when the army conducts an operation. Students will have to visit Jammu to fill out a form for any educational purpose. So slowly young people pick up guns and become terrorists. (IBNS/TWF)



(Top) An artist adds details to a portrait of PM Narendra Modi in Amritsar; and Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath felicitates BJP MP from Amethi Smriti Irani in Lucknow. (PTI)

(The author a South Asian Affairs Analyst)

Roosting time for flying-foxes



It may not be a common sight but this kind of phenomenon that usually takes place during this time of the year is interesting to watch as flying-foxes come in large numbers on the vast Camphor trees (*Cinnamomum camphora*) adjoining the Rhino War Memorial for roosting.

The place where a bat lives is called its roost. Bats need different roosting conditions at different times of the year and they will often move around to find a roost to meet their needs. Some bats prefer big branches or hollow trees, some like caves and some use both at different times.

Bats are also found sheltering in buildings, under the bridges, roost in built structures and in underground sites. For several weeks in summer, female bats gather in a maternity roost to have their babies.

The above scene that has been spotted recently are no other than the flying foxes and are the genus of bats which are among the largest in the world. They are commonly known as Fruit Bats or Flying-Foxes among other colloquial names. They live in the tropic and sub-tropic of Asia (including the Indian continent).

A flying-fox has a grey-brown like head, which looks a little like a fox's head. This is how it gets

its name. These creatures have a mixture of golden-brown dark coloured fur on their whole body and legs, down to their toes. They are about a foot long with a dark coloured wingspan that can be up to a meter wide.

Although flying-foxes are commonly known as fruit bats, their favourite food are usually pollen and nectar of eucalypt blossoms, followed by other native hardwood blossoms, such as melaleuca (paperbark) and banksia. They also eat fruits and flowers.

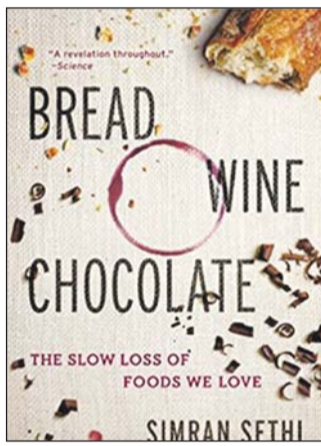
Bats are the only mammal capable of sustained flight and the flying foxes too are like other bats with flappy wings or powered flight. Despite the noises of cars plying on the road near the Rhino War Memorial, the flying-foxes continue to roost in different postures as seen in the photographs.

The Rhino War Memorial (also known as Rhino Prerna Sthal) is a solemn site built in honour of the soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the Bangladesh war in 1971. It may be mentioned that the military of 101 Area Shillong holds the high esteem of being the first tactical force to enter Dhaka for liberation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

(Contributed by Michael Shylla)

More than just savouring

Journalist and educator Simran Sethi explores the cultural and emotional importance of food



When she began writing her book on how the foods we enjoy are endangered by genetic erosion, a loss of diversity in what we grow and eat, she realised the deep connections between biological characteristics, personal preferences and emotions

By Paromita Pain

Food sustains life, but is there more to it? For Simran Sethi, food's vital connections with people and communities—its taste, smell and origins—is a story that calls for deeper exploration. A journalist and educator focused on food, sustainability and social change, Sethi has been named an environmental "messenger" by Vanity Fair magazine and designated as one of the top eight women saving the planet by *Marie Claire* magazine. She is the author of *Bread, Wine, Chocolate: The Slow Loss of Foods We Love*, which was named as one of the best food books of 2016 by the Smithsonian. She is also the creator of "The Slow Melt," a podcast devoted to chocolate—highlighting the people, places and processes behind this industry. Sethi's work in the field is steeped in the concepts of social justice and public education.

Her interest in the area of food sustainability and social change developed in the late 1990s. "An essay by Anuradha Mittal, executive director of the Oakland Institute, talked about hunger as not simply an absence of food, but as an experience built on geopolitics," says Sethi. "She really helped build my ideas about food justice and hunger issues."

The Oakland Institute is a California-based think tank.

Means to resolution

"Food is a lens through which we can work to resolve many of the issues facing our world today, like climate change, and other social and cultural challenges," says Sethi. "No country in this modern era is self-sufficient in feeding itself." Therefore, food can be an important area to connect and bond. As an area of research, food is deeply connected to social justice. "The people who feed us, like the small farmers who grow food, are often the poorest and eat a different kind of food than what they serve others," she says. "These are issues of equity that need further exploration."

A way to reduce such inequalities is to ensure that the public is more aware of what goes into food production, for instance, by making stories of food production more personal. The act and art of growing, preparing and sharing food are deeply emotional and intimate experiences. Sethi

knows how powerful such connections can be. When she began writing her book on how the foods we enjoy are endangered by genetic erosion, a loss of diversity in what we grow and eat, she realised the deep connections between biological characteristics, personal preferences and emotions. "It was then that I started thinking about all the food we use on a daily basis, like coffee that starts our day or chocolate that mends broken hearts," she says. "When we drink a cup of coffee that starts our day, do we think about the farmer who grew it? Do we think about its environmental impact?" Through her book, she aims to inspire people to eat more consciously, better understand familiar and new foods, and learn what it would take to save this world of tastes.

Nourish and connect

Food, for Sethi, is also a means of nourishing the body. As she says, "Deliciousness is something precious. Flavours matter." She is also always inspired by the people she writes about. Her subjects are diverse and range from small farmers' holdings growing cocoa and producers creatively using technology to connect people to researchers examining why people from low-income communities feed their children the food that others consider unhealthy. "Food represents so much of who we are," says Sethi. "For me, it's a constantly-changing puzzle."

Encourage diversity

As Sethi explains, she was always aware that certain varieties of fruits, meats and vegetables were going extinct, but it was when she started writing her book that she grasped its effects on the whole ecosystem. "So, in my book, I make a case for saving food by savouring them," she says. The key to public education lies in being able to place issues within people's existing contexts.

Sethi adds that everyone can play a role in enhancing and encouraging agrobiodiversity. "It is as easy as shopping from farmers' markets and choosing restaurants that source their produce locally," she says. "Volunteering with food banks and using skills like social media or marketing expertise to help organisations increase their reach is also very valuable." (SPAN/TWF)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, JUNE 9 2019

Mercury is opposite to Neptune on your solar return chart this ensures a very adventurous year ahead. You will achieve very big results this year. You will be treated very well by the people who support you whole heartedly. Your family will provide you with all the help that you require to make things work. On the professional front you will be able to conceive ideas and will execute them in team spirit. You will be goal oriented. Your juniors will look at you as a source of inspiration. Your financial position in totality will be good. You will remain in good health. And could also be drawn to some spiritual guru for seeking guidance in life. You will get proposals for business opportunities. You will be going to some travel destination with family for unwinding.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



People and friends look upon you with more respect, tolerance, and acceptance. You are likely to be more strategic in your actions during this period, as you become aware of the subtleties of human interaction. This is a time when your best course of action is to recognize that you need, or rely on, others for support. Efforts at self-promotion might be made now. Do your best to be in top form, make career adjustments if needed, and don't be afraid to show others exactly what you're made of.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



You would move towards a more positive and objective approach to your professional and personal life this week. You have a great desire to expand your work and knowledge. You might further your education and it's a fabulous time to do so, or you could broaden your knowledge in a more informal manner. Confidence is the key of success and faith in the universe and in your ability to do the right thing will get you everywhere now. This is the best time for realizing the positive potential you have. You would have a feeling of unrest or dissatisfaction with your environment.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to be more spiritual or idealistic this week. You are sober and serious in professional and personal relationships. You are getting serious about loved ones, family relationships and children. You are likely to take your hobbies more seriously. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness in professional aspects. You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending professional, personal and material aspects. It is a period to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



This week's planetary configuration brings communication, traveling and meeting new people. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are working. Your ideas are higher as teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases this week. Pouring your heart and soul into your efforts comes naturally now. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business this week with good energy and support. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



You are expected to be involved in lectures, debates, and discussions. With your enhanced communication skills you can convey your ideas powerfully to others, and you may be invited to speak in front of many people. A new project or goal begun at this time has a good chance of being successful and long-lasting. A short vacation allows you to enjoy natural surroundings with a loved one.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



There is perfection and beauty in emotional and personal relationships with your loved one. Mental pursuits, new learning, and all forms of intellectual activity are favored. Your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve

what you set out to do. You are more inclined to put your ideas into action than usual. Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored this week.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



A business partnership is lucrative and supportive this week. Good planning and management lead to be more progressive and productive in professional ventures. Good luck in financial opportunities is encouraging. You are also likely to form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with a compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



You are able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility this week. Your personal charm and attractiveness has a positive effect on your personal and professional relationships. Responsibilities and commitments may take up more time than usual this week, so set a target and make a proper schedule to meet the desired goal. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender, love and care. Children look up to you for love and affection. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused this week.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



During this week, elders are supportive and children are loving. It would be in your favor to make new beginnings and forget all old wounds, hurts and past patterns. It is best to let go of negative feelings about relationships and situations gone by. Your social life is expansive and a variety of people connect with you. You are stronger and wiser after having gone through trouble and difficulty. It is time to come back to your inner center to regain physical strength, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



Issues of sharing of power and authority with others in personal and professional relationships come to the fore this week. You are likely to experience events that highlight the necessity to share and trust. Events and circumstances are such that you learn about your own personal strength. You may have to deal with willfulness and issues of power and competition this week. You may discover a new direction in your career. Watch out for jealousies and manipulative behavior of people around. You could have problems staying calm, cool, and collected at times this week.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



You are in touch with dynamic, forceful and assertive energies. Professional power and authority is vested in you to organize and achieve important targets and goals. You bring stability and order in business and professional projects with a dynamic and assertive approach. Different people from different environments may attract you. Your warrior like qualities of energy, action, swiftness, strength and pride come to the fore this week. You need to value and respect established relationships and business partnerships as they stand by you in times of stress and trouble.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



It is time to breakthrough restrictions and emotional patterns as you are ripe and ready for major professional changes. Do not forget about the long-term commitments while you are dealing with short-term contracts. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event is celebrated. You are appreciative and caring as you give total support to loved ones through a difficult time. You are physically fit and it is important to keep a handle on and maintain balance in relationships, finances and new business ventures.

Paramedics are crucial

By Ranjan K Baruah

Career in health is not only limited to doctors as many other people are associated with the health sector. If we look at the health sector then we will find that there are other professions apart from doctors or nurses. In this regard one of the important parts of the healthcare profession is paramedics or paramedical.

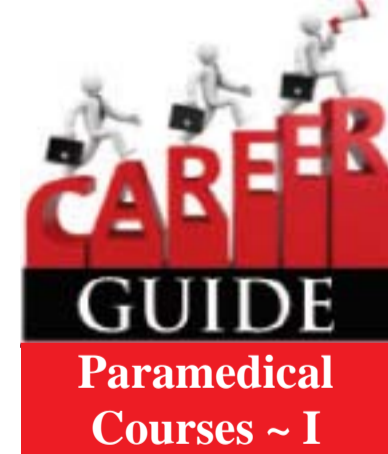
A paramedic works in emergency medical situations. A paramedic may be more formally defined as a medical professional who provides medical care at an advanced life support level in the pre-hospital environment, usually in an emergency, at the point of illness or injury. They are the key people who help doctors.

As there has been a boom in the health industry, so there is more demand for paramedical professionals. India is witnessing the phase of epidemiological change — along with communicable diseases the non-communicable diseases are also showing an increasing bent over the past few years.

The number of people aged 80 years or more will almost quadruple between now and 2050. It will lead to unprecedented and universal growth in the need for long-term care. For economic reasons or others there might be shift in health care and this will need professionals who can provide service or care the people.

There are many paramedical courses at the graduate as well as the post-graduate level. Apart from degree courses there are also diploma courses, including PG diploma and certificate courses.

There are also skill development training programmes related to some courses. Some of the courses are like Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Bachelor of Physio / Physical Therapy, Graduation in Audiology and Speech Therapy, Bachelor courses in Mental Rehabilitation), BSc (Radiography), BSc (Radio Therapy), BSc /MSc (Nuclear Medicine), BSc (Medical Technology X-Ray), Bachelor and Master Degree courses in Pharmacy, Courses for Operation Theatres, Medical Laboratory Technology, Bachelor of Speech, Language and Hearing (BSLH), Bachelor of Naturopathy and Yogic Science, Dental Hygienist, Dental Mechanics, Diploma In Community Health, Certified Radiological Assis-



According to my experiences I have seen many students who do not get admission into medical or nursing in good institutes choose the paramedical courses. In Assam, there are government medical colleges which offer different paramedical courses and the same should be started in other northeastern states too. I have interacted with many students of paramedical courses and found that there is a challenge when it comes to government jobs in few states. Students must make a good planning once they take admission in different paramedical courses.

There are medical colleges and other institutes under various governments that offer various courses in paramedics.

This is a growing profession, so one can plan well to step into these professions. Remuneration would vary from place to place. But with experience one can earn more and can also go abroad if they have expertise and knowledge.

Some can also start their own economic activities by providing health care to people who are in need. Interested people may also work with nongovernmental organizations which are working for the health welfare in various parts of the world apart from our own region.

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

"Don't waste your time with explanations: people only hear what they want to hear."

--- Paulo Coelho

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NPP gains national party status

IT is a matter of pride for the North Eastern Region that the National Peoples' Party (NPP) founded by Late PA Sangma in 2013 when he decided to contest the Presidential elections has now been granted the status of a national party. Ever since its formation the NPP had stated upfront that it would be an ally of the BJP. The NPP is the first party from the North Eastern Region to be given this status after it had fulfilled the criterion as laid down in Para 6(B) (iii) of the Representation of Peoples' Act. A political party becomes eligible to be recognised as a national party if it has won 2 per cent of seats in Lok Sabha from at least three different states in the latest general election; or in a Lok Sabha or Assembly election it has polled 6 per cent of the total valid votes in at least four states, in addition to winning four Lok Sabha seats; or if it has been recognised as a state party in at least four states. The NPP, recognized in four states of the region is allotted the 'Book' symbol which it had chosen at the time of launching the Party. Party President and Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K Sangma has reasons to feel elated. He has worked very hard to take the Party to Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and even distant Rajasthan. Recently the Party put up 5 Lok Sabha candidates in Assam, although they failed to win any seat there. The NPP won only the Tura seat from Meghalaya. But that is no setback for the Party.

There are many reasons why political parties want recognition as a national party. Firstly, it ensures that the election symbol of that party can't be used by any other political party in polls across India. A recognized 'National' party requires only one proposer to file nomination. Then it can have up to 40 star campaigners while others can have only up to 20 star campaigners. The expenditure incurred on travelling and other expenses of star campaigners is not included in the election expenditure of the party candidate. Perhaps what provides the cutting edge to a 'National' party is that it gets the time slot on national and state television and radio to address the people and convey their message to the voting public. However, this last clause is why all political parties want the 'National' tag. The party receives land or building from the government to establish its party office. This saves a lot of expenses on rentals etc. Every party wants to save expenses on infrastructure. It wants to spend every penny on wooing voters. Henceforth the NPP is expected to play a leading role in establishing a strong presence for the region in the national capital.

Changing the narrative for a better world

By H H Mohrmen

The story that is common to all of us is that humans are unique beings and they have placed themselves at the pinnacle of creation. Humans were meant to be the masters, to lord it over all creation. And oh my word! Aren't humans the worst masters? We are the favourite children of God while his others creations are inferior to us and they were created for us. We believe that we have been assigned this job by God the mystery of which is infinite but unfortunately the resources of the earth He made are finite. We have not only exhausted all the earth's resources but we have also burned down our own houses in the process.

Of the Homo species, which include Homo-erectus, Homo-Neanderthal, Denisovan and others, Homo sapiens which have narrowly escaped extinction are the only species that have survived till date. We were almost extinct like our cousins and yet we have flourished and multiplied at an alarming rate and we have dominated and filled the world with the likes of us. Homo sapiens have colonised every corner of the world and reached every part of the globe, greedy for her resources and used it to the hilt. In the process we have cleared forests, levelled hills and we have modified about half of the land surface of the earth. We have destroyed birds and animal habitats and have also caused soil erosion and killed coral reefs in the ocean.

We are consuming 160,000,000 million litres of oil every day and by doing so, increased our carbon footprints on the Earth. In his march to progress, man had emitted harmful gases to the atmosphere and it is said that more than half of the carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere from burning of fossil fuel was emitted in the last 30 years. In fact there is more emission in the last 30 years than in the centuries and the millennia before. We are not only responsible for green house gas emission which has caused serious global warming but we have also polluted our water bodies, land and air. This

pollution is the result of our different activities which include mining, industries and indiscriminate use of pesticides in intensive farming.

Humans are also responsible for species extinction. It is said that by 2050 humans will wipe out 30-50% of earth species. Studies have also found that insects are in a serious decline and most of them could die out by the end of the century. And if insects die, then humans will also follow suit, because without insects there is no pollination and recycling of nutrients in the soil will stop. Soil which is the major food source for most of the creatures will also die and when soil dies, humans will not be far behind. The author of a recent report on insects worldwide concluded: "If insect species losses cannot be halted, this will have catastrophic consequences for the planet's ecosystem and for the survival of humankind."

Still humans continue to deny that this is happening and carry on with their activities. And now the major by-product is waste which we don't know what to do with and we continue to dump 8 million tonnes of plastics into the ocean every year. In April 2019 more than 48 pounds of plastic, including disposable dishes, a corrugated tube, shopping bags and a detergent package with its bar code still visible, were found inside a dead sperm whale in Italy, the World Wildlife Fund said in one of its reports. The whale, a young female, washed ashore in Porto Cervo, a seaside resort in the north of the Italian island of Sardinia. Earlier similar news where whales washed to the shore were reported from Indonesia, Philippines and Spain and inside the whale's stomach huge amounts of plastics was recovered. And we continue to dump waste and million tons of plastic into the ocean every year.

We are in a serious problem now and if this is not a crisis then what is?

This crisis is caused by humans and only humans can solve it. But how can we stop this crisis? It is not as easy as pulling the brakes or engaging the reverse gear of a vehicle, but by doing one simple thing and that is by changing the story. The need of the hour is to change the narrative.

We have seen where the man-centric story takes us; the story where man was placed at the centre of the creation has not only taken us on a slippery path in a journey to kingdom come, but we have almost reached the destination. It is time to change the narrative that put man as lord of all creation because he had failed in his duty in the first place. It is time for humans to get down to their rightful place where they are equivalent to all creations and to understand that we are interdependent on each other. Humans are but a tiny speck in the universe and humans are mortal beings.

The story of humans has to be rewritten and the truth be told that the Universe, the solar system and humans do not have separate stories but are part of one story. That story is that man is not the master or the lord of all creation and that, in fact he is but a small part of the entire creation. And like all creation he is part of stardust which came from the Big Bang and will one day die, disintegrate, consumed by bacteria, become part of the soil and grow as a plant again. This new story is much more fascinating, it is scientifically true and it is more convincing than the story we already know, because it is not only the story about man and the world but of the entire Universe.

It is estimated that the Universe is about 14 or to be precise 13.772 billion years old which means that from Big Bang till today it is approximately 14 billion years. And it is also said that during most of this time the Universe was lifeless and in chaos. It was only in about 5 billion years ago that the solar system began to form and modern humans have only evolved in the last

200,000 years ago. And this human civilisation as we know it is only 6000 years old and industrial revolution which has changed the world is only 200 years old. The revolutions which work to satisfy the insatiable demon inside man, called greed is only 200 years old, but look at the damage that we have done.

We have to change our views of ourselves as the pinnacle of creation, the centre of the universe or a unique creation, because this is not only destroying the earth and eliminating other species, but it is killing us too. We are no extraordinary creatures but same and equal creations with animals and plants and in fact we are animals like any other animal. Yet some people still find it difficult to accept that the human race evolved from a common ancestor with chimpanzees which is an endangered species. Mind you we Homo sapiens are not much different from chimpanzees with which we share 99% of our DNA and if they are on the verge of extinction, why not us?

Recently in one of the All India Radio programs which was produced by the North East Service, Shillong, the moderator of the program raised a very pertinent point which I never thought of before. If I am to rephrase the question she asked, it was something like, 'why worry, we are going to die anyway?' Yes, our Homo species cousins, the Homo erectus, Homo-Neanderthal, Denisovan and others have become extinct from the face of the earth, but like the old Native American saying goes, "We do not inherit this earth from our parents; we only borrow it from our children." Hence as much as we can, we want to handover a good if not a better earth to its rightful owners - our children.

To do that we need to get down to the ground and understand that we are no different, not even from the tiny parasites that we cannot see with our naked eye. We need to get down from our high horses and be humble. We need to change the narrative.

Second Modi govt is yet silent on its vision

Women unemployment crisis accentuating fast

By B. Sivaraman

A massive mandate is no license for indifference or callousness in governance towards social crises, like the unprecedented labour force participation crisis haunting Indian women. The next one month in the run-up to the presentation of the full budget on 5 July by Ms. Nirmala Sitaraman would have to show whether this message has sunk in with the Modi Government 2.0.

The work-life crisis being faced by Indian women is multifaceted. At one level, their share in the labour force is alarmingly declining. Even among those one-quarter of women who come into the labour force, a very high share is facing unemployment and women are not getting jobs though they are ready to work. Even among those women who are already working, the number of those who suffer job losses is historically unparalleled. In short, it is an all-round crisis of women's work-life.

Women dropping out of the labour force is nothing new but in recent years it has reached the level of a social emergency. Over the last couple of years, many international agencies, think tanks, corporate research agencies, reputed academic centres and leading media houses have been warning about the intensifying employment crisis of Indian women. It was as early as in April 2017, that a World Bank Policy Research Working paper titled 'Precarious Drop' had raised an alarm. Based on NSSO reports and the Census reports, the report stated that, "female labour force participation in India dropped by 19.6 million women from 2004-05 to 2011-12. Participation declined by 11.4 percent from 42.6 to 31.2 percent during 1993-94 to 2011-12. Approximately 53 per cent of this drop occurred in rural India, among those ages 15 to 24 years".

In just eight years two crore women dropping out of employment is no joke! Any government should have acted on a war-footing to reverse the trend. But Modi government, which took office in May 2014, didn't even acknowledge the problem, leave alone acting upon it. So the female labour force participation further had a free fall during the 5 years of Modi's first term to hit a historic low of 27 per cent in 2018.

These studies were followed by a spate of reports from reputed think tanks and research centres like Oxfam, autonomous research institutions like Azim Premji University, ICRIER, NCAER, LSE, and even UN agencies like UNDP and UN Women, which were equally shocking. But there was absolute silence on this from one source: the Modi government!

Modi now boasts of appointing India's first woman finance minister but neither Modi nor Nirmala has opened their mouths on the crisis of Indian women yet. The BJP Election Manifesto declared that, "We would formulate a comprehensive 'Women in Workforce' roadmap focused on dramatically increasing the female workforce participation rate over the next five years. Will they walk their talk? Why they are not able to come up with any specific proposal?

During the election campaign cacophony, the multiple warnings by numerous specialised agencies could have been lost in the din. In the election year itself, the CMEI, based on its surveys, showed that in a single year of 2018 alone women lost 8.8 million jobs—6.5 million in rural India and

2.3 million in urban India. Why not introduce a job-loss allowance of 80 per cent of the last drawn wages three years for workers who lose their jobs as being practiced in many countries in the West?

According to the NSSO PLFS report, which Modi tried to suppress before elections but now forced to release without any change, among women who had completed secondary school education, the unemployment rate had shot up from 9.7 per cent in 2011-2012 to 17.3 per cent in 2017-2018 among rural women and for urban women from 4.0 per cent to 19.8 per cent. Perhaps, the Modi magic can only win elections but it is helpless in increasing job opportunities for women!

Now the Global corporate consultancy firm McKinsey has come up with another alarming report in June this year that upto 12 million Indian women might lose jobs in India due to automation in both tech industry as well as in manufacturing by 2030. What contingency plans does Modi have to cushion this catastrophic tech impact on women?

Child care burden is mainly responsible for many women leaving the workforce and so also are security concerns. Why not declare a working women's hostel and a crèche for every panchayat?

The 2017 Maternity Benefit Act was too late and too little to address the problem of women giving up jobs due to childbirth and child care. It was supposed to cover only 8 per cent of the Indian organised sector workforce and left out 92 per cent of the unorganised and informal workers. Why not transfer Rs. 60,000 to the bank account of every unorganised sector working woman who has delivered a child as the equivalent of six month wages?

Commuting is a severe problem for working women and school girls. Nitish Kumar followed Jayalalithaa's model of giving free bicycles to school girls and drastically brought down drop-out rate among school girls. But the BJP which was thumping its chest for ruling 15 States in India failed to extend the successful experiment of their own ally in other BJP-ruled States. Recently, Delhi government of Arvind Kejriwal allowed free travel for women in Delhi Metro and bus services, which was a very radical move to increase work participation of women. But instead of emulating the move in the States ruled by them, the BJP could only ridicule the move as vote-catching exercise.

The Congress-led State government in Karnataka first declared in December 2018 that girls in the State would get free education in government educational institutions upto postgraduate level and then the Rajasthan government followed suit in January this year, and since then Punjab government has also made a similar announcement. Despite Modi's high-flown Beti Pado! slogan, why are the BJP-led State governments not coming forward to emulate this and even declare that they would bear the educational cost for girls even if they study in private schools? Sadly, when it comes to women's welfare, even the usual jumlas of Modi are missing! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Modi wins hearts in Kerala

Editor,
Prime Minister Narendra Modi has surprised every Keralaite by paying a visit to Kerala and offering Thulabharam at Guruvayoor Sree Krishna temple even though the state had not given a single seat to the BJP in the recently held general election. Addressing the 'Abhinandan Sabha' organized by the BJP at the temple town of Guruvayoor on Saturday, Modi lamented that the ruling LDF government had taken a decision not to be a part of the mega scheme introduced by his government to help the poor in their health conditions. It may be pertinent to note that the poor in this country have to sell their houses, land etc., to pay off their huge medical treatment expenses once they are admitted to hospitals. The NDA government introduced Ayushman Bharat to end such sufferings of the poor patients and their families.

Referring to the recent elections, the Prime Minister said that people might ask why he went to Kerala even though there was not a single NDA MP in Lok Sabha from the state. He further said, "To those people asking such queries, I will say that there are people who have helped us win and those who could not help us win. But, I am the Prime Minister for 1.3 billion Indians and their well-being and welfare is my responsibility."

This statement of Modi has truly subdued the cynical attitude of the majority of the Keralaites towards Modi. He has been able to positively transform the mindset of the people towards him. It is little wonder that people have started liking him. Wonders will never cease!

Yours etc.,
T K Nandanam,
Kochi-15

Biodegradable sanitary pads

Editor,
Through the esteemed columns of your newspaper, I want to express my deep feelings and convey the message to all women to use Biodegradable Sanitary Pads. Menstrual Hygiene is a subject that is not openly spoken of in India. This communication gap has caused substantial danger to the health of women and the environment. Sanitary pads prevent the skin from breathing, so they can irritate the skin or deteriorate into vaginitis, if used constantly. Tampons should not be kept in the body longer than 8 hours because they can cause TTS (Toxic Shock Syndrome).

Statistics show that a woman uses around 16,000 sanitary pads throughout her lifetime. Those 16,000 hygiene products, full of chemicals, plastics, SAP, polymers, perfumes and other synthetic compounds, are buried in

the dumps of the world and take several centuries to decompose. In India, over a billion of these non-degradable sanitary pads clog landfills, water bodies and sewage systems every year. This is because synthetic pads are made of 90% plastic and are bleached with chlorine. That explains why the level of trash in India is on the rise. The disposable sanitary napkins are made of mainly plastic and synthetic chemical components. These are not only hazardous to health but also to the environment as an average sanitary pad after disposal would stay in the environment for 500 years before it starts to degrade.

To make the disposal of sanitary napkins within a limited time period, initiative has already been taken by V Ramachandran, an electronic engineer from IIT Madras. He has developed a sanitary napkin incinerator that can burn soiled pads into ashes within few minutes. The leftover waste generated from the incinerator can either be used as a manure for plants or can be flushed out. In order to find alternative and environment friendly options, women from a village in Goa have started an initiative to manufacture and sell hygienic biodegradable sanitary pads under the brand name 'Sakhi' bio-degradable sanitary pads. These pads are mainly made of pine wood paper. When buried in mud, the pad gets degraded within eight days.

Many educated women in India, in a bid to overcome this pollution, have already started using green biodegradable pads. The products are made using natural raw materials that are far less damaging to the environment. Not all women are comfortable switching from one type of sanitary pad to another. However, because the country is now promoting eco-conscious biodegradable pads, they have become a choice. One such great option is Heyday pads made from natural plant-based fibres of corn and bamboo. Heyday customers have loved the experience because these pads look and function exactly like a regular sanitary napkin but feel extremely soft and comfortable on the sensitive vaginal skin.

Biodegradable sanitary napkins are a new invention in the personal hygiene space that aims to transform women's periods by protecting their health and also helping the environment we live in. Let Us All Embrace to adopt Biodegradable Sanitary Pads In India.

Yours etc.,
Pinaki Nandy,
Viaemail

On environment and other things

Editor,
Apropos Salil Gwalis, "Why the unwarranted anger?" (ST June 6, 2019) the counter question to

this writer is why the unwarranted anger exposed in this paper with a worldwide readership when the writer was incensed with BSNL? Who gave him the moral right to call the officer a great man and to expose the name of the employee working under the officer? My sincere request to the newspaper is not to allow space for individuals to express their anger.

Now let me turn to the environment. The letter to the editor, "Environmental disaster awaits Shillong" (ST May 30, 2019) by Haven S Lyngdoh and the op-ed piece by HH Mohrmen, "Million trees and more..." (ST June 3, 2019), and the third by KL Tariang "Meghalaya's endangered water resources" (St June 5, 2019) provide three very thought provoking readings. When our joyous students with placards in hand were all hyped up by a sudden love for environment, I was reading all the write-ups in one stroke. It applies to all of us that we cannot have our cake and eat it too. The first two write-ups are contradictory to one another. From planting one million trees to hold water after twenty years to the other which speaks about pine trees on the slopes of the plateau overlooking Shillong to be soon felled for making a road. The presence of those pine trees has helped to provide water to one third of Shillong.

There is one fact we ought to remember. Man can survive traffic jams for decades but he cannot live without water for three days. We had suffered enough of traffic jam in the 90's, when overloaded coal trucks struggling to overcome the Puriang gradient and Sohryngkham were stuck, thereby causing massive jams. People from Bordoloi Trophy reached Jowai when the East Bengal players are already in their offices.

On KL Tariang's write-up, we are now hapless. A fortnight ago BBC referring to climate change had revealed the nexus between government and timber lobbyists in the Amazon. Forest cover of the size of one hundred and sixty football grounds was destroyed in one minute. Luckily for forest dwellers they have judicious and very strong activists with legal experts to back them. The acidic water in the coal belts of East Jaintia Hills has not been taken care of so far. Will the algae treatment plant make a cup of water affordable for the poor? In oil producing countries water is twenty times costlier than petrol but the people are multi-billionaires. The question right now is, "Where are the environmentalists to hear H. Lyngdoh's plea?"

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Viaemail

"Peace is the beauty of life. It is sunshine. It is the smile of a child, the love of a mother, the joy of a father, the togetherness of a family. It is the advancement of man, the victory of a just cause, the triumph of truth."

— Menachem Begin

The Shillong Times

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Maldives and more

INDIA'S outreach to nations near and far in the Modi-led NDA's second term has begun. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Maldives Saturday, followed by a trip to Sri Lanka. He aims to take matters forward with other visits too. In terms of foreign relations, these are not excellent times for India. China with its growing economic might is luckier in terms of resources to woo small nations in its neighbourhood. There are limits to what India can offer neighbours both in terms of economic support and military muscle. This reality must be acknowledged vis-a-vis our future engagements as well.

China has big plans for the region and beyond in spreading its influence. Sri Lanka, which had problems with India in relation to the LTTE, distanced itself from New Delhi and edged closer to China in recent decades. Myanmar has always been closer to China, be it under military dictatorship or under the democratic rule that followed. India's closest ally, Bangladesh, remains as a trusted friend, and this could continue as long as Sheikh Hasina remains at the helm there. Still, China came from behind and is extending economic and infra support to it. Nepal, which was very close to India until the palace coup and exit of King Birendra, is now keen on strengthening its lines with China. Even Afghanistan, another close Indian ally, can now be counted on for association only to a limited extent since China keeps a keen eye on it as well.

Pakistan, as is well-known, is a hard nut to crack and Kashmir is only an excuse for it to target India in multiple ways - with strong Chinese support of course. PM Modi's visit to the Maldives at the very start of his second innings shows the importance his government attaches to regional ties. There, too, Pakistan is working from behind fundamentalist forces to wean it away from India but the recent elections and other political developments there poured cold water on such Pakistani and Chinese hopes.

Closer association with the US is the acceptable way forward for India and this should help even in building regional ties. The first Modi government could not take matters forward in significant ways though India's ties with the US and the West showed some improvement. Diplomacy is no easy job. Modi did make an effort and succeeded to an extent. His second term should see better times for India in terms of diplomacy.

TO THE EDITOR

What's wrong must be exposed

Editor,
Salil Gewali is an accomplished and extremely knowledgeable writer. Whatever he wrote about the unprofessional functioning of BSNL is not untrue. He said nothing wrong; every consumer of BSNL knows it. Also, I feel that, there is nothing wrong if a writer exploits the opportunity to use the word 'great' for someone. In a democracy he has the right to do so. Of course, Gewali should not have exposed the name of the employee. But I think that cannot be a big issue because his primary objective was to bring out the inefficiencies of BSNL for which the public are suffering. Gewali's write-ups on the wrong-doings of Mamata Banerjee are also nothing new or isolated. The people of India are not unaware of it. I personally feel that it is useless now to write anything about the likes of Mamata because most of them already got what they really deserved. The will of God shall prevail. It cannot be defeated by intimidation or deceit.

Of shortsighted ideas

Editor,
With the arrival of the monsoons to our hills, the water crisis may be solved. Let us view this crisis from a long term perspective and look at the whole year instead of just the monsoons. With the arrival of the rains the oil film would temporarily disappear. The Wah Umkhrah with its catchment areas and banks destroyed by human settlements, and the new proposal to fell trees on the slopes of the Shillong plateau for building roads are examples of a lack of vision. As far as the Umkhrah River is concerned, where vehicular waste has exceeded the water, it has reached a point of no return. It now remains to be seen how we address the more serious one of felling trees on the Laitkor slopes. Are we fully convinced that this road will

not result in drying up of the catchment that supplies water to Shillong? Is alleviating traffic snarls more precious than water? We had experienced enough of traffic jams at Puriang and Sohryngkham when "load as much as you can," was the economic doctrine of the 80's to 2000.

Now coming to another crisis - that of shortage of beef in the market - we cannot replace beef with anything else. For beef eaters it's also the cheapest meat and the only item for many poor people like us. The few exceptions of people who stay away from beef do so for medical reasons. With the Indo-Bangladesh border notoriously porous and with our neighbours on the other side being the largest consumers of beef, the only item left for us is Nutrela. Mushrooms, even if identified as edible are not available in plenty. We have sadly missed the bus, when lakhs of our unemployed youth were not assisted to rear cattle. Now it's too late.

Let us pray that the beef crisis would soon be over. Let us realize one startling fact which is that we should enjoy beef as

much as possible for with a telescopic political view of our landscape the future of beef as a food item in our beloved State is very grim indeed.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Via e-mail

Learning to value water

Editor,
The much-awaited Southwest Monsoon hit Kerala state on Sunday afternoon after initial hiccups with the low pressure formed in the Lakshadweep area advancing northwest side. The state had been experiencing unbearable heat for the last few months though moderate pre-monsoon showers gave some relief too. But elsewhere in the country, the heat wave is claiming precious lives as the temperature has gone up unbearably.

The most important issue the nation faces now is non-availability of fresh water throughout the year in the country and the government is

still clueless as to how to harness rainwater in a big way during abundant rainy period. Another disheartening aspect about the people's growing fad that comes in the way of harnessing rain-water is that they cover the compound of their house with concrete/tiles. This prevents rain water from seeping in to the soil, hence the earth ceases to receive fresh water and the depletion of water saved inside the soil will lead to drought.

Here in Kerala too rain-water goes waste like water off a duck's back in a literal sense during the Monsoon period. Perhaps, the abundant availability of rain without fail during the Monsoons may not have taught Keralites to harness nature's freshest water to the hilt. Just as a burnt child dreads the fire, Kerala has to face an acute shortage of fresh water, which will only teach the authorities to run for taking steps to harness rain water.

Preserving abundant rain-water during the Monsoon season must be made mandatory with the government's implementing its plans. A required

number of artificial ponds must be constructed in each village with afforestation of trees surrounding the ponds. This will prevent the water from evaporating easily.

With central India becoming too hot and the condition of water scarcity reaching its zenith, people are very much distressed. But the onset of Monsoon in Kerala gives them hope too as the rainy clouds would march towards central India very soon and start raining there very shortly. As the winter retires, surely the spring cannot tarry any more. It must step in. So, the people in distress due to hot weather can surely embrace the rain as it is on its way.

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.

My careless India

Woh mar gaya, toh?

By Poonam I Kaushish

and babudom's choord yaar attitude. Arguably, do we still have rule of law? When did we become a morally corrupt and sick society that murders and rapes children and women?

Is Brand India aware that nearly 195.9 million Asli Bharat Indians go to sleep on empty stomachs, over

grimly forecasts water demand will be twice the present supply and India could lose up to 6% of its GDP.

And yet our jan sevaks continue to live in 5 acres lush bungalows in Lutyens Delhi and grow wheat and vegetables to feast on. All at the tax payers' expense. Questionably, does it make any

decade and by next year India will be categorized as "water stressed." India has 18% of the world's population but only 4% usable water, wastes more than it produces and spends billions on inane projects instead of focusing on water conservation. Alongside, air pollution causes 12.5% of all deaths and 1 lakh children below 5 years die from air pollution every year according to the State of India's Environment Report.

For those who enjoy the ruinous events unfolding, there is some good news! The end of the tragedy is nowhere in sight. The bad news? It's simply a system's failure! They collectively coo. Who failed the system? Not the politician, bureaucrat or police. All point accusing fingers at each other. Nevertheless, everyone agrees there is something rotten in the State of Denmark! And we call ourselves a civilised society!

The worst thing is nobody seems to care. The middle class has too many problems of its own to be bothered about the poor. The poor are getting angrier and desperate; the rich, as always, don't care. For a while now, 'feel-good' has been the holy grail of media and Establishment. It's almost a national conspiracy, let's ignore the warts and bad things, focus only on those glitzy speeches and idolise success.

However, these recent incidents make it imperative that we rethink how we want to shape New India. Tough times call for tough action. A revolutionary change is needed. Our leaders need to end their reckless drift offering pies in the sky. Pragmatic competence and out-of-the-box thinking is the need of the hour. Establish close links between policy, research and service with the aam aadmi at the centre of development.

One needs neither a bleeding heart nor blindness to know what should be done. It only holds out promises of more misery, more wrenching news bulletins and more cries for the Government to act. Zabaani jama khurch will not apply balm on scarred souls ravaged by malnourished stomachs. After all, life is not about collating numbers, but flesh and blood with beating hearts. The time is far gone to play the pied piper, just let them bleed and aver; its only life, stupid! ---- INFA

Circa 7 June, Akola Maharashtra: Old and young people are forced to walk miles to dig pits and wait for three hours to fill one pot of clean drinking water. Whereby, their daily battle to quench their thirst is a losing one as H2O is scarcer than gold.

700 million living below the poverty line, 3,000 children die of malnutrition every day, 14.9% of our population is undernourished and nearly one million dying every year due to inadequate healthcare facilities despite economic growth, Right to Food For All Act and India being the world's sixth-largest economy. So how does the Government intend ensuring basic food

sense that our Rashtrapati should live in a 350-bedroom mansion in luxuriant sprawling 300 acres Rashtrapati Bhawan boasting a 9-hole golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts etc even as the aam aadmi grovels for a tarpauline to keep his and his family's body and soul together. Why do our leaders need these ersatz trappings when the world's most powerful leader the US President

The anger and indignation coursing through the streets of India is palpable. Alas, nothing has changed in Mera Desh Mahan. Daily newspapers scream of abject poverty, starvation deaths, harassment by police, fights over water or bullied over morsels of food.

for all and building on human capital? How long will the political posturing continue instead of a serious debate on hunger? Which neta will take the lead to ensure that nobody else dies of hunger?

This is not all. Over 43.4% of the country is already reeling under drought. Twenty-one cities including Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad will run out of ground water by 2020 affecting 60 crores people and 11 river basins including Ganga will be water deficit by 2025, threatening over a billion lives with the challenge getting graver by 2050 as demand rise to 1,180 million cubic metres, 1.65 times the current levels even as fresh water resources dwindle. A June 2018 Niti Ayog report

resides in a one acre White House. Can our poor country justify this rich extravagant waste?

The Government's answer? Create a monolith Jal Shakti Ministry which is the amalgamation of Ministries of Water Resources, River Development, Ganga Rejuvenation, Sanitation and Drinking water. Look skywards to ward off the crisis while the Tamil Nadu Government has ordered all temples to hold yagnas to appease the rain Gods to cope with the water shortage, Madhya Pradesh is mulling a 'Right to Water' legislation to ensure adequate water for every person and residents of Rajasthan's Thar desert are forking out Rs 2,500 to buy 2,500 litres of water which they share with their cattle.

Add to this, water levels have fallen 21.5% in the last

Rampant Cartelisation distorting market, cheating consumers Time for competition commission to act randomly

By Nantoo Banerjee

Highways, Road Transport and MSME Minister Nitin Gadkari is absolutely right to slam cement manufacturers for raising cement prices at will. Input costs have not increased, yet cement prices are rising. "The cement manufacturers seem to be moving like a cartel," the minister said, adding that "it is an exploitation of the poor." Gadkari's outburst in the open is understandable. Higher prices of cement is affecting not only the country's highway construction projects, but also affordable homes for the poor. The cost of a 50-kg-bag cement has increased from Rs. 270 to Rs. 400 in the last two months.

The Builders' Association of India and National Highway Builders' Federation - both large consumer lobby groups - have sought the government's intervention. Cement prices typically go up before monsoon and soften briefly in the rainy season when construction works slow down. Even the rating agency, ICRA, noted that in March, cement prices were increased by Rs.15-75 per bag in key markets, followed by another hike by Rs. 60-70 in April and May. This is unbelievable. And, one wonders what the government watchdogs, including the Competition Commission of India (CCI), are doing to prevent the oligopolistic market behaviour of cement manufacturers to protect consumers?

India is the world's second largest cement producer, after China. Other top global cement manufacturers include the USA and Russia. India's total cement production capacity was 502 million tonnes per year (mtpa) as of last year. Almost all major cement companies are expanding their capacity. As a result, India's cement capacity is expected to reach 550 million tonnes by the end of next year. Of the total capacity, 98 percent lies with the private sector and the rest with the public sector. Among the major manufacturers are: the Aditya Birla group's UltraTech Cement, Shree Cements, Lafarge Holcim-controlled Ambuja Cements, ACC, Binani Cement, Ramco, OCL India, Birla Corp, JK Cement and India Cement. UltraTech Cement is the country's largest and amongst the world's top cement manufacturers. The company also has the presence in five countries. The total operation includes 11 integrated plants, one white cement plant, one clinkerisation plant, 15 grinding units, two rail and three coastal terminals, and 101 ready mix concrete (RMC) plants. UltraTech is the country's largest clinker exporter.

However, it would be wrong to think that only cement manufacturers are freely indulging in cartel like operations in the country, distorting the market and hurting big as well as small consumers. The cartelisation trend among packaged and branded goods manufacturers - from biscuits to automotive tyre, telecom and even life saving drugs - has gripped the entire market, right under the eyes of the so-called government regulators. While small consumers suffer, the authorities seem to be the least concerned. In the United States, a total of 44 states got together last month to file a lawsuit against as many as 20 global pharmaceutical companies, including seven Indian firms, for engaging in illegal con-

spiracies to stifle competition for generic drugs and illegal profiteering in over 100 different drugs.

The Indian firms facing the law suit are: Wockhardt, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Aurobindo Pharma, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, Lupin, Zydus Pharma (Cadila Healthcare), and Taro Pharmaceutical Industries - a subsidiary of Sun Pharma, the country's largest drug firm by sales. Some executives from these firms have also been named in the case. The lawsuit accuses Teva Pharmaceuticals USA Inc of orchestrating a sweeping scheme with 19 other companies to inflate drug prices, by more than 1,000 percent in some cases. If these Indian firms have the guts to indulge in price cartels in the USA, they are probably practising the same in India with impunity for years. Consumers are yet to see the Indian authorities busting drug cartel in India or looking into the matter even after the US action.

India has all laws of the land to regulate and punish price cartels, which operate more informally than under formal agreements like OPEC does for oil. The Indian market is large. The bases of both producers and consumers are wide. The producers' profiles differ as much as the quality of their products. Yet, prices of their products hardly differ. They make India among the world's most complex markets. On paper, the Indian Competition Act 2002 (Competition Act) regulates anticompetitive conduct in the country. CCI is the statutory authority in charge of competition law enforcement. CCI is aided by its investigative arm, the Office of the Director General (DG), in achieving the objectives of the Competition Act, namely preventing practices causing an appreciable adverse effect on competition, promoting and sustaining competition in markets, protecting the interests of consumers and ensuring freedom of trade.

The Act is supposed to regulate three areas of conduct: anticompetitive agreements, including cartels; abuse of dominant position; and combinations (mergers, acquisitions and amalgamations). CCI is supposed to be a proactive regulator that undertakes various advocacy initiatives, adding to the discourse between the regulator and potential leniency applicants. Separately, there is a noticeable trend in the number of bid-rigging issues in public procurement. In the light of the impact of such illicit activities on the country's sustainable economic development, CCI should have clear and keen eyes for such cases.

Unfortunately, the public is yet to see and appreciate CCI's role in ensuring at least a near-perfect-competition like situation in the market. Union minister Nitin Gadkari's latest remarks on the pricing practice of cement manufacturers are highly relevant and came at an appropriate time as the BJP-led NDA government prepares to implement major campaign promises following its sweeping election victory. The BJP had pledged a \$1.44-trillion investment to build roads, railways and other infrastructure, a boost to manufacturing, and a doubling in exports. The role of regulatory authorities will hold key to the success of the Modi 2.0 agenda. Price cartels - informal or otherwise - must be broken. Consumers must get the value for their money. (IPA Service)

“Books have a unique way of stopping time in a particular moment and saying: Let’s not forget this.”

--- Dave Eggers

The Shillong Times

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Press Freedom under siege

RECENTLY some journalists were arrested by Lucknow Police merely because they shared a video of a woman addressing the media and claiming that she had sent a marriage proposal to Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath and seeking that he responds to her because she is depressed by his silence. The woman claimed to have records of the conversation between the Yogi and herself. In an age mental health has become a crisis, the woman could very well have been a victim of grandiose delusions, since the man she purportedly claims has been in communication with her is a person holding high office. Whatever be the circumstances, the fact remains that the video went viral and journalists and others have tweeted it with their own comments. One of those who tweeted this video is journalist, Prashant Kanojia. Following his arrests he was remanded to 11 days custody. The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the UP Government to immediately release Kanojia. The Supreme Court bench also said that while the court does not appreciate the tweets posted by Prashant Kanojia but those cannot be grounds to put him behind bars. The apex court further observed that in this matter a person’s fundamental rights under Article 19 and 21 are non-negotiable.

The Uttar Pradesh police have so far arrested 11 people for allegedly sharing objectionable content against Adityanath. This includes Kanojia; Ishika Singh, head of a Noida-based news channel and Anuj Shukla, one of the editors of the channel. The Editor’s Guild of India had earlier condemned this attempt to gag freedom of speech and expression. There have been several cases of media persons being unnecessarily harassed in the last five years of the Modi dispensation. The pressure on media persons is such that many have today become wary of blowing the whistle and have resorted to self regulation. Several cases of media persons being attacked and killed have not reached closure. Their killers have either not been arrested and if arrested, then conviction takes ages, thereby giving free rein to evildoers. The murder of Gauri Lankesh an outspoken journalist still remains unsolved although some arrests were made. India is today ranked 140th among 180 countries in terms of media freedom. This is not a very healthy sign in a democracy. What, however, is a matter of grave concern is that a section of the Indian media have turned into cheerleaders of the ruling government. The divide in the journalistic fraternity is not good for press freedom. Indeed press freedom entails critiquing those in power and holding them to account. Anything short of that is public relations.

LOOKING BACK

June 19, 1989

Plea for providing facilities to linguistic minorities

The Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, Mr Bishnu Prasad, ex Mp called upon the State governments to provide facilities for linguistic minorities and help strengthen the forces of integration. He how ever expressed satisfaction over the efforts of the Meghalaya Govt to encourage linguistic minorities in the State. Addressing a press conference in Shillong on Monday, Mr Prasad said that besides the 15 official

languages recognised by the eighth schedule, there were some 2,800 languages and dialects in India. The linguistic minorities commission ensured the implementation of the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the constitution.

Replying to a question, he said that a minority language was that language which was not an official language in the State, and was not used by the majority group.

Employment And The Fourth Industrial Revolution

(Conflicting interests of capital and labour and their resolution)

By W. Synrem

Why do business people innovate? The simple answer is, for reaping the early bird maximum profit. People who arrive late on the scene usually reap lower benefits or just normal profits. Historically, when the first, second and third industrial revolutions started, entrepreneurs, industrialists, manufacturers and businessmen whose decisions are invariably driven by the profit motive, had always been in the vanguard of scientific and technological progress and they naturally reaped enormous profits by taking calculated risks to innovate. Labour on the other hand has always been somewhat apprehensive of adverse repercussions on employment due to mechanisation or the use of cost-saving and labour-displacing improved technology. In the past, this fear of labour had been proven wrong because the introduction of new technology necessitated the creation of new and better types of employment with new and different types of skill sets. As a result, it led to the introduction of new courses of study and the production of new curriculum, new textbooks and other new teaching-learning materials which were needed to prepare people for the new white-collared jobs that were newly created. Hence, the new process actually led to higher levels of overall welfare for almost everybody.

However, the fourth industrial revolution appears to be very different. The reason is that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be capable of doing almost everything that humans do in better, cheaper and faster ways. AI is likely to render millions of people jobless. Now if people are jobless, they would not receive any income or salary, hence they would not be having any purchasing power and effective demand is bound to fall. As human beings, they will continue to have innumerable wants but may not have the means to satisfy those wants. Hence, they would not be able to purchase anything except, of course, if the government provides them with some sort of social security or unemployment dole. Such amounts would, however, be sufficient to meet only basic needs but not the higher needs.

Producers may be able to turn out better and cheaper goods and services, but would they be able to sell out their entire produce/output? If not, then what is the point of introducing new technology? Jean Baptiste Say’s law of market as a valid theory of full employment has been discarded long ago, but its inconceivability to those who would be studying economics ten to twenty years hence is obvious for the simple reason that AI can only produce but they cannot consume. They won’t, in fact, need to consume any of the things they would be producing. Even the universally acclaimed Keynesian theory with its concept of effective demand, etc, which still holds good today and on which the

foregoing prognostication is based may need drastic revision in the context of the new social and economic realities of the coming decades. Hence, the study of economics as we have known it may change radically depending on the shape that the new economic order takes at both the national and the international levels.

The use of IBM Watson by a New York hospital five years ago to manage lung cancer treatment heralded the dawn of a new era in health care and management as improved versions of such AI are developed and put to increasing use. Recently, IBM also invented coffee drones which can predict who would need a cup of coffee in any particular location like a beach or a big restaurant and when. The drones are so sophisticated that they would also know whom to serve and whom not to serve depending on their medical records. These drones have already been tested and patented in the US and are ready to be launched commercially. Human waiters, waitresses and bartenders will soon be rendered jobless with the introduction of this new technology.

Some months ago I read a write-up on AI and its impact on the insurance industry in which it was said that the new technology would be good for both the service providers and consumers of their products. As things stand the contention cannot be gainsaid. But again the question that arises is: if millions of people will be rendered jobless with the introduction of AI, will the insurance business also not be affected? Jobless people can’t insure themselves. It is also learnt that online shopping giants like Amazon and Flipkart are already contemplating making use of AI to cope with the ever-increasing number of orders from customers for their different services. A crop harvesting robot has also been developed and is being improved further to reach a higher harvest success rate. The improved version is expected to be available within another four to five years.

According to one website, there are about 15 jobs that are going to be adversely affected in the long run and these include construction, manufacturing and even agriculture inter alia. That is definitely not good news. But equally bad is the news in another website which quoted the Institute for the Future, a California-based Think Tank, as saying that around 85% of jobs that workers will be doing in 2030 have not yet been invented. Governments everywhere will, therefore, have to take upon themselves full responsibility for the re-training of their citizens and the creation of alternative employment avenues in line with the progress in science and technology.

As already mentioned, we have now entered the 4th Industrial Revolution

that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work etc. At the core of this revolution, is the advent of AI which is the most profound and mind-boggling disrupter in the history of our planet so far and which is likely to take over not only jobs but also almost everything else on the planet. According to the (Late) Prof. Stephen Hawking, AI could be either the best or the worst invention humanity has ever made. The potential benefits of creating AI are huge but AI could also be potentially dangerous. Apart from disruptions on employment which is most obvious because AI can out-perform humans and can also be made to work 24x7. The other dangers are powerful autonomous weapons getting out of control and new ways for the few to oppress the many. Man’s own inventiveness may thus result in his own undoing.

The use of AI is therefore the latest phase of mechanisation or robotisation (derived from the word robotics) on which the owners of the means of production will have to take most careful and judicious decisions because of the cataclysmic and catastrophic repercussions they can have on economic, political and social relations if they lead to widespread unemployment. Apart from Sophia, an AI which has been granted Saudi citizenship, we now have an AI politician named Sam, developed in New Zealand, who may be allowed by law to contest for elections as early as 2020. We also have an AI lawyer by the name of Ross developed in the UK. Hence millions of jobs are going to slip out of the hands of humans and there are already some predictions that this may happen within the coming 10 to 20 years. If that happens and if there is over-supply of different goods and services due to improved means of production corresponding to reduced effective demand due to lack of purchasing power and large scale loss of employment, the resultant economic, political and social consequences will be unimaginably devastating and chaotic.

Unless early preventive and regulatory measures are put in place to effectively discourage the indiscriminate use of AI, the crash could become inevitable.

Tesla CEO, Elon Musk, has issued repeated warnings about the perils of AI, calling for new regulations to keep the public safe. In the process, he even clashed with Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg. When Zuckerberg called Musk’s AI doomsday rhetoric “pretty irresponsible”, Musk responded by calling Z u c k e r b e r g ’ s understanding of the issue “limited” and Elon Musk is probably right.

According to a top tech industry expert, at the moment, the United States, China and India are the top three countries leading the AI race. India’s determination to forge ahead and remain at the top

can be gauged from the fact that on October 11, 2018, Prime Minister Modi spoke eloquently about India’s state of readiness and eagerness to embrace the new technology during an event to launch the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. But Russia is also in the race and according to Russian President Putin, AI is the future not only of Russia but of all of mankind and he believes that whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world.

Hence Elon Musk believes that for this very reason other countries will also try to catch up by any means possible and will obtain AI developed by companies even at gunpoint, if necessary. Such is the craze for AI. We can therefore imagine the dreadful consequences if terrorist organizations could also somehow manage to have the technology to develop and deploy AI for furthering their diabolically abominable causes. It is not, therefore, without reasons that Elon Musk is so concerned about AI getting into wrong hands and he is not just scare-mongering.

Hence we must have a clear understanding of all the issues involved and, according to Elon Musk, try to help develop AI in a way that’s good for everybody, both employers and employees. Since large scale displacement of labour is fatal for humanity or society at large, it makes sense that uncontrolled robotisation and indiscriminate use of AI should be effectively regulated, curbed and checked through various means at our disposal since full employment should continue to be a major desired goal of economic policy and the purchasing power of the people has to be maintained, even if it cannot be increased. Otherwise, AI is likely to take over everything in no time leaving us all completely helpless to do anything about it. Ultimately, of course, we can only hope that Government and business leaders take their decisions with great prudence and sagacity keeping in view the importance of preservation of the predominance of the human race vis-à-vis AI in the overall scheme of things, if it is thought that the human race is really worth preserving. As the threat from AI should be palpably clear to everybody by now, timely measures are required to be taken before the threat becomes irreversible and humans are made to fight a losing battle. Apart from unemployment dole, other not so disagreeable social means have to be thought of including some sort of redistributive taxation for enabling the unemployed and the underemployed to continue to have a decent existence. The importance of making smart choices and taking smart decisions before it is too late cannot, therefore, be overemphasised.

(The writer is a retired Additional Secretary level officer of the Govt. of India)

Old but grand still? Congress must pick up the pieces Rahul Gandhi should put decisive end to leadership crisis

By Kalyani Shankar

The authority of the Congress high command seems to be eroding slowly going by what is happening to the party in several states, including Telangana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Karnataka. While the Congress is battling with the leadership crisis at the national level, the party is disintegrating in the states too. Senior leaders feel that with Congress President Rahul Gandhi’s stepping down with no clarity on whether or not he will continue, the grand old party is literally falling apart. In such confusion, it is no surprise that there is growing indiscipline and factionalism in the party has grown after such a drubbing in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Take for instance the pathetic condition of the Congress party in Telangana. In a serious setback, the state unit of the Congress is almost dissolved, with 12 out of 18 MLAs, who were elected in 2018 Assembly polls, joining the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi this week. Telangana Congress leaders like Uttam Kumar Reddy claim that the TRS has purchased the 12 MLAs. Retaining the remaining six will be a difficult job for the Congress leadership. The state unit is

defeats, the Gandhi family has to tread carefully. The first thing, as senior Congress leader Veerappa Moily suggested, is to remove the confusion about the leadership. The second is to save the present Congress-ruled states from instability. At least three states – Rajasthan, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are showing signs of instability.

The third thing is to contain the indiscipline and factionalism within the party, as is evident in Telangana, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Because of weak national leadership, the state units dare to revolt. The fourth is to check the erosion in the party in Telangana and elsewhere. More people might leave the sinking ship without a captain.

The fifth is the restructuring of the party as the Congress Working Committee, the top policy making body of the party has authorised Rahul Gandhi to do so. Many state-level heads of the party have also submitted their resignation owing responsibility for the defeat and a new leadership is

In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where the party had snatched power from the BJP in December 2018, it is facing indiscipline and factionalism. Rift in the party has already surfaced.

in serious crisis despite getting three seats in the 2019 polls. In the last Assembly, TRS managed to merge TDP Legislature Party with it by attracting 12 out of 15 MLAs who won in the 2014 polls. The Congress leadership is yet to recognise the gravity of the situation, as the party is almost finished.

In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where the party had snatched power from the BJP in December 2018, it is facing indiscipline and factionalism. Rift in the party has already surfaced. Some legislators who support the deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot demand that Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot should be replaced by Pilot. Ashok Gehlot has blamed Pilot for the defeat of his son in Jodhpur. In Madhya Pradesh too, there is a demand that Jyotiraditya Scindia should be made the chief minister. All these fractures are happening at a time when there is a threat to the government itself in both the states as the majority is very thin. The third state, which is facing instability, is Karnataka where the JD(S)-Congress coalition is not working well. There too is the danger of the government falling. If the Karnataka government falls, it will dent the image of the Congress further.

The Congress that ruled independent India for 55 years out of its 72 years so far is now fated to sit in the opposition for 10 consecutive years till 2024 — its longest dry spell. So far, the Congress, despite defeats, had revived again, due the leadership of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi.

With such humiliating

essential if the party hopes to rise again.

Lastly, the Congress leadership should lift the sagging morale of the party workers. After all, everything is not lost and there are many more Assembly elections to be faced in the next five years. The immediate challenge is the upcoming Assembly polls to Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Along with all these, the party should also function effectively in the upcoming Parliament session and take the leadership of the opposition by coordinating the floor management of all opposition parties. The CPP leader Sonia Gandhi is yet to nominate who would be the leader of the party in Lok Sabha. There are many who feel that Rahul Gandhi should take that responsibility and steer the party in Parliament. So far, he has not been attending the house regularly and spoke occasionally.

Sonia Gandhi vowed at the first Congress parliamentary party meeting last week: “In an unprecedented crisis, lies an unprecedented opportunity. It is up to us to grasp it with humility and self-confidence, drawing the appropriate lessons from our defeat... Undeterred by the many challenges that lie ahead, we will rise again.”

The decimated Congress party is certainly old but not grand any more. Many have written obituaries for the Congress but there is still time for the party to reinvent itself and revive under a good leadership. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Them Iew Mawlong imbroglio

Editor,

The violence that broke out between the local people of the state and the residents of Sweeper Line turned one year on May 31. The clash and tension resulted in injuries to people, destruction of public property, clamping of curfew in and around the place, but sadly the situation has yielded no solution as yet. The MDA government has not been able to resolve

the matter. Despite setting up a High Level Committee with the Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong, as its Chairman, the matter is still where it was. In fact, Mr. Tynsong went on to say that the matter cannot be solved overnight. Absolutely right sir! But isn’t one year, a long enough time to sort the matter out if the government was serious enough?

Since then and till date, the stretch from Them Iew Mawlong through the Sweeper Line to Bimola Pharmacy is still a heavily

guarded point with a NO ENTRY signage for vehicles. The only ones that seem to be enjoying this stretch are the residents of Sweeper Line as they are privileged with the protection of the police personnel stationed there and are thereby carrying on with their normal lives. If there has been any discomfort it has been to the rest of the population. The closure of this road for any vehicular movement is causing inconvenience as well as massive traffic jams in and around the area. One fails to

understand the need to prevent vehicular movement through this road. From what can be observed, the only purpose that the NO ENTRY has served is in adding to the traffic congestion in the adjoining areas.

The HLC may have carried out land survey and census to ascertain the genuine residents of the place a few weeks after the incident, but nothing concrete has evolved. In fact the matter has not progressed much and the

Committee is asking for another month to tackle the situation. At this point it appears that the Government is lackadaisical. This issue was revived after twenty years of inaction. It should have been dealt with strategically by successive governments. This time one had high hopes that the MDA government would solve the matter once and for all but it seems that the present Government too will follow in the footsteps of its predecessors. As always, the Them Iew

Mawlong issue will die a natural death. The only fear is that similar situations or perhaps even more graver and violent ones may again erupt in the near future. Do the people of the state deserve that?

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Viaemail

Marngor-Mawthawpdah road

Editor,
I fully endorse the plan

of Mawkyrwat MLA Mr R L Tongkhar to have a road connecting the northern part of South-West Khasi Hills with the Shillong-Nongstoin road at Nongkassen. This will help boost the economy of the area tremendously besides connecting it to Shillong, thereby reducing the distance. In fact this road with a bridge across Kynshi river is long overdue and if the relatively new road from Mawthawpdah to Mawkyrwat is widened it can serve as an alternate Shillong-Mawkyrwat road, with much less distance. The

area can, in fact, be turned into a tourist attraction in view of the beautiful scenic beauty it is endowed with. I only hope the Hon’ble MLA makes serious efforts to realise this dream project for the all round benefit of the people of that area.

Yours etc.
A Syiemlich,
Viaemail

Articles and Letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

“ If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy, if a blade of grass springing up in the fields has power to move you, if the simple things of nature have a message that you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive.”

--- Eleonora Duse

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2019

Flights via Pakistan

WITH Prime Minister Narendra Modi deciding to avoid Pakistani skies and deciding to take a circuitous route on his way to Kyrgyzstan to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, a patently unacceptable scenario has been averted. India had, some days ago, sought Pakistan's permission for the PM's aircraft to overfly the Pakistani skies - the direct route to the destination. This, in a situation in which Pakistan has banned all flights to and from India over its skies since the Balakot air strike by the IAF fighter jets in February.

Prima facie, India should not have gone with a begging bowl to Pakistan at this juncture. While an "in principle" nod was granted by the Imran Khan government to this plea, better sense prevailed on the establishment here and an alternative, circuitous route is now decided on via Oman and Iran to reach Bishkek, the city where the summit takes place. Notably, India had already availed a nod for former external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj to fly over the Pakistani skies to attend a regional conference after the Balakot IAF hit. This too should have been avoided.

It emerges that Pakistan is purposely not lifting the ban on flights to and from India over its skies to teach India a lesson for the Balakot hit. Pakistan's claim is that it banned such flights by way of a security step, so as to guard against another IAF attack. But, evidently, there is more of a play of mischief. The result is several airlines and passengers bound for India and those going out of India to destinations in the Gulf and Europe are seriously hurt by the Pakistani decision. There has been a huge cost escalation in fares, as flights from and to the western side will have to take a longer route.

The Indian government is duty-bound to address this issue in a broader format so as to facilitate a lift of Pakistan's ban. The Lok Sabha poll campaign might have distracted the attention of the establishment here to attend to such serious matters forthwith. With a new government in place, it is high time the issue is attended to and resolved. Instead, the government sounded Pakistan for a relaxation of the ban for the PM's flight, and earlier for the external affairs minister's flight. India should not have gone this length for a minor favour. This has put India in a poor light, and its sense of self-esteem is irreversibly affected.

Environmental emergency

Editor,
Two extremely crucial articles by two very prolific and highly knowledgeable writers appeared in this paper on consecutive dates (June 10, 11 2019), first by H H Mohrman and then by Poonam I. Kaushish, indicating how we are heading very speedily towards final catastrophe, thanks to our own greed and shortsightedness. Unhindered dumping of non-biodegradable materials, anywhere and everywhere, emitting loads of poisonous gases continuously to the atmosphere, releasing Industrial wastes into the rivers/streams, eliminating of water bodies, unabated felling of life-supporting trees and transforming greeneries into concrete jungles, humans have been leaving no stone unturned to ensure that the earth fast becomes a resting place for skeletons only. The saddest thing is that all other living species shall have to bear the brunt for no fault of theirs!

Bengal in ferment

Editor,
West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee and the Centre are fast inching towards a showdown with the bitter battle over West Bengal moving to the nation's capital. West Bengal governor Keshari Nath Tripathi met the Prime Minister and Home Minister and apprised them of the situation in the state that has been in the grip of political violence since the Lok Sabha polls. Speculation is rife in Opposition circles that the Centre may be planning to impose President's Rule in the state ahead of the Assembly elections due in 2021. Belligerent Mamata was quick to react that the Centre wanted to turn Bengal into another Gujarat. She even said with a warning note to the Centre, "Don't play with fire."
On Sunday, the Home Ministry expressed deep

A Division Bench of the Madras High Court directed all district collectors across Tamil Nadu to constitute committees and to book cases under Section 379 of the IPC (theft) against persons illegally drawing groundwater. The Court was hearing a PIL against illegal extraction of groundwater for sale. A Government order passed in 2014 prohibits illegal tapping of groundwater as a crime.

Water scarcity has resulted in the growth of a lucrative water trade and sudden emergence of private water suppliers. In many towns and cities in southern India, water cans are sold in grocer shops and vegetable markets. Borewells are dug deep in vacant lands in private possession without proper permission of concerned authorities for direct sale of water or through regular suppliers which results in drying up of other borewells for domestic use in houses around.

Undoubtedly, the water crisis is a global problem affecting several countries in all continents. About one-fifth of the world's population are living in areas of water scarcity and another one-fourth are said to be facing severe water shortage. The reasons for shortage are both natural and human-made and shortage is aggravated in many places by uneven distribution, wastage, pollution and unsustainable management.

The International Decade for Action "Water for life" was observed during 2005-2015, but without much positive effect. On the contrary, the rate of water use is calculated to be growing more than twice that of the population. Water scarcity is felt in more and more places though the extent of shortage varies.

The NDA Government soon after assuming office announced the setting up of a new Jal Shakti Ministry under a Cabinet Minister and amalgamated the Ministries of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. It immediately announced the Nal se Jal Scheme ---- to provide drinking water through pipes to every household by 2024 to fulfil one of the BJP's election promises that will directly benefit every person.

Like the Swachh Bharat scheme, it also needs people's cooperation for proper implementation. The Ministry is expected to provide the much needed impetus to water conservation as nearly 45% of India is reeling under drought. To raise

concern over the continuing violence in West Bengal saying the unabated violence even after the Lok Sabha polls were over, appears to be a failure on the part of the state government. However, Mamata hit back at the Centre saying there were a few stray post-poll clashes in the state and that the situation was under control.

The situation in the state is by and large bad with frequent bouts of political violence ever since the recent general elections. Mamata is solely responsible for sowing the feelings of hatred in the minds of the people of Bengal. She has only added fuel to the fire; not done anything constructive to blow off steam. In fact, the Chief Minister botched up the Home Department as well with direct interference in its functioning. So, it is better for her to stop disseminating "hate speech", which will have a negative impact on the people. Instead, she must give messages that should influence people positively, and it should eventually lead to prevalence of peace in the

Water crisis

'Day zero' looms large

By Dr S Saraswathi

awareness about the water situation, the Water Channel is now part of the Weather Channel Forecast.

It is said that more than 100 million people in India could run out of water by

was pushed off without announcement of a new date by tremendous efforts at water conservation and arrival of rains. Day Zero forecast by the Mayor of Cape Town will be the day when

“ The idea of Day Zero was introduced to focus everyone's attention on the importance of regulating water consumption as best as possible. Its main features are water rationing and standing in queue to get the ration.”

2020 due mostly to poor management and another 100 million could face inaccessibility to water near their homes. Press reports and TV channels are showing pathetic pictures of women fetching water for their domestic use from far off places while rivers,

4 million residents of the town will be required to collect daily water rations which would be less than 7 gallons (25 litres) for each person.

The idea of Day Zero was introduced to focus everyone's attention on the importance of regulating

“ Some are of the opinion that Day Zero has already arrived in India for over 100 million people living without access to water near their homes. By 2020, Day Zero may cover most of India due to excessive exploitation of groundwater. ”

tanks and ponds nearby are lying dry.

Agriculture suffers most and there are reports of farmers selling their trees and families migrating from their water-starved villages. Construction activities are coming to a halt in many cities and industries are forced to slow down. Schools and offices ask their staff and students to bring their drinking water. Water protests are daily events made worse by bias in distribution.

Worse, with rainfall predicted to be below average this monsoon, groundwater levels are depleting everywhere and water crisis is the main talk of citizens. There is a fear that "Day Zero" may arrive in India by 2020.

"Day Zero" refers to the bitter experience in South Africa's Cape Town in early 2018 after three consecutive years of severe drought when it seemed the city would run out of water and taps would be shut off. Luckily, the Day

water consumption as best as possible. Its main features are water rationing and standing in queue to get the ration.

India has to learn a lesson on water conservation and usage to forestall the arrival of Day Zero.

Some are of the opinion that Day Zero has already arrived in India for over 100 million people living without access to water near their homes. By 2020, Day Zero may cover most of India due to excessive exploitation of groundwater. Natural shortage of water is being aggravated by pilferage, wastage and leakage. Technology for re-use of waste water and conversion of salt water into potable water is not well developed in the country.

Depletion of groundwater is a serious threat aggravating water famine in many cities. A NITI Ayog report released in 2018 highlights this problem by predicting that by 2020, 21 major cities including Delhi, Bengaluru and

Hyderabad would face complete drying up of groundwater. Pertinently, India is a groundwater economy. It is the highest user of groundwater in the world using 25% of total groundwater extracted globally. It is ahead of the USA and China which are the other two major users of groundwater.

Goal 6 of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly to be achieved during 2015-30 says that everyone on earth should have access to safe and affordable drinking water. Climate change is likely to increase the size of the population affected by water shortage which has already crossed 40% of people around the world.

Besides, water quality in India is so poor that it ranks 120 among 122 countries in quality index. "When water is available, it is likely to be contaminated up to 70% of our water supply", states NITI Ayog which reports that this would cause nearly two lakh deaths in a year. Contamination follows shortage in the quest for some water and use of untreated water causing water-borne diseases.

Clearly, humanity is today facing acute overuse and pollution of water threatening the ecosystems and health and livelihoods of billions particularly the vulnerable. The poorest are the most vulnerable.

True, water management is generally considered as a very suitable area for people's participation, but even here, politics and money power may intervene. It can be organized at various points from the grassroots as States are primary water managers in India. Social participation should not be equated to social activism or protest movements; nor does it mean referendums and debates.

In sum, extensive involvement of informal associations with official committees is required and this is happening in many parts of India. But, the tendency to resort to litigations and court decisions and pre-eminence of experts and engineers tend to silence the voice of the affected people. Social participation is political as well as economic and is subjected to the stresses that arise from competing demands, rights, priorities and interests.

Still, enthusiastic social participation in water management is a reality in many countries. To avoid the dawn of Day Zero, the nation must wake up and act.

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

Meghalaya Power Corporation

Editor,
In this day and age people are being encouraged to make payments online. Cash backs and other incentives are the offers of the day, being made to woo the consumers. Government agencies are spending huge sums on commercials to encourage people to go paperless so as to do their little bit in saving the environment. Ironically on visiting the website of the Meghalaya Power Corporation, I was amazed to note that the Corporation charges an extra fee on bill payments which are made online. No wonder there are still long serpentine queues in the bill payment sections.

I request the authorities in the Corporation to kindly rectify this anomaly.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Tridib Kakoty,
Shillong -14

Economic challenges ahead Can govt mitigate them?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The economy is in a bad shape and experts believe it is in a worse shape than five years ago. Obviously the new Government has to face the challenges with great vision and tenacity. Topping the agenda is job creation, high growth and more investments besides the need to check the fiscal deficit and removing farm distress.

Undeniably, the rural sector is beset with varied problems as the focus of development is on the urban sector. It is noteworthy that within 24 hours of taking oath, the Government approved extension of the PM-Kisan income support scheme to all farmers, removed the limit of 2 hectares and cleared a pension scheme for agriculturists and self-employed persons.

The decisive election result will propel India's growth pace to the next orbit and drive the transformation of the country", stated CII President Vikram Kirloskar recently. Certainly, such positive statements look quite encouraging, however the crisis is quite deep and only a judicious approach which is inclusive and takes a balanced view of the situation should be undertaken.

Importantly, a Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data on the unemployment situation shows the number of unemployed increased by 11 million in 2018 which has gone up further in the last 5 months. Another study, State of Working India 2019 report by the Azim Premji University found that five million men lost their jobs in 2016-2018.

The beginning of jobs decline coincides with demonetisation in November 2016 although no direct casual relationship can be established, the report added. It also found that in addition to rising unemployment among the higher educated, less educated workers have also seen job losses and reduced work opportunities since 2016.

The report on India's labour market is based on the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) Consumer Pyramids Survey. It found unemployment has risen steadily post 2011 with the overall unemployment rate being around 6% in 2018, double of what it was in the 2000-2011 decade. Adding to rising unemployment among the higher educated, the less educated workers have also seen job losses and reduced work opportunities since 2016.

Meanwhile, economic growth fell to its slowest pace to below 6% in 18 quarters in January-March as demand for cars and consumer goods slumped while farm output contracted, posing an immediate challenge to the Government. Alongside, with limited fiscal space and build-up of massive off-balance sheet liabilities, a focused effort to address a strong and sustained revenue mobilization is necessary.

True, the fiscal deficit has been kept low on paper by accounting tricks. But the total public sector borrowing requirement exceeds 8% of GDP, among the highest in the world.

According to National Institute of Public Finance & Policy's Prof. N. R. Bhanumurthy there is need for fiscal stimulus to take a look at fiscal consolidation. There is also need to incentivise domestic savings and increase public spending as measures to rejuvenate the economy. Clearly, consumption has to be addressed immediately.

On the export front, India's trade deficit reached a record high of \$ 176 billion in 2018-19. Worse, exports failed to touch the Government's internal target of \$ 350 billion. A continuous import shoot-up, which grew at double digit levels for six months in the last 12

months, took cumulative imports to a soaring high of \$ 507.44 billion. This trade deficit needs to be brought under control carefully.

The only redeeming feature has been road building which continued since Vajpayee's time as also electrification and electricity distribution. However, though rural schemes have got a thrust, they have been rebranded from Congress nomenclatures. While most toilets either do not have water or sewage connection, gas cylinders are not replaced. The lack of proper decentralization or the Government's lack of concern to implementation and follow-up on these schemes is a big challenge.

The 'Make in India' programme is one key feature that need to be given a thrust. Besides, promotion of agro-based and micro or cottage industries that have great potential for employment generation should be given necessary support along-with massive skill generation training would be a step in the right direction.

Further, to check imports of electronic goods, attention should be given to the electronics sector as the private sector has somewhat failed to set up world class semi-conductor manufacturing company in the last two decades.

As electronic devices proliferate, there has to be a genuine effort to boost R&D and try manufacturing some key components, specially semi-conductors which are in huge demand and profits are high. With the Government's special relations with Japan and South Korea, collaborations in this field may yield the desired results. Indeed, the new industrial policy may make the 'Made in India' dream a success.

In the rural sector, there has to be serious introspection in ensuring that benefits reach those whom they are intended for, specially tribals, dalits and the rural poor. For this to happen there has to be definite rural orientation in the planning and implementation strategy with more powers to panchayats and grass-root organizations.

Noticeably, health and education has been neglected due to resource constraints and lack of strict monitoring. In Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary year, it would be prudent to push ahead with political and economic decentralization in the true sense of the term.

Resource mobilization is a key factor for India's first woman Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in carrying out developmental activities. She will have to restore the country's economic health and contend with the banking industry's bad loans alongside an industry that has shown a marked aversion towards attracting investments.

There is feeling, and not without justification, that higher the tax rate, greater the incentive to evade taxes, for instance, by transfer pricing. Low tax rates combined with low depreciation rates might have a strong incentive effect. But, tax for the super rich class need not be reduced and the top business class should be persuaded by the Government to take up developmental schemes, not on their own accord but as stipulated by it.

The private sector's involvement leaves much to be desired. Those who talk of privatization fail to realize that this sector aims to amass profits and has no social objective. As such, privatization may not be the answer but public-private partnership with management control jointly shared could yield desired results. It cannot be denied that this sector has not been investing enough to boost growth and generate industrial activity.

--- INFA

state.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Via email

Trending towards totalitarianism?

Editor,
The recent unprecedented and unexpected electoral triumphs of the NDA to the 17th Lok Sabha in which the BJP has single handedly achieved an absolute majority by capturing 303 out of 543 total seats and for this unparalleled victory, NDA must be complimented by the entire country as we anticipate under PM Modi's dynamism we would overcome national challenges ahead and thus make India go places in the global arena.

Consequent to the on-going political equation we see that events are unfolding before us where all Modi's detractors like Rahul Gandhi, Chandra Babu Naidu et al

and the bitter and outspoken critics of Prime Minister Modi such as the likes of Navjot Singh Sidhu, Mamta Banerjee, Raj Thakeray and much more have been literally decimated. And to top it all political news has come in from UP that the grand alliance between BSP and SP is on the verge of collapse owing to the electoral debacle suffered by this alliance on the parliamentary polls. All such turmoil and disarray among the opposition parties has made things easy for PM Modi, as it seems that all parties that oppose the latter may overtime fade into oblivion thereby turning India towards a single majority party dispensation and becoming a veritable and fertile ground for the emergence of a Kim Jong-Un like leader. God forbid if such a grim political scenario should ever unfold in India which is extolled world-wide as the biggest entity of democracy in the world!

Yours etc.
(Jerome K. Diengdoh)
Shillong - 2

“There comes a time when the world gets quiet and the only thing left is your own heart. So you'd better learn the sound of it. Otherwise you'll never understand what it's saying.”

--- Sarah Dessen

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Of poll strategies

IT is a sign of the times that leaders are, one after another, taking the help of professional strategists to win elections. Strategist Prashant Kishor, a former UN hand, started with Gujarat by helping the then CM Narendra Modi win the 2011 assembly and 2014 Lok Sabha polls. Bihar's chief minister Nitish Kumar got him to employ the smart techniques in the state assembly polls in 2015 and his electoral win was attributed to the work done behind-the-scene by the strategist. Nitish, enthused, gave Kishor a top party post. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the strategist was commissioned by Jagan Mohan Reddy, and his YSRC won the polls in Andhra Pradesh. Kishor is reportedly being commissioned now by a worried Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal to build her image, as also the ruling TMC's, for the future fight at the hustings.

Two premises can be made from the present scenario. One, our leaders are increasingly losing touch with the world around them. Two, a strategist who takes huge money to improve the image of parties and leaders and help them win polls will need to try and manipulate campaign scene, the local conditions and the media. Keeping the media on one's side is half the game won. It would mean a play with positive stories for one side, and a flood of negative stories to undermine the rival(s). The strategist might as well be doing a disservice to democracy in terms of “manipulating” people's will. The central point to note is that politics today is a dirty game to win power and pelf. Leaders have lost their direct connect with the people. The result is that they on their own have not been in a position to make up their mind on several matters relating to polls. Winning the trust and vote of the people thus becomes the job of the strategist. At the same time, polls have their own dynamics too. Notably, the BJP and PM Modi won the LS polls 2019 without the help of Kishor. In Bihar, a combination of JDU and RJD – meaning wider BC support – helped Nitish and Lalu win polls in 2015. Kishor was on the Congress side to win assembly polls in Punjab in 2017. His help saw the Congress defeated in UP assembly polls the same season. This time, Naidu dug his own grave in AP. It remains to be seen whether Mamata Banerjee will be saved by the strategist.

We voted for Change: Now where did we lose Change?

By Patricia Mukhim

The MDA Government came to power with the promise of change. After years of Congress (mis)rule or bad governance we thought the MDA is an idea whose time has come. We actually believed that like Narendra Modi who connects with the masses, the incoming Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma too would lead the change. But as they say, the more things change the more they remain the same. We have the same overloaded security apparatus for the CM and a little less for the other ministers. It costs a lot to the public exchequer to keep an entourage of police guys on the payroll to guard the life of one person - the CM - which we believe is not under any kind of threat. Lesser mortals, especially women and children are raped and murdered and the law always falls short when it comes to protecting the people. And if the reason for joining politics, (as is often touted by aspiring politicians at every platform), is to serve the public and not to amass personal wealth and to acquire a larger than life status then the creature comforts should be disbanded. The CM should lead by example. Walking only one day - World Environment Day 2018 - is not good enough. In fact, the NPP which is the main stakeholder in the MDA Government is a key partner of the BJP. Its leaders should learn from the BJP karyakarta how to connect with peoples' aspirations. Let us also remember that Modi's constant attack has been against the naamdars of this country or the dynasts - his beta noire the Nehru-Gandhi family and others in the Congress Party.

We may not agree with the BJP's ideology or with Prime Minister Modi's style of functioning but we cannot deny that his Government has tried to reach out to the last mile. For the first time the poor were receiving subsidies in their bank accounts. Ujjwala Yojna - a scheme

where millions of women from the poorest categories are now using gas cylinders for cooking thereby reducing their drudgery and their inhalation of smoke during the course of cooking, has proven to be a major game changer in terms of better health benefits. Then there is the health insurance for the poor which has also been much talked about. True that in five years it is difficult to overhaul the juggernaut of seven decades and of a bureaucracy that is resistant to change but Modi has tried. He has ensured that non-performers are weeded out and allowed lateral entry into his ministry.

PM Modi's ability to transform the Indian election into a presidential form with the twin syllable 'Modi, Modi, Modi' reverberating in the rural landscapes of the country also signals an end to dynasty. Dynasty encompassed a system of entitlement, patronage and greed that had become part of the Indian political ecosystem for over six decades. It's a different matter that political dynasties are not the prerogative of the Congress Party and the Nehru-Gandhi family alone. Closer home we have the Sangma dynasties ruling the roost. One set of Sangmas include former chief minister Mukul Sangma, his brother, Zenith Sangma, his wife Dikanchi D Shira and daughter Miani Shira who are all MLAs. The other set includes brothers Conrad and James Sangma and their sister Agatha Sangma who recently won the Lok Sabha elections. And we call this an egalitarian tribal society? Hell no, this is as feudal a society as any other Indian mainstream society and the people who elect these dynasts too are fawning vassals at the service of their lords and

masters.

It is not lost on Mr Modi (a man with his pulse on the political goings-on in the country) that Meghalaya is the first state in the country where two brothers elected from the same party are holding the two most important portfolios. Yes I am repeating the cliché - Conrad Sangma is Chief Minister and his brother James Sangma is Home Minister. Granted that the HM is the most demure we have had in a long time and that he leaves all the talking to his younger brother, but is that good governance? So when the HNLC - a proscribed outfit - makes an open threat to eliminate the Sikhs in different parts of Meghalaya and they even cited an example of how they eliminated one in the past, it is the Police Chief and not the Home Minister that speaks out and warns the HNLC. It's a different matter that the Home Minister is on a vacation in Europe! Wow! Is that part of the package of being a minister in Meghalaya? So what if our economic indicators are all going south!

My point is that a vacation for a Home Minister is a leisure he has not earned. He is not on top of things as far as law and order are concerned. Nor is he in command and control of the Power Department - another additional responsibility loaded on to him. This is a Department that requires reconfiguration and must prune its flab if it is not to sink to the point of complete collapse. We the people demand that the Power Minister make public the profit and loss account of the MeECL. If this is a Corporation then its balance sheets have to be available for public viewing. The public of Meghalaya have the right to know how the money recovered from their bills is utilised. We need to know the in-house power generation capacity now and how dependent we are on NEEPCo. If we are heavily dependent on this national PSU then it is

better we outsource the entire power distribution business to it and wind up the MeECL like we have done with other failed PSUs.

My second point is that this Government acts in fits and starts and does not have a comprehensive road map and nor does its partners the UDP, HSPDP and the PDF demanding one. Please note that the regional parties had their separate election manifestoes when they went to the public before the elections? Are those points in the manifesto being addressed or have they all merged with the NPP manifesto? If so then they owe an explanation to the public. Regional parties please do not mislead the people who voted you, for the next time around you are looking at a real drubbing. People might prefer to vote a national party, knowing that regional parties can never form a government without a national party.

Now going by the laundry list presented to the Finance Commission recently, which totaled a mind boggling amount of Rs 82,815 crore for the next five years, the priorities are heavily skewed in favour of the PWD - a money making department if there is one. Health as usual gets the least attention. The demands include Rs 4,956 crore for roads and bridges, Rs 2,476 crore for power, Rs 2,199 crore for sports and youth affairs, Rs 1,114 crore for water supply and sanitation, Rs 1,048 crore for law and order, Rs 957 crore for education, Rs 580 crore for health and family welfare. One would have thought that health would figure as priority number two or three considering the state fares very poorly on the nutritional index and in maternal and infant mortality front. Alas! Where indeed is the CHANGE we voted for? But may I remind those in the Government that we are a state with a growing number of poor people and when we see politicians flaunting their royalty status we can get very angry.

Is Technology the Answer or the Question?

By Ananya S Guha

Technology is breathing into our lives today and we breathe it out! Can we think of a life without a smart phone or the Internet? We are getting smarter and devious as well. So we circulate false news for propaganda, this has acquired a status- fake news. There is a halo around it and a design behind it. It is used to falsely propagate, incite or define person and persons. And the vehicles for such malice are what is known as social media sites meant for networking among peers, friends, writers, artists and colleagues. Let us pause here. Facebook insisted in its beginnings to trace old friends and reconnect with. Linked In expressly mentions not to 'befriend' people you do not know. Now people are using it to hound new enemies. There is an inversion of what it was meant to be originally. Whats App groups are used to sensationalise news and in the process murder it.

What is perhaps frightening is that the virtual world is replicating, even substituting the real world. So you wave, yes you wave at your virtual friend or even your real friend. But you don't need to meet him or her to wave. You can do it on your mobile phone. Time and spatial realities are new myths or the new realities. Reality

thunder silent plodders, workers, writers and artists miss out on this aggrandising and belligerent networking.

And education? We have the much vaunted e learning where for school students someone lectures and displays videos. So there is further separation of the classroom which in the normal situation in schools in India are separate because of elitism, affordability and hierarchies. Technology has no time constraint. But we have. Can we continuously keep on cutting and pasting, or our children to do their homework? But e learning that is electronic learning is a much more complex process of interaction, synchronous and asynchronous learning. It engenders the philosophy of multiple classrooms in consonance with ontologies of open and distance learning. It is also meant for disadvantaged learners socially, economically and those living in remote areas. Alternate sources of learning such as open access journals should be the high points of educational access today. Adults and children now share a common world

The Internet and the mobile have become more than status symbols, political and social insignias to pursue relentless ideologies, mind you not free thinking ideas. Hence a time warp between past and present is created. We watch reality shows which are bizarre and unreal. We share news with such alacrity that they become indigestible. The print media used to a certain sobriety cannot cope with it.

has been imposed upon a myth. The world is never so fabulous as now. There is no need for children to read fables or fairy tales. They are all around you ubiquitously on your lap top, mobile or some techie pad or the other. With the Internet of course driving them. There is no need for aesthetics or artistry, there is Siri for you to do the talking and answering your inane questions. Who says we are living in a global or a post global world? We are living in a self obsessed ulocal world me, solely 'me' driven. Books can be published anywhere on the Internet, not only e books but me books read my books. The emphasis is on Me and it should be there anywhere on the www and people should know this. Knowledge then is through information and circulation which is enforced and not by means of appreciation. Appreciation comes through 'likes'. Never have we been more self congratulatory. Never have we been so narcissistically driven because of technologically abetted- metaphorically put, I phones.

There has never been such a technological boom as now, but also crisis. The crisis is here: making an end in itself rather than a means to an end, the arts, poetry, fiction and related imaginative processes. Yes there are online expressions of art and aesthetics, we have e books but the virtuosity of the printed word gets missing in lost in this jungle of the I the me, my interview, my face, my book. In the process of stealing the limelight or the

world of mobiles and excitement. Real knowledge or the pursuit of happiness cannot come through such excitement. They can come through the quieter pleasures of life such as philosophy, arts, music, reading and writing. We can afford all these through the Internet but not as slaves. The robotic era has indeed dawned. Man as machine is no longer a postulate but a hard reality. Very soon we will be planning visits to the moon uncomprehending its innate physical beauty, what we see of it and the metaphor it has created for the poet, lunatic and the lover.

The Internet and the mobile have become more than status symbols, political and social insignias to pursue relentless ideologies, mind you not free thinking ideas. Hence a time warp between past and present is created. We watch reality shows which are bizarre and unreal. We share news with such alacrity that they become indigestible. The print media used to a certain sobriety cannot cope with it.

So what do we do? How do we throw the virtual out of the real? A rhetorical question. We cannot. Very soon the dichotomy between man and machine will blur into horrendous proportions with all the talk about robotics and machine made men. But Man will always remain the social animal he was meant to be and he should make the most of it!

TO THE EDITOR

Fishing in troubled waters

Editor,

So the banned outfit HNLC has finally given its views and opinion on the troubled Them Meteor problem and what they have written is not the least surprising to one and all. At best one can describe the outfit's call to kill all Punjabis living in Meghalaya as outrageous and stupid but at its worst its a deliberate wicked attempt to inflame and arouse unnecessary communal tension between the Khasis and the rest of the citizens of India. The HNLC has tried to give a patriotic colour to its call and that the threat given by it is to protect and defend the interest of the Hynniewtrep people, their land but nothing can be further from the truth and actually any HNLC action on the matter will boomerang badly on the Khasi Community as a whole. It will hurt Khasi people working and studying outside and such People will lose precious jobs, students will be forced to return home, our tiny community will be encircled and the sense of frustration within Meghalaya will increase. This is what the outfit wants and it is fishing in troubled waters as it can only survive when there is disharmony and dissatisfaction as well as failure of law and order in

society. This attempt at misinformation by the HNLC should not blind us to the fact that it is a bunch of desperate murderers, terrorists, extortionists, thugs and anti nationalists while statements from Sainkupar Nongtraw are sounding more and more like statements from ISI of Pakistan and that Patriotism and love of mother land is the last thing that they represent.

This brings up an interesting question: Why is the Home Minister of Meghalaya keeping quiet about the whole thing? No meeting with the Police has been called. No consultation with those who have earlier dealt with militancy has been made. No challenge to this outrageous threat has been forthcoming from the Home Department of Meghalaya. Why is the Home Minister of the State only interested in peace talks with this murderous outfit as all such action will simply demoralise the police force of the state. The Harijan Panchayat Committee of Them Meteor has written to the Union Home Minister asking for protection. The State Govt has been painted in very poor light and the Meghalaya Home Minister takes this lying down? Don't we have any confidence in our own Police force? The State

Govt should immediately take up the matter with the Centre. It should impress upon the Govt of India to take up the issue of HNLC refuge in Bangladesh among the Khasi community there. India enjoys a good relationship with Bangladesh so India should demand that anti national elements and terrorists using that territory as a safe haven be flushed out; force be used against their hideouts and against those who give them their shelter in Bangladesh. The HNLC must be flushed out of their safe heavens in the neighbouring country. They should be forced to flee back to India where our own Police can then finish them off one by one. The Meghalaya Police have the capacity to wipe them out and we had done it before earlier. This is not the time for olive branches but for tough action against such snakes and vipers.

Yours etc.,
JK Kharsohnoh,
Via email

Health administration must improve

Editor,

I wish to congratulate Dr. Khylllep, Dr. Surong and their team for successfully operating a large neck mass at a small government

facility (reported in the Shillong Times, June 10th, 2019). Many a time such efforts seem like a thankless job, considering the amount of preparation that goes into each surgery, and criticism any failure would bring. It is to be noted that their efforts to provide further services is limited by the non availability of blood bank services.

I wish to contrast this with your editorial, Health sector in distress, (ST May 4, 2019), wherein it was portrayed that doctors are responsible for the dismal state of Healthcare in the state. While there are a few black sheep, as in most professions, a lot depends on the administration, which in general is a non medical person's job. No matter how hard a doctor toils, without support from the administrative team, not much can be done. While you have called upon doctors to work beyond office hours, why not ask the administrative staff to do the same? In fact if administrative efficiency improves, better Healthcare can be provided to the public.

Would the media look into the adequacy of staff at Ganesh Das and other government hospitals? If not, who is to expedite the appointments? Why is the

Shillong Medical College not ready several years after the foundation stone being laid? While it's easy to blame doctors, it won't do anything to improve the health care of the state. The media needs to raise the right questions for the society to improve.

Yours etc.,
Dr Caleb Harris,
Via email

CAU in Meghalaya

Editor,

If media reports are to be believed, then Meghalaya may not get the much needed Central Agricultural University. If this is so it will be the saddest story of the state. We in Meghalaya are urgently in need of such Universities as students have a lot of aspiration from such a University. The University would have been a blessing to the state in so many ways if the proposal had materialised. However, the state government is taking this issue very lightly. Writing a DO letter to the Prime Minister will not be sufficient. What is most important is that the entire cabinet should take this issue very seriously and the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, should have gone with a delegation of his cabinet colleagues to the Prime Minister and Union

Agriculture Minister to press hard for setting up of the Central Agricultural University in Kyrdekulai as earlier promised by the then Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, who had also laid the foundation stone of the building there. This issue was raked up by the Mawphlang MLA, S.K Sunn in the Assembly last year. The MDA government took some interest in it for sometime last year but it did not follow up the matter. Mr.S.K Sunn has again raked up this issue with the Chief Minister recently vide a DO letter to him to ensure that this CAU is materialised in Meghalaya and not to be blackmailed by Manipur. Yes, the MDA government under Conrad Sangma should not take things lying down in this regard but pursue this issue to its logical end. I am certain that if this issue is left only to the state Agricultural Minister, Banteidor Lyngdoh, the much needed CAU will not see the light of day.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email.

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“Nobody ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public.”

--- H. L. Mencken

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.303

SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2019

Doctors' protest snowballs

IN an unprecedented move the Indian Medical Association (IMA) observed a nation-wide protest on Friday to condemn the violence against doctors in West Bengal. On Tuesday last, two junior doctors at NRS, Paribaha Mukhopadhyay and Yash Tekwani, were brutally assaulted by relatives of a 75 year old patient who died at the Hospital. They both suffered head injuries. Dr Mukhopadhyay, who suffered a skull fracture, has undergone surgery at the Institute of Neurosciences in Mullickbazar while Tekwani is admitted to NRS. The doctors appealed to State Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee to intervene in the matter and ensure that such attacks against doctors do not recur. But Banerjee maintained a stiff stance and accused the protesting doctors of being instigated by her political rivals in the BJP. This, after the doctors have repeatedly stated that they are not affiliated to any political party. Even the World Medical Association has passed a resolution against violence on healthcare centres and called for bringing strong legislation.

Meanwhile the IMA demanded a national law against hospital violence that provided minimum seven years imprisonment for perpetrators of hospital violence. It also demanded a law that would ensure that cases are registered and culprits are arrested and convicted. The IMA wants hospitals to be declared special zones and the State to provide security to them. In Bengal doctors being beaten up by relatives of patients is a regular offence. It is time that effective laws are implemented to prevent relatives from barging inside the hospital and attacking doctors. On Friday, doctors wore black badges and held protests at the headquarters of all State units. All 2,500 local branches of the IMA will send an email to Prime Minister, Modi and Union Home Minister, Amit Shah to urge for passing of a Central law against hospital violence. The shutdown of medical services has impacted thousands of patients across the state and sparked off angry responses from the public but doctors are adamant in not lifting the strike unless they are assured of their safety. It is a sad commentary on West Bengal that when the top cop of the State Rajeev Kumar was to be questioned by IB sleuths in February this year on the Saradha scam, the CM sat on a protest against what she termed as the centre's draconian policy. Now when doctors are demanding a safe working environment, she refuses to empathise with them. Instead, Mamata held a political rally on Friday and maintained an adversarial stance against the protesting doctors. Turning every issue into a political football is Mamata's forte but this has exacted a heavy toll on the health services of the state. At the end it's the public that suffers.

LOOKING BACK

June 19, 1989

Vandalism in sanctuaries

Whether the vandalism wrought in the Manas sanctuary is the handiwork of militants with the current Bodo agitation needs to be probed by impartial agencies. The more plausible assumption would seem to be that the poachers who have always been on their nefarious game of destroying the flora and fauna wealth in these reserves for their personal gain would only be intensifying their activities under cover of the militant agitation casting a smoke screen on those in charge of protecting the sanctuary. There may have initially been more cases of militants seeking refuge in the Manas seclusion to avoid the man-hunt for them, but it is unlikely that they should be seeking to convert the sanctuary into an operational base. Far less likely is that they should be killing the wild life which on the face of it does not appear to serve any positive political purpose as such.

The wanton destruction in the Sanctuary reported in recent weeks has taken a rather heavy toll seven

tuskers, four Rhino s and four Royal Bengal tigers have been killed but the killers have so far remained untraced or even unidentified meanwhile the Union Environment Ministry have got actively interested in the matter and in consultation with the Assam Government drawn up plans for ascertaining the extent of damage done, and this done after an aerial survey.

The Ministry has sanctioned Rs 50 Lakhs with which it is proposed to purchase weapons, motorboats, light vehicles and tents. It is somehow surprising that these were not available to the vigilance staff already, but what is no less important is to revamp and overhaul the entire security set up in this sanctuary.

That there have been lapses in the upkeep of the Manas and no less in the Kaziranga also were not altogether unknown to the local authorities concerned and the governments in the State and at the Centre.

We have already lost our beloved Lum Shillong once and we cannot do so again. So I totally empathise with Havenly Lyngdoh when s/he expresses shock at the State Government's plan to construct a 'link road' between Malki and Laitkor and an 'approach road' to Shillong View Point. Lyngdoh's registration of horror is completely justified: "...U Lum Shillong will become barren...the scenic beauty of Shillong will be a past glory; all water sources will dry up and citizens of Shillong will face tremendous water shortage"... (Shillong Times, May 30, 2019)

What is it with Meghalaya governments and roads? On the one hand they routinely ignore city roads crying out for repair and yet are happy to dream up schemes to wreck pristine wonderlands in order to build new roads. Are these new roads really in the name of connectivity and tourism? Or is the underlying story the same old one? That whiff of money turning our heads away from focusing on what really needs attention.

Synshar, Bishar, Rangbah Saidthma/U sur matlah u Shai Rupa- (Rulings, judgements, exchanges intense/All blinded by the silver slime), and Khyndai Umdih baroh kin rngat - The nine clear springs will soon run dry-words directly referencing the life-sustaining waters of U Lum Shillong.

Thus wrote our beloved Soso Tham in 1936. Tham however still hoped for a new dawn but increasingly all we can look forward to is environmental disaster. Four decades ago in his contribution to a collection of essays appropriately entitled **Khasi Heritage**, Mr RT Rymbai harboured the same sense of foreboding. He is specifically referring to the Jaintia Hills but I am sure you will agree that he is speaking on behalf of

Roads.....

By Janet Moore Hujon

the state as a whole.

"...Forests...are now vanishing...The greed for money in the minds of the father and the mother because of a craze to build new houses, to keep up with the Joneses, hastens the sale of primitive forests to the grasping forest contractors who reach every creek and corner of the land with their monstrous trucks to

I have long taken my mother tongue for granted and it is only the process of translation that made me realise how the natural world influences the way we express ourselves. Often to describe someone whose face is tender and glowing with health we say: "*I um ka khmat*". Tenderness, felt and perceived, is rooted in the word *um*-water. This simple solacing expression

Confused thinking, thoughtlessness and a lack of vision seem to mark the official position. Other contributors to the Shillong Times have highlighted the contradictions underlying government policies including planting trees to protect the environment while planning the destruction of pines that have long been the guardians of our water resources; the abundance of rainfall and yet the lack of initiatives to manage this natural resource; needing time to consider whether fossil fuels should be a source of revenue in a Meghalaya where coal mining has already claimed lives and ravaged the Jaintia Hills; promoting tourism but paying scant attention to the negative impact tourist hordes have on the environment.

destroy what it had taken ages to build...This if not checked...will ultimately affect the economy of the Pnars...because it is these forests which feed their perennial rivers with water to irrigate their superbly terraced paddy fields"...

Did anyone listen? Did anything change? So well done Havenly Lyngdoh for pointing this out, for today more than ever we need reminding. The old fears need to be resurrected and fearlessly challenged.

is packed with cultural significance. It is part of the world-view of the Khasi for whom our rivers, our waterfalls and our springs have been sources of life and abiding joy. Water is synonymous with freshness, with restoring, with promise and with life. To be told we represent these positive virtues is a compliment welcomed in a way that the following contrasting assessment is not: "*I tyrkong*", which or who looks dry. Randomly felling trees strikes at the

heart of that Khasi reverence for the natural world, which is the only reason why our landscape has endured for millennia.

Confused thinking, thoughtlessness and a lack of vision seem to mark the official position. Other contributors to the Shillong Times have highlighted the contradictions underlying government policies including planting trees to protect the environment while planning the destruction of pines that have long been the guardians of our water resources; the abundance of rainfall and yet the lack of initiatives to manage this natural resource; needing time to consider whether fossil fuels should be a source of revenue in a Meghalaya where coal mining has already claimed lives and ravaged the Jaintia Hills; promoting tourism but paying scant attention to the negative impact tourist hordes have on the environment. The Eden that is Nongriat, is already being poisoned by plastic bottles and packaging littering the slopes leading down to the bridges. What is the point of telling the world about the ingenuity of our people if we do not first respect why and how they were able to live in harmony with the environment.

It is time to stop fostering that 'been there, done that' mentality and to once again tell the story of ancient truths as it was once told by those who have gone before, who understood that *Ka maw ka dieng kan dang kren brieu*, (Wood and stone still speak to man). We need to revive the old narratives so that we do not merely seek the superficial view but learn to *experience and respect* - only then will roads really connect. And where 'tourism potential' is concerned let us focus on the kernel - *potent* - 'being powerful, being able' - in order to *enable* rather than *disable*. Let us walk the old ways with care.

TO THE EDITOR

Odds are stacked against ST candidates

Editor, The Central Agricultural University (CAU) headquartered at Imphal, Manipur is a prestigious educational hub for thousands of students across the country for pursuing degrees in Agriculture and allied sciences. It has branches spread across the North East. Recently, this Institute advertised the recruitment in various teaching posts for a total of 155 vacancies in various disciplines. However, this is where all hopes for Scheduled Tribe candidates, possessing PhD degrees, are dashed to the ground. In a ridiculous turn of events only a mere 5% vacancy out of a total 155 is reserved for ST candidates, thereby leaving many belonging to this category in deep dilemma. It is a known fact that nabbing a seat under Unreserved Category (UR) will be a herculean task due to the disappointing selections of yester years. Even in this 5% there is little to no vacancies in Assistant Professor Posts, with only one vacancy each for ST in agriculture, fisheries and veterinary sciences. Just a reminder that this is the same Institute where in its last recruitment in 2017, provided only a laughable 3% vacancy to STs. All the states where CAU is spread

out have a dominant ST population but why is there still no effort made by this Institute to include the local well qualified tribals for teaching jobs? Is it because the management of this Institute, sitting in Imphal, don't think that STs are competent enough? If an opportunity is never provided for STs, then can we ever hope to see great tribal scientists emerging from this region? Lastly, this is an urgent plea to our representatives in the government to take note of this matter so that the ST community can have a better representation in this Institute.

Yours etc.,
Baiarbor Nongbi
Ph.D., Scholar,
CPGS, Central
Agricultural University,
Umiam, Meghalaya

Water crisis looking large

Editor, Reading "Day Zero looms large" by Dr Saraswati (ST June 13, 2019) is scary and nightmarish. We now know that India is the highest user of ground water having used up 25% of the total ground water. What percentage of that 25% is being used by corporates like Coca Cola, Pepsi, Bisleri etc., is a question to be answered by the Government. Nalse-Jal Scheme to provide piped drinking water has proved to be a false, unachievable

election stunt. 100 million people will run out of water by 2020. At present water tankers in Maharashtra are earning not less than Rs 9 crore a day and children are seen drinking water from wells, full of mud. Having thousands of kilometers of coastlines with nuclear power, makes desalination a distant dream. The Chernobyl disaster and disposal of nuclear waste is too great a risk for a glass of drinking water. Saddest is when the writer laments that experts and engineers silence the voice of people affected. On June 13, the BBC news bar read, 'Australia approves the most controversial coal project.' This project belongs to Adani a businessman and close ally of the BJP, hence our parliamentarians thumped their desks in approval.

A few metres away were children with placards who are fighting a losing battle. It seems UN Goal 6 is helpless in this regard. One person carried a poster which read, "If you want mining, do not vote Labour". Thus when politicians with greed, coal lobbyists in Australia and sadly in our State too and timber lobbies in the Amazon slaughter forest cover right now at the rate of 160 football grounds (mind you this is world cup sized football grounds)per minute, even while armchair environmentalists who fear both hydel and nuclear projects and who wept painfully when a man eater was shot dead, all work in

tandem to speed up the reign of Ground Zero then it is all over. Very sad indeed!

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem
Via email.

A vexed issue

Editor, The Sikh community have made Shillong, or in a broader sense, our land i.e. 'Ri Khasi' as their home. No doubt this community has contributed in different ways in the evolution of the Khasi society which many are not aware of. But times have changed and so have people with the onset of modernization. The best solution for all concerned and in the overall interests of the Sikh community is for them to be relocated elsewhere since the centre of Iewduh (Them Mawlong) is a slum and living conditions are such that there is no scope for improvement. Taking into consideration the lack of parking space and also access during any emergency, the only way out is to free the present space. There must not be any hardening of stances or posturing but a common effort must be made, keeping in mind a better future rather than regret the opportunity.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Via email

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Modi's Tsunami-2 Time to wake up on Defence

By PK Vasudeva

Certainly, the election results are a Tsunami-2 for Modi, bettering his 2014 performance. Riding on a massive saffron surge sweeping through most parts of India, the BJP-led NDA Government became the only non-Congress one to return to power in India's political history.

Repeating its near improbable feat of landslide victory in North, East and West, the NDA with a vote share of nearly 50% surpassed its last Lok Sabha elections tally of 336 to achieve a super-sized number of 354, out of the total of 542 seats with the BJP's triple ton of winning 303 seats. The Congress with 52 seats did not make 10% of the Lok Sabha strength of 543 (55), hence it was denied the status of Leader of Opposition (LOP) for the second time.

Undoubtedly, Modi's emphasis on national security post the Balakot surgical strikes in February strengthened his image as a strong and decisive leader and defeated the Opposition's efforts to focus on economic and social issues with NaMo riding to victory on the crest of nationalism and national security.

Indeed, he used the terrorist attack in Pulwama by "enemy" Pakistan and Balakot as part of his

resolve to abrogate Article 370, which gives Jammu and Kashmir autonomous status and annual Article 35A which the BJP and its Government finds discriminatory against non-permanent residents and women of the Valley. One hopes this is implemented sooner than later to prove that the Administration means business.

"We believe that Article 35A is an obstacle in the development of the State. We will take all steps to ensure a safe and peaceful environment for all residents of the State. We will make all efforts to ensure the safe return of Kashmiri Pandits. We will provide financial assistance for the resettlement of refugees from West Pakistan, Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) and Chhamb," promises the BJP manifesto.

On another critical issue --- restructuring higher defence management --- the Congress manifesto talks of establishing the office of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as a single advisor to the Government on defence related issues and a member of Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

But the BJP manifesto is silent on this important issue. There is a definite requirement of CDS as recommended by earlier

The BJP manifesto had declared that it would "speed up the purchases of outstanding defence related equipment and weapons, and equip the armed forces with modern equipment to strengthen the strike capability of the armed forces". In reality this does not match its rhetoric on the acquisition of defence equipment, because of poor allocation of defence funds.

'Hindutva-Security' platform. Which helped build his macho image and a statesman who talked as an equal with world leaders like US President Donald Trump, Russia's Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

However, his Government has not been able to do much on national security and defence related issues during his previous five years term. The modernisation of its defence forces suffered because of poor allocation of defence budget --- only 1.44% of the GDP, the least since 1962.

Clearly, this is detrimental to armed forces capabilities in case of twin offensive from either of the two hostile neighbours. It is high time that the BJP-led NDA Government concentrates on modernisation of its defence forces and allocates sufficient funds during the next five years to make its Armed Forces and deterrents strong.

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Nonetheless, the BJP's clear and unambiguous stand on issues of nationalism and internal security, reflected in the Policy of "Zero Tolerance Against Terrorism and Extremism" and "giving a free hand to security forces in combating terrorism" did work.

As expected, the Party has repeatedly reiterated its

high-powered committees - -- Subrahmanyam Committee 2001, Group of Ministers Committee 2002 and Naresh Chandra Committee Task Force 2011.

Besides, there is a dire need of integrating Ministry of Defence with the three Armed Forces Headquarters by posting officers in the Ministry for better coordination, fast acquisition of weapons and equipment and infusing efficiency in the system.

Importantly, the Modi government should be magnanimous in honouring the good points of the Congress manifesto like the appointment of CDS and implementing reforms in the defence forces.

On the economic front India has been rated as the fastest growing economy of the world by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank has ranked it the 6th largest economy beating France. India is now likely to beat Britain in the next fiscal by emerging as the 5th largest economy of the world. Today needs to work post haste to overcome the critical economic situation and its failures in several economic sectors: High unemployment level, the agricultural crisis and the impacts of sudden demonetisation and poor implementation of GST.

Hopefully, the Modi Government will create a healthy environment for accepting positive suggestions of Opposition Parties. All Parties must rise above demeaning their rivals, should forget the electoral rancor and curb abusive language against each other as all Indian have one aim: Growth of country. --- INFA

Think before you drink



Dr Anjana Kannankara

A glass of chilled soft drink could without doubt hit the spot especially when you are feeling too tired or thirsty after a long day. The fizz moving down the alimentary canal can be so satisfying that you feel refreshed and bursting with energy. But have you ever cared to think about what the dissolved carbon dioxide and added sugars do to your body once you gulp down the glass of aerated drink?

Studies reveal that more than half of the young generation of the world has adopted the habit of consuming soft drinks on a regular basis. Taking sugary drinks such as cola products can lead to a number of shocking health-related problems. Based on a research by health writer Wade Meredith and an infographic by former UK pharmacist Niraj Naik, the effects of these sweetened drinks inside the body is revealed as quite disturbing.

First 10 minutes

Approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar enters your system which is supposed to be more than the maximum recommended daily intake for the body. The action of the phosphoric acid stops the body from vomiting that might naturally occur due to the overwhelming sweetness.

In 20 minutes

The blood sugar shoots up and insulin is released more by the pancreas to tackle this. The pancreas chugs out insulin to help transport the sugar (which is a carbohydrate) to your muscles for energy. But if the blood sugar content is more than what could be stored in the muscle tissues, all the excess sugar found in the blood stream at that point is turned to fat as a result and stored in the liver.

In 40 minutes

Within 40 minutes, caffeine absorption is complete and the rest of your body responds accordingly. Your pupils become dilated, your blood pressure rises and the liver begins to dump even more sugar into your bloodstream. The adenosine receptors in the brain are most likely blocked to prevent drowsiness.

In 45 minutes

The body starts to produce more dopamine, a neu-

rotransmitter that controls the brain's pleasure centres and reward-motivated behaviour physically the same way as heroin works.

In 60 minutes

The phosphoric acid binds calcium, magnesium and zinc in the lower intestine which gives a further boost to the metabolism. This compounded by high doses of sugar and artificial sweeteners increases the urinary excretion of calcium. The body would start evacuating the bonded minerals along with sodium, electrolyte and water which would have been useful to the body otherwise but now leaving the body dehydrated.

After 60 minutes

The body has given away most of the valuable nutrients, continues the tendency to produce more urine, the rave subsides and a sugar crash occurs leaving you irritable and sluggish, wanting to reach for another glass of the drink. It may become a vicious cycle if not careful enough.

Other harmful effects

A daily glass of soda has a negative effect on virtually every part of the body, including the heart, lungs, teeth and brain. Your kidney also comes into play by helping dump excess sugar through your urine, meaning your body loses water, which, along with the diuretic effect of the caffeine in the soda, increases your risk of dehydration. The sugar and caffeine in soda is quite the unhealthy combination", says Dr Zeytinoglu, an endocrinologist with the University of Chicago Medicine. The effects may also include liver damage, tooth decay, kidney disease, diabetes, heartburn, osteoporosis, hypertension, heart disease and impaired digestion.

Having said this, there might not be an urgent need to banish aerated drinks from your life. An occasional glass cannot pose much of a significant impact on your health. The key is to limit it to moderate quantities if you cannot abstain from consuming it. Logical reasoning would make us understand the harm these drinks cause to our body and surely we need to think twice before including it in our daily routine.

(The author is director, TGL Foundation, and senior director, FWO)

There are options for NE students

By Ranjan K Baruah

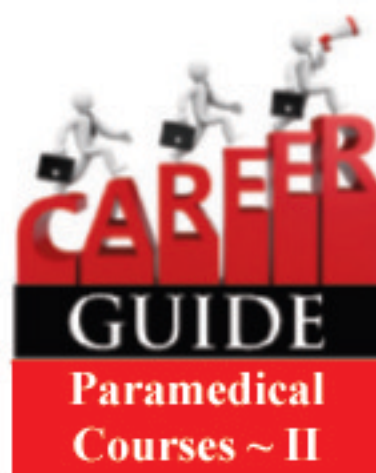
In our last edition we had published about paramedics or paramedical courses as a career option. Thanks for sending feedbacks to improve this column.

The All India Institute of Speech and Hearing was established in the year 1965 as an autonomous institute fully funded by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare provides various courses like certificate course on Communication disorders, MSc (Audiology), Diploma in Hearing Aid and Ear mould Technology (DHA and ET), MSc (Speech-Language Pathology), Diploma in Training Young (Deaf and Hearing) (DTY-DHH), Bachelor/Master in Special Education, etc. There are other courses apart from above mentioned courses.

RIPANS: The Regional Institute of Paramedical and Nursing Sciences (RIPANS) was established during 1994-95 under North Eastern Council (NEC) as an autonomous body with due approval of the concerned ministries of the Government of India to cater to the much needed paramedical, nursing and pharmacy personnel in the northeastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The institute is situated on the outskirts of Aizawl in a secluded hilly slope of about 39.60 bighas. It was transferred to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare from NEC on April 1, 2007. It offers courses like BSc

(MLT), Bachelor s in Radiography and Imaging Technology (BRIT), Bachelor in Optometry (BOptom), B Pharm, MPharm, nursing etc.

Apart from this there is Regional Institute of Pharmaceutical Technology (RIPSAT) in Agartala that offers courses like BPharm. We will publish more about career options related to optometry.



Updates:

Indo-US Fellowship for Women in STEM (WISTEM) 2019: The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India and Indo-US Science and Technology Forum jointly invite applications for the Indo-US Fellowship for Women in STEM 2019 from female applicants pursuing/having a PhD degree in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, or Medicine. The 3-6 months long fellowship has an objective to provide opportunities to female researchers to harbour their potential and capabilities and improve them. The fellows have the opportunity to avail a monthly stipend of \$3000 and other benefits. The scholarship is being provided by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India and the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF). Last date is June 17.

IDFC FIRST Bank MBA Scholarship 2019-21: IDFC FIRST Bank is inviting Indian students pursuing MBA programmes in India to avail scholarships for their academic expenses. The scholarship programme is designed to encourage students who need financial assistance to pursue management studies at selected 150 B-schools in India. The scholarship is being provided by IDFC FIRST Bank which is a renowned financial institution that specialises in providing debt financing to consumers and MSMEs in India. Aspirants may apply on or before July 31.

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

Earth: The designated hell for all sinners

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Mama, what does Papa do in office?"

He scares monkeys, darling."

What are the strangest jobs that involve wild animals? Every morning when I get to Shastri Bhavan, my office, I hear the sound of a man hooting. He hoots off the entire day. His job is to scare away monkeys. The monkeys run when they see him but whether it's because of his voice, or the large stick he carries, is a moot point. As soon as he moves away they come back and sit on the ledges of the upper stories of the building and outside my window, where I feed them.

Illegal langur kidnappers go from building to building (less so now because I have them arrested) and tie up their langurs on the gate to keep rhesus monkeys at bay. Some humans are paid by temples to dress up as monkeys to scare the others away.

Snake milkers are people who extract venom from snakes and other reptiles for medical applications, for the treatment of minor heart attacks and preventing blood clots, and for anti-venom serums that can be used if a person is bitten by a snake. A lot of venom is needed every year and the milkers has to spend all day catching and squeezing a snake's mouth open so that he can push snake fangs into a plastic container in order to milk them. Being bitten is not unusual. In

India, the Irulas in Tamil Nadu, who were snake hunters for snake skin, were taught by Romulus Whittaker and Harry Miller, to collect venom and sell it to the snake institutes. In 1978, an Irula Snake-catchers Co-op, owned and operated by the Irula tribals, was formed with Romulus as the technical advisor and permissions were given to catch snakes and bring them to the Snake Park in Guindy where they are milked.

Brazil mosquito researchers, fighting malaria, must study the biting habit of the mosquito that spreads this deadly disease. In order to study these insects, Brazilian scientists offer themselves as bait. In the early evening, when mosquito activity is the most, a mosquito researcher sets himself up inside a mosquito-netting tent with a gap at the bottom. Mosquitoes fly in and get trapped inside, where the researcher sits. As they bite the legs, he or she draws them into a mouth tube and then into a container, catching up to 500 in three hours (which means at least 3000 bites). Many researchers get malaria.

An avian vomitologist is employed by entomology laboratories to collect vomit samples from sick birds, to analyse the avian flu pattern. This means moving through fields and forests in search of vomit.

In 2014, the Giant Panda Protection and Research Center in China's Sichuan, announced its worldwide search for panda cub caretakers. Contenders faced several elimination rounds before getting the job. The ad stated, Your work has only one mission: spending 365 days with the pandas



and sharing in their joys and sorrows."

Better that, than working in China's bear bile centres. Bears have a permanent tube fastened to their gall bladders, and the bile gatherers have to

make sure the bile comes out and the bear, though in extreme pain, does not die. The bile is collected in jars and sold for the Chinese quack medicine industry.

Or even the rabbit hair puller-outers.

The Chinese and French grow rabbits in tiny cages. Every six weeks the hair pullers get them out, spread eagle them on a table with straps and then pull out bunches of hair while the rabbits scream. Amusement comes from hitting the rabbit to make it shut up.

Movies, that need insects, employ an insect wrangler. These individuals grow ants, cockroaches and flies for films and exhibitions, and get more exotic insects depending on the movie order. The wrangler directs the insects during filming, by motivating them with food or pushing them away with air etc. He has trained them to respond.

In Thailand, there is a whole industry of jewellery made of butterfly wings (you can see them on sale at the airport). There are people who actually tear the wings of live butterflies and quickly push them between plastic covers edged with a gold lining. Add a hook and voila, earrings!

That is in the same league as snake-skin catchers who pin a live snake to the board and then strip its skin off. This is made into shoes/wallets/handbags for the very rich and stupid.

Crocodile skimmers do the same. Their job is to catch the mouth of a baby crocodile and bind it. Hammer a nail into the neck which paralyses it and then strip the skin off.

For every guy who eats a live grasshopper, on reality shows as disgusting as Fear Factor and Survivor, there are people who are paid to do the same thing in real life. These masochists are called Gross Stunt Testers and their highly paid job includes doing everything that's gross, like eating worms or cockroaches. The film and

television industry employs them to test disgusting items, such as bugs and fluids, to make sure it is safe for others to consume on camera, in order to avoid lawsuits.

Professional elephant painters and dressers are hired to paint and decorate elephants during the festivities in Kerala. Sri Lanka has official outfitters for the elephants taking part in festivals. Each elephant has to be measured, and custom made outfits are made for the body, trunk, ears, and tail of the animal. The drapery has to fit snugly to the elephant's hide. The elaborate creations take around two months to make. The outfits are bought by wealthy families and donated to the temple. Every year at least ten elephants revolt under the heat of these dresses, the noise and the beating of the mahouts, and run amok. They are either killed immediately, or punished for months with beating.

Till a few decades ago leech were collected to draw blood from patients for therapeutic reasons. Leech-gatherers waded through dense leech-filled areas and allowed them to latch onto their legs and suck, losing tremendous amounts of blood. When they were covered with leeches they waded back and took them off.

One short life and look how we waste it. One very enlightened Guru told me 30 years ago that Earth was the designated Hell for all the sinners of the Universe. One look at these jobs that we create and I can believe it.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

Be straight with yourself

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



Sadhguru: When we talk about a spiritual process, we are not talking about jumping

to conclusions and assuming things that we do not know. If you are straight enough to see, "What I know, I know. What I do not know, I do not know," you are already a spiritual aspirant. This is the fundamental aspect of spirituality that I am not so flaky in my head that I make up things. I am willing to come to terms with what I know and do not know." Once you see this, the very nature of human intelligence is such that it cannot live with "I do not know." It wants to know. Once wanting to know comes, seeking will come. Once the seeking comes, finding a way could happen. That is why, once you are on the spiritual path we refer to you as a seeker.

But right now, it looks like the whole world is against this simple "I do not know." Whatever we do not know we just believe. The reason why every human being on the planet is not a natural mystic is because you went out shopping too early. It once happened, Shankaran Pillai got arrested and was brought to court. The judge asked "What happened? Why have you been brought here? What are the charges?" Shankaran Pillai said "I just went Diwali shopping a little too early." The judge said, "That's not a crime, that's being judicious. What do you mean too early? When did you go?" Shankaran Pillai said, "I went before the shops opened."

You go shopping too early in the sense, before you can barely pronounce your own name, you already know who god is, who his wife is, how many children he has, his address, his birthday, what he likes, what he does not like - you know the works. Instead of giving you these silly

suggestions and answers, if your parents and society had nurtured "I do not know" - that you actually do not know anything - where the hell you came from, where you will go, you do not know both - then every human being would have been a mystic on this planet. Because human intelligence cannot be satisfied by just eating, sleeping and living well. Naturally it wants to know. People think this is a problem but this is a possibility too. You can either see it this way or that way. Some people think it is a problem, but it is the greatest possibility too.

"I do not know" has been destroyed because you believe the readymade answers you have for all the fundamental aspects of life. Once you believe something that you do not know just because a book or someone says so with all due respect to all the books and the great men of the past - you destroy all possibilities of knowing. Suppose I tell you something that you do not know and which is not in your experience, the only choice you have is either to believe me or disbelieve me. If you believe me you do not get any closer to reality. If you disbelieve me you still do not get any closer to reality. If you want to get somewhere you have to be in touch with reality. Otherwise you will not get anywhere, you will just hallucinate that you know things.

There is enough intellect in the world today to cultivate a certain level of awareness in people to see: what they know, they know and what they do not know, they do not know. This is a simple way to exist. If you cannot be straight with anyone in the world, that's a social issue - it's up to you. But if you want to progress spiritually, at least take one single step in your life: be absolutely straight with yourself.

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

My stories shaped around dreams and devastations'



Academician Ajanta Paul's debut fiction, The Elixir Maker and Other Stories, a collection of 12 short tales, is, in a single phrase, poetry in motion. She paints her metaphors and images with the ease and cadence of a poet. Each story has a distinct subject that ranges from broken marriages, gender dialectics, female foeticide, the freedom movement, travails of street children, a family lawsuit and many more. The writer in conversation with IBNS correspondent Supriyo Hazra:

You are the principal of a girls college in Kolkata and are involved in various academic pursuits. How did the idea of expanding into writing fiction happen?

Educational administration and academics constitute the core of my professional duties. It's something I like doing, specially meeting the challenges that come one's way in the course of such an occupation. Writing, however, is my oxygen. It not only sustains me, it clears my mind and helps me to see things better. In a sense, writing was always there and antedates the career which came later, and now that the latter is about to close, I feel free to return to the pursuit that always drew me in the first place. So, it is not so much about expanding as I should think about returning to the original passion.

You also have non-fiction to your credit. Can you elaborate on that?

I have a book called *The Modern British Short Story: Critical Interpretations* (Presto, 2008); I have also edited a book titled *The Rite of Wrongs: Human Rights in India* (Avenel, 2013); revised *Orient Blackswan's edition of Shakespeare's Macbeth* (Orient Blackswan, 2014) along with a few other texts brought out by the same publisher. As a teacher, I have naturally published papers in peer-reviewed journals over the years.

Incidentally I have an earlier work of imaginative literature. It is a book of poems and plays called *The Journey Eternal* published by Salesian College, Siliguri, in 2013, as part of its Platinum Jubilee commemoration.

That apart, I have poems scheduled for publication in the April issue of *Setu*, a prestigious Bilingual Journal of Arts from Pittsburgh, USA.

Tell us a bit about your debut fiction, The Elixir Maker and Other Stories? How did the title idea come about?

Stories are important. They tell us so much about ourselves even as they tell the world about us. In a sense, stories are us! A fleeting thought, the slant of a sunbeam through an open window, the jagged edge of an image, a haunting tune, anything at all may trigger the train of associations that gather into the lineaments of a story. It's all there, waiting to be expressed, like the mute motion in a stone, eternal in its unseen rhythms just waiting to be drawn out.

You begin with these nascent apprehensions and sometimes it turns out very differently from what you had perhaps subliminally expected.

That, I feel, is the beauty and magic of art which surprises one with its capacity for changeable configurations which are yet truthful within the authenticity of setting and situation. The collection under discussion, *The Elixir Maker and Other Stories*, is a set of tales shaped around the themes of changing personal relationships, of beginnings and ends, of dreams and devastations, and loss and longings that inevitably characterise the human predicament.

If there is a predominant motif which emerges in the book as a whole, I think, it is the dissolution and forging of boundaries - geographical, social, perceptual, and even temporal - that redefines and re-orders human experience and understanding in interesting ways.

The title story, through its simultaneous collapse and conflation of life and art, and present and past, multiplies intensities, expanding the symbolic scope of the central metaphor of the elixir maker, challenging readers to make their own connections and inferences.

This is, of course, how I see the work. Its success or failure will depend on the readers' perception of it - whether it holds together as a book or not!

Which is your favourite story in this collection and why?

Well, *Storm* is a personal favourite. I like it for its mingling of the strains of the sub-continental narrative, chronicling, as it does, a cataclysmic storm in Bangladesh; the implied migrations between the two Bengals, and later between two nations along with the diasporic impetus of the twentieth century with its concomitants of anxieties peculiar to the situation.

If there is a predominant motif which emerges in the book as a whole, I think, it is the dissolution and forging of boundaries - geographical, social, perceptual, and even temporal - that redefines and re-orders human experience and understanding in interesting ways

Good fiction is that which seemingly unfolds on its own, developing organically into a credible cosmos entirely its own, engaging the reader

Freedom is another favourite, not least because of its position in the larger geopolitical history of the particular region evoked, and its engagement with a convulsive cartography that tore apart nations but also because such a traumatic transfer necessarily promises many untold stories.

Frankly, I was hesitant to approach such a sensitive subject; one interlarded with layers of personal trauma, still resonating in the popular imagination and overlaid with pain in the palimpsest of shared experiences and conjoined histories.

Incidentally, my husband's family had undertaken the journey from Pakistan to

India in 1947 (before he was born) and I had heard anecdotes of the same from family members. So, in a sense, I felt connected to this seminal separation and the writing of *Freedom* was a cathartic experience for me, in the way that it would be for any Indian or Pakistani citizen.

Do you have any favourite author?

Of course, I have several favourite authors - Ernest Hemingway, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor among the Americans; Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Ian McEwan among the British and VS Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy among those with sub-continental affiliations. There are several more; these names just came readily to mind.

What, according to you, makes for a good fiction?

Good fiction is that which seemingly unfolds on its own, developing organically into a credible cosmos entirely its own, engaging the reader to participate in that world, complete in itself, and be touched (even transformed?) with its truth of setting, character and action.

For me it's that luminous quality whether it is Salman Rushdie's evocation of Bombay in *Midnight's Children*, Ernest Hemingway's irrevocable authenticity of dialogue and situation in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* or the poignant description of the communal clash in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. I know these are random examples culled offhand but they serve to illustrate (albeit in a loose sort of way) the synthesis of vision and language which gives rise to this luminescence, so difficult to define.

Could you elaborate on any narrative strategies that you have used in The Elixir Maker and Other Stories?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, in the title story I have employed a magic realist mode, if you can call it that in so far as the eponymous character enjoys a dual existence within the span of the narrative (as Alok the painter and the fruit juice seller). He is, thus both creator and character inhabiting several frames at the same time - the frame of the story, that of a painting and the chronological era depicted in the latter - thereby suggesting a telescoping of effect, and also engendering a tension between life and art, and the past and the present.

In *Freedom* it's a different technique. With oral testimony having played an important role in the entire Partition discourse, I felt that maybe, the interview mode could be used as an effective narrative tool to draw out the feelings of a survivor on the subject.

What else do you want to write about, going forward?

About things that happen, things that matter. Also, things that don't matter. Often, the tiny, the trivial, the most overlooked of elements can harbor the synapses that hold together the circuitry of things. It is part of the search for the meaning of life which, in a sense, is what literature is all about.

To what extent have these projects progressed?

Oh - not to a great extent! A volume of poetry is slowly taking shape. Another collection of short stories is on the anvil.

Image by Avishek Mitra/IBNS

Star - Gazing

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, JUNE 16, 2019

Moon opposite Venus on your solar return chart ensures a very fortunate period ahead. This is a very beautiful combination. Moon represents creativity, our intellect and our inner feelings while Venus stands for anything beautiful in our lives. This will be amply seen in your case. This is going to be a year when your ambitions will be high. You will be looking to make your life colorful. These are going to be very profitable days ahead. Money inflow will be continuous. You would spend lavishly on your lifestyle. There are chances of getting into a passionate love affair with some very charming person. It could result into a successful marriage.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This week brings understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations. You gain money and influence through business ventures and partnership. You connect with old friends and business associates. Being open and receptive, you attract interesting opportunities and people. You are happy as there is balance and harmony at home and synergy in the work area. You start a new business project while adding zest to an old one. Don't allow personal feelings to influence professional decisions.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This week brings cordial relations with family and loved ones. Changes in personal relationships and attitudes happen by themselves, with natural ease, rather than pursuing them. Social, romantic, intellectual, and financial opportunities arise now. For you, an empowering conversation about the past or about support can occur now. An opportunity or investment to make quick gains is on the cards. Creative occupations bring pleasure. Energy is high and things happen swiftly. Be ready to make quick decisions at work and act spontaneously in personal situations.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This is the time to explore and develop a sense of inner security. This is a time for re-organization and heightened awareness of your roots, issues of intimacy and vulnerability, and it's an excellent time to be in touch with your feelings and needs. Focusing on your support system and the manner in which you support others is also probable. This is a good time to make long-range plans for the future or to do any type of re-organizing or even re-modeling of the home and other family-related activities.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You are dynamic and assertive while making new beginnings at work. However, you are soft and loving in personal relationships to maintain a balance. You make important changes in personal and professional situations by integrating contrasting elements or aspects. You are courageous and diplomatic when you need to be. You are ready to face professional competition or rivalry. Victory is on the cards after a short period of strife. Walking can be a therapeutic pastime and can add to your fitness routine.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are original and ambitious instilling a personal style in whatever you do. You socialize with important people in power or government. This phase challenges you to take responsibilities for who you are and live your truth. It is time to put your best foot forward, but be sure to do so with grace and consideration for others, or you may just make a display that you regret later. Give yourself the knack of responding to whatever comes, as it comes in life. Health needs to be replenished with a planned diet and fitness schedules.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You may be tempted to spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant. You retain a professional position of power and influence despite all the changes that happen at work. Success in material aspects is

on cards. You are noble when approached for involvement in a worthy cause. Your personal relationships go through a dreamy and transitional stage since you sail for promise and commitment. It's fine to make a compromise in an ongoing conflict and understand another person's point of view.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Finances and budgets need to be kept in mind as you complete projects and start new ventures. You would improve personal and professional relations with patience, love and care it would be better to avoid discussions, criticism and arguments. You would achieve professional success with your own power, wisdom and resources. You may require solitude in order to get mental work done during this time. Your memory is sharper than usual, and your thoughts often turn to personal matters, family, and loved ones.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Your communicative abilities will largely be applied to professional work ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. Your personal affairs may take time to resolve, be patient and persistent. Love, romance, party fun, celebration and family reunions can keep you busy and happy this week. Health needs to be nurtured and cannot be ignored.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You would bring a combination of wisdom and knowledge in personal and professional life. A personal involvement has the qualities of love, balance and freedom that you desire. It is time to heal old friendships with tender, love, care and move into new relationships with sensitivity. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. Arguments can be detrimental to production in business and harmony in family. Go out in the open and commune with nature it will help you reflect and be a stress buster too.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration indicates learning important lessons from life could be the beginning of spiritual growth and understanding. You are blessed with divine wisdom and inspired to take up a professional challenge. Spiritual pursuits and meditation can be rewarding. You grow and transform as you pass through a touching emotional experience. This is a period during which you can enjoy increased powers of concentration. Stars indicate an especially busy and hectic time on the domestic front.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Success in business and love in personal relationship transforms your life and attitudes. There are chances of new associations as new opportunities and changes may come. You have to find better creative and progressive options. It would be better to participate in social and family celebrations to lighten up and relax. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your responsible side and organizational skills. You feel fresh and re-energized after a long walk or light exercises.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This period brings more efficiency and creativity in your work. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships. Travel, promotion, or publishing could also figure in your career and benefit you. A professional collaboration comes together when you have given up all the hopes of it. Creative and professional plans are set to actualize and it is best to work towards them persistently. Your business plans have a magical quality of perfection and completion.

Home computers are being called upon to perform many new functions, including the consumption of homework formerly eaten by the dog.

--- Doug Larson

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2019

Start of new session

WITH the 17th Lok Sabha starting its session on Monday, the disarray in the Opposition camp is all too evident. Even as the count-down began, the Congress party was yet to decide on its leader in the House and surprisingly, party chief, Rahul Gandhi was away vacationing abroad. There is very little of action on the non-BJP side, as the unexpected windfall the saffron party had in the Lok Sabha polls has evidently come as a dampener to the spirits of the Opposition. The BJP-led NDA, which returned to power for a second term, is presenting a united face at least for now. This, though the allies are not all too happy with grant of only one minister each in the new Modi dispensation. The Prime Minister has sought to set the tone for his new term and start of the first Parliament session by urging the Opposition this weekend to join hands with the government in implementation of various growth-oriented programmes. Two things stood out in his address at the Niti Aayog meet – namely, a stress on carrying all sections of the people together, through the slogan of Sab Ka Saath, Sab Ka Vikas; and two, a commitment to turn India into a \$5trillion economy from the less than \$3trillion now – set against China's \$10trillion and the US' 20trillion.

The Opposition had made it clear a while ago that despite the small strength in the house, they would perform the role assigned to them in a spirited manner; which they should. Rahul Gandhi himself stated as much. At the same time, the Opposition is duty-bound to respect the mandate. The Parliament this time would miss many stalwarts – notable among them being former prime minister Manmohan Singh who retired from the upper house this week; another former PM HD Deve Gowda and former Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, both of whom were defeated in Karnataka; and Jotiraditya Scindia who was defeated in Madhya Pradesh -- as also BJP top guns like LK Advani, MM Joshi, Sushma Swaraj and former Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, to name a few. Interest would centre round the selection of a new Speaker, to be followed later by the presentation of the economic survey report and the Union Budget. Bills relating to the national citizenship registry and triple talaq initiated in the last Parliament but which could not be passed, would reappear in new forms this time, apart from other usual business. Overall, the tone for the next five years will be set.

TO THE EDITOR

Doctors' strike: Why punish the patients?

Editor,
The agitating doctors in West Bengal are reported to have stuck to their guns even though Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday claimed that she has accepted all their demands. Unfortunately, the doctors are still on the path of strike without having a prick of conscience in their hearts towards millions of patients who are now left in the lurch. Adding insult to injury, the Indian Medical Association, an apex body of doctors called for a strike on Monday in protest against the recent assault on doctors in West Bengal. On whatever grounds, the strike called for by the doctors is nothing short of a war against the dying patients in the country. It is true that the doctors in the country are a respected lot and they are not supposed to resort to strike considering their role which is so vital and is of paramount importance in the health care system. The reason behind the declaration of strike by the IMA was the assault on doctors in West Bengal. This incident and its impact was confined to only West Bengal and the issue itself should have been localised and not

dragged to the whole of India to make it a national issue. Sure medical doctors are also part and parcel of our society and they may be facing problems too. Hence the assault on doctors is to be condemned and the guilty are to be punished at any cost. But expressing solidarity with the doctors assaulted by declaring strike is something too much for a nation to bear. In the best interests of the nation, the IMA must withdraw the strike immediately and attend to patients who are in critical need of healthcare.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan,
Kochi -15

Indians still die of starvation

Editor,
A local train was to move again after its scheduled stop at a station for a minute or two. But the train did not start even after five minutes. Passengers became anxious. Soon, there was an announcement ~ "The signal beside platform number 2 is not working. The driver of down Sealdah local is requested to start the train." As rail is an

Garos Hills voters set the agenda

By H H Mohrmen

around one question, and that is how to survive for the next five years. The plan does not extend beyond five years. So the first option for Dr Mukul is to remain in the Congress.

There is also another saying, "anything is possible in politics," so the second option for Dr Mukul Sangma is to literally take a leap of faith of sorts and do the unthinkable. Will he take a leaf out of his former friend Himanta Biswa Sarma's book and take along with him some Congress MLAs and join the BJP. They are already four of them in one family, so one third of the numbers of the Congress legislators in the house is not an impossible goal to achieve. This is also

the party his other achievement was to get the Election Commission to recognise his party as the National party. Conrad has worked so hard for this and he has canvassed in all the states where the NPP had put up candidates. This has borne fruit now. Come what may at least till the next election in 2023, Purno Sangma's family will rule the roost in the state and particularly in the Garo hills.

But it's a different story altogether in the Khasi Jaintia hills region of the state. The verdict was a surprise not only because the Congress had won the Shillong seat, but it has also won by a huge margin. The question is how can the party with only 19 MLAs and some MDCs defeat the

his non performance as the two-time MP, still able to defeat Jemino who was considered to be a much better candidate in comparison with Vincent? That is the question that the NPP and its partners in the MDA would have to answer if they really want to learn from their defeat.

Conrad and the MDA should be ashamed of being drubbed by the Congress which is in fact a shadow of its former image. The question is, was it because the MDA partners were not serious in their effort to make sure their candidate wins the Shillong seat? But the most important lesson is for the UDP which has projected its own leader as the candidate for the election. Has the party been betrayed by its partners? If the MDA government is really serious and wants the coalition to survive, it should get to the bottom of this problem and come out with a solution on how to deal with the problem in the future. The truth is, there are black sheep amongst the MDA partners so does Conrad have the courage to punish the errant MLAs and MDCs?

One important lesson that we need to learn from this and the other election before it, is the fact the Garos knows how to vote and they vote en masse. When they decide to vote for Congress, they see that it wins maximum seats from the region and now it is the NPPs turn therefore the party is on a winning spree. Unlike their brethren in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, the Garos vote en bloc; they swing like the pendulum of a clock. There is also consistency in the way they vote and that is why they are always at the helm of power. On the contrary in the Khasi and Jaintia hills region, the verdict is always unpredictable. People always give a fragmented mandate especially in the elections to the legislative assembly. Therefore since the beginning of the history of this hill state, Garo hills in spite of having less number of seats in the LA than the Khasi Jaintia hills combine, have more say and influence in government formation. That is why we say when the Garos votes the rest of the state takes note.

The election has proven one very important point and that is that the Khasi Pnar people are unpredictable because with the kind of support that Jemino Mawthoh the common candidate of the MDA had, you would expect that the Lok Sabha election would be a cake walk for him.

precisely the reason why, almost all the adult members of the family join politics and contest the elections so that defection becomes easy and to make the impossible possible. Anything can happen in politics they say, and if this happens then the next government will be a coalition of the two national parties the NPP and the BJP. The NPP will then have no option because it is part of the NDA and if NPP and BJP government become a reality, then poor regional parties will be left high and dry. Well one may say that this is mere conjecture but who can say that this cannot happen.

But as of now the younger Sangma has taken the wind out of the sails of the elder Sangma and Conrad has not only emerged victorious but as the national president of

common candidate of the coalition of the regional parties along with the NPP? The more than forty MLAs in the Assembly along with the MDCs in both the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Councils, should have easily won the seat because the Congress is no match to the MDA.

The election has proven one very important point and that is that the Khasi Pnar people are unpredictable because with the kind of support that Jemino Mawthoh the common candidate of the MDA had, you would expect that the Lok Sabha election would be a cake walk for him. He has the support of most of the MLAs and the MDCs and surprisingly, Jemino lost even in the Constituencies represented by stalwarts of the NPP. Why did Vincent H Pala who was blamed for

areas with network issues.

India ranks 103rd among 119 countries on global hunger index 2018. Do we realize its implications? Can we feel the pain of being forced to go to bed on an empty stomach every day? No, simply we cannot. We have at the most experienced hunger only occasionally when observing a religious fast or for the sake of dieting. Not only are these occasional experiences but voluntary as well. It is difficult for us to empathize with the pain of those who are left to starve to death.

Indeed, we react strongly when malfunctioning of a signal causes traffic jam or a train to run late. But we do not cry out that loud when technical malfunctioning keep on killing our poor brothers and sisters one after another! How heartless a nation is this!

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

For a righteous purpose

Editor,
Apropos the letter "What's wrong must be exposed" (June 11, 2019), I thank PS Gupta for appreciating my letters. True, in the midst of turmoil and chaos Albert Einstein

had once said, "If I were to remain silent, I'd be guilty of complicity." If we deeply reflect on this small sentence by one of the greatest minds of all times, we as individuals are to varying degrees, or sometimes fully, responsible for a number of ills in various spheres of life. What's worse is that sometimes we also take the wrong side, knowingly or unknowingly, and find faults in those on the other side. Yes, a human being is not free from frailties. Even a very intelligent person often falls under the sway of long-held prejudices and surrounding influences.

Regarding my high-voltage letter against BSNL, "Is BSNL folding up" (ST, June 4, 2019), I will not budge an inch. I hate to write on my personal behalf unless that is affecting the "general public". Innocent people seldom come forward to raise their voices. Instead, they silently endure their sufferings. So, it falls on people with some awareness to take up their issues in right earnest. The PA of the CGM, BSNL is unarguably a smart and sensible lady. If not, I would not have taken her name. She herself promptly phoned me to thank me, and sincerely apologized for all the inconveniences when the letter on BSNL was published.

What with Mamata's

atrocities in West Bengal? It is a blot on the pristine landscape of the Indian sub-continent. Should we still overlook and keep mum that her MPs, her MLAs, and her cadres are overtly involved in a series of inhuman killings and intimidation? Not just that, some of the Hon'ble MPs and MLAs also have moved forward to establish a secret nexus with the dreaded terror modules. This situation had taken such an ugly turn in 2017 that it compelled the neighbouring Bangladesh Government to caution Mamata and the Indian Government. If not much, could we not condemn all such brutality upon humanity with serious words? Yes, I strongly believe that we should keep working for righteous causes with all sincerity so that we shall not be "guilty of complicity". Of course, we cannot make peace with everyone. The blocks of criticism must be jumped over with the vigour of right conviction and integrity.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

Multi-Billionaire Debtors Budget: No soft candy

By Shivaji Sarkar

Prime Minister Modi's first budget, after a massive election victory, is neither an easy process for the Government nor does it have the compulsion to be soft. It may tend to maintain a balance but with a revenue crunch there are likely to be efforts to raise it.

Except for Haryana and Maharashtra, which go to polls in October no other State is holding elections this year. Delhi is next January 2020. This gives further leeway. Certainly, the budget would not be populist and the income tax was taken care of in the interim budget wherein the limit has been increased to Rs 5 lakhs. This was not made the base of exemption limit. Now for those earning above Rs 5 lakhs might have this as the base. There can be some surprises and the Government might propose moves which may continue to pinch taxpayers.

Not many remember that the 2017-18 budget had increased cess from 3% to 4% though standard deduction was raised. This raised liability on higher tax slabs. They might remain the target again.

There are serious concerns too. The GDP data controversy is on along with questions on book keeping. The debate on growth also does not show unanimity. Stress is seen in manufacturing, industrial index, skewed GST on petro prices and less than expected show by the economy.

The annual growth rate in car sales in May 2019, according to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) was 26%, the lowest since 31% in September 2001. This trend started in November 2018.

Besides, sales have been falling since the National Green Tribunal ordered junking for operational ten-year old cars on false environmental concern. Cars contribute less than 2% of total pollution and are family properties and mostly a lifetime buy. Quixotic policy decisions have seen diesel car sales going to a critical low forcing Maruti to abandon production.

There is a crisis of confidence. It is not a benign issue and could lead to a deceleration in economic activity through a negative multiplier effect.

Further, it is unwise for the Government to fall into the trap of the US and western oil sellers propaganda of junking diesel. With latest technology, diesel is not that pollutant.

The policy makers have to see it from an economic viewpoint. Every day 12 billion litres of petrol and 27 billion litres of diesel are consumed. The entire transport fleet operates on diesel. It is a refining byproduct, cheaper and effective fuel.

The refining capacity has increased to 230 million metric tonne per annum (MMTPA) and as per the Petroleum Ministry imports in value terms have come down to Rs 4.16 lakh crores for 202 MMT import in 2015-16 from Rs 6.87 lakh crores for 189 MMT in 2014-15 due to fall in crude prices.

International oil sellers do not want India to have this benefit. Now if the country stops using diesel vehicles, about 10,000 billion litres of diesel refined a year in India would go waste, increase international crude prices as the country would import more and prop up profits of the western giants.

The budget has to address this critical issue. Next year for preparation of BS 6 (Euro VI) fuel, Indian Oil would have to shut down 11

refineries for roughly a month. During that time processed fuel has to be imported.

Instead of falling into the trap of oil-industry propped environment lobbies, India must sell diesel at cheaper rates to give a boost to its economy. New auto tech has made diesel more efficient with BS 6 as good as petrol.

Importantly, policy glitches have caused many uncertainties. The country must change its diesel policy ignoring international lobbyists. This would bring down operational costs of farms and industry who are clamouring for an overall economy. It would slash even the Government's own fleet cost. This decision would take the industry to fast lane.

The Government also should accept that despite our space mission progress of going to Mars and the Moon, we are still a developing nation. Its finances are critical though we may be a \$ 5 trillion economy in a few years.

Disparity is growing and so is inflation. Food prices are inching ahead but farmers still have to wait for doles. While PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PMKSN) has provided necessary cash to lubricate the rural economy, the nation has not yet streamlined agro-product sales. Kisans are forced to sell at distress prices despite now higher MSPs.

The corporate and middle men still rule the farm market. The Government should consider giving higher relief to I-T payee farmers considering often they get paid less than their production cost. They pay I-T as their volumes are large. There is no harm in extending them the PMKSN benefit too. Tax losses if at all would be notional as their numbers are very few.

A key issue is domestic savings. Savings of India's poor have sustained Indian economy for decades buoyed by reasonable interest that they were getting. The Government needs to bolster the National Savings Scheme, which even collected 25 paise from children, to launch new campaigns to increase savings.

It also has to consider giving them higher interest and not cut RBI rates to subsidise the giant multi-billionaire debtors (MBD). The MBDS should be given loans at commercial market rates. They should be forced to use their huge savings. Public money, they must be told, is neither free nor poor savers should subsidise the giants.

Long-term savings have to be incentivised. The savings rate surged from 25.9% in 2003 to 36.8% in 2008. Since 2012, because of deviant UPA policy, aggregate savings rate declined from 34% to 30.5% in 2017-18.

Household savings plunged from 22.4% in 2012 to 17.6%. This has been the mainstay of economy from 1950s to 1980s. Provisions of Section 80C has to be widened and limit must be increased to Rs 3 lakh at the least. This would bring in more funds to the Government programmes, a necessity as deficit is increasing.

There are many critical areas like re-skilling workforce, strengthening defence, integrate neighbourhood, Jal-water-mission, good education and health. Each needs investment. The budget would not be a soft candy but has to be an agent for growth.--- INFA

“The mediation by the serpent was necessary. Evil can seduce man, but cannot become man.”

--- Franz Kafka

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2019

Harijan Colony: Call for pragmatic approach

CHIEF Minister, Conrad Sangma has assured the Union Cabinet Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal MP, Harsimrat Kaur Badal that the residents of the contentious Sweeper's Colony would not be imperiled. But this does not solve the long term problem which is that of a slum in the vicinity of the largest market of Meghalaya, which is bursting at the seams. This issue which should have been dealt with pragmatism decades ago had been left to simmer until it took the form of a civil unrest last year. Very quickly an issue which is about removing a housing colony from a market place has transformed into a human rights issue with the residents of the colony claiming that they have rights to the place which cannot be alienated.

On May 31, this year, the officials of the Shillong Municipal Board served notices to residents of the colony to prove their ownership of land in the area. In the first place the question of ownership of land is a contentious one since the residents were provided living quarters by the Government of the time for doing rendering certain compulsory services which the locals were unwilling to execute. The land and building therefore should, to all intents and purposes belong to the state. This is true of all living quarters provided by Government to its employees. They cannot claim the land and building as their own and in fact have to vacate the place on superannuation. It is the onus of the Shillong Municipal Board to ensure that regular census of the residents is taken so that only those serving under the Government of Meghalaya were entitled to live there. But the Board failed in its primary duty. The Government too has failed to persuade the residents to shift to an alternative space created for them until the issue snowballed last year.

Now the residents of the colony have been asked to furnish information about their being legitimate employees of the Government and hence entitled to the living quarters. This, the Board said, was required in order to prepare both a long term and short term policy vis-à-vis the Colony. The idea is also to establish how many employees are actually working with the Shillong Municipal Board and other government departments. Needless to say the Colony now houses many non-workers too and has transformed into a commercial space that is rented out to different companies. The question then is who is collecting the rent from these commercial outlets. This was not what it was meant to be.

The Sweeper Colony issue calls for a pragmatic solution without allowing it to degenerate into a chauvinistic tug of war.

June 22 is fast approaching. In our localized context, we have a long list of local holidays. While these are significant in their own right; one might also argue that 22nd of June which is now celebrated as 'Thomas Jones Day' is the most significant of them all. The validation of the argument stems from the fact that in today's time and age, literature is not only the hallmark of any society; rather it is also an indication of its progress. There is a common saying that 'culture is an identity of a people and without culture a people is dead'. The point to be noted here is that within this culture is the inherent built of literature as the ultimate indication of the progress of a civilized people. As a scope, literature is huge; however, its initiation streams from a combination of a 'few symbols' commonly called 'alphabets'. As 'few' as they are, they are the DNA for the growth of any culture/people. In particular, it defines the nature of a people, their status and standing in comparison to others and the safeguarding and promotion of one's own literary works. It is in relation to these 'terms of reference' that this man named Thomas Jones appeals of such importance thereby calling a need to celebrate him as a significant character. Nonetheless and amidst all this, what exactly is the significance of Thomas Jones? Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, the arrival of Thomas Jones must be one of the most important developments in the journey of the Khasi community. He and his wife Anne Jones undertook the nearly seven month long journey by starting from Liverpool, England on 25th November, 1840. They reached Calcutta on 23rd April, 1841 and finally arrived at the hills of Sohra on June 22, 1841 amidst the monsoon. His zeal to work as a missionary in a mission field in India did not flinch despite being rejected unceremoniously in the first instance by the London Missionary Society. Accordingly, it was the Welsh Calvinistic Foreign Missionary Society which decided to send Thomas Jones to India as a missionary and based on the references, suggestions and recommendations of Jacob Tomlin. The Khasi Hills was chosen as the mission field. Once at Sohra, by and by started the journey of experience

The significance of Thomas Jones

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

and acclimatization, evangelism and preaching. However, these were accompanied by trials and challenges; heartaches and unbearable pain. He lost his child and wife and the latter part of his life was a sad story which ended with his death on 16th September, 1849 and buried at Scottish Church Cemetery, Calcutta. Nonetheless and amidst all this hardship, Thomas Jones was able to give the most significant gift to our community. Here, the wonderful journey of the initiation and development of the Khasi alphabets unfolded and took shape; and as they say, the rest is history!

“Through his mission exertions he also contributed a great deal in relation to other aspects of everyday life. During his time at Sohra, his practices and initiatives can be termed as unconventional and revolutionary.”

Secondly, it does not need further discourse to underline the fact that Thomas Jones came to Sohra with the mindset of a missionary. He was a missionary in thought and practice and intention and ultimate goal. He came to our hills with a Christian mindset under the Presbyterian system with the drive to evangelize the indigenous people in and around Sohra. However, what he thought and set out to do can only be termed as a contrast to what he actually did and ultimately achieved. Here, it must be extensively noted that Thomas Jones realized that 'it would be meaningless/impossible/difficult to preach the Gospel to the people unless they know how to write and read'. The 'writing' part is important as it would enshrine long-term what is being preached and administered. Thus, started the epic journey to devise 'alphabets' as per the spoken patter of the then 'Khasias' (at Sohra) and based upon the Roman script. As such, in the process he spent years in research and development through mingling with the locals of the time whereby he applied a great degree

of observation and analysis. The ultimate outcome of this tedious exercise is a wonderful combination of 22 symbols (which were gradually improved and increased in the succeeding years) now known as the 'Khasi Alphabets'. As mundane as it might seem at the time, this might be argued as the most significant of all developments/achievements/inventions in the Khasi context. These alphabets became the 'begin all' of what we are today and where we stand in relation to our literature and culture.

Thirdly, Thomas Jones is way much more in significance than just being 'The

invisibly supported his missionary cause. He used (knowingly/unknowingly) the societal affinity approach for spiritual resourcefulness. Importantly, this 'approach' is still being used today (example, missionary schools in/for mission fields).

Fourthly, what is the scope of commemorating 'Thomas Jones Day'? There is a critical (maybe, controversial) point to be noted here that although Thomas Jones was a person with missionary zeal under the Presbyterian system, the 'idea' of 'Thomas Jones and the Khasi Alphabets' is totally pluralistic in nature and transcends across and over all denominations and faiths. As such, Thomas Jones Day is about this 'idea' and its celebration. Hence, this auspicious day is to be viewed and revered pluralistically without confining ourselves to the denomination he actually belonged to. After all, the alphabets are for and they belong to everyone. As such, Thomas Jones belongs to everyone! On viewing the matter from such a perspective, maybe there will be a more inclusive and holistic celebration of the day not undermined by the bigotry of denomination.

On the other hand, the initiatives and petitions put forth for inclusion of Khasi in the Eighth schedule of the Constitution of India is a giant leap towards an everlasting legacy. Here, the efforts of the Khasi Authors' Society is to be widely appreciated. However, all of this will lose its real meaning if we fail to acknowledge Thomas Jones as an 'idea' that belongs to all and thereby is to be appreciated/celebrated holistically across the wide spectrum of the Khasi society.

Lastly, the intent of this article is not to undermine Thomas Jones as a missionary. By all means, he was that. However, a closer look at his life and his work in our hills depicts more of his efforts/achievements as a social transformist (or if you like, a social engineer). He brought the gospel, but he also changed the mindset of the people. This is a remarkable feat and it must be acknowledged. Most importantly, Thomas Jones and his alphabets can bring the Khasi society even closer. Alas, there can be nothing more significant than this!

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

Doctors strike blurs Mamata's image in Bengal

BJP set to take advantage of her administrative lapses

By Barun Das Gupta

A clash between junior doctors and relatives and friends of a patient who died in the government-run NRS Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata on June 10 night has brought the entire public health care system in West Bengal to a grinding halt. Doctors in all government hospitals in the State have gone on strike demanding adequate police protection for their safety. The strike has brought the medical fraternity all over the country in support of their West Bengal brethren.

What led to the clash? The initial narrative was that an aged patient, Mohammed Sayeed, died in the hospital in the evening after he was given an injection. The relatives of the dead patient alleged that the doctors had given a "wrong" injection. An altercation followed. The situation worsened after the doctors allegedly refused to issue a death certificate and release the body unless the patient party tendered an apology to the doctors. Af-

ter further altercation, the relatives left the hospital, threatening that they would come back later.

They did come back in the dead of night in several trucks and motor bikes. The doctors allege that about two hundred people entered the hospital and started beating up the junior doctors and interns who were injured, including an intern who was badly hit on the head and grievously injured. He is recovering now. But the junior doctors of NRS Hospital went on a lightning strike demanding safety. Gradually, junior doctors in all government hospitals in the State went on "cease work".

“There is another view that points out that on several occasions in the past, doctor-patient clashes have taken place in both government and private hospitals but such isolated incidents never took the form of agitation since 1984.”

One view is that for all these reasons, resentment was growing among the doctors over a long period and the NRS incident lit the fuse. There is another view that points out that on several occasions in the past, doctor-patient clashes have taken place in both government and private hospitals but such isolated incidents never took the form of agitation since 1984, that has been witnessed this time, affecting all government hospitals across the State. Such incidents never evoked protests in the medical fraternity across the country starting with the reputable AIIMS hospital in Delhi.

They suggest that the chain of events in the last few days indicates an unseen hand which is coordinating and orchestrating the movement across the country. They point out that immediately after the clash at NRS hospital following the death of Mohammed Sayeed, West Bengal BJP leader Mukul Roy said that "one particular community" was responsible for the clashes. Since then, "one particular community" has been the target of a State-wide whisper campaign.

This, however, does not absolve the Chief Minister of her share of the blame. When the doctors demanded that she visit the NRS hospital and talk to them on the spot, she took the stand that she would not visit the hospital. The doctors would have to come to meet her. Meanwhile, she visited the SSKM Hospital, the best run government hospital in the State, but would not go to the NRS. This haughtiness of the Chief Minister precipitated the crisis even more as obduracy of one side evoked obduracy on the other side too.

This is clear that Mamata is feeling severe political strains due to the continuing rise in her rival BJP's strength. She could have solved the problem at the initial stage through deft handling, but she saw the hidden hand of BJP complacency behind the agitation. One hopes that she takes proper lesson from this Doctors strike and corrects her approach.(IPA Service)

Improving the academic performance of students

Editor, Education in Meghalaya has made phenomenal progress since it became a full-fledged State in 1972. The Government of Meghalaya has done considerable job in providing facilities for the uplift and continuous growth of schools in all corners of the State.

Meghalaya also attempts to universalize elementary education. Since the inception of the State, the main thrust has been extension of educational facilities in the backward areas and the enrolment of 'out of school,' children. The State has therefore, launched various programmes to attract children to school, to stop drop-out and stagnation in a way to bring qualitative and quantitative development.

Today education is playing a dominant role in bringing about new changes in society. It is aptly remarked that education is responsible for the conservation and transmission of culture. But still, most schools in rural ar-

reas have unattractive school environment, lack of proper infrastructure and insufficient teaching materials which work as a demotivating force for the retention of students.

School performance has been a subject of considerable importance and interest in a developing country like India, especially so, in the state of Meghalaya. This state has emerged as one that is ready to face the future with hope and promise. But it is undeniable that every year in Meghalaya in any school examination whether it may be internal or external, a substantial proportion of students fail. The results of the Secondary School Leaving Certificate examination under the Meghalaya

Board of School Education reveals that still a sizeable proportion of the students fail every year. The huge wastage of money and human resource under the Board is a matter of concern for all.

One of the most important outcomes of any educational set up is the academic achievement of the students. So, the educational status of the student is depicted through academic achievement. Nowa-

days, this trend has been intensively felt by academicians, parents and students. Therefore, academic achievement has become an index of a child's future in this highly competitive world. But low achievement and school failure is a problem of gigantic proportions for almost all the countries of the world and it is a curse to the educational system. Why does a student underachieve or fail? Does he/she gets low grades or fails due to his/her low intelligence level? Is the cause of high or low achievement associated with some personality dimensions or socio-economic background? A close look at the problems of failure reveals many questions, the answers to which are not yet very clear. Low achievement or school failure is a colossal problem and it needs a thorough probe. There are various factors which are associated with these problems but these factors have not been studied.

The Government, the concerned department and the board of education needs to put together a team of intellectuals to attempt to probe this problem by making a comparative analysis of high, average

and low achievers in relation to intelligence, various personality dimensions and socio-economic background, thereby, making all efforts towards improving the academic performance of the pupils. An attempt of this sort would therefore definitely help the parents, teachers and educationists in creating a congenial atmosphere which may contribute to the scholastic achievement of the students. This speaks a lot about the need for taking up such investigation. Let us take this step and innovate to see if such investigation brings forth changes which will equip the students with the best facilities to attain excellence in academic achievement.

Yours etc.,
Phrangshai Hynniewta,
Via email

Eden Garden & World Cup 2019

Editor,
A record number of matches had to be abandoned because of rains during the current ICC

World Cup Cricket Tournament 2019, including that between England & Wales being played in England. Most of the stadia around the world are having arrangements for covering the playing pitch area only and rest of the outfield and ground area remains uncovered and remains wet for quite some time even after rains stop and resumption of play. In such a situation Bhuvneshwar Kumar slipped and fell prey to a hamstring injury while bowling fourth ball in his third over against Pakistan yesterday at Old Trafford. It is uncertain whether Bhuvneshwar Kumar ruled out of the match yesterday would recover fast from the tight hamstring injury for participating in the rest of the tournament matches.

The Eden Gardens Stadium of Kolkata is equipped with a unique and fool-proof arrangement for covering the entire ground up to the boundary perimeter. During spells of shower while a match is on, implementation of the system for completion of covering the

total ground area hardly takes about 10 minutes. Cricket Control Boards/ Authorities of all the cricketing nations may take a cue from Eden Garden Stadium, Kolkata to have similar arrangements for covering the entire ground surface to effectively counter spells of rains ensuring safety of players when national or international tournament matches are on.

Therefore it can be said that East or West, Eden Garden is the best. ICC may consider accrediting ranks to Cricketing stadiums on the basis of speedy systemic arrangements available to cover-up the entire ground when threatened by disruptive unpredictable spells of shower to reduce play-stoppage

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay,
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.

“Nothing happens to any thing which that thing is not made by nature to bear.”

--- Marcus Aurelius Antoninus

The Shillong Times

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Bihar Medical Crisis

ACUTE Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) has caused over one hundred deaths of children in Bihar's Muzaffarpur. This disease affects mostly children and young adults. Encephalitis is a swelling of the brain often caused by viruses, with symptoms like high fever, convulsions and headaches. Recent outbreaks of AES, also known as "brain fever," have been linked to the lychee fruit, which contains an unusual combination of amino acids that disrupt glucose production leading to hypoglycemia which can, in turn, exacerbate the AES infection with fatal consequences. Most of the reported deaths have taken place in Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital (SKMCH). That this medical emergency should come at a time when the medical fraternity was on strike over the attack on a resident doctor of NRS Hospital in Bengal is unfortunate. Although the SKMCH superintendent has said that that the countryside doctors' strike would not have any adverse impact on encephalitis patients, that is poor consolation. The strike has reportedly paralysed all health services in Bihar even as the state is facing intense heat wave. Thankfully the strike was called off Monday evening.

The LANCET medical journal has cited a research study by Dr Jacob John, well-known Vellore-based pediatrician and epidemiologist that put the blame on the lychee fruit for the transfer of the virus on to humans. But other pediatricians claim that Dr John's paper has been grossly misinterpreted. Most parents of children suffering from AES have also said that their children never ate lychees. How does a one year old eat lychees? Evidently there is more to AES than its connection to lychees and this has to be substantiated by better research. It is also a fact that most of the children affected by AES are from the Dalit community or are very poor and undernourished. Dr Arun Shah, a Muzaffarpur-based pediatrician, who has been following AES for more than 20 years, and is executive member of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics said it is wrong of the ministers and the bureaucracy to blame lychees. Dr John's main findings were that this fruit contains a toxin called methylenecyclopropylglycine (MCPG). But the authors never blamed litchi for AES. The causal factor is malnutrition and not the lychee. In fact Dr Shah maintains that lychees are only a triggering factor for malnourished children as the toxin MCPG can lead to hypoglycaemia (fall in sugar levels). Dr Shah says if a healthy child eats litchi, s/he will not suffer from AES. He urges governments, both central and state, to admit that malnutrition is the cause and not to run away from their responsibility to deal with malnutrition by putting the onus on poor lychee farmers. AES actually is a wake-up call for all other states as well since medical research is paramount in conquering diseases.

Your freedom ends where my nose begins and one man's food is another man's poison. Two adages, a succinct testimony to the ongoing maelstrom thanks to our *netagan's* handling of two incidents, one in West Bengal and the other in *ultra-pulta* UP. Which underscore the ugly side of power out of control!

In the first, life came to a grinding halt across India when junior doctors went on strike in support of two colleagues' in Kolkata who were attacked and seriously injured by relatives of a patient who died at a hospital. Compounding matters, Chief Minister Mamata's high-handedness by threatening doctors to resume work resulted in over 400 senior doctors of various State-run hospitals resigning. Even as no hospital would like its doctors to be hit or bludgeoned, Mamata too should exercise restraint and apologize.

In the second, a journalist is arrested by the UP police for posting a video 'maligning' Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath by a woman claiming she had sent a marriage proposal on Twitter and Facebook to him. He was released after three days by the Supreme Court asserting "the right to liberty is non-negotiable" and "free speech cannot be gagged for fear of the mob."

You could have fooled me. For yet another *presswallah* was thrashed, stripped, urinated in his mouth and arrested by policemen for covering a train derailment. In Bengaluru, Chief Minister Kumaraswamy jailed another for "belittling us. Do we look like cartoon characters to you? Who gave you the authority?"

Dittoes, mercurial Mamata who imprisoned *bête noire* BJP's youth leader for a meme she posted on Facebook which superimposed her face on actress Priyanka Chopra's Met Gala 2019 look. She was released on bail but asked to tender an unconditional written apology.

In Tripura too, the police arrested two newsmen for posting "fake news" about Chief Minister Biplab Deb's personal life on Facebook. In Orissa a journalist was jailed for a "derogatory and very, very objectionable" tweet about erotic sculptures in the 13th century Konark Sun

Growing Chauvinism

Bandh Karo Ye Natak!

By Poonam I Kaushish

Temple, another 19-year old Uttarakhand village lad was detained for sharing an 'offensive and morphed' photo of Prime Minister Modi.

Sadly, violence and intolerance is the rhetoric of our times. Pick any newspaper or surf any TV channel any day. Splashes of social schism gore into news headlines. Curse all you want, it's for a cause, remember. Undoubtedly, India thrives on protests. Which has perfected the old saying "jiski laathi uski bhains"!

Turn North, South, East or West the story is the same. In fact, no day passes without a strike somewhere or an arrest for intolerable behaviour. Be it a *mohalla*, district or State.

Worse, don't like a tweet? Arrest the person. Hate a film? Collect a crowd and burn the theatres down? Don't like a novelist's book? Get the Government to ban it or issue a fatwa against the author.

Shockingly, over 50 people were arrested last year for social media posts. Whereby any film, book or story which pokes fun or is out of sync with our leaders thinking, cause and outlook is considered an act of sedition and the writer or film-maker arrested.

Worse, don't like a tweet? Arrest the person. Hate a film? Collect a crowd and burn the theatres down? Don't like a novelist's book? Get the Government to ban it or issue a *fatwa* against the author.

Raising, a moot point: Are strikes and cartoons, tweets, memes on social media actually expressions of freedom or are they means of suppressing fundamental rights in a democracy? Is the polity afraid of the clash of ideas in our public life?

Arguably, not a few would simply shrug it off with "sab chalta hai attitude, this is *Mera Bharat Mahan* at its rudest and crassest best." Many would assert "how does it matter?" The cause is immaterial. It is all about registering ones protest, the louder the better. Success is measured in terms of causing maximum dislocation and

discomfiture to people.

Instances are plenty. Remember an innocuous cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was arrested for sedition by Mamata in Kolkata. Before him another of his tribe famed Shankar cartoons of Ambedkar in NCERT school books were posthumously removed. Tamil Nadu banned noted actor-director Kamal Hasan's 100 crore magna opus *Viswaroopam* which dealt with the issue of terrorism on the fallacious that it would hurt the sentiments of 'unknown' Muslim groups and create a law and order problem. Notwithstanding if India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, called sedition laws "objectionable and obnoxious".

What our leaders seems

every joke, wit, satire, humour or defiance treated as a monster.

In this milieu who do we turn too? Certainly, we do not need self-appointed guardians to tell us what we can see or read, what we can wear, eat or drink. We should be free to believe what we want, whom and how we should love, worship the way we want. Else, at this rate the day is not far when India could soon resemble Saudi Arabia or N Korea which have dispensed with producing movies altogether and punish those who lampoon leaders.

At the same time our doctors need to understand that democracy is neither mobocracy nor a license to create bedlam. It is a fine balance between rights and duties, liberties and responsibilities. One's freedom pre-supposes another's responsibilities and liberty. Paralyzing the State, to get attention and policy reversals only exasperates the public and inconveniences them. Using strong-arm tactics gets one nowhere as temporary respite is no answer for building a socially cohesive society.

Where does India go from here? Our *netas* need to see how public figures across the globe are more tolerant about what's written or depicted about them. A classic example of political freedom is former Italian millionaire-playboy-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi who was mercilessly satirized in the print and online forums globally. Americans and Britishers take a lot of liberties *vis-à-vis* their rulers.

In sum, the message has to go out clearly that the right of the citizen is paramount. No leader or group can threaten violence, and if they do, they lose their democratic right to be heard. We are a civilized democracy, remember coercion has a thousand fathers, while liberty is an orphan. As George Orwell said, if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. Can liberty survive in a country where even jest tends to get criminalised? Our leaders must desist from using narrow-mindedness and prejudices as pedestals to stand on to be seen. At some point we have to stand up and bellow, "*Bandh karo ye natak!*" — INFA

Besides, if politicians behave preposterously as some of them often do, why do they and others expect not to be mocked? Don't we live in a free country? Ridiculing the ridiculous is not and cannot be a crime, at least in a democracy. One cannot live life in the slim strip called the official and

Bengal went on strike over a brutal attack on their colleagues by the relatives of a patient who died during treatment.

Patients were at the receiving end with scheduled surgeries postponed in many government and private hospitals. It is not known how many patients died due to non-availability of treatment during the strike in West Bengal. It is true that the doctors' strike has caused untold miseries to people especially the patients and a strike like this should not be resorted to in the future. Assault on doctors is the rarest of rare cases and the doctor community declaring strike without thinking about its aftermath is highly unwarranted. Since doctors deal with the life of patients, they must know that they are last resort for patients, who in turn look to doctors with much expectation and trust them implicitly. Doctors resorting to strike cease to be doctors and they become like the fence (The fence is erected to protect the crop.) which gorges on the crop.

Yours etc.,
Tyrone D'Brass,
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

Bihar govt ill-equipped to deal with AES epidemic

Health dept doctors lack therapeutic proficiency

By Arun Srivastava

The utter lack of therapeutic proficiency of the doctors in Bihar has been primarily responsible for death of over 125 kids due to AES in the district of Muzaffarpur alone. In Muzaffarpur 125 kids died during the last fortnight due to inept and careless handling of the patients. No parents even raised their voices to protest doctors' apathy. Their fraternal bondage has been so strong that even in this situation the doctors in Bihar did not forget to respond to one day strike call given by the IMA. Undeniably this is the highest order of lack of sensibility and responsibility.

Encephalitis which has become a recurrent health problem for Dalits and extremely poor people of the state, does not motivate the doctors to give their hundred per cent to these hapless kids. In the last ten years not less than one thousand kids have died due to this disease.

Some doctors have amassed wealth in the name of carrying out research on it. Of course one breakthrough has been achieved and it is rechristening of encephalitis as "chamaki" (a local dialect). That doctors have absolutely failed to fight the disease is evident from the fact that instead of applying their medical wisdom to tackle the crisis, they have been depending on the diagnosis of the rural quacks.

While the number of patients is swelling every day, it's only recently that a Pediatrics ICU has been

After his visit to the area the Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, an MP from Bihar, said, "The entire state is in shock over the death of innocent children. We are with the family members of the affected and ready to provide any kind of assistance". But his claim was vehemently refuted by the father of a patient admitted at SKMH who said that there are no arrangements in the hospital. Doctors are not paying proper attention. Since midnight, there are no doctors, only a few nurses are on duty.

One feels pity at the assertion of some research scholars and doctors attributing the deaths to consumption of litchi. Though encephalitis has been invading Bihar for not less than ten years, a report appearing in *Lancet* magazine blamed litchi for the disease. "Children die in Bihar state from a deadly brain disease believed to be linked to a toxic substance found in the fruit". But they have no explanation for why the disease was also occurring in the areas where litchi is not grown.

It is worth mentioning that most of the kids who died are in the age group of 1 to 4 years. Do these researchers want us to believe that one year old kid could regularly eat litchi? The general argument has been that while the parents go for plucking the fruit, he kids also accompany them and also eat litchi.

Nitish has been in power since 2005 in alliance with the BJP, barring of course the nearly one an half year period when he ruled with RJD.

sanctioned at Sri Krishna Memorial Medical College, Muzaffarpur. Despite deaths becoming a recurrent annual feature the basic health infrastructure and hygiene remained inadequate.

It is shocking to notice that the state government has not shown alacrity in fighting the epidemic. The so called icon of good governance and a compassionate chief minister Nitish Kumar, announced an ex-gratia of Rs 4 Lakh each to families of the children, but so far could not make out time to meet and console the parents of the deceased kids. This is highest order of insensitivity demonstrated by Nitish. How could a person claiming to be servant of people let the victims lurch?

His Health Minister, Mangal Pandey trying to present the façade of a government that cares for Dalits and poor said: "We have been carrying awareness campaign in Muzaffarpur and adjoining areas," but despite this, deaths are taking place. It is a shame that though the disease has been hounding the kids for last ten year and crores of money has been spent on research, the government was still not ready to fight the dreaded disease. IN this backdrop his claim that government was doing everything to contain the crisis is a misleading statement.

Nitish has been in power since 2005 in alliance with the BJP, barring of course the nearly one an half year period when he ruled with RJD. It is a matter of disgrace that during his long stay in power he did not activate the health mechanism to find out the real nature of the disease. Why have the doctors who invented the role of litchi in the spread of the disease been maintaining a passive silence all these years.

Some of the parents at the hospital revealed that their kids did not eat litchi but even they were attacked with AES. How can this syndrome be explained?

In fact the farmers and people associated with the Litchi plantation view the allegation with suspicion. They feel that it was a propaganda against litchi. In recent times litchi has emerged as the major source of revenue. Despite many years of investigation, researchers have failed to isolate the virus, or any other agent responsible for causing it. Ironically so far no significant link could be established between litchi and encephalitis.

A total of 4400 cases of AES were reported between 2009 and 2014, an average of 733 cases per year. Around 1309 deaths were reported. Interestingly according to a new study, it's the land and not the produce that was causing the unexplained neurological damage. In 2014, 122 children died in the Muzaffarpur region. The new study, published in *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, found that a number of pesticides which has been banned since 2011 caused the brain damage among children.

The claim of the Nitish government of being proactive in fighting the dreaded disease is exposed in the move of the Centre and Bihar Government to undertake a special vaccination drive immunising children in districts of Bihar affected by the killer Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) on June 22 and 23. This move should have been taken well before the months of March and April when the disease was likely to descend. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Meghalaya moves at snail pace

Editor,
Meghalaya is a snail in every aspect. This letter particularly focuses on the delay of seat allotment for the MBBS course through the State quota. Medical institutions across the country commence their first academic year in the first week of August. But here in our state, it is a noted trend that the ranking list is usually released in the third week of July and in the previous year, screening of eligible candidates was done on July 31. In the rest of the country, by July 31, the students who are selected to pursue MBBS studies are already present at their respective colleges. This past year, seat allotment was done on August 21 and by the time our students joined their respective institutes, they had already missed nearly a month's classes. Medical studies as we all know are a tough call. It is essential for a student to be present from day one. It is during the first few weeks of classes that a student is introduced to each and every subject and the where the basics of each

subject are taught. But owing to the unnecessary delay, our students have to struggle to learn on their own what they've missed out. In a busy medical college, it cannot be expected that the teachers begin each subject from the start. There is difficulty in coping up and the first terminal exam is usually held in September. This may lead to a higher probability of failure only because of the delay caused by our administration. In Assam this year, 23,108 candidates appeared for the NEET exam and just a few days back, the ranking list was released. Perhaps two weeks later, seats would have already been allotted. In Meghalaya only 2515 candidates appeared for the exams and yet we are so slow in publishing the results. Why can't we keep pace with the rest of the country?

As an addendum, it is also suggested that the number of medical seats through the government be increased. It would be of significant help to many aspirants and to the state too.

Yours etc.,
N Lyngdoh,
Via email

Make better use of Parliament's time

Editor,
The recent oath taking ceremony for the 17th Lok Sabha witnessed several members affirming their oath in different regional languages while assuming their position. The day-long event saw all members reading the transcript of the oath presented in the presence of the pro-tem speaker. The event witnessed many first time members setting foot into the August House as parliamentarians but the entire day was wasted without any business. The day was reserved only for the oath taking ceremony, which holds no relevance in today's busy world and resulted in wastage of tax payers' money. The archaic oath reading ceremony could have been replaced by mere signing of the papers through necessary parliamentary procedures and the business session could have started from day one itself.

As there are many

crucial amendment bills pending in the Lok Sabha which require sufficient time for necessary discussions before being passed, the Hon'ble Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs should now ensure that unwarranted and archaic procedures including oath taking ceremonies are dispensed with so that sufficient time is given to the House to discuss important issues.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Via email

Doctor's strike

Editor,
At last doctors have called off their week-long strike in West Bengal as thousands of patients went through a traumatic time. Healthcare services were severely hit across the country on Monday as doctors wearing helmets and forming human chains went on a strike in solidarity with their protesting West Bengal colleagues. The Indian Medical Association called for a nationwide shutdown withdrawing non-emergency health services after junior doctors in West

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi -15

“Wherever you go, no matter what the weather, always bring your own sunshine.”

--- Anthony J. D'Angelo

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2019

Simultaneous polls

THE holding of an all-party meet on Wednesday within days of the swearing in of the new NDA ministry, and at the very start of the first parliament session, to discuss the theme of holding 'simultaneous polls' to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, is significant for more reasons than one. On the positive side, it indicated the seriousness of the Prime Minister to effect reforms of a serious nature in various fields. This might also be proof of the speed with which the new government wants to take matters forward.

The reason cited for simultaneous polls is to avoid waste of huge time, energy and funds through iterations of polls here and there. The suggestion involves synchronising assembly polls in two phases; polls for one group of 12 states or so being held along with the parliament polls and the others grouped for polls by the middle of the five years of parliament. In the past, both the Election Commission and the Law Commission had favoured simultaneous polls – as was happening in the first two decades of Independent India.

On the negative side, however, all shades of the political spectrum do not share the same enthusiasm of PM Modi – who first mooted it in 2016— and their anxieties about the PM using this to his and the BJP's advantage is understandable. There is a chance of the popularity of the PM being of help to the BJP in states too in a more pronounced manner if both LS and assembly polls are held together. But, it is not necessary that such a consolidation could take place, because regional leaders today are equally popular in several states.

Predictably the Congress as also several regional entities like the Trinamool Congress, the BSP and AAP have decided to keep off the PM's meet on Wednesday. In a general sense, this might be unjustified. When the government takes a call on a serious matter like this, the view of the Opposition is important and they should have been there to present their stands or apprehensions. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, while refusing to participate in the discussions, has instead sought a white paper on simultaneous polls before a discussion takes place. BSP's Mayawati wants a discussion rather on use or misuse of electronic voting machines. At this juncture, these stands could be viewed as diversionary tactics, and ones that display a lack of readiness for cooperation with the ruling party at the Centre or with the PM himself. This is at odds with parliamentary democracy.

SCO at Bishkek

Much ado about nothing!

By Dr. D.K. Giri

such a scenario, what is the sanctity, integrity and authenticity of such a Resolution? What purpose does it serve for India? Should India latch on to such a network that is Beijing-led, when ironically, China is India's biggest threat, and countries like US expect India to be the bulwark against China.

What is SCO? How and why did it come into being? It started originally as Shanghai Five on 26 April 1996, at the behest of China, which wanted to expand its market and influence to the Central Asian region. The original five members were China, Russia, Kazakhstan,

China, and we were chanting Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai. Narendra Modi is said to be a hard-nosed leader. It could be that South Block and NAMO thought, Russia is pushing us into SCO, we would have the scope to deal with both the super powers in the region, China and Russia, which would help us counter Pakistan.

Secondly, India was driven by triple interests of energy security, connectivity and trade in Central Asia, that is hydro-carbon rich. Some observers argue it will give India an extra forum to interact with Pakistan in absence of SAARC. All these arguments do not hold since SCO economy and geo-politics do not favour India. On the other hand, India creates misgivings among her more reliable allies like Japan, USA, Israel, South Korea and Australia.

At the cost of repetition in this column, New Delhi should never fall back even inadvertently to its old days of non-alignment or balancing and straddling the competing interests of the emerging blocks. The US, moving close to India, is wary of New Delhi procuring S-400 anti-missile systems from Russia, allowing Huawei for 5G telecom bid, and buying oil from Iran. New Delhi will have to find substitutes for these or take US into confidence. Given Beijing's manoeuvres in the region, New Delhi can no longer run with the hare and hunt with the hound. It has to make a choice.

Also SCO itself lacks full commitment of members. Any alliance with China is a matter of convenience, not conviction. The Central Asian countries cooperate in other forums too, like Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) of Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA) and so on. These dilute the central importance of SCO for them.

However, in international affairs, a country has to be a part of various, multiple forums. In that sense, New Delhi could continue to associate with SCO, at least to retain the past goodwill and friendship with Russia. It could expect no more from SCO. Let us face the facts. ---INFA

(The writer is Prof, International Politics, JMI)

Will Budget give sops or are new taxes inevitable?

Challenges Modi faces

By Lalit Sethi

In spite of winning absolute majority in the 17th Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi realizes that he faces a number of challenges in his second term. It is not a bed of roses, though not even a crown of thorns he wears.

The Government is concentrating on the work in hand that is financial business and its economic goals. The Budget Session of the new Parliament, which has been joined into the Monsoon Session, is being sought to be kept low key as the government is keeping the Opposition informed about its plans.

Yet, what are the priorities of the new Budget? Has it to be full of sops for the people, the farmers, the poorest of the poor, housing, shelter, toilets, schools for children, health care, roads, especially village roads, wells, water bodies, rain harvesting, and bank deposits of Rs. 6,000 into the accounts of all small farmers. The Rural Development Minister in the Modi Sarkar has claimed that tens of millions are now receiving the money; and under the Jana Dhan Yojana, says 320 mil-

report, the farmer must be paid one and half times the cost of growing food grain and all produce. The big farmers owning more than five to ten hectares or acres grow flowers and horticulture or exotic organic vegetables and fruits; not all of them earn good prices, but there is much wastage all around as harvests remain on the ground uncared.

The Prime Minister would like to avert regular disruptions and walk-outs during the Budget Session. He has sought cooperation of the Opposition and even offered to recognize the Congress as the regular Opposition and its leader even though the Congress is short of three members of the required 55 seats. Mr Modi has also stated that it is not the large majority of numbers in the House he has that matters, but the debating skills of the members that ultimately count and he would wish to keep that point in mind in his dealings with the Opposition.

The Congress Opposition has responded to that point graciously and offered to cooperate on issues of national interest,

“The Government started its in-nings by releasing the draft of the New Education Policy, but quickly withdrew the threat to impose Hindi as the link language in place of English and even modified the three language formula.”

lion new bank accounts have been opened between 2015 and 2019.

Or has the Finance Minister to mobilize taxes in a big way to finance all the promises the new Government has made? The treasury needs tons of money to keep its word. It claims that the work the Modi Government has done and is now promising with redoubled efforts has won it the 2019 General Elections. Its promises are not empty. It has lived up to them and is redoubling its endeavours to keep the pledges it has been making and is making every day.

By the year 2022 it really hopes to double the farmers' incomes because 500 million poor women farmers are doing a yeoman's job on their tiny farms and earning up to Rs. 5,000 a year. The Government claims that alone will double the poorest farmers' income. Rural Development Minister Tomar claims that even West Bengal has been doing good work on making rural roads and housing for the poor in spite of being ruled by an Opposition party.

Yet why are farmers committing suicide in large numbers? Is it because 30 per cent of the people of India are poorly fed or starving? Is it because 56 per cent of all farm land is dry land or parched and 33 to 50 per cent or even more of India faces acute water shortage, with Tamil Nadu having had no rain for 90 days or more.

Could the Modi Government find solutions to these problems in the weeks, months and years to come? It thinks and claims it could, but the ground realities are harsh. They know it even as they claim that food grain production has risen from 30 million tons in 1947 to 280 million tons a year in 2018, but the population has risen from 320 million to at least 1.3 billion this year. That is five times in population and nine times in grain production.

Yet the farmer is not paid a remunerative price for his produce. He cannot even sell all his produce; much of it has to be destroyed. Yet the Government says that in keeping with the Swaminathan Commission

but not the one on Triptle Talaq faced by Muslim women. Will the ruling party go slow on that issue since it lacks the numbers in the Rajya Sabha where voting on Bills becomes crucial if they have to be enacted by both Houses.

The Opposition and the National Democratic Alliance might feel that Mr. Modi has shown a degree of arrogance by treating them with disdain. The Government started its in-nings by releasing the draft of the New Education Policy, but quickly withdrew the threat to impose Hindi as the link language in place of English and even modified the three language formula.

After that withdrawal, it asked West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, to report on the deteriorating law and order situation in her State. She responded by saying that it was all right, but the Centre had already received reports from the Governor. There appeared to be a lurking threat of imposition of President's Rule or Governor's Rule, but the Centre appears to have held back the threat as it could be counter-productive because such a step would have led to countrywide protests and created tension, especially during the Budget Session of Parliament.

But even the dealings with NDA allies of the BJP like Janata Dal United, Shiv Sena and Ram Vilas Paswan have been far from smooth. JDU wanted two Cabinet positions as a coalition partner at the Centre, it was offered just one. The crafty Nitish Kumar declined even one seat and instead expanded the State Cabinet in coalition with the BJP, but offered no new position to BJP allies in the State. Shiv Sena and Paswan accepted one ministerial position each at the Centre, and continue to be unhappy. The BJP ties with National Democratic Alliance are far from smooth. Will they be papered over? Time will tell.

(Lalit Sethi is a journalist of long standing and a commentator on political and social issues)

“Note the spirit and intent of the above Resolution. If it is observed in the same spirit, the world would be a much better place, let alone the SCO region.”

Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Then SCO or Shanghai Pact came into existence in 2001 with inclusion of Uzbekistan. As Russia became increasingly wary of China's growing influence in the region, it wanted to rope in India to counter it. At the same time, China wanted to bring in its all-weather friend Pakistan to balance India. That is how India and Pakistan became full members in 2017.

SCO is theoretically driven by the 'Shanghai Spirit' - harmony, non-alignment and non-interference in others' internal matters; and the SCO charter effective from September 2013. The objectives enshrined in the charter include, "strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among member States research, technology and culture as well as in education, economy, energy, promoting their effective co-operation in politics, transport, tourism, environmental protection, joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, stability and security in the region." It seeks to fight the evils of 'terrorism, extremism and separatism'. It further commits to an "establishment of a democratic, fair and ra-

really confused our students.

We are now in the month of June and the need of the hour is to convene an urgent meeting of all HOD's (Physics) of St. Anthony's College, St Edmund's College, Shillong College, Lady Keane's and Tura and Jowai colleges. Meanwhile, I will be grateful if CBSE text books are switched too. The effort is not small but the text should be rid of the errors. Let our children who aim for Medicine, Engineering, Veterinary, Agriculture not be misled at the crucial stage of Class IX and X. On Chemistry and Biology I am not authorized to comment. Let the HOD's mentioned above in their respective subjects scrutinize the text.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem
Via email

When will terror end?

Editor,
In a fresh encounter with the security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district on Tuesday, two militants were killed and an Army jawan was martyred in the operation in Bijbehara area of South Kashmir district. The encounter started when

some density. This technique is used in sensing some internal organs of human body. It is superior to x-rays scanning as it does not cause harm to human cells unlike x-rays. The instrument which uses ultrasonic for getting the image waves travels through the tissues of the human body and get reflected from the region where there is a change in density. These reflected waves are converted into electric signals. These signals are then displayed on TV monitors or can be produced in films. The process is called Ultrasonography and help doctors to detect abnormalities such as stones in gall bladders and kidneys or tumors in different regions. Ultra sound waves of high intensity are employed to break small stones in kidneys into grains. The fine grains then get flushed out with urine.

Sonic boom: When the speed of moving object exceeds the velocity of sound the object is said to be moving with supersonic speed. The first such object was produced in 1948, in the form of supersonic jet planes. When sound producing objects move with speed higher than the speed of sound then it pro-

KHADC quagmire

Editor,
When an institution like the District Council starts to act in a responsive manner and applies its own checks and balances, it is a welcome step, but going on an over-drive mode such as to cause loss of employment of local youths of the state is detrimental to their future. It also sends wrong signals to investors who wish to invest and develop our state economy which obviously cannot be done by a State Government that relies on the central government for everything. Granted, that Swiggly or Rapido should have according to Mr Paul Lyngdoh, EM (Trade), KHADC, gone by the rules and regulations governing trade license but then did any authority take any initiative in summoning these firms and asking them to apply for a trading license before signing or entering into an agreement? If digitisation is the norm of the new Council it should start profiling all businesses run by non-tribals including those from other northeastern states who thrive on our resources. Let the law be equal for all.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Via email

Gross errors in MBoSE text books

Editor,
I wish to point out some extremely important issues related to the MBoSE Science text books of Classes IX, X and XII in the interest of our Science students. I do hope that though my findings are problematic only as far as Physics is concerned, others teaching Chemistry and Biology could also examine their subjects. The text is full of critical, unfounded information some of which are as follows:

Hearing aid: Ear trumpet is a device which is used by a person who is hard of hearing. Its shape is just like a trumpet. The narrow end is kept in the ear hole of a person who is hard of hearing, whereas the wider end faces the speaker. The waves received by the wider end of the trumpet are reflected into narrow end. This in turn increases the intensity of sound energy and hence a person who is hard of hearing can hear clearly.

Ultrasonography: The ultrasonic vibrations can be reflected from boundaries between materials of

“One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done.”

--- Marie Curie

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Jobs versus the law

THE sudden closure of 33 shops in a particular area of the city has raised a stink. Mr AL Hek the MLA representing the area and a minister in the MDA Government has naturally taken the matter head-on and argued that genuine non-tribal residents of the area should not be deprived of their livelihoods. Nongmysong where the shops are closed is a Scheduled Area hence the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District (Trading by Non-Tribals) Regulation 1954 is effective in the area. The Act clearly specifies that any trade or business for profit including other similar vocations requires a trading license from the District Council.

The Act also spells out clauses that restrict trading by non-tribals. It says, 'no person other than a tribal resident in the district shall carry on wholesale or retail trade or business within the Khasi Hills Autonomous District, except under a license issued in that behalf by an officer of the District Council duly authorized by the Executive Committee under provisions of this Regulation and the Rules made there-under. However, such license shall not be refused to a trader who has been carrying on such business within the District before the commencement of this Regulation, i.e. before 1954. If a trading license is refused, the grounds of refusal shall be recorded in writing after giving the applicant an opportunity to show-cause. However, no trading shall be deemed to be Benami when such trade is by any one spouse (one of whom is a tribal), consequent to a legal marriage, on behalf of the other or by any one of their legal issue. A non-tribal who is employed in any trade or business owned by a tribal shall obtain a clearance certificate from the Executive Committee to the effect that he is working as an employee or labourer of such tribal in the particular trade or business. What is of concern is the loss of jobs to young people post the closure of Swiggy and Rapido both of which are franchises with head offices elsewhere but which are catering to public needs. Many of those working in Swiggy are tribal young men. The Rapido bike taxi is intended to ease the traffic of Shillong. It would be easy to surmise that local taxi drivers would not be happy to see their business taken away by someone smarter. And Swiggy has become a household name as much as Domino's Pizza is. People needing to get their food home delivered efficiently are using Swiggy. The question is whether such franchises should also come under the District Councils since they are operating in non-scheduled areas.

Facing the 21st century with outdated ideas

By Patricia Mukhim

No sane person will deny their children access to education, no matter how poor the person is. But the fact is that poverty has made education inaccessible to many, despite the Right to Education Act. There are still thousands of kids that are out of school and doing menial jobs. With just one parent having to feed many mouths, education is beyond their grasp. And I dare say that the numbers of such children and teenagers who yearn to be in school but whose family circumstances are so precarious are growing every year. If these kids are asked why they want to go to school, the immediate answer is that they want to learn to read and write; to get out of the poverty trap and to be able to hold a job and better their stations in life. It is a failure of the state that there are still so many children out of school and of those who do have the good fortune to be in school, many just drop out before they pass high school. They are termed "drop-outs" which I think is a very disparaging term. The politically correct word for them would be, "out of school" children. Needless to say, teenagers who drop out of Class VII, VIII, IX or who fail their SSLC exams soon become the dregs of society because our system has not developed the capacity to address their specific handicaps. Yes, the state has come up with skills training but many don't fit into those modules because these 'out of school' youth are 'out of school' for a reason or several reasons and there are not enough safety nets which can capture them and work on their psyche, for, that is where the problem starts.

Let's face one fact. No single child is like the other one. Yet our schools are modelled to produce an assembly line of pass-outs who are tested on a single format and where creativity is not given any space at all. When I look at children today they seem to carry a heavy burden. The syllabus is huge; they all seem to need private tuitions in Mathematics and Science

and they have absolutely no time to play and sweat it out. They are addicted to their mobile phones and they are perpetually with their head phones on. Half the time they don't hear when you call them or are talking to them. They live in a world of their own which is like an escape mechanism because they find school to be an echo chamber. It's almost as if the mobile phone with its humungous range of apps offers them the comfort that the real world cannot. So where have we reached at this point in our history?

We are told that young people engage in virtual romance and are depressed when they break up. Yes, this and other issues are what we hear and discuss as adults and as parents but when it comes to finding solutions we don't seem to have any. They are out of reach because we need psychiatrists and counselling psychologists but have too few of them, even as mental illness has burgeoned and mainly because of internet addiction.

In this scenario, what education are children actually imbibing? Many say they find school and college boring because students these days know more than their teachers. Also, because teachers are not able to keep pace with the rapid technological progress of the present generation. Indeed technology is king and we are all trying to fit. This is a progress with no known trajectory. Since most young people live in a world of their own and they no longer accept do's and don'ts from grown-ups be they parents or teachers, they are also alienated from the social life that actually enriched the experiences of their parents and elders.

Today there are enough WhatsApp forwards that tell us on a daily basis what is wrong with the world; with us; with our young

ones. There are also enough sages and psychologists to advice us on what we should and should not be doing vis-a-vis our troubled kids but at the end of the day there really is no, "Do It Yourself (DIY) kit for handling children and young people. They need so much patience which busy parents of today just don't have enough of.

It is in this complex environment that most young parents are bringing up their kids. It's a daunting feeling to even answer their pointed questions. Kids today don't believe in beating around the bush. They are direct and they don't care if you hurt. I sometimes feel there is an emotion deficit in most of them, perhaps because they are more connected to gadgets than to humans. Many of them ask Alexa (the AI that is perhaps most affordable) for answers to difficult questions so why would they need their parents? Of course, Alexa is not supposed to know the state of mind of the person asking the question, but parents know and they can sense when their child is hurting or grappling with an emotional storm. That's the big difference and one hopes that parents understand that and don't allow Alexa to hijack their kids.

And now we are in the season of admissions into Higher Secondary schools and colleges. Those in Class XII are preparing to welcome freshers in their midst. Before they know it these students would have passed Class XII to move on to undergraduate colleges and as is the norm here many will waddle their way into University. Whether these students actually know what they want from life is anyone's guess. To date most schools, especially in the rural areas do not have career counselling sessions that should begin in Class VIII -X when the child's aptitude can be gauged. Hence many kids still decide for themselves or allow their parents to decide their future

course of studies and even to plan their careers. Some parents have this neatly sorted out and expect their kids to simply fall in place. The problem arises if at some point the kid realises he/she is not cut out for that course of study and decides to opt out. Is there an easy exit route without the melodrama of, "Oh how can you do this when we have invested so much on your studies and you have wasted so many years?" One can understand the anguish of parents but isn't the future of the kid more important? Isn't it more judicious for the kid to find out where he/she fits, even if it is dropping out of the Science stream to study music? Is that so appalling? It is appalling because our mindsets are so tunnelled and constricted and because we have not really understood the meaning of "liberal education." In fact liberal education is what's needed for the 21st century. Not everyone is going to be an Einstein or a medical genius or an outstanding architect. Each person has his/her own strengths and aptitude and should be allowed to excel in that. But for that to happen, parents have to be willing to shift their goalpost and better still to allow their children to put up their own goalposts.

Other than university education there are any number of professional courses that can provide better jobs than a nondescript Master's degree. It 's important to seek out these professional courses that the current job market demands than to waste a University seat merely because the state subsidises University education in India. I am always dismayed by the fact that we have produced thousands of University scholars but we don't hear them holding a view on any contemporary issue. They neither question nor dissent but readily join the crowd. What a waste of a University education.

On this note let me rest my pen here and share some more thoughts on education at a later stage.

Kolkata doctors strike has many lessons

By B. Sivaraman

The recently concluded strike by West Bengal doctors had many unusual features to it. There is nothing new in irate relatives of patients attacking doctors. Such outbursts keep occurring regularly in different parts of the country. There is nothing new in the affected doctors going on strikes demanding better protection either. What is new this time is the larger political dimension the entire issue assumed in West Bengal. Even as the State was being rocked by post-poll violence with the BJP being on the offensive, the ruling party at the Centre opened a new front. When the junior doctors in the State went on a flash strike to protest against serious attack on two of their colleagues by a patient who died at NRS Medical College and Hospital on 10 June 2019, the BJP saw an opportunity to fish in the troubled waters. The ruling powers at the Centre swung into action.

Then something hitherto unheard of happened. On 13 June 2019, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) called for a four-day nationwide protest including a one-day all-India solidarity strike on 17 June. The entire BJP party machinery among doctors was activated. On 14 June morning meetings were arranged between Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and no less than half a dozen doctors' associations in Delhi, where they complained to him about attacks on two of their colleagues in Kolkata.

In a highly controversial move, on 15 June, while writing a letter to all Chief Ministers about beefing up security to doctors, Harsh Vardhan also circulated an old 2017 Bill titled Draft Protection of Medical Service Persons and Medical Service Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss of Property) Act, 2017 as a model bill of sorts. The Bill however had been drafted by the IMA and not by the Union Health Ministry, and it prescribed ten years rigorous punishment to those who assault doctors, almost considering them at par with murderers, and the Bill had not been vetted by the Union Law Ministry or approved by the Cabinet!

In another unusual gesture, the Union Home Ministry under BJP strongman Amit Shah sought reports from the West Bengal government not only about the general political violence in the State but also specifically on the attack on these two doctors. In an equally unusual gesture, on 15 June, the AIIMS Doctors' Association, known to be loyal to Harsh Vardhan, gave a two-day media "ultimatum" to the West Bengal CM Ms. Mamata Banerjee though they were at a loss to explain what the ultimatum was about.

On 17 June, from Ahmedabad to Hyderabad, and from Lucknow to Patna, and in Pondicherry and Chandigarh, tens of thousands of doctors went on a strike.

In yet another surprise development, the RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat stooped down to the level of a mofussil politician and criticised Mamata personally for the doctors' strike while addressing the concluding session of a training programme for RSS volunteers at Nagpur on 17 June.

Are the assaults on doctors by patients' relatives too widespread and is the entire medical community too incensed to go on a spontaneous strike in solidarity with the striking West Bengal doctors? Is the

issue really so serious at all parts of the country that it was snowballing into a major all-India media and political issue? No, not at all! The local IMA chapters and the BJP wings among the doctors took care to explain to the doctors that there would be no action as the strike enjoyed the indirect support of the BJP governments. In this sense, it was an engineered strike.

But the dramatic anti-climax happened in Kolkata that day. Mamata Banerjee, who had earlier made some insensitive remarks about the doctors' strike and issued an ultimatum to them to return to work on 13 June, realised her folly after sensing the BJP's larger plan, and invited doctors for talks on 17 June. Being a consummate political communicator, she even accepted their precondition for live-streaming of the meeting. On 17 June, the day of all-India strike, she met with an unusually large delegation of 2 representatives each from more than 30 hospitals, and in the meeting she assured them of full protection and accepted almost all their demands. Meanwhile, pressure and public criticism was also mounting against the doctors and one patient even died in Malda allegedly in the absence of timely medical attention. The young doctors were not carried away by the unexpected new-found all-India support from the BJP but withdrew their strike. The BJP which had hoped to further rake up the issue against Mamata ended up with egg on its face!

The high-point of Mamata's agreement with the doctors' was the establishment of complaint redressal cell in each hospital, a sensible institutional option which the patients can use to take up their grievances instead of resorting to blind physical violence against the doctors. Mamata also directed the police chief to appoint nodal officers to oversee security arrangements for doctors in each hospital, who would be answerable for that. These were the most practical and sensible solutions to the vexing issue.

Regarding legislative protection to doctors, Tamil Nadu had already passed an act in 2018 called Tamil Nadu Medicare Service Persons and Medicare Service Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss of Property) Act, 2018, that made any act of violence against any medical personnel or institution a cognizable non-bailable offence and prescribed imprisonment for a term not less than three years but which may extend to ten years with fine. This itself was called too stringent by rights groups which feared its misuse against poor people and nobody has been punished under it though and there has been no review of its functioning by the Centre either. Instead of proceeding in that direction and drafting a realistic Bill at the ministerial level after consulting the Law Ministry, Harsh Vardhan thought it fit to circulate an unofficial Bill prepared by the IMA that made a mockery of criminal jurisprudence and the principle of proportionality.

The young doctors of Bengal remained stuck to their professional concerns and failed to walk into the trap of BJP's political manipulation. Mamata Banerjee also outsmarted the BJP in their own political game-plan. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Beef traders' strike: A legal perspective

Editor,

Illegal smuggling of cattle to Bangladesh via the state of Meghalaya has witnessed a depletion of cattle stock in the State. The healthy and fit cattle are smuggled away to Bangladesh while the less preferred and sickly ones are disposed off to the beef butchers and traders in Meghalaya. How is it possible that the needs of another nation are given priority? Cattle smuggling via the Indo-Bangladesh border is a violation of many statutes of the Indian Constitution and the Consumer Protection Act. It is alleged that the nexus between the illegal traders and the BSF (Border Security Force) favour such activities which happen in their area of jurisdiction. This daylight smuggling of cattle has brought the sale of beef in Meghalaya to a standstill as butchers they have resolved to stop buying cattle from the market at Khanapara which roughly 90 kms from Shillong. The Khasi Jaintia Butcher's Welfare Association (KJBWA) has stopped buying the skinny, diseased cows which are butchered and sold in the Meghalaya beef markets at Rs 300 per kilogram. The main cause of such illegal trading and smuggling is because the local cattle traders accumulate more wealth

through this activity than what they earn from their normal businesses. There is a saying that no one should get rich at the cost of someone else's loss. Yet, this is happening in Meghalaya. The local traders have amassed wealth by disposing off the unhealthy cattle which is obviously illegal and atrocious. The beef consumers and butchers have become victims of this unfair trade practice.

In this case a fundamental right has been breached by the local cattle traders/smugglers where our right to consume healthy and fit beef is now beyond our reach. The Supreme Court of India through Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has recognized the right to healthy food as a fundamental right through Article 21 of the Constitution. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 has directed the setting up of State Consumer Protection Councils and District Consumer Protection Forums under section 7 and 8 and sections 8A and 8B of the Act. This said, the State Government has to take necessary action to curb this illegal trade and smuggling which is carried out at the cost of the citizens of the state thereby affecting their consumer rights. It is a clear violation of the law and what is surprising is that the BSF is allegedly promoting

this smuggling along with the local traders for their personal gain.

Another surprising fact is that a fitness certificate must be issued to certify healthy and fit cattle before they are sent to the slaughter house, yet unfit and weak cattle pass through this mechanism which obviously betrays the discrepancy in the system. The Indian Penal Code, 1860 under section 421 and 424 states that fraud/dishonesty and concealment of property is a crime. In this case cattle which are actively concealed by the traders are being sold at a lucrative price to Bangladesh while the local beef butchers are deprived of healthy cattle.

The State Government had repeatedly ordered that illegal smuggling of cattle to Bangladesh should stop. The Minister for Animal Husbandry and Veterinary had ordered strict inspection at various check gates which have to comply with such guidelines of the law and trade practice. But the situation needs better and more effective scrutiny to ensure that such trade does not happen at the cost of the consumers and beef butchers of Meghalaya. The law has to be effective enough to punish all those connected to this illegal trade/smuggling of cattle to Bangladesh. They must be booked and made to compensate for the harm caused to the public who

are forced to consume unhealthy beef.

Yours etc.,
Ritre O Lyngdoh
B.A.L.L.B (Hons)
National Law
University & Judicial
Academy, Assam]

Of pre-determined interviews

Editor,

An advertisement published in your news daily on the June 7, 2019 invited applications for the post of Asst Prof in the Department of Political Science, Sankardev College Shillong. As a candidate who had the necessary qualifications for the post I was happy to see this advertisement. Later I realized that the same post was advertised in the same news daily on October 11, 2017 for which I had applied and also faced the interview board on Nov 8, 2017. I have the habit of checking the time before I enter and exit an interview room to keep a record of my interview and how I could have fared. As far as the interview in this College is concerned, I clearly remember that when I entered the interview room it was 12.59 PM. I was given less than two minutes for a demonstration. I exited the interview room at 1.11 PM. The points to be noted

about this interview are: (a) there were about 8 persons in the interview panel comprising the College Principal, the HOD, the GB President, the Subject Expert and other Professors (b) I was not given time to write a single word on the blackboard before the demonstration (c) three questions were asked by the Subject Expert which I was able to answer (d) when I could not answer the fourth questions the panel simply said, 'that's enough.' I had to leave the interview room (e) besides the Subject Expert, others in the interview panel were mere observers who filled up the chairs with no interest in interviewing me.

I was not the only who was treated like that at the interview. In fact almost all applicants were not interviewed properly, except 'one' So, I realized the interview was predetermined and even sensed the 'one' would get the job. One of our friends told the 'one' that he would be selected based on the kind of interview this 'one' had. About a week later the 'one' informed me and others that he had got a call and that he was selected for the job. Later I came to know that the College had already sent the necessary documents to DHTE for its approval, but which I assume it did not approve, for reasons best known to the College. So now the questions arises (i) why did

the College 'properly' interview only 'one' candidate? (ii) what happened to those documents sent to DHTE? (iii) Whether the College has again pre-determined whom to select this time too, as it did in 2017?

The College must respond to the questions above if it does not want any information from

outside to come out in the public domain in order to clear the air. As a candidate who has appeared in the 2017 interview and in those of other colleges in Shillong and who will be submitting the application to Sankardev College once more, I place this letter in the public domain so that all applicants for the said post including me, will understand the rationale of the upcoming interview in this College. We all have the right to pose the above questions to the College and it must provide the information otherwise the present advertisement and interview to be conducted for the same will be no different from that which took place in 2017. Good Luck to all the applicants.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request.

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"Every time you suppress some part of yourself or allow others to play you small, you are in essence ignoring the owner's manual your creator gave you and destroying your design."

--- Oprah Winfrey

The Shillong Times

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Bad apples in BJP's basket

BY any reckoning, this is now the best of times for the BJP. It has re-asserted itself as the strongest political establishment while at the same time has the luxury of finding the Opposition in total disarray, the regional parties crestfallen and the Congress rudderless. Such a scenario imposes a heavy responsibility on the saffron party to present a better picture of itself. But, actions like the open-arms policy it extended to four Telugu Desam Party (TDP) members of the Rajya Sabha within days of installation of the new Modi government are indications of what lies ahead for the future. At the minimum, the party's accommodation of the four MPs does not inspire confidence about a change for the better. This, even granted that the Modi government badly needs more strength in the Upper House to see through key legislations and the TDP deserved a hard hit. Reports are that some of these MPs face serious cases of suspected wrongdoing in money deals, like wilful defaults after taking huge loans from banks etc. The BJP had itself equated them with the likes of Vijay Mallya, who fled the country after bleeding banks though major financial misdeeds. It's natural for such men to avail the nearest opportunity, jump ship, and be safely ensconced in the ruling establishment. The cases against them by the ED, the CBI etc have not reached their logical conclusions yet. To that extent, these are crucial times. These MPs claiming they are innocent cannot be taken at face value.

One is judged by the company he keeps; so with political establishments too. Parties should, in the minimum, keep liabilities for the future at a safe distance. A cleansing of the political system demands as much. The reverse has happened here. The Congress party did not have a record of good conduct when it came to corruption. It was infested with corrupt elements also as it was the ruling party for long years. While the BJP and PM Modi had a landslide victory in the LS polls this time, it must also be noted that they did not take the fight against corruption very seriously in their previous innings. The scenario overall has only worsened, though PM Modi and his ministers were not seen as corrupt. This, despite the stench of Rafale charges. Hope is that the PM and the BJP would acquit themselves well by taking positive steps and keeping the bad apples at bay.

We haven't got Change: We need Change

By UD Tmar

As I was reading Patricia Mukhim's article, "We voted for change: Now where did we lose change?" (ST June 14, 2019) the only thing that comes to mind is that it reiterated the point that we have been taken for a ride. As a matter of fact whichever party has won, has taken us for different rides. I agree with the article but I disagree with the term 'we.' Not all people voted for a single party. The 'we' here are the winners, who turn to losers once their representatives hold the seats of power (others might agree or disagree on this aggregation of conclusion). The dictum, 'government by the people, for the people and of the people' doesn't apply anymore. Democracy is no longer the process when it comes to decisions making; if there is, it is only a façade. Democracy is now only a festival, manifest vibrantly during elections.

Democracy must be an everyday affair. It begins in classrooms, households, offices, localities, durbars et al. Democracy here is not about freedom, for this term has been loosely and subjectively understood. Democracy is about respect and responsibility; it is about providing a social, political and economic environment where all people without discrimination can grow and prosper, but not at the cost of his or her fellow citizens and most importantly the environment.

Demos Crisis or Systemic Failure

This failure of democracy is also the problem of the 'demos.' Citizens must also share the blame, but, when citizens are offered only candidates selected by a party (National or State), the possibility of having the right candidate diminishes. When money power comes into play, then and there the fate of the State is sealed. If a worthy and true democracy is to happen, the process of selection of candidates has to change. This demands a paradigm shift in the procedure of selections. If you take the constituency as a classroom, not only students who score good grades are the most intelligent or able; there are other students who are intelligent too and who are good at lateral thinking. Therefore, not all social workers, NGO workers, student leaders, businessmen etc., are the best options. There are also people who can do a far better job. We might also say, that experiences in dealing with the daily functions of society and other social issues have more weightage but in this modern world of governance and policy making and the enabling effect of technology, and

administration has attained new meaning and enabled us to venture into the horizon where knowledge and information and the integration of data determines various optimality where society has to move. The convergence of economics, politics, history, culture, technology and the changing environment (human and natural) demands leaders with a broad-based understanding of various issues. Ideally (practically crucial), we need a person who has the ability and faculty to correlate things, set a vision and targets, a person who understands systems of interactions (ecological perspectives, crucial in the context of climate change), a person with an acumen to feel society (emotional intelligence) and more. Hence mere education or holding a degree is not enough, but dedication to work, ethics, aesthetics and humanity are the paramount objectives, if we have to have a democratic society based on respect and responsibility. Judging from the present trend of leaders, this is a far cry from reality. We are all in a situation, as defined by Herbert Spencer, 'where the fittest survive,' but in the present socio-political context, the term fittest can be equated with wealth or money, family and affinity. How this wealth/money is being accumulated is a different topic to be discussed.

Politics of Dynasties or Dynastic Politics:

In the context of dynastic politics, political parties are in some way dynasties but not in the truest sense of family dynasty. Somehow political parties are far better than family dynasties. In many ways political parties are a convergence of single interest(s); they are a family of interests. Parties will be better off if they practice internal democracy which will have a beneficial effect on society at large. Kong Patricia is correct when she said, we are 'a feudal like society', and it also seems that egalitarianism has gone out of the door in the present political arrangement and alignment. In the context of regional parties, egalitarianism is dead; infighting is the hallmark of regional parties, and since the time of Brington Buhai Lyngdoh (if my memory serves me right) there were efforts to unite the regional parties (Meghalaya Federation), but till date we are

nowhere near achieving this objective. This conflict of interest is inherent in us; it's part of our DNA (lah long doh, long snam). People call it a 'curse'; this is a lazy analysis and perception. On careful judging we will find that individualism and egotism are to blame. Therefore as I see it, political parties are parties of mutual, individual interests, and they will serve the party as long their interests are being served. Society, community, people are not part of their scheme of things except prior to elections which are now equated to a 'Festival'.

Election as a milestone or precursor to democracy is not a festival, nor a religion, nor a celebration. It is an occasion where citizens are bestowed the right to bring about not only governmental change but socio-economic changes including environmental changes. The rights of the citizen are paramount. The representatives must see to it that these rights of citizens (those who voted and those who did not vote) must not be forfeited, trampled or sold to the highest bidder.

A state or nation cannot progress without vision and policies, and policymaking is a technical task that demands sharp faculty and deeper understanding of issues at stake. In a democracy, policy making is also a participatory effort, where all people or stakeholders have a say and where cost-benefit analysis is done in line with the short term or long term goals. How many policies has our state legislated on or shelved? That's a bigger question. When I browse the net, to look for state government policy on education, sports etc., all I see are draft versions. It begs the question, 'Is our future a draft?' Why is it so hard to have a proper policy? Public representatives are in government, first of all to frame policies and debate on them. Similarly, the duty of the opposition is to question, analyse and debate the policies threadbare. But most of the time what we read or see on TV are only pedestrianised debates. If we look at the government assembly archives during the time of JIM Nichols Roy we will see the language and the diplomacy with which debates happen. They are certainly of the highest standards compared to the present day. How do these past leaders of muster such intelligent oratory? That's because at the core of their debate lies the sincerity, dedication towards governance and society. Even the debate/exchange of letters (this was in the year 1939) between Nongthymmai Durbar and the British government on the issue regarding the

hygiene and sanitation of Nongthymmai, will make the present assembly discourse look childish.

Need of the Generation, not the Hour:

We might wish for leaders of great personality, integrity and dedication, but in the present socio-political structure and organisation, it is difficult to see this fructifying, until we overhaul the system, starting with the selection of candidates (bottom-up approach process). We will at least see some positive change. Whatever the situation, the present and the future demands that our representatives be practical and proactive. In the light of climate change and its overall non-discriminative impact on life (ecosystem, agriculture, diseases, water, air, rainfall, temperature etc), we are in dire-straits, and we have to act now because by 2050 we are altogether in a different life threatening situation and time is not on our side. Will politics be our saviour? It has and it hasn't. But most of the time politics takes the first seat, not the people nor development nor environment. Aristotle associates politics with 'practical science' a social service. What we have here and everywhere is politics is first and foremost a 'political service', a service to achieve power by any means or mechanism. The only antidote towards this politics that puts people in the backyard is the Constitution and the Judiciary or again, paradoxically, the Elections.

To conclude on an elementary note, Development (loaded term) is a right of the people not a prerogative of a representative. Development is a societal need not a want, a representative is constitutionally bound to provide basic infrastructural necessities and amenities for the people. Development is not a gift of or from a public representative; it is an instrument of the State to sustain itself and its citizens for the long run and for sustainable development. The role of representatives is to see the fruits of development reach all sections of the people. Development is also about creating a social, economic, and political environment where people can thrive vibrantly. Ergo democracy runs hand in hand with development which is people centred. Alas, Democracy is also the social capital for the third industrial revolution. How far ahead have our leaders thought about this!

(The writer is Assistant Professor Dept. of Geography, St Mary's College, Shillong)

Round the states

By Insaf

Bihar tragedy unmasks cruel Govt

Bihar government must hang its head in shame. The shocking tragedy of deaths of over 100 children from poor families in Muzaffarpur due to Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) has exposed the criminal apathy of the Nitish government for human lives and worse, kids in the age group of 1-10 years. Distraught parents and relatives of the children being treated in the ill-equipped Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital (SKMCH) rightly expressed their anger when Nitish and his deputy Sushil Modi finally chose to pay a visit on Tuesday last-- two weeks after the AES outbreak. Predictably, the administration tried to dodge the issue and not accept its miserable failure in containing the encephalitis epidemic that Muzaffarpur faces every year. Heat wave or Hypoglycemia, when blood sugar levels drop, were to blame is how it tried to wriggle out of its responsibility. This notwithstanding that Nitish has been quoted saying "Every year before the onset of monsoon, this disease (AES) wreaks havoc. It is a matter of concern that every year children die because of it." The big question then is what steps have been taken to address this concern? Nothing, for the recent deaths show it has failed miserably to follow basic guidelines on AES - raise awareness, tackle malnutrition and upgrade its primary health centres. So when the tragedy hits national headlines, which it has, the administration has the usual knee-jerk reaction - of sending medical supplies and doctors. Not to forget the ex-gratia payment which is offered to families of the deceased children - this time a royal sum of Rs 4 lakh each. Can this dispel the fact that life is cheap in Bihar?

Gujarat Bypoll Row
Gujarat is gearing for another exciting by-election to the Rajya Sabha. With every single seat critical for its relevance, the Gujarat Congress has knocked on Supreme Court's door challenging Election Commission's related notification. With two of the six vacancies to be filled in Upper House from Gujarat, following Amit Shah and Smriti Irani moving to Lok Sabha, the Congress has questioned the poll notification. While EC says there will be a separate poll for each vacancy as per the RPA, the Congress demands it be held together. Why? If held together (as was done in 2017) it will win one seat and the BJP the other in accordance with proportional representation in the 182-member Assembly (BJP has 100 MLAs and Congress plus others 75). But if held separately, which the Commission says is 'consistent practice' both will go to the BJP. The Congress smells a rat and accuses the EC of 'adopting new method of conducting elections under government pressure.'

The apex court has asked EC to respond and matter is listed next week. Who is playing mischief will soon be known.

Water Crisis In TN

The water crisis in Tamil Nadu has caught the AIADMK government on the wrong foot. While Chief Minister K Palaniswami may claim the issue wasn't as big as was being made out by the media, and rival DMK, the Madras High Court is not convinced. On Tuesday last, it pulled up the administration for not taking adequate steps to handle the crisis in capital Chennai, despite two failed monsoons. Hearing a PIL, the court impleaded suo moto Secretary, PWD to submit a detailed report on 'number of reservoirs in the State, steps taken for de-silting, amount sanctioned and status of those works,' notwithstanding the government reeling out actions taken so far to handle the crisis, including

removal of encroachments on water bodies. It is putting up a brave front despite the fact that drinking water shortage has led to 100-odd hostels around Chennai stopping operations, IT firms asking employees to work from home and people rationing water! Undoubtedly, that confidence doesn't hold water with the people or the experts!

Andhra Cross Over
Post-election season of moving on to greener pastures has engulfed Andhra Pradesh's TDP now. On Thursday last, four of its members in the Rajya Sabha resigned and switched loyalties to the obvious choice- the BJP. The move has triggered a crisis alright for Chandrababu Naidu and worse the timing is unfortunate as the party chief is holidaying with his family in Europe. With four of the six MPs breaking away, it means the split would be recognised in Parliament given that it meets the legal requirement of anti-defection law, which mandates support of at least two-third members. So not only did they hand over their resignation to RS Chairman but passed a resolution to merge TDP's legislature party with BJP! A hard hit for Naidu, but he's putting up a brave front. 'It's nothing to be nervous about,' is his message to party leaders/cadres as 'a crisis is not new to the party.' Forget the others, is he convinced?

WB Misery Over

West Bengal can have a sigh of relief. The junior doctors called off their week-long strike on Monday last following an unexpected fruitful meeting with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Didi did eventually relent and promised measures to ensure doctors' safety: such incidents (assault on doctors by patient's family at NRS hospital, which triggered the strike) won't happen in future; state-wide emergency number and email id to report an assault to be started; action against police if they fail to act with regard to their security; to deploy additional 125 police personnel inside NRS hospital to boost security and set up grievance redressal cell in government hospitals. She also told the doctors that five persons involved in NRS incident had been arrested. All's well that ends well, may be a relief, but the nagging question is why did it take Mamata a whole week to sit on the negotiating table? She could have spared thousands, if not lakhs, of patients across the country of their misery. If only she remembered the adage 'a stitch in time saves nine'.

Karnataka Cong Awakening

Mahatma Gandhi's quote "It is the quality of our work which will please God and not the quantity," has finally takers in the Congress. At least in Karnataka. On Wednesday last, the AICC decided to dissolve its Karnataka PCC by retaining only its President and Working President, appointed last July. This should have been done before the Lok Sabha polls as suggested, but didn't. The party, which was in power in the State from 2013-18 and is now a ruling coalition partner, won only a solitary seat this general election and is marred by nagging uncertainty of retaining its hold. Obviously, its jumbo PCC with 452 members, 21 Vice-Presidents, 65 General Secretaries and 170 Secretaries since at least two years did precious little and was inactive. The thrust on quantity rather than quality has done the damage like the adage too many cooks spoil the broth. The new avatar it is said will take shape in a month's time. In the given circumstances of uncertainty looming large over the JD(S)-Congress government's survival, hope it's not too late. --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Will the Sports Minister respond?

Editor,
I wish to draw the personal attention of our Sports Minister, Banteidor Lyngdoh, with a request to make public the statement relating to development of Sports infrastructure in Tura as preparation for upcoming National games in the State. It may be stated that the Tura Sports Association, the premier Sports body of Tura has submitted one representation on April 30, 2018, to the Sports Minister, listing a number of pending projects to be taken up on priority basis. Sadly, there has been no response from the Hon'ble Minister till date. There was reported news of his visit to Tura in the first week of July, 2018 and several times thereafter, but he has not taken any interest to make spot visits to the proposed sites nor to discuss the matter with the members of the

Sports Association. The apathy of the Sports Department towards development of sports in Tura is well known. It is evident from the fact that not a single stadium has been constructed by the Sports department in the last forty years. The construction of Sports Complex at Alotgre in the late sixties has been totally abandoned and no Government has ever dreamt of its restoration or completion. The PA Sangma Stadium, the only mini-stadium at Dakopgre is the only saving grace for sports lovers of Tura town. This was constructed at the initiative of the eminent leader (Late) PA Sangma, in his individual capacity from the MPLAD scheme. Had it not been for his foresight Tura would have been the only place in the entire North-East sans a football stadium till date. Unfortunately, even this small stadium is mainly used for all sorts of public events throughout the year

rather than games and sporting activities. The former Sports Minister, while visiting the stadium in 2016, had assured that a substantial amount had been earmarked for upgradation of this stadium, of which Rs 3 crore only had been sanctioned. We want this case to be expedited with placement of artificial turf. The insensitive and unilateral decision of the State Government to take over the Youth Hostel at Alotgre Sports Complex in Tura to accommodate the militant surrenderees for six years without consultation with stakeholders like T.S.A. and local residents, had caused a major setback in promotion of games and sports in Tura. By the time the occupants vacated the hostel in 2012, the building was left in a dilapidated condition and no one has taken responsibility for its renovation. During the budget session of 2017, the Government had

announced financial clearance of Rs 40 crores from Central Pool of Resources (Non lapsable fund) for construction of a new stadium at Tura and another Rs 40 crores for Ampati Stadium. This was stated by none other than the former Sports Minister Zenith M. Sangma and reiterated by then Chief Minister Dr. Mukul M. Sangma in the House. It is learnt that construction work at Ampati is nearing completion whereas the Rs 40 crores for Tura Stadium is lying unutilized even now. The question is: what is the reason for keeping the amount for two years in cold storage? When and how is the money going to be utilized? The sports loving public of Tura want a clear cut reply from the Sports Minister to allay any suspicion of misutilization of funds by diverting to some other project. In this present scenario, the personal opinion of Dr. Mukul Sangma would have been

of much help since it was during his regime that the said amount of Rs 40 crore was allotted for Tura Stadium and the surrenderees got dumped in the Youth Hostel as well in 2005-06. Under the above circumstances, the present Sports Minister is requested to enlighten us about the mysterious disappearance of Rs 40 crore meant for construction of a new stadium at Tura, in the interest of sports lovers of Tura town. Lastly, the two local representatives (VIPs) are also requested to look into the matter by pursuing this important case with the Sports Minister without delay.

Yours etc.,
Rozario M. Sangma
Tura

MPPS School and traffic jam

Editor,
The stretch from Mawroh junction to MPRO

quarters is always caught in a traffic snarl during school hours and this causes immense difficulty to the commuters along this route especially the residents of Mawroh and beyond. The problem arises because of haphazard parking and insensitivity of the drivers parking their vehicles to drop or pick up their wards. The road width is not a problem but the problem is with the irresponsible parking. Moreover, the Police school bus is also parked right at the school gate and the time taken for dropping and picking up the students is an added problem. This is not to criticise the school but only to request the authorities to regulate traffic and ease the ongoing problem. Necessary instructions should be given to parents and guardians to properly park their cars to avoid this current situation.

Yours etc,
RN Rymbai,
Shillong - 8

Basketball takes root in India

The American popular game comes to India with NBA starting academy in country

By Isaac Jahns, Sabyasachi Mukherjee & Ethan Burks

Like millions of American children, 11-year-old Arsh Singh of Uttar Pradesh fell in love with basketball from his first dribble.

My elder brother is a fan, he said. I used to play the game at home, and after playing it I just loved the game and I decided to get into an academy.

Basketball is gradually taking root among young people in India, a country known more for cricket runs than free throws. And the NBA in the United States is taking advantage of this budding interest to grow the game internationally.

Arsh hones his basketball skills at Ramagya Sports Academy in Noida, a city on the outskirts of New Delhi. Ramagya is one of three Indian schools housing the NBA's Basketball School initiative, which encourages kids ages of 6 to 18 to learn the game.

In May 2017, the NBA launched the NBA Academy India, an elite basketball training centre at Jaypee Greens Integrated Sports Complex in Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). The first NBA Basketball School was launched in Mumbai as part of a multi-year agreement with India On Track (IOT), one of India's leading sports management, marketing and development companies.

The NBA earlier launched NBA Basketball School, a network of tuition-based basketball development programs around the world open to international male and female players ages 6-18.

NBA in India has been set up for many purposes. One is obviously to promote the game and the American league, which is very popular across the world... said Abhimanyu Bhalla, operational manager of the NBA Basketball School at Ramagya.

Another is to train potential future players for US teams.

Forbes estimates the average NBA franchise is worth \$1.9 billion and experts say NBA's growing global influence promises to increase the value of franchises even more.

The NBA has successfully planted seeds in several countries. China's love for basketball has been well-documented thanks to NBA teams taking Chinese preseason tours and Miami Heat star Dwyane Wade signing a shoe deal with Chinese conglomerate Li-Ning. European-born players like Kristaps Porzingis and the recently-retired Dirk Nowitzki have thrived.

India, the world's second most populated country with more than 1.3 billion people, is the newest basketball frontier.

First generation American Rit Kar, a recent University of Missouri graduate and rabid basketball fan, says he considers basketball a global sport that is only becoming more so. I think India is a huge untapped market, he said, and it's only a matter of time before we see more Indian players.

Top Indian-born NBA players have made history in the past few years, sparking interest among children in



(Clockwise from top) NBA Academy games in India; players at the academy; first generation American Rit Kar, a recent University of Missouri graduate and rabid basketball fan, says he considers basketball a global sport that's only becoming more so

their home country. Sim Bhullar became the first Indian basketball player to play in the NBA when he debuted for the Sacramento

Kings in 2015. The following off-season, Satnam Singh became the first Indian-born player to be drafted by an NBA team when the Mavericks took

him in the second round. Children at Ramagya academy look to players like these for inspiration. Besides centres like Ramagya,

which accepts any children interested in learning the sport, the NBA also runs a center in New Delhi for India's best young players, which its website

says builds on the NBA's existing basketball and youth development initiatives in India.

That centre's 23-player roster, filled entirely by players between 14 and 18 years old, regularly plays Indian college teams. And it's won more games than it's lost.

Amid such success, the Indian pipeline to the NBA is bearing fruit. Satnam Singh, whose success precedes the academy, is a role model for these children.

NBA schools are currently in 7-8 states in our country, Bhalla said.

Our vision is to give them a platform in order to get the raw talent out of the Indian youth. Players like Satnam Singh (arc) already establishing them in the international field and we are hoping to get more talent like him in the coming future.

As the sport takes hold in India, the culture surrounding it is spreading, too — promising millions in profits for American companies. The Nike subsidiary Jordan, for example, routinely charges hundreds of dollars for a pair of sneakers, raking in just under \$3 billion per year.

And India provides a huge new customer base.

Basketball's global future

Missouri grad Kar was born in India and moved to Hershey, Penn., as a child, becoming a diehard supporter of the Philadelphia 76ers. After orchestrating one of the most dramatic multi-year turnarounds in league history, Kar's 76ers are at the forefront of the modern NBA.

On a recent day, he sat on his couch watching Game 3 of the first-round NBA playoff matchup between the 76ers and Brooklyn Nets. He was amped up watching franchise cornerstones Joel Embiid, Ben Simmons, and Jimmy Butler. [Joel] Embiid is a unicorn, he said as he watched the game. He does everything for us. After how bad we were, it's nice to have a roster like this.

The emotions of a sports fan vary wildly between games and season, but Kar's fellow Philadelphia fans can be ruthless.

Philly fans are Philly fans, Kar said. When they [the 76ers] actually won a few games, you know, there were serious cheers, but they'd still boo the other team...

Kar admits that cricket is still king in India, and said there's good reason to believe it always will be.

But Kar wouldn't be surprised to turn on the TV one day and see more players from his home country on the court — along with players from nearly every part of the world. He said the 76ers started the season with a UN lineup including a guy from Australia, another from Cameroon and a third from Croatia.

You have all these different players from different parts of the world, in different stages of their careers, he said. They play the game in different ways, but they come together as a team for the greater good.

(IBNS/TWF)

We need dark nights to fight health disorders



By Dr Agnivesh Jyotiraditya Kannankara

The Earth, its existence from time immemorial has been following the cycle of day and night with a predictable 24-hour pattern of light and dark. But in this new era of fast life where we are flooded with artificial lights, can we say the same about our nights? Time is a limited resource and, to make full use of it, the night has been illuminated and kept occupied these days. Even when we sleep, street lamps and security lights pierce the darkness around us.

Our efforts to gain freedom from the natural constraints of day and night may have come at a price. With the transformation of nights into days by the advent of artificial lighting we are certainly losing out on natural darkness and its beauty unknowingly. In fact, we are creating a conflict between what we want to do and what our internal timekeeper, the biological clock, prepares us for. This is a serious issue posing crucial adverse impact on health, psyche and even affect other animals as well creating environmental and ecological problems.

The nights of course are not

so dark now as they used to be, a fact that needs to be admitted with guilt. The incredible view of a clear night sky with the moon and stars shining brightly is an alien story for the kids of this generation. The sky is just not visible with the neon-LED lights overpowering the nights and blinding the eyes of those who try to catch a glimpse of the night sky. However, the loss of darkness is no longer considered a matter of sentimental or aesthetic loss.

Researches on the subject of artificial light at night in the last decade establish serious health consequences. It causes sleep deprivation. Sleep disorders are associated with many major diseases. The absence of true continuous darkness might be affecting our quality of sleep. Constant bright light that has long been used as a means of torture clearly disrupts peaceful sleep since the message given to the brain is to wake up, leaving the person drained of energy each day without adequate sleep.

Another major after-effect is the interference with our circadian rhythm causing an imbalance. Circadian rhythm is the internal 24-hour clock that coordinates biological processes in our body by remaining

tuned to natural cycles of light and dark. Tying with this will create serious threat to our well-being.

Being too much exposed to artificial lighting hampers production of the hormone melatonin, the lack of which is said to be one of the reasons leading to cancer. Melatonin secreted by brain plays a very important role in the sleep cycle as well as mood of a person. The increasing risk of other diseases due to this problem is also being investigated by researchers.

We need both light and darkness with equal importance on Earth. A major section of species on earth are nocturnal they depend on darkness for their survival. Stealing away their habitat would mean them venturing out into our spaces and being destructive during daytime. Bats are unable to hunt for prey due to excessive light at night. Moths and other insects that get attracted to the lights at night die the unnatural way. This results in destroying the ecological balance by stripping the food chain of its problem. Animals will be pushed towards extinction if the illuminated nights continue for long.

It has been argued that

keeping the streets bright and lighted at night in the changed times will ensure social safety. But does more and more light keep us safer? Have the crimes reduced due to excessive lighting? This is a complex issue. While some amount of light is good, extreme amount of lighting can be disastrous to all lives depending on the situations and places. With the brightly lighted nights, the vehicles out on roads are also much higher contributing to increased carbon emissions and thereby worsening the global warming issue for the world.

The countries and organisations worldwide are slowly awakening into the idea of saving the darkness of nights. France has recently passed an ordinance to put off all lights by 1 am.

The WHO has described the night shift as being probably a carcinogen to human community. The message to be taken from all this is that of maintaining the balance between keeping up with requirements of modern times yet not destroying the natural aspects of our environment essential for the survival of life.

(The author is a multiple world records holder)

A reminder of your mortality

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



The reminder of one's mortality has always been the fundamental force behind the human search for something beyond. If they never knew that they would die, nobody would seek spirituality. Why there are sayings and misunderstandings that you must seek spirituality only after the age of 65 is because then, the body will remind you strongly. When you are young, you think you are immortal. But slowly, as you get older, it definitely reminds you that you are mortal. For some, the reminder comes early, for some, later depending on your health.

This is why it is said that Shiva constantly spent time in cremation grounds. Almost every yogi at some time spent time in cremation grounds. Cremation grounds were held as very sacred because that is what reminds you of your mortality in a strong way. When somebody dies, the mortal nature of your existence hits you somewhere in your body; it is more than just an emotional reaction. Even if it is somebody that you do not know, when you see a human form lying dead, it hits you, isn't it? If you are a little more sensitive, any dead form hits you in the body, not in the mind. Mentally and emotionally there may also be reactions, but the most important thing is that the body imbibes life in its own way. The body has a memory of its own, which functions in its own way. Right now, the memory that your body carries is ruling you far more than the memories of your mind. It is the body's memory which is far more significant than the mental memory.

Yogis always chose to live in the mountains because there, the body is suddenly, strongly reminded of its mortality not a mental or intellectual reminder but a physical reminder. The space between life and death is so flimsy. That space or that line is narrowed in the mountains. Living in the mountains constantly reminds you of the

transitory nature of your existence. If you realize the mortality of who you are, if you are constantly aware that you will die, if your physical body is aware that it is not permanent, that it is going to be sucked into this earth one day, and it could be today now your spiritual search is unwavering. That is why yogis chose the mountains. They wanted to be constantly reminded of their mortality so that their spiritual search does not waver at all.

It is very important that you are constantly reminded of what the nature of your body is. Right now, you are a mound of earth prancing around. This body around which your whole life revolves is just a little bit of earth. When the earth decides to suck you in, you just become a small mound.

Yogis wanted that constant physical reminder that you are just earth and nothing else; they wanted to be in touch with earth. For this reason, they always chose to be with the earth. How to stay surrounded by earth? You could dig a hole and sit in a well, but that is not practical. So they went to the mountains and chose the natural holes that were there, where the physical body is constantly reminded that the earth is trying to suck you back. Mother Earth is trying to get her loan back as quick as possible. Your fight for survival is the struggle against that.

In the ashram I always tell people, no matter what work you are doing, every day you must stick your fingers into the earth at least for an hour. Do something with the garden; somewhere your hands should get muddy. This will build a natural physical memory, a bodily memory in you that you are mortal; your body will know that it is not permanent. That realization in the body is extremely important for one to keep his focus on his spiritual pursuit. The more urgent the realisation becomes, the stronger the spiritual sense becomes.

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

Pavitra movement is on

Project talks about menstrual hygiene

Menstrual health is a subject that many of us do not talk about. It is still a subject that is exclusive to women and men are not part of the conversation. However, a new project under Art of Living (AoL) called Pavitra is trying to make women, as well as the society, aware of the health and hygiene problems during menstruation.

Samita Chakravarty, a member of the AoL faculty, says menstrual health awareness is not up to the mark in India, especially in the rural pockets where it is still a hush hush.

In Meghalaya too the awareness on menstrual health and hygiene is not very much, she says.

When we talk about menstrual health, several factors come to fore. They are food habit, hygiene, exercise (yoga), awareness on diseases and breaking myths and taboos, says Chakravarty. Pavitra, a project under the AoL's social department, covers all these components in its awareness programmes.

Pavitra means pure. So menstruation is not something dirty but pure. Pavitra, which was launched last year, is a movement now and is reaching the rural as well as the urban areas. When we reach out to young girls and women, we realise that so much ignorance is there regarding it, she says.

In Meghalaya, the volunteers are targeting both rural and urban schools and have already reached out to over 800 girls belonging to the age group of nine to 17. The programme is targeting around a thousand stakeholders. Chakravarty says



the response everywhere was overwhelming. In fact, Pavitra aims to reach out to all schools and colleges in the whole of Meghalaya.

She insists that every woman should be part of the programme as ignorance about menstruation will lead to infection and other health hazards. There is no shame about talking. Come out and be a part of Pavitra. This cycle is what makes a woman mother. This is the

best thing that can happen to a woman, she asserts.

The initiative is scientific and explains health and hygiene scientifically. However, unanswered questions still remain. In many parts of the country, menstruating women are barred from entering temples as they are considered unholy or dirty. There is, however, no explanation as to how a natural process like monthly bleeding can be considered dirty.

But Chakravarty says there are some traditional practices which are logical but were later misconstrued. Menstruating women were usually not allowed to enter the kitchen because she needed rest and may have cramps and feel low. No hard work was recommended during period. However, over the years it was distorted and became a taboo, she rues.

Talking about the myths in Meghalaya, Chakravarty, who is a master trainer in this project, says she has never come across any taboo among people in the state but there is a need for awareness on hygiene and means of relief from the pain.

Pavitra can help to a large extent in educating in a more practical and scientific way," she asserts.

Under the programme, teenagers and young women are told about the reproductive system, food habits, hygiene during that period of the month, study of the flow and yoga that can help them during cramps.

Pavitra also intends to encourage production and marketing of sanitary napkins at a cheaper rate. It is open to including men stakeholders for a wider awareness platform.

In fact, men can help in the expansion of the programme by encouraging their wives, sisters and daughters to participate. The film, Padman, has changed the whole perspective about menstruation, says Chakravarty, who has been associated with AoL for the last 10 years.

Citing the examples of Roma Joshi and Chandrani Dey, who were trainees and are now working towards spreading the message of health, Chakravarty says women from all walks of life and from all parts of Meghalaya are invited to join the programme so that the awareness spreads among more people.

I am proud to be a woman, a mother, a wife and strength for my family and friends. And I want every woman to feel the same. Womanhood should be celebrated, without shame and fear, says Chakravarty.

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Star - Gazing

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, JUNE 23, 2019

Moon sextile Uranus on your solar return chart promising very favorable time period ahead. This is going to be a productive time period for you. Your business ventures will see light of the day and become operational. Your partners will fully support you. You will have the confidence to accomplish something big that you have thought for long. You may enter into venture/collaboration with some technical partners. You will be making huge business profits. Those in jobs will also perform exceedingly well and receive a jump or promotion. Salary paypackage will be excellent. You may think of buying some business/residential property. Friends will provide support and guidance from time to time.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This week brings forth a powerful and energetic approach to resolve professional projects in hand. As you travel you will find that it brings in luck in another aspect of your life. Some of you may have to make some critical decisions due to situations in your life that force you to make choices between career and family goals. The challenge is to find a healthy balance to improve home life, while at the same time tending to your career needs. Meditation is needed for gaining deeper insight into personal relations and complex situations.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine luck and good management. This tends to change your outlook in life, perhaps stimulated by travel or contact with people of different cultural backgrounds. You are more determined to achieve your personal goals, and more strategic in the manner you go about doing so. Fundamental changes in your domestic situation and career orientation are likely.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You feel energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. As you accept the individuality of people around, this would help to resolve conflicts and differences. You feel the need to be appreciated by family members, and the need for togetherness with others, comes into play. New contacts with others may also occur. Events are such that you move towards a more objective approach to your life and you cultivate true friendships. 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.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Personal relations are rejuvenated and your romance moves more rapidly as you relate well on the intellectual level as well and move towards a long-term commitment. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. You are also likely to form business relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You are able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility during this period. Walking and gardening can be therapeutic pastimes.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This is a magical time for romantic relationships. You initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with difficult professional and family matters. It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and other relatives. At times life becomes extremely distracting and work and other financial or professional commitments take over. You would give attention on fitness and health related programs.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

People are attracted to you for your intelligent and sharp mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with interesting people. You need to remain in touch with personal relations or you stand to lose valuable emotional support. You feel on top in domestic issues and spend quality of

time with people you care about and in activities that are rejuvenating. A light and playful attitude takes you to high places and to important people. Don't allow old fears to get to you but confront important issues and people that are likely to change. A happy surprise awaits you.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Trust your feelings and intuition about people and situations when taking decisions. Work and pleasure can be combined. You connect with well-known personalities and artists. You could find relationships with others confusing and hard to define. Although you may enjoy an increase in your intuitive capabilities, you can also be too open to influence so that fears or delusions impact your ability to see your life clearly. This could also be a time when you are more creative, yet not always in a reliable or organized manner. Explore, look for adventure and keep your eyes open for opportunities this week.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You feel fresh and re-energized this week. You may take up new assignments and a project that would call for creativity and new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. There may be gains from property and fixed assets. You are nurturing and caring in personal relationships. You are likely to experience events that highlight the necessity to share and trust. You may have to deal with willfulness and issues of power and competition in others and in yourself.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This is a special time for romantic relationships. Your credibility is important at this time and efforts at self-promotion might be made now. It is time to come back to your inner center to regain physical strength, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness. A comfortable level of personal popularity helps to keep conflict to a minimum. With the ability to handle your emotions successfully, there is less stress on both your mind and body. Your self-confidence and positive attitude will reward you.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

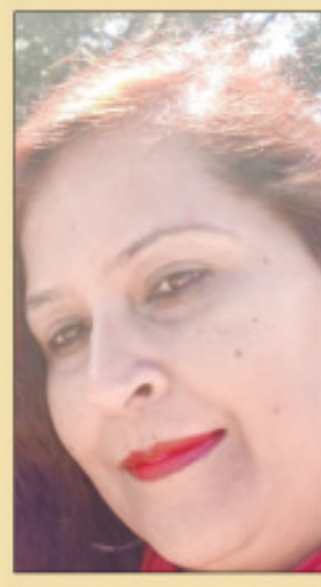
The planetary configuration indicates responsibilities and commitments may take up more time than usual this week, so set some time aside. Also, parse your schedule so that you don't take on too much and that you don't wind up handling more errands and odd jobs than you meant to. The key to success is adopting a realistic, practical and disciplined approach to your life which comes easily to you. Certain elements of your social and financial lives are stabilized, secured, and more reliable. You may solidify a romantic relationship under this influence.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This period proves good in terms of investments and speculations. It's a good time to join religious organizations and groups. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. Circumstances may be such that you need to handle money more carefully or this may simply come naturally to you now. You would focus to regain mental balance and emotional harmony. Travel will be meaningful.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives, drawing respect from them. You have new attitudes towards love matters, finances, and social relationships. Your creative urges are powerful indeed. New friendships, or new spins on established connections, are indicated. A period of hard work and effort is also in store. You take on new responsibilities, but enjoy the challenges. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining balance in all areas of life. Walking can be a therapeutic pastime.



Pavitra means pure. Menstruation is not something dirty but pure. Pavitra, which was launched last year, is a movement now and is reaching the rural as well as the urban areas

Samita Chakravarty, AoL faculty member

Be part of healthcare business

Hospital management is a new concept in the management stream. Gone are the days when a senior doctor was generally responsible for the role of a hospital manager. In today's world of specialisation, the term hospital has undergone sea changes and many categories related to medical sciences and hospitals have been revamped completely.

Now we have ordinary hospitals, specialty hospitals and even super specialty hospitals depending upon the kind of services they render to the public and the number of people they cater to, on an average. For the smooth functioning of a hospital, qualified professionals are required. As a consequence, several courses and training programmes have been developed to churn out professional hospital managers.

Such individuals are by far exceedingly well-equipped to face the growing challenges and cater to the specific requirements of modern day hospitals. Hospital management courses are not only for the medical graduates but are also open to non-medical and non-science graduates. A Hospital administrator is overall in charge of administrative affairs of the hospital. He takes over the charge of various aspects of health administration and hospital administration with respect to patients and healthcare.

Eligibility criteria

For the undergraduates there is a three-year degree course i.e. Bachelor of Hospital Administration (BHA). For BHA programme, the applicants should complete their

10+2 with Biology with 50 per cent marks in aggregate. One can also pursue a postgraduate course i.e. Masters in Hospital Administration (MHA) or MBA in Hospital Management which are of two years' duration and are available for both medical and non-medical students. Graduates in any discipline can apply for this course. However, few institutes have their own eligibility criteria for selecting candidates.

Job Prospects

Employment opportunities in this field are plenty. Fresh degree holders may start their professional career as assistant hospital administrators or as managers of non-health depart-

ments like finance. One can find employment in large corporate and public sector hospitals, international and national healthcare organisations and health insurance companies, college and universities, healthcare

Pay Package

After successful completion of training, an aspirant can be absorbed in junior positions with salaries ranging between Rs 18,000 to Rs 25,000. As one gains understanding in the field, he/she can command higher salary. The demand for skilled and experienced hospital managers in foreign countries is relatively high. The salary offered by foreign hospitals is ten times more than that of the salary offered in India.

Institutes

- All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi
- Birla Institute of Technology, Pilani
- Symbiosis Centre of Health Care, Pune
- Assam Down Town University, Guwahati



(Contributed by Kaustov Kashyap, founder and director, Prugatey HR and Career Consultancy)

“Words calculated to catch everyone may catch no one.”

--- Adlai E. Stevenson Jr.

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Cut-money syndrome

WEST Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee is opening new fronts in her fights, and the latest offensive is against her own party-men/women. This past week, she created a stir by asking TMC local leaders to return the bribe-money they took from people for availing various welfare schemes. The call came in the context of reports that up to 25 per cent commission was taken by such leaders for grant of free houses to the poor and other similar schemes. Protests had erupted in front of TMC leaders' houses in several districts in coordinated action against the “cut money” system in welfare schemes. It is not often that one gets to hear a politician sternly asking his or her party-men/women or government officials to return the bribe-money they took or to threaten to arrest those who failed to return the money. The general trend is to duck the issue. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi had, in his first innings, famously slow-pedalled cases of corruption. In five years, for instance, his government could not move a finger against Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra, against whom the PM himself had made accusations vis-a-vis land grab with alleged support of the erstwhile Hooda government. During the present LS campaign, he revisited the theme, saying Vadra would be arrested; but he did not explain why he took no such action in his first term.

When allegations of corruption are raised against politicians and bureaucrats, governments so far did nothing more than initiating an inquiry, and not acting on the findings thereof. Public memory is short and such matters get forgotten over time. Against this backdrop, the West Bengal CM's firm stand – though belated – must be appreciated. Without doubt, she has her back to the wall these days due to the electoral defeats her party suffered and the other issues that came up in the state thereafter which made her lose sleep. In much of these, allegations are that the BJP played a sinister role. At the same time, despite her frenzied attempts to craft a unity of opposition leaders to take on PM Modi and grab power at the Centre, she has her good sides. The nation would now watch as to how the scenario in West Bengal, vis-a-vis the cut money issue pans out. If she shows the guts and disciplines politicians, that is bound to set a trend for the entire nation and this will also help Mamata Banerjee reinvent herself from the bad times she's been through in recent times.

Them Iewmawlong Issue: It's now or never

By HH Mohrmen

Whether one calls it Them Iewmawlong or Harijan colony, the issue has plagued the state for decades now, but this time it has escalated and the issue has even reached the highest office of the country. Thanks to the irresponsible statement made by the proscribed militant group based in Bangladesh, in spite of the attempt made by the Government to bring this issue to a logical conclusion, the issue came to the fore again. The Organisation did not weigh the pros and cons before making the statement and it does did not also appreciate the initiatives taken by the Government, hence the issue has reached its crescendo now.

The statement made by the HNLC which threatened to attack the residents of the community has changed the case from that of dispute for a plot of land to a human rights issue. The reason is because lives of the people in the area are in danger. And the Chief Minister of Punjab has not only sent a delegation to meet the Home Minister of the State, but he had even taken up the issue with the Prime Minister of the country. We have seen delegations of different Sikh groups visiting the State and the issue was also taken up by the minority commission of the country, all because of the threat.

The issue which only has to do with relocation of the residents of the colony who are also staff of the different departments of the government has become a major fight now. Therefore the issue has not only escalated because of the intervention but because of the unnecessary statement, has only pushed the matter from bad to worse. Thankfully, things have not gone out of hand; the Government is still in control and it has not become a law and order situation in the state capital.

The Them Iewmawlong issue is not only a long pending issue but because previous State Governments have failed to solve the prolonged issue in time it has now become a complex problem which is difficult but not impossible to solve. As is always the case, with time, the different

issues related to this land have piled up one on top of the other and become a mountain of problems that the current government will have to deal diligently. It is true that the community had lived in the Them Iewmawlong or Harijan colony for many decades now and they have every right to be treated respectfully by both the Government and other stakeholders, but land issue is a different matter altogether. The reason is because ownership of land in the scheduled area is restricted by law. Besides, the employees were allotted lands for temporary residence only. This point should be impressed upon the residents of the area and Government can always

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find alternative arrangements which are acceptable to the community.

It was reported that not all the residents in the area were actually working with any Government agencies, so the important question is whether they are entitled to be accommodated in the area which is meant for those working in Government departments. The point that needs clarity is whether the colony can be treated like a dorbar shngong where they have power over land and administration over the area. In case it is not a village administrative unit recognised by the ADC because the land is under the jurisdiction of the KHADC, then it can only be treated as a social welfare organisation of the people who live in the area. What had further complicated the issue was the fact that certain parts of the land are being used for commercial purposes.

It is true that the community has contributed to the development of the state and the grateful people of Shillong should bear this

in mind and treat them with the respect they deserve. But it is also true that the condition of the space they are currently living is not conducive to a healthy and peaceful living. It is therefore in the interests of human rights that the Government has proposed to relocate the people of the area to a place which is more favourable than the one that they are living in now. Moreover, it is for the brighter future of the children of the community that the Government has offered to relocate them to a much better place; but more than mere relocation the Government should see that their basic rights are provided.

From the reports in the press, we are given to understand that what the community wants clarity

with regard to ownership of the land that they are supposed to be relocated to, so this is one issue that the Government needs to come clear with. Of course, the people who now live in the area know that the quarters and space that they were proposed to be relocated to, will be much better than the one they are living in now, but since some of them have lived in the current space for decades, it is very natural that they would also need clarity on the ownership of the new space. This is one issue that the Government will have to take due care and consideration of, if it really wants to get their support.

There is no issue which cannot be solved by discussing across the table. The stakeholders therefore need to sit across the table and discuss threadbare the different aspects of this issue and arrive at an amicable solution. This is a difficult imbroglio and it is therefore wrong to expect that this Government would be able to come up with an amicable solution for all stakeholders in a few months time. People have to be patient because it takes

time to arrive at a lasting solution to a long festering problem.

After the unfortunate incident last year, this Government through the High Level Committee, along with the Urban Affairs Department and the Shillong Municipal Board have worked hard to close this unpleasant chapter in the State's history once and for all. The Chief Minister has made it public, that the Government is taking every genuine stakeholder's demand into consideration and it is leaving no stone unturned to come up with a mutually agreed solution. The Government has also promised that it would try to carry all the stakeholders along in any decision that it will take, therefore stakeholders are also equally responsible in solving the problems and this includes pressure groups in the State too. For all those who wish to see that the issue comes to a logical conclusion and hopes that peace prevail in the State, this is the time to show solidarity with the Government and try to be part of the solution rather than creating more problems.

No stakeholder in this entanglement would wish to prolong this issue any longer. We have lived with it for far too long, so the option is to support the Government and it will definitely come up with a solution which will not only resolve the matter once and for all and put the issue to rest, but which will also be in the interests of the State and the country. We are inching towards arriving at a solution to the problem, therefore let us not jump to conclusions but wait for the HLC to come up with its report. We must appreciate the efforts made by the HLC under the leadership of the Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong and lend our support to its efforts.

The leaders of the Harijan Colony too should look at the issue from a realistic point of view which is in accordance with the law of the land. Hopefully the Government will be able to come up with a win-win solution for both the community and other stakeholders because this is the last opportunity for us to solve this prolonged issue once and for all. We have reached a stage where, it is now or never.

Congress must allow Rahul Gandhi to step down now Revival needs accountability, democratic decision-making

By Harihar Swarup

The Congress has taken a wise decision by choosing a person outside the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty as the leader of the party in the Lok Sabha. The Parliamentary core committee picked five-time MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, as the leader even though it was widely believed that the post would go to Rahul Gandhi. Rahul was present at the core committee meeting. Adhir Ranjan represents Berhampore constituency of West Bengal and is known to be a bitter critic of Mamata Banerjee. The BJP has decided not to give the status of the leader of the Opposition to the Congress because the party's tally of 52 seats fell short of the requisite number 55.

Rahul Gandhi has resigned as the Congress President owning responsibility for the rout of the party in the recent Lok Sabha election, and has been insisting on stepping down. Will he be allowed to go or persuaded to continue? A section of the party feels that he should continue in the overall interest of the Congress. Equally strongly, the other section feels that his resignation should give a chance to someone outside the dynasty.

Despite the slump in its fortune, the Congress is the only centre-piece, even today, around which opposition at the national level can coalesce. Regional parties will play a role but only up to a point. For a start, the Congress should honour Rahul's resignation and allow him to step down. It would be a real charade that the Congress has been mounting in the past, if it persuades him to continue.

This time it will not only deepen the cynicism about a party already facing an existential crisis, it might also finish Rahul Gandhi's political career. On the other hand, if he holds firm—he also said that his sister Priyanka Gandhi should not be made Congress President in his place—he may win the respect of some, and live to fight another day.

Even if the decision turns out to be a mistake, it is always better to have erred, following an inner steer, than the cacophony of voices outside. If nothing else, Rahul Gandhi would be ensuring accountability. Equally important, he would be respecting the sentiments of dynasty, which was implicit in the 2019 mandate, particularly among the young and first time voters.

Many apprehend that Rahul's exit may cause more problems than solve. For, in the way the Congress is structured, it is Nehru-Gandhi family which has kept the party united, and won it votes though the latter is now diluted.

The party, however, need not split if the president is chosen by consensus, and has backing of Nehru-Gandhi family. With the wipeout in 18 states, the Congress leaders have to pull themselves up and hang together — or be forced to walk into sunset.

There are enough talents in the Congress who can head the party, and this time it can be somebody from the South, since southern states have stood by the Congress more than North and the West.

The delay in deciding either way has only deepened the insecurities in the party. As it is, the exit of leaders has started, what with 12 of 18 of its legislators gravitating to the TRS in Telangana, the party's leader of opposition in Maharashtra moving across to the BJP and more are likely to follow. Defeat has

unsheathed knives inside the organization, be it in Rajasthan, or in Haryana and this is given when a party weakens.

Talk to ordinary folks, in towns and villages, and they are clear about the two reasons for the Congress's woes: Congressmen and women have forgotten how to work hard. And the Congress has lost touch with the reality.

The Congress was always a party of patronage but it has over the years become no more than a conglomerate of comfortable men and women pursuing their individual agendas, interesting in amassing wealth given half a chance, and promoting their progeny. After all it is the guilty men and women of UP who brought Modi to power in 2014. Even today, the party's leading lights are not willing to go beyond 'money', 'media' and 'marketing' as the only reason for Modi magic. They discount the fire in Modi-Shah belly not just another stint in power, but to wield absolute power and leave a historical legacy, recasting India in accordance with their ideological world view. There is no counter to it from the Congress side. The implication of outcome 2019 has been more far reaching for the Congress than the BJP. As a beginning, the party has to democratize the decision-making processes. Why should not Rahul Gandhi work as an ordinary general secretary? Priyanka Gandhi as general secretary in charge of East UP, has already been tasked with winning UP for the Congress in 2022. May be Rahul Gandhi can undertake a padayatra going around the country, with folded hands, only to understand what young and old India has to say about Congress mistakes and what should it do.

Perhaps, the new narrative that the Congress seeks will emerge from such a process—of looking to the ground for solutions, and emergence of leaders from there. For entitlement is also elitism, just as it is about a name opening doors. And, about a culture which leaves everything to High Command. Should there be a place for High Command in a modern, democratic organization? Should decisions be left only to the Congress President? Or, to Sonia Gandhi, who soon after she was elected chairperson of Congress Parliamentary Party, was authorized to decide who should be leader in both houses of Parliament? Should not this decision be taken by a presidium of leaders, which is under consideration?

The sooner the Congress takes a decision on who should head the party, and knuckles down to preparations for the elections that lie three months down the line, in Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand, the better for it. The party has fared better in recent elections (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and in local elections in Karnataka) than in national polls, and that may be the way to go. It is, after all, winning elections, which provides the adrenaline to any party, and can arrest the outflow of leaders.

And who knows, Rahul Gandhi's resignation may unleash processes, which starts to dismantle — at least dilute—dynastic structure in other political outfits, which have become family fiefs. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

How Kerala failed the BJP?

Editor,
I'm somewhat taken aback to analyse the facts that while a good number of states in India, especially the cow belt zones, had voted overwhelming for the BJP but I never cease to wonder why even in the Congress ruled states like Rajasthan the Congress had drawn a shocking blank! In other states like Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh the Congress had fared no better as the party has been virtually and comprehensively elbowed out.

However, Kerala exhibited a diametrically contrasting picture where the BJP had tried ever feasible trick up its sleeve to make inroads into the state, a hitherto non-BJP bastion, through the Sabarimala temple issue and by parachuting in the incumbent Governor of Mizoram to defeat Shashi Tharoor but all BJP's essay to steal a march on Congress and Communist parties herein had ended with egg on its face. Perhaps this standout failure in question may be due to the phenomenal literacy rate of Kerala where it has achieved a whopping 93.91 % while that of entire India is as low as 74.04% only as per the available data. With such

remarkable literacy standards, the same may perchance reflect the voters' mindset that can't be hoodwinked by the communal overtones of PM Modi, who while organizing the election campaigns to the Lok Sabha this year, had uttered something about the minority becoming majority, insinuating at Rahul Gandhi contesting from Wayanad Constituency in Kerala. Perhaps, even Mr Modi's previous references to mind blowing allusions by raising the communal question of land distribution for kabristan and shamshan and supply of electricity during Eid vis-à-vis Holi while campaigning in the UP assembly elections in 2017 couldn't have moved the voters of Kerala. Based on the premise thereof, we may conclude that Kerala's literacy factor and a questioning electorate must have played spoilsport to Modi's juggernaut as elsewhere even eminent and likely winning candidates have to shockingly bite the dust!

Coincidentally, if we forget the Balakot skirmishes for a moment, that must have, by and large premised PM Modi's victory in the recent parliamentary polls vis-à-vis the voters of Kerala, highly literate as they are, they may have keenly

grasped the historic turn of events pertaining to the outcome of the parliamentary elections in Britain occurring seventy four years ago when Churchill as the leader of Britain had successfully led his country in the World War II epoch making victory over the Axis powers in 1945. But as it may sound odd, in the same year of 1945 on the immediate end of the said war, Churchill and his conservative party was thrashed by the Labour Party led by C. Attlee. Such turn of events only goes to show how the English voters were so acutely conscious of the sacrosanct implications of adult franchise of democracy many years ago. They are not led by mere emotional hype and breast thumping of a show-man!

Your etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong, 2

Much ado about Yoga

Editor,
The Fifth International Day of Yoga on Friday last saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi taking the lead in observing the day throughout the country through his appeal to people to take yoga to all sections of society. Modi said, “Yoga is above religion

and caste.” In my opinion, yoga is not fully outside of the purview of Hindu religion. In the ultimate analysis it can be said that yoga is part and parcel of Hinduism, but one can choose to sans its religious overtones and practice it. But practicing the complete course of yoga has per-se the ritualistic obeisance which may be revolting to the belief system of other non-Hindu people.

So, it is not really advisable that all should practice yoga as it is not above religion as is claimed by the Prime Minister. For example, ‘om’ is a sacred syllable typifying the three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, who are connected to the three operations of integration, maintenance and disintegration. During the breathing exercises in yoga, one has to chant this ‘om’ which may be revolting to the spirit of a non-Hindu person. But delinking some asanas from the whole body of yoga and practicing them are alright and may not displease the spirit in a non-Hindu person. As a matter of fact, yoga is not mandatory at all for maintaining good health if a person follows a set of stretches similar to yoga. There are a number of

other exercises which can be practiced as easily as yoga. Projecting and promoting yoga alone as the panacea for a number of lifestyle diseases and stresses of this modern life is absolutely unacceptable. While a lot of exercises similar to yoga are available and millions are following them, Prime Minister's exhortation to include yoga in everyone's life does not hold water. So, it is not good to preach that yoga alone is good for maintaining good health.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam
Kochi -15

Give equal importance to all national festivals

Editor,
The entire nation and the world witnessed enthusiastic participation in the International Day of Yoga event. World leaders, spiritual gurus, diplomats and yoga experts during every year's celebration are overwhelmed by the response to the call given by India at the UN five years ago. India celebrated Yoga day with active participation of senior political representatives, govt officials and the Hon'ble PM himself, who took issue to

the United Nations to mark this event. All Indian embassies and consulates across the world too celebrated Yoga Day under the flagship initiated by the government. The entire nation thus stood still for few hours in anticipation and dedication of few minutes towards Yoga. The enthusiastic response witnessed in India especially amongst the urban masses signifies the need and primacy of Yoga in a modern, stressful and busy world.

However it is ironical to note that no such enthusiasm or overwhelming response is demonstrated for other national festivals. All national festivals as declared signify India's democratic strength in celebrating either her Independence Day or Republic Day. Also we are in the 150th birth centenary year of Mahatma Gandhi to be celebrated in the upcoming months but the enthusiasm of people to celebrate these national festivals is ironically fast dwindling. There is now an urgent need to restore pride and enthusiasm in observing other major events as well, as demonstrated on International Yoga Day.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Bengaluru -72

“My key to dealing with stress is simple: just stay cool and stay focused.”

--- Ashton Eaton

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.313

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 2019

Shillong's civic challenges

FROM traffic chaos to sanitation to the burgeoning problem of hawkers Shillong has it all. And all these problems seem to defy solution because the political will to tackle the issues systematically is lacking. It is only a matter of time when the entire city of Shillong will turn into a miserable slum that most visitors would rather avoid. Police Bazar the commercial hub of the city is literally taken over by hawkers. They sell everything from clothes to footwear to street food and fruits and flowers and what have you. Rights activists argue that hawkers have a right to peddle their wares for a livelihood because they are “poor.” If the hawkers are poor then poverty has a new definition because they do good business on free space. They don't need to rent space and nor are they accountable for the garbage that they generate on a daily basis. Police Bazar is a free for all zone and no one really knows who controls the proceedings in that area. In the absence of any clear authority it is only natural that lawlessness will prevail for how you define a scenario where a person can decide overnight that he/she wants to set up shop at a particular spot and does so because there are no rules or regulations to follow.

The situation in Laitumkhrah is far worse. Fish vendors have now started selling fish by the roadside and cleaning and paring fish on footpaths, leaving the waste behind. Next to a fish vendor is a cosmetics hawker and vegetable vendors. Now commuters have to stand on the road to flag a taxi or bus. Such is the predicament that even the Dorbar Shnong of the area which is known to be pro-active has fallen short of public expectations. Needless to say Shillong does not have a civil society group to take on the hawkers who are well protected by powerful lobbies. The hawkers have demanded alternative space for hawking. To accommodate all the hawkers of Shillong whose numbers grow by the day, the Government would require a place that is as big as or bigger than two football grounds within the city.

Between Jaiaw and Mawprem there are butchers who slaughter pigs and cows and leave the remains to rot in the stream below. This is causing health hazards but no one seems to care. Then repeated attempts to clean up the two important streams – Wah Umkhrah and Umshyrypi have failed miserably. Are citizens going to sit and watch the city degenerate to the point of no return or will they take responsibility? The call for civic action is now. Governments only respond when there is pressure to do so. Are there enough public spirited citizens who will exert that pressure on the Government?

Despicable behaviour inside and outside Parliament

By Albert Thyrniang

On suspicion of theft a Muslim man identified as Tabrez Ansari was mercilessly beaten for hours before he succumbed to his injuries on June 22 in Jharkhand. In the video that went viral, the man was taunted by the mob and forced to chant ‘Jai Shri Ram’ by the attackers. This is the latest of numerous cases where the slogan, ‘Jai Shri Ram’ is used to commit heinous crimes and hooliganism. Earlier a Muslim man was beaten and forced to chant the same slogan on suspicion of carrying beef in Assam. In Gurugram a man was forced to chant, ‘Jai Shri Ram’ for wearing a skull cap. In Rajasthan too a Muslim man was repeatedly slapped and forced say ‘Jai Shri Ram’.

In West Bengal, the latest epicentre of violence, of which the ruling dispensation at the centre is a part, ‘Jai Shri Ram’ is not only a mix of religion and politics but is strategically and intentionally used for hooliganism and to commit violence, spread hate and create divisions for political purpose. Such misuse of the religious slogan is despicable and highly condemnable. Groups, outfits and even mobs get legitimacy from political leaders. The recent oath taking ceremony of the 17th Lok Sabha was an exhibition of sloganeering. MPs from the ruling party heckled Opposition MPs shouting religious slogans. It was least desirable in a secular parliament. In general the media were critical of the unbecoming incident. Some called it a spectacle, others viewed it as a brazen display of majoritarianism and a deliberate attempt to institutionalise it while others questioned whether the Temple of Democracy was reduced to a playground for religious slogan shouting. One newspaper termed it as an unpardonable behaviour but the most appreciated reactions are left to the Twitterati who expressed dismay and ruled that it was an insult to parliament. Many also noted the complicit silence of top leaders in the saffron party, including the PM himself, Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and others.

I watched the episode only on TV news channels. To me it was despicable. It was a harassment and intimidation of the opponents. It was taunting the rivals who happen to belong to other religions. It was a blunt rejection of and a to-

tal disregard for India's diversity. The promise of the Prime Minister on the eve of the oath taking ceremony of 17th Lok Sabha that the ruling party would go by nishpaksh (impartiality) and that the Opposition is very important, meant little to hecklers.

The PM's message that in parliament all should forget of ‘paksh’ (treasury) and ‘vipaksh’ (opposition), meant nothing because almost the entire Opposition had to face the ‘wrath’ of the large section of BJP triumphant winners. Sonia Gandhi of the Congress, Asaduddin Owaisi of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, Shafiqur Rahman Barq and S.T. Hassan of the Samajwadi Party, MPs of Trinamool Congress and the DMK MPs were greeted with irksome slogans. The victims were mainly the Muslim MPs. The slogans were ‘Jai Shri Ram’, ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai’ and ‘Vande Mataram’ – slogans that the saffron party used to not only evoke ‘Muscular’ Hindu nationalism but also because they know that these are not acceptable to Muslims as they go contrary to their faith. Sadly, Communalism was evident even inside the Lok Sabha.

The RSS, the BJP and the right wing ‘parivar’ still have an unforgiving grudge against Muslims. They still hold bitterness at what happened in history. They have not accepted the fact that the Mughal Emperors ruled India for about 200 years. More importantly they are still angry that Muslim kings ‘forcefully’ converted Hindus to Islam. While forced conversion might have happened but Muslim rulers in India were by and large tolerant and did not pursue a clear-cut religious policy. Political agenda was their main pre-occupation.

Aurangzeb did make an attempt to pursue a religious policy but miserably failed. His policy actually contributed to the ultimate disintegration of the Mughal Empire. The present ruling government should learn a lesson from Aurangzeb that religious intolerance will lead to the disintegration of this religiously diverse nation. Gladly, a recent survey shows that 80 per cent of Hindus consider that India

is meant for all religions. In this connection, the theory of ‘one nation one religion’ along with its implicit extensions of ‘one nation one language’, ‘one nation one culture’ and even ‘one nation one election’ must be nipped in the bud.

The Sangh parivar also still cannot get over the Partition of 1947 – that Pakistan was created for Muslims, that India was made a secular and not a Hindu nation, that millions of Hindus were killed and forced to flee Pakistan, that Hindus now have no way of governing that country, etc.

Another supposedly ‘maltreatment of Hindus’ by Christian rulers (British and French colonists) is still affecting the psyche of the Sangh. Accusations of conversion to Christianity and destruction of temples to be rebuilt with churches in their place, remains with the right wing groups.

No one denies that terrible things did take place in the past. Forced conversion by Muslim rules, demolition of temples, replacing with mosques might have happened over 500 years ago. The same might have been repeated by the European colonists and missionaries but does it help to live in the past? Is it worth trying to restore the past? What is the benefit in re-winding the clock? What is the point in rewriting history? Can mistakes of the past like demolition of temples be a justification for doing the same to mosques and churches today? Is ‘Ghar Wapsi’ a way forward? Does the malicious attempt to make Muslims and Christians declare that their ancestors were Hindus a progressive action?

Seventy two years ago the sub-continent, united by civilization and culture was split on religious lines. It was painful. Millions suffered on both sides of the border. It was a tragedy, no doubt. But should the enmity and animosity continue? What purpose does it serve? Is not peace the best for both India and Pakistan's progress? Should not the citizens of both countries treat Partition as a distant historic event and move on as two strong nations? Should we not get over the bitterness of that experience and focus on building ourselves? Should we not put an end to wars and conflicts and fight against poverty, illiteracy,

backwardness, religious bigotry and other common enemies? A conscious effort to move on is the best option. Remember and learn from the past but never be enslaved by it.

Religious slogans divide. West Bengal is now deeply divided, thanks to ‘Jai Shri Ram’ slogan initiated by the RSS and the BJP. It is clear from the oath taking ceremony itself. The Opposition MPs responded with slogans of their own like ‘Jai Bhim’, ‘Allahu Akbar’, ‘Hindustan Zindabad’, ‘Jai Maa Kaali’, ‘Jai Bangla’ ‘shloka’, ‘Bismillah-i-Rehman-Rahim’ and Khuda Hafiz’. The new Lok Sabha Speaker has vowed not to permit religious slogans in parliament. If he does not keep his word, it will not be surprise if other slogans are coined and chanted. Christians lawmakers might say, ‘Praise the Lord’ or even ‘Jesus is the Saviour’. That would be a disaster but should the minority not assert itself, the slogan way though.

Another slogan the RSS, BJP and their offshoots are trying to force on everybody's throat is, ‘Bharat mata ki Jai’. This is nothing but a defence mechanism to hide their non-envious history of patriotism and nationalism. The RSS had little or no role in India's Freedom Struggle. The father of RSS ideology, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar begged for mercy from the British Queen to be freed from Andaman jail and struck a deal with the foreigners not to participate in Anti-British activities. The Hindutva champions never unfurled the National Flag until 2002. Sardar Patel had to virtually force the RSS to accept the Tricolour as a pre-condition for lifting its ban clamped after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

It is time we reclaim nationalism from the ultra-nationalists and jingoistic outfits. Nationalism and patriotism is not reduced to chanting slogans. This nation does not belong only to those who shout slogans. Everyone is a nationalist unless proved otherwise. It is time the vast majority of Hindus reclaim Hinduism from the ‘Jai Shri Ram’ sloganeering hyper active groups. They are doing more harm to Hinduism than good. It is high time to deal firmly with anti-national elements who use religious slogans to commit hate crimes and polarise the society.

Population growth Can resources meet challenges?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Population growth continues to be a cause of concern globally with different predictions. On the one hand, the UN estimates that population is expected to peak to 11 billion by 2100 and only then will stabilise, and on the other many demographers are of the opinion that it will peak much earlier, may be by 2050 at about 9 billion and start shrinking after that. In such a scenario, the problem will accentuate in third world countries, including India.

In these countries the high density of population and increasing growth has come as a burden and resulted in failure to assure the lower segments of the population a dignified standard of living. Obviously, this is due to the fact that their resources are inadequate to match the necessities.

Let us refer here to famous scientist Robert Malthus prediction, way back in 1798 (in his book ‘An Essay on the Principle of Population’) where he stated that population may grow exponentially while resources would grow arithmetically. As more people entered the workforce, wages would fall and goods would become scarce. Then there are experts of the last century who had talked of a crisis situation emerging due to high levels of population growth and it cannot be denied that during the middle part of that century there were innumerable starvation deaths in many countries of Asia and Africa.

A follower of Malthus, Paul Ehrlich in his famous book ‘The Population Bomb’ in 1968 warned that “in the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programme embarked upon now”. Ehrlich was a big supporter of India's family planning programme as he considered it would become impossible for this planet to feed the ever-increasing population. Though a section of economists, mostly from the Western world, feel that population growth has no relation to poverty, it is a fact that in the backward countries of Asia and Africa, where population growth and its density are high poverty, under nutrition and squalor has been on the rise.

At the same time, while it is acknowledged that human beings are the best and finest resource, the pressure of population growth on natural resource has been rising. An example could be countries such as India, which is primarily agro-based. Apart from the fact that productivity is quite low, land holdings have become smaller due to divisions with an increase in family members over passage of time, further aggravating the situation. This has resulted in migration from rural to urban areas, where infrastructure is poor and people have been forced to take shelter in unauthorised slums, squatter settlements, railway tracks etc. where living conditions are undoubtedly degraded and inhuman.

On the question of food, while innovative methods have been successful in improving yields of essential commodities and negating the Malthusian warning, there are certain concerns which need to be addressed. Though food production has increased and the conspicuous consumption of the rich is a reality, there are still starvation deaths, even in India as also deaths due to under-nutrition, both of adults and children. This is clear indication that availability of food in Third World countries like India is not quite sufficient. Can anyone say when the whole population of the developing economies will get a nutritious diet and whether this at all is achievable in the next two decades or so?

Regarding technological innovations in increasing food productivity, it has to be admitted that pollution has emerged as a big challenge, whether it is the case

of water pollution, soil pollution etc. Degrading of land due to excessive use of chemicals and fertilizers is well known as also the over use of groundwater resources. While soil pollution is destroying large tracts of soil, arsenic, fluoride and iron contamination of water has become manifest, specially in various parts of India as water levels become lower.

The point that is sometimes missed is that water contamination has little or no effect on the upper and middle income sections; it mostly affects the poorer sections of society. Thus it would not be judicious to say that science and technology has worked wonders in feeding the population without the resultant effects, which are indeed quite disastrous for the economically weaker sections.

Adding to all this is the contamination of whatever we eat and the air we breathe. Scholars, who mostly come from the upper echelons of society, are not much exposed to problems suffered by the poor, specially those living in backward areas of the country or living by the side of railway tracks. They simply cannot imagine that the toxicity the common man on the street has been exposed to has resulted in a virtual jump of diseases like cancer, which were a rare occurrence some 40 years ago. There is little possibility of the disease burden on the poor receding in spite of best scientific interventions. Is not the high population growth responsible for it?

Another interesting finding is that most of the rich and the upper middle classes have small families, whereas the number of members in poor families is much higher. However, in recent times, with the spread of massive awareness campaign, birth control has been brought down though population growth still remains a problem. And this problem primarily affects the poorer sections of society due to lack of education and exposure to socio-economic problems.

One may mention here the observation of Ted Nordhaus, co-founder of Breakthrough Institute, a California-based energy and environment think tank, who aptly pointed out: “For decades, each increment of economic growth in developed economies has brought lower resource and energy use than the last.” This trend of severing the tie between GDP and energy/materials throughput is called ‘decoupling’.

Many economists make big claims for past decoupling and promise much more of it in the future. But a careful analysis of decoupling to date shows that most is attributable to accounting error. And to get the developing world up to the level of an average American's energy usage would require nearly quadrupling global consumption, even assuming advances in efficiency, which, however, appears unrealistic. Thus, unless we find ways to make decoupling actually happen in the future more reliably and at higher rates, growing the global economy will require us to use more of the Earth's depleted resources.

The Global Footprint Network calculated that humanity is currently exceeding Earth's sustainable productivity by 60 per cent. We do this by drawing down resources that future generations and other species would otherwise use. As a result of our actions, Earth's long-term carrying capacity for humans is actually declining. ---INFA

Thomas Jones - Father of What?

Editor,

One must take strong exception to the Shillong Times labeling Thomas Jones as the “Father of Khasi Language (ST June 24, 2019). The Khasi language is not an illegitimate child in search of a father. As language researchers tell us, languages evolved as a series of calls or gestures which over time developed into combinations, giving us the complex communication necessary for social interaction and survival. The simultaneous evolution of the human brain and its neural connections enabled the processing of these early sounds. Some contrived languages like Esperanto or Ebonics may have had an originator but they never caught on. There is no such thing as father of a language though mother tongue is accepted, but that of course is something else.

The tombstone epitaph pictured in the article itself

describes Jones as the “Founding Father of the Khasi Alphabets and Literature”. Alphabets, yes, but literature? Definitely “No”. The oral Khasi language was rich in literature, grammar, syntax, etymology, nuances and dialects long before Jones arrived. “The Languages of Meghalaya” edited by G.N. Devy and Esther Syiem and published by the People's Linguistic Survey of India in 2014, provides a comprehensive description of the formations and linguistic complexities of the Khasi language.

The tendency to map ourselves as a people and culture against Western norms shows our weak sense of identity and social insecurity. Why else are we obsessed with calling the Khasi Hills as the “Scotland of the East”, name our landmarks as “Jacob's Ladder” and give our children Western (not even Biblical) names (mine is taken from Scottish). Even our

Christianity is largely Western in its church architecture, ritual and clerical vestments.

The multi-talented Thomas Jones gave us much more than is generally known. The book “Welsh Missionaries and British Imperialism” published in 2012 and released in Shillong by the historian Andrew May is in a sense a biography of Thomas Jones. Being the great great-grandson of Thomas Jones gives the author a unique vantage point. Jones taught carpentry and other vocations and improved the distillation techniques of the local rice beer. While we may have moral stances about liquor, in his own country distillers carry no stigma. So maybe we should call Jones the “Father of Vocational Education”.

We are all familiar with Thomas Jones's life of missionary service and literary contributions. He eventually fell out with the church by marrying an underage girl, got himself emeshed in a busi-

ness misadventure and fled for his life from the Khasi Hills. He was human, flaws and all, like all of us. We need not canonize him or exalt him on a pedestal that is higher than what he was. So by all means let's celebrate Thomas Jones birthday but in constructive ways. Perhaps the same church that gave him a new gravestone may like to set up a vocational school in his name for orphans and dropouts. Or an enterprising businessman may come out with a rice beer named after him. I could drink to that!

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor
Via email

Harijan Colony issue

Editor,

The issue of the Harijan Colony at Them Iew Mawlong keeps coming up again and again because successive Governments in the

past, especially during the Congress led regime, did nothing to solve this issue once and for all. In fact the issue of relocating or removing the Harijans from Them Metor or Them Iew Mawlong (Harijan colony) was demanded earlier by the Khasi Students' Union but the then Congress Government did nothing to explore ways and means to solve the issue. The fact of the matter is that it is good in all respects for the people staying there to move away from the place as it is a place of filth, dirt and garbage (slum) area. In fact the Government has already made ready a housing colony for them which is far better than the place they are staying in today. The intention of the Government is very loud and clear that relocation for the residents of Harijan Colony is for their good only. What they should do now is to co-operate with the Government and not to antagonise it by putting a lot of hindrances which include litigation, and po-

liticising it by calling their brethren from Punjab, complaining to the Minority Commission etc. All these exercises will make matters worse. It is sufficient for them to just cooperate with the present plans of the present Government. We know that the Government will treat them with respect and fairness. In fact majority of the residents of Harijan Colony are agreeable to the Government's settlement plans. Those opposing are the few vested interests who also have business stakes in Them Iew Mawlong. Moreover, they should not worry about the threat issued to them by HNLC as nothing is going to happen to them because Meghalaya Government is giving them full protection

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email.

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

"Whenever I hear, 'It can't be done,' I know I'm close to success."

--- Michael Flatley

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.314 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2019

Opportunities for the MDA Govt

THE NPP-led MDA Government needs to list out its priorities and pursue them with a sense of purpose. It is unfortunate that the Central Agricultural University (CAU) which was to be set up in Meghalaya since 2010 and had been allocated 200 acres of land is not just hanging fire but is being reduced to a college. Obviously past State Governments had not pursued the matter vigorously. But if politicians come and go the question to ask is to those in the bureaucracy that headed the Agriculture Department and how much they have done to engage on this issue with the central government to bring it to its logical conclusion. Also it's unfair that the Congress should lay the fault for all unfinished projects at the door of the MDA Government. In this a counter question can be asked as to what the MUA Government, with two back to back tenures, has done for the state.

The other issue is of the Umroi Airport and how soon it can attain a status of a full-fledged airport that will connect Meghalaya to the national capital and other state capitals in the country. Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has enough clout in the National Government to make this happen. He should take this opportunity to ensure that the airport is fully functional before the National Games 2022. Speaking of the National Games, this is also a great opportunity for the MDA Government to showcase to the nation that it can be trusted to create the best sporting infrastructure if enough funds are made available. So far we have not heard of any scams in the present Government except for its affinity to the illegal coal mining and transportation business that continues to make news. There are also whispers among those with their noses to the ground that some illegal collection is going on from transport vehicles and check/toll gates. Conrad Sangma and the NPP have been bestowed with public trust to contribute to the future of this state. It is incumbent upon the Chief Minister to ensure that none of his ministers indulge in self-aggrandisement, which many in power succumb to, especially for first timers who are unsure of their next win. Letting down the aspiration of three million people will have its own 'karma.' Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has a degree in Management from a foreign university but Meghalaya does not need a manager. Managers have never brought change in the system. Meghalaya is in need of a bold leader to bring change in their socio-economic status of its people. Questions have been raised about devolution of funds for Sports infrastructure in Garo Hills. These questions need honest answers.

TO THE EDITOR

Shocking editorial!

Editor:
We are shocked to see the editorial, Harijan Colony: Call for a pragmatic approach. (ST June 18, 2019). The entire content of the editorial is against the residents of the Harijan Colony and in the name of pragmatism and slum clearance, you have chided CM Conrad Sangma for his assurance to the Punjabi Lane settlers by saying, "But this does not solve the long term problem which is that of a slum in the vicinity of the largest market of Meghalaya, which is bursting at the seams."

Dharavi is the biggest slum of Asia in the heart of Mumbai city. The city administration and the State government has not taken any steps to relocate the residents out of the city in the name of cleaning up the city. Right to a housing of one's choice is a fundamental right and no state can force any such policy on the residents. You have not made a single reference to the history of the area and have arbitrarily condemned the residents of the area. Significantly, the whole editorial thrust is to give legitimacy to the Shillong Municipal Board, whose actions are in contempt of orders of the Meghalaya High Court.

We expect the Shillong

Times to adopt an impartial approach and not a biased and sectarian approach against the poorest of the poor residents who have served the state of Shillong for the last two centuries.

Yours etc.,
Gurjit Singh,
Viaemail

MeECL services collapsing

Editor,

The services of the MeECL are going from bad to worse in spite of numerous and regular shut-downs for so called maintenance works. Power outages are frequent in all major towns of the state. Rural areas go without any power supply for weeks on end. Reverse polarity happens every now and then posing a danger to the users. The inefficiency is so glaring yet there is no accountability whatsoever. The senior management seems to have lost all control over its ground and maintenance staff!

To add to the woes of the paying individual consumer, the MePDCL also seems to be on a downward slide. Two years back I had complained online on their website as well as to the Grievance Committee that one cannot make any corrections/alterations in

respect of their profile like contact number etc. Nothing has been done even up-to today. Doesn't this Corporation have an IT Manager? And if yes, what is he/she doing? Or is it that no one bothers to check and test the functionality of the various options on the website?

The worse, however, is that their website has now been non-functional for a month! Online payments can, therefore, not be made. Do the officials of this utility expect the senior citizen consumer to go back to the old practice and stand in line for an hour or more to pay the electricity bill?

Those at the helm of affairs in these two Corporations, what do you do during your working hours? Do you even attend office, because that is what it looks like? We are paying for electricity unlike you who get free power supply!

Is there any hope for these utilities, or are they on the verge of collapse?

Yours etc.,
Eugene Thomas,
Shillong 793006

Is medical education expensive?

Editor,

I have often pondered over this dilemma faced with a barrage of high

profile persons including political leaders, social scientists, administrators and even doctors like Dr Devi Shetty endorsing the view that it is. Figure of 1 crore being spent by the Government on every MBBS doctor produced has been banded about for a long time. This is the excuse used to introduce a compulsory rural service for MBBS students from time to time in different states in different forms. Even the idea of No Objection certificate from MCI needed by MBBS doctors to go abroad stems to some extent from this hoax. Yes I call it a hoax or a propaganda and I will try to prove the same.

Where did this figure come from? My idea is that it was picked up from what private medical colleges charge as fee and ancillary charges from its victims. Total of about 67,000 MBBS doctors are produced in India every year. If it costs 1 crore per doctor as input cost then we are spending 67000 crores on this venture as a nation. With approximately 32,000 Government seats we can whittle down the Government's expenditure to 32000 crores which is 65% of the nation's budget for healthcare. Even taking into account the states' contribution the Government then is

spending about 40% of its annual budget for health only on medical education. If we take example of UT Chandigarh which has budget of about 475 crore for health which it has to cover expenditure of all 4 major hospitals multiple dispensaries and other facilities at its command obviously it is not spending 100 crore out of this only on education of MBBS doctors.

Fact is Medical Education provides cheap labour to healthcare and if anything, it subsidizes the healthcare provided to the citizens as part of its responsibility by the Government. If undergraduate and post graduate students were not to participate in providing healthcare, the entire system would collapse and Government would need to hire three times more doctors and nurses to do the same inadequate job it currently does. In fact medical education saves expenditure which government would otherwise have to do as part of its duty.

Why then is this oft repeated propaganda heard that Government spends "crores" to make one doctor. The reason is that the Government is loathe to let go of the cheap labour which it has used and abused for 10 years or so it takes to prepare a doctor and wishes to

MP finishes his allotted time. Winston Churchill once told his party MPs that MPs should endeavour to make only one point in their speeches. It is the privilege of Prime Ministers alone to make two points!

True, there is no magic remedy. The process will be slow and long. Nevertheless, a meaningful beginning would be made if Speaker Birla puts an end to brazen rowdiness. The Chair needs to ensure that the House is not held to ransom through a 'gang up' of MPs determined to disrupt its smooth functioning. Any member rushing into the House's Well should automatically stand suspended for a week.

What next? Plainly it is time to rectify the flaws. Rules have to be drastically changed to put Parliament back on track and ensure no one can hold the House to ransom. We have to be clear: Are we for democracy as a civilized form of Government or have we degenerated into a "democracy" of devils and fixers? Remember, there can be no place in a 21st-century Parliament for people upholding 19th-century prejudices.

With 267 new MPs it remains to be seen if our jan sevaks adopt an attitude of cooperation or confrontation and adhere to rules. They must desist from reducing our temple of democracy in to a monument like Taj Mahal or Qutab Minar. We know what pigeons do to them.

As Prime Minister Modi gets down to bringing change in governance, he must recognize the Speaker's key role and help him serve democracy impartially by adopting the British maxim: "Once Speaker always a Speaker"

In sum, Birla needs to heed Indira Gandhi's words: "Parliament is a bulwark of democracy... It also has a heavy task of keeping an image that will gain it the faith and respect of the people. Because, if that is lost, then I don't know what could happen later." That faith and respect needs to be restored and built by the new Speaker through a new chapter. Any takers? --- INFA

extend the period of bonded labour by another 2-3 years by hook or crook if possible. Unfortunately since this figure has been loosely and frequently stated in public, press and even in court judgments and it has never really been countered, hence it has become entrenched in public psyche.

Medical education is extremely profitable which is why so many powerful people ventured into it. 80 MPs were reportedly owning Medical Colleges at one time. Students who could not afford the 60 lac to 1 crore cost in private colleges in India go abroad where the MBBS education is obtained in 15-30 lakhs cost from different countries. Obviously those managing the colleges in China, Philippines, Russia, and so many other countries make a profit from this amount.

What is needed is a white paper from the Government as well as the medical associations on the factual cost of medical education after a detailed study of the matter.

Yours etc.,
Dr Neeraj Nagpal
Convener, Medicos
Legal Action Group,
Managing Director
MLAG Indemnity,
Ex President IMA
Chandigarh

Declining Parliament New Speaker, new chapter?

By Poonam I Kaushish

within and without eager to destabilise India and disrupt its unity and integrity. This calls for reasoned debate.

Yet, till date even a one-man Opposition army has prevented discussion by holding the House to ransom. Many members have made it a habit of rushing into the Well of the House. All spew sheer contempt. Bringing things to such a pass that pursuit of power, pelf and patronage is replacing law making. The figures tell all. Parliament spends less than 10% of time on legislative matters and the most on trivialities.

Moreover, we take great pride in calling ourselves the world's largest democracy. Yet most of us forget that Parliamentary democracy provides for a civilized form of Government based on discussion, debate and consensus. Alas, ruthless politics has taken over and discussions and debates have largely lost their meaning. Numbers alone matter and have become the sole criteria of success.

In this milieu, the Speaker's job has become all the more important and demanding. However, few appreciate his key role without whom, according to Erskine May, "the House has no Constitutional existence."

Alas, over like the years Parties have used Constitutional posts as lollipops to reward or oblige Party workers, the Speakership is no exception. Think. Although the Lok Sabha Rules of Procedure are largely based on the Westminster model, the all-important issue of having an independent Speaker was overlooked.

Under the Westminster system of Parliamentary democracy in Britain, an MP resigns from the Party on his election as Speaker. Moreover, the Speaker is re-elected unopposed to the House of Commons in subsequent elections. Sadly, few follow the premise that a Speaker is expected to be above Party politics, not a plaything of

the Party.

As a former Lok Sabha Speaker confided, "We are elected on Party tickets with Party funds how can we claim independence? Moreover, even if we resign on becoming the Speaker, we would still have to go back to the same Party for sponsorship for the next election."

Consequently, most Speakers have been Party members, especially after laying down Office or prior to it. From second Speaker Ayyangar who became Bihar Governor on expiry of his term to GS Dhillon and Manohar Joshi who switched roles from Ministers to Speakers, Balram Jhakar never concealed his identity as a Congressman, Rabi Ray lived up to his Janata Party's expectation and Shivraj Patil who post Speakership, lost the re-election, but was nominated by Congress to the Rajya Sabha and anointed Home Minister. Sadly, today eyebrows are not even raised.

Undeniably, to conduct the House business smoothly stern discipline is paramount. Discussions should be made more meaningful and focused through a strict time schedule. Today, time management has become a joke. Most Speakers are too indulgent, allowing Party leaders to speak endlessly, as though they are speaking at a political rally.

Hence crucial legislative business meriting in-depth debate is rushed through with only a cursory glance. There is no such thing as first, second and third readings of bills as during Parliament's golden era under Nehru. Unlike the past, demands for grants of various Ministries and Departments, running into lakhs of crores rupees are guillotined without any discussion because time is wasted on non-issues.

Clearly, Speaker Birla has to walk a tight rope. Ensure the Opposition has its say even as the Government has its way. For starters he needs to take a leaf out of the West's book to save time, whereby the microphone is switched off as soon as a

Armed with Supreme Court directive, banks are defying RBI Modi Govt still refusing to name and shame big defaulters

By Nitya Chakraborty

Emboldened by the directive of the Supreme Court to the Reserve Bank of India that the Bank must reform its transparency guidelines and provide details on top wilful loan defaulters, the public sector banks have started the process of naming the wilful corporate defaulters without waiting for the RBI decision. The process has started with the UCO Bank and already other PSBs have started discussing the issue at the board level so that the managements can come out with the names of the wilful defaulters.

Recently, the Kolkata based UCO bank published the name of Yashovardhan Birla, along with his photograph in newspapers as a wilful defaulter because of his company failing to repay Rs. 67.65 crore for long and showing no intention to repay. This created a storm in the banking circles as the RBI's Finance Ministry and the RBI have been refusing to make public the list of big wilful corporate defaulters. On April 26, 2019, the Supreme Court heard a contempt plea regarding RBI's refusal to divulge details of defaulters.

NPA value is owed by these top 100 borrowers. As of March 2019, 9.3 per cent of the total given loan amount had been declared as NPA.

The apex court said on April 26 that this was RBI's last chance, and that if the bank still refused to provide details, action would be taken against the central bank for contempt of court. Yet, in response to the RTI filed by The Wire, the RBI refused to provide details on the accounts of the top 100 borrowers. It did not provide the names of the account holders, the amounts owed by them or the interest rates at which they have borrowed money. The RBI said that such information is not available.

The central bank said that it collects information regarding debt under Section 27(2) of the Banking Regulation (BR) Act 1949 and under Section 28 of the RBI Act, 1934. The RBI's response said: "As per Section 28 of the BR Act, RBI can only disclose information collected under Section 27 (2) of the Act in such consolidated manner as it deems fit."

The bank said that in

The apex court said on April 26 that this was RBI's last chance, and that if the bank still refused to provide details, action would be taken against the central bank for contempt of court. Yet, in response to the RTI filed by The Wire, the RBI refused to provide details on the accounts of the top 100 borrowers. It did not provide the names of the account holders, the amounts owed by them or the interest rates at which they have borrowed money. The RBI said that such information is not available.

The Court criticised the RBI and directed the apex bank to reform its transparency guidelines and provide these details to the public.

Two months have passed since then but the RBI has not come out with any follow up action on the Supreme Court directive while the affected public sector banks have started taking action without waiting for any fresh RBI directive. After UCO Bank, the UBI and the Syndicate Bank have discussed the issue and, many other bank boards will be shortly taking up the issue. They are impatient for taking action and going public with the names of the big wilful corporate defaulters.

Nearly 50 per cent - or Rs 4.5 lakh crore - of the total value of India's non-performing assets (NPAs) are due to loans taken out by the top 100 borrowers, an RTI query filed by The Wire has revealed.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that as of December 31, 2018, loans taken by the top 100 borrowers created NPAs worth Rs 4,46,158 crore. This means that on average, each of the top 100 borrowers is responsible for NPAs worth Rs 4,461 crore. The RBI refused to provide details on who these top 100 borrowers are.

According to an answer given by the then finance minister in the Rajya Sabha on February 5, 2019, the total value of NPAs in scheduled commercial banks was Rs 10,09,286 crore as of December 31, 2018. Of that, the value of NPAs in public sector banks was Rs 8,64,433 crore.

This means that 44 per cent of the total NPA value is owed by just the top 100 borrowers. And if only public sector banks are considered, then 52 per cent of the total

terms of Section 45(E) of the RBI Act, RBI is prohibited from disclosing credit information except under certain conditions as stated in the Act.

The number of wilful defaulters in nationalised banks has increased by over 60 per cent to 8,582 in five years to March 2019, the government sources say. By the end of 2014-15 fiscal, the figure stood at 5,349. Rising consistently since 2014-15, the number of such borrowers increased to 6,575 in 2015-16; 7,079 in 2016-17 and further to 7,535 in 2017-18.

As per data reported by nationalised banks, till March 31, 2019, suits for recovery have been filed in 8,121 cases. In cases involving secured assets, action under the provisions of the SARFAESI Act has been initiated in 6,251 cases. Further, in accordance with RBI instructions of initiation of criminal proceedings wherever necessary, FIRs have been registered in 2,915 cases.

Besides, vide Sebi regulations, wilful defaulters and companies with wilful defaulters as promoters/directors have been debarred from accessing capital markets to raise funds, she said. In addition, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 has debarred wilful defaulters from participating in the insolvency resolution process.

For effective action against wilful defaulters fleeing Indian jurisdiction, the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 has been enacted to provide for attachment and confiscation of property of fugitive offenders and has disintegrated them from defending any civil claim. (IPA Service)

“It's the mark of a backward society - or a society moving backward - when decisions are made for women by men.”

--- Melinda Gates

The Shillong Times

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More fines from motorists

THE Union Government is coming up with a bill to change the Motor Vehicles Act, with a view to streamlining matters relating to road use and safety. With a huge increase in vehicle population on the roads, an unprecedented situation is at hand. Several cities are witnessing chaotic situations due to the intensity of traffic, lack of sufficient road width and unruly behaviour on the part of sections of motorists. Ludicrously low levels of fines, like imposition of Rs 100 or 200, also is a reason for rule-violations.

Helmet use is sure to reduce the intensity of accidents. It saves one's head. Yet, youths and even elders are often reticent about using this device, and there are those who cite excuses and argue their case against use of helmets. Such irresponsible activism should be checked; and there is need to raise the fine amounts to higher levels. The Union Government is doing precisely that, among other things, by way of coming up with amendments to the MV Act – something that it did in the last Lok Sabha but failed to pass in the upper house.

Among other things, the amendments seek to raise the fine for helmetless-ride to Rs 1,000 from the existing Rs 400; drunk driving to Rs 10,000 from the present Rs 2,000; non-use of seat belts meaning a fine of 1,000 instead of the present Rs 100; use of mobile phone while driving to mean a fine of Rs 5,000 instead of Rs 1,000 at present and not giving side to Ambulance meaning a fine of Rs 10,000; while parents have to pay Rs 25,000 if under-age children drive vehicles. The new rules would also heavily penalise contractors for defects in road constructions resulting in mishaps, a Rs 10 lakh compensation for hit-and-run cases, and a fine of Rs 500crore for companies manufacturing defective vehicle engines. Looks fine.

Raising the fine amounts helps in two ways – one, to reduce instances of rule violations; and two, a massive revenue to the exchequer. The more faults on the citizens' side, the more the strain on them, and the more the government earns. The flip side is about the way the implementation would be done. Cops are used to taking undue advantage. They are likely to misuse the provisions to tax the ordinary citizens even in situations where an inadvertent rule violation takes place; like, “not giving side,” to a police vehicle. This calls for suitable redressal mechanisms for the public too to work effectively.

Women's Empowerment – Miles to Go

By Rajdeep Pathak

Two news items – one recently shared by a senior journalist friend on a social media platform on 15 women who helped draft the Indian Constitution; and the other infamous ‘Kathua’ rape case left me wondering how a nation where women have risen to the pinnacle of success since the Independence can also tolerate and suffer brutality on them. I am also reminded of another photograph that was widely circulated in both social as well as mainstream media platforms on March 8, 2019 (the International Women's Day), of the former Defence Minister of India Nirmala Sitharaman addressing all male Defence personnel at a round table meeting with the top brass of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The photo was so much in circulation as it projected not just a transformative and progressive society of giving woman the place they rightfully deserve, but that photograph was intended to inspire many others.

The women I mentioned who played a key role in drafting the Indian Constitution included: Ammu Swaminathan from the Palghat district of Kerala; Dakshayani Velayudhan, the leader of the then titled ‘Depressed Classes’ from Bolgatty in Cochin; Begun Aizaz Rasul of Malerkotla; Durgabai Deshmukh, the founder of the ‘Andhra Mahila Sabha’; Hansa Jivraj Mehta; Kamla Chaudhary, who went on to become the vice-president of the All India Congress Committee in its fifty-fourth session; Leela Roy from Goalpara Assam; Malati Choudhury from East Bengal (today Bangladesh), who married the then Orissa Chief Minister Nabakrushna Choudhuri; Purnima Banerjee; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur the founder of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS); Renuka Ray; Sarojini Naidu; Sucheta Kriplani; Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Annie Mascarene.

It is noteworthy to quote Ammu Swaminathan, who on November 24, 1949 during a discussion on the motion by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to pass the draft of the Constitution said: “People outside have been saying that India did not give equal rights to her women. Now we can say that when the Indian people themselves framed their Constitution they have given rights, equal rights to women equal with every other citizen of the country”.

What Ammu Swaminathan couldn't anticipate was that even after seven decades of Independent India, the nation has struggled to place in Parliament a considerable number of women representatives. In fact the nation is still struggling to amend its laws

given the heinous crimes women are subjected to. A small example – which is just the tip of the iceberg – to justify this point is the data from the National Crime Records Bureau which estimates that more than 1,000 cases of acid violence takes place every year in the country. While the Delhi Government's move – towards protection of women – by making rides in public transport free, seems to be a populist move for gaining votes, the safety measures have not been taken seriously enough though.

It was also heartening to hear the Hon'ble President of India in his address to the Joint Session of Parliament on June 20, 2019 when he expressed his happiness that the grand electoral festival saw a large number of women voter turnout this year.

This is indeed correct to the extent of the ratio of the women's participation in the electoral process as voters; and women who actually get a chance to voice their opinion. As the saying goes, a thin line separates fantasy from fear. For whether it is an eight-old-year girl belonging to a nomadic Muslim tribe being sedated, tortured, gang-raped and finally bludgeoned to death inside the devasthanam or temple in Kathua, Jammu; or the death of a minor girl from Assam at the residence of an MLA in Arunachal Pradesh under mysterious circumstances – these incidents send bizarre warning signals of whether – despite the trumpet blowing investments by state and central government for ensuring women's safety – women and children are safe in this country anymore? Though justice was delivered in the Kathua rape case, thanks to the soundness of the Judicial Institutions, but the incident itself is gruesome and speaks of sheer brutality and the savagery of the crime.

The incident at the residence of the legislator in Arunachal Pradesh further speaks volumes of denial of justice to the victim's family (and this isn't the first time) who in many such cases are in a vulnerable position because of the socio-economic factors such as poverty and illiteracy. Girls and women from such families across the nation are compelled to work as domestic help and this is one of the factors of their growing vulnerability.

This brings us again to a vital question of education. Sarojini Naidu (one of the tallest women figure of the Indian National Movement), while arguing that

women should be educated says: Therefore, I charge you, restore to your women their ancient rights. ... Educate your women and the nation will take care of itself; for it is true today as it was yesterday, and will be to the end of human life. The hand that rocks the cradle is the power that rules the world.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Red Fort cried his heart out appealing citizens to respect women and stop violence against them. His clarion call for making India completely open defecation free (ODF) was intended towards providing women per se their dignity and the country responded overwhelmingly.

The then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2001 categorically remarked: “Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.”

Former U.S. President Barack Hussain Obama, on the occasion of the International Women's Day in March 2013 said: “Empowering women isn't just the right thing to do – it's the smart thing to do. When women succeed, nations are more safe, more secure and more prosperous”.

The stories of Nirbhaya who was brutally raped inside the heart of Delhi in a moving bus in December 2012 and her subsequent death; or for that matter of tribal women, in the Malwa district of Madhya Pradesh who are exploited into live-in relationships by men (middle-aged businessmen, traders, public or private sector employees) and then abandoned for life – like the tales of the British regime of sahib debaucheries (when men from the East India Company would exploit ‘native’ girls, father children and then heartlessly sail back home to their wives) – is seriously harming the society and destroying the social fabric and impeding progress.

One must understand that empowering women in the development context is to a greater extent, the recognition of the dignity of human life. The whole idea of sustainable development – the concept of which stems from a state of diverse variables pertinent to human life and all its socio-cultural and economic activities – is the sum total to maximize individual and societal development in the background of the environmental protec-

tion and progress.

Kamla Nath in her book “Education and Empowerment of Women: A Case Study of India,” states, ‘Empowerment’ as one sees, it is, both a process and a result, that cannot be measured, nor can it be taken by some individual or institution/organization and given to somebody else. A woman can only empower herself; organizations (through logistic support) and, governments (through their gender just policies) can play a role in supporting the journey and providing an enabling environment. Women are empowered when they become aware of the unfair power relations they face and are able to take the challenge to overcome inequality. Empowerment enables women to take control over their lives and build self-confidence and self-reliance.”

For Kamla and many others, stories of “Sheroes' Hangout” a café in just a half mile away from Taj Mahal run by the survivors of acid violence will be a reason to celebrate. The café opened in December 2014 in Agra in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh started as a crowd-funding project by ‘Stop Acid Attacks’ (SAA), a group committed to ending acts of violence against women through its Facebook campaign since March 8, 2013. Its “pay as you wish” contributions go toward the rehabilitation of survivors of acid violence in India. Sheroes' Hangout also provides skills training in the subject that each survivor is interested in learning. SAA has been collecting data through its volunteers across the country and has information on 430 survivors, 350 of who were attacked in the last two years. It has assisted 70 of them so far. Many other such institutions and campaigns have helped thousands of women, young girls and children come out from their traumatic conditions and have given them back their lost confidence.

More important is to extend the boundaries of education which by no means is a panacea, but can reformulate by engaging young men in questioning and challenging harmful gender norms with the goal of reducing sexual violence and dating/relationship abuse. This education as Maryjo Oster in her write-up: “Preventing sexual violence starts what we teach our boys,” in the Blog “Child Trends” says, should start early. “It should go beyond what girls can do to prevent being victims, to the attitudes that boys have about women and about masculinity, and the actions that men can take to promote mutual respect and egalitarianism”

opinions, measures adopted by the government and importantly the programme now has a mandate to carry on with the non-stop monthly shows till the end of this term for next 5 years. The radio broadcast has a wider reach to the audience through the regional audio translations made in the evening of the same day of broadcast.

However the transcript of the radio programme should now be made available through leading national dailies in English and all the regional languages to be carried and published the next day. The communication strategy as suggested will have a wider impact on national and international readers through publishing of the transcript even through Press Information Bureau portal. The simultaneous broadcast aired even on television channels should carry detailed subtitles and text support in both English and other regional languages, as made in the original speech of the broadcast.

Yours etc.,
Varun Dambal,
Bengaluru- 72

Post-election politics Continuity & change

By Dr S Saraswathi

Prime Minister Modi has started his ambitious mission to achieve sab ka vishwas (trust of all) with a sound advice to the Opposition members in Parliament that they need not worry about their number and that every word they speak is important. His conciliatory remarks at the beginning of the new Lok Sabha urging for total efforts for a nishpaksh (non-partisan) approach to issues of public welfare and the larger interests of the nation is exactly opposite to the prevailing mood in Parliament. It is difficult to make the Opposition members believe, whoever they may be, that an active and effective Opposition is a necessity in a democracy when their sole aim is to capture the seat of the government.

The advice reflects an old democratic belief that even a hopeless minority of one could come out with valuable suggestions in legislations and governance. It applies where that minority has positive mindset.

With a decisive verdict given by the electorate, suspense politics of the past several months that pervaded all kinds of activities has ended yielding place to post-verdict, non-electoral politics. It is normal to expect that all participants in the electoral contest would have learnt many lessons from personal experiences and observations and actions of others that would help them to perform better in future. Of course, it is subject to the will and capacity of the learners and their sincerity in playing the democratic game democratically.

It is reasonable to expect that the winner(s) in the election would continue their technique of expanding and strengthening their support base while the losers would try to identify their mistakes and change their strategies.

Post-election politics that immediately follows an election has not been receiving as much public attention as pre-election politics particularly when the verdict is clear. Hung Parliaments and hung Assemblies are watched with keen interest to see how the waves move. Such movements happen in the aftermath of decisive mandate also. The object cannot be to topple a government that is numerically irremovable by arithmetic moves, but to obstruct and delay decisions and discredit the government so as to overturn the popularity of the ruling party.

Frequent elections under the present system as opposed to “simultaneous” elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies under consideration which carries fixed term give more scope for altering the fortunes of parties. Party politics is kept alive and active in such a manner that pre-election and post-election politics do not vary much in bitterness between rivals.

Modi's seemingly friendly approach to Opposition parties is a good beginning provided it is received with friendly response. The phrase sab ka vishwas (trust of all), which he added to the earlier motto sab ka sath, sab ka vikas summarises his post-election mood reflecting political sagacity. There can be no objection to this, but only expressions of disbelief from staunch political opponents.

Participation of people in governance (jan bhagidari) and people's awareness (jan chetna) are set as the aims to be achieved in the next five years along with raising the image of India globally.

The big pro-incumbency victory is taken by the BJP as a mandate to accelerate development, make governance less intrusive, implement NRC in areas affected by infiltration, and push for the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill and has been proclaimed through the President's address. Government's priority and the main

goal is to strive to make people sufficiently empowered to carry on their daily life.

To focus attention on key challenges for economy – slow growth and unemployment – raised in election campaigns of opposition parties, two Cabinet committees – one to deal with investment and growth and another with employment and skill development have been set up.

The BJP through the rise and fall of regional parties must have realized their importance in national politics in the 2019 General election. It has been reiterating that no goal can be achieved if the States and the Centre do not work together in cohesion. The same lesson seems to have been understood by some of its main opponents that the best way to oppose the ruling party is unlimited non-cooperation.

Post-election violence erupted in clashes between Trinamool workers and BJP. Police had to fire that resulted in the death of two persons. Continuing inter-party clashes in West Bengal coupled with abusive language speaks volumes on the state of democracy, federalism, and popular elections developing in India.

The biggest impact of the defeat is the announcement of Congress President Rahul Gandhi to quit the post of party President leaving it to the organisation to find a successor. As he is till now firm on his decision, the face of the Opposition is going to change which in the absence of a proxy for Rahul Gandhi will introduce changes in the role and/or style of functioning of the Opposition. Though the resignation of the party chief is not unusual in a situation such as that faced by the Congress today, it makes world news when it happens in the Congress. Leadership crisis continuing for over a month in this party, one may be tempted to comment that the AIADMK has fared better by adopting dual leadership as temporary arrangement.

The uncertainty is impacting State Congress units and will immediately affect Haryana, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra where organisational preparations for Assembly elections due this year have to be made. The uncertainty will also affect local alliance relationships and reopen same old pre-poll party politics.

Total defeat has deepened dissensions in some State units of the Congress. Blame game started and infighting became vigorous in Rajasthan and Karnataka. A faction views this phase as the ripe time for change of guard. Telangana is witnessing defection of Congress MLAs to TRS which is on the ascendancy. Four TDP Rajya Sabha members joined the BJP reducing TDP number to two. The AICC also decided to reconstitute the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee.

Rumours are afloat about “misleading” data given by the Data Department of the party on poll prospects and trends in elections. It is for the party to probe into the matter. If there is any truth about possibilities to break into the inner circle of any party, it is organisational weakness and must be rectified.

Defeat led to the end of B S P - S P Mahagathbandhan, a failed experiment, and with it weakened OBC-Dalit attempted coalition. BJP's strategy in choosing candidates proved the futility of playing exclusively caste identity politics in the quest for “vikas”. Still, BSP chief has not closed the doors permanently to SP.

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

Correcting perspectives

Editor,

Apropos the letter, “Thomas Jones – Father of What?” by Dr. Glenn C. Kharkongor (ST, 25 June 2019), I would like to submit this rejoinder on certain points in the letter. While I agree that “we need not canonize” Thomas Jones or “exalt him on a pedestal that is higher than what he was,” I would humbly request for a more informed evaluation based upon actual historical evidence, explained in the context of 19th century missionary-colonial government relations. I also happen to have read the particular book that the letter-writer refers to, “The Languages of Meghalaya,” commissioned by PLSI. He describes the book as providing “a comprehensive description of the formations and linguistic complexities of the Khasi language.” Actually, the main thrust of Ganesh Devy's and Esther Syiem's project was to document the varieties (formerly called ‘dialects’) of language that exist today apart and distinct from the written, literary form. It is a monumen-

tal work that unearths the little known village varieties rather than explains the formation and development of a particular Khasi language.

Thomas Jones' innovation was to reduce the Sohra variety into written form, by devising a modified Roman script and standardizing spelling, sentence structure and basic grammar. (Jones and subsequent missionaries incorporated many words from the War varieties into the Khasi Bible and other writings, while retaining the Sohra sentence structure and grammar. I happen to notice this linguistic assimilation because I have worked for ten years at Sohra where my wife's family is from, and they still speak the ‘dialects’ of, the Ri-War Sohra region.) I join with many Khasi scholars, people actually qualified in linguistics, in maintaining that Jones' great contribution was in pioneering the transformation of the Sohra variety from the vernacular of about a thousand speakers to the full-fledged language of over a million people. We can quibble about terms as to whether Jones was the ‘pioneer’ or

‘founder’ or ‘father,’ but we cannot belittle his seminal contribution to the development of Khasi language and literature.

It is true that the Khasis possessed a rich oral tradition long before Thomas Jones arrived in 1841. But unless expressed in writing, it would never qualify as a formal language. Besides, it is an unfortunate fact that many oral languages have disappeared because they never possessed an alphabet, never had written material, never experienced literary transmission. In this regard, Thomas Jones' teaching in Khasi and using the Roman script went against the British colonial policy of using the Bengali language, for the sake of convenience, as the language of education and governance. In fact, the first Khasi New Testament was in the Bengali script, published by William Carey in 1824, which is a significant contribution of the Bengali language to the Khasi language. One may argue post factum that one script is as good as another. But the fact remains that it was the script and syntax that Thomas Jones devised and later

missionaries developed, and not previous efforts, that survives to the present day and flourishes to the level of doctoral research.

In light of the above arguments, I would regard statements like “the Khasi language is not an illegitimate child in search of a father,” as sensational but not substantial. The Khasi tendency to give Westernized names and Jones' second marriage after his first wife's death hardly affect the legacy of Thomas Jones. Yes, the book “Through the Green Door” (earlier published as ‘Gwalia in Khasia’), tells of distillation of alcohol for medicinal and surgical purposes, but apart from hearsay, I am still looking for footnotes beyond Nigel Jenkins' book. Given that most of our churches officially advocate abstinence, proposing a rice beer named after Thomas Jones sadly trivializes the letter's supposed reappraisal of the great man's legacy. What is described as Thomas Jones getting “enmeshed in a business misadventure” is well explained by Rev. Dr. B.L.

Nongbri in many of his writings (see Ka Pateng Khristan, June 2019) as actually his fight for justice, together with some Khasis, against the monopolistic trade practices and legal manipulation of that infamous colonialist, Harry Inglis. Finally, we do not celebrate Thomas Jones' birthday as the letter says, but the date of his arrival at Sohra on 22 June, 1841.

Yours etc.,
Rev. Lyndan Syiem,
Shillong

PM's Maan Ki Baat

Editor,

The Hon'ble PM's flagship outreach radio broadcast programme ‘Mann Ki Baat’ is all set to start from this month, post a two month hiatus owing to elections. The popular outreach radio programme has uniquely set out a record of over 50 shows aired through national broadcasting network primarily through All India Radio.

As expected one is eagerly looking forward to hear more about policy matters, elections victory outcome,

"The inner fire is the most important thing mankind possesses."

--- Edith Sodergran

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 28, 2019

A speech that rocked the nation

IN the motion of thanks on the President's address TMC MP, Mahua Moitra who represents Krishnagar constituency spoke what many feel but dare not articulate because of the oppressive political climate today. In a fiery diatribe, Moitra silenced the cacophony that sought to shut her down. She pointed out to the Speaker that she was making her maiden speech and cannot therefore be disrupted. Moitra brazenly warned of the consequences that awaited the country as it rapidly inclined towards fascism. Mahua Moitra who was formerly an investment banker with the American multinational investment bank JP Morgan had quit her job in London and returned to India in 2009. After a brief stint with the Congress she shifted to the TMC and was its spokesperson. She won the 2019 elections against the BJP candidate Kalyan Chaubey. Moitra has caught the attention of the entire nation and proved that words have the power to touch people's hearts and minds. She pointed at the growing xenophobia that is tearing the national fabric apart. Her choice of words is extraordinary. By referring to the BJP's agenda as 'a lust to divide and not a desire to unite,' Moitra has touched a raw chord which will not be missed by the cheerleaders of the saffron party.

The Krishnagar MP listed out the cases of lynching and atrocities on Muslims and Dalits since 2014 and said India is too diverse a country to have just one religion or a single slogan as a symbol of patriotism. She touched on the media climate in the country and pointed out that news media organisations are directly or indirectly controlled by the ruling government. Pointing further that the just concluded election was fought on social media platforms and that fake news was spread to counter opposition parties, Moitra rued that farmers' distress and other critical issues were left unattended and that the Government was peddling lies on several fronts. Moitra also took a dig at the Government's control over the Election Commission and the systematic quelling of dissenting voices even as she emphasized that national security has become an obsession under the BJP Government, so much so that even the success of the Balakot strike was appropriated by the BJP. Referring to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) as attempts to redefine the citizens of India, Moitra says these are sinister designs to polarise the citizenry. Clearly, there is need for some plain-speaking in Parliament which is the temple of democracy. Moitra has rightly stated, "If not in parliament then where," would an MP speak.

Leaders we want versus Leaders we have

By Patricia Mukhim

Leadership is no cakewalk. Nowhere do you learn this better than at the Asia Plateau, Panchgani which houses the Moral Rearmament Centre now known as Initiatives of Change. Here batches and batches of young people are trained by people who have dedicated their entire lives to train the youth of this country to lead by example. That's quite a tough thing to do! To lead by example means to make sure that we don't wear masks to hide our real selves. It means being ourselves, saying what we mean and meaning what we say.

At this training centre, I met a young person from Senapati District of Manipur who was so concerned about the poppy cultivation in his area that he started a movement to stop this. Today, about a hundred youth have joined the movement. He said that he was appalled at the rapid pace at which jungles were being cleared to make way for poppy cultivation. He also said that after poppy has been cultivated in virgin land it depletes the soil and growers have to keep clearing forests to grow poppy in fresh soil. He said those growing poppy are not the poor. They are the elite. The same group is also campaigning against use of plastics. Recently the team collected 1700 kilograms of plastic but they are at a loss of how to dispose of the plastic waste so they have just tied filled them up in those super large garbage bags.

Another youth from Nagaland said that before the Lok Sabha elections he and others formed a group called 'Chain for Change' and campaigned widely asking people not to take money from candidates contesting the elections. However, they were intimidated and even summoned by militant outfits. So even trying out something to bring change has its downside in states where corruption is second nature and where elections are reduced to vote buying.

A young lady from Arunachal Pradesh who is also a lawyer by profession and had joined the NPP said she too tried to campaign against the use of money power in the recent state elections. It is an established fact that each

candidate contesting the Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh spends at least Rs 20 crore. Where does this money come from if not from development funds since Arunachal does not have any resources except forests? The young lady was however taunted that she is campaigning against the use of money power because her party the NPP did not have money to shell out. She now thinks politics is not her forte.

The youth of Karbi Anglong are trying to document and conserve their culture and are using all resources at their command to revive the language and get it included in the Sixth Schedule. They were very aggrieved when two Assamese youth were recently lynched by some men from the Karbi community and media reports tarnished the entire community. They wondered why media was not more sensitive to this aspect since not all Karbis were involved in the lynching, nor condoned it. Besides, there are criminals in every community, they said.

The youth of Bodoland too are very upset at the use of the word, "Bodo militants" to define a particular militant outfit that has its origin in Bodoland. However, they used a very unique strategy to convey their displeasure to the media. They sent a red rose to all the journalists with a request that they be more sensitive and not give a bad name to the entire community for the transgressions of a few. They said that media persons later apologised for this infamy.

Then there are young tribal leaders from different part of the country who also have a story to tell. One of them said after he got his Masters Degree in Social Work from TISS, Mumbai and worked for a couple of years, he wondered if the sole purpose of his life was to get education, get a job, marry, have kids and then die. He tried to explore the larger purpose of life and started to educate poor

children from the tribal community pro-bono. He felt that they should also get the best education that he was deprived of in his childhood. And there are many such inspirational stories that restore your faith in humanity. These young people are poised for leadership but they also worry that if they get into politics, they will be subsumed by the system.

It is a travesty of democracy that those we elect as leaders ultimately serve themselves and their interests. When we vote we believe our collective interests will be taken care of. But does that ever happen? How do elected representatives represent our aspirations when they have not spoken to us and assessed our needs? They represent a political ideology. Does that ideology take care of our aspirations as citizens? People accept democracy because of the perception that people we elect represent us and that through our representatives we are governing ourselves. But isn't this a symbolic representation? When political parties nominate their own candidates only because of his/her winnability, which of course is based on the candidate's money power, then is that doing justice to people's aspirations? We can blame people for taking money but that is because politicians have first taught them what patronage democracy is. So aren't we moving further and further away from governing ourselves when we don't even have a voice? And do we think we need to change this? Is there a talk-back system that we now have to create so that we can call out our "representatives" when they cease to represent us but work for their personal interests?

In Meghalaya, can we name one candidate who after becoming minister would want to give up his/her creature comforts and live a minimalist lifestyle as an example for other young leaders to follow? That indeed would be asking too much. The moment our politicians are elected they are quick to seek their dues. And those dues are a SUV

with personal security and a whole list of other perks. Everyone is in the game of grabbing. No one wants to give away anything unless they get something in return. I am not sure that this is how the tribal value system works. Look at the avarice as far as land is concerned. People don't seem to have enough of land. The wealthier they are the more land they want to acquire. And who do they acquire such land from? There are the poor who need to sell out land due to some domestic compulsions. But it is also a fact that the so-called 'community land' which is supposed to be held by the so-called custodians of Khasi customary practices namely the traditional institutions headed by the Syiem and the District Councils are actually the agents for turning community land into privately owned "property." I am now seriously beginning to wonder if there is indeed the concept of community land in Khasi society. If there were, then how come only a few Khasi clans are termed as "zamindars" while the rest are landless? Of course no one wants to raise these uncomfortable questions since we are all in cahoots. How I wish we had a courageous government that will bring in the cadastral survey so that we know who owns how much land and where. This is where true leadership comes in. Will Meghalaya ever give birth to that leader who will not think of the self first but who will have the courage of conviction to change some of the pernicious practices that have created a depraved system? When it comes to the worship of wealth we are all in the same boat.

Yet we cannot lose hope for the young too are disillusioned and impatient for change. One hopes that institutions created by selfless visionaries that envisioned the MRA (IofC) will bring that much needed change. We need to mentor many more young leaders so that we can create that critical mass that will bring things to a tipping point. May that silent prayer of many who have no voice but who yearn to see a better future, be heard!

BJP putting pressure on Bengal police to corner Trinamool

Amit Shah determined to achieve 'Mission 2021'

By Arun Srivastava

The role that police play in shaping the dynamics and dimension of political system in West Bengal decides the future character of the polity and the nature of the party which would rule the state. Political parties have ruled the state, but it has been the police who helped them come to power and run the government.

Though any change of the political dimension is attributed to the ideological policy preferences, the fact remains that the changes often relate to the dynamics of dominance and not specifically to the ideology. The political changes are often projected as outcome of ideological change but it is the material gain and element of economic empowerment that underlines the political change not the ideology. Ideology often loses its relevance.

The defeat of Congress in 1967 was described as the ascension of Marxism in Bengal. But it soon became clear that it was more for sharing power and getting the share in the financial gains than becoming an ardent Marxist. If the communist parties had succeeded in imparting ideological orientation and indoctrinated their supporters then they ought to not have lost power to

has proved to be more organisationally profitable for the BJP. A week back the BJP had organised rally near Lalbazar, the police headquarters. Two years ago, the BJP had also organised a similar march to the Kolkata Police headquarters, which had also resulted in clashes.

This is the tactical move of the BJP to politicise the police and to send the message to its rank and file that police would not harm them. Getting the police protection is the prime consideration of the rank and files of any political party. The close nexus between the police and political parties has politicised the police in the state.

Kailash Vijayvargiya, senior BJP leader in-charge of West Bengal is certain that people will overthrow Mamata Banerjee government very soon. He is right. The politics that is being practiced by the BJP would eventually pave the path for its ascension to power. The spurt in political violence in the state after 2019 election results underline that a transformation is under way.

BJP has come to realise that in order to order to throw out Mamata from power it is imperative that

The BJP's differences with the Trinamool Congress intensified with clashes

breaking out between workers of the saffron party and the police in the state.

While BJP has been identifying the Trinamool as its prime enemy, in most of the clashes the police was at the target of the BJP cadres. Confrontation with police has proved to be more organisationally profitable for the BJP.

Mamata Banerjee or turn to BJP in 2019 election for their survival. Their ideological orientation was completely a false pretention was proved by the desertion of the large scale of cadres during the Lok Sabha election this year and embracing the fascist nationalist ideals.

It would not be exaggeration to say that Indian politics is non-ideological. It is a fact that political parties irrespective of their colour differ very little on core economic principles. Look at the changes that the BJP has undergone. This party was described as the party with difference. Its leaders claimed that they would be pursuing different economic policies than was practiced by the Congress.

But what we saw was that the BJP government headed by Narendra Modi simply followed in the footsteps of Congress and precisely of Dr Manmohan Singh. So far no alternate political line could be propounded by BJP about economic development. The Modi government has not evolved its own economic policy.

After India secured independence in 1947, a fierce debate took place within the Congress Party over its policy outlook. BJP under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee pursued a moderate position, a decision that provoked the RSS to open front against him.

The BJP's differences with the Trinamool Congress intensified with clashes breaking out between workers of the saffron party and the police in the state. While BJP has been identifying the Trinamool as its prime enemy, in most of the clashes the police was at the target of the BJP cadres. Confrontation with police

the police should be neutralised and made to follow the saffron line. The recent clashes make it apparent that the BJP has been targeting the police with this intention. Most of the violent incidents had taken place in North 24 Parganas district, an area which was the Marxist bastion. In recent times they have joined the BJP. The BJP must tread cautiously as the former Marxist may desert the saffron any day they find convenient.

The BJP has been targeting the police with twin objectives; first, to weaken the hold of Mamata on police and create a sense of panic in he police so that in future they keep a distance from her and TMC.

During its ruled Trinamool has politicised the police. Now, with the change in the political scenario in Bengal, the government appears to be losing control over police. This is evident from large scale desertion from the TMC to the BJP. These politicians cannot survive without the police support. BJP leaders have been openly advising and even warning the police that Mamata's 'time is up' and they should either work properly or face the consequences after the BJP comes to power in Bengal.

It is worth mentioning that before the polls, Mamata Banerjee had written a strongly-worded letter to the Election Commission condemning the transfer of four senior police officers in the state. Their removal came after the BJP lodged complaints that they are working on behalf of the ruling Trinamool Congress government. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Thomas Jones Day

Editor,
I thank Rev Lyndan Syiem for the corrections to my letter. His description of Jones's linguistic contributions is much appreciated.

The purpose of my letter was twofold: If we wish to ascribe to Thomas Jones the appellation of 'Father', of what should this 'Fatherhood' be? He seems to be commonly described as the 'Father of the Khasi Alphabet' but his gravestone in Kolkata carries this further with the inscription, "The founding father of the Khasi alphabets and literature." One would argue that 'founding' and 'father' are redundant, but that is just semantics. What was objected to was the Shillong Times front page extending this even further to 'Father of Khasi Language'.

The second point of the letter was to point out our cultural inclinations. When religious conversion takes place, cultural proselytization also seems to happen. So we not only adopt the new religion, but adopt the lifestyle, social mores, names of children etc. of the country or society from where the new religion was brought from. Whether this threatens our cultural roots and identity is an important point. We also seem to honour these foreigners with holidays. But apart from three martial heroes and freedom fighters, in our own state we have not honoured any litterateur such

as Soso Tham, Homiwell Lyngdoh or Hamlet Bareh. Yours etc., Glenn C. Kharkongor, Via email

A slur on secularism

Editor,

It is a matter of great concern that these days some people have mustered so much courage as to openly lynch Muslims and Dalits all over the country. Recently on June 24, a young Muslim youth, Tabrez Ansari was killed in Jharkhand. Another youth Sharukh was insulted in the train in West Bengal and so many such incidents are occurring all over the country.

They are trying to destroy democracy and secularism in this country. It seems that they want to defame the glorious face of the largest democracy in the world. It is high time to unite against these elements and promote communal harmony. I want to draw the attention especially of the members of the parliament to pay heed to this serious issue and to take steps to prevent such incidents in future.

Jai hind

Yours etc.,
Jamil Ahmed,
Mumbai

Cow vigilantism

Editor,
Cow-vigilantism reared its ugly head again in

Kerala where cow slaughter is not banned. Six men in a car waylaid a van transporting cattle in a North Kerala district early on Monday, dragged out the driver and his assistant and assaulted them in a suspected case of cow vigilantism. A cow-farm owner had bought the cattle from Ismail, a seller in neighbouring Karnataka and the cattle were being brought to Kerala.

Cow-slaughter is banned in Karnataka and middlemen who buy cattle from the state usually transport them either to Kerala or Goa where beef is freely eaten and cow slaughter is not an issue. This has led to friction in Karnataka where Sangh Parivar groups object to the sale of cattle for slaughter. On earlier occasions too, there were reports of cow-vigilantism in Kasaragod, the northern district of Kerala and the latest one was in April last year when a group waylaid a van transporting cattle from Mangalore.

Though I am personally averse to killing cows or goats for eating, I do not oppose the practice of consumption of beef by others so as to strike a harmony between the two groups. Let us promote the idea of 'live and let live.' It must be borne in mind that the entire population of the world except certain sections of people in India have included meat in their daily diets and it would be foolish to oppose others who wish to eat beef. Once

we try to be more understanding then we will be more tolerant.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi - 15

Crying foul to save nature

Editor,

World Environment Day is celebrated every year in Meghalaya along with the whole world. Nonetheless, the celebration of June 5 every year has proved to be futile as the message is yet to influence the general mass. Why so many hundreds of truck loads of stones are supplied to a neighbouring country everyday from Meghalaya, thereby creating unnecessary chaos at the border crossing. Is it not the destruction of the natural environment of the state in particular and the country as a whole? So many heavy machineries are set in to destroy the hills of the state. It is also tearing down the serenity and calmness that attracts tourists in the state both domestic and foreign to savour its picturesque beauty. Accumulation of debris by the sides of the charming winding roads as seen today adds nothing but only repulsiveness. It may be reminded that tourism is a great industry today. If we turn and look towards Bhutan we can very well understand the importance and magnitude of tourism that has christened the mountain country as the Switzerland

of Asia. Ironically, the nation which is asking for the stones is quite discreetly preserving its own resources of the non-metallic mineral. One wonders when our people will realise this travesty. Ultimately who will be losing out? Obviously it is our next generation. What will we answer them when they raise the question of why such destruction? It is high time we understand and stop the menace or simply remain satisfied with the expression of sincere apology for the devastation when nothing will be left with us to offer and contribute towards environment preservation.

Yours etc.,
Bibhash Dhar,
Viaemail

India's wealth stacked abroad

Editor,

The Standing Committee of Finance tabled a report in the Lok Sabha on Monday, which should indeed baffle everyone. The report brings to the fore a shocking information that some Indians have stashed almost an unaccounted wealth of Rs. 9L crore outside the country over various periods between 1980 and 2010. The studies conducted by the three institutes have found that the sectors where unaccounted income is found to be the highest included real estate, mining, pharmaceuticals, pan masala, gutka, tobacco, bullion, commodity, film and education. However, there are no reliable estimates of black

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi - 15

“One thing an exceptional employee never says is, ‘That’s not in my job description.’ Exceptional employees work outside the boundaries of job descriptions.”

--- Travis Bradberry

The Shillong Times

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Revisiting Kashmir

CLEARLY, one of the top items on the agenda of the second Modi term is Kashmir. A tough home minister like Amit Shah is currently engaged in efforts at setting things right there. The first step forward for the Centre is to extend Central rule there for six more months. This would mean elections to the state assembly can wait even as the Lok Sabha polls were held there successfully. The scenario in Kashmir being what it is, a straight approach is neither likely nor expected from the government. As the situation stand today, Central rule is likely to continue there for longer periods than even the six months for which Parliament’s nod was sought by the home minister on Friday.

The BJP’s alliance with the PDP of Mehbooba Mufti, which saw the woman leader heading a government with the saffron party as her partner for a couple of years, did not yield good results. Keeping the Congress away from power there by itself meant little. That period saw stone-pelting incidents at security forces rising to high levels. At the ground level, the PDP threw its hands up. Cops were handicapped by the “soft” attitude displayed by the Mehbooba dispensation and the scenario was brought under control only after the military took up the challenge. The killing of young Burhan Wani, commander of a militant outfit that drew inspiration from Pakistan, by security forces in July 2016 helped change the scenario for the better, but only to an extent. It sent out a strong warning to the militants. The Mehbooba government’s decision to set free the large number of youths arrested for stone-pelting incidents was one among the many wrong steps taken by the PDP-BJP government there. Those attacking the security forces required to be dealt with a strong hand.

The Lok Sabha polls for the six seats in the state showed that three seats each went to the BJP and the National Conference. It was a washout for the PDP which had held three seats in the last Lok Sabha, as also to the Congress. Amit Shah’s two-day visit to the state this week preceded his Bill to extend central rule. Kashmir requires time to heal. The Centre now plans long-term steps. PM Modi who has won a huge mandate to rule the nation must act decisively to restore normalcy in J & K. He has the nation’s backing. Given the complexities involved in the state’s governance, an extension of Central rule for now is inevitable.

Railway privatisation programme gets a fresh impetus

Agitated employees unions planning for protest action

By B. Sivaraman

mediate action plan?

This announcement was contradictory to the earlier announcements, and hence the announcements of Modi Government do not carry credibility. In April 2017, the then Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu categorically ruled out privatisation underlining the fact that Indian Railways had to meet social obligations to the tune of Rs. 30,000–35,000 crore through subsidies, passenger rates and other concessions. On 11 June 2018, the new Railway Minister Piyush Goyal who replaced him too reiterated the same saying, “Let me make it very clear that there are no plans to privatise railways, either now or ever”. And privatisation of railways is the prominent agenda in the 100-Day Action Plan of the Railway Ministry!

It is not that Modi’s ministers were taken unawares. They were plainly lying through their teeth. They themselves were steering the multi-faceted privatisation process that was already on. Neo-liberal theory of privatisation undergoes modification in India with an Indian imprint – privatisation is just an investment opportunity for private sector and such an investment opportunity is also a lucrative opportunity for cuts, kickbacks and political fund-raising.

As far back as in 2017 itself the Railway Ministry under Suresh Prabhu circulated a draft cabinet note to various ministries seeking their response to handing over 400 railway stations on a 45-year lease to the private sector for redevelopment. It was a different matter that the proposal met with a lukewarm response from private parties. After drawing up an unnecessary ambitious plan of redevelopment of railway stations for Rs.1 lakh crore, Piyush Goyal recirculated the note in January 2018 with a modified proposal involving 600 railway stations on a 99-year lease! He did this with the blessings of the PMO despite objection from the Finance Ministry, which wanted the lease period to be restricted to 60 years only. To further push his proposal, the Manduadih Railway Station in Modi’s

constituency of Varanasi was developed into a swanky showpiece resembling Frankfurt Airport at a huge cost! Even before Cabinet clearance, the Railway Ministry has embarked upon a path of modernisation of 50 such stations initially through Indian Railway Station Development Corporation (IRSDC) at an initial cost of Rs.7500 crore in 2019 itself, involving private sector through PPP.

Corporatisation and PPP are the initial steps at privatisation. Not just IRSDC, several parts of Railways activity have been hived off and converted into corporations like Container Corporation of India (CONCOR), Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES), a Railways consultancy and infrastructure development firm, Indian Railway Construction Co. Ltd. (IRCON), Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and Raitel Corporation of India are a few examples. A closer scrutiny of their finances shows that almost all of them are dependent on Railway Budget overwhelmingly for their business. Though they have been listed as public limited companies, it is a different matter that no private entrepreneur has come forward to touch them even with a barge pole leave alone taking them over.

While Piyush Goyal has announced a target of 100 per cent electrification, he has also declared his intention to privatize 30,000 kms of power transmission lines to earn Rs. 30,000 crores.

Indian Railways also aims to earn about Rs. 50,000 crore over the next 10 years from commercialisation of rail land near stations, another indirect route to privatization.

And now the 100-Day Action Plan of the Ministry of Railways has announced handing over the running of trains to private companies. Misleading unofficial reports are saying that only two routes would be privatized initially on an experimental basis in low-congestion and low-revenue routes. When contacted about this, Mr. Ilango, Vice-President of the Dakshin Railway Employees Union (DREU) says, “The actual proposal is to hand over even premier trains like

Rajdhani and Shatabdi and high-premium routes like inter-city expresses and routes running along the Golden Quadrilateral and those linking tourist and pilgrimage centres to private parties. RITES wrongly estimated that at present 25 per cent of the railway workers are surplus and proposed downsizing. If 25 per cent of the railway routes, especially the lucrative ones, are privatised, the threat would be real and half the railway workers would have to go home”.

“The dedicated freight corridor funded by Japan and the World Bank has already been handed over to the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL) and though it is the Indian Railways which has to pay back the money, under the World Bank instruction, it has to pay for the goods trains it runs through the corridor as it will involve private companies to build and operate large parts of that corridor”, Ilango adds. “Bibek Debroy Committee recommended amendment to the Indian Railways Act to set up a Railway Development Authority to handover rail routes to private operators. In 2017, privatization of parts of Railways’ operations has been started based on just a cabinet decision. Now without even setting up a Railway Development Authority, routes are being privatized. It is patently illegal”, he claims. Bibek Debroy, who is now a Niti Aayog member, wants Indian Railways to shed its social service obligations like concessional fares to 53 categories like the handicapped and senior citizens amounting to Rs. 33,000 crore in 2014, which accounted for 67 per cent of the total passenger revenue of Rs. 49,000 crore that year. He wants the Railways to shed schools, hospitals, and printing presses and 5 presses have already been closed down. This is also an advocacy to favour private sector as private corporates would not foot the bill”, another CITU leader says. “If the Modi Government doesn’t give up the new proposals for privatisation, an indefinite all-India strike would be inevitable and a couple of days of strike can cripple the Indian economy”, Mr. Ilango warns. Rae Bareilly is a pointer to that! (IPA Service)

Lynching programme is continuing in Modi’s second term Saffron cadres care little for PM’s ‘warning’

By Arun Srivastava

A new saffron government has come to occupy the coveted throne of prime minister. People vouch that Modi has undergone change and so his approach to the contour of social relations. His opening remark at the MP’s meeting strengthened the belief that he is a changed ruler and has now developed soft corner even for the Muslims for whom he had high level of hate.

But this assessment does not appear to be true. Muslims continue to be the object of hate. Lynching of the Muslims continues unabated. During the first term of Modi, the saffron mercenaries chose some false alibis like transporting and carrying beef, after his fresh installation the vigilantes are resorting to the same tactics.

The saffron vigilantes indulging in lynching of the Muslims are more precious for the prime minister, Narendra Modi than strengthening India’s relation with USA, the best friend of Modi amongst the global fraternity as claimed by the BJP leadership.

A week back the US State Department had released a report on international religious freedom mentioning that BJP office-bearer were indulging in hate speech and the Modi government was protecting cow vigilante groups. Just after the report hit the public domain, BJP accused the U.S. State Department of a “clear bias” against the government of Narendra Modi and the BJP. Significantly the annual report “The cow vigilante menace: U.P.” records highest number of incidents

The 2018 report which was released by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had listed 18 attacks against “Non-Hindu and Dalit” victims, in which 8 people were killed in violence linked to cow protection. The state authorities and officials never accept the brutal killings of the Muslims as an act carried out by saffron mercenaries. Often they cite these cases and allegations against the victims as false.

No doubt Modi and BJP leaders have deplored violence against minorities and weaker sections, but their move was half hearted. They were never serious in their condemnation. Authorities often protected perpetrators from prosecution,” the report said, adding that a “crack-down” on one Christian group in Jharkhand was part of “a ploy to discredit the organisation as part of the State government’s anti-Christian agenda.”

If there is no design behind the lynching of the Muslims then why is the government so protective to the vigilantes. The government’s action and its machinations to put the victims in bad light, as being butchers or beef eaters or thieves, sends the strong message of a grand design behind anti-minority violence.

Interestingly while Modi and some of his senior ministerial colleagues try to project the government as the saviours of the Muslims most of the party leaders make inflammatory speeches against minority communities aimed at inciting the communal hatred.

Replying to the debate on president’s speech in Parliament on Wednesday, Modi expressed surprise why Jharkhand was singled out. Modi was absolutely right. When the lynching has been taking place in other states why only Jharkhand was being targeted? The reason is simple the vigilante goons have become quite active in the state after the Modi government came to power. The state had been in lime light for lynching maximum

number of Muslims and dalits. They are the vanguards of Hindutva and have launched their mission from Jharkhand.

In Jharkhand, the fresh incident of lynching combining with a communal motive took place on May 22. The murder of 24-year-Tabrej in Jharkhand days after he was brutally beaten by a mob is a sordid reminder that the disturbing phenomenon of lynching continues to dictate the politics of the state.

The victim a Muslim came under the suspicion of a mob, which chose to mete out vigilante justice. The crime would not have got exposed if some one in crowd had not recorded it. Crowd forcing him to shout ‘Jai Sri Ram’ and ‘Jai Hanuman’, confirmed that vigilante justice and lynch mentality confirmed the fact that communal motive has been dictating the politics of the state.

The apex court noted, “It is distressing that lynching, as a consequence of vigilantism, communal bigotry and the dissemination of hate messages and rumours on social media, has acquired the status of a preponderant social trend. Rising intolerance and growing polarisation expressed through [a] spate of incidents of mob violence cannot be permitted to become the normal way of life or the normal state of law and order”. Nevertheless lynching of Ansari shows that the problem has taken to a sinister form of enforcing the chanting of Hindu slogans by citizens professing other religions.

Though Modi told the Parliament that action ought to be taken against killers, he did not specify his role in it. He did clarify why his government has been silent on this issue. What has indeed been shameful that his government has adopted the stance of passive silence on the issue of police and state administration joining hands with the saffron vigilantes to perpetrate the crime.

In two other incidents cow vigilantes beat up three in M.P. for possession of beef and three persons were also beaten up in Gurgaon area. In both cases the police arrested the accused persons. But the question ought to be answered is why there has been sudden spurt in lynching. What does this symptom underline? It is a paradox that a powerful person like him has been warning the gau rakshaks, but these mercenaries have refused to listen to him

It is a paradox that the vigilantes are not to be cowed down by the warnings of the most powerful person in India. These mercenaries have refused to listen to him. During 2018 Modi had warned the cow vigilantes at least on four occasions to refrain from such activities. On June 29 last year in Ahmedabad he came out with warning: “Killing people in the name of ‘gau bhakti’ is not acceptable.” But not bothered of his warning these elements continue to indulge in the heinous crime. Though the Sangh leadership and even Modi are aware of the identity of the gau rakshaks, to protect them from public ire and also prohibit them from giving a bad name to the RSS, have been putting the blame on criminals and anti-socials. In Jharkhand the police is not at all willing to accept complaints against these marauders. In some stray cases it acted, but that was eye wash exercise.

(IPA Service)

CAU: The missed opportunity

Editor,

Years ago and more frequently during the recent months, the question of setting up of the Central Agricultural University (CAU) in Meghalaya has come up in the local papers, and some politicians tried to claim credit as if the said University is going to come up due to their own efforts. The fact, however, is that we have missed the opportunity offered on a silver platter.

As Secretary, Government Meghalaya, I was holding the charge of Agriculture Department for five long years from 1990 till December 1995 when I was promoted and transferred as Commissioner & Secretary. Since, I still remember something about the University proposed to be set up in the state, let me try to let the public know what had gone wrong.

If I remember correctly, it was way back in 1985 when, without our asking, the Central Government offered to set up the Central Agricultural University in Meghalaya, with campuses of different disciplines in neighboring states. It was indeed a special and specific offer for our state. To look into the proposal, a Cabinet Committee was formed.

By the time I took charge of the Department, it appears, the Committee had already had three sittings, but it is not known what transpired in the meeting as no proceedings were recorded.

The views of different departments such as Personnel, Planning, and Finance etc. departments were also sought for. They agreed on one point: that the state had no manpower of its own to fill up technical posts particularly at the higher and top levels. As such, setting up of the said University would lead to influx of scientists and other staffs as well from outside the state. That, to my opinion, threw a spanner in the works and derailed the whole idea of setting up the University in the state.

From time to time, the Central Government reminded the State Government if it was willing to accept the proposal. In the meanwhile, some neighboring states were vying for the University in their state with offers of land for the purpose. As our Government showed no keenness and was procrastinating, the Central Government finally and perhaps reluctantly yielded to the demand of the Manipur Government, and the University was set up in Imphal under the Central Agricultural

University Act, 1992.

Even after this the Central Government had a soft corner for Meghalaya and offered for setting up of the Post-graduate Centre in pure Agriculture in the state. To be able to make a concrete response, efforts were made to find suitable land for the purpose. But to find required amount of land for such a purpose in Meghalaya is next to impossible. We approached the then Director of ICAR, Barapani, if the ICAR could spare some of its land for the purpose. He said that the Post-graduate Centre would require much land particularly for Demonstration Farms, and the ICAR itself was already short of land to meet its requirement.

Then it was time for me to leave the Agriculture Department but I kept no track of what transpired afterwards. What I can say now is – we were petty minded, short-sighted, we woke up too late, and thereby missed the golden opportunity to have the University. I am not sure if we sincerely need it now or are just trying to make a noise. In any event, we are ourselves to blame ourselves and there is no point in crying hoarse now.

Yours etc.,
H.Chinkhenthang
(IAS Retd),
Ex-Principal Secretary,

Government of
Meghalaya

Municipal Board and its entanglements

Editor,

The Shillong Municipal Board at this very juncture seems to be caught in a dilemma as to what is the next course of action that it can resort to, considering the precarious situation it is in; with many associations and groups taking the Board to the Judiciary, for every action it has taken. The Municipal Board because of the plethora of litigations against it has now taken a back seat, and more so because of the various delegations seeking intervention of authorities, by citing issues such as human rights among others, which has indeed driven the Board to reverse gear rather than forward.

A year ago the city was brought to a complete standstill in the aftermath of an incongruous incident between two communities. However, the high point of the imbroglio is that the 20 odd days of standoff only resulted in maximum injuries (barring the rioters) caused to officials of police

department, and since the return to normalcy nothing concrete has emerged. As we all know, as of today there are two areas within Shillong City which are being occupied by the Sikh (Punjab) Community, i.e. in Laitumkrah (also known as Sweepers Lane or Gora Line near Lumsohra) and one is in Lew Mawlong. Both these areas have been inhabited by this community a long time ago but the crux of the matter that needs to be addressed is that, both these areas were allotted to employees of Municipal Board who were employed for cleaning the wards falling under Municipal areas and not for renting, subletting or any other activities. This sadly is not the case, which is evident when one passes by these areas.

The efforts of the Board to relocate the residents of the contentious area seems to have hit a dead end, because a simple action as preparing of inventories could not be completed even after a year, and no one knows as to how many more attempts it will take for them to complete the required task. The idea of relocating the residents is dawning as an improbable reality, as the Board is not as equipped as compared to Nayagoan Municipal Council of Punjab which has issued demolition notices on December 27, 2018

to the owners of at least 60 houses in Singha Devi, a locality next to the Shivalik Hills in Mohali District, to pave way for a road from neighbouring Nada village to Kaimbala, Chandigarh or as the Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA) which had razed to the ground around 70 pucca houses, all illegally constructed, during a demolition drive at Behlolpur village located behind the Civil Hospital, Phase 6, in Mohali (Punjab) on February 11, 2019.

Perhaps the Shillong Municipal Board needs to learn from them as to how it was possible for these authorities to facilitate development through demolition without violating human rights. The Board has already given the community two plots of land in the heart of the city, and if successful will be giving them some more land after relocation. Perhaps before swimming in deep waters, the Board can plan proper housing systems in the already available land within Laitumkrah, prior to parting with another land of theirs, which in the years to come may also drag the Board into peril and litigations, thus becoming a déjà vu all over again.

Yours etc.,
B S Lator,
Shillong

In the land of waffles & Tintin

By Sujoy Dhar

When you think of Brussels, the image that conjures up in mind is not something like a Paris of Eiffel Tower, Louvre and pavement cafes or Berlin with the remnants of the wall and holocaust memories. Neither of an Amsterdam with canal cruises.

Well, when you think of Brussels you rather think business that of a staid city which is a hub of European politics and economic decision making the European Union headquartered here.

Brussels indeed is considered the de facto capital of the European Union as it hosts the official seats of the European Commission, Council of the European Union, and European Council, as well as a seat of the European Parliament.

But there is much more to Brussels than its EU institutions. It packs much more in terms of architecture, culture and food.

This year Brussels celebrated 150 years of its tramway while the Brussels-Capital Region is observing its 30th anniversary as it was formed in June 1989 as one of the three federal regions of Belgium, along with Flanders and Wallonia.

The Art Nouveau Legacy

Brussels has not one but several UNESCO heritage sites or spots or rather houses to take pride. In 1998, Brussels' famous square, Grand Place, made it to the UNESCO list and since then more Brussels landmarks have earned their place on the prestigious list.

But before we talk about Brussels and its landmark houses and sites, let us remember the man responsible for this glory, Victor Horta.

Son of a cobbler in Ghent, Victor Horta loved music but when he was 12, he was thrown out from the Conservatory on disciplinary ground. He then enrolled at Ghent Academy, in the architecture department. At 15, he bagged his first medal. Two years later he left for Paris and later returned to Belgium to work there.

But it was his design of Hotel Tassel in 1893 that catapulted him to stardom as an architect.

His other masterpieces in Brussels are Solvay House (1898), Maison du Peuple (1899), his own house (now Horta Museum, 1901), department stores such as Innovation (1903) and Wauquez Warehouse (1906).

So we would suggest that on day one of your stay, explore Brussels gift to the world, the revolutionary movement called Art Nouveau that began around 1890. It was led by Victor Horta. The movement influenced not just the architecture of the city but also the art of that time, extending its domain to furniture to decorative objects, jewellery, painting and sculptures.

So when in Brussels, along with your tour of the famed central square of Brussels, Grand Palace, take a walking tour to check out the four major town houses now recognised by UNESCO, Hôtel Tassel, Hôtel Solvay, Hôtel van Eetvelde, and Maison & Atelier Horta. The districts of Ixelles, Saint-Gilles, Etterbeek and Schaerbeek are where you find the best of Art Nouveau.

Horta's works are characterised by these buildings open plan, the diffusion of light, and the brilliant joining of the curved lines of decoration with the structure of the building.

Visit to the Horta Museum at Saint-Gilles which is located in the private house and studio of Victor Horta (1861-1947).

Built between 1898 and 1901 at 23-

Brussels is the birthplace of Art Nouveau architecture, the Tintin comic strips and yes, the toothsome Belgian waffles and chocolates



25, rue Américaine in Saint-Gilles, the two buildings are best examples of Art Nouveau at its peak. The interior retains the mosaics, stained glass, and wall decorations forming a harmonious and elegant whole, down to the last detail.

Another Art Nouveau gem in Brussels in this area is a house built by architect P Hankar in 1897 for painter A. Ciamberlani. The townhouse, which now is the office of the Argentine embassy, is a mansion that includes different material in its façade: ironwork, bricks and natural stone. This façade shows great originality and the architect's deliberate rebuttal of traditional building concepts.

These walking tours of the houses can be followed by a visit to another remarkable house, Van Buuren Museum (House). This house was bought in 1928 by the banker and patron David van Buuren. It has an outdoor architecture typical of the Amsterdam School, while the indoor decoration characterises an Art Deco whole by Belgian, French and Dutch designers.

This is an interesting visit in Brussels for connoisseurs of art and good interiors since the van Buuren made their villa a living academy, with rare furniture, carpets, stained-glass windows, sculptures and international masterpieces. This 'private memory house' became a museum in 1975 according to the testament of Alice van Buuren, the widow of David van Buuren.

The collection of paintings in this house represents five centuries of Art — Flemish and Italian masters from the 15th to the 19th century, as well as several oil paintings by the two sons of Bruegel, a school of Rembrandt, Guardi, Fantin-Latour, Ensor, or Van Gogh.

When in this house, surely keep some



(Top) A view of the Grand Place; (above) a shop selling Tintin souvenirs in Brussels; and chocolates at Leonidas shop

time to spend in the garden of over 1.5 hectares of land. The garden complements the villa. The actual garden is made of the 'Picturesque Garden', The Labyrinth, and The Garden of the Heart'. The 'Picturesque Garden' was designed by Jules Buyssers, a landscape architect, in the twenties, and represents the geometrical ideas of the Art Deco.

Grand Place

Brussels' signature showpiece is surely the Grand Place, which was enlisted as UNESCO World Heritage in 1998. While eminent French writer-visual artist Jean Cocteau called it a 'splendid stage', UNESCO sees this square as being an outstanding example of the

eclectic and highly successful blending of architectural and artistic styles that characterises the culture and society of this region'. It 'illustrates in an exceptional way the evolution and achievements of a highly successful mercantile city of northern Europe at the height of its prosperity'.

Once the pride of the Hapsburg Empire, Grand Place has been a marketplace since the 12th century. It was lined by houses and market halls, which are still mostly wooden.

You are bound to be awed by the grandeur of the Grand Place with ornamental gable roofs and gilded façades of the houses besides the gold-filigreed rooftop sculptures. If you like minimalism, this square will appear bit loud to you.

According to Brussels tourism, the Gothic City Hall here was built in the 15th century in three stages; it was also in this century that the guilds established themselves in the houses around the Grand Place. After being bombarded by Louis XIV's troops in 1695, it was almost entirely rebuilt.

View from Mont des Arts

The Mont des Arts, or Kunstberg, means the "hill of the arts." This green urban complex in heart of Brussels is a must visit. It offers quite a panoramic view of plane trees and the spire of Brussels' City Hall. From an elevated vantage point on a clear sunny day, you can also catch a glimpse of the Koekelberg Basilica and the Atomium, the city's another landmark since the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.

Major tourist attractions here are the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM), the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, the Royal Palace, and the Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula.

Situated on the North-South axis of the city, Mont des Arts connects the lower, working-class Brussels with the upper, aristocratic part.

The spot is famous for all kinds of artistic activities, from concerts at Bozar to movies to exhibitions at the Royal Museums of the Fine Arts. Visit here to immerse in the culture of the city and its green space.

Comic Strip Center

Can a Brussels visit be complete without following a trail of Tintin? Housed in an impressive Art Nouveau building, created by none other than Victor Horta in 1906, the Belgian Comic Strip Center is where you find it. It opened in 1989. Among others Tintin also lives here.

Well, for Indians as well as so many other nationals, growing up as a kid to stepping into adolescent, there was a constant companionship of Tintin, the realistic yet courageous young Belgian reporter created by cartoonist Georges Remi, known by his pen name, Hergé.

So as you step inside, a giant replica of a red and white moon rocket greets you. You know immediately that you have entered the world of Tintin and other comic characters. Life-size models of other famous comic series greet you as well besides a bust statue of Tintin and a photograph of his creator, Hergé in one corner of the stairways.

According to the centre, with more than 700 comic strip authors, Belgium has more comic strip artists per square kilometre than any other country in the world!

The comic strip in Belgium has transcended from a popular medium of entertainment for readers into an art and this Center speaks volumes about that.

The Belgian Comic Strip Center marries the Ninth Art (the combination of visual arts with narrating literature) and Art Nouveau, two artistic forms of expression which have always been particularly cherished in Brussels.

This kingdom of imagination is thus home to some of Belgium's best-known comic strip heroes: Tintin, Spirou, Bob and Bobette, the Smurfs, Lucky Luke,

Blake and Mortimer, Marsupilami, etc. They are one big happy family of paper heroes. Yes, the heart of European comic strips beats in Brussels.

Waffles at Place Royale, Chocolates from Leonidas

Before you check out the UNESCO enlisted Grand Place, there is one more city square in Brussels to explore. While the Grand Place is all about grandeur and history, one more square in Brussels, and less crowded, should not be missed during your walking tour. It is the Place Royale or Koningssplein (Dutch: King's Square), a historical neoclassical square near the centre of Brussels. The square bears memories of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, the knights of the Golden Fleece, of Isabella and Marie-Thérèse.

While at the Place Royale, do not miss out on having a bite of the famous Belgian waffles sold by waffles trucks (a retro Volkswagen van).

You would spot one of those Volkswagen trucks right there selling waffles like hot cakes. Belgian waffles are of two kinds. The Liege waffle (named after the place Liege) is small with rounded edges. It is thick with little clumps of sugar. The Brussels waffle is larger, rectangular and lighter, sprinkled with icing sugar.

Well if eating waffles is part of your nibbling tour in Brussels, then you surely do not want to skip the chocolates. There are plenty of shops selling chocolates for which Belgium is famous. My Belgian friend Pierre Marsart took me to Leonidas for buying fresh Belgian chocolates.

For four generations, the Belgian Master Chocolatier Leonidas has plied its trade with passion and made chocolates with the freshest natural ingredients.

Moving Around in Brussels

Brussels is a very walkable city. You can walk as much as you can. The network of trams is fascinating and you would love taking a tram in Brussels for sure. A Brussels card is advisable for rides along with access to museums and other places of interest.

The tram network in Brussels celebrated its 150th anniversary in May 2019. Most public transport in the Brussels-Capital Region is organized by the STIB (Société des Transports intercommunales bruxellois), which also runs the trams.

The STIB network includes metro lines, which connect the eastern and western districts of the city. Pre-metro lines (trams in the tunnels) complete the metro service. A great many metro lines also have above ground bus and tram connections.

If you want to have a gourmet experience in tram, Brussels offers you that. You can actually board a tram that has been fully decked out as a modern gourmet restaurant.

Aboard you will be served a six- or seven-course meal put together by top Belgian chefs, whilst you tour the most beautiful places of Brussels by night for two hours.

You can also visit the Tram Museum in Brussels. (IBNS/TWF)



High on heels

Low on freedom



By Madhumita Mookerji

Is it mandatory for women to wear high heels at workplace? A raging debate has been going on in Japan where actress and writer Yumi Ishikawa submitted a petition to the country's labour ministry complaining against an employer-imposed diktat that makes high heels a part of women's dress code in office.

Apparently, this has been a simmering dissatisfaction among the Japanese women working in the corporate sector. Otherwise why did the petition amass more than 23,000 signatures, as per media reports, within a short time? In fact, the campaign received support from the social media in a #KuToo hashtag in a take-off on the #MeToo movement with a pun on the Japanese words for shoe (kutsu), and pain — kutsuu.

This is the latest on this issue that started in 2015 as Nicola Thorpe, a receptionist at finance firm PwC in London, was sent home without pay in December, 2015, for wearing flat shoes to work. Thorpe dug in her heels, literally, and started an online campaign that gathered more than 152,400 signatures, as per media reports, and it even figured in the Par-



A scene from The Devil Wears Prada

liament debates putting pressure on the government to review workplace dress codes.

But the government said laws in place were already adequate to deal with discrimination on gender grounds

a decision that Thorpe, who had been directed to wear 2-4 inches of heels to work, called "a cop-out".

The British government also rejected proposals from women to outlaw companies from forcing their women employees to wear high heels to work.

Restrictions have been on women's attire for ages, including heels. One can recall the old Chinese custom of foot-binding so that women would have dainty feet. Remember the film The Good Earth based on Pearl S. Buck's story when you see the newly married O-Lan finding it hard to keep up with her husband on the village road because her feet could not carry her fast enough? But living in this so-called scientific and progressive age as today, forcing women to wear high-heels at workplace when women have to walk around unpteen times, and not a fashion-show ramp mind you, they seem out of sync indeed.

Set by the heels

High heels and stilettos have been intrinsic to the attire of the well-heeled and the fashion conscious for some time now. But for some, they could be their Achilles heel too, pun intended.

It involves the issue of choice too. She may like to add a few inches to her height by wearing high heels, but the moment the powers that be issue a dress diktat, those same pair of heels take that society a few steps back into regressive gender politics.

Says Ruchira Goswami, teacher at the National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS), Kolkata, that not only the archaic tradition of Chinese feet binding but certain stories that children grow up with, that of Cinderella and her lost slipper, for instance, also basically have to do with keeping women in a bind figuratively. The material out of which Cinderella's slipper was made, glass, itself is also symbolic of the most fragile world that women inhabited, which could easily break into splinters any moment, leaving her vulnerable and exposed to male whim and fancies.

"Our feet cannot be judged in isolation from the rest of our bodies. But sexual politics runs in such a way that it objectifies the woman and her feet," she says, adding, "Society generally doesn't want women to be mobile and wants to bind them up and then it tries to justify itself by saying that the restriction is for beauty or a necessary attribute of workplace wear."

Of course, Goswami admits, "You can't take away the fashion aspects of high heels, whether in the form of stilettos or block heels. But still it's a diktat, an imposition and the fact that you are making it part of a dress code where the woman doesn't have an option to choose."

A Kolkata-based psychologist says, "It's all about beauty in the eye of the beholder. Men and women have different walking gaits. Female feet and the various ways to clad them have always been under the male scanner because certain types of shoes make the female gait even more attractive, at least to the male gaze."

Says Bulbul Bakshi, a counsellor in Kolkata, "There has been research indicating that heels increase attractiveness of women to men. It may be assumed that this is one of the key reasons why they are being mandated to wear heels to work in some countries or industries. It goes without saying that this commodifies the woman employee and reinforces the notion that women should be sexually attractive to be worthy professionals."

She also likes to focus on another aspect of commodification. "Both men and women, as a mere means to an end, without regard to their own well-being, have long defined some kinds of corporate cultures. Men having to wear a tie and even a three-piece suit in summer in tropical countries,

whether or not they want to, is another example."

This, Bakshi points out, closes doors on exploring options and diversities and therefore contributes to creating a monolithic society where differences are less tolerated. Perhaps more importantly, it teaches us not to be empathetic. "As we experience a society that has no empathy for us and enforces compliance at any cost, we are likely not to value empathy as a desirable attribute."

The first complaint about high heels registered in The Times newspaper appeared in 1873 and it came from men! The soldiers were required to wear high-heeled boots and it led to many blistered feet and induced a most ungainly walk and ungraceful carriage."

Ironically, India, known for keeping its women in a bind for ages, has not really played gender politics with their feet, which gives them enough room to put up their feet. "That may be because sarees are regarded as formal wear and whether high heels or flats, both can be accessorised with the nine-yard drape," Bakshi observes.

A woman vice-president for an MNC in Kolkata, speaking on condition of anonymity, says: "I often attend high-level meetings. I do wear black shoes but not necessarily high heels. The flat shoes look equally formal. I don't see the necessity of wearing high heels. It's not fair to impose such dress codes on women which make her feel uncomfortable."

While travelling, she comes across women employees working in airlines and hotels in constricting high-heeled shoes and makes her wonder how difficult it must be for them being constantly on their feet. "It would make so much more sense to allow them to wear flats," she feels.

Heal thyself

Meanwhile, good things are happening with the rise in protests against the 'heel dress code'. The Canadian province of British Columbia has banned dress codes which require women employees to wear high heels to the workplace. The local government has ruled that such requirements are a health and safety issue.

Doctors have been warning against the health hazards of constantly wearing high heels. These include lower back ache, sore calf muscles, overall muscle pain and spasms and feet pain due to change in the walking gait, especially at the ankles and big toes, and damage to toe nails, apart from other risks. Most women feel their feet should be left alone. Society, heal thyself! (TWF)

Star - Gazing

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 30, 2019

Moon sextile Mercury on your solar return chart ensures an exceptional year ahead. You will get an opportunity to make your creative skill shine at your place of work. Your distinct style of thinking will help in meeting lot of challenging situation. You will interact and spend a lot of time with people on one-to-one level. And also by those with whom you work together or share your thoughts. You will exude an air of enthusiasm and this will help in getting positive vibes from people with whom you interact. Your financial position will be excellent. You will share good equations with members of your family. Your friends will support you. Your social standings will increase and you may be rewarded for your services to society.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

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

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

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

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

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

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You are likely to get business and work opportunities from overseas and engage in multiple activities. You may be tempted to spend lavishly on things that make your life more comfortable and pleasant. It is a good time to organize your workplace and make it more efficient and equipped with good infrastructure. You may need to adjust your plan of action. Errors in judgment made now are likely due to impulsiveness and the overlooking of crucial details. You could have so many new ideas that you don't have time to implement.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

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

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

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

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

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

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

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

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

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

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

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

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

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

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

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

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

Keep an eye on opportunities

By Ranjan K Baruah

Optometry is a healthcare profession that involves examining the eyes and applicable visual systems for defects or abnormalities as well as the medical diagnosis and management of eye disease. Traditionally, the field of optometry began with the primary focus of correcting refractive error through the use of spectacles. Modern day optometry, however, has evolved through time so that the educational curriculum includes intensive medical training in the diagnosis and management of ocular diseases. In most of the countries, the profession is established and regulated.

Optometrists are healthcare professionals who provide primary eye care through comprehensive eye examinations to detect and treat various visual abnormalities and eye diseases. Being a regulated profession, an optometrist's scope of practice may differ depending on the location. Thus, disorders or diseases detected outside the treatment scope of optometry (i.e. those requiring certain surgical interventions) are referred out to relevant medical professionals for proper care, more commonly to ophthalmologists who are physicians specialising in tertiary medical and surgical care of the eye.

Optometrists typically work closely together with other eye care professionals such as ophthalmologists and opticians to deliver quality and efficient eye care to the general public. The term optometry is derived from the Greek word 'optos' which means eye or vision and 'metria' which means measurement.

World Council of Optometry (WCO) has defined optometrists as: Primary healthcare practitioners of the eye and vision system who can successfully manage the leading cause of vision impairment (i.e. refractive error) and can also help alleviate the burden of other causes of blindness through diagnosis, referral and co-management. One may join the course after completing senior secondary in science stream. There are governments and private institutes offering the courses and the career options can be in government as well as in private sectors. All India Institute of Medical Sci-



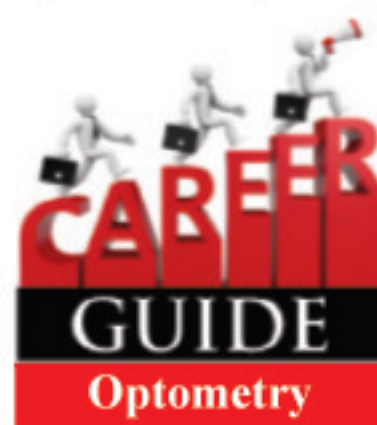
ences, New Delhi offers BSc (Hons) in Ophthalmic Technology, Optician and Refractionist Course; Tripura Institute of Paramedical Sciences, Agartala offers Bachelor of Optometry and Vision Science (BOPTM),

tion is not enough to be employed. One must make a good career plan once they take admission in optometry to be successful in life.

Updates:

L'Oréal India for Young Women in Science Scholarships: L'Oréal India invites applications from young women who have passed Class XII in 2019 and wish to pursue higher education in science. The scholarships will be granted to promising young women who are economically disadvantaged. Selected Women scholars will receive financial aid to cover college fees for graduation studies in any scientific field (Pure Sciences/Applied Sciences/Engineering/Medical, etc) at a recognised college or university in India. The scholarships are being offered by L'Oréal India with an objective to support and encourage young women for pursuing higher education in science stream. The programme was instituted in 2003 and it has consistently helped young women to pursue scientific studies. Aspirants may apply before July 1.

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



Regional Institute of Paramedical and Nursing Science based in Aizawl offers B.Sc (Optometry & Ophthalmic Techniques) under the Mizoram University; Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences, Guwahati offers Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) in Optometry. There are many other institutes offering the course all over India. Apart from qualification aspirants must have employability skills to excel in their career and professional life. One must remember that mere qualifica-