

The Land of India's First Sunlight

By Prasanta Talukdar

Kibithoo is India's easternmost inhabited place which stands on the line of control (LAC). It is uniquely located on the tri-junction, with China to the north and Myanmar to the east. A small village in the Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district, it is located on the last road head of extreme northeast of north eastern India and the very place that the Lohit River enters India. Lohit River is a tributary to the Brahmaputra River which rises in Tibet Autonomous Region, in the Kangri Garpo range, where it is known as the Zayu River. Kibithoo is located 380 kms from Tinsukia town of Assam. Kibithoo is one of the places which forms the Indo China border and has always been a place of great importance. The village is nestled roughly around 4000 ft above sea level and lies in Mishmi hills, 27 kms on the east of administrative town of Walong.

Kibithoo is 275 kms from the nearest brigade formation at Tezu. Soldiers of the Sikh Light Infantry are posted on the Line of Actual Control, while the Chinese brigade at Langzu under Western Theatre Command is merely 60 kms away. The Indian Army uses a foot suspension bridge to carry its military supplies to its Kibithoo post, considered very important from operational point of view, as the only road connecting

the East bank of Lohit river with West bank, remains closed due to landslides for most part of the year. Kibithoo is one of the five officially agreed Border Personnel Meeting points between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army of China for regular consultations and interactions. Do note that the last petrol pump is at Khupa town, which is around 125 kms before Kibithoo. Kibithoo lies on the east of Dong Valley, where the first sun rays in India is received. However, Kaho village, which is on the southern side of the river, is the last populated village of India, and is around 2 kms in the east of Kibithoo.

One can stay for a night at Hawaii, district headquarters of Anjaw and 75 kms from Kibithoo. One can make plan to visit the Walong War Memorial, where Indian Army jawans stopped around 4000 Chinese troops in the Indo-Tibet war. It is roughly 20 kms before Kibithoo. Also can visit the Kibithoo Helipad, from where one can clearly see the Chinese army camp. Visit to Garampani, hot water spring, 7 kms before Walong is another spot to be noted.

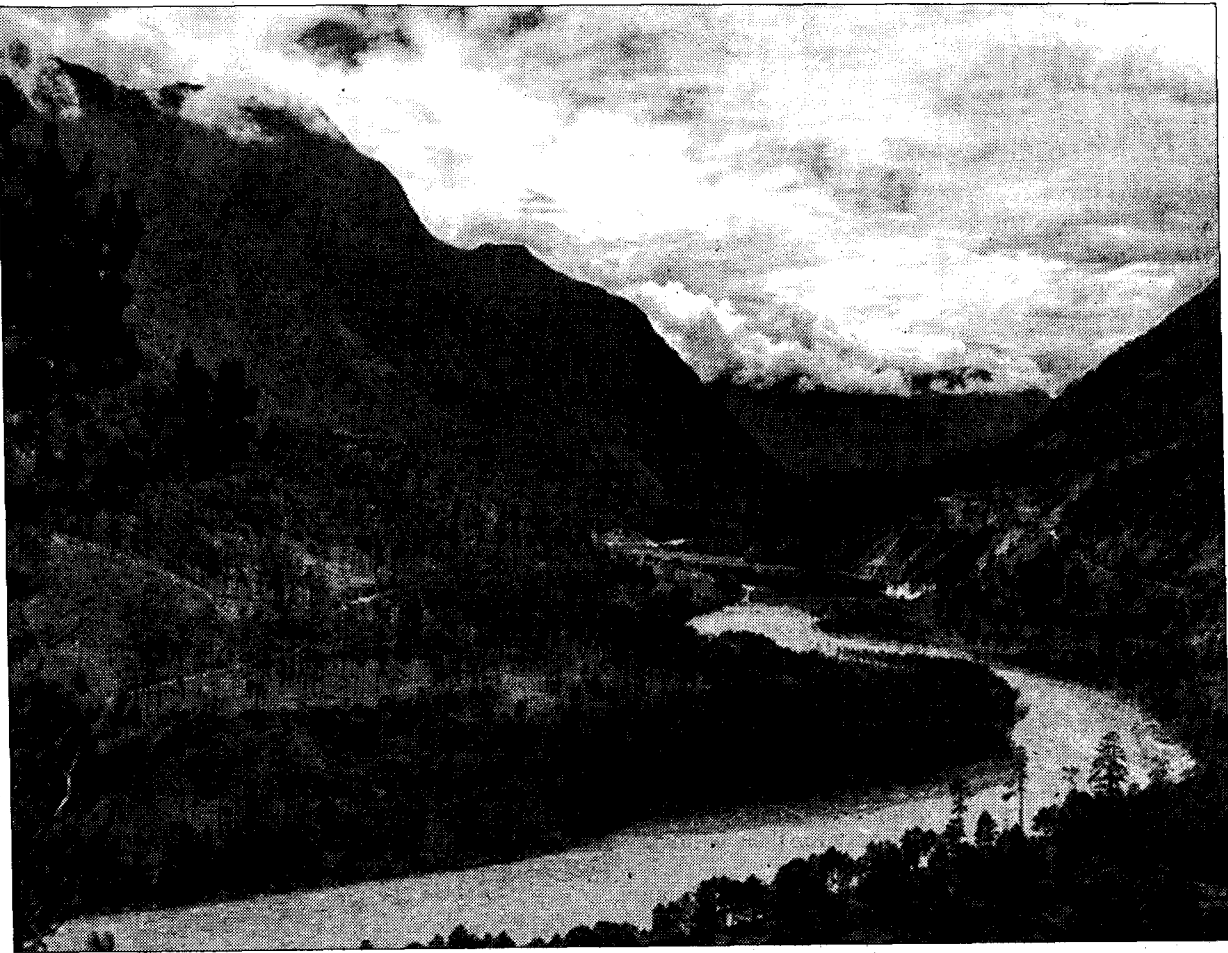
Walong is a small cantonment and an administrative town carved out of Lohit District in 2004. Known for its memorials dedicated to the Indians who died there during the hard times of the 1962 Sino-India war, this place is located on the "Helmet Top" where the hot water springs attract

a great number of tourists from other parts of India. Tidding is quite popular among locals and travellers alike. The opulent and shining aquamarine water of this place is its major highlight. Furthermore, the undulating slopes create a very satisfying respite, especially for people who love nature.

It is intriguing to know that when one is still cosying up in bed waiting for the sunrise, there is a part of the land in our own country which sees the very first radiant rays of sunlight piercing the clouds and warming up life on the land and forests alike.

The place which I am talking about here is Dong Valley- the easternmost village in India. Here, the tourists climb up the mountains at 3 in the morning to witness the very first rays of sunlight. The Dong valley is located 17 kms from Kibithoo. In 1999 only, it was discovered that this place experiences the first sunrise in India. The Survey of India officials confirmed that Dong being located further east than Katchal, dawn broke over the former ahead of the Nicobar Island. Dong is located at 97 degrees longitude and 28 degrees latitude while Katchal is located at 93.30 degrees longitude and latitude of eight degrees.

Dong valley is situated under the district administration of Anjaw and the history can be traced Anjaw District was bifurcated from Lohit Dis-



trict on February 2004 with its Headquarter at Hawaii, back to British India. In 1914, this place was a part of the Lakhimpur district. The British created the north-east frontier tract for the very purpose of administering the three areas which are namely the central and eastern section, the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract along with the western section. After this, in 1956, the Dibang valley was constituted as a separate subdivision, placed under the charge of an Additional Political Officer. Then coming to June of 1980, it was further separated into two independent districts- Lohit District and Dibang Valley District.

A remote place in the farthest corner of the country, untouched by our modern lives, pristine, and maintaining its natural beauty, Dong is a small slice of heaven. Nicknamed a "photographer's paradise" the village is enshrouded in a blanket of clouds over the towering mountains that surround the area.

At 1,240 metres, Dong is located at the confluence of the rivers Lohit (a tributary of the mighty Brahmaputra) and Sati, strategically placed at the tri-junction of India, China and Myanmar, and can be reached only after a one-and-a-half-hour climb from the important military base of Walong. The journey and the stay at various places are made pleasant by the army, which has a large presence in the area.

Normally tourists make it in 90 minutes, descending into the Dong valley even as the sun is faintly visible over the peaks. Locals do this in 45 minutes.

So far, villagers from Dong had to either walk 90 minutes to reach Walong, or take the more adventurous ropeway where you tie yourself to a rope, catch hold of a pulley and slide down the 100-metre long single wire across the rapidly flowing Lohit. Trekking is the only way to get there from the village but the hike is truly worth it as the spectacle is nothing short of the best views you would have even seen in your life! Visitors make their way to the lush green, misty grasslands in Dong Krong as early as 3 am to witness the sunrise that comes in around 4:30 am every single day! The original Dong village is now a deserted place, lack of water has driven the villagers to other parts. But you can still visit the place for panoramic views of the rivers and meadows and a peek into Myanmar as well. It is advisable to hire a guide when exploring the region; otherwise, one will get difficult to find the right locations.

The cascading rivers and Herculean Mountains are just a few aspects of its overall natural abundance. It is the kind of place where one can find solitude away from the glamour of city life. And if you seek all this, then Dong Valley is an op-

tion worth considering. There are no motorable roads to Dong and is difficult to reach. But its natural beauty is beyond comparison. The state government officials, when contacted expressed complete ignorance of this rare opportunity to promote tourism in the virgin valley at the foothills of the Himalayas and a paradise for trekking.

According to the Census of India, 2011, the village has 15 residents across 4 households. 6 are male and 9 are female. The children go to school in Walong. Matter-of-factly those things have not changed much except for the fact that the road to Tezu is now all-weather and that Indian soldiers are in better shape than ever before. The army put up its bravest fight against the invading Chinese at Walong in 1965. Indian Army didn't have anything then, but fought valiantly. Today, they are much better off. The 2,000 kms long proposed Mago-Thingbu to Vijaynagar along the McMahon Line will pass through this place.

The best time to visit Dong Valley is between the months of April and July. During this time, one can hope to explore the best possible sight-seeing places. Overall, Dong Valley is a beautiful travel destination that can mesmerize everyone with its lush natural surroundings. To witness this undeniably wonderful travel destination, one can make a plan for the next season.



"Standing on the shoulders of giants of Indian literature"

By Vishnu Makhijani

Author, columnist, screenwriter, TV personality and motivational speaker Anand Neelakanthan is perhaps the only Indian writer to present the Ramayana and the Mahabharata from the viewpoint of the vanquished. He has authored seven works of fiction in English and one in Malayalam and two prequels of the hugely successful "Bahubali" movies, with a third one on the way, and has now ventured into the genre of children's books. Through all this, he remains firmly rooted to the ground.

"I may be the only writer to do so in English, but Indian languages have a tradition going on for centuries to write from alternate points of view. India is a land of rebellion, counter thoughts, and non-willingness to accept any form of dogma. Questioning is a part of Indian culture, or it had been until recently.

"The earliest Jain and Buddhist Ramayanas, the works of Bhasa almost two thousand three hundred years ago and folk versions of our epic, all are an example of this diversity of thoughts. I stand on the shoulders of giants of Indian literature and only one among hundreds in this long tradition spanning many centuries," Neelakanthan told IANS in an interview.

"We have printed not even 10 per cent of Indian folk stories and versions of epics. There are countless stories out there, a product of six thousand years of storytelling, and one needs to only develop an ear and an eye for them -- we breathe stories in India. I do not base my research just on books and the internet. It is from performing arts, folk and classic, temple sculptures, poetry, and localised mythologies," he explained.

Thus, in this scheme of things, it is but natural that his latest book is titled: "The Very Extremely, Most Naughty Asura Tales for Kids" (Puf-

fin), given that his debut novel "Asura: Tale of the Vanquished" (2012) has been cited by Amazon as one of the hundred books to be read in a lifetime.

Profusely illustrated by Subhadeep Roy and Shiladitya Bose, the book has as its leitmotif: "Aren't we chubby, aren't we cute? Aren't we lovely, sweet as fruit? Give us a bear hug, give us a kiss. Regret not later for giving it a miss."

"I had a fairy tale childhood in a picturesque Kerala village. I grew up drunk on stories. There would be the tale about the ghost living on the tamarind tree in the rear courtyard of an abandoned palace, the seductress witch on the palm tree who would stand with her bewitching smile by the river on a moonlit night or about the giant who frequented the temple pond at midnight.

"This giant kept one foot on a banyan tree and the other on the Indian devil tree on the other shore of the pond and leaned to lap up water using his long blue tongue," Neelakanthan elaborated, adding: "And I was that kid who wondered what would happen to the giant if one of the trees broke with his weight. Would he fall flat on his face and flood the village?"

There were the night birds, whose cries opened the doors of death and invited Yama, the god of death, to ride through the village streets on his buffalo. "And I was that kid who wondered why the god of death did not upgrade to a scooter or at least a cycle. Even the fishmonger had a cycle, and it was unfair that such a fierce god must roam around on a buffalo," the author said.

"There were funny prankster ghosts who threw cow dung on your

face from the attic and ran away with a giggle when you woke up. There were more than 100 temples in this ancient town, and almost for six months of a year, there would be temple festivals at one of these temples," he added.

Alas, his children grew up in the city and so have many others. Not for them was "the world where this Bhuta bore through earth, crouched in the well and when you drew water to drink, came up plonked on the water bucket to spit at your face and grin. It is the Harry Potters and heroes of the Marvel universe that they are familiar with. Brilliant tales, no doubt, but set in an alien culture and I felt they were missing something extraordinary that I had", Neelakanthan said.

Noting that there are few books that can introduce the ghosts, goblins, and vetalas of our fantastic tales that would appeal to the generation who have grown up on Disney films, he said: "Some kids found the books based on Indian Puranas not cool and often preachy. I thought, why not write a fun book for them in the way I had experienced these tales? Not a preachy book, not a moral book, but with some delightful irreverence, some quirkiness, some songs and dance with stories that celebrate life. Even after seven best sellers for adults and almost 500 episodes in popular television series, I never dared to write for children. Thankfully, the team in Puffin was so encouraging that I have plunged into this formidable task."

Does he plan any more books of this genre? "I would write more books for children as it is fun and rewarding, though not monetarily. Such things are done for the passion and not money," Neelakanthan said.

How did the "Bahubali" prequels come about?

"S.S. Rajamouli, the legendary director of the film, came to read my 'Asura' and as luck would have it, he loved it. He invited me for a discussion, and one thing led to another until I ended up doing a three-book prequel on the 'Bahubali' movies," the author said.

How does he see the road ahead?

"The journey so far has been fantastic. I am a dreamer, and I keep dreaming while sleeping and while awake. One of the dreams is to take over the world with stories that have the fragrance of our land and answer the challenge that the west has thrown at us. Indian are the greatest storytellers in the world, for we view it as an illusion, a play, a story. I want to do what Disney did to the west. Create a world of imagination and values agnostic of religion, but that speaks of the human spirit, and adventure. As they told many thousand years ago in our country, the world is bliss -- Jagatanandam", Neelakanthan said.

But wait, he isn't finished yet. "Just ask me what I want to do when I grow up. And the answer is, I refuse to grow up. It is an extended childhood I am having in my mid-forties. My childhood friends, the Asuras, Bhutas, Pretas and Pisachas, have come to the party and I have unleashed a few of these naughty ones up on our unsuspecting kids. So, all the kids out there, even the ones who are in the garb of adults, it is time to go back to your childhood.

"Leave your electronic gizmos and worries back. I have brought the time machine, and it is time for a journey to a fantastic world of the past. There are many interesting ones waiting to befriend you and if they have horns and tails, fangs and claws, booming laughs or naughty grins, fear not for they are fun," Neelakanthan said.

And that, precisely, is what makes the world go around! Hop on!

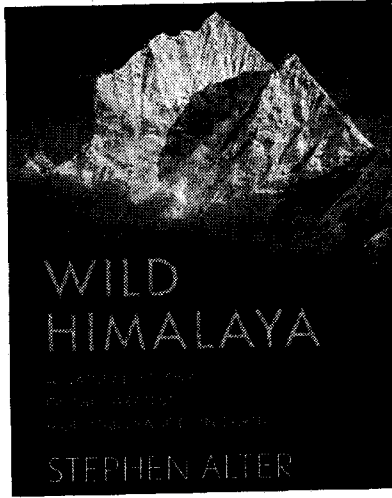
Canadian honours for book on Himalayas

Prolific writer Stephen Alter has won the prestigious Mountain Environment and Natural History Award at the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival 2020 in Alberta, Canada, for his book "Wild Himalaya" (Aleph) that brings alive the greatest mountain range on earth in all its terrifying beauty, grandeur and complexity.

Travelling to all the five countries that the Himalayan range - 2,500 kilometres in length, between 350 and 150 kilometres in breadth and rising to a maximum height of almost nine kilometres above sea level (Mount Everest) - traverses through India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal and China, Alter braids together on-the-ground reports with a deep understanding and study of the history, science, geology, environment, flora, fauna, myth, folklore, spirituality, climate and human settlements of the region to provide a nuanced and rich portrait of these legendary mountains.

Adding colour to the narrative are riveting tales unearthed by the author of some of the range's most storied peaks - Everest or Chomolungma, Kanchenjunga, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri, and Nanga Parbat, among others. This book is divided into eight sections which delve deep into particular aspects of the Himalayas.

"Orogenesis" explores the origin, evolution, geology, geography and other such core aspects of these mountains; "The Third Pole" concerns itself with weather, glaciers, wetlands and rivers; "Flora Himalensis" details extraordinary Himalayan plants and trees; "Winged Migrants" goes deep into the world of Himalayan birds and insects; "Mountain Mammals" crosses high passes and goes above the tree-line in search of brown bears, blue sheep and snow leopards; "Ancestral Journeys" takes a close look at human settlement in the Himalaya and stories of origin and migration, both ancient and contemporary; "At the Edge of Beyond" recounts epic adventures and great mountaineering feats; and, finally, "In a Thousand



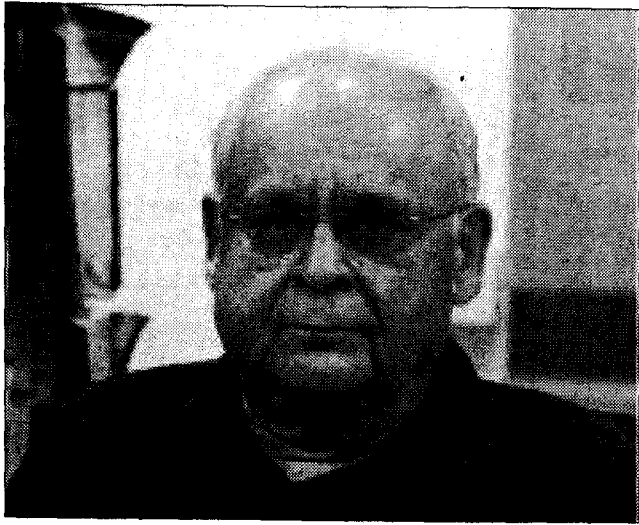
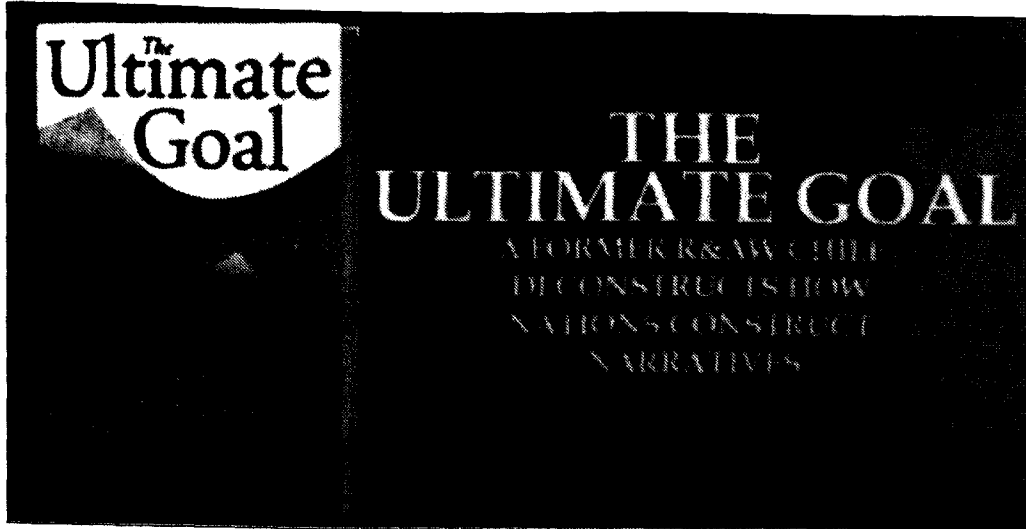
Agnes of the Gods" examines the essence of Himalayan art, folklore and mythology as well as enigmatic mysteries such as the existence of the Yeti, along with key questions of conservation. Although there have been hundreds of books, and some masterpieces, about one or the other aspect of the Himalaya, rare is one that has come close to capturing the incredible complexity and majesty of these mountains.

Stephen Alter, a cousin of the late actor Tom Alter, is the author of 20 books of fiction and non-fiction. He was born in Mussoorie, Uttarakhand, and much of his writing focuses on the Himalayan region, where he continues to live and work.

His honours include a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Fulbright award. His recent memoir, "Becoming a Mountain: Himalayan Journeys in Search of the Sacred and the Sublime", received the Kekoo Naoroji Award for Himalayan Literature in 2015. His most recent work of fiction, "In the Jungles of the Night: A Novel About Jim Corbett", was shortlisted for the DSC South Asian Literature Award in 2017.

Alter was writer-in-residence at MIT for 10 years, before which he directed the writing programme at the American University in Cairo. He is the founding director of the Mussoorie Mountain Festival. (IANS)

Spy book lifts veil off the world's best kept secrets



By Aarti Tikoo Singh

This world could be just one large simulated reality, is a metaphysical idea. But after reading former chief of India's external spy agency Research & Analysis Wing (RAW), Vikram Sood's latest page-turner, 'The Ultimate Goal', one is left with the feeling that the geopolitical world too, is like a matrix where most people live without the awareness of its true nature and reality.

The Ultimate Goal, published by HarperCollins, will shake you out of your naivete in believing that watching television news and movies, reading books, memorising general knowledge and consuming content on the Internet, makes you a fully-informed person.

The book takes you through a geopolitical journey that will lift the veil from your eyes, and confirm the long-held suspicion that modern powerful states make you believe what they want you to believe by manufacturing narratives.

But what it does additionally is that it shows you how the biggest secrets of our geopolitical world are hidden in plain sight using the narratives spun by powerful states of the world.

What is a narrative, though? Sood answers this question at length and eloquently defines it as alteration or

tweaking of historical facts and ideas for a political agenda.

His 350-page book then dwells into unmasking the process of narrative-building, its main drivers, tools and vehicles used by the superpowers to shape and influence collective thinking for political outcomes favourable to them, at least since the onset of the US-Soviet Cold War. It is a logical second to his first book 'The Unending Game' which had provided a broad overview of the profession of espionage that aids to secure a country's strategic interests.

In The Ultimate Goal, Sood essentially explains how the West, particularly the US, post-WWII, used ingenious ways and means to peddle a favourable narrative about itself to pursue its 'imperialistic' goals around the world, without facing any revolt or defiance. The vehicles it used to build a suitable narrative are the Church, intelligence agencies, news media, television, cinema and the Internet.

The former spy chief, meticulously decodes behind-the-scenes mechanism of how all such institutions are used to weave a credible story to influence political outcomes. It is the narrative-setting, using all these tools to create corresponding ecosystems which then in a self-fulfilling prophecy sustain similar ideas and arguments. It is the

US narrative, in the post-WWII era, that made Islamic theocracies or military dictatorships or Communist totalitarian states appear benign.

The book enables us to understand why and how the Indians failed to draw support of the West, for example in Kashmir even as Indians have been the victims of Pakistan's cross-border terrorism. Well, it was New Delhi's failure to counter the anti-India narrative manufactured by powerful players inimical to India! Sood however warns that non-democratic states cannot build credible and long-lasting narratives because it is harder for them to defend or justify their actions at home and abroad as well.

Had this book been written two decades ago, one would have escaped the trap of believing some of the constructed narratives which were not based in reality at all.

In India's case, many of the narratives fabricated by the mainstream media, for example, caused extreme self-doubt, self-loathing, suppression of self-esteem and lack of confidence. Its only after the advent of social media, which empowered the common man, some of the false narratives, faced resistance and questioning.

Sood's Ultimate Goal, therefore, will serve as 'The Truman Show' to India's academia, media, cinema, artists, activists and youth, with an insight on how our world is a large set populated by performers for a show controlled by invisible and powerful directors.

From that perspective, it is one of the most important books of our times. It divests the geopolitical reality of all the ornaments and brings us face to face with the crude nature of the geopolitical world where nations, communities and civilisations compete for their respective interests.

In the end, the revelations in the book make you question whether political free will exists if the geopolitical future is predetermined by the states and deep states. But more than that, it leaves you with the question whether the human mind will continue to be a Guinea pig.

The former intelligence chief's writing style is cogent and substantive, with one sub-theme seamlessly and effortlessly connecting with other.

Compared to all the books written by former R&AW chiefs, this stands out because of its in-depth analysis, covering a wide-ranging of topics that elucidate how the world has come to be geopolitically, the way it is.

Though it is loaded with information and acuity, Sood's ability to provide all of it with a dollop of intrigue, as if it were a suspense thriller, is exceptional. (IANS)

Circus shows on the verge of extinction

The lockdown due to coronavirus affected everyone's livelihood significantly. The lockdown has adversely affected the future of circuses as there is no audience for the shows. Many circus operators don't even have money to recharge their phones.

Clowns, who bring smiles to many people, animals like lions, tigers and elephants who perform on the directions of ring masters, motorcycles running in the well of death, beautiful girls performing stunts etc might not be seen anymore which means the circus might become a history for the next generation.

Anil Kumar, manager of Asiad Circus, told IANS, "Our circus has been closed since March 13. Some of the people working have gone back to their homes while some are still living in the camp but they are working as daily wage labourers. They sleep here after coming back from their work."

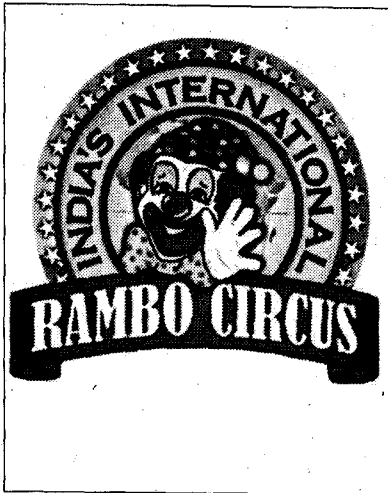
"The situation was already bad for us, but the pandemic spread has made it worst. Earlier, we hardly managed to earn bread and butter but now we don't even have money to recharge our phones," he said.

There used to be around 150-200 circuses in the country but due to the restrictions imposed due to coronavirus, they are on the verge of closure. Some of the circuses closed down due to increasing cost while the remaining are closing down due to various restrictions imposed by the government.

Though there is a circus association in the capital but due to lack of members it is also not active.

According to circus operators, around 10 to 15 circus closed down due to coronavirus while the remaining are struggling. According to Kumar, circus is no longer a profitable business and if the government does not pay attention, soon it will just be on papers. However, the growth of multimedia has also affected the circus business as now children have a lot of options for their entertainment.

Rambo Circus, one of India's most popular and oldest circus, has been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to provide financial assistance to the members of this circus, it has started digital shows.



Rajesh Shah, a resident of Boroda, runs a consultancy which helps the circus companies. Shah said, "Out of 20 big circus across the country, only 10 big are existing now. All the artists have gone back to their hometowns because of Covid."

"It will be very difficult to get these artists back as they are very hardworking and they will find some other work for themselves."

The Great Bombay Circus, which started from Mumbai in 1920, completed 100 years this year and witnessed a great success but currently its condition is bad. Two brothers run this circus.

Sanjeev, the owner of the Great Bombay Circus, said, "150 members of the circus have gone back to their homes because of no work in the past seven years. Everyday cost of running a circus is around Rs 1 lakh. A lot of circus companies have closed down in the last two years. We even had to borrow money from relatives due to financial problems."

"There is an association, the Indian Circus Federation, but it is also not active now because there are no active members. More circus companies will close down in the future," he said.

"The government will have to help our industry financially. Nobody thought that this disease will bother for so long. While showing online circus is not feasible for a long time, because a whole family will watch the circus on one ticket which will result in huge loss for us in the future," Sanjeev added. (IANS)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, November 1, 2020

Sun is forming an angle of 72 (Quintile) degrees with Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give amazing result for the whole year ahead. You will get your government related work done easily and will also come in contact with influential persons and high ranking government officials. New job/business offers will keep coming. Those who were preparing for competitive exams/interviews will get success. You will also get work-orders from abroad. Even your financial condition will keep getting better. You will also get new investment opportunities. The little problems that you were having with your health will come to an end. You will also get relief from chronic diseases. This is a year where you will enter into new romantic ties leading to marriage. You will also share good bonding with your mate. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. Children will perform well.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they too draw upon you a great deal. You need space and contact with others in order to feel content. You are blessed with intuition and foresight which leads you in the right direction. You seem to need a good friend with whom you can share your ideas. You focus on balancing your personal interests and objectives with what would be best for a significant other. It's important to give others credit and recognition, and to attempt to harmonize and include others rather than to go solo for the time being.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This is an especially introspective phase during which you have the chance to truly uncover your personal strengths and talents. On a more practical level, you may be dealing with joint finances and shared resources now more than usual. This is an excellent time under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions in your relationships with loved ones. All which is deeply personal comes into focus now. Intimate matters are especially important to you during this period. Just how well you are handling your life comes up for inspection. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. Research uncovers new material that allows you to develop a better overall picture of the events.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. Financial benefits may come your way. 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. You would focus on intimacy with a partner, or simply retreat a little from the hectic pace of life. This is an excellent time to create a budget or financial plan, or to rid yourself of bad habits that undermine your sense of personal power and self-mastery.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You display great skills in sports, competitive exams, physical activities and this wins appreciation and brings about new opportunities. Close relationships continue to be in focus. Emotions run close to the surface. You may also see the culmination or fruits of a personal project at this time. This week is good for foreign affairs and education. Personal relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. You are likely to get back to fitness routines and diet programs to enhance health and energy.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are ambitious, authoritative and courageous. This period is excellent for career and business income. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to negotiations and one-on-one communications. Be as non-judgmental as you can with a partner. There may be the need to revisit old issues in a partnership. There could be some communication problems with a partner. Misunderstandings with your partner now can do some damage if you focus on words said instead of the meanings behind the words. Stick to regular exercise routine and regular pattern of nutritious diet.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

If you need to talk through problems, do your best to be as non-judgmental as possible, and don't over-react to what your partner has to say either. Re-thinking a partnership arrangement is possible now, but you should avoid jumping to any

premature decisions. It would be wise to be especially clear when it comes to communicating with people, take time to re-examine issues rather than communicating about them prematurely. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This week brings entertainment, communication and popularity among people and harmonious relations in personal and professional life. Intimate connections can be especially meaningful. Intensity appeals in your relationships. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You may get the backing you need now-financial or emotional. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will be the keystone.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

People in fine arts, and communication related fields would give a non-traditional blend to their creations and get popularity by the work done. Routine affairs simply don't seem to satisfy. You receive pleasure from anything that expands your horizons, both physically and mentally. People from overseas and foreign climes may particularly appeal now. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love. A love interest who attracts you during this cycle may be somebody who, you previously wouldn't consider attractive, or someone whose cultural background is very different from yours.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You would have a strong desire to cooperate and communicate with others. You feel most comfortable spending time with people on a one-to-one level, or with those with whom you share personal matters. Your own thoughts become clearer through dialogue with others. You may be involved in public relations work, counseling, negotiating, or arbitration during this cycle. There is a lot of emphasis on communications with partners and best friends at this time. You can use the power of words to advise others or to make peace with people in your life.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration indicates authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life who will support you and whose respect you will earn. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. The more willing you are to be in the limelight and take center stage, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities and family relations. You have a taste for the exotic now that can show up in many areas of your life—who you are attracted to, what you buy, the kind of art or entertainment you enjoy, and so forth. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

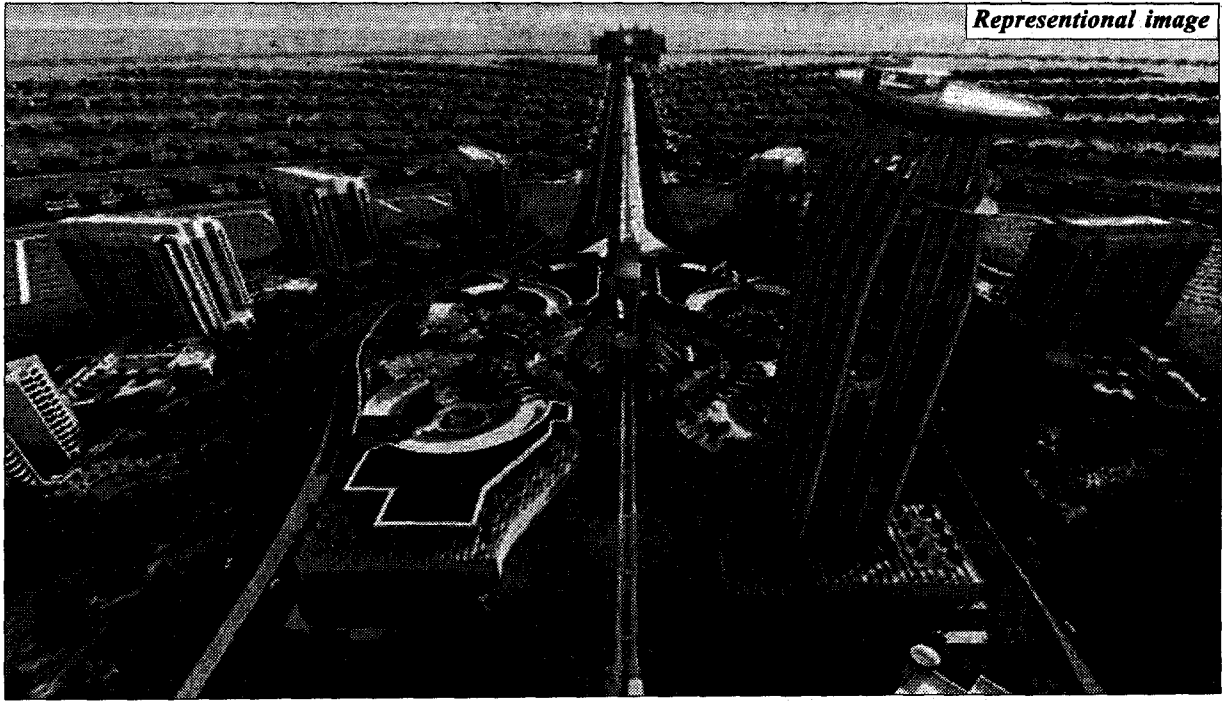
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You are more diplomatic than usual during this transit. Delays and miscommunications are possible. It's a good time for rethinking and revising partnership matters. You are likely to take your hobbies and talents more seriously. This is an excellent week for concentrating on a personal hobby and turning it into a source of income. You accept the individuality of loved ones and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. You feel fresh and re-energized. Finding a balance between autonomy and dependence is key for you at this time.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Negative expression of this energy is the tendency towards ego conflicts concerning jointly held property or money. Conflicts with partners over values or possessions are possible. Occasionally, this transit could bring a crisis or ending of some kind. Something you hear about now might disturb or touch you deeply. You would be more sensitive and dedicated to your personal and professional life. You work hard to meet the goals. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and wellbeing.

Career in Urban Planning



Representational image

By Ranjan K Baruah

People migrate to cities or big towns for better employment and other facilities. In recent times we have seen the growth of cities in many parts of the world. In India, we can see rapid urbanisation. There are positive and negative impacts of the urbanisation but with proper planning things can be managed in a better way and for which we need planners. We are talking about the importance of urban planning and how it can be another career option for our students. Urban planning is also referred to as urban and regional planning, regional planning, town planning, city planning, urban development, urban management, etc.

Urban planning is a technical and political process that is focused on the development and design of land use and the built environment, including air, water, and the infrastructure passing into and out of urban areas, such as transportation, communications, and distribution networks. It answers questions about how people will live, work and play in a given area and thus, guides orderly development in urban, suburban and rural areas. It is a dynamic field since the questions around how people live, work and play changes with time. These changes are constantly reflected in planning methodologies, zonal codes and policies

making it a highly technical, political, social, economical and environmental field.

It is an interdisciplinary field that includes social science, architecture, human geography, politics, and engineering and design sciences. Practitioners of urban planning are concerned with research and analysis, strategic thinking, architecture, urban design, public consultation, policy recommendations, implementation and management.

There is evidence of urban planning and designed communities dating back to the Mesopotamian, Indus Valley, Minoan, and Egyptian civilizations.

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the 31st of October as World Cities Day, by its resolution 68/239. The Day is expected to greatly promote the international community's interest in global urbanization, push forward cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contributing to sustainable urban development around the world. Urbanization provides the potential for new forms of social inclusion, including greater equality, access to services and new opportunities, and engagement and mobilization that reflects the diversity of cities, countries and the globe. Yet too often this is not the shape of urban development. Inequality and exclu-

sion abound, often at rates greater than the national average, at the expense of sustainable development that delivers for all.

From career perspectives it involves developing buildings, parks, streets, understanding the use of resources, planning permission, use of land and working according to the safety of the environment, etc. Aspirants may study architecture, design, planning or engineering to enter into urban planning. A few of the leading institutions in India offering a course in Urban Planning include: School of Planning and Architecture Delhi; Birla Institute of Technology, Mesra, Ranchi; Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, Ahmedabad, etc.

Career opportunities are with government departments, private sectors, academic institutions, research organisations, real estate, etc. There are institutions that offer courses in planning and design around the world. Students may choose the course after passing senior secondary or even after graduation. Mere academic degree and qualification may not ensure a sustainable job but with qualifications and employability skills anyone may shine in the field of urban planning.

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

"Democracy does not guarantee equality of conditions - it only guarantees equality of opportunity."
--- Plato

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No. 77 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2020

Pulwama, Balakot

THE Pulwama attack in February 2019 was among the major hits India took in recent years from terrorists trained in Pakistan. The nation has not recovered from such shocks. As many as 40 CRPF soldiers were killed in the attack by a suicide bomber on a convoy of security forces. India responded 12 days later with Air Force jets bombing a hilly area suspected to be hideouts and training centres for pro-Kashmiri Jaish-e-Mohammed outfit operating from Pakistani soil. Pakistan made light of the attack, did not acknowledge any deaths, and sent its fighter jets a day later to browbeat India. India lost a fighter jet and its pilot was taken into custody by the Pakistani authorities, only to be returned a little later. Now, the statement by Pakistan's Science and Technology minister Fawad Chaudhry in the National Assembly, giving credit to Prime Minister Imran Khan for the attack in Pulwama, is seen as the first official confirmation that the Pakistani establishment was involved in the attack. Yet, short of an official confirmation, it is well-acknowledged that the Pakistani military intelligence service, the ISI, is directly involved in training and inducting people into terrorism through agencies like the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar e Taiba. Why, even Osama bin Laden of Al Qaeda was known to have been given sanctuary near the military headquarters by the Pakistani establishment before he was targeted and killed by the US in a midnight operation in Abbottabad.

Overall, what India gained from the action in Balakot was the fear that the IAF was able to instill in the Pakistani establishment and the military brass in particular. The Indian fighter jets managed to reach close to the military headquarters in Rawalpindi that night without being challenged. Pakistanis could only scramble their jets but could not take on the intruding IAF planes. But, Pakistanis gained the upper hand a day later by downing a freshly intruding Indian fighter jet. Fact is that India gains nothing from the minister's statement. He has stated only what India already knew. To the international community, Pakistan will have the luxury of saying these were simply soundbytes sans stuff or a political circus in the national assembly. Fact is also that Pakistan did not get a fitting response from India after Pulwama; Balakot was by all reckoning a small show, though PM Modi gained votes on that count. We lack the cutting edge in most spheres of military action.

Of Khasia and Cambodia

By HH Mohrmen

In the recent tirade which sparked from the Ichamati issue, what caught one's interest from the exchange of invectives is the contention that Khasi by which it was meant the grand Hyniew Trep community were originally from Cambodia. Humans have migrated from one place to another since time immemorial and the question rightly asked is where did the Hyniew Trep people come from? Do we have historical evidence of the people's migration to the hills? The answer to this question is unequivocally no. Hyniew Trep people also tell stories of their migration to the place they call home now, but the question remains whether there is any truth in the statement that they came from Cambodia.

The assertion that the Khasi Pnar people come from Cambodia is no different from the overly over-generalised statement that all Bengalis in Meghalaya are Bangladeshis. The very fact that Bangladesh has only come into existence in the year 1971 and many Bengalis in Meghalaya have lived in the hills long before that, makes this statement unfounded and inconsequential. Similarly it is irrelevant if the Hyniew Trep people had migrated to hills or they were originally settlers of the hills. The fact remains that they were the autochthons of the area.

The Hyniew Trep people have no history of their migration to the hills but the only thing they have are stories and the familiar stories that people tell is that it was a long arduous exodus of twelve long years or 'khad ar, snem pynthiah/kyntih'. It is also said that it is for this reason, that they called the Himalayas 'ki lum Makashang' the mountain that they walked around. These two elements which are part of the story-telling are the only parts of the tradition which connect the people with the great migration story of the tribe. But it is also to be noted that twelve here is symbolic because they used certain numbers to define something which is uncountable or

innumerable, for example when they say 'ki laiphew mrad' or 'ki laiphew jingthaw' or 'ki laiphew syiem' it does not mean that there are only thirty kinds of animals or kings but it also means many. Similarly 'khardar' like in 'khardar dalo' or 'khardar pateng' is not meant to be taken literally.

Apart from stories, the Hyniew Trep also have their monoliths, stone carvings and sculptures around which they weave stories. They also weave stories around natural phenomena too. In fact the monolith culture that is being practiced by the people till date is one unique aspect of culture that needs more studies. Monolithic culture occurred in different parts of the world during the Neolithic age, hence it would be interesting to study if the Hyniew Trep people who still practice the culture till date have any connection with the tradition that was practiced in the distant past. If so, how is it that people in the area still continue to practice tradition while the monolithic culture in the other parts of the world has disappeared long time ago.

The recent history of at least the Khasi Pnar was that they have separate chieftainships of which the few prominent ones are ka hima Nongkrem, ka hima Sohra, ka hima Nongkhaw and ka hima Jaitia to name a few. But of these the Jaitia kingdom has a long recorded history from the fifteen hundreds until the kings were defeated by the British. The state not only finds mention in the chronicles of the neighbouring kingdoms, but it has also issued its own coins. It was indeed great to know from J.B. Bhattacharjee a renowned Bengali historian of Meghalaya who first taught at the Kiang Nangbah (then known as Jowai Government) College that the Jaintia Buranjis which is the main source of information about the Jaitia kingdom is now being translated into English.

The last known history

about the kingdom is the rebellion against the British led by u Kiang Nangbah the famous freedom fighter of Jaitia. The freedom that u Kiang Nangbah fought for was for his country the Jaitia kingdom which was then under the dominion of the British rule. Although initially the cause of the rebellion was the house tax which the British government imposed on the people of Jaitia and also the interference of the British with the religious activities of the people, but at the later stage of the battle the rebels also demanded that the British reinstate their king. Although the people who lived in the kingdom shared the same culture and language with other Hyniew Trep people, those who live in the area known as Jaitia have since evolved to form a unique identity of their own.

The common obvious characteristics of the Hyniew Trep People is that they follow the same culture and the distinct part of it is the matrilineal family system and that people speak what the linguists call the Austroasiatic group, Khasi-Aslian language. The different sub tribes may not have the same history but they are united by the culture and language they speak. Perhaps the argument that the Khasia are from Cambodia is based on the fact that they speak the mentioned language, and if that is the case then the Mundas too speak the same language like the Khasi Pnar.

According to Tony Joseph's book there are two questions related to the origin and spread of the Austroasiatic language speaking population in India. Question number one is whether the Austroasiatic population originated from India and spread to other parts of the world or that they migrated to India from South-east Asia. Tradition amongst the Pnars of Jaitia hills also has a story of u Sajar Nangli who rebelled against the king of his time and left his land for good. It is believed that he led an

exodus of his followers and walked towards the east.

Recent genetic studies on ancient DNA provide answers to the question of the origin of the Hyniew Trep people. With regards to the Austroasiatic population in India the studies suggest that what is relevant to us that the first wave of migration from Asia to India happened through land route. This study suggests that the migration to India happened around 2000 BCE which gives a fair idea that the ancestors of the Khasi Pnar people had arrived in India a long time ago. It was also suggested that the population migrated from South East Asia as part of the farming migration originating from China around 2000 BCE. This also answers the pertinent question about the practice of wetland farming culture of the Pnar people in particular. It also provides justification to how rice became a major crop of the people with the community having many varieties of rice in their custody.

Tony Joseph may have arrived at the conclusion about the migration of the people to their present home and their connection with rice, but the question remain as to how the people still continue with the monolithic culture which was primarily a culture prevalent during the Neolithic age. The continuation of the monolithic practice amongst the people which was in fact was prevalent between 7000 and 1000 BC remains an enigma that needs more studies. It is therefore pertinent to note that people migrated from one place to another in search of food and shelter and they continue to do so even today. Some Bengalis in Meghalaya had migrated to the hills since the British time and the Khasi Pnar too had migrated to the hills from South East Asia. If the threat to the state is the influx of illegal migrants into the state, it is the responsibility of both the communities to work together and check this illegal activity.

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Ankhi Das's exit from facebook not enough for Indian users

By K Raveendran

Ankhi Das, who through her own interpretation of her role as public policy director of Facebook in India gave a tinge of saffron to the social media giant's blue colour scheme, has finally exited the India operations. She has been with Facebook since 2011, when Mark Zuckerberg's outfit had not grown much beyond a start-up.

Her selective application of the company's hate-speech policy to spare Hindu nationalist leaders from the company's rules in this respect in the interest of 'protecting' its business prospects in India, had become highly controversial, following an expose carried by Wall Street Journal in July this year. Her policy had even prompted some colleagues to question its propriety.

Ankhi Das ended her Facebook career with an appearance before the Joint Parliamentary Committee studying personal data protection issues last week. A company statement on her resignation said she

policy attracted global attention when the Wall Street Journal carried a report saying that Ankhi Das had put pressure on her company to ignore its strict hate speech norms, when applied to the accounts of BJP activists and followers.

The newspaper cited four instances of such bending of rules in favour of the ruling party, including the one by Telangana BJP legislator Raja Singh, amounting to communally provocative statements, one of which even called for violence against minorities.

According to the report, officials monitoring content on the platform had concluded that the BJP MLA not only had violated the company's hate-speech rules but qualified as dangerous. It then quoted 'current and former Facebook employees' to say that Ankhi Das intervened on behalf of the BJP as part of a broader pattern of favouritism by Facebook toward Modi's BJP and Hindu hard-liners. Singh has claimed that the



was stepping down to 'pursue her interest in public service'. One does not know if that could mean a role in the saffron party, although she was in her younger days known for left leanings. Her exit does not mean that the social media giant's flirtations with the saffron, is going to end and Indian users will be getting less hate filled messages in Facebook platform. The new person Shivnath Thulkral who is a replacement of Ankhi, was a known pro-BJP TV personality when he was taken by the Facebook management. In fact he was taken for his contacts in the BJP more than his policy management expertise. So that way, Facebook's policy division is back to square one in terms of the leaning of the policy head. It has to be seen how he functions despite all this controversy over Ankhi's handling.

Facebook has not been a stranger to controversies, with the social media giant having been accused of divisive role in elections by carrying fake news for money. It has faced a series of anti-trust actions in the US and there is one already under way currently. US Federal officials had initiated a major antitrust probe last year after the company agreed to pay \$5 billion to settle a probe over a series of privacy scandals.

In India, the tech giant seems to have gone through a special acclimatisation with the Indian environment, in which the Modi establishment is alleged to have embarked on a policy of saffronising constitutional and democratic institutions. That should explain the company's alleged friendly disposition to the ruling party and its affiliated entities.

The tech giant's India

offending content was not posted by him.

The report also referred to posts by BJP MP Anantkumar Hegde, who alleged that Muslims were spreading Covid-19 in India in a conspiracy to wage 'Corona Jihad'. Such allegations clearly violate Facebook's hate speech rules, but the platform took no action. WSJ claims that Facebook removed the posts only after it sought comments from the platform's officials. Twitter had promptly suspended Hegde's account as a result of such posts.

The WSJ report highlighted how important the Indian market was for the business of Facebook, as the platform is banned in China, the only other country with the potential of a billion customers. India has more Facebook and WhatsApp users than any other country in the world and Zuckerberg and his team know how suicidal it will be to earn the displeasure of the ruling dispensation.

It is not just the prospects of Reliance telecom giant Jio that prompted Facebook to invest \$5.7 billion or Rs 43,574 crore in it, making Facebook its largest minority shareholder. The investment makes perfect sense for the key social media player to further fortify its empire in India. Matrimony has been established practice among princely states of India to consolidate their political stability. So the Jio-Facebook alliance can be considered to be true to Indian tradition.

The WSJ expose has let off a political storm, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleging that it is the BJP and RSS that 'control Facebook and WhatsApp' and use the platforms to influence the electorate.

(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Clarification

Editor,
In the column "Musings of a so-called Non-tribal" ST Oct 31, 2020, the word "Megher Alay" or the abode of clouds was not coined by Rabindra Nath Tagore but by Satya Prasanna Mukherjee, a lecturer in Calcutta University. The error is regretted.

Yours etc.,
Biswajit Ghosh,
Via email

Why has Umroi airport gone silent?

Editor,
"Umroi Airport" was seen to be busy last year till mid March 2020 when Indigo has started its daily flights to Kolkata and vice versa. Yes, the Airline has suspended services due to the pandemic that was prevailing these past few months, however the country as a whole has opened up the aviation sector and in most of the states, airports have been opened including our neighbouring Guwahati airport (LGBI International Airport).

Being a regular flier myself, I really don't understand why Indigo has not started its operations again from Umroi and why has the Government been quiet on this? Going to Guwahati and taking a flight

from there is tiresome and time consuming, when we already have an airport which was functioning very well in the past. Can I ask the Government and Indigo why this silence? At least keep the public informed about when we will have our regular flights again!

This silence from the State Government and Indigo is confounding. We need answers to this as soon as possible.

Yours etc.,
Dr Channmiki Laloo,
Via email

Local language in the Assembly

Editor,
I fully endorse the suggestion in your column "Local languages should be part of Assembly debates" (ST Oct 30, 2020), which encourages use of local languages in the State Assembly. For all I know, such a provision has been in existence for a long time. The only issue is that if a member wishes to speak in local dialect, a translated version should be made available with the Speaker one day in advance. This is not practicable. Most debates in the House are spontaneous and therefore it precludes a lot of our MLAs from participating since they don't have the power of articulation in English. That doesn't mean they don't have the capacity to debate. They tend to keep their mouths shut lest they

are mocked at for their faulty English. From the officers' gallery, I have witnessed debates in the Assembly for many years now. Often I tended to empathise with the less-articulate MLAs, mostly from the rural areas for their inability to participate or put across their points of view. For good reasons, they tend to get tongue tied.

A letter by Manbha Diengdoh in these columns made a mention of Mr Nit Shabong and some of the hilarious moments that he created in the House, not just because his English was rustic but also because of the passion and confidence with which he could make his submissions. Often, as the House would burst into laughter over his idiosyncrasies, he would go with great aplomb presuming that the audience was applauding him. However, I must admit that Mr Nit Shabong despite his apologetic English, conveyed his message and most times won the argument. Such was his power of rusticity that ministers and officers alike would take due note of the points made by him.

Coming back to the topic, although I endorse the idea, I would like to caution all concerned that should we open the scope for debate in local languages---Khasi and Garo---much of the sting of the debate would be gone.

By the time the interpreters convey the translated version, the speaker would have gone on to the next sentence. The spontaneity of the debate would be lost. Besides, a Khasi legislator may find it unappealing when the Garo uses his native tongue, and vice versa. Let us not forget that English is the link-language of Meghalaya. We should encourage members to speak in English so that they cultivate English language in order to remain familiar with laws, rules and what have you which are all in English. Speaking in local language should be a second choice because we may not have sufficient vocabulary to put across an argument incisively unlike in English.

All said and done, there should be provision for simultaneous translation in English, Khasi, Garo and if possible Hindi, too. I hope that the idea would be seriously considered by the Speaker when the Assembly shifts to New Town Shillong in its new avatar.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email.

Is the coal scam fake?

Editor,
I have been reading in the local dailies including yours about the so-called coal scam. Every day without fail there is some news or a comment on the issue. As a

layman having little first hand knowledge about the matter, I am highly confused by allegations made by BJP and Congress against NPP and UDP who are on a denial mode. Which side of the story do I believe? We all expect the Opposition to pounce on the treasury bench for all lapses. It is also expected that the ruling side would defend the charges. And that's what has been happening for the past year or so. Since the never-ending episode doesn't appear to be heading in any direction, as a common man my question is why not resolve the matter once for all by allowing a third party investigation? Of course, only if the ruling side has nothing to hide!

Yours etc.,
Brilliancy Dohtdong,
Via email.

No future for Congress in Meghalaya

Editor,
I am amused to read the news item "Mukul rubbishes report of Cong MLAs 'joining NPP'" (ST Oct 28, 2020). Our former chief minister who is also the leader of the opposition, has to rubbish the report because he has to keep the morale of his team high. Everybody in Meghalaya knows why he is denying the report that 11 Congress MLAs are seriously considering to leave the

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"We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge."

— John Naisbitt

The Shillong Times

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Who's listening to farmers?

THE story of the farmer from West Khasi Hills who is now an acknowledged strawberry grower, despite being told by the Agriculture and Horticulture Department that the fruit will not grow there, is a lesson to be learnt. Farmers till the soil and know more about it than those sitting at the desks and delivering sermons to farmers. The Agriculture/Horticulture departments need to develop a knowledge bank where indigenous knowledge can be documented and melded with scientific learning. Agricultural graduates from Meghalaya all study outside the state and don't get to learn much about the soil and weather conditions and other elements that go into making agriculture a viable proposition in their own states. It is important for the State Government which regularly deposes students to study Agriculture in outside the state to scan the curriculum and find out the core components missing from there which restricts the graduates to book knowledge. And these agricultural graduates actually provide training to farmers when it should be the other way round. Successful farmers should be talking to other farmers to share their success stories. The platform for such knowledge-sharing should be provided by Government.

India is known for farmers' suicides which have been documented by writers like P Sainath who has written extensively on farmers' distress. The Green Revolution with its prescription of applying chemical fertilisers and pesticides had harmed the soil of this country. Governments are now talking about organic farming. This, after agricultural scientists have found that the chemicals in the soil are absorbed by plants which are then ingested by humans and does incalculable harm to their biological system. But detoxifying the soil to get back its purity is a tough call. Besides, there is also the entire nexus of producers of chemical fertilisers and pesticides and those in government agriculture departments that have developed a vested interest in this chain for personal gains.

In Meghalaya, while farmers are not in a similar distress as their counterparts in the rest of the country, they are not doing well either. Their children are giving up farming because it is labour intensive and the returns are not commensurate to the effort invested. The presence of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) in the state has not helped much. Farmers growing citrus fruits like the mandarin oranges have been complaining for several years now that the trees are dying due to fungal attack and some other problems which they think could be connected to the soil or climate change. The ICAR should have done a soil study and also come up with solution for the farmers.

Institutions are created to serve the public, not to generate employment. The ICAR needs to answer to the public about its specific contributions from lab to land and vice versa. There is too little of that happening. Will the Meghalaya Government take note of this?

TO THE EDITOR

Paradox of Covid-19 battle in Meghalaya

Editor,
I was a victim of this virus with no symptoms at all till the time of recovery. I write this to express my personal opinion and with mixed emotions towards the State Health Department. It is not my intention to go against the guidelines given by the Department but to mention a few paradoxes vis-avis this virus. Till date I am in a dilemma as to how I contacted the virus when I have not left my compound from the beginning of the lockdown. Health-wise, I am a healthy person with no experience of visiting a hospital on account of any sickness till date. I was shocked when the Health Department declared me covid-positive although I showed no symptoms before and even after being tested. Surprisingly,

I was declared covid-negative without being tested for the second time and with the sentence in the certificate which states 'as of today the - he/she is symptom free.' Is this not a paradox when I never had any symptoms before and after being tested?

Now shops are asked to follow the Government guidelines where all customers should wear masks. In fact, all shops have a little placard with the words, 'no mask no service.' However, shopkeepers accept money (notes) from the customers. Is this also not a paradox, because according to the health experts, the virus can also be transferred from person to person through materials? We see beggars at Police Bazaar begging every day without masks yet no virus has touched them. Moreover, government officials have also done nothing to make them aware of covid19. Perhaps, the vi-

rus attacks only those who strictly follow the SOP of the State Health Department, including those who have not left their homes at all!

Ironically people were asked to strictly follow the SOP of the Government for Sunday service in churches, but the same is not practised in the markets or public places. I am shocked at the manner in which covid19 positive cases have increased in the state after the decision for home quarantine was taken. In the beginning when the State Government was looking after those testing positive the cases were relatively less in Meghalaya. So is there any hidden agenda behind this pandemic? Earlier, to declare that a person has recovered from covid19 two tests are conducted after 24 hours, but at present a person is simply released from home quarantine or quarantine centres after several days without testing. So is the virus

different from the earlier virus that a person is declared recovered without a second or third test? Earlier there were adequate funds to treat each person who is covid19 positive, but when home quarantine started the Government hardly reached out to help those people infected particularly in the rural areas.

'It is unfortunate that the Health Department regarded in high esteem by people for its service to humanity does not seem to be on the right track as far as handling covid19 is concerned.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Delay in publishing results

Editor,
Through this letter, I would like to draw the at-

Few dare to be Kong Spelity's disciples

By Albert Thyrniang

On October 30 last I got an email saying, "You are awarded Rs 2 crore from covid19 relief fund. To receive funds send name/account-number/address/age to info@elkenservices.com." Thereafter the same message was repeated twice over. Knowing fully well that the senders are cheats I was still tempted to provide the details. After all there is a 'possibility' of becoming a crorepati!

In complete contrast was Kong Spelity Lyngdoh Langrin. The extraordinary lady rejected the Rs 45 crore or Rs 1.5 crore annually for a 30-year lease of her land. The legendary lady's statement, "Money will not buy my freedom" might become folklore.

The Nonagenarian and anti-uranium activist breathed her last on October 28. Rich tributes were paid to her. She was called the 'Iron Lady', 'an icon', 'a legend', 'a Wonder Woman', 'the matriarch of Domiasiat', 'the Mother of anti-uranium movement' and 'the Face and Symbol of Meghalaya's anti-uranium struggle'.

The uncompromised principles, conviction and courage of the simple, uneducated and perhaps illiterate land owner is truly admirable. Her refusal to part with her priceless land stood in the way of Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) to mine the yellow cake in Kylleng-Pyndengsohiong-Mawthabab in South West Khasi Hills. While we acclaim the heroics of the unsung hero; while we salute her undaunted spirit; while we hail her legacy few can emulate her example. Few can match her values. Few can rival her 'sacrifices for the Jaithynriew'.

The state is facing three suspected scams - corruption in the ADCs, illegal mining and transportation of coal and covid19 inflated expenses. Kong Spelity, as she was affectionately called, rejected the central money via UCIL for herself in favour of her village, the surrounding area and the people of Khasi Hills. The three ADCs received the one-time assistance worth crores from the central government meant for the people but allegedly misused the funds for their own welfare (paying salary for staff in case of JHADC), expenses for a non-existent museum (for KHADC) and ghost roads, bridges and footpaths, duplication of projects and high quotations for repairs of buildings besides exorbitant payment for film making and radio jingles. Councilors and contractors might have benefited at the expense of the state. A cover up must be going on in full swing. The interest of the people is forgotten.

Allegations of illegal

mining and transportation of coal has been carrying on ever since NGT banned rat-hole mining in April 2014. Allegedly politicians, bureaucrats, coal barons and others are beneficiaries at the cost of the state's exchequer running into hundreds of crores. Dismissive, the state government has given the least importance to the allegations and even refused to comply with the Lokayukta's order for a CBI inquiry. Illegal miners and transporters will continue to pocket the cash including the revenue of the state for want of ethics unlike Kong Spelity.

The excessive covid19 expenses have raised many eyebrows. The Rs 399 crore expenditure in six months under generic heads for 9000 cases is more than six times the Rs 60 crore spent by Manipur for its 18,000 positive cases. Demands for detailed breakdown expenditure have not been met. Is there something amiss?

All the individuals and NGOs who adore Kong Spelity for her 'No' to the multi-crore in exchange for her land have not uttered a single word on illegal coal business, corruption charges against ADCs and the curious covid19 expenses. One would have expected a hue and cry. One would have liked a tsunami of reactions. One would have hoped for a bombard of queries. One would have anticipated agitations and hartals. But none of these took place. The civil society is very cool. The normally impatient pressure groups have maintained a stoic silence on the three alleged financial irregularities. They have raised no question. They have not demanded for any enquiry. They are totally indifferent to corrupt practices. In all likelihood they have stakes to lose if everything functions as per law. We have a long list of anti-uranium groups but few anti-corruption activists. Fans of Kong Spelity abound but disciples of the steadfast lady are hardly there. Hypocrisy is detected right here.

In the illegal mining and transportation only Civil Society Women's Organisation (CSWO) has spoken against the malpractice. Regarding covid-19 expenditure only Thma U Rangli Juki (TUR) has demanded transparency and accountability from the government, fearing that unscrupulous individuals might have seized the pandemic as an opportunity to enrich themselves. Among the political parties, the BJP which initially came out with all guns blazing has now gone silent probably deciding to flow with the current of normal-

ising corruption. The Opposition, Congress has made a noise or two and its leader is on a 'verification tour' of the coal belts but whether it is a temporary zeal or a result yielding effort, one is not sure. The almost forgotten man, Former KHADC chairman, PN Syiem has suddenly come out to demand a detailed report on the covid19 expenditure. As stated above NGOs and pressure groups have kept mum for lack of credibility in challenging the status quo. While we venerate someone who relinquished the opportunity of being a crorepati via fair means we don't mind acquiring wealth the dishonest way.

The 95-year-old anti-uranium activist was laid to rest last Saturday in Domiasiat. There were prominent attendees from Shillong, Mawkyrwat, Nongstoin and other places. Earlier too anti-uranium proponents visited the uranium-rich area. None have highlighted the backwardness of the region. No one has narrated how tedious the journey from Shillong or Nongstoin or Mawkyrwat is. No one has posted pictures or videos of the pathetic road condition. No one has lamented over the never ending bumpy and dusty ride to the 'Hima Langrin'. They don't want to show to the world that due to the lack of the absolute basic amenities the residents of the uranium belts and its surroundings would be compelled to welcome mining in return for development and employment because the state government does not care. Anti-uranium lobbyists want the area to remain backward and the uranium mining to be shut forever. The home of the 'mother' of anti-uranium movement will remain the same.

Anti-uranium campaigners even link road construction to uranium. The Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Ranikor road was stalled due to opposition of the KSU and other groups under the pretext that the two lane highway is meant to facilitate uranium mining. They did not budge when told otherwise. One hears that under the same project the Ranikor-Moheskola and Nongstoin-Guwahati via Rambrai two lane roads have been accepted for the NHAI to execute the work. Some other similar projects are in the pipeline in the state. There will be no opposition. Why should only the Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Ranikor road be targeted just because it happens to pass near the uranium deposits? Why should the uranium areas be denied development? Besides, Uranium is found all along the entire western part of the state right from Jaintia Hills through Khasi Hills to Garo

Hills. Does it mean that any proposed highway along this belt be opposed?

After the construction of the Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Ranikor road was blocked an announcement of the sanction of Rs 100 crore was made to repair the current road. The money has disappeared into thin air. The road leading to the village of the valiant lady is as terrible as ever. Thanks to the mineral, villagers in the uranium zone will continue to face neglect and step motherly treatment. They will only win admiration from Shillong, Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat and elsewhere for not handing over the land to UCIL. For sure anti-uranium enthusiasts will not stand up for the people of South West Khasi Hills.

This writer wants to keep open the possibility of mining uranium in Kylleng-Pyndengsohiong-Mawthabab villages provided it is 100% safe. One is of the opinion that the ultimate purpose of a mineral is to be utilised. Uranium too brings many benefits. However, the safety of the people is the utmost priority. At present the overwhelming majority in the state is against mining the 'most dangerous' mineral. In this regard UCIL has itself to blame. The horror of Jadugoda in, Jharkhand is too frightening for any risk. The documentary, Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda which was also dubbed in Khasi is not a fiction. There are reports that the ill effects from uranium mines on the 50,000 residents around the 25-km radius are an endemic. Radiation might be responsible for the common cases of deformed children at birth, miscarriages, stillbirths, physical disabilities, cancer and other mysterious diseases besides degradation of environment through hazards caused by tailings ponds, displacement of people, deforestation and loss of livelihoods. Additionally rehabilitation and compensation is absent as UCIL and the central government have denied that there are adverse effects of uranium in India's first uranium mines.

Why should unprivileged citizens face nightmares for the country's nuclear ambition? The lackadaisical record of UCIL in Jadugoda convinced Kong Spelity that Domiasiat and the 23 surrounding villages cannot be endangered for the sake of fulfilling the dream of the nation in producing 40,000 MW of nuclear power by 2030. With her passing we have lost an irreplaceable lady whose exceptional values we fail to uphold.

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should not play with the youth's future in this manner. Admittedly, the covid19 pandemic may have played a role in the delay of the declaration of results, but we have now reached a point where the pandemic can no longer be cited as an excuse. Once again the DC is requested to address this issue expeditiously. Since our current DC is known for being a hard worker and someone who is praised throughout bureaucratic circles and celebrated in the public circle for her dedication and transparency, we hope she will not let us down.

Yours etc.,
Jeremiah Syngkli,
Via email

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Meghalaya and the National Education Policy, 2020

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

If we go by face value alone, the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 is a game changer. The intention is to take the country into a new era of trained human resources. This is in consonance with the idea that an efficient and effective human talent/resource is the key element for growth and development. In the contemporary school of thought, money and capital counts for a lot less in significance as compared to human ability. That way, it can be said that the NEP has got the environmental analysis absolutely right. As such, now the focus is on applying new systems and pedagogy right from the elementary school level flowing into higher education. In addition, the structural changes ranging from new academic bodies to govern research to the idea of autonomous colleges can be considered to be highly tenable. However, at the heart of all this is the question as to which state will be successful or will struggle in its efforts to ramp up and meet the intentions of NEP. In relation, here the focus is on Meghalaya in terms of what the policy means for its people and the challenges faced through a focus on some of the important elements of the NEP.

To start with, the focus on 'foundational literacy' is most appropriate. In general, people believe that 'foundational literacy' is literacy per se. So, what is the fuss all about? Is there a need to compartmentalise literacy into two areas? Well, the answer to this is pretty straight-forward. The foundation acts as a necessary enabler for the desire to continue into higher classes. It serves as a motivation that drives a hunger towards continued learning and higher knowledge. As such, if we can get it right early then the chances of a student staying back in school as opposed to dropping out of school becomes more tangible. Moreover, the intention to provide foundations in the student's own mother-tongue is laudable. The crux here is also of retention. How many times have we talked about students abandoning school early just because they failed to figure out lessons in the early classes? Yes, this is not the only factor for school drop-out in Meghalaya (poverty and accessibility being the main reasons); but this is one of the important factors. Hence, foundational literacy will contribute to a certain extent in controlling school drop-out. In addition, the importance of making learning 'enjoyable and engaging' is the reaffirmation of the age old efforts towards the same. However, this presents a challenge because making it so calls for resources which many schools particularly the ones in the rural areas may not be able to afford. It calls for proper school premises which are attractive and fun combined with gadgets and technology and fun tools and plays. Where will the money come from for all of this?

As we move forward, the issue of providing 'equitable and inclusive' education for all is closely related to the above. This is because if the school drop-out rate is high (around 30% in Meghalaya) then the very effort towards inclusiveness is defeated. Similarly, if the learning process is not enjoyable and engaging at par for all then equitableness is lost. The point to be noted here is that inclusive education is closely related with and dependent on poverty. The higher the poverty level, the lower is the degree of inclusiveness in education. As of today, inclusive education in Meghalaya is a far-cry. Shillong in itself suffers; forget about the situation in

rural areas. To make it worse, the covid-19 pandemic has really disrupted schooling. In the villages, there are reports that students have stopped learning altogether for want of gadgets (and know-how) for online classes. They have gone to the fields to practice agriculture and rear livestock. To this, further add the necessity of equitable education. Well, even in greater Shillong there is no equitable learning. Take for example, schools located around Don Bosco Square and the ones located at Laitkor and Mawiong areas or even around Nongthymmai and Mawlai. Where is equitable learning? In the end, the reality is a huge divide between the haves and the have-nots; the lucky and the unlucky!

In the process, as we try to comprehend the NEP in its entirety, it has thrown a number of things into perspective. These are particularly important in the context of school education. These days a class 12 pass certificate is the bare minimum qualification that any person should possess. That way it will ensure a chance for a meaningful livelihood. As such, the issues of drop-outs, inclusiveness and equitableness need to be studied in tandem. This will help in the execution of the guidelines as laid down in the NEP. This is because for any policy to work, the ground situation upon which it intends to develop must be sound and workable. In other words, we cannot talk about equitable education if some schools do not have teachers/white boards/computers and so forth. As a result, even before we think of being serious with NEP we have to ensure that all the schools have adequate and appropriate infrastructure. If we fail to do this, then there will not be a level playing field as far as improving education for all is concerned.

In the end, the NEP will result in even further inequalities in education thereby leading to further inequitable distribution of income. As we consider the above; it is important to recall that we also have a Meghalaya State Education Policy (MSEP), 2018. Now, it is a matter of convergence, fusion and synergy. At the very least, the guidelines of the MSEP may be applied as a spearhead for ultimately achieving the goals of the NEP. Here, the process starts with the assessment of the ground situation and then intervention for equitable infrastructure.

Ultimately there is need to embrace technology and digital education. This covid-19 pandemic has thrown this issue into sharp focus. However, forget covid-19 for now. This is because we must not talk about technology and digital issues in education as arising out of some pandemic. The fact remains that in any case and for the future benefit of our students in the job market, being technologically savvy and trained through digital platforms is a must. The future of the job market is artificial intelligence (AI) based. At the very least, technology will be the basis for everything from learning to business to government to governance to product delivery to service quality.

One may be blunt in saying that without technological soundness a student will not have a fighting chance for employment in the future job market. Let us just look around us; this is already happening. So, are we ready to inclusively and equitably take the technological plunge? This is a point to ponder and brainstorm; else, the NEP in Meghalaya will mean nothing for the masses and at best will result in being counter-productive!

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“A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week.”

– George S. Patton

The Shillong Times

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Gain for NDA in RS

THE ruling NDA led by the BJP is coming closer to a majority in the Rajya Sabha with the new rounds of polls to the upper house of Parliament from various state assemblies. A week hence, when more results stream in, the ruling alliance led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reasons to cheer. But, with this cheer there also comes a demand that the government should start performing better. PM Modi can no more say he is handicapped in the upper house of Parliament where bills got blocked.

The Modi government, through the past six years, is a mix of hope and hopelessness. Not many across the board would give it a pass mark. There were blunders as was seen in the Demonetization in November 2016. The way the GST legislation was left with many lacunae, and the scenario of a wholesale shutdown of the nation from March last over the Covid-19 pandemic, does not speak well of the Modi government. On the defence front, more should have been done. The economy is now caught in a very bad situation of negative GDP growth; a steep fall from a high.

Modi cannot hope to be on a charm offensive for more time without solid work on the ground. India lost precious years even as there has been political stability. A billion plus population is willing to go the extra mile granted that the leadership creates the conditions for positive action. Big talks alone will not take a nation forward; rather, a deficit of it will be better as nations like China or Bangladesh nearer home are showing us.

Systems in India are going for a toss. This is well-acknowledged. Vested interests including politicians and bureaucrats are taking full advantage. Corruption is growing by leaps and bounds, with hardly any checks. The agencies involved in tracking and punishing the corrupt are themselves corrupt to the core. Modi has been a silent spectator to all these. Even if he attempted to set things right, the systems took him for a ride. Those who virtually looted public sector banks by resorting to fancy NPAs found sanctuary abroad, they keep fighting cases through courts and are on a merry-go-round. There are those who scuttle such cases from within the system itself here.

Good governance requires that effective mechanisms are introduced to set things right. The majority that the government can now muster in both houses of parliament should prompt effective action to put the nation in forward mode. There must be an end to the present lull and to the sense of all-round disillusionment.

TO THE EDITOR

Risky interview during Covid-19

Editor,

We are living in extraordinary times where we are forced to adapt to a new reality, a way of life where wearing a mask, regular washing of hands or sanitising them and avoiding public gatherings wherever possible have become the new normal. We are concerned not only for our own well-being from the health point of view but we also have to be concerned for others. The virus directly affects us all because an act of carelessness by anyone whether intentionally or otherwise makes us all worried and scared.

I was in such a situation when I went for an interview at Synod College. Most of us interviewees were shocked and surprised when we were asked to remove our masks on entering the interview room. While all the experts were wearing their masks and those checking our documents were wearing gloves, we were left exposed, especially when one after the

other we entered the room without any facility for sanitizing. We shared markers and dusters and we were not sanitized before entering the room or using these markers. I have no ill intentions against the Institution but felt some common sense should have prevailed especially during these pandemic times. Personally I feel that all interviews should be postponed until next year and if interviews are conducted then candidates should be allowed to wear masks and the institutions should observe due Covid protocols. If all meetings and press conferences are held with people their masks, then interviews too should be conducted with candidates wearing masks because if something unfortunate happens not only will we put ourselves but our families too at risk.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

A weird interview

Editor,
I want to share an ac-

National Education Policy-2020 and Indigenous Knowledge System

By Bhogtoram Mawroh & Gratia E Dkhar

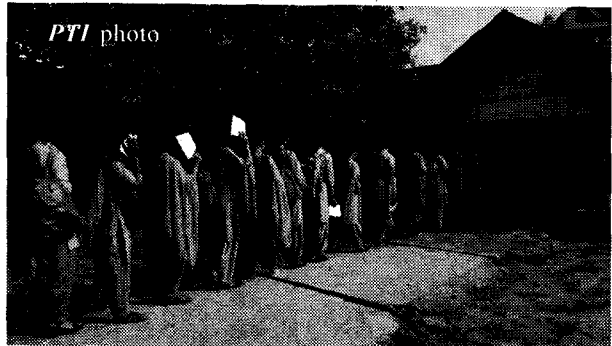
One of the biggest casualties of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic has been the education sector, with educational institutions remaining shut even after the lockdown is lifted. Concerned about the loss of a full academic session, suggestions were made to host online classes as a solution. Results have been mixed. While the education sector was reeling with the problem of functioning in such an extraordinary situation, the Government of India brought out its National Education Policy (NEP) – 2020, which is the third in the series after Indira Gandhi in 1968 and Rajiv Gandhi in 1986.

Declared as the first education policy of the 21st Century, its stated aim is the “revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st-century education, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), while building upon India’s traditions and value systems” (page 3 of NEP-2020). In terms of rhetoric, it seems to have done its job. But what about the substance, especially as it relates to the knowledge system of indigenous communities? The North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) has been working on the Indigenous Food System (IFS) as part of a project supported by Rural Electrification Corporation (REC). The theme of this project is, “No One Shall Be Left Behind Initiative: Biodiversity for Food, Nutrition, and Energy Security.” The project is being implemented in Meghalaya and Nagaland. On this, the NEP-2020 presents opportunities as well as hindrances.

Among the hindrances, lack of recognition of the indigenous knowledge systems is the biggest one. NEP-2020 talks about the ‘rich heritage of ancient eternal knowledge’ of the Indian civilisation to be the guiding light for the Policy. Here, the Hindu tradition is being emphasized without mentioning any other knowledge system especially that of indigenous communities who, being autochthonous, have knowledge systems predating those that came after them. Also in terms of languages, Sanskrit – which is part of the Indo-European language family -- is given preference. Dravidian languages get mentioned but Austro-Asiatic and Sino-Tibetan languages (spoken by many of the indigenous communities in the Indian subcontinent) are subsumed under local languages, consigning them to a lower status at national level discourse. The term ‘indigenous’ does find mention but concerning tribal

communities, which is not the same. Unless the knowledge systems of indigenous communities are recognized and stated, there is a danger that NEP-2020 will not be able to stop the slow obliteration of this ancient knowledge system which has sustained indigenous communities for millennia. At the same time, when one examines the Policy document, there are tremendous opportunities for strengthening and promotion of indigenous knowledge systems.

An important aim of the NEP-2020 is to utilize local traditions to inform the education system. This has the potential to allow the indigenous knowledge system to become part of the mainstream narrative. This can be achieved through the route of experiential learning. Section 4.6 of the NEP-2020 Policy document states that



“in all stages, experiential learning will be adopted, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, storytelling-based pedagogy, among others, as standard pedagogy within each subject, and with explorations of relations among different subjects”. Indigenous knowledge is experiential knowledge, attaining its current form based on practical experiences with its surrounding through trial and error. This knowledge is cumulative, growing through the accretion of generations of experiences which translates to wisdom. This is different from information (a hallmark of modern knowledge system) as remarked by one of the participants in the recent webinar ‘Indigenous Food Systems, bio-cultural heritage and the SDGs’ organised by the International Institute for Environment and Development. On its part, NESFAS has been working on the promotion and transmission of indigenous knowledge through its ‘Agrobiodiversity Walks and Nutritional Campaign for Children’.

Recognising the role of the younger generation to safeguard the IFS and the importance of ensuring the health of its children, NESFAS along with selected community facilitators from different areas saw the closure of educational institu-

tions as an opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of the Indigenous Food System (IFS). Agrobiodiversity (ABD) walks, which is a transect walk through the villages while documenting the food plants (cultivated and wild), is one of the activities designed to facilitate the understanding of IFS and nutrition. Several ABD walks have been held across a number of partner communities of NESFAS. The objective of the ABD walk is to acquaint the children with the crop diversity found in different production systems, to encourage the consumption of clean and nutritious local food, and to learn about the farming practices. Through the ABD walks, the children are taught about the 10 food groups, the seven food groups of plant sources that are available within their village which can be consumed to meet the minimum

dietary diversity. During one such ABD walk in Madanrtiang (a community in Ri Bhoi), children were able to identify the different wild edibles that can be foraged, their seasonality, and benefits. Wild edibles play an important role in supplementing nutritional needs and equipping children with this knowledge is crucial for the conservation of biodiversity-rich forests. Kitchen gardens with the maximal crop diversity and agroecological practices in the village were also identified and selected for the ABD walk. During the program Custodian Farmers, who are members of Agroecology Learning Circle (ALCs) and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) groups along with Anganwadi workers taught the children how to grow their food and engaged them in: Preparation of the soil: This includes the process of clearing land, tilling, preparing beds, adding manure and compost to fertilise the soil;

Selection of Crop: This includes sharing the importance of saving good quality seeds and process of storing seeds;

Planting of Crop: Crops like potato, peas, beans are planted in the prepared soil, where the spacing between seeds and soil depth was taught;

Pest management: This includes the process of con-

trolling pests that can attack the crop that has been planted. The use of ash to deter pest infestation in bean seeds was demonstrated.

Again Section 5.6 of the NEP-2020 states that ‘Schools/school complexes will be encouraged to hire local eminent persons or experts as ‘master instructors’ in various subjects, such as in traditional local arts, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture, or any other subject where local expertise exists, to benefit students and help preserve and promote local knowledge and professions’. These ‘master instructors’ are the custodian farmers who have been helping NESFAS in many of its activities across the communities.

What NESFAS has done is pre-empted the aims of the NEP-2020 and has created a module that can be integrated with the revamped educational set-up as and when the Policy becomes operational. With some persuasion from NESFAS, schools in five villages, viz., Nongtraw, Dewlieh, Laitsohpliah, Mawmihthied, and Nongpriang have already introduced lessons on Indigenous Food Systems as part of Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) curriculum.

To date, 1,773 children have taken part in 70 ABD walks over the last two years. More are planned for the future. The initiative has got a shot in the arm knowing that similar aims – the promotion of indigenous knowledge systems (implicit not explicit) are also enshrined in the NEP-2020.

On October 2, FAO launched the ‘Global-Hub on Indigenous Food Systems’ officially endorsed by the members of the 27th Committee on Agriculture. The aim is to ensure that research and scientific knowledge respects indigenous scientific knowledge, and gives them the same level of respect, recognition, and validity. There is increasing recognition of indigenous knowledge systems as one of the solutions to the global ecological crisis. The NEP-2020 has the potential to contribute to that vision and the ‘Agrobiodiversity Walks and Nutritional Campaign for Children’ developed by NESFAS can be an important tool in that.

About the writers :
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India-USA relations will undergo change if Biden wins

By Arun Srivastava

The eighth round of bilateral talks between China and India are likely to take place once the result of the USA presidential election is announced. It is the outcome of the election that will define the nature of the relations between the two countries. If the present mood of the electorate is any indicator, then it can be safely presumed that Joe Biden would be the next president of the USA. With Biden as the new ruler, America will witness many significant changes and reforms in the policies and programmes being followed. The most important that is likely to take place is changing the character and orientation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

After the seventh round of talks, a joint statement issued by India and China had said: “Both sides agreed to maintain dialogue and communication through military and diplomatic channels, and arrive at a mutually acceptable solution for disengagement as early as possible. Both sides agreed to earnestly implement the important understandings reached by the leaders of the two countries, not to turn differences into disputes, and jointly safeguard peace and tranquility in the border areas.”

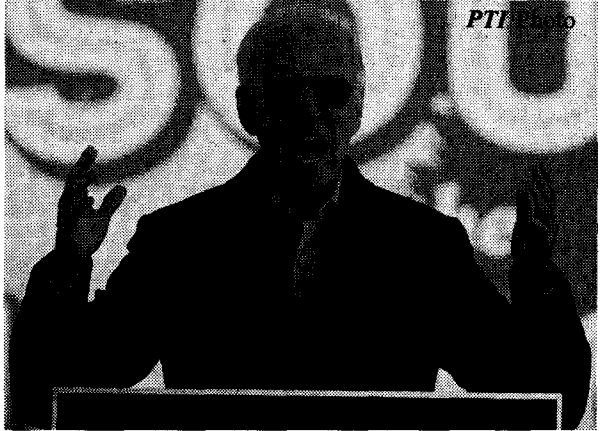
Expecting a change in the guard, the Modi government has already launched the exercise to rebuild its relations with the USA. India’s bilateral relations with America were based on certain fundamental political and economic parameters. But during the presidency of Donald Trump they were

Whether it is Trump or Biden, who will occupy the White House in the next four years, the priority of the next US administration will be trans-Atlantic ties, its own neighbourhood, Russia, China, Japan, the Middle East and the like. Not India. This fact is known to Indian diplomats.

By pledging India’s loyalty to the individual Trump the prime minister has put the Indian interest in jeopardy. The policy of Modi has created fissures in the Indian American society. Some new organisations have been floated with the aim to support Biden. Alongside Indian Americans for Biden and the campaign’s Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPPI) Outreach, Hindu Americans for Biden comes in a long line of ever-shifting campaign categorisations, reflecting ongoing identity contestations in the community.

At some level India is finding it tough to commit at this stage. But the signs emerging make it imperative that India cannot be seen as sitting on the fence. It has to compensate for the wrongs of the policy makers. Since Biden is not likely to follow Trump’s line on China, Modi will have to reconsider his stand.

Peaceful development and win-win cooperation are the only right path forward. The Indo-Pacific strategy, a pet project of the Trump administration is widely perceived to be part of Washington’s China-containment policy, and India’s engagement with it is seen by experts as one of the irritants that have crept into the bi-



ignored. It was the personal liking and disliking of Trump and Narendra Modi that defined the character and nature of the relation. Trump made India to follow his line and perform proxy for him. As a part of the exercise, the Modi government is trying to tap hitherto little used sources of support for the Indo-US relationship which are to be leveraged once a new establishment occupies Washington. There is a vast difference between former PM, PV Narasimha Rao’s landmark decision 25 years ago to break with tradition and appoint lobbyists for India.

The reason was quite perceptible. For Rao the interest of the country was the top priority, but for Modi his rightist liking and personal loyalty to Trump scored over national interest. For other countries mending ways with new incumbent would not be of much constraint. But for India it would be a tough task. Modi prefers to play proxy for his friend even risking the interest of India. The external affairs mandarins claim that New Delhi is using the current phase to consolidate past gains and course-correct its policies on the ground. An insight into the past does not throw sufficient light on the gains that India made under Trump.

There is a populist impression about the “Howdy-Modi” extravaganza in Houston failed to serve Indian interest. It is murmured that Donald Trump did not have a clue about the Houston reception for Narendra Modi until a few weeks before the actual event. Trump agreed to become a part of the programme after he heard about it from Modi at one of their bilateral meetings. Trump later used the opportunity to outreach to Indian Americans.

lateral relationship with China even before the face-off along the Line of Actual Control.

India can no more follow the Trump line. Trump was working on the plan to use India as proxy under Indo Pacific strategy. India was supposed to confront China. Now in the existing situation the primary task will be to elevate the real partnership between the two countries to a higher level under the next administration.

The worst affected of the new administrative change in USA would be the Quad or the Quadrilateral Security Framework. Only a few days ago, Delhi announced the much-awaited expansion of the annual Malabar exercises with the US and Japan to include Australia. This is not the first time we are seeing an acceleration of the engagement between Delhi and Washington. The USA has been trying to play the emotion card of killing of 20 Indian army personnel by Chinese forces.

Both US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and secretary of defence Mark T. Esper brought up China in their remarks to the media with the former making a specific reference to the 20 Indian soldiers killed in the Galwan Valley clash. Pompeo honouring the brave soldiers said; “The US will stand with the people of India as they confront threats to their sovereignty and to their liberty”. China must have noted this burst of the U.S. secretary of state from the New Delhi meeting.

India-US ties will move forward but there will be imponderables ahead, principally arising out of US strategies towards China. Also, because of the relook that a Biden Presidency will give on China policy, India will also have to review the Quad and Malabar templates. (IPA Service)

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

"Into each life some rain must fall."
— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Shillong Times

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US election maelstrom

NO election is as riveting as this one which will elect the next President of the United States of America (POTUS). It's not just Americans that are treading on eggshells but in India and other countries as well, all news channels are reporting news of the counting and which way the stakes are moving. Even panel discussions across all news channels revolved around the US election almost as if who wins or loses will have a deep impact on their country. For India, the abiding interest in US elections is because of the huge constituency of Indian-Americans, many of them very influential and with their families back in India. An election in the US is bound to generate much interest. Also that Kamala Harris, the Democratic Vice- Presidential candidate is a person of Indian origin makes the race even more interesting for India. The tension-filled atmosphere prompted someone in Australia to coin the words United States of Anxiety (USA) even as the nail-biting finish takes longer and longer. As of writing this editorial, chances of a resounding victory for either President Trump or former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. have evaporated even as voters on both sides of the divide - red and blue steeled themselves for prolonged state by state legal battles over which ballots will be counted.

Both Republicans and Democrats have readied their lawyers and the prospect of legal battles intensified on Wednesday as closely fought swing states counted mail ballots and the petulant Trump alleged fraud in the counting process. He threatened to move the Supreme Court to try to prematurely shut down the election. From declaring his victory ahead of the final declaration to threatening that the counting should stop, Trump is far from accepting that victory could go either way.

Elections are unpredictable and Americans a deeply polarized polity. Considering Trump's big mess-up in handling Covid 19 and the large number of deaths in the US and his flip-flop stances on issues, it would have been expected that he would be voted out. Trump has not been able to perk out the economy as promised four years ago but it appears that large sections of Americans are allured by Trump's overt anti-China posturing even as that country has been named as the culprit that spread the novel coronavirus worldwide. A section of Americans are wary of voting Democrats because of the Party's socialist platform which is seen as catering to the constituency that lives off social security at the expense of tax-payers.

The intense interest with which the world views American politics reflects the considerable power of the USA, yet Trump has been a global disrupter in chief. He has redefined relations with American allies in Europe and Asia and has left no stone unturned to stonewall the rise of China apart from also cozying up to autocrats in North Korea and Russia.

This looks like a nail-biting finish, with all the marks of suspense, swings, threats, bullies, claims and counterclaims. The results of what is the world's most-watched election, held on Nov.03, will not be known for at least several more hours. Joe Biden is in the lead but ever so slight; pollsters are still unsure if he will make it to the White House. The prospects of a Donald Trump victory are bleak but still, not many are ruling out stalling tactics or a refusal to accept defeat or repeat of the kind we saw four years ago, when Hillary Clinton, the then favourite according to most pollsters, lost the Electoral College even though she got more votes overall than Trump. Once again, the Democrats are leading in the popular vote but unsure of the electoral College majority of 270 required to become President. In fact, Donald Trump has already declared victory, a blatantly false claim, and has said he will move the US Supreme court to halt the counting.

Late pre-poll reports had it that in Pennsylvania, a key battleground State and the place he was raised, Biden had a teeny five-point lead just before election day. At the time of writing this, with over 70% of the vote already counted, Pennsylvania is still too close to call with Trump in the lead. The State voted Trump in the last election by a difference of 0.72%, the narrowest seen in 176 years! A small set of people therefore will eventually decide who becomes President. Twists and turns such as these bring to mind the words of historian Will Durant, who wrote, "History is largely the battle of a few minorities, the winner of which is then lauded as the victor by the majority."

In sum, this is not an election where the outcome is as clear as it is in the minds of many we might think of as "right-thinking individuals" who worry that Trump is unfit for any office, let alone the office known by the odd-sounding acronym of POTUS. Even The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, a large newspaper in Pennsylvania which has endorsed Trump (the first time it has endorsed a Republican candidate since 1972), put out this caveat on his failings: "We share the embarrassment of millions of Americans who

The fall and fall of America

By Jagdish Rattanani

are disturbed by the president's unpresidential manners and character — his rudeness and put-downs and bragging and bending of the truth." Yet, the paper's editorial board endorsed Trump for his support of the petrochemicals sector and criticised Biden for his (misunderstood) promise to end fracking, and what the paper called his other "cuckoo California dreams" of green jobs.

That is only a partisan endorsement of a candidate based on local priorities but one cannot deny that there is a lot else that's cuckoo about America today. The entire election drama is fascinating in that it provides some insight into the work-

far right movement, responding to a question by almost playing along, "If I can help save the world from problems, I'm willing to do that." One report said at least 19 House Republican candidates who have supported QAnon are on the ballot. The QAnon "theory" holds that America is run by a parallel State that works with cannibalistic elites and Satan-worshipping paedophiles, and President Trump is the only one who can stop them. In the conspiracy are linked of course Biden, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, liberal Hollywood stars, and business magnets — almost everyone who questions Trump and supports the Democrats. The story line

has been a part of the system for four years almost unchecked and comes as a close contender for a second run tells us about the rottenness of a system that is flush with data points, surveys, sophisticated analyses and swing meters. We are only one conspiracy theory away from embracing the devil.

This is the price to be paid when almost an entire generation of citizens has grown on a diet of modern-day entertainment-laced debate that ignores the substance and overemphasises the form. What is one to expect when Presidential outcomes can be decided based on the soundbite and the headline, or the appearance of a candidate, or based on debates that are like an elaborate attention-grabbing drama? As candidates speak in a much-hyped event called The Presidential debates, television keeps up the charade with ridiculous minute-by-minute tracking of moods, swings and the so-called pulse of the "undecideds". We can do ever more sophisticated studies, representative and larger samples or complex quantitative analyses, but in those numbers is lost the larger story of a nation that did not see or know or even learn that it is headed to disaster and that the enemy lies within. This is the tyranny of the smart soundbite — it appears to catch the attention, get the cheers and draw the crowds but it dumbs down everybody and delivers a system where soundbites, not substance, will decide the most important issues of the day.

In the 1985 book "Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business", the author Neil Postman writes: "When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk..."

The warning is apt, for America, and equally for India.

(The writer is a journalist and a faculty member at SPJIMR) (Through: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Mumbai police's foolish action goes to Arnab's advantage

By Sushil Kutty

Only the night before, Arnab Goswami in his primetime show had raised a stink over #ParamBirSingh and a news report doing the rounds that said Goswami was allegedly a 'hawala operator' and which was published by a prominent newspaper. Goswami while attacking the newspaper and the Mumbai Police challenged Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh to arrest him if the police had proof that he was a 'hawala kingpin', a challenge which was praised and challenged in turn by panelists on his show.

But, whoever at that time knew that Arnab Goswami's wish (or challenge) would come true within less than 12 hours! The Mumbai Police would land up at his front door and after a dramatic quarter of an hour of virtual takeover of his residence's drawing room try to forcibly draw him out of his home and into police custody, arguing with his wife all the while and, at one time, pushing aside his obviously scared teenage son who tried to save Papa dear! This Wednesday saga in morning does not speak well of the propriety of Mumbai Police.

Well, Arnab's Republic TV Network was by then at his residence and Arnab was "dragged" out by a dozen policemen and pushed into a waiting police "prison van" which took off with a cavalcade of police SUVs leading and following the prison van with Arnab's "boys" in tow, his wife and a Republic TV reporter giving a running commentary on the "illegal arrest" of "our editor-in-chief." Spotting the "tail", the cops halted the prison van halfway and Goswami was pulled out and shifted into another prison van coming from the other way and obviously planned to intercept the first one. This ensured that "Republic's" "tail-car" couldn't take up the chase anymore!

It was all dramatic and the police were acting like they were in a Bollywood thriller. Earlier, asked where Goswami was being taken to, the policemen (of the Crime Branch) said he was being taken to Raigarh, but that was a red herring! The Republic TV editor-in-chief was actually driven to Mumbai and Senior Police Officer Sachin Waze, encounter specialist, said Goswami was being arrested under section 306 of the IPC which is "abetment to suicide" in a case dating back to 2018 but which had been "closed" by the police itself in 2018 and now "reopened."

So, was it a "lawful arrest"? Maybe not, even though officer Waze told Republic TV that the "police has reopened the case and taken the permission of the court to do so." Clearly that was not enough and the Mumbai Police had overstepped its brief. It had no right to barge into Goswami's residence in an early morning raid and "drag" him out unceremoniously to a waiting prison van, unmindful of what law they were breaking, the ham-handedness of the police glaring and no less unlawful than Goswami's alleged crime. The police could have summoned Goswami to the cop-house and then arrested him. Instead it chose to make a tamasha!

Besides, the 2018 abetment to suicide case was registered against Goswami by the Raigarh police, whereas the police team that came to "arrest" him Wednesday morning (November 4) was of the Mumbai Police Crime Branch which was investigating the TRP Scam case

registered against Goswami and his Republic TV. Encounter specialist Sachin Waze was in charge of the TRP scam investigation. Clearly the Mumbai Police were out to "teach Arnab Goswami a lesson" and were least bothered if they were crude and ham-handed in their approach.

Fact is, Goswami with his "style of journalism", which is loud and abrasive, downright insulting to persons and personalities, had made "powerful enemies" in Mumbai's corridors of power and if the grapevine is to be believed, the Mumbai Police was geared to take him in and stake him out! Massively hurt at the crass broadcasting style which Republic TV practiced, the Mumbai Police has with his "dramatic arrest" only added to his so-called "charisma." Goswami's #IamRepublic has been trending for several days and on November 4, #ArnabGoswami began trending.

At this rate Arnab Goswami doesn't need to engineer a "scam" to scale up Republic TV's TRP. The Mumbai Police have in the past several weeks done all sorts of deeds to raise Republic TV's stock every passing day. And if today the Mumbai Police and the Uddhav Thackeray Government are being criticized for imposing "undeclared Emergency" in Mumbai, it's nobody's fault. The TRP case against the channel is in the courts and the CBI and Mumbai Police were all investigating it.

There was no need for the Mumbai Police to enact the early morning arrest drama and then drive a prison van to infamy. Why the haste to be compared to "Gestapo" and the "SS"? The police officers should have used some common sense and allowed the law to take its own course, in its own sweet time, and not gone overboard in its haste to teach the "rogue journalist" a lesson.

Clearly, it was unnecessary and best avoided. Now, the entire BJP-led government at the Centre is up and shouting and trying to milk the last drop of political capital out of this episode of the "TV soap opera" played daily on TV, a reality TV show which beats both Salman Khan and Kamal Haasan's reality TV show 'Big Boss' to second and third spot. Arnab is no great fighter for press freedom, rather he is a drum beater of the Modi government. But he has rights as a free citizen and a journalist. The Mumbai police have made a mess of the delicate issue of press freedom by arresting him without following the normal norms for such actions. Now, for Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut to say that the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government has not acted "vindictively" comes too late. The Mumbai Police has ensured that Raut's statement is taken with a pinch of salt. Besides, there's always somebody else to muck up the case in a very fundamental way: Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik termed Arnab Goswami's arrest as "Part 2 of India's Most Wanted" and ensured that it sounded like revenge! This despite the fact that he insisted that the Mumbai Police hadn't "acted out of revenge."

Let's not be naïve. November 4 2020 will be remembered as a "black day" for journalism. For whatever reason, and for whose-soever's fault, a precedent has been set. Hereafter, journalists can be arrested in an early morning swoop from their bedrooms and hauled off to a police station in a prison van on whatever charges come handy. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

At last a counterpoint!

Editor,
I must thank you for publishing the write up "Musings of a so-called non-tribal" by Biswajit Ghosh (ST Oct 31, 2020). I also thank the writer for having gathered courage to speak the truth. For me, it is a rare counter-narrative from the minorities living in Meghalaya. I appreciate the tone of the letter especially when he said, "Love begets love," and called for maintaining "brotherhood." The example of blood donation is absolutely spot on to drive home the fact that all human beings are essentially the same at birth. As we grow up we tend to change due to religion, language, ethnicity and the prevailing political climate. The write-up has some errors, though. One such error that he has since corrected is about who coined the name "Meghalaya". The other error is about the non-tribal population when Meghalaya was born. According to the 1971 census, the areas that constitute Meghalaya now had 20% non-tribal population, and not 38% as stated by the writer. Over the years, such population has fallen to below 10%. The question obviously is: Why so? According to the census norms, every community has a minimum growth of 2.5% per decade. That means the non-tribal population should have naturally grown by another 12.5% in the past five decades. In reality, there is a negative growth of 2%. This in itself is a pointer to the fact that

the popular notion of our tribal brethren that there is influx of outsiders and foreigners is not borne out by hard facts. As I see it, it is a profitable political issue to keep stoking the sensitive communal cauldron and keep the target groups on tenterhooks.

My family has moved out of Shillong after living there for over 75 years. Normally, anybody who resides at a place for such a long period of time is naturally and legally assimilated as a local resident. But not in Shillong! There is a palpable air of being unwanted, whether spoken explicitly or not. The well-behaved tribal brethren with whom we lived from childhood are today a changed lot. Their attitude has changed. The old generation is gone and with them the sense of tolerance that we experienced has dissipated. The new generation has other ideas. I can't blame them totally. They are victims of the continuous falsehood and venom poured into their ears. Today, in Shillong it seems it pays well to be a hate-monger. Look at the way the houses, shops and business establishments that once belonged to the non-tribals have passed on to the rich tribal families. I don't grudge them this change of fortune. But it pains me that they first created a reign of terror among the old non-tribal residents for easing them out of the state. This is plain ethnic cleansing. I had hoped they would live happily and peace would return. But the recent portents suggest that the profitable business of keeping hate-crimes alive is unlikely to die down

soon.

Yours etc.,
RK Chakravarty
Via email

Shouldering the economy

Editor,
Yet another inspiring journey by Klestar Syiem, (58) from Khliehmalwih West Khasi hills, Nongstoin was brought to the limelight by The Shillong Times. I believe in the saying, 'God helps those who help themselves'. To me the farmers are the real soldiers of our economy. Without any uniform their continuous battlefield being the cultivation field, with their fruit bearing spirits of ever fighting with their farming equipments, while placing nutritious food on our plates day in and day out.

Bah Klestar Syiem, we are informed was not able to walk properly since the age of 13, however his disabilities did not stop him from fulfilling his dreams as he was determined to do what needs to be done. Here I need to add that 'when the going gets tough, the tough gets going'. When Bah Klestar Syiem, was made a laughing stocks, the reading from the Scriptures came to my mind, 'God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful'!

Bah Klestar Syiem, presented two buckets of Sweet Charlie Strawberry which he planted in his garden. Now that I say is a miraculous blessing for self and others too. The Almighty always tells us to be a fruit bearing

person, which Bah Klestar Syiem really is. He is a blessing to us and the farming fraternity.

Thank you for bringing out such wonderful news of the journey of a farmer which keeps us motivated and inspired for doing greater deeds.

Yours etc.,
Joydeep Sharma
Shillong -2

Watch out! Two tremors in a month

Editor,
On November 2, at precisely 1:15 am there was a strong jerk of 4.4 on the Richter scale as reported on TV news. Are we disaster prepared? The answer is disappointingly, No! We need not go far enough taking the Qualapatty church building fire as an illustration (1) We were not prepared with narrow body vehicles like jeeps to have access to the building on fire (2) From 1972 till date we have just two fire brigade stations (3) The people in the station on night duty ignored the frantic calls for help.

Thus on every aspect of disaster we are wanting in all departments. Let us learn from the Turkey earthquake which was 7.1 on the Richter scale. The rescue operation by earthmovers was unhampered as well-planned wide roads are available, hence many lives were saved in spite of the magnitude. For the rat holes in our state there is little one can do as cavities tend to resonate with slight tremors and these would collapse like a packs of cards.

Dams are vulnerable to earthquakes. The one many years ago in Italy is a lesson for us. But a suggestion in The Shillong Times by a concerned person, to install battery operated alarms that automatically trigger in case the dam collapses, to warn those along the swelling waters to run to higher ground was not taken seriously by our Government which is in deep slumber and currently mired knee-deep in the coal controversy after the NGT ban in 2014.

Hospitals should be equipped with one week back-up of inverters or diesel generators, especially for operation theatres to deal with casualties. Walkie-talkies should be ready in the event of towers tilting. In our homes we should be ready with an LED torchlight which works efficiently with dry cells and not the rechargeable variety as there may be power cuts. Above all we should not panic. More casualties occur due to panic.

Yours etc.,
Manbha Diengdoh
Via email

Changing face of fascism in India

Editor,
Frankly speaking, I do not know whether the arrest of Republic TV Editor-in-Chief Mr Arnab Goswami earlier today was as per the laws of the land, or was a blatant misuse of power by the Maharashtra state govt. Whatever may be the case, it pains the heart to see a man once so elevated, plummet to such lows and why would it not? He is, after all,

one of Assam's favoured sons, who in his formative years as a journalist made not just our state but the entire country proud. But, it's not his arrest that I want to comment on today (as I'm confident that the law will take its course). Rather, it is the inexplicable outburst by one after another BJP leader that we saw throughout the day today that has compelled me to pen this.

I'm baffled by the manner in which the party has come out in support of a journalist who in recent years has probably been the loudest custodian of 'Independent' journalism in India and apparently has zero political affiliations.

Yes, any citizen or political party has every right to speak up against any injustice happening anywhere in the country. However, was the arrest as big a deal as the BJP made of it? The Union Home Minister Amit Shah believes that the arrest is an attack on the freedom of press. In fact, he went to the extent of calling it an 'emergency' in a country that has seen the same party selectively turn a blind eye to countless rapes and murders (of journalists included) not so long ago. A notion that is hard to fathom, also because Arnab has been arrested for allegedly abetting a suicide and not for his journalism (or lack of it).

So brazen was the BJP's support for Arnab today that it seems as if it is only the Prime Minister of India who's now left to come out denouncing the arrest.

Yours etc.,
Fahd Hazarika
Guwahati

“Old age and treachery will always beat youth and exuberance.”
— David Mamet

The Shillong Times

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Biden to the fore

THE last word on the tightly contested US presidential polls will be heard only later in view of the legal hassles that threaten to delay the process. It is clear by now that Joe Biden, the Democratic presidential nominee, has taken the upper hand. President Trump, who tried for a second term in office, is no more his usual confident self. He is exploring legal options to thwart a verdict in favour of his rival while Joe Biden is cautiously optimistic he would enter White House.

Among many irritants for Trump this time was that his leads were “magically” disappearing in states run by Democratic governors; and he has said a “fraud” was being played on the nation. The truth might be different, but what was pronounced all through the campaign this time – as also in 2016 – was that he is fiercely opposed not only by Democrats but also segments of the society. This time, they say they are not impressed by his words and deeds in the White House.

The death of George Floyd on May 25, when he was pounced upon and pinned down to death by the Minneapolis police after a complaint that he purchased cigarettes with counterfeit \$20 bill, shocked the black community. The casual response of the President added to their grief. Their massive show of protests in the streets and the campaign that former president Barack Obama did for the Democratic candidate this time formed only one part of Trump’s misfortune. Americans were unhappy with the way he handled the Covid-19 health crisis; where too a casual approach led to the death of more than 3,00,000 people.

The 77-year-old Joe Biden has been aspiring for a White House stint for many years but could not make it due to hurdles that came his way. Family tragedies like the death of his wife and daughter in a road mishap in 1972 added to his personal pain. His election as Vice President alongside Barack Obama from 2009 for two terms, apart from his other political engagements through decades, should keep him in good stead.

There were those who expected a second term for Donald Trump in the White House to push the American moves against China in forceful ways. Joe Biden, or any American president for that matter, would do only what national interests dictate; and as much can be expected from a Biden presidency as well. A Biden win also would mean a win for Kamala Harris, for whom too national interests matter first.

The MDA: A mix of the bold and not so beautiful

By Patricia Mukhim

In the MDA government there is clear division of responsibilities. Like those playing basket ball, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma is the scorer and his deputy Prestone Tynsong is the one who staves off all opponents so that Conrad can shoot and score. Hence each time the maverick Mr Tynsong who increasingly resembles his mentor of yore, Mr BB Lyngdoh, is asked questions he deflects them back at the questioner. If the question is – “Will the Government investigate the allegations of illegal mining and transportation of coal, Tynsong’s ambivalent response is, “Those who make allegations should come up with evidence.” What a convoluted argument! Will Mr Tynsong reply then as to what is the role of the police if the citizen has to do his/her own investigation into every malfeasance and also gather evidence? Also there seems to be a misconception here about the role of the media. The media reports wrongdoing and the responsibility of a responsive government is to take cognisance of what the media says and investigate such wrongdoing. A government on the defensive can only mean it knows there is transgression and is trying to bury it alive.

Tynsong also has very little understanding of democratic tenets. When Angela Rangad of TUR questioned why the Meghalaya Right to Public Service Bill was not put up in the public domain for consultation so that the Bill has contributions from civil society, which is the sine-quanon of democracy, Tynsong questioned her credentials. You cannot wish away civil society because they represent collective voices. If democracy is a government of, by and for the people then the MDA government which is elected by the people has a responsibility to listen to all kinds of voices, including uncomfortable ones. Perhaps Mr Tynsong needs to jerk his memory and remind himself that Meghalaya is still a democracy and not yet a kingdom, although we are soon getting there.

Incidentally, those in the government tend to forget that they are to serve 3 million plus people, the large majority of whom are poor. Since the pandemic, poverty has exacerbated. You really have to walk around and not be driving in an SUV

to understand that our own people are today facing stark poverty – it includes the poverty of food, poverty of voice, poverty of thought, poverty of land, poverty of health care, poverty of not having even the bare necessities of life. But of course those in the government don’t know poverty except for spelling it. And who dare tell the bloated that hunger is the ultimate siege within. When there is poverty of voice there is a complete sense of helplessness and

on the GHADC scam; a misconduct that is not even hidden considering that over a thousand employees have not been paid for over two years. But perhaps the BJP’s internal machinations have sent this scam into the dungeons for now. The BJP has gone silent, thereby falsifying what their pradhan sewak, Narendra Modi has been mouthing all along about short-circuiting corruption. One is not privy to what senior BJP member, AL Hek conferred with the bigwigs of the Party in Delhi but



victimhood. The government then treats such people as beneficiaries of its patronage. Because of the poverty of thought, people don’t even use reason while voting. The single mother with four kids is only too grateful to the politician who gives her Rs 5000 two days before voting because it would have taken her a whole month to earn that amount. Such is the reality of life in Meghalaya today. By whatever yardstick you might want to measure economic development, we are not making any headway. So the certification that the State got recently for being the best governed small state is, to me, an optical illusion.

Mr Tynsong and other ministers need to understand that criticism of the government is the responsibility of the media and of citizens. To believe in conspiracy theories that critics are trying to topple the government and is using the media is infantile. Someone has rightly said that only the insecure see a conspiracy in everything. The media here does not get used; nor does media allow opposition politicians to fire the gun from their shoulders nor to plant juicy gossip. We have been around long enough to know who is pulling a fast one. The BJP tried to corner the Government

the silence of the BJP is ominous. They were the only Party that really took on the Government. Others like the UDP have been wishy-washy, although their ministers hold some important portfolios, albeit not the lucrative ones. In fact Education is a tough call and has to do directly with teachers’ salaries, and, although the present minister is steering the ship in the right direction, the sea is rough and one has no idea where the ship will dock in 2022, especially with the National Education Policy, 2020, which will require substantial resources. Mr Rymbui the Education Minister is passionate. Alas, passion needs the momentum of cash.

Normally governments come up with a mid-term balance sheet. The MDA has not yet done so although it will soon be crossing its third year in office. By 2022 December the constituents of the MDA will have to come out with a profit and loss account. Following the impact of the pandemic there may not be too many moneybags around to fund elections. And when a moneybag tells a politician he only has a wallet; the politician is in deep electoral trouble.

By the time the MDA Government reaches its life span, nay a marriage of five years, a lot of stress would

have accumulated which would be like cascading dominoes. By then the ego of every politician in the ruling party would have stopped spinning off its axis and a perverse humility would have set in. At that point Mr Tynsong cannot ask civil society groups for their pedigree before they can ask questions. By then every question must be answered and impudence will get short shrift. Voters will not tolerate impudence or wisecracks. They want to know if you have made the roads and bridges promised; constructed and made functional the health care centres; reduced the infant and maternal mortality and assisted farmers who are the backbone of Meghalaya’s economy. Sadly the focus has been on limestone and coal; one is sold legally; the other through illicit trade and both at great cost to the environment.

And worse of all is that every aspiring politician, especially those who have sat on the power seat for five years will have to contend with the new drug – social media and its unending cacophony. In Nagaland a group has created a Facebook page where you can lampoon ruling party politicians. It’s quite a fun page but it gives one the sense of what people actually think of the elected who live in a make-believe world of invincibility.

To add to the melee of 2023, there will be new faces – the faces that have spread dystopia and xenophobia all because they too want to be up there where it matters. They will preach unrealistic policy proposals such as “no railways,” but with no alternatives. They will not have a white paper on the economy, on education and health because they would not even have thought of these weighty issues. They will pick and choose issues that will trigger emotional and ideological polarisation.

Meanwhile, as media persons we must also plead guilty of making our main stories those where decision makers are creating events but we don’t ask people how they perceive these events. So there’s a lot of soul-searching to do too on our part.

Meanwhile, we trundle on aimlessly in an illusory world with the pandemic being the only real thing that scares the hell out of us.

India’s civil service needs now to reinvent itself

By Moin Qazi

When India attained independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the first to envision civil services as the ‘steel frame’ of Independent India. Despite reservations of several colleagues, his resolve to retain the cadre was strong. While speaking to the first batch of civil servants at the Metcalf House, Delhi, Patel pithily articulated the future role of civil servants. In his address on April 21, 1947, Patel said,

“Your predecessors were brought up in the traditions in which they... kept themselves aloof from the common run of the people. It will be your bounden duty to treat the common men in India as your own.”

Later, Vallabhbhai Patel in his letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on 27 April 1948, emphasised the role of civil services saying, “I need hardly emphasise that an efficient, disciplined and contented service, assured of its prospect as a result of diligent and honest work, is a sine quanon of sound administration under a democratic regime even more than under an authoritarian rule. The service must be above party and we should ensure that political considerations, either in its recruitment or in its discipline and control, are reduced to the minimum, if not eliminated altogether. The constitution is meant to be worked by a ring of service which will keep the country intact.”

Today, more than six decades later, the Indian bureaucracy is both celebrated and reviled. Far from what Patel had warranted, his vision of a “steel frame” is now derided as “babudom”.

While the bureaucracy has earned itself some qualified praise, it has disillusioned many. An overwhelming majority today asserts that the services are no longer a ‘steel frame’ but have become a ‘creaking structure’.

Under the current system, lack of domain knowledge is a hindrance to effective policy formulation. This has led to a situation where an agricultural expert is looking after the defense, a veterinary doctor is supervising the education system and a geography graduate is dictating the health policy. It is in this backdrop in which the government decided to allow lateral entry into the IAS.

In the past two decades, the Constitution Review Commission (2002), the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008), and the NITI Aayog’s 3 Year Action Agenda (2017) have all suggested domain specialization instead of generalized competence, looking at the rising complexity of modern-day policymaking.

This is a shift that even the United Kingdom started making as early as the mid-20th century when the Fulton Commission started privileging domain knowledge over simple seniority and ‘experience’.

While it is true that those entering through lateral channels may face tough resistance from the IAS lobby which is highly possessive of its power club, the attempt is worth the effort.

In the case of IAS, there is no mechanism for weeding out inefficiencies. Once a candidate clears the exam they are assured of promotion throughout their careers, irrespective of their performance. The only disincentive they may incur is a fringe posting.

Moreover, in view of the complexity of issues confronting the country, we need specialists as well as individuals from relevant sectors, so that we get diverse talent and varied perspectives in policy formulation and implementation.

Even in the days of the ICS, officers could select a branch of governance after a period of services, such as the social sector or econom-

ics, so that they could specialise and perform better. That practice has since been abolished.

The government had earlier tried this experiment by establishing the Industrial Management Pool (IMP) in 1959. The IMP envisaged hiring talent from the private sector to man high and mid-level managerial posts. But the attempt failed. After just one hiring in 1959, the IMP came to a formal end in 1973. Inducting domain experts may not necessarily solve all problems.

Today, our bureaucracy is twenty times more bureaucratic, our deference to the chain of command more cringing and decorous, our worship of paper more entrenched. To quote Hyman Rickover, “If you are going to sin, sin against God, not the bureaucracy. God will forgive you but the bureaucracy won’t.”

A bureaucracy that wastes its precious human potential is morally indefensible.

This does not mean that there should be fewer oversight checks. An administration certainly needs guardrails in the form of non-negotiable rules. Without such rails, the system can stray badly. But necessitating a dozen signatures where a few can do, is a criminal surfeit of supervisory controls.

Similarly, we have a colossal army of paper-pushing subordinates churning out work of frivolous value. Honest and competent civil servants—and there are many—need to initiate human capital reform to create high-performing machinery that does fewer things but does them better.

A bureaucracy must be an enabler and not a hinderer that clogs the decision-making pipeline.

As the British Prime Minister Theresa May observed, “We’re getting rid of bureaucracy so that we’re releasing time for police officers to be crime fighters and not form writers.”

Most retired senior civil servants in India have argued that there are three tenets underpinning the functioning of the civil service—performance, neutrality, and anonymity.

These tenets provide continuity and change that are important for democracy so that we have a continuously evolving system of governance. It is a challenge in a modern democracy to live up to them. Given the autonomy and protection that the Constitution guarantees to the civil servants is enough reason why these morals and tenets cannot be discarded.

As the well-known retired civil servant, Najeeb Jung spelled out for us, “A civil servant often finds himself/herself in unsolvable, peculiar, and unpredictable situations. He/she tackles them to the best of his/her ability, planning with care but often hitting in the dark sometimes; with luck he/she gets away, unscathed but sometimes luck runs out.”

Perhaps, the best antidote to the present despair is to study the examples and lives of those who have fought against the odds and succeeded.

In every country, there are some courageous people who have refused to give in, who have stuck by their principles, and whose lives shine as examples of what can be done. Few people outside the system realize the very personal cost that follows the decision to risk it all in an act of conscience.

Not all can expect recognition or to become folk heroes.

For most of those who put their conscience first, the satisfaction and rewards are not fame, but in knowing that they did what was right and that things are definitely better than they would have been. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: The Leaflet

TO THE EDITOR

Why is Umroi airport idle?

Editor,
I am a little curious about the actual status of making Umroi airport functional. For quite some time now I have been reading news reports in your esteemed daily about resumption of flights from Umroi to Kolkata, Delhi and other places. First, one report said flights to Delhi would start in October. Later another report quoted our chief minister saying that launching of commercial flights would begin from November. And now, there is a talk about activating the airport in June next year. This is a disheartening news for all those who are required to travel off and on to the national capital. Like me everyone else was hoping that Shillong would be shortly be air-linked to Delhi.

From what I understand from your news report, “AAI working to resume flight service from Umroi airport” (ST Nov 2, 2020), the Airport Authority of India are at present having facility for two flights a day. In order to make it four flights a day, they will need at least eight more months. I therefore suggest that Meghalaya Government should pursue with the authorities concerned to at least launch Kolkata-

Shillong and Delhi-Shillong flights. This will be comforting for air travellers who otherwise are made to waste one full day to catch a flight from Guwahati. The long road travel from Guwahati airport to Shillong is really taxing. Therefore, I urge upon the Government to expedite the process of activating Umroi airport before the year is out.

Yours etc.,
P. Sunn,
Via email.

A virtual paradise on earth!

Editor,
A land that is bequeathed with all the natural attributes that surpass human imagination should be making waves. In fact this beautiful piece of land is bejeweled with all the natural characteristics to bewitch people from all across the country and abroad. Be it the scudding clouds or rolling lush-green hills; intriguing cultures of the indigenous people or their life styles; exotic species of orchids and flowers or vibrant vegetation; serene lakes or roaring waterfalls; different species of birds or mammals, Meghalaya has it all? In-

deed it has all the divine elements that are at par with the most exotic places in the world. While writing this, a proverb popped up in my mind “nearest to the church, farthest from the gods.” This proverb seemed quite befitting exclusively for those longing to go on vacations to far-off lands ignoring the exclusivity of the place which is just few hundred kilometers or few hours away by flight from their cities.

As a travel enthusiast, I have had the opportunity to visit many places including Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, and Shillong (Shillong is of course my birth place). My visit to these places not only availed me the opportunity to be with nature, but also enthused me with their ancient history, tradition and culture; cuisines, architecture, and above all the welcoming nature of the people was the joy of all joys.

Shillong is an exotic destination so why it is failing to attract substantial number of tourists? This should be a matter of concern. Since the ban on coal mining and transportation the economy has been badly impacted and employment for the locals has shrunk. Therefore, the government should focus on the ways and means to promote tourism in the state particularly targeting Shillong and its surround-

ing areas like Cherrapunji, Mawsynram and other places of touristic importance which are pleasant and easily accessible.

Shillong and its surrounding areas have myriad options for travellers, be it for culture vulture, hiking enthusiasts, anthropologists, cultural buffs, speleologists, botanists or bikers? It only requires a sincere approach to promote these elements by creating appealing promotional videos, posters, business tie-ups with the best prospective visitors and patrons; and organizing tourism marts in the state and also attending such marts organized by potential travel agents within the country and abroad.

Not only can tourism be helpful in introducing the destinations to the wider population, but it can also help in creating millions of jobs directly or indirectly. For instance our neighbouring countries like Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, and some of the Indian cities have been generating significant amount of revenue from the tourism industry which is not only contributing to the economy of these countries but also helping to generate millions of jobs.

Shillong has profound possibilities of becoming the most favoured tourist destination in India. There-

fore, proper marketing and investment in tourism related infrastructures such as increase in flight frequency to Umroi airport from various cities of India, construction of exclusive hotels and resorts, bar and pubs in idyllic places; beefing up security system in the city to avoid any repulsive incidents, managing hanging wires from utility poles in the city center, managing stray dogs and the stench in the city, plantation of trees on both sides of the roads and streets, and generating skilled manpower are some of the basics that can be helpful in making our city graceful and tourist friendly.

It is our responsibility as well to promote our state and city to people across the globe. Hence let’s all extend our unconditional support to our government in transforming Shillong and its surrounding into a tourist paradise.

Yours etc.,
Tirtha Acharya,
Via email

Encouraging our youth

Editor,
The youth in our State have now come up with various concepts of Do It Yourself (DIY), which is such an inspiration because they are trying to create their own

employment avenues, since the State lacks employment opportunities. There are different upcoming young talented artists in contrasting fields who require moral support from each of us. We must encourage and applaud them so that they can come forward and take their place.

Recently I discovered and watched the ‘Ki Jlawdohtir group’, ‘CatxLizz’ etc., on YouTube and was amazed by their talent and dedication. I think it’s high time for all of us to dedicate some of our time to help upgrade and inspire the youngsters like them that we come across especially the ones in our State so that their efforts can reach far and wide across the state and country as a whole!

Let’s at least try to build a core body to support and encourage our youth instead of criticizing them, because it is difficult to be where they are. They have struggled and deserve recognition and encouragement.

Let’s be vocal for our locals!

Yours etc.,
Erica Process Syiem,
Via email

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

*"Democracy is messy, and it's hard.
It's never easy."*

— Robert Kennedy, Jr.

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No.82 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2020

Rule of law must prevail

THE arrest of Arnab Goswami, Editor-in Chief of Republic TV, was overshadowed by the US elections but it makes for an important case about the rule of law or the absence of it in India. Goswami was arrested on an abetment of suicide case filed by the family members of a suicide victim in May this year stating her dissatisfaction on the investigation process following which the case was closed. Arnab has been at loggerheads with Mumbai Police over the Palghar incident which he alleged was communal in nature when the facts speak otherwise. Arnab also insinuated that Congress President Sonia Gandhi orchestrated the attack on Hindu priests for which she will report to the Vatican. Then followed the Sushant Singh Rajput suicide case Arnab believes was murder and which turned into a witch-hunt for the murderer. Journalism is by no means a license to try people for murder. But Arnab has pronounced worse judgments after conducting trials on various issues in his studio. The allegation against Rhea Chakraborty reeks of vendetta by Republic TV although the alibi was to fight for justice for the deceased Bollywood star.

But while we might oppose the highly polarising and communally charged journalism that Arnab Goswami practices, it is important not to forget that the rule of law in this case has been compromised. A journalist cannot be arrested simply for critiquing the government of the day. Due process of law would require a summons to be issued to Arnab Goswami under Section 91 for interrogation before any arrest could be made.

In law abetment to suicide implies an overt act by word or deeds which drives a person to suicide and that should be the burden of police investigation. It would be premature comment on this matter at this stage. After the wife of the deceased interior decorator had petitioned for reopening the case an investigation under Section 173(8)CrPC is ongoing. The due process of law would have meant a summons to be issued to Goswami for questioning before any arrest is made.

All right thinking citizens committed to the Right to Life and Personal Liberty guaranteed under the Constitution should demand that the Rule of Law must prevail and the growing misuse of the power of arrest against journalists that are critical of State or Central Government irrespective of which party is in power, should immediately stop. But the uproar against the arrest of Arnab Goswami should not subsume the other arrests of other lesser known journalists across the country on very flimsy reasons and on charges of sedition amongst others. The fourth estate cannot be coerced to tow the government line, although it has to operate within the ambit of Article 19(1)(a).

The United States of America is going through the quadrennial process of electing the 46th president, or re-electing the incumbent despot Donald Trump, heavily challenged by the mild Democrat Joseph Biden. At the time of writing this column, Biden has secured more votes than any president in the history of the United States. But, cannily enough, his lead is razor-thin, thus clearly establishing how popular Trump remains

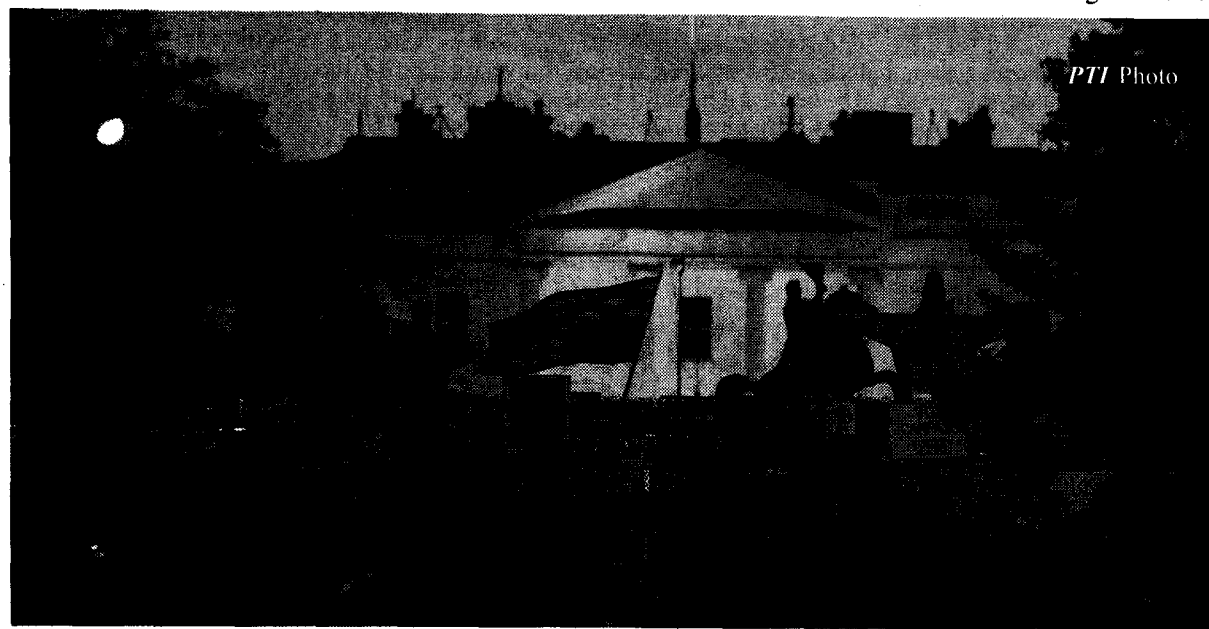
Divided States of America (and India) Democracy at crossroads

By Annie Domini

white supremacy, the deep underbelly of American history. Racial fascism and racial capitalism, systemic exploitation of black economic and social labour, is the substratum of American "exceptionalism", this oldest and flawed democracy. Seething under "universal values" have been policies and systems that have marginalised, devalued and disenfranchised millions for

not even a clear-cut black versus white binary as Trump is supposed to have garnered support from Latinos, even sections of African-Americans and LGBT peoples. While American writer Isabel Wilkerson compares the American racial structure with the Indian caste system, the multiple fault-lines nevertheless portray a society in deep churning try-

spite the abysmal state they are in, still function with some degree of objectivity. In India, the capture of every institution — whether the judiciary, the media, the Election Commission, the tribunals overseeing environmental, land, water resources, forests, etc — is complete. Legislature in India has been made almost redundant with the brute parliamentary majority of the ruling BJP, which steamrolls every oppressive law through Parliament



among his supporters. US observers are saying no matter who wins, Trump will remain the "president of Red America".

Given the slim lead and the humungous voter turnout, both in person and via mail-in ballots, America is clearly on the edge. The New York Times election needle keeps quaking furiously, and the famed pollsters Nate Silver and Nate Cohn get cursed aplenty over how they underestimated Trump the fan base. This, despite ample evidence on social media, which saw staggering engagement for far-right fake news items, particularly on Facebook, while the mainstream media gradually learned to counter Trump's blatant lies and repeated incitements to white supremacist violence.

Swing states or not, America right now is a deeply divided country, reminiscent of the mid-nineteenth century civil war era, or the 1960s civil rights movement years. Trump might be an incompetent sociopath but he's very well a sociopath who entertains via performing overt

two centuries. Any progressive, democratic, ground-up movement within America has been about bridging the massive gaps between the historically privileged and their victims. Potential loss or reclamation of longstanding privilege, such as losing the racial upper hand, and by implication, the socio-economic top spot, is the premise on which most of the American elections have been fought. The 2020 polls are thus both typical and unprecedented in accurately representing the tensions underlying American domestic politics.

The similarities, as well as differences, with India are staggering. USA, like India, is a country split wide open over issues so contentious that elections are haplessly failing to resolve them in a bipartisan manner. That almost 50 per cent of the voting population chose a lying racist sexist rape-accused, fraud-accused, almost-impeached Trump is a strong indication over extreme anxieties determining American politics today. It's

ing to be timelessly repressive in modern ways and resisting the oppressive innovations.

Trumpism and Modism are similar to the extent that both have branded institutions as unnecessary to political success, preferring telegenic performance over substantial critique of any real institutional shortcomings. Both are adept at exploiting chronic grievances, playing off one community of vulnerable against another. Add to that the gargantuan mis/disinformation ecosystems created by the near-totalitarian States that both have created, rivaling Soviet-era Russia in propaganda, but missing deplorably its super scientific temper. In fact, in both America and India, the divisions are, more than anything else, along the lines of information versus mis/disinformation, reality versus delusions, comprehensive democratic equality versus entrenching hierarchies of race, class, gender, religion and nativism.

Yet, there's a crucial difference between India and America, and that is the institutions in America, de-

by the sheer dint of numbers and disregard for constitutional values. While the courts in Georgia and Michigan dismissed a despot Trump's lawsuit to stop counting the ballots, courts in India disregard any legitimate grievances against the extremely questionable electronic voting machines, and this obsession with quick results in place of accurate results where every vote matters.

Elections alone are woefully inadequate to address the material and symbolic hurts that communities are nursing both in India and America. The world's largest and oldest democracies are seeing unprecedented churns, seeing civil wars in instalments between the divided segments. On top of that, the ravages of Covid-19 have unsheathed an entrenched irrationalism and disbelief in science embedded in religious fundamentalism of various shades. Even if America evades the Indian destiny that re-elected Narendra Modi in 2019, Red America and Blue America wouldn't see eye to eye for a long, long time. (IPA Service)

Opposition to govt in power is not anti-national

By Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

In India, political philosophy and theory are not popular. So issues like the rationale of the State or the irreducible status of the individual on moral and existential grounds have never been debated as they should be. Most political scientists in the country — liberal and anti-liberal — talk about the need to defend the fundamental rights of individuals in a rather loose sense.

So, when the State gets down to the act of prosecuting an individual on charges of sedition and conspiracy, the supporters and critics of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) do not offer sufficiently substantial arguments either to justify the action of the State or that of the individuals charged with conspiracy and rebellion. The government's defense is national security, and the anti-government critics argue that it is harassment of accused individuals by the ruling party.

The arguments never rise above the basic sparring point of partisan politics.

The rights activists arrested in the Bhima Koregaon violence, and in north-east Delhi, communal riots have been accused, in various degrees, of posing a mortal threat to the state. It is not necessary to sympathise or support the cause of the activists targeted by the investigating agencies. It is incidental that most of the accused can be seen as leftists of different shades of red or that they oppose what they consider the majoritarian bias of the BJP.

philosophical and moral doctrines? This is a problem of political justice, not a problem about the highest good."

It is not necessary for those who believe in a majoritarian worldview to deny political freedom to those who believe either in the collectivism of the left kind or of uncompromising individualism. In India, it is generally a clash of opposing collectivism, either of the neo-fascist kind or that of the neo-socialist or neo-communist or religious identities versions.

The moral basis of individual beliefs is ignored in political debates.

The modern state however derives its moral legitimacy from the fundamental rights of freedom of the individual. Liberty is at the base of the state, and the legal framework that keeps the state system in place must continually satisfy the principle of fundamental rights of the individuals.

The constitutional compact agreed upon by the citizens of a state is the respect for irreconcilable world views of the individuals constituting the state. It follows from this that an individual or a group have the right to oppose not just those who hold opposing views, but also to continually question the moral legitimacy of the state.

Freedom does not mean that we say polite things to each other. It means that we oppose each other tooth and nail.

You cannot be termed a traitor because you oppose the state. It is by opposing the state that you want to



The cases against them raise some fundamental questions. To what extent can an individual oppose the state per se, and not just the ideology of the ruling party? To what extent the state can trample upon the individual in the name of defending the state? Is there a proportionality principle at work?

There is an implicit possibility that those who accuse the state of using brute force are hapless and moralistic individuals — there is an undeniable moral dimension to protest per se — will only be too willing to use the same brute might against, what they believe, to be fascist elements. To put it in plain terms, the religious person has the moral right to raise moral objections to a secular state, even as the liberal and leftist enjoy the same privilege of opposing the nation-state idea as well as the notion of nationalism as a sacred creed.

This is indeed the kind of hard dilemma that a political theorist or philosopher must face.

American political theorist and philosopher John Rawls faces up to this difficult problem in his second, and a little less well-known book, 'Political Liberalism' (1993). He lays out the moral challenge, "...the problem of political liberalism is: How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious,

open the possibility for others to take a critical look at the existing institutions, and perhaps be persuaded to make changes. The only limitation is that you cannot indulge in violence to throw off what you think is an immoral state.

It is the tendency of those in power to prosecute dissenters saying that there is an explicit or implicit attempt to overthrow the state. It becomes imperative to critically scrutinise the claims of those in power against the accused, more than the other way round.

The conscientious objector stands on a higher moral ground than those wielding state power. That is why Henry David Thoreau's refusal to pay taxes to a government that wages an unjust war and courting arrest is civil disobedience of a high moral order. The conscientious objector is the moral anchor of the state.

The democratic framework of the state imposes the obligation that those who raise their voice, not just against the ruling party but also against the state, should have the freedom to do so.

The state and the political establishment must throw the protective cordon around the dissenters. Remember that one of the reasons that Athenian democracy destroyed itself is because it delivered the death sentence to Socrates. It holds a lesson to all other democracies. (IPA Service) Courtesy: The Leaflet

TO THE EDITOR

No fireworks during Diwali please!

Editor,
Covid19 and Diwali firecrackers do not go together. Our weakness in the respiratory system due to pollution will make us much weaker and more susceptible to the pandemic.

Moreover, the festival of light — Laxmi Puja — represents the victory of righteousness and knowledge over vices and ignorance; good over "evil" and light over darkness. Therefore, we should not let the evil of Covid bring the darkness of death upon humanity. The Government of Meghalaya should consider banning all toxic firecrackers in this coming Diwali. In view of the pandemic, Delhi, Odisha, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Sikkim governments have already completely/partially banned fireworks. This is a very welcome move.

I further add, there will be no better time than this DIWALI amidst the coronavirus to take a serious pledge to restore our pale and sickly environment. We have to learn from the pandemic that has devoured so many lives and brought so much sorrow. God's creation should always be in bloom in every

respect. Our senseless greed and consumerism have "toxified the environment". Have the alarm bells not already been pressed by the ozone layer and melting snow? If we want to live a healthy life we must stop playing with fire.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong

Proxy groups should be exposed

Editor,
Since the outbreak of trouble in Ichamati, we are witnessing a sudden and ominous development. Organisation after organisation has been holding protest demonstrations in Kolkata over alleged atrocities on the residents of Ichamati. At first the protest was at Meghalaya House, Russell street, Kolkata. Then it was at Kasbah where the old Meghalaya House is located. An organisation which calls itself "Amora Bangali" (I am told it means "We Bengalis") shouted slogans and displayed protest banners against Meghalaya.

I am wondering, why they are demonstrating only in Kolkata. They are free to come to Shillong and tell us their problem. At the same time, I am also won-

dering who these people are. Who do they represent? Does the organisation have a large following among the Bengalis? Do they have any branch in Meghalaya? If there is a branch here, they should have the courage to speak out here and not allow a proxy battle to be fought from the soil of Bengal. The little that I have gathered about "Amora Bangali" is that the organisation does not have a mass following. It does not have any political "ism" and is out and out a Bengali right wing organisation. Also I wonder if the former Governor Nathagata Roy is behind this. For, there is a similarity in the tone and tenor of both when they demanded a ban on the Khasi Students' Union.

In my opinion, the State Government should write to the West Bengal Government seeking a ban on public demonstration outside Meghalaya House and provide adequate security to the staff of the two Meghalaya Houses in Kolkata.

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrwa,
Via email.

A weird university

Editor,
Appropos the letter by Angeline A. Sangma 'A Weird Interview' (ST Nov

4, 2020) I would like to state that Central Agricultural University indeed seems to lack professionalism and sensitivity, thanks to its dubious policies and incompetent officers. The University has campuses all over North-East India, but hasn't really made any visible impact, particularly in Meghalaya. Being from Tura, I didn't even know that a college existed here until very recently. People in the know, though, have expressed dismay over the functioning of this university particularly during the tenure of its recently retired/terminated Vice-Chancellor. It seems he was on an endless recruitment drive where preference was given to candidates of only one North-Eastern state. Besides, appointment of Deans of colleges was arbitrarily done to accommodate officers with inadequate qualification. The current Dean of College of Post Graduate Studies in Umiam has superseded many senior professors to occupy the post. He is now in the news for terminating local contractual staff who have served for many years. It shows insensitivity particularly at a time when people are suffering due to this pandemic.

The Dean of College of Community Science in Tura, as per Ms. Sangma's

narration, appears to be equally insensitive, and worse, is ill-mannered. How can a Head of an Institution put on her earpieces with eyes glued on her phone during an interview? It's utterly disrespectful to the candidate. And shouting at strangers is not part of our tribal culture.

One wonders whether such people, who are domicile of the so-called 'mainland', deliberately do such things to frustrate the locals who normally lack patience and tolerance. It is perhaps purposely done to discourage the qualified locals, so that 'others' can be recruited. What has happened to Ms. Sangma is indeed very weird and displays an unconducive environment.

Another reflection is on the necessity of such public-funded institutions, whose purpose is more for the fulfilment of dubious motives of those in key positions. This is true in most colleges and universities of the country. The arrest of A. Ganapathy, Vice-chancellor of Bharathiar University in Tamil Nadu in 2018, who was caught accepting bribes from a job aspirant, is an example of deep-rooted conspiracies inherent in the higher education system.

Yours etc.,
Rikrak K. Sangma
Tura

Unlocking higher education

Editor,
The UGC has given the green signal for reopening of universities and colleges through its latest guidelines issued on November 5 last. As it is a circular the guidelines may be adopted by the institutions as per the local conditions and directives of the state government authorities. The universities and colleges outside the containment zones may be opened in a graded manner after consultations with concerned State/UT Governments and subject to the fulfillment of the guidelines/SOP for safety and health protocols prepared by UGC. The institutions should ensure that not more than 50 per cent of the total students will be present at any point in time and necessary guidelines/protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are in place.

Universities and colleges must follow social distancing, use of face masks, and other protective measures also with administrative offices, research laboratories and libraries. This is a good move to sustained higher education in the post-pandemic period.

Yours etc.,
Amit Singh Kushwaha,
Satna (M.P.)

Saving the environment through innovative ideas

Forest-PLUS, launched by US AID and the Indian government in a collaborative project, aims to improve the management of forests to combat climate change, conserve biodiversity and enhance livelihood benefits, reports SPAN writer Megan McDrew

It is estimated that about 300 million people in India depend directly on forests for sustenance. However, a large percentage of India's forests are degraded, which impacts the flow of forest goods and services critical for inclusive economic growth. To address these challenges, USAID signed a bilateral agreement with the Indian Government and launched the Forest-PLUS program in 2012.

From 2012 to 2017, Forest-PLUS focused on initiatives to reduce forest carbon emissions in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. USAID and India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) designed Forest-PLUS to combine technical expertise in India and the US to develop and field-test innovative ways of managing Indian forests to mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity, improve environmental services and enhance livelihood benefits.

There are many examples of successful outcomes of the program, which were direct results of the collaborative work done by USAID and MoE-



FCC.

In Sikkim, for instance, 'Bio-briquettes,' or biofuel substitutes, were made and promoted to reduce fuel-wood extraction. In addition, Buddhist monks from Rumtek and other monasteries were provided information on climate change through the Monks for Climate Change campaign.

Innovative solutions were developed in partnership with local communities and forest officials in two wildlife sanctuaries in the state, to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

In Rampur, Himachal Pradesh, the introduction

of solar heating systems reduced firewood use by 32 percent, helped lessen women's workload, and improved grazing management techniques that yielded about seven times as much grass while saving trees.

The work in Shivamogga in Karnataka is no less significant.

Along with a project to cover 21,453 hectares of forests to reduce forest carbon emissions and equip six village forest institutions with the materials and knowledge to monitor carbon emissions, there has also been use of radio outreach and street

plays to educate people about climate change and sustainable forest management.

In Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh, where forests are seasonally dry, planting new trees outside the forest, by leveraging resources from corporate enterprises, proved to be a successful strategy in saving the natural forests.

Building on the huge success of Forest-PLUS, with some of the initiatives being firsts of their kind, Forest-PLUS 2.0 was initiated in December 2018.

A five-year program designed to improve the

management of targeted forest landscapes in Gaya, Thiruvananthapuram and Medak in Telangana, Forest-PLUS 2.0 takes on a larger challenge of protecting water in forests. Varghese Paul, senior forestry advisor with USAID India, terms this "forests for water and prosperity."

"Water is one of the very important ecosystem services that the forested landscapes provide," says Paul. "In times where India, with just 4 percent of the world's water, caters to 16 percent of the world's population and 18 percent of the livestock, this assumes a much

greater significance and importance."

A 2016 analysis of 290 of India's approximately 400 rivers showed that over 70 percent were in critical condition due to diminished water flow, unsustainable use or pollution.

"The increasing freshwater scarcity has elevated the importance of forests as 'water tanks' since many rivers originate and are sustained by forested landscapes," says Soumitri Das, forestry specialist with USAID India.

Without thriving forests, millions of people, animals and ecosystems

will lose not only their economic base, but also the ability to stabilize the climate that is essential for clean air and water. People will also lose the ability to use the forests for recreation and spiritual purposes.

"Forest-PLUS 2.0 is tasked with the immense challenge of bringing about a shift in the way forests are managed in India, shift to an ecosystem approach to forest management that focuses on enhancing the entire gamut of services that the forests provide," says Ujjwal Pradhan, chief of party of Forest-PLUS 2.0.

"Linked with that is the challenge to improve, beyond subsistence, the livelihood of all those who rely on this incredible natural resource."

"Fortunately, with advanced tools and technology, the dedicated and educated minds in India and the US working together and the critical support of those who live in these communities," says Paul, "there is much to be excited about as we face the climate crisis with not only an eye on the dangers, but also on all the opportunities aimed at living in harmony with the forests." (SPAN/TWF)

Time to reaffirm 'patriotic idea of India': Shashi Tharoor

By Vishnu Makhijani

India is a rare example of the successful management of diversity in the developing world but the events of the past few years make it necessary to "reaffirm the patriotic idea of India enshrined in our Constitution" to build a "New India that will cherish and uplift" all its citizens, noted author and parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor writes in a scholarly new book that methodically takes the reader through the world of patriotism, citizenship and belonging.

"The healthy spirit of acceptance of difference, of constitutional encouragement of debate and discussion, fuelled by a thriving free media, contentious civil society forums, energetic human rights groups, assorted autonomous institutions, and the repeated spectacle of our remarkable general elections, are all assets for India's civic nationalism."

"Together with a fractious and competitive political culture, sustained by the proactive framework of the Constitution, they have made of India a rare example of the successful management of diversity in the developing world," Tharoor writes in "The Battle of Belonging - On Nationalism, Patriotism, And What It Means To Be An Indian" (Aleph).

"It is time to reaffirm the patriotic 'idea of India' enshrined by our Constitution, in order to build a New India that will cherish and uplift each and every one of us. This requires a conscious effort to defend the besieged institutions of civil nationalism, restore their autonomy and ensure their effectiveness," he writes.

Towards this, "we will need to separate the powers and roles of the legislature, the judiciary and the executive to ensure that the first two do not become mere rubber stamps for the third", Tharoor states, harkening back to his book "India Shashtra" in which he had advocated a Presidential form of government "with a clear separation powers, in order to ensure efficiency and democracy".

Elected chief executives at all levels, from village heads up to the President, would "have the mandate, the authority and the resources to deliver

solutions in their respective areas, to be accountable to independent elected legislatures, and an autonomous judiciary, and to face voters at the end of fixed terms", he writes.

The existence of such multiple power centres "would ensure decentralisation and prevent the emergence of a hyper-nationalist strongman, while celebrating patriotism and the best features of civic nationalism at all levels", Tharoor maintains, even as he admits he is "conscious of how little support there is in India's political class for a presidential system".

Even so, Indianness is constantly being remade "in a continuous process of deliberation and democratic discourse, a process that must continue (and that civic nationalism permits and encourages) in perpetuity", he asserts, adding: "To defend and strengthen our civic nationalism, with its unique overlay of everything that is good and valuable about India, we will also need to undertake a careful retelling of modern Indian history

that is comprehensive, embraces all experiences, and refuses to see the past through the prism of any one faith."

Recalling that Swami Vivekananda spoke of the religion professed by the majority in this country, Hinduism, as "one that does not merely tolerate other faiths but accepts them as they are", Tharoor writes that this acceptance of difference has been "the key to our country's survival, making...unity in diversity the most hallowed of independent India's self-defining slogans. It is that unity we seek, not uniformity; it is consensus we must pursue, not conformity".

Noting that this requires a "re-armed liberalism, with a mass movement for the restoration of our civic nationalism" the author writes that the "battle of belonging in our country is a battle between two ideas -- the idea of a civic nationhood of pluralism and institutions that protect our diversity and individual freedoms, pitted against the ethno-religious nationalism of the Hindu

rashtira".

To effectively wage this battle, Indian liberalism "needs new ideas, precepts, narratives and heroes. It must be rooted in genuine patriotism and refuse to cede ground to the Hindutva bakths on nationalism".

"It also needs a wide social coalition as Gandhiji was able to build for his nationalism" and probably also needs to "move out of the Khan Market circles so beloved of the Lutyens elite, to the mohallas, the jhuggi-jhopris, the rural hamlets, and the streets of India".

It will also have to be ensured that the South is not "provoked into political disgruntlement by Hindu chauvinism, financial inequity or centralised government. We must once again help Muslims and other minorities enjoy the assurance that they are integral parts of the Indian nationalist narrative. Only by maintaining civic nationalism, and its commitment, through liberal constitutionalism, to a democratic and pluralistic ethos, can New India be able to fulfil the aspirations of all Indians", Tharoor contends.

If India is to "reclaim its soul", he writes, "the urgent national challenge is to restore, empower, and renew the very institutions of civil nationalism that the BJP has commandeered and weakened. These are the institutions that can best protect the minorities and the marginalised, that protect free speech and the expression of unfashionable opinions, that elevate principles and values above the interests of politicians in power, that offer shelter and aid to the vulnerable, and so create the habits and conventions that make democracy the safest of political systems for ordinary people to live under".

Such an India "can not only survive but thrive, if we reassert and rebuild the civic nationalism in which our Constitutions embeds it. We must remain faithful to our founding values of the twentieth century if we are to conquer the looming challenges of the twenty-first", Tharoor concludes, but after a caveat: "Only then will we be able to look a questioner in the eye and say with upright stance and uplifted gaze: 'This is my nation. I am proud to say that I am an Indian!'"

Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno



Make this festive season magical for children around you!

MISSED CALL DO, KAHANI SUNO

With schools remaining closed for nearly seven months due to Covid-19 pandemic, Bengaluru-based not-for-profit Children Book publishing house 'Pratham Books' has relaunched its famous 'Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno!' programme.

With the help of Cognizant Foundation's support the education programme will enable access to quality education to the students from underserved communities. The foundation has adopted Scholarship for higher education, Digital learning, STEM and Vocational Technical education as its focus areas in Education.

"Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno" programme is aimed to help children to listen to delightful stories in Kannada, English, Marathi and Hindi languages.

Speaking to IANS, Pratham Book's Priya Desai said that listeners can give a missed call -- which is for free -- and receive a call-back, where they can select the language of their choice and the age group of the child, and then listen to an audio story.

"They can even call again and listen to new stories every time! There are hundreds of audio stories that children can enjoy listening to, as schools remain closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic," Desai added.

"Two stories of four to six minutes each will be played to entertain you. That's what 'Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno' is all about," she explained.

"Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno! saw a tremendous response when the Covid-19 lockdown began, showing that it did indeed help to keep children engaged while they were stuck at home."

"There was tremendous traction for the campaign, where over 1.6 lakh children listened to 3.6 lakh stories across India during the months of April, May and June 2020," the CEO Pratham Books Himanshu Giri said.

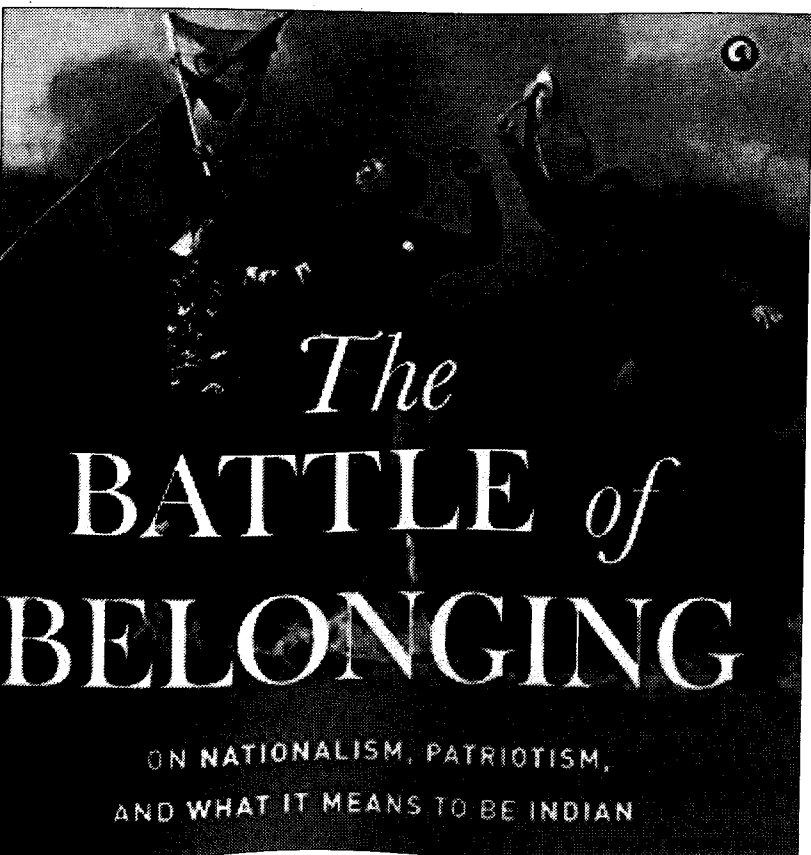
"Cognizant Foundation is proud to have supported an initiative that brings the time-tested benefits and delights of stories to today's children. The initiative is a timely and effective way to help children not only relax and deal with the stress of being constrained by the pandemic, but also unlock new experiences, reflect and improve their understanding of language and the world around them," Rajashree Natarajan, CEO, Cognizant Foundation stated in a statement.

Giri further added that the audio stories on offer deal with a diverse range of subjects that explore concepts of science, technology, maths, wildlife and biodiversity, family, friendships, life skills and more.

"Children are exposed to many new ideas through these stories that help them engage with the world around them with curiosity, imagination and empathy. These stories will help foster listening skills, build vocabulary, and develop an enthusiasm for reading," he claimed.

According to the statement the "Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno! saw a tremendous response when the Covid-19 lockdown began, where over 1.6 lakh children listened to 3.6 lakh stories across India during the months of April, May and June 2020, Ashowing that it did indeed help to keep children engaged while they were stuck at home."

The missed call can be given to 08068264448 to listen to the delightful stories from Pratham Books. (IANS)



"Americans are so enamored of equality that they would rather be equal in slavery than unequal in freedom."

--- Bernadette Devlin

The Shillong Times

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India with Biden

THE US has, with considerable strain, 'decided' on having a Biden presidency for the next four years. Donald Trump, though, is lurking in the shadows. This could yet be a fait accompli. Trump squandered whatever goodwill he had by his whimsical and aggressive postures, which were not in tune with the styles of democracy. He is paying a price for his failure to gauge public mood and for his casual approach to the Covid-19 pandemic that hurt Americans badly. India heaved a sigh of relief by Sunday as Joe Biden has come out with a re-tweet in which he spoke highly of the good relations the US sought to maintain with India; principally referring to the Barack Obama period when things changed for the better. That was a Biden season too as Vice President. Biden termed the growing ties between his country and India as a "defining relationship of the 21st Century." The 20th Century for most part was different. Starting with the Nehru era up until 1990, India remained under Soviet influence and NAM was essentially a Socialist bloc with an Islamic twist too. The 1990s saw a turnaround, also after the end of the Cold War and disintegration of USSR. The ties between US and India are improving though Pakistan remains a fly in the ointment. The US is resolved to take strong action against terrorism. In relation to China too, what matters most for a President are American interests. China's attempts to control the waves will continue to be resisted by the US. The Quad arrangement would carry forward involving India, Japan, Australia and the US.

As for immigration, Biden has promised to review the H-1B visa policy; good for India. Add to this, the Kamala Harris factor. Biden calculated well when he took her as his running mate. This helped him harness the anger of the Blacks against Trump into votes for him from this prominent segment of the population; and by way of a bonus, he got sizeable support from the American Indians via the 'Kamala' factor. Her mixed parentage is reassurance to both Indians and Africans. There, though, will be too little of the personal when it comes to framing of policies. Republicans are aggressive in foreign policy matters, as was also evident in Afghanistan and Iraq during the Bush Junior season, or with Ronald Reagan vis-a-vis Iran. Yet, Trump did not shake the world. Democrats are seen as doves of peace; and Biden has stated global peace is his priority. It's time now to watch out how his presidency shapes up.

MDA Govt aiming to strike two birds with one stone

By HH Mohrmen

It looks like the elections to the Bihar State Assembly will largely be decided by the votes of young electors. It is now crystal clear that unemployment is not only a state issue but it is a national problem and it is compounded by government not giving due attention to this vital issue. Governments at both the national and the state level need pay more attention to this issue not only to enable young people to be gainfully employed, but more importantly to help build the economy of the country.

In the current election to the Bihar State Assembly, 24% of the voters are in the age group of 18 to 29 years and this includes the 5,79,035 first-time voters in the age group of 18 to 19 years. Studies show that this in fact does not represent the correct number because most of the eligible new voters were not able to enrol themselves due to the lockdown and the disruption of the electoral process due to the coronavirus pandemic. In spite of that, job creation became a major factor in the elections and the two major contenders in the battle for Patna compete, among themselves to woo the young voters.

Political parties on both sides of the spectrum recognise the fact that the young population has now become an important constituent in the election. Tejashwi Yadav the RJD leader was the first to promise 10 lakh government jobs if the grand alliance is voted to power. Not to be left behind the BJP too which initially criticised the RJD of promising voters the moon, also followed suit in the later part of the campaign and promised to generate 19 lakhs jobs if voted to power. The BJP and its alliance in the centre will do itself a favour if it gives more importance to job creation sooner than later.

At the state level many regional political parties in Meghalaya still do not see job creation beyond government services. Hence very recently the UDP and the KHNAM, rather than coming up with ideas of how to create jobs, instead demanded for extension of eligible age for applicants to apply for government jobs. The question is how many unemployed youths do we have in the state and how many of them can be accommodated in government services? The regional parties should get real and do themselves a favour by working hard to explore avenues which will

help create more jobs for the young population in the state.

The need of the hour is to help create employment beyond government jobs; in this regard it can be said that the NPP-led government is at least moving in the right direction by launching a program named Promotion and Incubation of Market-driven Enterprise or PRIME-Hub. 37 percent of the little less than 30 lakh population of the state is in the age group of 15-34 years. Of the 29.7 lakhs population of the state 80 percent live in the rural areas and depend on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihoods, so these are very important features to consider while coming up with a policy to create jobs.

Building on the institution created by the previous MUA government the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) and Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE), the new government's approach to job creation is to first build an ecosystem for social and economic growth in the state. Considering the fact that (Medium Small and Micro Enterprise (MSMEs) are the backbone of economic growth and job creation, the government ushered in the Meghalaya Entrepreneurship Promotion Strategy 2020-25. Small states like Meghalaya can only accommodate small businesses and the new approach is based on the existing strengths of people which include organic agriculture, horticulture products, nature and eco tourism, indigenous handloom, handicrafts and pottery and of course the social capital of the respective communities that is already very strong.

The objective of establishing institutions like MBDA, MIE is to change the development narrative in the state from subsidy-based, government-program driven approach to credit-linked enterprise through advocacy and IEC campaign. From experience one can say that this is a very challenging task because the grant-culture and subsidy-based system has engulfed the whole development ecosystem in the state. Consider this fact that in some cases people even expected to be paid to attend the concept seeding of the project or for that matter any government awareness program.

The other unique approach in the MBDA

development model is to explore avenues of convergence across development departments. A case in point is horticulture department is promoting growing of fruits and vegetables but value addition and marketing of the produce was never in the plan. Marketing and adding value to the produce is the responsibility of the Industries department, but is there any opportunity of convergence amongst the departments?

Trying to ensure that departments converge rather than operate in silos when the goal is the same is still a challenging task. The approach of the different departments is to execute the job by spending the funds sanctioned and to send the report after the job is done. Monitoring the impact of the project is almost nil; neither is there any mechanism to measure how much the project has impacted the intended beneficiaries and there is almost no follow up to see whether the goal of the project is achieved. The challenge of convergence is also the question of which of the participating departments involved in the project get the credit after the project is executed. This is often the bone of contention when two or more departments engage in the same project, but it is really important who gets the credit as long as the goal is achieved?

PRIME Hub is an approach which intends to guide entrepreneurship development in the state and changing the mindset of the youths by making entrepreneurship a preferred career choice for them. This approach also takes into consideration the importance of the four pillars to build an enterprise which include credit, technology, skills and markets. The earlier approach did not give due importance to the pillars and how they are linked to each other in entrepreneurship development. An entrepreneur may have the skills, the required technology and even a ready market but if one cannot access credit then it becomes a non-starter.

As per the document, entrepreneurs are being divided into three segments namely, Startup Entrepreneurs, Nano Entrepreneurs and Livelihood Entrepreneurs. Livelihood entrepreneurship is a segment at the local level such as agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, apiculture etc., that are feeders to the start-ups and the effort is to increase the productivity.

The initial approach is to promote producer groups (PG) and clustering of villages based on the common produce or activity of the people in the area.

The attempt is also to support Nano entrepreneurs at the local level which could be regular, non-innovation or imitation based producers that employ two or more people. The third segment is a Startup entrepreneur who innovates or adds value to the produce and employs more than 20 people. The goal is to set up 50 PRIME Hubs at the District Headquarters and Blocks; support 250 Startup entrepreneurs, 7000 Nano entrepreneurs and 22,000 livelihood entrepreneurs in the span of five years from 2020 to 2025.

This looks like a holistic approach to development because it takes into consideration all development projects and agencies working in the state. The attempt is not only to encourage government departments to work on a convergence mode, but to also consolidate other government projects and program like Meghalaya Livelihood and Access to Market Project (Megha-LAMP), 1719 teams and the National Rural Livelihood Mission to work together. M-LAMP's main focus is supply chain and enterprise development, and rural finance by introducing Integrated Village Cooperative Society (IVCS) which help improve financial inclusion and rural folk access to financial services.

But this project will also be partially successful if the SHGs promoted under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) by Meghalaya State Rural Livelihood Society (MSRLS) across the state are not included. The service of 1719 team should also be used to improve transport of goods from the villages. Then there is also the Piggery Mission which was recently launched hence convergence of all the departments or agencies which work for job creation or uplift of rural economy is of utmost importance.

This is the first time that the state government has taken a comprehensive approach to economic development where all the actors in development are incorporated. Hopefully the plan will not only create the much needed jobs for the young people of the state but it will also ultimately lead to economic development of the state.

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Knotty issues in House privilege move against Arnab Conflict between democracy and imperialistic mindset

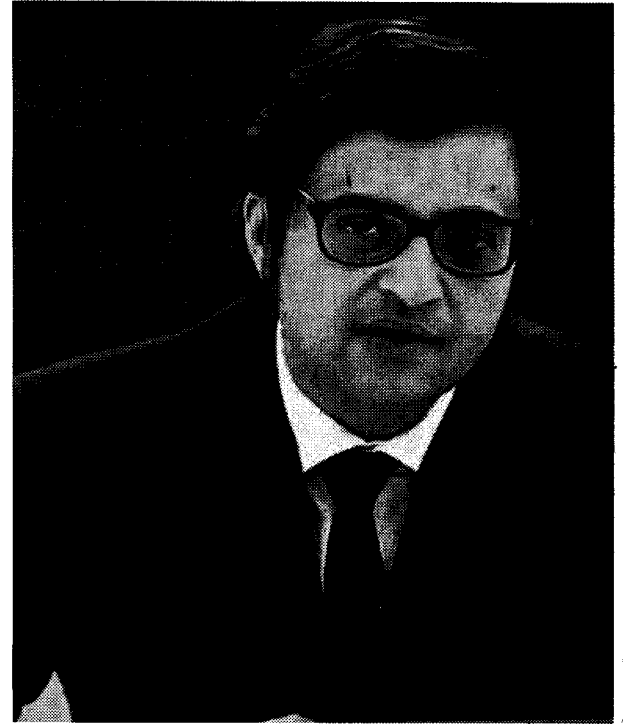
By K Raveendran

The contempt of court notice sent by the Supreme Court to the Secretary of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly for sending a letter to Republic TV editor in chief Arnab Goswami, 'intimidating' him for approaching the court against the privilege notice issued by the state assembly has a few unexplored angles.

The Vidhan Sabha secretary's case is that the proceedings in the house are confidential and unless the Speaker permits, the privilege notice (served on Arnab Goswami) cannot be used in a court of law as there are various

positions right now certainly does not deserve such reverence.

Many of our elected representatives, at different levels, are thugs and criminals and they cannot be equated with the more respectable among them, who deserve respect. But even in their case, imperialist practices and salutations are jarring to the traditions of true democracy, where 'we the people' are the masters and everyone else a servant. The assembly officer needs to be given a refresher course on parliamentary democracy, of which Fourth Estate is an essential part.



prohibitions in force.

The court was furious that a responsible officer of the assembly dared to prevent someone from approaching the court, which it said was unprecedented. It said no authority in the country can penalise somebody for coming to the court, which is a fundamental right granted to every single person under Article 32 of the Constitution.

"There is no doubt that if a citizen of India is deterred in any way from moving the court in exercise of his right under Article 32, it would amount to serious

A much-awaited move to debar criminals from contesting elections has not made any material progress, except for mechanical response from contestants to queries of the Election Commission, which are often incomplete, inaccurate and often meant to mislead.

An amicus curiae's report in connection with a PIL in the Supreme Court recently threw light on the shocking state of affairs. A whopping 2,556 sitting MLAs and MPs from 22 states have criminal cases pending against them. If former MPs and MLAs from these states are also included, the number rises

The assembly officer needs to be given a refresher course on parliamentary democracy, of which Fourth Estate is an essential part.

interference in the administration of justice in the country", the order said.

Chief Justice S A Bobde, who issued the order, pointed out that there was only one instance of someone having been prevented from approaching the court. That happened in the 1940s, when a letter to the court from a prisoner was withheld by the jail superintendent, for which the officer was issued a contempt of court notice by the chief justice of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court.

One of the offences cited by the assembly official against Arnab Goswami, among many others, is that he referred to the chief minister, other ministers and officials by their names, without the salutation of 'honourable'.

While it is true that the archaic practice is still prevalent as far as official procedures go, the assembly official must be living in a fool's paradise to expect everyone else, including members of the media to address these people with the honorific. The original concept of a leader or a legislator would have warranted such respect to the elected representatives, but going by the calibre of people occupying those

to almost double. In nearly 200 cases, the offences involving these elected representatives are the ones punishable with life imprisonment.

There is clearly a void in the law relating to the problem, but the responsibility of addressing it gets tossed between the executive, judiciary and the Election Commission.

A Supreme Court judgment in this regard had called for a strong new law by parliament to make it mandatory for political parties to revoke membership of persons against whom charges are framed in heinous and grievous offences and not to field such persons in elections.

But the court refused to go beyond making such a recommendation, citing the 'Lakshman Rekha' that exists between the powers and authority of the executive, legislature and the judiciary. It is a matter of great irony that persons charged for an offence punishable with imprisonment for five years or more are liable to be declared as disqualified and yet such people remain lawmakers who then control civil servants and other government machinery. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Umroi idle for many reasons

Editor, Apropos "Why is Umroi Airport idle?" by P Sunn (ST Nov 6, 2020), the answer is very short and precise. It should be mentioned that Umroi Airport was built in the 70's when the era of Dakota, Fokker seemed to have welcomed the new big aircraft which were no longer engine propelled but flown by jet engines. Why did the Civil Aviation authorities not have enough far sightedness to plan the airport so that it would also meet the needs of these new powerful machines on the sky? If that has been paid heed to, the DGCA need not have ordered the slicing of one hillock at Umroi. Sadly even when one hillock was sliced the finding was not to their liking. Then the second hillock and the third hillock were grounded but still the required line of sight, very vital in landing, was not achieved. There was a rumour too that the National Highway may be shifted. This was 2019, the year of the highly defined

G.P.S data available and to arrive at this sad state of affairs is not in good taste at all.

Finally the plan was abandoned and the new jets would never land at Umroi. And what's more serious is that Umroi Airport was branded as third category. It is the aviation terminology which I believe the Transport Minister is in a better position to explain to our prospective flyers who encounter hardships in proceeding to Borjhar. If the clarification is not forthcoming, one could consult Google.

Yours etc.,
Manbha Diengdoh,
Via email

Reckless driving

Editor, I would like to bring to the notice of all the concerned, that nowadays countless lives are lost due to reckless driving especially by truck drivers who do not seem to care about other smaller vehicles driving on the same road. I request the drivers to please drive

cautiously and I also urge the Government of Meghalaya to devise a policy or mechanism to stop this menace so as to save many more lives in the future.

Yours etc.,
Joseph Lyngkholi,
Via email

Why appropriate Kamala Harris?

Editor, Interpreting the victory of Kamala Harris in the US Vice-presidential race as "triumph of an Indian," as being done by a section of national media, is bizarre to say the least. At best Harris has some Indian blood in her vein courtesy her mother but neither is Harris an Indian citizen and her father is Jamaican. Hence she is as much "Jamaican" as she is "Indian" (from her mother's side).

Kamala Harris moreover vocally identifies herself as African-American with the US media to the electorate perceiving her as a representative of Black only; if ethnicity is taken in

consideration at all. Still if Kamala Harris is projected as an "Indian" by national media, then indirectly it provides a moral boost to the who's who of the BJP when they religiously refer to Sonia Gandhi as "Italian" despite her full-fledged Indian citizenship! Realities on the ground should not yield place to silly emotions.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Via email

Paying peanuts for skilled jobs

Editor, I draw your kind attention to some of the Job ads appearing in your esteemed daily where the employers are offering salaries as low as Rs 6000/monthly for full-time engagement to candidates possessing general skills in computer with specialisation in specific areas like Tally, Internet, Web management etc. To me this meager salary offer is unacceptable simply because it violates the minimum wages promulgated by the Meghalaya Government. To the best of

my knowledge, the current minimum wage (daily) for a skilled employee should be Rs 375 per day. That works out to a monthly salary of Rs 11,250 as minimum salary for a skilled worker. How any firm can deny the minimum wages is beyond my comprehension. It is quite understandable that because of the economic slowdown due to Coronavirus, some employers might find it difficult to pay the legitimate salary, but in no way should it be slashed to half of the prescribed rate. Perhaps due to lack of job opportunities there will be many takers of the low pay. However, all employers should honour the rules and orders of the government.

Yours etc.,
Firstborn Pakyentein,
Via email

Baffling reaction to Biden's victory

Editor, The election of gentleman Joe Biden as the

President elect of the USA who will bring back decency and dignity to American politics should delight all who have been cringing each time Donald Trump utters his profanities to put down opponents. Sadly, there is a section of fundamentalists in this state and other neighbouring states too who have been praying hard for Trump the misogynist who has polarized America to return to the White House. This is baffling because the same set of people accuse Prime Minister Modi and his government of being right wing fundamentalists. We cannot have it both ways. We have to renounce religious fundamentalism or lose the right to call ourselves a democracy. Religion should not define governance in a democracy, especially in the USA and India - two countries with diverse population groups and religious persuasions.

Yours etc.,
Nadia Singh,
Via email

"Slavery has never been abolished from America's way of thinking."

— Nina Simone

The Shillong Times

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ADCS: Boon or bane

AT last some straight-talking from Congress legislator, David Nongrum. The MLA has stated what many have been asking for a very long time that the autonomous district councils (ADCs) should be abolished. He has pointed out that these Councils have become redundant after Meghalaya attained statehood, which is a fact. Those leading the state at the time of its creation did not have the foresight or political will to do away with the ADCs for populist reasons. The Councils have long been recognised as the second tier legislature rather than institutions to uphold tribal rights and privileges. Quite a number of failed MLAs bide their time for the next state assembly elections by entering the district councils and enjoying the perks of office there and also asserting their populist agenda.

Perhaps the one thing that keeps the ADCs busy is the issuance of trading license which also gives them the handle to put pressure on non-tribal traders and professionals working in the state. This particular department headed by the Executive Member (Trade) does not work as a matter of course. There is much arm twisting on those applying for trade licenses, many of whom have to wait for years. These traders in the meanwhile have to operate without this piece of document and are then harassed by pressure and interest groups that take it upon themselves to check the trade licenses of business establishments from time to time. These traders are then coerced to shut down their businesses or pay up even if they are permanent residents of Meghalaya and have run the same business for the past several years.

Other than the business of issuing trading licenses very little is heard by way of development programmes because there are limited funds and much of the funds go into payment of salaries.

The revenue model of the ADCs is faulty. They have more staff than required. Those drawing their salaries from the Councils have been appointed not because they are needed but for political expediency. How else will the Garo Hills District Council have over 1700 employees? Does it even need so many people to work for it when the outcomes are not visible? Modern institutions run on the principle of outputs, outcomes and impact. Impacts can be measured by strictly monitoring and evaluating (M&E) the work of an institution. But such monitoring has to be done by an independent agency which has no vested interests.

Each time the Councils organise an event of some significance the stench of corruption is not far behind. The Monolith Festival landed in misuse of Council funds and ended becoming a one-time event. It is time for the central government that funds these Councils to take stock of the situation and recommend strict measures or their disbandment. Institutions that do not deliver have no business to keep draining the public exchequer.

A history teacher once skipped the normal lesson to tell us, "Learn history but also learn from history. Don't just study history. Make history. Be the first doctor, engineer, professor, professional sportsperson, professional musician and so on from your locality or village." The pep talk has quite a lasting impact.

The US election 2020 is historic. Joseph Robinette Biden Jr better known as Joe Biden is on his way to the White House displacing the incumbent president Donald Trump. By conquering the state of his birth, Pennsylvania Biden comfortably crossed the 270 Electoral College votes to secure the presidency. In January the two-term former 47th Vice-President will be the 46th president of the United States of America. In terms of being historic the ex-senator for Delaware, Senator for 36 years will be the oldest President of the world's most powerful country. He has repeated the rare feat (Bill Clinton was the only other when he defeated George H.W. Bush in 1992) of sending a sitting president packing after one term. The Democrat who braved personal losses (death of wife, daughter and son) had to withdraw from the race of presidency twice, in 1988 and 2008. To make such a stunning comeback at 77 is nothing short of remarkable. Enviously he has polled the highest votes in history (74 million to Trump's 70 million according to the latest information). Hats off!

As opposed to Trump who is viewed as a hardliner, a symbol of white supremacy, a religious fanatic, an exclusive politician, Biden on the other hand is a moderate, an inclusive personality who stands for all Americans, Whites, Blacks, African, Asian and Latino origins, LGBTs. In his victory speech he presented himself as the unifier and the healer. His personal religious beliefs did not make him look down on others with a different outlook. He was banned by the Catholic Church from receiving Holy Communion on the ground that he supports abortion although he declared that while he personally believes that life begins at birth he respects those who believe otherwise. With Biden's win, America is moving back to sanity. Clearly voters have had enough. The four years of polarisation, rhetoric and undermining democracy were more than enough to oust the arrogant Trump. Indeed Trump's casual attitude to Coronavirus extracted a heavy price. His initial proclamation that the 'Chinese virus' would disappear like magic proved

From USA to India and Meghalaya

By Albert Thyrsiang

disastrous as very quickly his country jumped every country in term of cases and deaths. After four years his promised health policy is still at the conceptual stage. The voters punished him for his failure on healthcare front particularly the catastrophic fight against COVID-19. Americans have learned their lessons. His catchy slogan 'make America great again' was nothing more than a catchword. During the four year tenure America was rapidly declining economically and otherwise. Fortunately the voters of the 50 states have corrected it.

In India when will we see reason? When will we learn our lessons? When will we reject religious polarisation and bigotry? When will we cast off majoritarianism? When will we embrace inclusiveness, unity and pluralism? When will we discard dangerous policies of the present regime? When will we be convinced that we were taken for a ride by the slogans of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas', 'Make in India', 'Minimum government maximum governance'? When will we discard muscular nationalism? When will we see the actions that threaten our democracy? When will we reject calls to vote on the basis of religion and caste? When will we focus on jobs, employment, education, healthcare, infrastructure, the economy and development? When will our elections be performance and achievement based? It is scary that in 2024 Ram temple in Ayodhya will override everything else. The Americans have learnt their lessons in four years. Will we not learn ours in ten years? Will we prevent history from repeating itself?

The history scripted by the U.S. Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris is even more impressive. A national daily has listed her many 'firsts'. A first time Senator, she is the first woman, first Black and first Indian-American to be elected as Vice president of the United States. She is one of only three Asian Americans in the Senate and she's the first Indian-American ever to serve in the chamber besides being the first woman and first African-American and Indian-origin person to be the district attorney for San Francisco. Born to two immigrant parents— a Black Jamaican father and an Indian mother and called the "female Obama" Ms. Harris is the only third woman to contest the Vice-presidency. In her victory speech the lady with roots from

Chennai said she will not be the last to occupy the office of the Vice-President.

It is surprising that the land of possibilities, as it is often acknowledged, is able to elect a woman Vice-President only in 2020. Since 1776 (when America became independent) there has never been a woman Vice President. It took 244 years to have one. How long will be the wait to see a lady President? The records of third world countries should put USA to shame. Way back in 1960 Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) had the first woman Prime Minister, In 1966 Indira Gandhi was India's Prime Minister. Some countries which have produced female heads of state/heads of government much before the US are: 1974 Argentina, 1976 Central African Republic, 1979 UK, 1980 Bolivia, 1980 Portugal, 1981 Norway. 1992 the Philippines, 1996 Bangladesh, 1996 Pakistan, 1996 Iceland. Currently modern democratic countries like Germany, New Zealand, Croatia have women Prime Ministers. The US is perhaps conservative to granting equality as women's right to vote was achieved after more than half a century of struggle to finally become a reality in 2020.

For our benefit let us return to India. Not only the 1.3 million Indian-American voters who played crucial roles in key battleground states like Pennsylvania to ensure Ms Harris' and her boss's victory but the whole of India is celebrating her greatest achievement. While we in India rejoice and pride ourselves whenever individuals of Indian origin abroad make a name for themselves we need to reflect on our own records. In 2004, unruly and uncivilised opposition and protests of patriots' forced Sonia Gandhi to relinquish the Prime Minister's chair in spite of being a constitutionally eligible candidate as the Supreme Court had upheld her citizenship. A lady MP threatened to tonsure her hair in protest if the then President of the Indian National Congress was invited to be sworn in. Even today the wife of a former Prime Minister is subjected to disrespectful comments, ridicule and even character assassination. She has to deal with being called a foreigner and an Italian. The hate extends to her son and daughter for no reason.

We might have had women occupying the office of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Deputy Rajya Sabha Chair Person, Chief Minister et al but political empowerment of women is still a long way away in the country. Right

from the highest decision making body, the parliament to the grass root institution, the Panchayati Raj men dominate unchallenged. The current Lok Sabha has the highest number of women representatives since independence but they number only 78 accounting for a mere 14.39% of the total strength. In the Rajya Sabha out of 242 members only 25 are women. In March 2019 a report revealed that only 9% of MLAs and MPs were women. The Women's Reservation Bill that proposes to reserve 1/3rd of all seats in the Lower house of Parliament and in all state Legislative Assemblies for women will probably never see the light of day as men cling to their power. Though the Rajya Sabha passed the bill in 2010 the Lok Sabha has never taken it up. Apart from conservative outlook abominable crimes against women are the order of the day. Political parties continue to allot tickets to candidates accused of crimes against women.

The Northeast is seen as progressive corner of the country but women are almost kept out of political representation. In all the states in the region there is massive participation of women voters but their representation is plausible. This column is too limited to prove the point with facts and figures.

Matrilineal Meghalaya is no better. We have hardly any women (three) in the Legislative Assembly. In the ADCs, KHADC has two women, JHADC nil and GHADC has one to show. In the traditional institutions women are still barred from being members of the Dorbar Syiem (Councils of traditional chiefs). Only recently the courts permitted women to participate in the Dorbar Shnong (Village council). In Garo Hills though Nokmas are women the actual work is mostly done by a male, in most cases by the son in law (chawari). Something is drastically wrong which needs attention, debate and deliberation to rectify the imbalance particularly in the political sphere. Of course, rape and sexual assaults are such a common occurrence that someone branded the state the 'Abode of Crime against Women'.

The US election results are fascinating but are we propelled to see the implications? Email: thalbert@rediffmail.com

Bihar poll campaign challenges the leadership quality of Modi

Results on November 10 may herald transition to younger leaders

By Arun Srivastava

Bihar has voted decisively. As the elections in Bihar set the national agenda, provide an insight into the future politics, obviously the people especially the pollsters and experts prefer to keep a sharp eye on the developments and the results. Usually the elections are the occasions for diagnosis and prescription, what's wrong, what can right it, clearly a keen debate has surfaced in the political circle about the nature, implication and possible outcome of the result.

The defeat of Nitish Kumar as projected in the exit polls is being viewed as the end of political era of triumvirate; Lalu Yadav, Ram Vilas Paswan and Nitish Kumar, the original players of the Mandal politics. But the likely defeat of NDA has put the entire BJP leadership in a precarious situation. The main challenge before them is to how to salvage the situation.

With the exit polls predicting the defeat of the NDA, the BJP leadership has launched a campaign to protect the image, charisma and political stature of their leader Narendra Modi. His leadership quality has been at stake. Though the NDA and especially BJP leadership from the beginning has made it clear that the election would be fought under the leadership of Nitish Kumar, the reality has been the election virtually turned out to be a referendum on the performance of Modi.

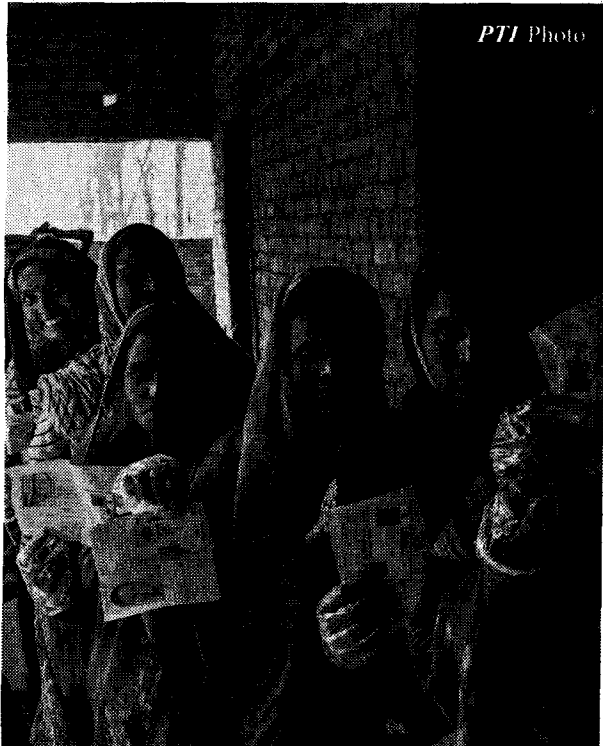
The BJP leadership was quite hopeful that with falling popularity of Nitish, pro-

position alliance came to power, underlining the need for order in the state for development. He underscored that he "needs" a Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in the state to ensure development. But these machinations failed to work.

The exit poll results nevertheless send the message that this gamble of the BJP leadership has miserably failed. Modi has proved to be a non-starter. His charisma did not work. He failed to reach out to the people. Now with the intention to bail Modi out of the crisis and save his image from being maligned an all-out tirade has been launched against Nitish to hold him responsible for the miserable defeat. The party has been trying to convince the people that the image and charisma of Modi was not at all at stake. He merely campaigned. But the fact is known to people of Bihar.

It is really a matter of concern for Modi and his party men. What has been incongruous is the people were reluctant to subscribe to Modi's assertion "better infrastructure" and "rule of law" were imperative for the social and economic prosperity of Bihar. He claimed that since 2005 in the state, change has been ushered in and continuance of the "double-engine" government (the NDA at the Centre as well as in the state) was needed to take the process forward.

The infighting within the NDA has also emerged in the form of some BJP leaders claiming that absence of



PTI Photo

jection of Modi as the public face of the NDA would help the party reclaim its lost glory. In an unprecedented manner the prime minister of India addressed not less than 14 public meetings in the state. This is a pointer to the seriousness and importance of the election. It was none else but Modi who chalked and defined the agenda to be raised during the election. In his initial meetings he raised the issue of brining development to the state, but once he came to know that it was not working he shifted to maligning the image of Tejashvi by calling him the heir of Jungle Raj. After this issue also failed to catch the imagination of the common Biharis, who had suffered immensely during the pandemic, he took a leaf out of his old religious and nationalism epic. Modi also used the old slogan of Lalu and Nitish to create a Naya Bihar.

Modi and Nitish also used the mechanism of emotional blackmailing of Biharis. While just a day ahead of the last phase of polls, Nitish announced that the ongoing polls would be his last brush with electoral politics, Modi in a last-ditch effort wrote a letter addressed to a common Biharis seeking to invoke the fear of 'jungle raj' if the Op-

a charismatic Dalit leader cost the party. One more development was clearly visible in this election and it was the averseness of the OBC and EBC castes towards the NDA, especially towards Modi and Nitish. Though Nitish tried to identify himself with the EBC and in his endeavour also created a new class of mahadalits, these people refrained from responding to their overtures.

If the exit poll results are really any indicator then it can be construed that dalit voters threw their weight behind Chirag Paswan, son of dalit leader Ram Vilas Paswan. Dalits of Bihar who constitute nearly 16 per cent of the population preferred to support Tejashvi and his RJD though Chirag Paswan had staked claim to his father's political legacy. No doubt he has gained a certain amount of acceptability among the Dusadh, this is not enough to establish him as the dalit leader.

The BJP leadership nursed the hope that the Dalits would respond to the appeal of Modi and accept his argument that under the RJD government their rights would be denied, it failed to happen. The younger generation of dalits, like the youths of other castes, preferred to rally behind Tejashvi. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

NH 44 in shambles

Editor,
Right now the stretch from Umroi to Jowai then to Umkiang is no longer motorable in its true sense. Suggestions and prayers to the Government to at least save our roads and highways fell on deaf ears because it is too heavily mired in the coal controversy and the Rs 399 crore expenditure for Covid-19. So everything is going awry. These things happen as cultures are hungry. Suggestive ideas with support of the law to check overloading are discarded. And what happened to the two major bridges connecting Umroi and Mawryngkneng is shameful, considering that the highway is only 9 years old with modern advanced technological survey made possible by satellite GPS. Look at our Dawki Bridge built in 1931 by the Damodar Construction Work under the supervision of the British.

There was no GPS nor seismic nor meteorological parameters then but it is still as good as new

So what developed as the major cracks on the two bridges is not excusable especially when only two minor tremors of few seconds shook the state recently. The cracks obviously are the result of overloaded coal trucks.

What is very grave is the present health of our reservoir dam cum bridge. As a matter of fact reservoir dams are relieved of bridge duty as the engine vibration of trucks may be resonating with the natural frequency of the dam. The very fact that this valuable asset would be tortured for many days to come is very worrying indeed! And Mawlai bridge, Nongthymmai (Jingkieng) and the devil's elbow bridge at Wah Demthring may not withstand these slow moving overloaded monsters.

Unless the Government of the day diverts the trucks via the east-west corridor

and maintains this status quo until Umkiang, Jowai, Mawryngkneng get their pucca Highway, believe me the worst is yet to come.

Yours etc.,
Francis Suchiang,
Via email

District Councils need to be abolished

Editor,
It's sad to hear of the mis-governance and corruption taking place in the autonomous district councils of Meghalaya from one of government's own allies in recent times. Agreed ADCs were needed when Meghalaya was a part of Assam but why these councils exist post Meghalaya achieving statehood in 1972, remains a mystery. Apart from corruption and mismanagement they are also proving to be a liability as a Congress MLA recently pointed out. What special activities do these councils

perform which cannot be done by the state government? The Meghalaya Art and Culture Department and literary societies can very well look after the tradition and culture of the tribal people so why the need of another authority? Recall how Mizoram District Council was abolished when the state achieved statehood.

The District Councils have perpetually been under fund crunch ever since their inception. This fact was highlighted when the ADCs appraised the Finance Commission that the revenue collected is barely sufficient to carry out their day-to-day administrative activities and primary duties let alone developmental work. The question thus arises: when there is not enough revenue, why not wind up and let the state government take over as they do elsewhere in the country?

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission had recommended the abo-

lition of all the District Councils in Meghalaya on the grounds that the tribal majority themselves now head the governance of the state.

Today the Councils have indeed become a liability. They incur crores of rupees as administrative costs every month. In the absence of stringent anti-defection laws, it is not uncommon to see Council members indulging in topping games. Many a times, there have been clash of interests between the District Councils and the State Government. The recent instances of refusal/delay in issuance of trade licences to the non tribal community have also cast aspersions on their functioning - an issue that has been reported to the governor by few residents.

It is time the State does some due diligence and introspect whether these Councils are indeed required today. With the passage of time they seem outdated and irrelevant especially where there is a democratically elected people's

government.

Yours etc.,
Bhaskar D,
Via email

Hero at such a young age

Editor,
I was heartened to read of the courage of twelve-year-old Everbloom K Nongrum from Mawryngkneng village (East Khasi Hills). Not even the Jeevan Raksha Padak Award, 2019, he received, can reward him enough for his exemplary courage. To be so young and to have already saved two lives is spectacular karma. This child must be a very pure soul.

Yours etc.,
Deepta Majumdar
Via email

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"Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory."
— George S. Patton

The Shillong Times

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Unenviable Nitish

IN Bihar as well as in the eleven states that went for assembly by-polls, the BJP has performed well; this being the first round of elections after the start of the Covid pandemic some eight months ago. As the counting progressed in the 'Bihar Decides' exercise, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has taken a beating. His party that resolutely bargained and got as many seats as the BJP for the 243-member assembly polls would now settle for much less the size of the BJP strength in the new assembly.

Granted that the LJP of Chirag Paswan purposely ate into the JDU votes with a view to spiting the "arrogance" of Kumar, the palpable "disinterest" of wider sections of the electorate was there to see too. In power for 15 years, even as he did a reasonably good job as CM, people seemed tired of him. That he has understood this was evident from his public pronouncement that this would be his last election. The BJP emerged stronger and can be trusted to put Kumar on notice.

At this point, it must be noted that the opinion polls proved correct in that Prime Minister Modi is more popular in Bihar than Kumar. Many thought this would be an unlikely scenario. Modi's three rounds of campaign in Bihar might have helped the NDA alliance immensely and offset the anti-incumbency factor there.

The massive response that RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav got in his campaign rallies had a footnote; the crowds composed mainly of the two segments of the population, Yadavs and the Muslims — the RJD's core support base. This alerted the rest of the electorate. They suspected that a gang-up similar to the one in the past led by strongman Lalu Prasad might emerge again.

The Congress suffered heavily, and a part of the anti-BJP votes went to the Left in areas where they have a traditional foothold — spread over some 40 constituencies. The Left did well in about 20 of these constituencies; mostly the CPIML. Clearly, Rahul Gandhi could not make any impact even as he was willing to play second fiddle to the young regional leader Tejashwi. Notably, the Congress show in the 11 states that went to assembly by-polls too turned out to be miserable. Principally so in Madhya Pradesh, where the Scindia men rode back to the assembly as BJP nominees this time.

Significantly, gain or loss, this assembly election saw a new generation of leadership emerging in the state; they are bound to gain steam and call the shots in the future. Dynasties, though, are not good for democracy.

TO THE EDITOR

Has Covid fatigue set in?

Editor,
The Bihar elections seem to have violated all the rules of social distancing and masking. People crowd together and on Tuesday when the votes were being counted supporters of the respective parties were seen celebrating without masks. Only a few people wore masks; others couldn't be bothered. Even here in Shillong people seem to have become tired of following Covid protocols and are moving around nonchalantly without masks or wearing their masks below their mouths. One wonders whether they even care about hand washing and sanitizing. Testing in Meghalaya has come down after the Government announced that testing is payable. I wonder how that is going to affect the state and its people now that winter is approaching and we are told that Covid19 spike during winter. We have seen what's happening in the European countries which have gone in for a second lockdown. Do

we in Meghalaya want to arrive at a similar situation? But how much can government do if people don't have show basic responsibility in keeping the pandemic at bay?

This newspaper had written some months ago that following the Covid protocols requires behavioral change. As a psychologist I can say that behavioral change is the toughest change to bring about. Humans are hard wired to go by habit. The mask is a new thing and uncomfortable too. Many complain of suffocation when wearing masks. It is especially uncomfortable for those wearing spectacles. But Covid demands that we make sacrifices to protect ourselves and others from the virus. Conveying this to the person on the street is the biggest challenge. There is ample evidence that masking and social distancing as well as hand hygiene can keep Covid away but some people feel they are invincible. Earlier on the Dorbar Shnong had taken responsibility to enforce these Covid protocols but they too have now become weary. Besides, not all Dorbar Shnong are respon-

sive. There are localities like Nongmynsong and Pynthor where people are seen crowding and without masks. To expect police to be present to impose a fine on all violators is asking for the impossible. Can the religious institutions of all shades come forward to create a sustained awareness campaign on the importance of observing Covid protocols?

Yours etc.,
MS Sawknie,
Via email

Coal distracts from other issues

Editor,
Never has a government been so exposed at wheeling-dealing insofar as the issue of illegal mining and transportation of coal is concerned. From TUR a civil society organization to politicians and political parties, all are focused on the issue of coal to the exclusion of all other issues. I am not saying that this issue is not important. The coal scam has exposed shows the venality of the present government but there are other very serious issues

too that need to be addressed. Why has not a single MLA raised any questions in the Assembly on the extremely poor quality of the roads within Shillong city and its suburbs, not to speak of the rural areas? Meghalaya is now beginning to become like Nagaland or competing to get there. I am also amused that there are no pressure groups to take up the issue of bad roads or other matters that affect the general public. Since the BJP is the only Party that is raking up issues of corruption can it also take up the matter issue of bad roads with their Minister for Road Transport and Highways Mr Nitin Gadkari who we are told is a very responsive minister. However, there must be a way by which the funds for road construction and repair must be channelized in such a way that the state government will not be able to have a hand in the execution and the project must be monitored by an independent agency. Otherwise we will continue to have roads that last only six months and are washed away with the first rains, especially now that rainfall has become very heavy.

I recall when PA Sangma was the CM of Meghalaya he brought the Oriental Company to construct a few roads. These roads were excellent to drive on and lasted several years with any need for repairs. Of course he lost his job for doing what was right. The contractor lobby — a very powerful vested interest group in Meghalaya, paid money to topple the PA Sangma government. Today, Sangma's son is sitting in the chair he once occupied but he is yet to bring in any development that will stand out because of excellent execution. On the contrary he has to battle allegation after allegation almost on a daily basis. When will we get a government we deserve? Or do we deserve a good government?

Yours etc.,
Marsella Phawa,
Via email

A model PHC

Editor,
Every time our rural health sector comes into focus in the local or national news it often leaves a bad taste in the mouth and embarrasses the Health De-

partment authorities and reflects on the poor performance of the State Government. But, while all this makes news there are a few that stand out from amongst the rest. The Primary Health Centre at Pongtung near Pynursla is a prime example of dedication, determination and commitment of the individuals working there. The medical health officer in-charge along with his team deserve recognition and appreciation for whatever resources they have to handle a several patients on a daily basis. Some patients I met at Pongtung spoke highly of the PHC and its staff and preferred it to the CHC at Pynursla Block. Such examples of dedication to the cause of medicine should be replicated and recognised as best innovative practices which can become part of the learning process.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong

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Biden in Trump out

America's revolving door democracy wins

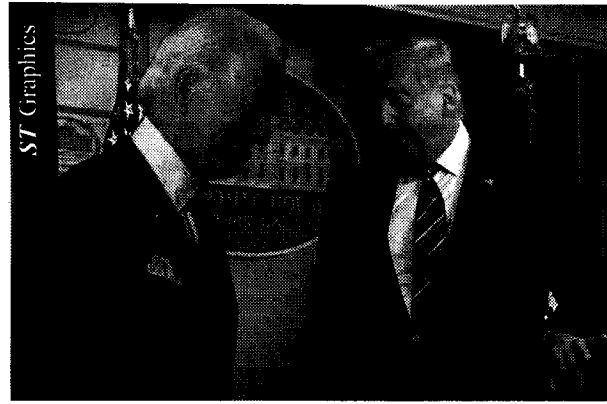
By Karamatullah K. Ghori

Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in violation of international law and US obligations to them.

But Trump touched his nadir with his total abdication of responsibility to fight the Corona pandemic. More than any other act of omission, it was his abject failure in leading America against this pestilence that cost him the contest against Biden.

Even in the face of the horrendous cost of nearly 240,000 American lives from Covid-19, Trump remains unrepentant about his abysmal failure to lead the American peril in this darkest hour of their history. He only

Also, making history is his Vice-President-elect, Kamala Harris—of mixed Jamaican and Indian blood. She becomes not only the first woman VP but also the first woman of colour to land where she gets within a breath of reaching the pinnacle of American leadership. At home, Biden's first priority will be to narrow the racial and social divide and fill the fissures with alacrity. He has already spoken of being president of all the people of United States, not just of red (Republican-majority) States as under Trump. He has vowed to be a 'healer and unifier' and revive the 'soul of America'



added insult to injury by venting his rage at WHO— for its alleged partisanship to China—as he threatened to cut off ties with it.

By contrast, Biden has declared fighting the scourge of Covid-19 his top-most priority. At the gala event in his native city of Wilmington, Delaware, to celebrate his victory, Biden announced that he will be nominating a team of top scientists and experts to prepare a plan to combat this pestilence.

So, Joe Biden finds himself with a load of Trump's trash on the doorstep of his Oval Office which he must clear before starting to heal the gashing wounds on America's body-politic inflicted by "the worst criminal" to have ruled in the history of mankind, in the words of world-renowned linguist and social activist, Noam Chomsky.

The 'divider in-chief' Trump will be leaving behind a legacy of a country deeply fissured, racially and socially, and polarised to the extreme because of his myopic agenda of hate-and-divide. That would mean a big cleaning job for Biden who, with his tally of 74.4 million popular votes in his favour, has already created a unique history in the annals of US democracy.

bruised by a paranoid Trump.

Overseas, in foreign policy, change will come but not so swiftly. Refurbishing ties with NATO and European allies would be top of the order, as would pulling out of America's longest war in Afghanistan. But that's easier said than done. Trump went through loops, prevaricating and deploying his bullying, bluff and bluster as a tactical ploy. However, Afghanistan is a can of worms and may tax Biden's ingenuity and integrity as an honest and upright leader to the hilt.

Pakistan, primarily, and India, secondarily, would scramble for space on Biden's foreign policy radar in the context of Afghanistan. Trump reluctantly conceded, despite his administration's strenuous efforts to the contrary, that the Afghan chestnut would need Pakistan's helping hand to pull out of the fire. But Washington, under Trump, made it also a policy plank to factor in India as a rider on a post-American Afghan apple cart, if it couldn't weave Delhi into the matrix of a final settlement with the Afghan Taliban.

But while relations with Pakistan may keep to their roller-coaster trajectory—with Pakistanis needing lit-

tle reminder of the historical reality that a Democratic-led US administration has traditionally been less inclined in their favour than a Republican-led one, India may be given fresh assurances that cultivating closer cooperation with it is an establishment and non-partisan priority for Washington.

Indian leaders and policy makers may not readily admit it but getting cozy with US has a history of its own. At the height of championing the non-aligned movement in world affairs India wasn't allergic to getting on Washington's bandwagon, given an opportunity. One illustrious example of that was Pandit Nehru, the apostle of NAM, willing to sign a defence pact with the US when, under assault from China in NEFA, in 1962, he pleaded with President Kennedy for arms.

Indeed, a more circumspect Biden may not be as chummy with Prime Minister Modi as Trump but US will, in all likelihood, keep promoting India as a counter-weight to China in its one-upmanship tussle with Beijing. There's hardly any reason for Delhi to worry that the warmth Trump injected into their bilateral equation would evaporate under Biden.

There's, however, cause for considerable concern for the Arab Sheikhs—Saudi and other Gulf rulers—who felt so comfortable being in bed with a raucous Trump. The wheeler-dealer, now in retreat in Washington, was so blinded by his hatred of Iran that he would do anything to cultivate the Arab potentates and tyrants. One outstanding example is that of MBS, Saudi Arabia's budding Czar, who literally got away with murder under Trump. He may not have that luck with Biden.

By default, Iran may get its fractured relations with the US repaired under Biden. He has hinted at restoring the Nuclear deal with Iran that was disrupted by Trump. A new ball game is on. A new dawn is about to break.

Karamatullah K Ghori is a seasoned career diplomat, author and former ambassador of Pakistan to several countries (not India), who has had a ring-side view of history. He is now based in Canada. (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

National Education Policy 2020 & its implication

By Ricky Renthlei

The new education policy known as the National Education Policy (NEP)2020 recently introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India will replace the curricular and pedagogical structure of 10+2 by 5+3+3+4.

Like the earlier system, board exams will be conducted at class X and class XII but the undergrad course will take 4 years instead of 3 thus giving a fair chance to students aspiring to pursue higher studies in foreign universities such as the United States or Canada. There's no arguing the fact that the current education system that was introduced 34 years ago has outlived its relevance in the present day context, hence the NEP 2020.

No doubt, the new policy has many desirable features that seek to address and meet emerging challenges of the present social and economic realities and the intention of this piece is not to discuss the merits of the new policy. However, I would like to draw the attention of readers to item No. 4.13 of the NEP 2020 that specifically pertains to the replacement of two language formula (this system presently being followed up to secondary school level) by three language formula. If implemented, the three language formula will be patently unfair to the non-Hindi-speaking tribal student community of the northeast (Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal and many other tribes of Assam and Tripura) as they use the ROMAN script for their mother tongue while their counterparts in the mainland use either Devanagiri or Tamil Brahmin script. One cannot deny the advantage of being multilingual. The unique skill gives us an edge and opens up a host of opportunities in this competitive world. Such gifted students however are not common. We also have to be realistic, and empathise with the average tribal student who has to struggle getting a pass mark in Hindi even up to secondary level.

Imagine a situation where a tribal student struggling to get by the mandatory three language formula, that includes learning a totally different script, which in any case will not guarantee his/her future success. Chances are that he/she may miss out on the more important subjects which are crucial for his/her academic pursuit. These students will certainly be at a disadvantage when they compete with students hailing from backgrounds that use Devanagiri script. So much for the LEVEL PLAYING FIELD.

Let us for argument's sake, consider a parent from the North East who is affluent enough and is aspiring to get his child admitted in one of the renowned institutions in Chennai. This child would have to opt for English first language, Hindi second language and Tamil third language. He would have to go for private tuitions for the two languages. The resources and efforts would be spent on subjects that get him nowhere. The irony is that this parent sent his child to Chennai with the aim of getting him admitted into a good medical school.

In 1979, the Janata Government decided to make the Indian languages in 8th schedule as a compulsory subject in Civil Services Examination. Except Bengali and Assamese, all other North East candidates were in trouble as it was difficult for them to clear these language papers. The North East student representatives at Delhi decided to meet the then Home Minister Shri H M Patel, ICS (Rtd) to represent our grievances against the language imposition on the North East candidates. We apprised him that the imposition is quite discriminatory against the North East

people of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh as our languages are not included in the 8th schedule. We asserted that if Hindi is to be imposed, it should be made compulsory for all the candidates as well. We questioned as to why Tamils, Bengalis etc. were allowed to answer in their languages whereas other languages are imposed on us as this is clearly discrimination against North East candidates. Subsequently, he informed us that he would give exemption for one year to us. To this, we further expressed that we do not agree in principle the exemption for specific period be it one, five or ten years and we were strongly against the injustice and discrimination.

When Shri Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, the former President of India visited Mizoram in the same year in 1979, the Mizo students under the umbrella of Mizo Zirlai Pawl (Mizo Students Union) lined up in the streets of Aizawl received him wearing black clothes with their backs to him as a sign of displeasure against this mandatory language imposition in the Civil Services Examination. It appeared that the President was extremely touched by the reception given by the Mizo Students. On his return to Delhi, he was invited as a Chief Guest at a college function where he narrated his recent visit to Mizoram. He expressed his displeasure with the imposition of language in Civil Services Examination. He reprimanded the Hindi chauvinists for their intolerance for imposing their language on other minorities. He said that he was extremely sympathetic to Mizo students who still gave him a reception despite their anger against language imposition. The President, therefore, took up the issue with the Janata Government and consequently the Government exempted us from the mandatory language in Civil Services Exam on his advice and this stands till date. Had the order of imposition not been withdrawn, the number of candidates from the North East who could have cleared the Civil Services Exam would have been dismal. After a lapse of 41 years, it is essential that we contemplate whether our candidates are equipped to clear the language paper if it is re-introduced. The same political party in 1979 is now in power again and who knows if they will re-introduce compulsory language in the Civil Services Exam.

Although the three language formula in the National Education Policy 2020 is intended to bring about national unity by bridging the linguistic gap between states, however it is not the only option to integrate the ethnic diversity of India. It is possible to enhance the educational standards even without adopting imposition of three language formula.

Presently, there is a lot of resentment against the 3 language formula in Tamil Nadu. The Chief Minister, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, expressed that his Government would oppose this policy and was looking for support from like minded Chief Ministers of other states. All other political parties of Tamil Nadu except BJP have opposed this policy. Mr Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, the former President of India, a Telugu had saved Northeast students 41 years back, and we may hope that Mr Venkaiah Naidu, who is also a Telugu, holding the post of Vice-President of India can save our people again this time. It is high time that the people of the North East unite and raise our voices against this injustice for our survival.

Lets us all rise to the occasion and raise our voices for the future of our children and ourselves.

E m a i l :
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"The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are."

— Joseph Campbell

The Shillong Times

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Legislative privileges and decorum

LEGISLATORS are quick at claiming legislative privileges but forget that their behaviour in the August House also bears strict scrutiny. The Assembly and Parliament are the sacred grounds of democracy where language and decorum matter. The English language is known to be a language of great finesse and can add grace and dignity to what's spoken. Alternatively, language can also be abused when the speaker is unable to take in his/her stride the verbal sparring in the House. What happened in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on Wednesday is a blot on the annals of the House which has had legislators who have upheld the highest traditions of parliamentary behaviour, no matter how much they are provoked by questions and counter questions from the Opposition. It has been rightly stated that the Opposition in the House speaks on behalf of the people. If those in the Ruling party cannot maintain sang-froid when provoked they are perhaps in the wrong place. In disrespecting the voice of the people who are supposed to be the masters in a democracy.

In a parliamentary democracy the legislature exercises full control over the executive or the Council of Ministers. Members have the right to put questions and supplementary questions to the Cabinet in the House. The Opposition can bring in a No-confidence motion, Adjournment Motion and Censure Motion against the Government if the situation so demands. Who else can correct the wrongdoings of the Government if not the Opposition? A No-confidence motion is not necessarily a coup for toppling the Government, hence to construe it as such shows lack of maturity of those in support of the ruling party. And for ruling party members to vent their rage against fellow legislators in the House is unwarranted. It speaks of the slow erosion of democratic values and respect for decorum. It is good to remember that those elected to the House are also called "leaders," and leadership comes with a set of behavioral mores, not least of which is to desist from using slangs (unparliamentary language).

Several issues have been raised in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in the last few days and they reveal the lapses of government and the breakdown of the law vis-à-vis the illegal extraction and transportation of coal amongst others which follows a clear modus-operandi and suggests the collusion of those in Government. Unless such improprieties are corrected, governance will be subverted. Those in the Opposition have a public duty to halt the corrosive corruption which has become a state-sponsored enterprise and is hastening Meghalaya's descent into anarchy.

Finally, legislative privileges don't come as a matter of right. They are earned, above all by the use of sanitized language.

Emphasis has shifted to building broad Anti-BJP consolidation

Congress eyes Assam to regain its lost status in the Northeast

By Sagarneel Sinha

With the curtain closing down on the Bihar elections, the focus now shifts to the four states — West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam — which are expected to go to polls together by April and May next year. In the north-eastern region, Assam is politically the most significant state — which alone has 14 out of 25 Lok Sabha seats of the region. In the 2016 assembly elections, BJP emerged as the single largest party in the state for the first time and formed the government with the help of its allies — Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF).

Assam was always considered a stronghold of the Congress party — which has won 10 assembly elections out of 14. Although it faced electoral defeats in 1978, 1985 and 1996, the grand old party was successful in winning back in the next elections. In assembly elections, the party, as of now, hasn't faced defeat consecutively. In 2021 elections too, the aim of Congress is to keep its past record intact.

This time, however, the political situation is completely different. The Congress party nationally doesn't command the appeal that it used to. Its electoral fortunes are at an all time low. In Assam too, the situation of the party isn't that very well — although it has been able to regain its Muslim vote bank successfully from the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), mostly regarded as a Muslim based party — which is led by Dhubri Lok Sabha MP Badruddin Ajmal. Notably, the state Congress leadership has already taken the decision to ally with AIUDF. The proposed alliance is waiting for the approval of Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

The victory of BJP in 2016 assembly elections was an "aberration" — this is what Congress wants to desperately prove. For that, it has to win the upcoming elections. It would also strengthen the party in the north-eastern region — where presently it has no governments. After con-

quering Assam, the BJP has successfully penetrated in the entire region — and the governments in all the eight north-eastern states are ruled by BJP or by regional parties that support the NDA at the national level.

The state Congress leadership is already in an active mood to bring all the anti-BJP forces in the state under a single umbrella. AI-

gress party is opposed to the alliance with AIUDF — which is viewed by the most Assamese and the tribals as a party representing the interests of the illegal Muslim immigrants. It is seen as a communal party — a major reason for worry for a section of Congress leaders who believe that it may result in backlash of the majority Hindu community and in that



ready, the Congress has received positive responses from the AIUDF and the Left parties. As of now, if everything goes well, the alliance with the AIUDF is certain. This would prevent the division of Muslim votes. Muslims are 34% of the

scenario, BJP will be the major beneficiary.

But the Congress can't ignore AIUDF — as it will split the Muslim votes. The grand old party won't take the risk learning from the Bihar election results where the All India Muslim-e-

comprising of RJD, Congress, CPIM(L), CPI and CPI(M). This division of Muslim votes was one of the key reasons for defeat of the Mahagabandhan by the NDA alliance in Bihar. But the Congress knows that Assam isn't Bihar — so it is keen to stitch the alliance with the AIUDF by invoking the anti-CAA political views, as AIUDF too is against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

But the two new regional parties — Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and the Rajior Dal — as of now have shown no interest in joining the Congress led anti-BJP alliance. If these parties won't join the alliance, BJP would be the main beneficiary. Already the two regional parties have decided to contest together. They would definitely take away a chunk of the anti-BJP votes — which the Congress is eyeing.

Also the Left's influence in Assam has declined considerably. The situation of the Left in Assam isn't similar to that of Bihar — where it contributed to Mahagabandhan's seat share by winning 16 seats. In the last 2015 Bihar assembly elections, despite the Left fighting alone, CPI(ML)(L), the largest left party in the state, won 3 seats. But in Assam, this isn't the case. During the last 2016 assembly polls, the Left parties performed poorly. CPI(M), the largest left party of Assam, even came third in the Sorbhog seat, the traditional stronghold of the party. The current situation of the other Left parties — CPI, CPI(ML)(L) and RCPI — is worse.

The Congress alliance with the Left will come handy to the grand old party only in a few seats — if the contest is too close in those seats. Congress, as of now, has a huge challenge in the state — if it has to defeat the BJP. It has to convince the majority Hindu community in the wake of its alliance with the AIUDF and also to bring all the anti-BJP forces under its umbrella — for that it has to persuade the AJP and the Rajior Dal. (IPA Service)

"The Congress alliance with the Left will come handy to the grand old party only in a few seats — if the contest is too close in those seats. Congress, as of now, has a huge challenge in the state — if it has to defeat the BJP."

state's population. Particularly, AIUDF is more eager to ally with the Congress — as in recent times Ajmal's party has witnessed shrinking of its base due to the shift of a section of Muslim votes towards the grand old party.

A section of the Con-

Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) led by Hyderabad Lok Sabha MP Asaduddin Owaisi, another Muslim based party, took away the Muslim votes in the Muslim populated Seemanchal region of the state by winning 5 seats — harming the interests of the Mahagabandhan

Celebrating the ascendancy of Kamala Harris to the Vice Presidency

By Chauncey K. Robinson

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has made history as the first African and Indian American and as the first woman elected to that office in the history of the United States.

There are those on both the right and the left who downplay the significance of her victory by zeroing in on some particulars of her political past at the expense of the strong positives in her record and the meaning of her election.

Nothing should get in the way of the real reasons to celebrate the election of an individual who personifies the leadership of Black women in the fight to preserve democracy and the election of a person who, as a senator, had perhaps the strongest pro-worker record in that august body.

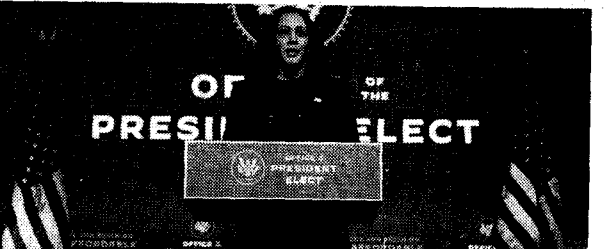
Harris is not a perfect politician. She, like many figures that work within mainstream politics for years, has a layered history of positives and negatives. Her years as District Attorney of San Francisco and her tenure as Attorney General of California can be described as marked with contradictions as she tried to find her place in the restrictive political terrain.

She has been a supporter of reparations for Black Americans. In the wake of the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor murders by police, Harris joined Congressional Black Caucus Chair Karen Bass, Sen. Cory Booker, and others in introducing the Justice in Policing Act of 2020. This bill includes measures to increase accountability for law enforcement misconduct, eliminate discriminatory policing practices, and establish a framework to prohibit racial profiling at the federal, state, and local levels.

Throwing disparaging, dismissive, and limiting comments at Harris, comments such as "cop," as though they summarize her entire career, doesn't take into account her multi-faceted history in politics and her current role as a leader for progressive change.

She may be far from leading any sort of revolution, but she shouldn't be painted as an enemy of change, either.

Harris is the daughter of immigrants and was raised within the civil rights movement. For her entire career, she has had to exist within a white male-dominated terrain as often the only Black



She championed a truancy law that would be used to criminalize parents, usually of color, for their children missing school, a law for which she has since shown public remorse.

As Vox noted, Harris was ahead of her time regarding California's harsh "three strikes" law. The law said that someone who committed a third felony could go to prison for 25 years to life, even for nonviolent crimes. Harris required that her San Francisco D.A. office only charged for a third strike if the felony was a serious violent crime.

When she was California A.G. her office fought to release fewer prisoners, even after the Supreme Court found that overcrowding in California prisons caused unconstitutional punishment. Yet, also as A.G., she directly implemented and expanded her "re-entry" program called "Back on Track" that aimed to keep low-level young offenders out of jail. No one is denying that Harris's record as San Francisco D.A. and California A.G. reflects these contrasting positions.

Describing herself as a "top cop," did herself no favors in the fight she would face to gain support from progressives and those further left on the political spectrum. Going by only her record before she became a senator could have some wonder whether Harris was capable of holding government officials accountable, and implementing transformative change in the criminal justice system. Yet, in recent years, we've had consistent backing by Harris of policies that place rights of the people over abusive law enforcement and the establishment.

Harris came into the Senate during the start of Donald Trump's presidency. She would emerge as a main figure in the political resistance to his administration and its abuse of power.

She is a co-sponsor of Sen. Bernie Sanders' single-payer Medicare for All bill. Harris is the lead Senate author on legislation, championed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, that would require the scoring of environmental regulations to see their effects on frontline communities, who often are the most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change.

woman around in any position of power.

She is part of a growing movement of Black women who are taking center stage in the political arena rather than playing only supportive roles to white politicians. This movement, including her role in it, was a key factor in the "blue wave" that swept the country during the 2018 midterm elections.

Harris rightly acknowledged as much in her acceptance speech, pointing to the fact that Black women are the backbone of democracy in the United States.

The importance of Harris championing Black women in this way must not be underestimated.

Black women are 13.8% of the U.S. population of women, yet they are 60% (three times more likely) to be in prison than their white counterparts. Thirty-three percent of the girls who are detained and committed in juvenile justice systems are Black. These numbers reflect the criminalization of the most vulnerable and exploited women in our society.

Yet, 90% of this same demographic showed up in support of the Biden-Harris ticket, and plenty of that 90% was galvanized by the idea that a Black woman, who has spoken to their issues, would be in the White House.

We've seen that when Black women are empowered, progress and change happen, and that's beneficial for working people as a whole. This is exemplified in their high voter turnout and their participation in organized labor.

Harris being put into the White House represents what can be achieved when one of the strongest yet vulnerable demographics in the U.S. makes itself seen and heard. It goes beyond symbolism as her insistence on combating systemic racism has the potential to address issues in an intersectional way — unseen before on the national political stage.

In a time of civil unrest, this is needed now more than ever. Harris's record shows us that working people have space to push her and Biden even further towards progressive change.

All of this is cause for celebration because it is part of a winning strategy towards a better tomorrow. (IPA Service)

What's Govt's plans on Education?

Editor,
Kindly provide me with some space for sharing my thoughts on the consequences of current lockdown of our educational institutions due to the coronavirus pandemic. There is no denying that during the first few months of the lockdown, the situation was tense and grim. There was fear all around. Very rightly the institutions came under lock and key. After all, we couldn't have exposed our children to the virus. Eight months later, although there is no tangible improvement in the spread of the infection, people outside Meghalaya have begun to live with the virus. In Meghalaya the infection rate appears to have fallen appreciably perhaps because of lesser tests being carried out today compared to say August/September.

However, we notice that the Meghalaya Government in its wisdom has refrained from resuming normal classes. Without questioning the rationale of such a decision, as a parent, I am a little worried about the likely impact of such a long lockdown of institutions on our children and youth. For one, the on-line classes and home works on WhatsApp are in a way a substitute for normal classes. Since March this year, the children I know of have learnt precious little. On-line classes are a sham. This cannot be a replacement for normal classes. During normal times, the school students have a standard work load. They conduct themselves

more predictably. Their life's rhythm is even. They are more productive and have new lessons to learn, new tasks to perform. Today, I don't notice this. The students have become casual and care-free. They have no pressure on them and spend time more on mobile phones than on books. I am sure, by and large, this is a common scenario.

But my real worry is what next? Next calendar year the institutions are bound to reopen, COVID or not. While it is true that school children across the country have suffered in a similar fashion, I know for a fact that students elsewhere have not wasted their time and kept themselves on their toes for higher challenges that lie ahead. The same cannot be said for the children here. Therefore, I foresee that it is going to be a huge challenge for the students of Meghalaya to compete with the students from the rest of the country. As it is, our students need to be constantly pushed and without handholding from teachers and parents they tend to take it easy. Given this situation, I wonder whether the Government has a plan to protect the interests of the local students planning to sit for all-India exams. It would be good, in my opinion, if the government comes up with special coaching facility for this category of students.

Yours etc.,
A concerned parent,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Concern well expressed

Editor,
Apologies the article

"NEP 2020 and its implications", by Ricky Renthlei (ST Nov 11, 2020) I would like to express my sincere thanks to the writer for having shown the grave implications of item No 4.13 of NEP 2020. This item is very grave as it pertains to the Hindi Language over and above the two language formula already in place in our Secondary Schools. Let us not forget that the purpose of one's education is to excel on subjects of interest be it science or humanity, while at the same time not losing interest in his/her roots as a citizen. I can cite numerous examples of our students who are not very good in Science or English perform extremely well in their mother tongue which is where their livelihoods are ensured. For those who plan to study in foreign universities let me tell readers that few of my friends needed to spend one year more to be well equipped in English for no one can deny that English is the language in which Science, Economics, Social Science etc are taught. The writer is very right in saying that we the tribes of the North East who were trained to write alphabets in the Roman Script would encounter mountains of difficulty to write in Hindi.

If I am to believe my friends in the banking sector, till date no tribal has changed the format of Rupees to the Hindi ? They still write Rs. Writing in Hindi will necessitate an artistic excellence of high degree. I once tried to write the Hindi version but failed and spoilt some cheque leaves in the bargain.

Finally let the imposition of Hindi not create a sense

of isolation of our tribal values. If we are familiar with shudh (pure) Hindi and like to speak it, let us do so not under any compulsion but for sheer love of the language. This too will be the unity factor of a country of diverse languages. And as long as the South exist we in the North East are happily safe.

Yours etc.,
Manbha Diengdoh
Via email

Road in urgent need of repair

Editor,
The road from Mawroh to junction (Umshing-Mawkyndoh road) is in urgent need of repair. The road is in a pathetic condition with potholes all along this stretch and the road edges are being eroded by the recent heavy rains. The narrow width of the road makes it difficult for two vehicles to pass at certain stretches. There was some ray of hope a few months ago when there were rumblings and talks that the road will be double-laned for the ensuing National Games. On June 14, 2019, it was reported in a local Khasi daily that 12.50 crores have been sanctioned to re-lay the road from Mawroh to Umjarain from the Central Road Funds. There have been many inspections conducted by the PWD officials and also by the respected MLA, Mr PT Sawkmie. However, the work which has been started is very slow for reasons not known. The pandemic has of course stalled most of the projects in the State but I would urge the

Department to please speed up the work if things are in place. Presently, the road is in bad shape and all I pray through this letter is for the authorities to do some minor repairs to make it road-worthy till the major repair and reconstruction is effected.

Yours etc.,
R N Rymbai,
Shillong - 22

Whither transparency

Editor,
At last the police have had to speak up after being held responsible for all the crimes committed vis-à-vis the illegal coal mining and transportation. Police have said that the entire coal business is controlled by different departments and each department must discharge its duty as per the law of the land. According to Supreme court directives the seized coal shall be dealt by the State in accordance with Section 21 of the Act, 1957. The court further stated that the state can decide on taking action against the illegal coal mining and the cases have to be dealt with in accordance with the law.

The Mining and Geology Department has laid down some procedures to allow transportation of seized coal after its disposal through public action: Consignment carrying auctioned coal shall be allowed for transportation only with the High-Security Mineral Transport Challan (MTC) containing hologram and fugitive ink to be issued by the DMR. The truck number, route, and destination shall be indicated in MTC and the consignor should use the only route mentioned in the MTC.

The DMR shall intimate the issuance of Mineral Transport Challans to the concerned Superintendent of Police and Commissioner of Transport along with route of transportation and destination. The Mineral Transport Challan (MTC) shall be stamped as Auctioned Coal' with internal security marking. The Superintendent of Police shall ensure checking of vehicles by Police on National Highways and Roads to detect illegal coal transportation within their jurisdiction.

The concerned Deputy Commissioner shall station a joint team consisting of Police, DMR officials, and Transport Department at the junction of weighbridge-cum-check gates of Transport Department or DMR check gates to divert all the goods laden trucks including coal-laden trucks from the main road towards weighbridge-cum-check gate. Joint team shall check all the goods carrying trucks for necessary documents. Joint team shall detect coal-laden trucks without valid Mineral Transport Challan and seize the vehicle, and shall register the case under Section 21 of Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957.

The Superintendent of Police concerned shall deputize at least two Police personnel to each weighbridge-cum-check gate in his jurisdiction to detect vehicles carrying coal illegally.

With all the checks and balances in place no criminality should occur but it does. Why? Who is responsible? We the people need to know.

Yours etc.,
NR Lyngdoh,
Via email

"Nobody gets justice. People only get good luck or bad luck."
— Orson Welles

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXIII No.88 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2020

Return of NDA

SEASONED politician and veteran administrator Nitish Kumar is set to roll back to power and occupy the post of Chief Minister in Bihar for the seventh time – a rare achievement in Indian politics. This, despite the fact that his party has lost a substantial number of seats – nearly two-thirds of what it contested – due largely to a revolt within the NDA targeting him, and at the hands of the Lok Janshakti Party of Chirag Paswan. With the BJP getting a larger share of seats – 74 – than the JDU tally of 47, the BJP leadership still seems willing to honour a commitment it made to the CM that he would not be disturbed from the post.

Notably, both the JDU and the BJP had contested about equal number of seats for the 243-member state assembly. Suspicion still lurks in JDU circles as to whether BJP played any role in the LJP's fielding of candidates in all the seats that the JDU contested. For the sake of the NDA unity, this issue might now be ignored and Nitish's hurt feelings assuaged by the saffron side.

Clearly, the Mahagatbandhan failed to muster more support than what it traditionally enjoyed from the Yadavs and Muslims. With such a high-voltage campaign, its leader Tejaswi Yadav ultimately cut a sorry figure. Apparently, his own pre-election strategies failed, though initially it was felt that his 10-lakh jobs promise did evoke a good response from the youths.

While the Mahagatbandhan tried to erase the feeling of the RJD being a sectarian enterprise, this did not click as the results showed. The people seemed wary of the RJD even 15 years after the family's leadership of the state from CM post ended. The Congress party failed to re-activate itself and got very few seats. The smile is on the CPIML-L which won a substantial number of seats - 12, from the traditional red belt in the state.

While Nitish Kumar did well as chief minister, having reached basic amenities to the countryside and ensured security to the people in general and women in particular, the state deserves much more. Building more bridges and the like will fasten development, but the world is growing at a faster pace, requiring more dynamism from those who govern. Bihar is where poverty and want are acute. Large numbers of its youths continue to travel to other states to seek work in the absence of opportunities in their own state. The entire eastern sector failed to catch up with the faster-paced development in the north, east and south. The new government must do better.

When Government becomes complacent

By Patricia Mukhim

When the Congress moved the No-Confidence Motion (NCM) against the NPP-led MDA Government on November 11, the Party knew full well that it was punching below its weight. For one the MDA has a comfortable majority of 41 versus the Congress's 19 legislators. No wonder the rightful and appropriate role of the opposition in a parliamentary democracy has long agitated the minds of those involved in statecraft. The opposition is a government-in-waiting and has to view itself as such. Hence its opposition should never be outlandish. The role of the opposition is to draw attention to the failings of the government. But considering that the Congress government in its long tenure was not free from blemish the NCM becomes a blame game. More so, when a legislator supporting the MDA government made a veiled reference to the Education Scam that happened under the watch of Dr Mukul Sangma the then Chief Minister. That precisely is the problem with listing out the ills of the present government because the counter question will always be, "What did you do or not do in your time?"

Of course a meaningful opposition means putting the government on the mat on issues that simultaneously enhances the alternative way. The opposition cannot carry out a lengthy tirade without also offering a way forward. Opposition does not mean opposing everything and not seeing anything positive in what the government does. After all, MLAs whether in the ruling or opposition have been elected to govern. In a parliamentary democracy, moreover, today's opposition is often yesterday's or tomorrow's government.

The MDA has a duty to give an account of the Rs 399 crore shown as Covid expenses. This is the people's right to know. Secondly, on the Power sector there are many questions that were left unanswered by the Minister which too, the public has the right to know. They include (a) what is the total amount of dues owed by MeECL to power suppliers? (b) What is the current revenue generation per month/per year? (c)

Why is the revenue generated not commensurate to the power consumed? (d) How is this proposed to be dealt with? (e) Is it possible to turn around the MeECL or is it too far gone to be rescued? (f) Is there a revival plan? Can that be shared with the public?

The other questions raised pertain to the creation of a public limited company – Meghalayan Age Limited with government officials as directors and a share capital of 5 crores and paid up capital of Rs 1 crore. On the internet what is mentioned is that the Company is involved in business activities. Can the CM please explain the purpose of the



Company? Is it created to attract shares from the market or so that it can function independently of the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC)? If the MTDC is a no-gainer and incapable of driving tourism in the State then why not offload it and save money? After all the Chairperson of the Corporation receives pay and perks from it whether it makes or does not make profit. It has been stated times without number that the Government's business is not to do business. The MeECL is a good reminder. Yet this Government insists on walking the beaten track that is strewn with bad memories. All tourism projects run by MTDC have had to be outsourced. Does that not say something about Government being a bad businessperson? The CM's answers are not convincing considering that of the three directors none has background in business management and has also not demonstrated what revenue model they are going to create, to drive this special purpose vehicle (SPV).

The third and most important question of course is the business of coal mining and transportation despite clear directives from the NGT that this should have been stopped in 2014 until the Government comes up with an environmentally sustainable policy. This Government is held captive by the coal barons and becomes weak in the knees when the issue of coal is raked since coal money funds elections. So the CM is mum on the coal-related questions. But coal is not the only area where revenue is leaking. Congress MLA HM Shangpliang pointed out to under-reporting of export of limestone and boulders re-

sulting in loss of revenue of Rs 26.12 crore. Shangpliang held the Forest Department is responsible for this loss since the load is being carried with no challan or STP from the Forest Department. I will repeat the question raised by Shangpliang – "Who is legalising all illegal activities?"

Then there are the illegally operating coke plants of which only three have got operating licenses after due clearance. Eight units are set up without any permission or clearance while nine units are awaiting approval. The coke is being traded outside the country and state. The raw material for coke is coal. If coal mining is banned since 2014 where did the coal come from?

And then the other day, a Rabha gentleman from Rani near Jirang called up this writer and asked, "Why is Meghalaya selling away everything from stones to sand in the middle of the night? The person informed that there are hundreds of stone quarries around Jirang operating without any license and environmental clearance. One is left to wonder what the Deputy Commissioner of Ri Bhoi is doing and whether she is aware of this illegal quarrying. But why Ri Bhoi, the entire East Khasi Hills is a quarry. One only has to go towards Kyrdem Khla-Laitlyngkot to see large scale quarrying. There are illegal quarries in West Khasi Hills too and the hills are coming down one by one. Someone had rightly said that at the rate at which the hills are descending and forests depleting, one day Meghalaya will become a flat plain.

The truth is that Meghalaya needs a monumental shake-up but that's far from happening because we don't have leaders, only politicians. The MDA came in promising change but it is replicating old loyalties in a contemporary garb. This is a club of young inheritors and by the looks of the unspeakable exchanges in the Assembly these young Turks are swollen with vanity and needless irreverence and believe that Meghalaya is their family estate. The revenue generated from the illegal trade of different commodities are all squandered like casino chips in the hands of a compulsive gambler on a monumental losing streak. The only difference here, is that the gambler is using the people of Meghalaya as casino chips. It's we the people who are losing out but we don't seem to care. We will vote the same old tired faces next time around.

Do I sound like a broken record? Perhaps I am one; broken by the pain of seeing Meghalaya's descent into chaos. Wonder who's surveying the poverty levels and the state gross domestic product. And to date this coalition government does not even have a common template for aligning their vision. Where is the common minimum programme? What is the ideology of the MDA? None that we know of! So in effect this is a government of time servers. After five years even if some ruling party MLAs don't return they can continue with their private businesses. The nerve-shattering question is - Who will be the next set of political entrepreneurs? It a long journey from desire to destination.

The shadow letter-writer would be advised to re-read the complete comments regarding Plasma Therapy for proper knowledge on the matter. Institute follows a process of decision-making and consultation with other qualified persons for most issues before arriving at a decision. No super specialist doctor has left NEIGRIHMS during the current Director's tenure. However, it is up to the public to comment upon requests by some of them to return to NEIGRIHMS! It is critical to nurture excellence, especially with AIIMS, Guwahati expected to be fully operational in 2 years – for this Institute to strive ahead and compete with the other central Institutions of the Nation. The opinions of "secret" letter writers flinging unsubstantiated charges do not help. The letter-writers must come clean with evidence, approach CBI/ CVO to help the institute and desist from low-level character assassination attempts for possibly ulterior motives.

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Tale of two arrests Anchor Arnab Goswami & activist Stan Swamy

By Revati Siva Kumar

Star anchor Arnab Goswami's arrest on November 4, 2020, from his home in Mumbai and his bail process, has sparked off a political war and protests in many places. But the nation sadly does not seem to want to know why 84-year-old Stan Swamy is still in prison post-November 5, 2020, the date till when his judicial custody was extended.

While Goswami is whipping up a sympathy wave for his "persecution", octogenarian activist Swamy's simple request for a straw and sipper in prison to drink water as he had Parkinson's disease was deferred by the National Investigative Agency for 20 days. Other details of his arrest on October 8 from his Ranchi residence are distressing. Why was it done at night? What was there to fear from a gentle Jesuit priest? Why was Swamy in judicial custody until October 24 and why was his remand extended for two more weeks? What could be the reason for taking him as the 16th detainee under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in "terrorism"-related charges?

Arnab Goswami was arrested for his alleged role in the death of Anvay Naik, who died of suicide in 2018, and held under Section 306 and 34 of the Indian Penal Code. Yet his imprisonment stirred a lot of protests about "press freedom" and "political vendetta". However, the reasons for arresting Swamy, a veteran rights activist, under UAPA was neither clear nor was there any concrete evidence against him, even though the charge-sheet against him runs into 10,000 pages. What are the purported reasons, anyway, for Stan Swamy's detention? Firstly, it was seemingly to prevent him from perpetuating unlawful activities, due to an alleged past record of having "incited a mob to violence" at Bhima-Koregaon in Maharashtra on January 1, 2018.

Fact: The Jesuit priest never visited Bhima-Koregaon or the festival, 1,800 km away from Ranchi. How could he have engineered a riot, even if he did, from a place so remote in another state?

Second accusation: He had Maoist links.

Fact: Stan Swamy had no links with Maoism except to challenge the arrest of a number of Adivasis and Moolavasis accused of Maoism. The charge-sheet claims that a lot of "incriminating" documents of his links were found through digital evidence in the form of "emails, call records, writings, speeches and past conduct", allegedly related to a "conspiracy". Swamy denied them all and called the evidence fabricated.

Thirdly, he was said to have converted a number of Adivasis.

Fact: Being an activist, Swamy was more interested in supporting Adivasis to fight for their land rights, not in getting them converted. Moreover, if he was really a Maoist, he would be an atheist, so "conversion" would be a paradox. The evidence against him appears flimsy, but he has not been given the right to challenge it in court till his next hearing on November 26. The People's Union for Civil Liberties recorded that in October 2018, the police had clearly told the Bombay High Court that Fr. Stan was "only a suspect and not an accused". Yet, he was questioned in Bagaicha for 15 hours over five days and still the NIA remained silent. On April 14, the NIA swooped down on him and other activists "under a completely fabricated and non-existent conspiracy". Purportedly, the UAPA, a "counter-terrorism law", seems to be a convenient weapon for governments to arrest human

rights defenders, journalists and protesters. Though it first became a policy in 1967, it has today enlarged its ambit to detain individuals who can be held for almost 180 days. The UAPA exceeds even international law as well as standards, slowing down investigations and bail provisions, ensuring that detainees are held much longer during pre-trial. About 3,005 cases were registered under UAPA from 2016 to 2018 and 3,974 people were arrested.

The distressing aspects of UAPA were called out in May 2020 by the UN Special Procedures mandate holders (independent human rights experts), who released a public communication outlining their concerns and calling upon the authorities to amend the Act in sync with international human rights obligations. It equates non-violent opposition or criticism of policies and institutions as anti-national or "terrorist". While there is support for the UAPA, detainees from progressive, liberal individuals and institutions, the opposition is not visible or glamorous to the public, who prefer to shed tears over the arrest of Arnab Goswami.

However, the real reason for slapping Stan Swamy with Elgar Parishad charges was probably to deflect attention from the anti-establishment issues that he was grappling with. He had been working with Adivasi communities on issues related to land, forest and labour rights in Jharkhand for over three decades and questioned the non-implementation of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, which mandated the setting up of a Tribes Advisory Council.

He had opposed many government laws and policies, even filing a PIL for the release of undertrial prisoners and pursuing the conduct of a speedy trial and appointment of a judicial commission to probe delaying of the trial process. He also opposed setting up "land banks" to free up community land for small and big industries. "This, I believe, is the main reason why the state is keen to put me out of the way," Swamy said in a video released before his arrest.

Hence, Swamy's arrest is not just about arresting one person. It is about what he represents – a threat to the government and its ideology. He summed it up best: "...what is happening to me is not something unique happening to me alone, it is a broader process taking place all over the country". He added that in a way, he was "happy" to be part of the process, so that he was not a silent spectator but became part of the game. "I am ready to pay the price whatever be it," were his brave words. Swamy is thus a symbol of activism, the voice of tribals, and their struggles to address their broken hopes and aspirations related to displacements and land alienation beyond caste and religion. To silence people like him, the UAPA was used as a form of feudalisation of democracy. It was meant to translate negative energies into positive ones, not do the opposite. It has been used indiscriminately against others too such as Gautam Navlakha, Delhi University associate professor, Hany Babu, Goa Institute of Management professor and Anand Teltumbde, Jyoti Jagtap, Sagar Gorkhe and Ramesh Gaichor, activists of the Bhima Koregaon Shaurya Din Prerna Abhiyaan group. And among those who were not mentioned in the charge-sheet include human rights activist Sudha Bharadwaj, who was jailed in August 2018 by the Pune police, along with Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira.

Courtesy: The Leaflet

TO THE EDITOR

NEIGRIHMS clarification

Editor,

Apropos the letter to the editor captioned NEIGRIHMS at the crossroads (Oct 21, 2020) by an individual, who has conveniently kept his identity withheld, the following clarification is offered.

Initially, it was felt that NEIGRIHMS need not respond to each and every "baseless accusations" that come its way, and to expect that the esteemed readers will read through the lines and decipher the real intentions of the "secret" writer. In respect of the misinformation and fabricated details shared by an individual to The Shillong Times. NEIGRIHMS accepts that everyone is entitled to their personal opinions and would itself encourage "whistleblowers" to approach the concerned authorities.

However, since the individual has charged various officials of NEIGRIHMS with wrongdoing – and the newspaper did not feel it necessary to make even a preliminary attempt to clarify with NEIGRIHMS regarding their response to specific charges by a "shadow" accuser, the clarification is deemed necessary.

It must be noted that an Institute exists to serve the people for whom it has been set up and optimize effi-

ciency – even if involves stepping on someone's toes. If the writer agrees that the previous Director was removed for poor governance, then, the same person must also agree that certain correctives were necessary in order to meet the challenges of COVID19. In a Government set up with "permanent" tenures – bringing about changes will definitely impact upon "non-performers." It is the Director who is entrusted with the job of delivering the services who will have to take responsibility. He will have to ensure that people working in the Institute step-up to meet the needs of the people of the region as well as the Health Care Workers in the Institute under his care – while ensuring continual consultations with various personnel with their specific responsibilities (and on occasion, areas of expertise). If he did not act decisively in these times of COVID19 – he would be roundly criticized for abdication of responsibility for the period the Institute is under his care – given that, he has to steer the Institute for not a few days/ weeks – but for nearly six months. The mysterious letter writer has rightly quoted the Director who has repeatedly stated that he is a "spare tyre" – but entrusted to ensure that the vehicle continues on its treacherous journey with safety – no excuses offered. It might be noted that he is the seniormost faculty in

NEIGRIHMS with vast administrative experience covering nearly all of the responsibilities he has been entrusted with.

The Deputy Director (Administration), NEIGRIHMS is appointed by the MOH&FW on tenure basis, as per Approved Recruitment Rules and rules in force, through a duly approved Standing Selection Process, of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India (MOH&FW – GOI). It must be appreciated that any extension of tenure will be subject to assessment of performance, capability and eligibility of the Officer. His tenure has been extended as per DOPT rules till 15th December 2021 – any further clarification, may be raised with the MOH&FW, GOI.

With regard to purchases and procurements in NEIGRIHMS, we are proud to inform that we have one of the most transparent modalities existent in India – with our procurement being on "digital platform" (to the extent of availability) conforming to the Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure mandate to procure all goods and services available online on (Government e-Marketplace) through GeM only (www.gem.gov.in) and there is no occasion to process bidders by identification or choice or any other requirement other than the mandated requirements notified by Ministry of Finance / Commerce, GOI. This has

led to drastically lowered procurement prices e.g. with regard to COVID19 Testing Kits – which allow us to charge extremely low rates for RTPCR (Rs 600/-), CBNAAT (Rs 2400/-) – one of the lowest in the country.

The misinformation about the "brother of the purchase professional" is false and fabricated and with (in all probability), an ulterior motive only to malign the image of the officer. As per records of the Institute the name of brother of the purchase professional, has been declared to be a qualified hardware engineer, working as service engineer in multinational private firms.

The institute follows strictly the CCS (Conduct) Rules wherein "cousin brother" is "not a family member" of the Stores & procurement Officer as per rule 2 of the CCS (Conduct) Rules, 1964, which in the definition of "Members of Family", has clarified that in the context of rule 4(1) and 4(3) "Members of family" in relation to a "Government servant include the wife or husband, son or daughter, parents, brothers or sisters or any person related to any of them by blood or marriage, whether they are dependent on the Government servant or not".

It may be pointed out the "Liaison Officer" appointed during May 2017 was by the then Director, NEIGRIHMS, Shillong and not by the Deputy Director (Adminis-

tration). Hence the allegation is factually incorrect. It is also a clear falsehood to have stated that the purchase official "has been signing cheques for payment to suppliers and contractors". As per records available with the Institute the indicated purchase official has never signed any such cheques in the last five years.

It is clarified that the "Deputy Director (Administration)" of the Institute being the Drawing and Disbursement Officer, is duly authorized by competent authority in Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi. Further the Institute's expenditure of accounts are audited by C&AG for both Transaction and Financial transactions from time to time.

With regards to the removal of a Senior Doctor from the post of Medical Superintendent, - it is clarified that appointment of the Medical Superintendent is the prerogative of the Director. In this case the previous Medical Superintendent, has completed his initial term of 3 years and was on extension. Efficiency and not "seniority" alone is the criterion for a hospital administrative post. It may be noted that the Director has had to hit the deck running and it was imperative to take "tough" decisions to meet up with the demands of COVID19, decisions which have helped NEIGRIHMS navigate troubled waters at

this point of time.

The shadow letter-writer would be advised to re-read the complete comments regarding Plasma Therapy for proper knowledge on the matter. Institute follows a process of decision-making and consultation with other qualified persons for most issues before arriving at a decision.

No super specialist doctor has left NEIGRIHMS during the current Director's tenure. However, it is up to the public to comment upon requests by some of them to return to NEIGRIHMS! It is critical to nurture excellence, especially with AIIMS, Guwahati expected to be fully operational in 2 years – for this Institute to strive ahead and compete with the other central Institutions of the Nation. The opinions of "secret" letter writers flinging unsubstantiated charges do not help. The letter-writers must come clean with evidence, approach CBI/ CVO to help the institute and desist from low-level character assassination attempts for possibly ulterior motives.

Yours etc.,
Dr.V.Cornestone Wann,
PRO NEIGRIHMS,
Via email

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."
— Frederick Douglass

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No.89 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2020

Children's Day reflections

FREDRICK Douglass, an American social reformer, writer and statesman once said- 'It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men'. This is an intuitive quote on the role that children could play in laying the foundation of a strong nation. This year has been especially hard on children. The natural inclinations of children to move out and expend their physical energies have been short-circuited by the pandemic. The toughest challenge is for children to be 'normal' during these trying times. They have been cooped up in their homes and have missed their friends and relations. We might not realise it but studies have shown that children suffer most from social distancing because they thrive best when socially connected. Many studies have also reported a tendency for obesity in children as they spend more screen time inside their homes with little or no exercise. Think especially of children living in gated communities with very little space to maintain distancing. Kids in the rural areas have the advantage of fresh air and huge spaces to lose themselves in but many of their counterparts in the cities do not live in a neighbourhood with access to sidewalks or walking paths. Hence physical activity is hugely inhibited.

Home schooling has become a fad and serves its purpose but it can never replace the vibrancy and aliveness of a school environment where social skills are learnt through trial and error. Over three-quarters of older children between the ages of 6 and 17 take part in sports after school or on weekends, or are members of clubs or organizations which engage them after school or on weekends. Some take part in other organized activities or lessons, such as music, dance or the arts. Many of these activities have been cancelled or curtailed due to social distancing policies. Most parents who are not in the habit of thinking creatively on how best to engage their children have been at their wits end. This also shows that for most parents putting the kids in school is akin to escaping the parental duty of looking after them for about five-six hours a day when they can have their "Me" time. This routine is so entrenched that the present disruption has left them confounded.

Parents agonise that their children will fall behind socially and emotionally if schools do not reopen. And now there's the huge dilemma of whether or not to attend school when they do reopen in 2021, if and when they will. We have never been as uncertain about the future as we are today and it is telling on our children. Alas! Not enough resources have been developed to help adults cope with this extraordinary circumstance so that they can help their children cope better. Children's Day this time should be more about reflection than celebration.

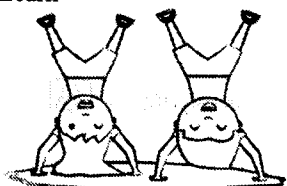
Flip side of the pandemic A Children's Day special

By Br. Solomon Morris

"We destroy the love of learning in children which is so strong when they are small, by compelling them to work for petty...rewards, gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall..."

In short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else.

- John Holt How Children Learn



No! This image does not talk about how the lives of children are turned upside down (though it may be true for most of them).

This article endeavours to look at how this pandemic has drawn out the creative part of us, especially our children. Children have an amazing ability to adapt to changing situations with the minimum of fuss. And we are not surprised, because the moment they arrive on this planet from the safe confines of the mother's womb, they are thrust into a world of light, noise, air, sound, viruses and bacteria! They are quick to adapt to these alien conditions.

I have reflected on various facets of life during this pandemic and in this article I would like to look at the 'Flip' side of our children's lives and what this pandemic has taught me about education!

While we fret and fume about how much our children are missing the school and the 'real-life' lessons, I would like to share with you all, the positive learnings as a result of the pandemic! These are not necessarily in any particular order (in keeping with the chaos that is already bestowed upon us).

#1. More family time at home - as children are advised to stay at home and there is no school.

#2. Kids don't have to get up early! No morning rush, no scrambling to beat the traffic snarls!

#3. Parents are involved in the teaching-learning

process. I heard from some quarters that parents are more eager to be ready for school than their little ones. Flipped roles.

#4. Children, both boys and girls, can experiment with new hairstyles.

#5. Flexible learning is in - structured learning, synchronous with bell timings is out.

#6. Children don't have to listen to long hours of

from their peers! Online Unit tests, Google Form tests, MCQs and other forms of assessments are a collaborative exercise where kids are on Conference calls, or busy sharing snapshots of their findings! This is education. They share their wisdom and knowledge with others without the usual, unhealthy competitive spirit, that would otherwise exist in the normal classrooms



tedious teaching. They can switch off and blame it on network issues, connectivity and low bandwidth!

#7. Kids and parents are finding innovative ways of keeping themselves occupied - baking, gardening, cooking, crochet-work, music, art, robotics, coding, online courses, hikes, cycling, outdoors trekking, etc. This is real education. Who said education is confined within the four walls of a

#10. There are no more comparisons being made. Parents are not keen on finding out who came first! Everyone is on the same level playing field. Suddenly, children are feeling relieved of the huge expectations that they might have had to fulfil under normal circumstances. Thank goodness for the 'new normal'.

#11. Children are asked to do the exams at home and most have the liberty of using

"Children have an amazing ability to adapt to changing situations with the minimum of fuss."

classroom?

#8. Children are surfing the net to look for stimulating learning resources - YouTube videos, PowerPoints, language courses, Discovery Channels, National Geographic, games and challenges etc. Onus is on independent learning. This is the future.

#9. Children are learning

ing their text books to find the answers. The Open Book policy is a superb idea. Isn't this re-'search'?

#12. Time -Management: Children are learning to manage their time the hard way. Parents are helping them to meet the deadlines set by the teachers to hand in their assignments. It is a battle but the rewards are there for all

to see and some children are doing very well.

#13. Responsibility: Parents have engaged their children to shoulder certain responsibilities especially in helping out with the household chores.

#14. Teachers are learning to use technology and are getting good day by day! For a change they owe a debt of gratitude to the 'virus' while ensuring their computers have the anti-virus installed to tackle the influx of all sorts of digital content coming into their phones and laptops.

#15. Both teachers and students are learning from each other and through effective collaboration.

Having said all of the above, I do believe children do miss their school, especially their friends, the games, the activities, the interactions, the brawls, the teasing, the pranks, the sharing of tiffin, the forgotten homework, the little detentions, the concerts, the Creation Week, the picnics, the Campfire Trails and overnight adventure, the excursions, the Carnivals, the NCC activities, the P.T. classes, the Annual School Sports, the Debates and Quizzes, the Art & Craft Classes, the Aerobics classes....the trip to the parks.

Dear Children of Meghalaya and indeed all over India, I would like to appreciate your amazing resilience and adaptability. You have all adjusted yourselves to the 'new normal'. You are doing your best in keeping yourselves focussed and trying to learn. It is a daunting task for you and yet you do it without any fuss or complaints. I salute all you children. I would also like us to remember all the children across the World who are caught in wars, famine, natural disasters and dire poverty. We remember and pray for all who live in remote areas where education cannot reach. God bless ALL. A Very Happy Children's Day

(Br. Solomon Morris is Principal, St. Edmund's School, Shillong. Email: principaleds@gmail.com)

Teaching children about safe and unsafe touch

By Diana Chiu Tangsong

In India, Children's day is celebrated on November 14 every year as a tribute to India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. This day is celebrated to promote awareness of the rights, care and education of children which includes certain rights of children that are not being stressed upon but are worth throwing light on. Child sexual abuse and the importance of how parents can help ensure safety to their young ones is critical resource.

According to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), the data of child sexual abuse cases has crossed 13000, between March 1 to September 18 this year. Child sexual abuse affects all communities and is not limited to race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality.

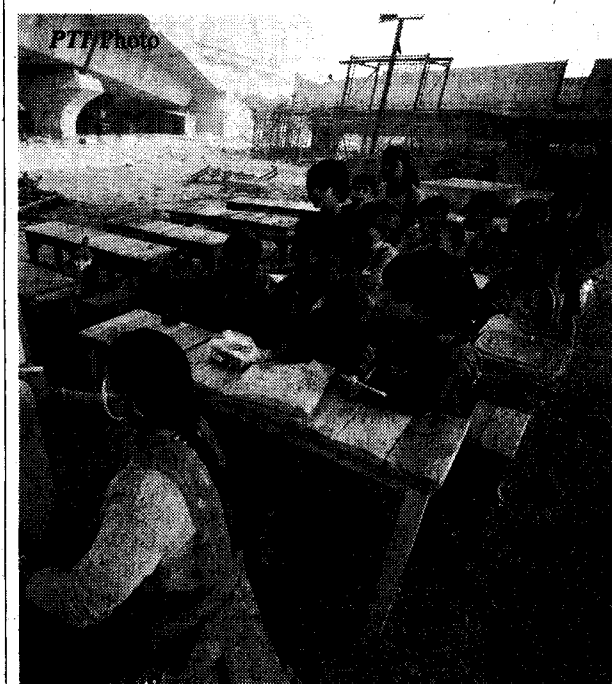
Children are the future citizens of tomorrow and it is

have to learn to respect their wishes when they don't want to be touched, kissed or tickled. It is okay to not insist when a child does not want to hug or kiss a particular family member if they feel uncomfortable with certain relatives.

3. Encourage the child to create a 'safety circle': This ensures that a child can trust few adult members (including the child's teacher) in case, he/she feels scared or uncomfortable and requires to reach out to the three-five adult members in the safety circle.

Explain to the child that there are three kinds of touches:

Safe touch: Safe touch can be explained as touch that keeps them safe and are good for them. Safe touches can make them feel cared for and important. They include hugs, pat on the back, or an arm around the shoulder. It is



our duty to help build a better world for them. It is important for parents and caregivers to spend quality time with them and make them feel safe and loved. As children grow older, they interact with their social environment and meet different people. It is impossible for parents/caregivers to be with their children 24x7, which is why it is essential for parents/caregivers to teach their children what safe and unsafe touch is all about. It is crucial too to understand that child abuse is extremely dangerous and can leave a lasting traumatic impact on an entire generation.

Parents/caregivers may find it difficult to talk to their children about body parts and sexual abuse. It is important to understand that in teaching safe and unsafe touch to the children, the elders can help children protect themselves from being abused in the absence of their parents/caregivers. Here are some tips that will help parents/caregivers talk about safe and unsafe touch

also important to include that safe touch can hurt, such as doctor giving an injection when a child is sick. Its important to explain to the child that the injection hurts but it is needed to keep them safe and healthy.

Unsafe touch: An unsafe touch can hurt their body or hurt their feelings such as hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing and pinching. It is important to teach children that any touch that is to be kept secret or makes them feel scared, nervous or uncomfortable is an unsafe touch.

Unwanted touch: An unwanted touch can be safe but it is possible that the child does not want to receive that touch from that person at that moment. Teach the child to say 'no' in an assertive, polite manner to help set boundaries. It is alright if the child is to say no to the touch of a familiar person.

For parents/caregivers, it is important to teach their children to stand up for their rights and not fall prey to abusers from a young age by

- Here are few important Safety Rules for Children:
- It is okay to say 'No!' when they feel funny, awkward, uncomfortable by the touch of certain adult members.
- It is not okay to touch someone else's private body parts.
- It is not okay for someone to ask you to touch his or her private body parts.
- It is not okay for someone to touch his or her own private body parts in front of you.
- It is not okay for someone to ask you take your clothes off or take photos or videos of you with your clothes off.
- It is not okay for someone to show you photos or videos of people without their clothes on.
- Run, leave the room and tell a safe person in case the child is experiencing any of the above.

with their children:

1. Teach children correct names for their body parts: Children as young as 3-4 years old are aware of all parts of their body. Program the child to learn the body parts accurately, including the private parts without any embarrassment so that they are not confused what words to use in case of an abuse. For example, using a swimming costume can be shown to the child that the body parts covered are called private parts.

2. Ownership of one's body: Child should know that they are in complete control of who touches their body, how and when. We

following the safety measures as given above. It is not uncommon that most of molesters/abusers are family, relatives and friends. Molestation can happen anywhere, at home, school, park, religious places etc. This can further help the children to become aware of their rights to their own body and stand up against becoming a victim of such a tragic event that can have a major impact on the long-term mental health of the child.

The writer is Counselling Psychologist/Behaviour therapist, RoUTES, Shillong. Email: diana.chiu91@gmail.com

TO THE EDITOR

Diwali is not about noise

Editor,

Year after year the Government notifies that crackers especially the loud and thundering ones would be banned but such notifications have no effect. People are deaf and blind to such notifications knowing fully well that they are only paper tigers and that in Meghalaya no one really cares a hoot about such government orders. They are brought out as a matter of routine and there's no one to implement such orders on the ground because ultimately it is left to an overworked police force. The police today have to check cars without curfew passes; check people who don't wear masks; check crowding; check traffic jams and once in a while also try and catch thieves. Since Meghalaya boasts of robust grassroots institution - the Dorbar Shnong, why not make it incumbent on them to appeal to their residents to be more responsible and to fine those that violate the appeal. Dorbars should police their own localities for law breakers! It is already well known that the Coronavirus (Covid19) can cause breathing difficulties, especially for those that have contacted the virus and have healed. Their lungs, we are told continue to take time to heal from the pneumonia and they therefore need clean, fresh air.

I don't believe that crackers are associated with any kind of worship. We light diyas and candles to bring in the real spirit of the Festival of Lights. We do not celebrate a festival of noise. How can this be drummed into people's heads and why

are they adamant about creating both noise and fumes even during this pandemic. We would have thought that the pandemic would have brought down the arrogance of those with money to burn (burning crackers worth thousands of rupees is burning money) but that's not the case. We have been hearing loud noises from certain localities. God forbid if those localities have Covid patients that are convalescing from their illnesses.

As an old resident of Shillong, I appeal to all those observing Diwali to take a call not to pollute this beautiful city with noise and toxic fumes. Lets us respect this earth and this place that sustains our lives. It's the least we can do.

Yours etc.,
SR Roy,
Via email

When will Govt remove Byrnihat entry point?

Editor,
Apropos the news, "CM warns against harassment of citizens at entry points", (ST, Nov 13, 2020) can the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma say by when the Government of Meghalaya is going to remove the entry point / check-gate at Byrnihat in Ri Bhoi district? Meghalaya is the only state in the country and perhaps in the world where we still have a check-gate when the entire country and the world are switching back to normalcy. Nagaland was the first state in this region to remove such entry-points and other states followed suit. This check-gate at Byrnihat has become more of a harassment outlet on the Guwahati

- Shillong highway due to which the Chief Minister himself had to warn against harassment of citizens at entry points, this Thursday. It is indeed weird to see such a check-gate functioning when the state government has opened every other sectors of the state economy. Whereas it seems that the upcoming entry and exit point at Umling is going to be an indirect implementation of ILP in the state, which may well go for judicial scrutiny given the tendency of those who are going to man it. One really wonders how there can be such mechanisms in place in today's world. The primitive mindset of the people has to change for good since. The fear psychosis has to end and people must accept that the world is not an island. Without interface with the outside world no state can survive. So let Meghalaya learn that.

Yours etc.,
BC Paul
Shillong - 4

Flooring the Government

Editor,
It was an interesting week to watch the Assembly proceedings and to listen to and observe the actions, arguments and counter arguments from both the ruling and the opposition benches. Both had displayed tact and strategies to corner one another which is the beauty of the Assembly session which grants democratic rights to the Opposition to question every department of the Government. The Opposition had brought out startling issues of corruption and illegalities which the ruling party found difficult to defend. It is worth noting that

the Opposition this time is better prepared, more articulate and poised and more in control of the situation than the ruling side. They are able to hold this current coalition Government accountable for its acts of omissions and commission. We do need a strong Opposition to keep democracy alive and kicking.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Shillong-3

Assembly antics

Editor,
Like the Cabinet on the Move mooted by the MDA Government, these days nearly all of us can watch the Assembly on the move on our mobile phones because the proceedings are live-streamed. Those sitting in their offices can watch the debates especially when certain contentious issues are brought to the attention of the House. I watched the heated exchange between Saleng Sangma of the ruling side and Zenith Sangma of the Opposition and could not believe what I heard being spewed out by the former to counter the allegations of the latter about the law and order situation in Meghalaya. Unprintable language was used by Saleng Sangma which is not expected of an elected member of the Assembly.

The rule of the game is that issues have to be debated in a spirit of bonhomie and without losing one's cool. Why is Saleng Sangma in such an overdrive to defend the MDA Government? Does he want the Opposition to simply swallow everything the Government claims it has done but which actually is left undone? On the Covid spending, the people of

Meghalaya want to know where this amount has gone and how it was utilised. We heard of ASHA workers being given raincoats in lieu of PPEs and that despite their heavy duties during the pandemic they are still paid a very meagre salary. These humble workers need to be paid better because they are also frontline workers who are exposed as they have to go from home to home to track out Covid patients.

Sadly we did not hear much discussions in the Assembly about educations and how students are coping in the pandemic. All that was discussed was teacher's salaries. I am not saying that this is not important but what about students as a constituency? We want to hear more informed debates in the Assembly and even if there are fireworks let there not be "unparliamentary" language used. These days with the smart phones at our disposal, things can go viral very quickly. Kudos to all those legislators from the Opposition who did their "homework" thoroughly. They deserve our respect and gratitude.

Yours etc.,
TK Passah
Via email

Sardar Patel remembered

Editor,
Prime Minister Modi paid rich tributes to Sardar Vallabhai Patel on his birth anniversary at the place where the World's tallest statue - the Statue of Unity of Sardar Patel stood tall, shooting high into the blue sky hovering over the serene blue lake of Kevadiya. The statue was constructed by Chinese engineers and their rank and file at the cost

of Rs 3000 crores. It is copper-jacketed to fight rusting. Those were the happy peaceful era of Chini - Hindi Bhai Bhai. The Statue of Unity depicts the gratitude of all Indians for the extreme sacrifice of Sardar Patel in his fight against British colonialism under the Satyagrahi, M.K Gandhi who was assassinated in January 1949.

For Meghalayans, Sardar Patel had played a major role in the matter of Accession of Khasi states to the Indian Union. He took part in the sub Advisory Committee meeting held at Shillong on June 10, 1947, 2 months and 5 days before Independence to listen to the views of those led by Rev JJM Nichols Roy. Rev Roy wished to be clubbed with India and not East Pakistan. On the other hand the other party comprised the native chiefs whose powers and rights had been severely eroded by the British. I don't understand why U Wycliffe Syiem did not continue his resistance to anything that endangered the Syiemship.

Be that as it may, one can never be disappointed with Rev Nichols Roy. It was 1947 and we could not have expected our leaders, however patriotic they may be, to have a telescopic eyesight into 2020. Let us not lose sight of Sir Winston Churchill's fears conveyed to one contemporary historian Mr Hussain of possible invasion from the North. And only 15 years later the fear of Churchill was right in front of our eyes. So let us not dabble in history but rather reconcile to our fates as a tiny tribe.

Yours etc.,
Manbha Diengdoh,
Via email

Serving happiness, one plate at a time

Leading NGO Akshaya Patra Foundation (APF) served a whopping 10 crore fresh meals and supplied food relief kits across the country since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, an official said on Thursday.

"We have served 10 crore fresh meals and supplied food relief kits with essential groceries to the needy in 18 states and 2 Union Territories across the country since March 2020 when the pandemic broke out and spread," Foundation Chairman Madhu Pandit Dasa said in a statement.

Set up in this tech hub with former Infosys Director T.V. Mohandas Pai as its co-founder in 2000, the foundation is the world's largest not-for-profit organisation that serves mid-day meals on school days to over 18 lakh children in 19,039 state-run and aided schools in 12 states across the country.

Dasa of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is the founder of the two-decade-old NGO.

The foundation, which completed 20 years of service to the needy on Tuesday, has cumulatively served 3.3 billion (330 crore) mid-day meals to school children across the country since its inception in 2000.

With 1 kitchen 20 years ago, the foundation came a long way to have huge kitchens to serve cooked meals to the COVID-hit people in 14 states across the country, including Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, and Uttar Pradesh.

"Through the government's flagship school-feeding programme — the mid-day meal scheme, the Foundation strives to address the issue of classroom hunger and promote education in the country," said Dasa in a statement.

On a pilot basis, the foundation has recently started a breakfast programme in Tamil Nadu.

"Our British Chapter has adopted the centralised kitchen model to provide an affordable, scalable solution to child holiday hunger — each meal served in Britain will sponsor a meal for a child in India," said Dasa.

Investment in infrastructure and resource mobilisation over the years have enabled the foundation to serve the needy efficiently.

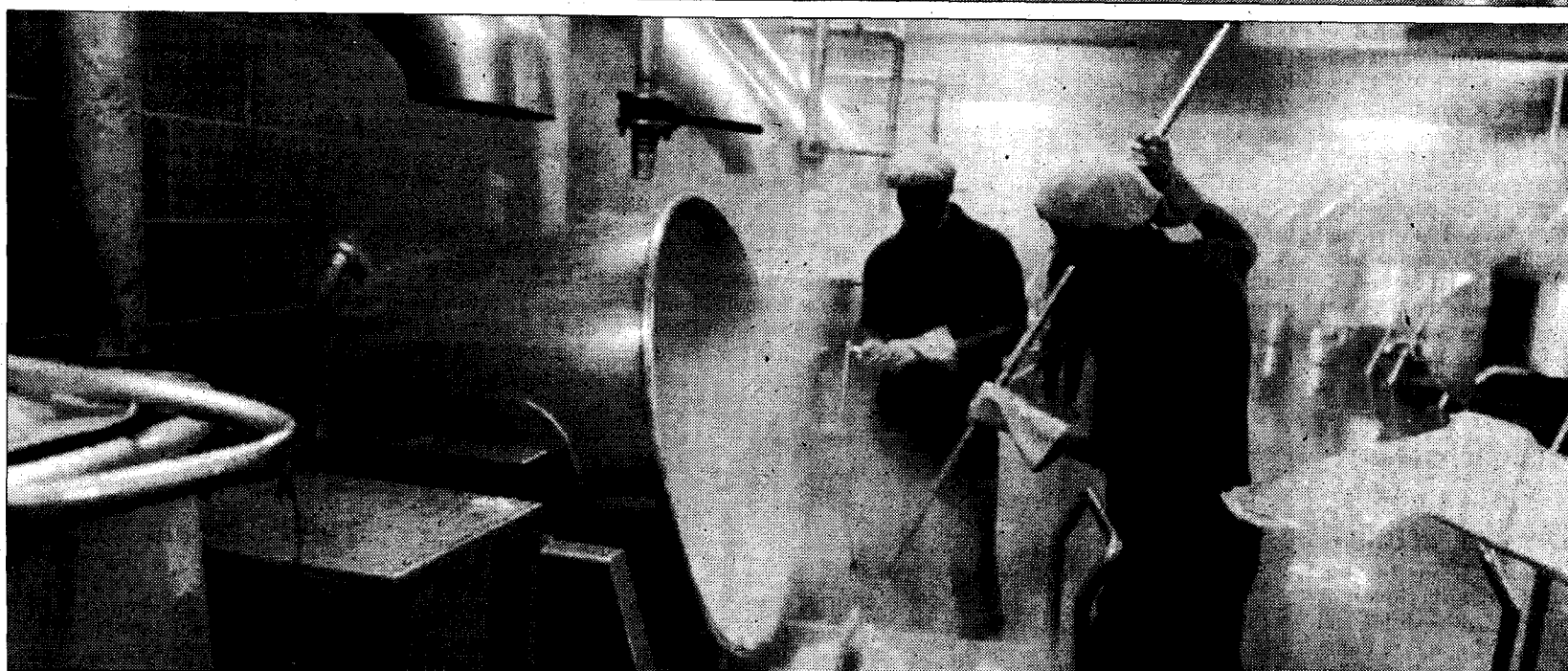
"By leveraging technology, we have set up modern kitchens, added to the scale and replicated feeding programmes like mid-day meals for maximum impact," asserted Dasa.

With schools shut due to the pandemic, the foundation is providing food to the vulnerable communities across the country with the support of donors.

"We are working with the government and donors to ensure nutrition support to mid-day meal beneficiaries by providing Happiness Boxes," noted Dasa.

Besides nutrition, the boxes are also designed to focus on hygiene and education with their contents ranging from glucose biscuits and ragi flour to colour pencils and activity books.

"We are honoured to complete 20 years in service of children providing them nutritious mid-day meals as an incentive to come to school. Our mission is to reach 5 million children by 2025," added Dasa. (IANS)



A fine balance of culture and music



Carrying forward the artistic legacy of his grandfather and tabla genius Pandit Chatur Lal, who was one of the pioneers of tabla on world stage, young tabla player Pranshu Chatur Lal says that one must not forget their cultural roots and essence, even if one continues to experiment with music.

Pranshu was part of a commemoration concert 'Smritiyan' by Pandit Chatur Lal Memorial Society, marking his 55th death anniversary and celebrating his contribution to Indian classical music. He had passed away at the young age of 39, with an indelible mark on the music scene.

Speaking about the arts heritage he inherited, he told IANSLife that his grandfather played the tabla since his childhood and had a good name.

"He came to Delhi in 1948 and started as a staff artist at All India Radio. He then came in touch with Pandit Ravi Shankar Ji and created a huge difference just in 2-3 years enhancing his playing with a closer understanding of the audience. In 1955, he was the first Indian player to introduce Tabla to the western audience with Ustad Ali Akbar Khan Saheb. He created his niche internationally and was the first Indian Tabla player to have a solo LP record by Hollywood. Soon, he was also the first Indian Tabla player to be known for the first ever jugalbandi with western drums with God of drums, Papa Jo Jones which was a live telecast by Ford Foundation under Robert Saudek which also showcased other legends Urbie Green, Ruby Braff, Toni Scott and

Ronnell Bright.

"Then in 1956-57, he went with Pandit Ravi Shankar Ji and then they bagged the special BAFTA Award, Oscar nomination for a Canadian animated film 'A Chairy Tale'. In such a short time, his journey had been so organic despite the absence of technical advantages we have today. His 'Baaj', style of playing and his Bols (language) was so clear and his 'chaa' on the Tabla had a vibration of different levels. With all these distinguishing features he reached great heights. He then went to Australia on a world tour with Smt Sharan Rani Ji and likewise, his journey went on. Unfortunately, on 14 October 1965, being at the peak of his glory, he passed away suddenly. There was a mourn not only in India but also in Germany. That was how much he was loved and adored globally. The American Embassy, the German embassy started having concerts in his name to pay tribute to the legend who created a big difference in their country, introduced the nuances of Indian percussion and created a name for himself worldwide. Similarly, my father Pandit Charanjit Lal also worked hard to promote Pandit Chatur Lal Ji's name," he shared.

During their childhood days, the tabla wizard's grandchildren — Pranshu and his elder sister Shruti Chatur Lal — listened to stories as how Pandit Ravi Shankar and my grandfather (who they lovingly call 'Taa') after finishing the concerts, used to again sit with their instruments for their 'riyaz' (practice) the entire night. "Me and my sister used to be so mesmerised listening to his life stories; which actually got us

know our grandfather more personally though we never saw him met him but decided to continue Pandit Chatur Lal Ji's legacy in our own ways and follow his footsteps as his torch bearers for the commendable work he did."

Being part of the Indian classical music space, does he see artists and patrons honouring and valuing music legends enough?

"Earlier the time was different the listeners were different, and hence the 'Baaj' was also different. If we look at today's time, there is a lot of western influence and I don't think that this influence is wrong. We have western classical, blues, jazz

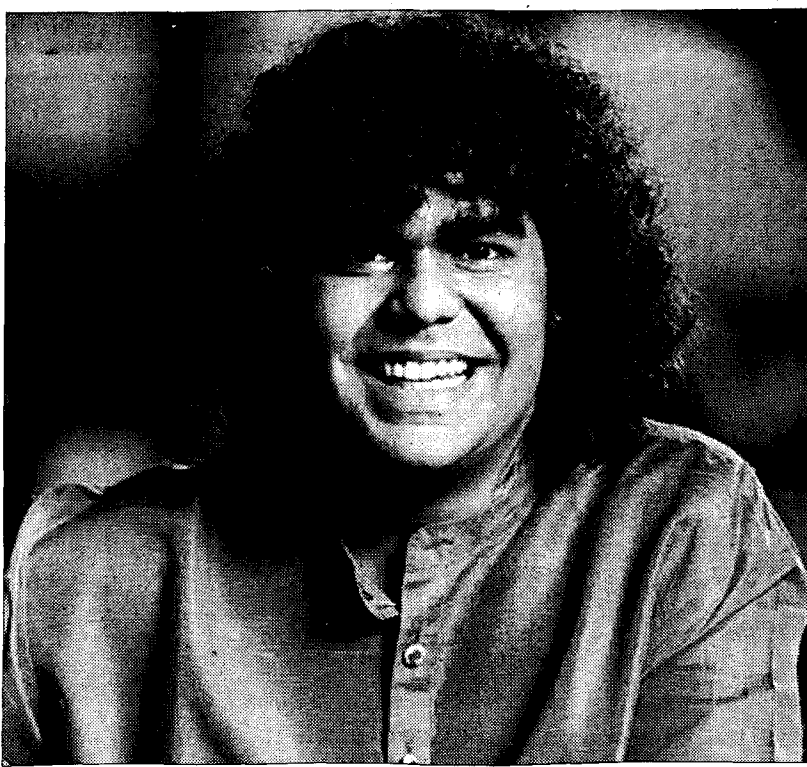
and other different music genres that have its aroma. The artists are doing extremely well in experimenting and bringing it's different flavours. But the most important is, although you continue to do musical experiments, do not forget the roots, the real essence of your own culture," he said.

Adding: "I, myself have done so many collaborations with Polish, Mexican, American, Jazz and also played with the maestros like George Brooks, Horacio Franco, Park-Eun-Ha. There is no harm in experimenting with various genres but at the same time if we are following your Sanskriti, and it's roots then there is no way we are forgetting our performing arts heritage and no cost is involved. Maintaining your cultural roots by adjusting to the ambience and musical taste as per the changing times should be the trend."

Speaking to IANSLife, his sister Shruti, who is also associated with the Memorial Society, recalled an instance from 2005 when she and my brother Pranshu went to Germany to perform?

"There we met a lady who came with a recording of my grandfather's performance along with Pandit Ravi Shankar Ji from the year 1957. Her love towards his music was so overwhelming that for at least 15-20 minutes she was crying saying how much she misses him and his performances."

In 2009, the family set-up a museum 'Taa-Dhaa' where all belongings of Pandit Chatur Lal are preserved. (IANSLife)



Needs of children with intellectual disabilities



By Siddhi Jain

All of us are naturally diverse learners and it is important for us to understand children with learning and thinking differences, along with reducing the stigma and the feeling that something is 'wrong' with them, says Dr Alok Kumar Bhuwan, Managing Secretary, Manovikas Charitable Society. The Society works towards the inclusion of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) into mainstream education and gaining their recognition in the society.

Explaining how in our country, according to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, there are 21 types of disabilities specified, he says that this includes intellectual disability.

Intellectual disability includes "specific learning disabilities" — a heterogeneous group of conditions wherein there is a deficit in processing language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself as a difficulty to comprehend, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations and includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and developmental aphasia. It also includes "autism spectrum disorder" — a neuro-developmental condition typically appearing in the first three years of life that significantly affects a person's ability to communicate, understand relationships and relate to others, and is frequently associated with unusual or stereotypical rituals or behaviours.

He explains: Developmental disabilities is a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime.

Explaining stigma around children who are neurodiverse, he suggests

that the strategy to help and build confidence, self-esteem, motivation and resilience is very important when we think about neurodiversity in the children. "The concept of Universal design of learning (UDL) can benefit children with learning and thinking differences. UDL, for instance, shares many of the principles of neurodiversity. UDL recognises that there's a wide range of students with a wide range of abilities. It uses a variety of teaching strategies to remove barriers to learning especially those with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder."

"We must have the goal to give all students, of all abilities, equal opportunities to succeed," he said.

His school, established in 1997, facilitates thousands of children to study in mainstream schools. "Children with disabilities are sometimes unable to go to mainstream schools due to their age, financial crisis, and especially when parents wait to recover their son or daughter from disability and the age to attend school gets belated. Reasonable accommodations are required to enhance need-based learning of any child with special needs."

Manovikas also has an Institute for Higher Education where they provide the skill training in hospitality, IT, retail, health and beauty, to students with disabilities. The school and its initiatives creates awareness for non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in university and colleges, especially for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Speaking about work during COVID-19 times, he said that Manovikas Charitable Society developed a virtual learning Manovikas eGyanshala mobile app, a weekly live consultation with experts to help people with IDD, and a program to develop friendships in the lives of individuals with special needs who face isolation.

A bagful of stories

Lockdown inspired Sudha Murty relive her childhood with grandparents' stories

By Vishnu Makhijani

A prolific author and philanthropist, Sudha Murty is quite content at often being addressed as "Mrs Narayana Murthy", as she presides over the Rs 400 crore Infosys Foundation that works among the less privileged sections of society and practices what she preaches — that "money alone does not bring satisfaction" and that "satisfaction comes from the heart".

And it is from the heart that she has penned close to 40 books in Kannada and English, some of them translations and the bulk of them for children, with her latest offering "Grandparents' Bag of Stories" (Puffin), an ode to keeping your spirits up in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic — a story a day keeps all troubles away — released on Children's Day, November 14.

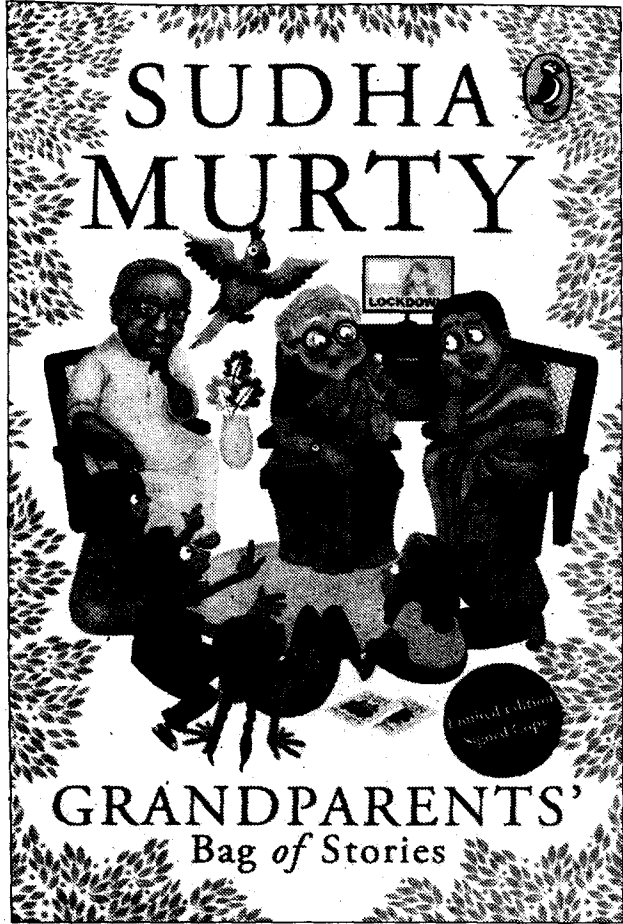
"My journey has taught me so many things, particularly to understand the difficulties of the human being. I enjoy writing for children...they make me aware and to be sensitive to many, many issues," Murty, the mother-in-law of Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, told IANS in an interview.

Tracing her journey in the world of writing, she said it "started when I was very young. I used to write in Kannada and changed to English only when I was 50 years old (she is now 71)".

"English translations, or writing in English, both helped me a lot because I could reach out to more people; a lot more people can read (English than Kannada)," Murty added.

Does she write to a pattern?

"I don't plan anything about what is the road ahead for me. When my experiences are full, and I cannot just keep it in my mind then I start writing. I don't plan, that I should write this book or that book

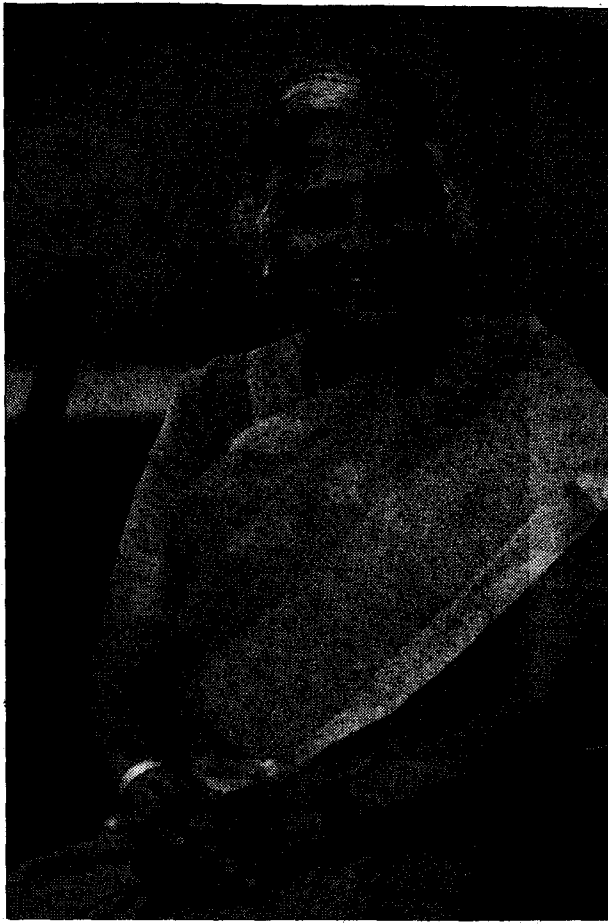


but I always look at what I have and whether I will be able to pen down with more honesty and more compassion."

To that extent, Murty's latest book is an exception in that it is follow up to the iconic and one of her best-loved books, "Grandma's Bag of Stories", that has sold over 300,000 copies. Featuring fascinating tales and endearing characters, especially the grandparents - who exemplify comfort and nostalgia of childhood stories and profusely illustrated by Priya Kurian, the book contains positive and timeless stories that inculcate values of compassion, resilience and sharing. It's an absolute must-have for every young Indian reader's bookshelf.

It's 2020 and children are stuck indoors as the novel coronavirus has found its way to India. A nationwide lockdown is announced, and amidst the growing crisis, Ajja and Ajji welcome their grandchildren and Kamlu Ajji into their house in Shiggaon (Murty's birthplace).

From stitching masks, sharing household chores, preparing food for workers to losing themselves in timeless tales, the lockdown turns into a memorable time for the children as they enter the enchanting world of goddesses, kings, princesses, serpents, magical beanstalks, thieves, kingdoms and palaces, among others. The myriad stories told by their grandparents become the biggest source of joy,



making the children compassionate, worldly-wise and more resilient than ever.

"It was wonderful to work on this book during the lockdown period due to COVID-19. It was a joy to create something memorable and positive for the children, especially in this unprecedented time when most of us are restricted to home," Murty said. "Writing this book was a delight and took me on a trip down memory lane where I once again became a child listening to stories from my grandparents and spending time with my cousins. I hope my young readers enjoy reading this book and find themselves having fun in this new world of simple and enchanting stories," she added.

'My story to tell, my truth to reveal'

By Sukant Deepak

During the peak of lockdown, unlike many of her contemporaries, she refused to jump the digital concert bandwagon. For singer Sonam Kalra, it was important that the years she put into her craft were not eclipsed by the low quality in output that had become synonymous with such concerts.

"I simply did not mind the rigor that went into learning new technology. I was clear that I would not get into it unless I was satisfied with the way I sounded. How can a phone's mike do justice to the years of riyaz? I am glad I could decipher ways to ensure a relatively good quality for myself and my musicians after discussing the issues with experts, trial and error, and improvisation. Sometimes, being a perfectionist pays off," she smiles.

The singer, who recently participated in a HCL Digital Concerts edition where she sang Sufi kalaams does however feel that the digital medium has opened several new possibilities not just for artists but listeners too. "In a recent concert, I had audience members from the US, the UK besides India. It was heartening to see the number of people in attendance. The reach of the medium has been a revelation."

But of course she does miss physical performances. "I am tired of looking at my own face during a Zoom concert. Sometimes it is as bizarre as singing to the mirror. I recently did an outdoor physical concert with 50 people — it felt magical. Believe me, I sang a few songs with my mask on. I personally feel that the most important lessons are learnt when we are pushed out of our comfort zones — that is when we become better versions of ourselves."

Adding that she envisions more outdoor concerts with social distancing as the new normal for her fraternity, Kalra said, "Considering the change in weather, I am sure people



would love to listen to music under the stars. Also, now that we have realised the power of digital, physical concerts that can also be streamed live — that way you get the best of both worlds. People who are in a vulnerable state, like the elderly or those can't come, also get to be a part of them. The future will be a blend of these two, and it will be a good confluence as it will allow us to reach a lot many more people."

Stressing that more than the lockdown, what hurt her was the government's apathy towards artists, Kalra feels that placing art at the bottom of non-essential items said it all. "I really want to ask the powers to be if they can imagine a world without music, cinema, television or a beautiful piece of fabric on them. Not to mention people who would insist that we should perform for free as they were 'giving us a platform and exposure'. I mean, really..."

Kalra, a trained Hindustani classical musician who has done theatre, worked in advertising, hosted car and travel shows on BBC to eventually come back to music is known to blend multiple elements of different forms in her performances. Be it the Sufi Gospel Project or Partition: Stories of Separation which witnessed music, installation, video, theatre and performance on one stage, she feels that those willing to 'listen' will always get it.

"Well, I may not cater to the lowest common denominator, but let's be clear — I came after long to my music because I realised I wanted to say something through it. I had to be more than a singer who sings nice songs. It's paramount for me to do the stuff that leaves the audience thinking. No matter what I say, it should be a reflection of my belief system. The last thing I want is to be boxed in. Tomorrow, if I decide to rap, it's me. I make these decisions for me because it's my life to live, my story to tell, my truth to reveal."

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, November 15, 2020

Sun sextile Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results for you for the whole year. You will keep moving towards victory step by step. You will work with full sincerity and dedication towards your job and this will make your boss and other senior officials happy. Indications of a new property can be seen. You will also be able to solve the biggest of problems with courage and strength. Your business will rise. You will make a strategy for marketing. Regulate your exercise and diet and keep your daily routine organized. This is the right time for money. You will make full use of your capabilities and abilities. Romantic life will be wonderful. You will get many opportunities. Friends and family members will help you. Auspicious functions will keep taking place.

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. This is the time when you're noticed for what you've done or haven't done. Do your best to be in top form, make career adjustments if needed, and don't be afraid to show others exactly what you'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. It's an excellent time in which you make a lifestyle change, as your ability to concentrate on what really matters to you is enhanced. 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, your 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. Your position of power and authority is maintained

despite many changes all around. You should maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way otherwise you will become frustrated and dull. 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. It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and siblings. 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. You may disagree mentally with your partner but the love between you allows peace and acceptance. 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. You come up with original and creative ideas that surprise others in the professional arena. 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.

Career Option in Jewellery Designing

By Ranjan K Baruah

There are occasions when we use different charming products. One of the attractive and charming products is different jewellery. It is one such thing that charms all of us.

It has been part and parcel of our lives since ages. From ancient days to the present we could see how it has been important for us and on many occasions.

A woman has always had an affinity towards jewellery and women adorned her with precious jewellery, gold and diamonds to enhance her feminine beauty from time immemorial. India is the biggest consumer of gold with more than 20% of world gold consumption and this industry gives employment to millions of people.

Indian jewellery industry is said to have an ancient and historical tradition of over 5,000 years with its own distinct designs, patterns and art forms.

Traditionally there were less people involved in designing or making jewellery and other ornaments.

Goldsmiths were involved in the process and it was more like family tradition or practice but now things have changed and there are new people coming into the profession who had no family connection with goldsmith. Jewellery designing is an art of designing and making jewellery, stone cutting, engraving and polishing etc.

Jewellery designers are those who plan the style and pattern of jewellery, silverware and other decorative metal work products.

They require a high degree of skill and precision and use a variety of specialized hand tools and equipment to design and manufacture new pieces of jewellery.

The fast growing jewellery business in the country has tremendous employment potential and offers excellent career opportunities to professional executives in the industry. Graduates with specialization in Jewellery Design and Management are in great demand globally for managing the jewellery business.

A course in Jewellery designing is a comprehensive one, dealing with all the fine details of jewellery making and designing.



Jewellery designers require a high degree of skill and precision and use a variety of specialized hand tools and equipment to design and manufacture new pieces of jewellery

Specially meant for those who are creative and have an artistic blend of mind, these courses give basic information on the different kinds of stones, colour coding, schemes, polishing and finishing, presentation and framing, drawing techniques, ornament making and designing and so on. Apart from these, they could also learn special skills like electroplating, metal colouring, anodizing, enameling, stone setting and silversmithing.

Numerous institutes all over India offer various courses in jewellery designing.

In most of the institutes, the course is incorporated with other designing courses. There are short term courses related to entrepreneurship too.

Nowadays, computer-aided design (CAD) software is used in the manufacturing firms to facilitate product design and to avoid flaws during the designing process.

There are many courses related to jewellery designing and different institutes offer those courses. Apart

from bachelor level courses there are also short term diplomas related to the course.

After successful completion of a course in jewellery designing, one can find outstanding job prospects in various jewellery manufactures & designing houses, export houses and renowned jewellery brand names such as Nakshatra, Tanishq, etc.

Students from northeastern states can also think of career options in this field. The region has rich jewellery design and they can be marketed well or with creativity new innovations can be made.

Different tribes have their traditional ornaments and they can be marketed well with new designs and looking into the needs of the people. One can be an entrepreneur and self employed related to this career option.

(The author is a career mentor and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjana@gmail.com for further details or any other career queries)

“For an apple you can’t reach up and pick, you have to climb that tree; the tree won’t bend down for you!”
--- Mehmet Murat ildan

The Shillong Times
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Nitish back as Bihar CM
APPREHENSIONS of a BJP volte face at the last minute have been dispelled and Nitish Kumar is re-elected as Chief Minister of Bihar for another term. The swearing-in takes place on Monday. Kumar obviously has crossed the first post, but hurdles are bound to remain for as long as he continues in this position. While the term is for five years, anything could happen midway through this run. The electoral arithmetic predicts as much. Even then, this is a remarkable credit for a politician that he is still wanted for such a top post. His Sushasan Babu image, one of “good governance”, apparently keeps him going though there have of late been spectacular set-backs to him and his JDU. The majority for the new government is wafer-thin. But, having reached this far, the BJP can be trusted to keep the show going in a stronger manner because of the clout the national party enjoys and its propensity to poach on legislators from rival political formations with relative ease. This was evident in Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere too. For some reason, the party allowed others to take the wind out of its sails in Maharashtra after the assembly results came up with a fractured verdict.

Caste equations that weighed heavy in Bihar politics for long years have changed. Though a Backward Class returned as CM, upper castes through the instrument of the BJP will call larger shots in the ministry. The Nitish Kumar ministries have been reaching out to all segments of the population but a pro-BC tilt was suspected; this being more so during the previous Lalu family term of 15 years. Now, a substantial number of forward community members have been elected to the assembly and several of them would become ministers. It remains to be seen how long the 69-year-old Kumar will remain in the saddle, given the weak positioning of his party and the chances of BJP raising its strength further. Yet, it is not out of context to urge the CM that he would need to take governance more seriously. He has developed a lethargy, which the voters have noticed. Bihar requires faster progress. It is the third least-urbanised state. This means that job opportunities are fewer; forcing large sections of youths to reach out to other states for work. Kumar's contributions towards social progress are worthy of praise; but there has been too little economic heft or progress. It is here that the new government should concentrate better on now.

TO THE EDITOR

Ex-Governor’s communal instigations

Editor,
Mr Tathagata Roy, the Ex Governor of Meghalaya, known for his grotesque articulations posted on social media. In these incendiary statements he has pitched the residents of Them Meteor vis-à-vis the indigenous tribals of Hynniewtrep. And to add fuel to the fire, he has further called upon the Bengalees and other non-tribals of our state to unitedly stand against the local tribals. Such disseminations are bound to arouse societal tensions and this is nothing short of a communal incitation, thus making him a veritable offender with an ulterior motive to create social disaffection. Hence, such hostile expressions with an agenda to create feelings of hatred, ill-will between different religious, racial, language or regional group or castes or communities are perhaps liable to be booked under Section 153A, IPC.

Co-incidentally, during the last Durga Puja’s deities immersion in Shillong we were much elated and felt re-assured to hear from some senior Bengalees in one of their interviews with a local TV channel that they will not tolerate any anti-social elements in their midst who intend to interfere in

the hitherto by and large seamless social harmony that exists between the tribals and non-tribals. They reiterated that they were in fulsome praise of the State government and the local populace for having had a trouble-free puja celebration. To sum up, if the bonafide non-tribals of Shillong can articulate such words of wisdom, I can’t see why our Ex- Governor dares to naively post such unfounded misplaced observations?

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong-2

Assembly session takeaways

Editor,
The five-day autumn session of the Meghalaya Assembly ended last Thursday but the main issues raised in the house by the Opposition like illegal mining of coal, it’s illegal transportation and sale outside the state; the nagging power issues and the unreasonable Covid-19 expenditure refused to go away from public memory.

The Opposition brigade of Meghalaya ought to be reminded that illegal mining, transportation and sale of coal did take place even during the former’s regime right after the NGT ban in April 14, 2014. The illegality continued till the take-over

The cloudless sky with the hot autumn sun over the blue horizon is normally what people in the rural areas would welcome with open arms. The harvested rice has reached the farmers’ homes and it would have been a perfect weather to dry the new rice; only that this year there is not much rice to dry. This year the yield from rice is very unsatisfactory. Everywhere we visited there were complaints of low yield as compared to other years due to the abnormal climatic condition. The erratic weather with incessant rain has not only affected the production of rice but it has damaged many paddy fields some beyond repair. This year was rather extraordinary not only because rice production was affected by the unfavourable climatic condition but the unpredictable rain has affected the productions of other crops too.

The state has experienced discontent in many spheres not so much because of the COVID-19 pandemic but because of a host of other issues too. Meghalaya’s economy is largely influenced by people in the rural areas, who also depend on agriculture as a primary activity, hence the climate plays a major role in the rise and the fall of the income of the people. This year the weather played spoilsport on the lives of the poorer sections of the population, but there is nothing to cheer about the performance of the government either. People are complaining that even after cross the halfway tenure the performance of the state government is below the mark.

The autumn session of the Meghalaya state assembly is an indicator of how the NPP-led MDA government fares in the last two and half years of its existence. Credit goes to the Speaker of the House who accepted the No- Confidence Motion moved by the Congress the main party in the opposition in spite of the same being tabled at short notice. It is immaterial to debate why the Speaker allowed the Opposition to move the No Confidence Motion against the government, but the very fact that the House is

debating it, is an indication that democracy in the state has come of age and matured.

The Speaker also deserves to be congratulated for launching the Meghalaya Assembly TV channel which provides live coverage of the proceedings in the House. The live telecast of the proceedings in the House enables the people of the state to watch the debates and to see how their representatives performed in the August House. A healthy democracy indeed needs a vibrant and impartial house with a strong opposition and the Congress too ought to be congratulated for doing its job well, by tabling the No Confidence Motion against the MDA government. The No Confidence Motion is not about who wins or loses because ultimately it is a numbers game and whoever has the majority will win, but because of it many issues and failures of the government were brought to the fore.

Unfortunately, the CM’s replies to the many issues brought up by the Opposition left much to be desired; in fact that was not what people expected from a suave, young and techno-savvy political leader like Conrad A Sangma. The decision of the Government to ignore and refuse to say anything on the issue of illegal mining and transportation of coal provides ample evidence for people to doubt the sincerity of the government to tackle this important issue. It provides people with a reason to suspect that there is something behind the scenes and the Government is hiding something from the public. Not only the performance of the Government is questionable but even the competence of the ministers in the cabinet is also questioned.

The NPP-led MDA government encouraged its ministers to be constituency ministers only. Ministers who seek to bring development only to their constituency see nothing beyond that and are not state leaders. Ministers don’t realise that they are to ministers to the entire state. The plan to start two Centres of Excellence in

collaboration with the Government of Israel to improve and promote livelihoods of farmers in the state is one such instance when the choice of location is debatable. For instance, the choice of a location which falls in the constituency of the Agriculture Minister is also a case of the minister abusing his power and position to bring development to his constituency only.

In fact, the first example of this is the transfer a division of the PWD department from Jowai to Shangpung lock stock and barrel. Isn’t it true that the move to shift the entire PWD North from Jowai to Shangpung was made to please the MLA of the constituency who was recently dropped from the cabinet? The MLA tried to shift the department from Jowai to Shangpung when he was minister in charge of PWD. Now when the government realised that the move they made is rather unpopular, the Chief Minister had to rush to Jowai and to promise to build a Mini Secretariat in the location where the PWD North Jowai is located.

Now what exactly is a mini secretariat and how will it be of help to the farmers whose paddy field was damaged or their yield affected? Why didn’t the Government instead help farmers rebuild their paddy fields or compensate for their loss rather than planning to build the mini secretariat? The pertinent point there is - when the Government cannot even pay for the salary of the staff of the two Autonomous District Councils, and it is unable to pay the salaries of the SSA teacher regularly, how will building a mini secretariat help the people of the District?

When there are already District Councils at the respective districts what is the need for the mini secretariat? The Government should instead help to strengthen the ADCs and build the capacity of the MDCs. This will go a long way in strengthening the District Councils instead of building the mini secretariat.

The CM claimed that moving the PWD division to Shangpung is to bring the Government closer to the people, but what about the existing Government facilities in the rural areas? Are they up to the mark? Rather than wasting the State’s meagre resources on the so called mini secretariat, why not improve healthcare and education especially in the rural areas of the state?

While on the subject of the mini secretariat it is also perhaps not out of place to question how much impact has ‘the Cabinet on the move’ made on the development of the state? What is available in the public domain is that this move is rather a costly affair. If it cost Rs. 19.18 lakhs only for holding the so called Cabinet meetings on the move, one can only imagine how much it will cost to hold a mini assembly. If the intention of the Government is to reach to the people, it should make it mandatory for every cabinet minister to make a regular and surprise visit to the districts and the Block headquarters. This will have more impact rather than having the mini secretariat or the Cabinet on the move.

With regards to mining and illegal extraction of coal one wonders how a man who also has a business interest in providing internet services does not realise that we now live in the world of likes, share and hits. How did the computer-savvy Chief Minister miss the point that the YouTube video of the Leader of the Opposition’s recent visit to the coal mine areas to assess the extracted coal in the Jaijith hills has more than one lakhs hits?

This is the autumn of discontent. Despite the fact that it has been almost six months since the pandemic hit the State yet people are still in a dilemma as the future is uncertain. The farmers are the ones who have to bear the brunt. The pandemic had not only hindered their movements; now the weather too had affected their incomes and the Government too is playing with their lives.

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critically acclaimed “arthouse” films as well as in those of “mainstream” vintage. Moreover he was one of the most malleable actors seen on screen portraying a wide range of characters with utmost conviction. From an urban sleuth to rural teacher, a struggling swimming coach to top-end doctor, romantic hero to unscrupulous villain, from comedy to serious roles, Chatterjee was at ease with any challenge thrown his way.

No wonder the legendary Satyajit Ray featured him in as many as 14 films with his acting gems liberally showered in films of Mrinal Sen to Tapan Sinha, Gautam Ghosh to Aparna Sen to name a few. Apart from being a great actor and star, Chatterjee was both an enigma and an institution in Bengali life with perhaps each person feeling a direct or indirect attachment to this tall figure.

During my college days in the early 1990s, I had the privilege of receiving as many as three letters from the legend who had the humility and decency to reply through his own handwriting numerous postal mails from his innumerable admirers, thereby proving his down to earth character.

Once when an enthusiastic self “rebuked him” for working in some meaningless potboilers, the stalwart politely expressed the hard fact of paucity of

good films being churned up with no guarantee that he would necessarily get the call to act in those along with his compulsion to keep the kitchen running and finally asking forgiveness by keeping in mind his vast body of work in memorable films despite several constraints. On another occasion when I expressed my desire to meet him, Chatterjee agreed to meet me, an absolute stranger in a theatre on a particular day of the week and time where he was regularly performing in a play! Also he gave out his phone number if I wished to call him!

No wonder why, like Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray or Uttam Kumar; the humble cultured dignified Soumitra Chatterjee has also become an indispensable part of the lives of all true-blue Bengalis.

In critical phases of their lives his innumerable admirers will certainly continue to draw inspiration from the inspiring call of Chatterjee’s character in the epic film ‘Koni’ where in his role as the swimming coach he would encourage the struggling swimmer from a poor economic background thereby paving the path for her success by cheering - ‘Fight Koni Fight!’

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Via email

Financial Literacy
Key to practical inclusion

By Moin Qazi

Financial services are analogous to safe water, basic healthcare and primary education— these are essential to enable people to participate in the benefits of a modern market-based economy. Ideal financial societies are those which provide safe and convenient ways that enable people to navigate their daily financial lives. The poor need to set aside money in times of plenty and draw it in lean times. In addition, they should be able to borrow, make and receive payments, and manage risk.

Without a safe place to save money, it’s difficult to cope with the unexpected or to plan for the future such as the unprecedented pandemic. Without access to affordable credit, it is difficult to acquire an asset or set up a business. Without insurance, all your security can be wiped out by one misfortune.

When the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) was announced in August 2014, it could not be anticipated how successful a scheme it could be in respect of financial inclusion of the masses. The Jan Dhan account-holders are to be brought under a social security cover, with the two schemes; an auto-debit of 7330 and 712 annually gives separate life and accidental coverage of 22,00,000 for those in the age group of 18 to 50 years and 18 to 70 years, respectively.

While we are nearing universal financial access, we still have to go a long way in achieving greater usage of these accounts. That is the real challenge of financial inclusion. In order for people to be able to use financial services, account holders need to be literate enough to understand the basics of these monetary affairs. Merely opening physical accounts as flag posts of financial identity won’t help unless they are actively used by people for managing their money.

To make this possible people have to be imparted an ability to understand and execute matters of personal finance, including basic numeracy and literacy, budgeting, investing, and risk diversification. This skill is known as financial literacy. It is a combination of financial awareness, knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviours necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve financial well-being.

In simple terms, it refers to a set of skills that allow people to manage their money wisely along with some understanding of essential financial concepts, not the least of which is an appreciation of the trade-off between risk and return. It is the single biggest skill that can ensure economic well-being and freedom.

People with robust financial skills and a strong grasp of financial principles are able to better understand and negotiate the financial landscape and avoid possible traps. Conversely, people with a lower degree of financial literacy struggle to understand money matters and their potential impact on financial well-being. Financial ignorance carries significant costs and results in people spending more on transaction fees, getting overextended with debts since they are ripe prospects for predatory practices. They usually fall prey to aggressive marketing and end up with troublesome financial products.

In the past few years financial literacy has gained great momentum because it is seen as an assured path to universal financial inclusion. However, the financial environment is now populated by a huge range of complex and nuanced products. In such a situation, literate and working populations tend to feel overwhelmed by the

range of options and the arcane financial and digital vocabulary in which these options are couched. To keep abreast, even those who are financially literate need to brush up on the latest.

We need to develop a full suite of financial literacy interventions so that more youth and women develop the confidence and skills to manage their own finances. On account of financial illiteracy, they get saddled with risky levels of debt.

Financial inclusion and financial literacy are two sides of the equation. Financial inclusion works on the supply side by providing financial market/ services that people demand whereas financial literacy stimulates the demand side by making people aware of what they need. Therefore, financial inclusion and financial education must move in concert; each triggers a supportive reaction in the other.

People believe that the triad of financial inclusion, financial literacy and financial stability will be extremely relevant in the coming times because our financial lives are going to become complex. The depth and breadth of financial systems determine the financial stability of any society.

Everybody is happy while getting a loan. The problem begins when you have to repay the loan. It should be dinned into borrowers’ minds again and again that excessive borrowing (taking multiple loans) and sub-lending or ghost lending (allowing the use of your identity for a loan that someone else uses) can be extremely toxic for financial lives – for communities at all levels of income.

Financial literacy has now acquired nuanace with the onset of digital financial services (DFS), considered the most powerful tools for financial inclusion. Offering basic financial services through mobile phones, point-of-sale devices, and networks of small-scale agents, DFS have the potential to reach more people, at a lower cost, with greater convenience than traditional “brick and mortar” banking services.

However, millions of people cannot read, write, or understand the long number strings necessary to transact on mobile phones. We need to aggressively train the end-users on the nuances of digital finance that will empower them to adopt technology with ease. Women are eager to learn how to use digital payments because it gives them greater privacy and financial control – something they value a great deal.

At a time when individuals are increasingly being called upon to make complex financial decisions, a large fraction of households have only a rudimentary understanding of basic concepts. Moreover, participation in financial markets is far from universal, and individuals with low levels of education and financial literacy are the least likely to participate in these markets. These correlations have motivated policy makers to devote substantial resources to financial literacy education. Functional proficiency in core money skills and their subtle nuances is crucial if they are to successfully manage their future money needs. The complex nature of our financial lives has given rise to a new concept – financial capability.

This can lead to cross learning and cross-pollination and sharing of best practices, unique experiences and breakthroughs, and both successes. Policy makers will do well to act in interest of the people. ---INFA

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."
— Frederick Douglass

The Shillong Times

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Protectionism versus tourism

ADELBERT Nongrum, MLA of Shillong North constituency feels that the Assembly debates on illegal extraction and transportation of coal were not important enough. His contention is that issues such as the setting up of entry/exit gates at Bynihat and other vantage points and the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA) should have been the priorities as these are important to 'protect' the indigenous people of the state. The point is that the Dorbar Shnong already exercise the right to admit or refuse to admit residents into the localities within their jurisdictions. As the first contact points at the ground level the Dorbars are better placed to execute this task without the need for government machinery to be entangled in the process. In fact the Dorbar Shnong should be empowered to check the antecedents of all residents within their jurisdiction. They would be able to manage things better and more efficiently and reduce officialdom. Of course the Government would need to compensate the Dorbar for the time and effort in carrying out that process.

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) which some perceive as an instrument to counter illegal migration to the State would be untenable because Meghalaya is a transit state. Besides, there is the paradox of Meghalaya promoting itself as a tourist destination even while a section of xenophobic politicians and pressure groups want to apply every instrument under the sun to make the business of tourists entering Meghalaya a tough one. Many would be deterred from entering the state if they have to be looked at askance as illegal migrants when they actually belong to this country and also want to see another part of their own country.

Ironically, while the people of West Khasi Hills have rued the slowdown of tourism which has resulted in guest houses remaining empty since March this year, the entry/exit point is likely to slow down tourism even further. Tourists have confided that the idea of restricting entry into a part of the country is anathema to self respecting Indians. It's equivalent to carrying an inter-state visa. How many tourists actually visit Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur for that matter? What are the earnings of these states from tourism? In Meghalaya the livelihoods created by tourism are perhaps the only sustainable ventures since tourism requires a rich biodiversity, protected forests, greenery and cleanliness. Tourism also allows the state to sell its culture and heritage to visitors and allows them to tell their stories to the world. Unfortunately there is a disconnect between tour operators and xenophobic pressure groups that spread paranoia and will never allow the local people to fight out the demons using their indigenous strengths without being force-fed with fear of the outsider. How long protectionism?

The 2020 United States presidential elections took place under the sepulchral conditions of a worldwide pandemic. It was moving to see American democracy groan its way back to life, despite the dreariness of so many unnecessary Covid deaths, caused, at least, in part, by negligence at the federal level. It was touching to see volunteers at polling booths, risking their lives, inspired by genuine patriotism. Unlike frontline workers, who have no choice but to risk their lives to earn a living, these volunteers were risking their lives, without being compelled to and without financial remuneration. It was also moving to know of the historically unprecedented voter turnout. Finally, it was magical to see the results, after the tense few days following Election Day, November 3rd- and following four years of frustration, since Mr. Trump was elected by the Electoral College in 2016.

This election has brought many firsts in the form of Kamala Harris - the first woman, first African-American, and first Asian-American vice-president elect of the United States. But Mr. Trump also represents many firsts. He is the closest any American president has come to being a dictator. He is the first cultish president to have made a mockery of the American democracy. Without conscious intent, he has proved that what make democracy valuable, are not its structural aspects, but the moral quality of its people - especially their elected leader. Mr. Trump is also the first president to have broken all bounds of shame - unabashed in his myriad prejudices, out of touch with reality, a frozen snarl always adorning his face. Manifesting his character on a daily basis, his perpetual anger, and gigantic (hence fragile) ego, became the standard trademarks of a president one newspaper called a "foolish child." Finally Trump is the first president to be divider-in-chief, stoking the flames of every possible feud, just to get his own way. Not even the most violent of all prior presidents has been quite as unabashed in expressing shocking prejudices and a coarseness unfitting for this highest office. In his dark binary world of winners and losers, Trump has always feared being a "loser" more than anything else. This triumphant post-election moment therefore comes with poetic justice in the form of anti-Trump protestors lam-

A Temptation and his legacy

Of Trump and Trumpism

By Deepa Majumdar

pooning the president by covering the White House fence with "loser" signs. Trump's Washington hotel had two signs posted in front of it, saying "Don't be a sore loser" and "Face Reality." But his fear of being prosecuted perhaps outweighs his fear of losing, thus strengthening his refusal to concede electoral defeat. Mr. Trump may be prosecuted for prior misdeeds, in which case, he may abscond, by fleeing to his iconic golf hotel in Scotland.

While most of the world may heave a sigh of relief that Biden-Harris appear to have beaten Trump-Pence in the popular vote, Americans cannot afford to rest on the laurels of the 2020 election. First, Mr. Trump may not vanish altogether. In four years' time, he may return for another bid for election. Or, his kith and kin may run for office. Given his large cult-like following among rural white uneducated Americans, who identify with his crudeness and prejudices, in a venal celebration of coarseness - he and his family members may win national elections in the future. Let us not forget that if Biden won more than 74 million votes, then Trump won nearly 70 million. All these voters may return full blast to support Trump, or a member of his family, in the 2024 presidential elections. But second, even if Donald Trump fades from the horizon of History, his followers, who represent his legacy of Trumpism, will not. If nothing else, Mr. Trump has brought to the surface, aspects of the ugly American that were always there. Like all nations, but perhaps more vividly so (because it is a superpower), America has an ugly aspect stemming from its original sins of racism and materialism.

Who is the ugly American? Who is Trump's follower and disciple? Lustful, and therefore deeply gendered, he belongs mainly to the mostly white aspect of the American plebeian that thirsts to express its white supremacy, by disdaining formal education, and rejecting science. Confusing freedom with licentiousness, and confidence with rampant egotism, he celebrates moral-intellectual bankruptcy - fancying himself superior to the rest of world (including Europeans), because he suffers a tremendous inferiority complex. Despite his robust realism, he has a deluded

mind - especially since the great sin of America's 2003 pre-emptive attack on Iraq, which boomeranged back upon its citizens who failed to protest this war, beclouding their minds with delusion.

Although Trump's legacy of Trumpism appears new, it is something ingrained in the American psyche and its ethos. It was always there - a wistful longing for the days of slavery and unabashed white supremacy. But, what Trump has brought about as new is the unabashed, emboldened visibility of this sickness of racial prejudice. Never before in recent history has white supremacy been as bold as in the last four years of Mr. Trump's presidency. Like a cult leader, Trump understood and manipulated the longings and fears of his followers, who, in exchange, overlooked his crudeness, lies, and other flaws. By certain praiseworthy gestures, like donating some of his sizeable presidential income, and by giving a show of respect to those otherwise disrespected by the intellectual Left, Trump convinced his followers that he "loved" them. Yes! His whole bid at presidency was always deeply personal and egotistic - never for the greater good of the nation. Couching every human relationship in binary terms - either you support me or you do not - Trump degraded democracy by converting his base to a fan club. Like every narcissist, he forged his base as a mirror, into which, he could peer whenever he wanted to. But the converse is true as well. Trump himself also served as a mirror for his base to look into. Through him they saw what they themselves might achieve - money, power, prestige, without the slightest toil of moral labor. Always a temptation, Mr. Trump served as a perfect nemesis of the political correctness that silenced his adoring fans.

What were the mirroring qualities Trump shared with his base? More than anything else, a coarse love for money, a disdain for knowledge (especially science), a gigantic ego, and a paranoid mind given to conspiracy theories. When they look at the starry heavens Trumpists see resources to be mined and sold - not heavenly bodies trembling with life. Given all this, what else can one expect from Trump's base, but poor judgment of character, or a poor sense of what eastern reli-

gions call the power of "discrimination" (which the west calls critical thinking)? What else can one expect from such a base, except the blind loyalty that a narcissist like Mr. Trump interprets as "love" for him - when in fact, it is a projection of their own desires, or the narcissism of his followers? In this mutual self-projection, all the narcissist strokes is his own ego.

A living testament to the truth that one does not necessarily grow wise with age, Trump, the Temptation, proves that even at age seventy-four, one can be a foolish rogue, wholly bereft of wisdom. Yet, it is important to put things into perspective and remember that Mr. Trump is not as bad as the Left makes him out to be. Neither a Hitler, nor a Pol Pot, he is merely a lewd narcissist. In his first term, which hopefully will be his last, he has not yet waged war, nor taken as many lives, as have his presidential predecessors (including Mr. Obama). While his motives may be suspect, he has donated a portion of his presidential salary, in keeping with the generosity so characteristic of Americans. The question every American asks is not whether to donate, but how much and to whom.

What will Mr. Trump leave behind as his legacy? Not his unjust policies fashioned over four years of tense turmoil, nor his crude nationalism - but the Pandora's Box he has unlocked - a box containing America's original sins of greed and racial hatred. What do I mean by Trumpism? Unconcealed coarseness, the delusion that one can bend reality to one's own will, and the impudence to parade braggadocio as confidence. Mr. Trump has always been accused of lying. I do not think he ever willfully lied, but rather, lost sight of truth. The massive hypocrisy in his soul made him delusional enough to lose sight of the basics of veracity. A liar must first know the truth in order to willfully distort it. But Trump, I think, is out of touch with reality and truth.

Despite the likely Biden-Harris triumph over Trump-Pence, the beast that Trump nurtured, emboldened, and unleashed, continues to growl in the background - pointing unmistakably to the last days of America as superpower - a civilization in a downward spiral since its unrepentant 2003 preemptive attack on Iraq.

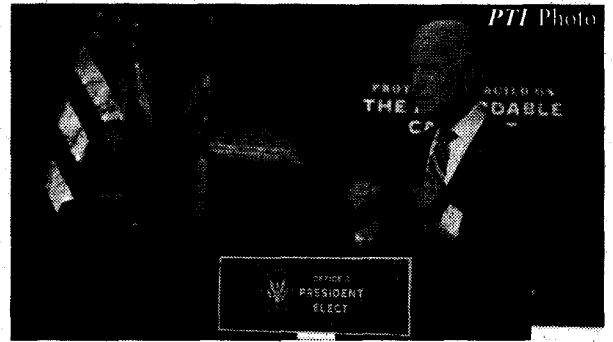
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Two-way trade, investment look brighter than ever before
President-elect Joe Biden means a lot for India

By Nantoo Banerjee

India-friendly Joe Biden's ascendancy to the top job in the United States means a lot for India, especially in the area of trade and economic relations as the country is looking for large foreign investments from diplomatic allies to grow its domestic industry and boost employment. Contrary to the official data on sources of FDI inflows into India from April 2000 to December 2019, putting the USA as the fifth largest investor after Mauritius, Singapore, Japan and the Netherlands, nine out of the top 10 foreign companies in India today are from the US. The nine companies are: Apple, Amazon, Citibank, Coca-Cola, Google, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Microsoft Corporation and Pepsico. Japan's Sony Corporation ranks 10th in the list. For several years, the US and India have been working on boosting investment and employment. Now the time has come for a stronger push. For this, both the US industry and India needs support from

Biden's personal dislike for Chinese President Xi Jinping in the recent years. Biden had personally known Xi for several years and reportedly spent more time in private meetings and dinners with Xi than any other world leader. Xi too had lauded Biden, gushing public praise. However, the 'bonhomie' no longer exists between the two leaders. At personal level, they seem to distrust each other. What soured the Biden-Xi relationship remains as much a mystery as the sudden overturn in the 'personal level' relationship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping since 2019. Xi was one of the very few global leaders who didn't immediately congratulate Biden after his election victory, apparently because President Trump contested the election results. However, days later, China finally congratulated Biden and Kamala Harris after Biden's Arizona victory. The Biden administration's diplomatic and economic ties



Washington DC, especially with regard to technology transfer and immigration rules.

In its own way, India is increasingly investing in the US, expanding its enterprises and creating jobs for US citizens. According to a report by the Confederation of Indian Industry, under the title "Indian Roots, American Soil 2020," as many as 155 Indian companies have invested \$22 billion in the US. These enterprises created nearly 125,000 jobs in the US. These Indian companies are doing business in all 50 the states. Texas, California, New Jersey, New York and Florida are home to large number of US workers directly employed by Indian companies.

The top five states in which Indian firms have generated maximum employment are: Texas (17,578 jobs), California (8,271 jobs), New Jersey (8,057 jobs), New York (6,175 jobs) and Florida (5,454 jobs). The Indian FDI was the highest in Texas (\$9.5 billion), followed by New Jersey (\$2.4 billion), New York (\$1.8 billion), Florida (\$915 million), and Massachusetts (\$873 million). Indian investments in 20 US states stand at over \$ 100 million each. The report said that 77 percent of the companies plan to make more investments in the US.

The reason behind the brewing expectation of deeper Indo-US business and trade relations is Biden's long and productive association with India even much before he became the Vice President in the Barack Obama administration. He had always advocated a stronger relationship with India. As early as in 2006, three years before he became the US Vice-President, Biden's vision of the future of US-India relations mentioned: "My dream is that in 2020, the two closest nations in the world will be India and the United States."

Although Obama, then a US Senator, was initially hesitant to support the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal, Biden had championed the cause leading the charge and working with both Democrats and Republicans to get the civil nuclear deal approved in the US Congress in 2008.

Another reason behind the expectation under the present circumstances is

with China will bear significance on US-India relations.

The possibility of a better US-Iran relation, under the Biden administration, may also directly benefit India and its economic ties with Iran which came under severe pressure from actions by Trump imposing trade embargo and Xi promoting large infrastructure investment in Iran. China and Iran are in the process of sealing a long-term economic and security pact. India is highly concerned about its strategic stake in the Chabahar port project in Iran. India has committed a Rs.100 crore investment to the project in its last budget. The port is close to Pakistan's Gwadar port being developed by China as part of its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

India's pace in developing the Chabahar project has slowed down due to US sanctions, making Iran impatient about it. India is clearly caught in the geopolitical rivalry between the US & China over Iran. While India got a waiver from US sanctions for development of the port - on the ground that it will help access Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan - it is still not clear whether railway and other linked projects are exempt from such sanctions. India, as also a number of prominent EU members, hope that the Biden administration will lift the trade sanction on Iran. The last but not the least, India hopes that the Biden administration will go soft on immigration and visas, specially H1B visas for skilled professionals. Before the presidential election, Biden promised to support family-based immigration, increase visa allocations for permanent and work-based immigration, reform the visa system for high-skill, specialty jobs and eliminate the limits of job-linked green cards. However, it may not be immediately easy for Biden to keep his pre-pol promises on immigration visas for which the rules have been tightened by Trump through official orders over the last three years. Visa and technology transfer issues hold the key to the expansion of economic relations between the two large democracies. The issues may be difficult, but surmountable. Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election certainly provides a silver lining. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

MBBS beyond reach of meritorious poor

Editor,
Amidst huge protests with meaningful suggestions by our students who aspire to become doctors, to postpone the NEET until COVID-19 subsides, the authorities backed by the Supreme Court paid a deaf ear to those pleas. One month of TV discussion taught me one doctrine. I now know why our students are in a state of utter desperation and helplessness. When three girls from Tamil Nadu took the extreme step to die of suicide then the picture became clearer. All three who died of suicide were the one or two failures, some even managed to be wait-listed. The story of a boy who also took his own life was more pathetic. Last year he could manage to clear entrance and was invited to one college. But the fees charged were too much for the father who is just a poor farmer. Scrutinising the case

further all students all over India who excelled in their studies in NCERT schools be it CBSE or ICSE or State Boards had to study voluminous bazaar notes and the majority of these poor meritorious students concentrated 60% in Biology, 25% in Chemistry and only 15% in Physics. Worst these bazaar notes are very expensive very heavy in weight. So all those valuable years of studying beautifully compiled textbooks by 16 renowned professors of JNU, IIT'S and PGT'S proved to be in vain as no questions were ever set from those books.

What prompted the then government of 2012, the UPA to do away with the good practice of our states taking the help of their State Directorates of Health Service to select the best in Physics, Chemistry and Biology from ICSE and CBSE Boards and send them to the medical colleges in order of merit is not known. What we know is the NEET coaching centres are flourishing like mushrooms and till date the NEET coaching centres have become the

most flourishing industry in the country. After Class X Science results, the best rich students would be pulled in and two years of heavy coaching to attack weird problems never found in any NCERT textbooks. This would produce results which-- then advertise the coaching centres fighting for supremacy.

It appears that the paper setters, moderators evaluators are from these centres. Why I say this is because in the last 2020 NEET paper in Physics, there were five very wrong questions and surprisingly one boy scored 100% in P.C.B. Two wrongs cannot make a right. Objective questions very hidden in nature with silly choice of (1), (2), (3), (4) predominate. Except two questions on the Guitar and Photo-electricity which deserve praise as being conceptual, the rest are simply memorisation of formulae, hundreds of them followed by lengthy arithmetic of Class VII standard of division and multiplication. These take the students to more than ninety seconds, 30 seconds more than time allotted. Worst is that it appears that the pa-

per setter does not follow the 2019-2020 NCERT curriculum which had undergone some change. Transistor and Logic Gates were omitted as per order. But these topics were set. So for our poor who have no money to be attend coaching classes, is this a fair deal? Is there any justice in it?

Tamil Nadu which had since 2012 opposed NEET is now repentant following the 3 suicides before examination, to resort to the old method of selection. I do pray our Education Department emulates the state of Tamil Nadu. The present 2020 NEET qualifier assisted by SC concessions are two or three time repeaters. So unless we act, NEET is going to be the National Elimination Test of the "meritorious poor" who cannot afford to be extra heavily coached as the rich do with NEET coaching. Hence the meritorious poor will no longer become doctors. Isn't this nepotism of the highest order?

Yours etc.,
Manbha Diengdoh,
Via email

Entry points & MRSSA: Case for judicial scrutiny

Editor,
The decision of the Meghalaya government to construct entry and exit points at interstate borders apparently to curb influx and provide security to its citizens is an unwarranted and regressive step. The provision, a part of the Meghalaya Resident Security and Safety Act is a gross violation of Article 19 of the Indian Constitution which guarantees "the right to move freely throughout the territory of India" and therefore bound to face stern judicial scrutiny.

Several questions remain unanswered in this regard. The Government of Meghalaya needs to answer 1) Why it sees citizens of India as a threat if they enter the state freely. 2) What was the need to bring in a law similar to ILP which has already been rejected by the Centre. 3) Why disclosure of information at the entry and exit points should not be seen as state surveillance and violating right to pri-

vacy. 4) Where is the evidence/study to suggest large scale influx is taking place in Meghalaya when the 2011 census reports suggests otherwise? 5) Why entry/exit gates are being built on interstate roadways rather than at the international borders.

The comments of the Chief Minister on the last day of the autumn assembly session warning the state not to harass people at the entry points and at the same time admitting that out of 100 Indians perhaps only 1 may be found to be an illegal immigrant, nullifies the rationale and effectiveness behind such a draconian act which involves crores of rupees of taxpayers' money.

At a time when the world is advocating free trade and increasingly becoming global, such experiments do not augur well for a state that envisions itself as a leading tourist destination of the country. On the contrary it promotes alienation and portrays the state in poor light.

Yours etc.,
Bhaskar D,
Via email

"Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard."

— H. L. Mencken

The Shillong Times

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Democracy, polls

DEMOCRACY is facing odds in its traditional strongholds. The recent US presidential elections cast a new shadow over this governance system. That the incumbent president Donald Trump was not ready to acknowledge the election results and is now alleging "fraud" presents a curious case. This, even as the polls were held directly under his watch. He took legal recourse to nullify the verdict that went in favour of Democratic nominee Joe Biden. There is no full guarantee yet that the swearing in of the next president in January would be smooth.

The fact that such chaos erupted in what was the world's strongest democracy — and the oldest — goes to show the future of democracy worldwide might not be very rosy.

India is the world's largest democracy in terms of people's participation. Notably, the Lok Sabha polls in 2019 ended in a controversy as the Opposition alleged tampering of electronic voting machines by the Modi government. The Election Commission denied any irregularity. India has a sound election machinery in the form of ECI. Yet, the side that lost the polls did not think it fit to accept defeat gracefully. The protests turned out to be a storm in a teacup.

The Bihar assembly elections were done in a remarkably orderly fashion this time, unlike the chaos that reigned the elections in the state long ago. Nitish Kumar as CM in the last 15 years had helped restore order to conduct fair polls in Bihar. This time, yet, the RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav is not willing to accept defeat and has alleged "fraud" in the elections at the behest of the BJP-RJD combine. There was very little margin vis-à-vis total votes polled for the two rival formations. Prima facie, nothing went wrong. Else, he will now have to come up with proof. The power transfer to a new government has been smooth. That much must be said to the credit of Indian democracy.

Democracy faced serious odds in Europe as well, as was evident in relation to the Brexit referendum and the problems it posed to the political leadership. Heads rolled. There was too much confusion and the efficacy of the democratic system itself was called into question.

By contrast, China that has a one-party system, detached from democracy, is seeing smooth governance and no cacophony. Governance is more focused and visionary. Freedom is a casualty, though. Limited democracies as in Singapore are also doing well. It is imperative that Democracy be given a chance to perform better universally.

Are ADCs white elephants?

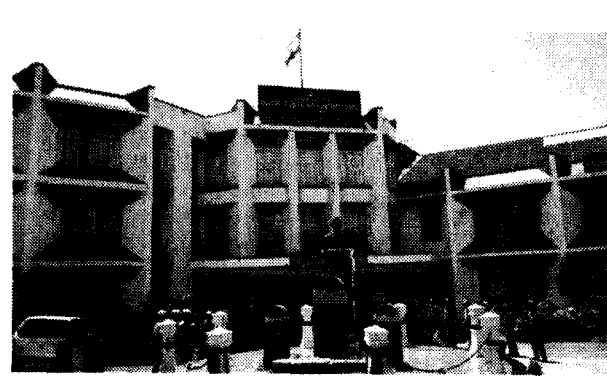
By Albert Thyrniang

bly. Mechanisms like ILP could be in place to shield the state. The reason for excluding Meghalaya from ILP is because of the Sixth Schedule. CAA is excluded from IPL states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur. So CAA does not necessarily come into operation even in the absence of ADCs. The reason for the Government of India not granting ILP to Meghalaya is because of the existence of ADCs/the Sixth Schedule.

In Assam the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council (KAADC) administers the two districts, South and West Karbi Anglong because statehood is still a dream. The Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) was granted as an alternative to 'Bodoland' state. If 'Bodoland' was

but gets nothing in return. Is this not a liability?

JHADC diverted 20 crore of the central funds earmarked for development to pay the remuneration of its personnel. It implies that the Council is not able to generate enough funds for its own workers. Is this not a liability? KHADC depends on the central government to build a 'missing' museum. Even if the museum does come up there may not be fund for its maintenance. Is this not a liability? The affairs in GHADC are no pleasant commentary. The Council is too overstaffed with more than 1700 employees. Their salary has not been paid for past 28 months. Is this not a liability? To make it worse new appointments did not halt in spite of the excess number of staff. Notwith-



standing the directive of the High Court of Meghalaya and The Meghalaya Human Rights Commission (MHRC) the dues are still to be cleared.

How long will GHADC take to pay its employees? No one knows. How much money does the council need? If we take an average of Rs. 20,000 per employee per month for 28 months the amount totals to a whopping Rs. 95.20 crores. If this is not a liability then what is it?

The KHADC chief said that there is a strong sentimental attachment and a great pride in the ADCs. This is precisely what a white elephant does. Due to perceived reverence for the ADCs as institutions for the culture, customs, tradition and rights of the indigenous people we may not be able to get rid of them in spite of them being more of a bane than a boon.

Supporters boast that ADCs preserve and promote the culture of the indigenous people. When was the last book on culture published by an ADC? Do ADCs have publications of culture? Monolith Festivals turn out to be instances of alleged corruption and misuse of funds thus teaching people to move away from the integral tribal values of honesty and integrity.

It might have been in 2015

in a minor function organised by a literature society in Tura the present Chief Minister Conrad Sangma informed that GHADC does not have a library. It was quite a shock. Till today the Council has no library of its own. How come after more than 70 years a library is not even in the plan? Then where are the books on the Garo history and culture stored? If someone wishes to read about the Garos the first and best place to visit should have been the GHADC's library. Do the questions hold good for other ADCs?

KHADC's CEM Titosstarwell Chyne was the first to staunchly defend the institution he is heading. The observations/questions below are addressed to him as CEM of the Council and not to him as an individual. Therefore, there is nothing personal. It is learned that 'Chyne' is an anglicised version of the Khasi surname 'Khain'. If true, what was the need to so do? Was it to look more English? Is the anglicised form superior to the Khasi counterpart? Did the change have the approval of KHADC? What if others too decide to anglicise their titles? Will that be okay? Will the Council approve the move? Will they remain Scheduled Tribes (ST)? Would that mean preserving or diluting the culture?

Why don't we broaden the implications? What if names of villages, localities, towns, etc., are modified to look and sound more English? Would the District Council stamp its approval? In Shillong quite a number of localities have lost their original Khasi names. In Tura too the same! Why not demand for their renaming?

The cited editorial suggested an independent assessment by an independent agency to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the ADCs. Between 2012 and 2018 the management of schools in Meghalaya and Assam (and in fact in the whole country) run by a religious society decided to engage an independent agency to evaluate its institutions. The schools are a prestigious brand. They are highly appreciated and are much sought after by the general public. But a shocker was presented to the authorities after the assessment. A vast majority of these schools came nowhere close to the national and international standards. Will the ADCs submit themselves to an independent assessing agency to shut all doubters up?

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Republic TV Where vaudeville meets vicious

By Jagdish Rattanani

There is little doubt among many reasonably well-informed people that there is an ugly mix of the vaudeville and the vicious in the material aired by Republic TV. There is also the complaint that this is the political arm of the Bharatiya Janata Party at work, so must not qualify as journalism and be regarded as a political player trying to divide people and serve hatred through its filthy rhetoric, delivered by a frothing-at-the-mouth anchor who is often comical in his fulminations.

But if this alone is the large part of the problem, we can leave the particular channel to its fate, irrespective of the ratings (trumped-up or not) it tries to present as proof of its viewership. The trouble is that the damage the channel is doing is much more and in many other ways. Led by an overzealous performer who has fattened himself at the expense of society and discovered that this game pays him personally, he has lowered the discourse to a level that the very idea of decency and civility has evaporated from any conversation on this particular platform. In that, the channel led by its actor-in-chief is harmful to the long-term health of citizens and the idea of a civilised way of living. Here is a streaker who runs across the field to grab eyeballs and make money, but streakers often are and must be restrained, even when it is one odd person across the cricket field. Here is one doing the full Monty every other day and claiming the right to do this under the terms of free speech.

Further, a definite communal edge runs through the discourse. In that, the channel falls foul of the law again and again, as it did when it sought to force a communal divide in instances of the killing of two saffron clad travellers in Maharashtra's Palghar district or the rush at Mumbai's Bandra Terminus as migrants sought to leave for their homes in the midst of the lockdown. Both were clearly not related to religion but were sought to be presented as such, thus sowing discord and building divides where none existed. The target often is the Maharashtra government led by the Shiv Sena, which has of course broken with the BJP, which then has an interest in feeding these tales and fomenting trouble.

It is no excuse to say that this is the BJP's game, or that we must blame the party and not the broadcaster of its wishes. The players of the game and the profession they use to deliver this dirt must impose their own restraints as they work in the field of journalism. Without getting into anything complicated, there are some simple rules offered to trainees: keep a sense of balance, reasonableness and responsibility in reporting. Prosecute your point of view but keep civil. The rules need not be exacting; the least we can ask is for some broad boundaries within which the game may be played. The complete refusal to do so is a problem for the particular news channel and all that it does to please its bosses.

This is a problem also because those who know will understand that there is no conviction in the positions being argued. These are opportunistic presentations that are out to milk the system, draw blood from the people of India and stash away a pile of cash in the process. The BJP will be well advised to dump this rascalism but instead it seeks to own it, which tells its own tale.

Consider how amid all this noise, the nation is being robbed of some truly precious wealth. Take the example of how Bollywood has been sought to be demonised in the wake of

the suicide by the actor Sushant Singh Rajput. The words of the judge issuing notices to two channels (Republic TV and Times Now) in a case filed by some Bollywood associations and production houses mirror the anger and frustration. For example, according to reports, Justice Rajiv Shukla of the Delhi High Court noted: "Now I am hearing that participants in TV debates are using cuss words because they get so excited. If you keep egging them on, that is what happens".

In the case of Bollywood, the channel appears to have tasked itself with tearing apart this exciting fabric that binds India, that celebrates the power of its diversity and that adds to the nation's unique flavour, colour and soft power. Bollywood has its ills, as does Hollywood or indeed any other industry, but Bollywood is one place where Hindus and Muslims work as one — every day, over long shifts, eating together, sweating it out late nights and celebrating together to produce the imagery, the song and the dance that has captured the hearts and minds of millions across the globe. Every once in a while, a random wanderer comes by and becomes a star. Stories are legion about struggle, grit, determination leading to stardom, as are stories of failures who got nowhere. This is a true market at work. In its productions, it depicts temples, churches, gurudwaras and mosques all with a sense that mirrors how the average Indian looks higher for deliverance from the misery of everyday trials.

The protest staged by the Producers Guild of India is in fact being more than fair when it notes, as it did recently: "This is to let all aspirants to the film industry know that they should not be misled by the clickbait journalism currently being peddled to advance the sensationalised narrative that the film industry is a terrible place to aspire to work in. This is a place that ultimately rewards your talent, work ethic and ability to connect with an audience — regardless of your religion, gender, caste or economic strata. While it is undoubtedly more difficult for those on the outside to get that first chance to display their talent, with perseverance, persistence and a little bit of luck — you can and do succeed. There are too many examples to enumerate across more than a century, of outsiders to the industry who are a shining testament to this fact." That is just the plain truth and the intangible wealth that Bollywood generates is not to be trifled with. This is being broken, torn apart by a small band that has gone rogue because they see profit in it. The whole is tarred, then specific names are tarred, then new controversies are sought to be created. How, for example, must the actress Rhea Chakraborty be compensated for all that has been said against her on these stations? Who is next in line to be thus slaughtered for the pleasure of a few and for the money making of one individual?

If we can all agree that this is wrong, then we can begin to agree that this is not journalism, that it cannot take the cover of free speech and the persons playing this must face the law and bear the consequences of their actions.

The late BJP leader Pramod Mahajan, the architect of the now defunct alliance between the Shiv Sena and the BJP used to say that the Shiv Sena does the right things in the wrong way. In pursuing cases against Republic TV and its chief, the Shiv Sena-led government has done the right thing in the right way.

(E m a i l :
editor@thebillionpress.org)

TO THE EDITOR

Plight of SSA teachers

Editor,
This is with reference to the report, "SSA teachers protest outside CMO's office" (ST 12 Nov, 2020). SSA teachers have not received their salaries for several months and are aggrieved. Teachers have to depend on the nearby "Shylocks," for their upkeep. And the Shylocks all demand their pound of flesh! But who will save our poor teachers from this pitiable situation? No solution is in sight. In fact, we are literally unable to "understand and feel" the real woes of the teachers, especially those who have no other sources of income/bank-balance. They lead a very hard life. This present pandemic has further added to their miseries. What if they can't borrow money from the lenders when they don't receive the salaries for several months? They will be dying of starvation. Thus, those who live in poverty are always oppressed, sometimes even unfairly discriminated by the people from the upper strata. This is what I have

noticed.

However, the flagship program under RTE, SSA has come as a "boon" for the state with meagre employment opportunities. It now boasts of having employed over "twelve thousand teachers", undoubtedly a big number. This should be a big relief for the state. But this SSA has its share of demerits too. Many qualified job seekers have taken up the SSA teaching post on "contractual basis" and the worry of job termination after the contract expires always worries them endlessly. Most of them again end not being able to apply for other lucrative jobs outside because they are age-barred. Perhaps this frustration also contributes to making the teaching fraternity express anger on the streets. With various inadequacies, and need to be accountable for every penny to the CENTRE and loads of blame from within the state, the SSA management here in Meghalaya often "staggers" by the burden of its own weight.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

Whither ECI?

Editor,

The recent Bihar election in which the usual charisma of Prime Minister Modi was overshadowed by the young dynamic 34 year old Teshwaji Lalu Yadav was viewed by many in right earnest. Had the Congress accepted its weakness and sacrificed more of the 70 seats, the young man would have won. Leaving this for the time being, let us dwell upon the gravest threat ever in the fairness of the election campaign. Never before in any form of civilisation was vaccine a freebie. "Vote and you will get free vaccine was the BJP slogan," which is nothing short of an inducement. Its almost like saying to the voters, "Vote BJP and get the vaccine or die." And surprisingly the Election Commission found nothing wrong in it!

This ECI and its conduct in the last Lok Sabha Election could be well recalled. The Supreme Court kept on shouting, "You are toothless, you woke up now; now you know your powers, now you can watch the Modi biopic etc etc." When three citizens who are

bonafide voters of India complained of deviant behaviour, the Election Commissioner, far from taking necessary steps to study, began to suspect the voters. The ECI should know that nobody has time to complain unless they find it necessary to do so and the ECI seemed to misconstrue the matter as being one that challenges votes which never happens with ballot papers. How could one stamp on say a 'bicycle' and a 'lantern lights up?' Instead of correcting the many errors of the EVM like paper jamming, failure to switch on for which a technician is on standby. Even while voters returned home empty handed, the ECI kept on praising the system. Look at the US. As vast as the country is they still rely on ballot papers. It is thus high time that we admit our handicaps and humbly go back to the Old is Gold - ballot paper.

Coming to the freebie of free vaccine, the remaining Assembly elections of West Bengal and Assam will be in great jeopardy. We had succumbed to vaulting ambitions that overleap human decency and behaviour. None can save us now. That the COVID vaccine which is

yet to finalised could determine election results in Bihar is astounding. Let the world judge!

Yours etc.,
Manbha Diengdong,
Via email

Humans and the Universe

Editor,

Humans like all other living beings are part of the universe. The planets and all heavenly bodies continue to function in the same order since the beginning. The planets for instance have rotated and revolved around the sun since the very start. Even the animals continue the lives as it was. It's we humans who are moving in different directions to the extent that we are responsible for the destruction of Mother Earth. Unplanned construction in the name of development is alarming. Greed is the only agenda, whether it's an individual or a corporate business house. Cities like Mumbai continue to deteriorate making them unlivable.

The pandemic is clearly man made and we will continue to suffer unless we

change our ways. The way man has gone about wanting to apply his newly discovered knowledge in this world, is almost exactly like his current eagerness to introduce the new Covid-19 vaccine without due diligence - to ensure that the cure is not worse than the disease... which can have disastrous consequences. In fact his assumption of superiority over the universe and all things natural has led humankind to the brink of extinction. So also has his penchant to apply all knowledge for aggression and conquest. Mother nature has evolved over eons and continues to do so, filtering and retaining the best survivors of harsh environments while eliminating both the weak and monstrous threats to sustenance. So it will always remain sine qua non that man works for nature and not the other way round. That is nature's commandment.

Yours etc.,
Albert Andrew Nongrum &
Sanjay Rao,
Via email

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“At any given moment, public opinion is a chaos of superstition, misinformation and prejudice.”
-- Gore Vidal

The Shillong Times

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BJP dares MDA Government

DISSATISFIED with the State Government's attempts to do a Local Fund Audit to clear the air around the issue of corruption in the Autonomous District Councils the BJP now wants to take the matter to the Lok Ayukta. It is evident that the link between the BJP and the NPP-led state government is tenuous. Chairman North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), Himanta Biswa Sarma while campaigning for the Manipur by-polls recently had told the people there not to vote for smaller parties but to put their trust in the BJP which is a nationwide party and is like an all-embracing mother. The message was clear. Since NPP also contested the seats to the by-polls, Biswa Sarma's obvious reference was not lost on the voters. This does not auger well for the MDA alliance or for the alliance that the NPP has with the BJP in Manipur where four NPP MLAs had tried to create instability after being dropped from the ministry. Somehow the patchwork happened after a visit of Manipur CM, Biren Singh to Delhi and meeting with BJP higher-ups. The status quo was restored and NPP MLAs rejoined their ministerial positions. This could not have pleased the Manipur CM for whom it was a virtual climb-down, in that he could not effect a cabinet reshuffle the way he chose to but had to bow down to the diktat of the Party bosses in Delhi.

Whether the NPP will continue to work in tandem with the BJP and vice versa in the next elections in Meghalaya is a question mark. The State BJP has been digging in its heels to attack corruption not just in the District Councils but in other areas of governance as well. After a short hiatus the State BJP President is back with his allegations and seems unlikely to quieten down. Also the BJP is watching the Congress attack the MDA Government day after day and cannot let that party take the credit for addressing corruption. Moreover, BJP being part of the MDA might have to carry the burden of guilt as much as the NPP and other coalition partners have to. So the BJP is playing a strategic game. After all, nationally the Congress is the BJP's beta-noire and that must extend to the states as well. It won't do for the BJP to remain nonchalant while the Congress is busy piling all the sins on the MDA Government.

Now that the BJP is approaching the Lok Ayukta it remains to be seen as to which route the Congress will take. In the last Assembly session, Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma and Power Minister James Sangma had referred to all the allegations of mis-governance as "inherited" from the previous Congress Government. But 30 months down the line the MDA should have corrected what was wrong. That is not evident. The blame game does not always work.

TO THE EDITOR

Meghalaya needs a monumental shake-up!

Editor,
Thank you for your soul stirring piece, "When government becomes complacent" (ST Nov 13, 2020). I went through it at least thrice to absorb the multiple messages the write-up has brought home. Frankly, as an avid reader, after quite some time I found the subject matter of the article you have chosen to be simply compelling, relevant and thought provoking. Of the many things you have touched upon let me confine myself to only a couple.

First, the inability of the opposition to go the whole hog with its No-confidence Motion. Right from the beginning, it was becoming apparent that the Congress legislators were in two minds. The writing on the wall was pretty much clear about the fate of the Motion. With no cracks in the ruling MDA, there was no possibility of a political upheaval. Then, was the Motion for the gallery alone?

Perhaps not! Congress MLAs are disenchanted with the political portents in the country and the state. The Modi juggernaut is simply unstoppable, while the Congress is on the brink of collapse. The oldest party is in such disarray that it can't even find a leader! Against this backdrop, the Congress MLAs will be naturally wary about their future. They can't rot in the opposition for eternity. They need to move on. If we view the situation from this perspective, it was a valiant attempt on the part of Leader of the Opposition Mukul Sangma to give the party MLAs a glimmer of hope. He needed to energise them. He needed to keep them bound by a common purpose. What better than a 'No Confidence Motion' which also was a test of their loyalty to the Party.

Going by the tone and intensity of the attack on the ruling side, I cannot say that all Congress legislators went out all guns blazing. Perhaps they could not do it because they have a "past". Look at the areas of attack the Opposition confined itself to. The coal issue and corruption in ADCs were the main planks of their attack. The Opposition

Joe Biden has spoken about his world vision in an article wherein he has adumbrated his vision on retrieving America's pre-eminent position in world affairs. Interestingly, he calls it why America must lead again and how to rescue US foreign policy after Donald Trump.

Biden starts with at least two advantages; one, he was the Vice President with a noble laureate, popular President Barack Obama. He is entering White House after the horrible pandemic that devastated America's economy and society. He is known to be predictable, moderate, balanced and above all institutional, a great contrast to Trump.

His main mission will be to repair and reconstruct the damage done by Trump. To start with, he will try to repair the global political architecture, established after World War-II. Trump had withdrawn from such world institutions. Biden will rejoin WHO before it is completely taken over by China. He will also enter into negotiation with Paris Agreement. The United Nations, which is fundamentally fractured, will receive greater attention.

Apparently, there will be three flash points that will draw Biden's immediate attention. First, the Iran nuclear deal, the punitive sanctions may be lifted and Biden will rejoin the Iran deal while bringing Iran back into compliance. Iran is inclined also to do so, unlike Trump, who founded American Arab policy on the Israel-Saudi Arabia axis. Biden will go beyond and seek opening up to other powers in the region.

Indubitably, China is the foremost challenge to the US. Biden's policy on China is not clearly articulated, although there is a bipartisan consensus in the US about China posing a primary challenge to its supremacy through 5G and BRI etc. Biden, along with US allies, will put pressure on China for ensuring security on South China Sea. Biden administration may not act unilaterally on trade issues. But the decoupling of US-China supply chain will continue, though the process may be bit slow. All in all, Biden's policy towards China will be of containment as well as cooperation. The containment is clear, the co-operation might ensue in dealing with pandemic, climate change and nuclear non-proliferation, at least to North Korea.

The third concern is Russia. Biden may extract a cost from Russia for meddling in US elections in 2016 and partly in 2020. America had imposed sanctions after Russian conflict with Ukraine, which is likely to

continue. American's sanctions have pushed Russia through the oil and gas pipeline and defence sales etc. Biden might repeat a Nixon moment with Russia. In 1972, American President Richard Nixon visited China against a strong popular anti-Communist sentiment and ushered in a thaw in Sino-American relations. Biden might try to normalise strained relations with Russia and wean it away from Chinese tent.

However, Biden may not have a smooth sail as the Democrats lack majority in the Senate. Even if they win a couple of states, they will have a tenuous majority,



which will hold them back from a pro-active foreign policy. Second, the left wing of the Democratic Party has become stronger. They will exert influence on tilting towards a radical posture in foreign policy.

On India, the apprehension from Indian observers is that he might not be as friendly as Trump since Narendra Modi twice endorsed Trump's candidature, in a rally in Houston called 'Howdy Modi' and then in Ahmedabad. But this is a misplaced concern as Biden is an institutional person, and will focus on political rather than personal. His policy will largely reflect Obama's foreign policy, including towards India, as he was his Vice President. India, for various compelling reasons, will be crucial to Biden. Also, Democrats have had a romantic attachment with India.

As a sidebar, Biden has received the second highest award from Pakistan. There have been talks of linkages with Islamabad, which in diplomatic terms are called

parallel talks. Biden and his Vice President Kamala Harris have been sceptical of India's moves on Jammu & Kashmir. But it is one thing to make a radical statement when one is out of office, and another to follow these in policy terms when in power. Biden will be more concerned about reasserting US leadership in the world than of defending the biggest democracy i.e. India.

In Biden's approach to India, the reference point will be Indo-Pacific. Washington has been nudging New Delhi to play a role in this region. Now that the Quad has been established, America will continue to

push India to be active. Biden will engage America's allies in the region as he will continue with the traditional relationship between strategic partners like India and Indonesia. So the security partnership consolidated by Trump will continue.

The strategic trajectory with New Delhi should grow. Just before US elections, BECA - Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement - was signed, which allowed both countries to exchange geo-spatial data sharing and GPS military signals from US to India. However, they stopped just short of signing a security agreement like the one done on 9 August 1971 between USSR and India. The Indian security observers thought that New Delhi was waiting for the US polls to be over before it went whole hog with the Americans. This might happen under Biden regime.

On economy, Biden will be balanced and better. He might revive a H1B visa for Indian professionals; the punitive tariffs on steel and aluminium may be revoked;

GST will most likely be revived. American investment under Trump had increased and is likely to grow even under Biden.

On climate change, there will be greater convergence between India and America. Both were critical of the Paris Agreement. Biden will join it but will initiate discussion to make it Paris Plus. On climate change technologies, India and the US will have greater exchange and cooperation. America is by far, the world-leader in research and innovation. Given India's commitment to climate change, it should benefit from transfer of technology.

Biden may keep an eye on the internal developments in India. Democrats had some concerns on Kashmir. Much of the reaction from Biden will depend on how India handles its internal issues concerning mainly human rights and personal liberty. For instance, Kashmir policy is not written in stone. Even the Home Minister had said in Parliament that statehood will be restored if situation becomes conducive.

Will Biden support India's permanent membership in UNSC? Yes, it's most likely. Obama had pitched for a permanent seat for India in UNSC on November 8, 2010. However, its support alone is not sufficient.

Will US come to India's aid should China invade? In terms of military supplies, and sharing military intelligence, in case of a war, the answer is yes. But putting actual US military boots on the ground, the answer is no. Even in case of invasion of Taiwan, the American military entanglement is unlikely. It's assumed there's no appetite in US for military involvement. That is why it's withdrawing from Afghanistan and Syria. However, given America's anxiety over China overtaking it into the number one position, US military involvement to check Chinese expansion cannot be ruled out. China's presence looms large in Americans' psyche. Biden, only last week, said, US would defend Japan if Senkaku islands were invaded by China.

In the wake of China's aggression and expansion, US-India relations are expected to deepen. But politics is dynamic and international politics is a reflection of countries pursuing their national interests. US position might change in correspondence with its national interests as India has been a reluctant partner. So like before our own actions and inactions will shape the relations between India and US.—JNEA (The writer is Prof, Intl Relations, JMI)

Takeover by IAS/MCS

Editor,
I refer to the various reports appearing in your newspaper regarding the whimsical transfer and postings of officers by Government of Meghalaya and particularly of junior officers being allowed to hold higher posts. It is learnt that similar moves are also on in the Urban Affairs Departments to bring in favourable people to hold important posts. Take the case of the Director. Although there is a qualified person to take charge of the post, yet MCS officers are being allowed to hold charge. Although the Department has a Service Rule which provides for the qualification and experience of personnel to hold the post yet officers from outside the cadre are being brought in from other services to hold the post of Director. To the extent that there is a now a move to amend the Service Rules to enable an IAS or a MCS officer to hold the post of Director. If this be the case, there is no reason why aspiring candidates should go for professional courses and work for donkey's years

only to see a person with general qualifications being allowed to hold the top post in the Department. This is happening not only in the Urban Affairs Department but across various departments. With Civil Services officers heading the Personnel Department, it is very convenient to tweak the Service Rules to bring in people of their ilk to hold important positions.

There is a substantial amount from the Government of India parked in the Urban Affairs Department and with land to be allotted in New Shillong Township, no wonder people of choice who are amenable to the powers that be, will find favour. Having captured huge tracts of prime land in New Shillong at a cost much lower than the acquisition cost, the Civil Services officers appear to be the most privileged lot in the state. Anybody travelling towards New Shillong will notice that palatial buildings are under construction there. All at the cost of poor citizens of the State! What a pillar of democracy!

Yours etc.,
B. Mawlong
Shillong-3

Ever-growing reach of 'digital republics' poses challenge
Fight against fake news enters decisive stage in India

By K Raveendran

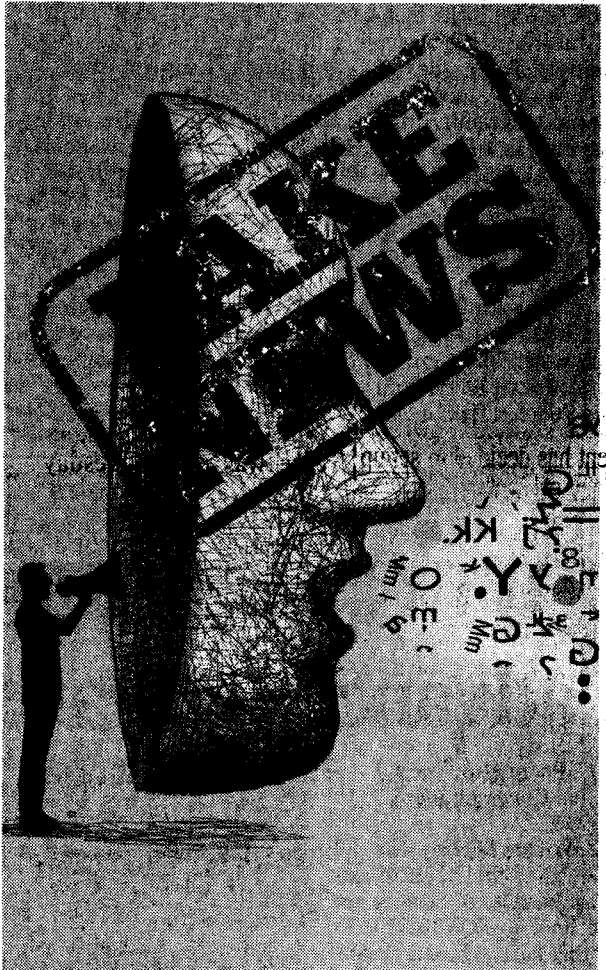
The fight against misinformation and fake news on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and others is apparently entering a decisive stage, with the government reportedly floating a tender to invite agencies for providing solutions and services related to fact verification and disinformation detection on social media platforms. The tender has been floated through the public sector enterprise Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL).

While fake news is a global problem, it is posing a bigger threat in India due to the massive reach of social media platforms, which are being used to wage information wars, bombarding Indians with fake news and divisive propaganda from a wide range of sources, from television news to social media giants like Facebook and WhatsApp. Cyber armies have become a regular part of political parties and

by 12% year-over-year. Facebook was also the most popular social networking platform. YouTube and WhatsApp followed with 2 billion users each, while Messenger was third with 1.3 billion. In total, the four had a cumulative 8 billion users.

Thanks to India and China, most of this growth is occurring in Asia Pacific, which accounted for a market of 1.17 billion users, compared to 413 million users in Europe, 255 million in the US and Canada, with the rest of the world accounting for 906 million monthly active users.

Facebook was the first social media platform to surpass the 1 billion mark in the number of active users. It also owns four of the most popular social media apps which include WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram as well as Facebook core. Across its family of apps, Facebook posted a total of 3.21 billion users during the third quarter, up from 3.1 bil-



propaganda outfits, which use the platforms to target their opponents, minorities and all those who hold divergent opinions.

Parallely, the government has moved quickly to bring digital media, films and audio-visual programmes over OTT platforms as well as news and current affairs content under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to ensure easier regulation.

There is no doubt that the problem is of a huge magnitude. But the task of bringing the platform under regulation has to be undertaken in a manner that will limit the scope of arbitrariness and authoritarianism, which any such control is liable to degenerate into. Also, it has to be done without impinging on the freedom of speech and expression, which makes it all the more sensitive. The social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have become nothing less than digital republics, with their membership far exceeding the population of the most populous countries of the world. This has meant that they have a stranglehold over the business of disseminating information.

According to a latest research and data analysis report on the reach of social media platforms published by ComprarAcciones, Facebook inched closer to becoming the first social network with 3 billion users as of the third quarter of this year. it had 2.74 billion monthly active users at the end of September 2020, up

lion in the second quarter.

According to a We Are Social report, WhatsApp was the most popular mobile messenger app as of October 2020, with 2 billion monthly users globally. Facebook Messenger came in a distant second with 1.3 billion users, while Weixin/WeChat was third with 1.206 billion. Other apps beyond the top three followed at a significant distance. QQ was fourth with 648 million, Snapchat fifth with 433 million and Telegram took the sixth spot with 400 million.

On the list of most popular social networks globally though, Facebook took the lead with its 2.7 billion user base. YouTube came in second with 2 billion, same as WhatsApp, which ranked third. Facebook Messenger was fourth. In total, the top four most popular social networks boasted a cumulative 8 billion active users. This was higher than that of the next 13 networks combined, which totalled 7.8 billion, according to Statista.

YouTube was an exception in the top four social media networks as it does not belong to the Facebook family. According to its parent company Alphabet's Q3 2020 earnings call, its Premium and Music services had more than 30 million paying subscribers in Q3 2020. The number had doubled in less than 18 months as it only had 15 million paying subscribers in May 2019. Moreover, YouTube TV subscribers reached 3 million during the quarter, up from 2 million in February 2020. (IPA Service)

"The press is our chief ideological weapon."

— Nikita Khrushchev

The Shillong Times

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Sonia must act

THAT the Congress party is passing through tough times needs no repeated emphasis. The Bihar assembly results combined with the debacle for the party in 12 states overall in a string of by-elections alongside the Bihar polls might have sent alarm bells ringing in the party. This pathetic scenario is largely its own making.

The party is rudderless since mid-2019, when Rahul Gandhi walked out of the President's post in a huff and mother Sonia Gandhi had to step in and handle the affairs as "interim" president. Rahul Gandhi is around and still not around. This was evident even in the Bihar assembly campaign, which he took lightly and the party paid a heavy price for this.

Sonia Gandhi, who had demonstrated strong leadership qualities in the past, is faced with health problems which curtail her movements in these Covid times. General secretary Priyanka Gandhi fails to come upfront for whatever reason. Other leaders are not in a position to decisively act as the leadership remains firmly with the Nehru-Gandhi family.

As former minister P Chidambaram stated quite unambiguously, the scenario building up for the party is quite scary. The loss of by-elections almost everywhere in this last round signified the organisational weakness of the party. The rank and file is seriously demoralized. What this could mean is that, left unchecked, the party will perish on its own. The BJP is waiting in the wings to draw in any number of Congressmen, state after state, as was evident in Madhya Pradesh during and after the exit of young and dapper Jyotiraditya Scindia.

Leaving the field entirely open to the BJP at the national level is bound to cause serious problems for the system of democracy itself in the long term. Note the fact that the new JDU-BJP ministry in Bihar does not have a single Muslim. The regional parties are mostly family enterprises with the exception of Nitish Kumar and Mamata Banerjee. If the regional satraps gang up and grab power at the Centre, India will script new and more horrifying chapters in corruption, waywardness, political instability and nepotism. Even national security will be at serious risk.

The Congress still is left with some ideological strengths and it conducts itself in responsible ways. It has an all-encompassing outlook and a positive world view. The party must build on these strengths, put in place a strong leadership structure at the top and at state levels too. It is here that Sonia Gandhi must act now, and act firmly. Any dragging of feet at this juncture would be suicidal for the party.

Press freedom does not come free

By Patricia Mukhim

India is now at a critical juncture where the media is struggling to find its space. It has gone down several rungs on the world press freedom barometer and is now ranked at 141 which is below Myanmar, Sri Lanka and many African countries. This is very disturbing for the media but it does not matter to the Indian establishment which would rather see the media choked completely. The present BJP-led government has a disdain for media persons and picks only friendly media to give interviews to. We have never seen a Prime Minister indulging in a monologue to reach out to people with his Mann ki Baat but will not

passed off as good journalism because it suits the Right Wing agenda. This is the challenge that the media faces and it's ironic that it should be from within its own fraternity. To expect camaraderie for media persons and a common banner in which to work unitedly to reclaim the freedoms we have lost is well nigh impossible. We in the media are a fragmented lot. Some have chosen to become apologists of the government and to defend its wrongdoings. Hence the pulverising impact of Covid on our economy and the gross deficiencies in our health care systems; the loss of employment for thousands of youth

organizations is a travesty and it shows which way the media in this country is headed.

Walter Lippman's most enduring quote is, "Once you know the party and social affiliation of a newspaper, you can predict with considerable certainty the perspective in which the news will be displayed. This perspective is by no means altogether deliberate. Though the editor is ever so much more sophisticated than all but a minority of his readers, his own sense of relative importance is determined by rather standardized constellations of ideas. He very soon comes to believe that his habitual emphasis is the only possible one."

This sounds so true of the media situation in India today where editors are mere employees of politicians who own media houses or are major shareholders and are therefore the ones who push their agenda. The editor becomes but a tool for setting a political agenda that the owner/shareholder desires. The truth is compromised and fake news or manufactured news such as Sushant Singh Rajput's death being attributed to murder and the #JusticeForSushant emanating from a news studio. Noam Chomsky's concept - "manufacturing consent" plays itself again and again where the public mind seems to resonate with the loud and belligerent anchors.

In enlightened democracies, the intelligentsia which understands the role of a free press would stand to defend it. Here there is a conspiratorial silence and the media is left to defend itself. It is indeed unfortunate that this intelligentsia, parasitic on western thought, is seldom curious enough to find out what forms the pathologies that keep Meghalaya a sickly state. This state should have produced thought leaders galore considering there is a 40 year old public funded University here. But perish that thought for speaking up has a cost that no one is willing to pay. This out of form intelligentsia lives in a bubble and uses the media but will not stand by it although a free press is the lifeblood of democracy. Sigh!

National Press Day

November 16



have remained unaddressed by many in the mainstream media. The fact that a section of media has almost become a spokesperson of the government today has made it easier for government to attack, ridicule, dumb down and strangle that section of the media that seeks to pursue the path that journalism outlines - to afflict the comforted and comfort the afflicted. But those with an independent voice are increasingly having to pay the price.

What's ironic however is that a section of electronic media has decided to play along with the Government and help deflect the flak from it instead! For all of four months since June this year a particular high-profile electronic media went on a tirade against the Shiv-Sena-Congress-NCP Mahaaghadhi government of Maharashtra and used a Bollywood actor's death (who allegedly died of suicide) to embarrass the state government. It then brought in the drugs angle and crucified the Bollywood fraternity, who for some reason the anchor in chief did not take a liking to. The late actor's girlfriend came in for special censure from this angry, frothing at the mouth anchor. And all these shenanigans have

have remained unaddressed by many in the mainstream media.

Walter Lippman that distinguished journalist produced by the US is said to have taken journalism seriously, not as a trade or even a profession, but as an instrument of democracy. Normally people of Lippman's stature that take journalism seriously and don't just flirt with it are not known to have political ideologies unlike our own larger than life anchors and some senior editors who have joined political parties, contested elections, lost and then rejoined journalism. I think such people are a slur on the independence of the media because their old loyalties will always remain and the tilt will barely be hidden. That such people now head media or-

BJP state govts violating constitution on issue of love jihad

Whole issue smacks of bigotry and bias against women

By Dr. Arun Mitra

The statement by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath that the Uttar Pradesh government will make tough laws against Love Jihad is not surprising. Haryana and Madhya Pradesh governments too have now joined the chorus. Haryana's Minister Anil Vij has gone even further. He said that he would make laws against the newly invented term Love Jihad and will look into all such cases since the formation of Haryana. Their motives are clear; they have never tried to hide them either. It is part of their design to make monolithic society and impose their views on the personal human relationships as well.

To like someone, choose him/her as partner and get married is one's personal matter. Our constitution permits anyone who has attained the legal marriageable age to marry the person of choice. In case of marriage through religious rituals, both have to be from the same religion. For example in the case of wedding by

gone far ahead of men to the extent that they are in permanent commission in army and air force. Indian origin women Sunita William and 'Kalpana Chawla' even ventured into space.

If the girl is a Hindu and the boy is a Muslim, then it is problem for those talking of Love Jihad. On the contrary, if the girl is a Muslim and the boy is a Hindu, then Love Jihad is not an issue because in their thinking lineage runs with men. It is also important to note that the children of many RSS - BJP leaders have inter-religious marriages. But they do not matter. This whole issue is to be applied only to the general public.

The U.P. CM has even said that those engaged in Love Jihad will be subjected to Ram Naam Satya, meaning that they will be killed. This is an open threat to kill which the custodians of law must not ignore. It is not too far when the term Love Jihad will be used for inter-caste marriages as well. There are already several social impediments in inter-



Hindu traditions both have to be Hindus. If one of the partners is not a Hindu he/she has to convert to Hindu religion. To marry through Nikah, both have to be Muslims. Same holds true in the case of marriage by Christian or Buddhist traditions.

But with the changing times, many youngsters are deciding to choose the partner of their choice irrespective of religion or caste. Realizing this, our country had enacted a law, the Special Marriage Act in 1954. This permits marriage of girl or boy from different religions after attaining the legal age without any one of them converting to the other religion. Their marriage will be registered under the Special Marriage Act. Both of them can practice respective religion if they want to. This act allows marriage with a foreigner as well with the condition that one of them has to be Indian citizen. This is a very progressive step in the matters of personal relations. It is true that there are many shortcomings in this Act, as first a notice has to be given and then witnesses have to be called. These sometimes lead to difficulties; but broadly speaking it is a step forward.

Commenting on the marriage RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had said that "a husband and wife are involved in a contract under which the husband said that you should take care of my house and I will take care of all your needs. I will keep you safe. So, the husband follows the contract terms. Till the time, the wife follows the contract, the husband stays with her, if the wife violates the contract, he can disown her". He further said "marriage is successful only when the wife looks after the household things and husband looks after the earning and outside work. This system is also good for society and ensures proper order in society".

In the present times many women are not limiting themselves to domestic work. They not only perform equal work outside home but in many fields have

caste marriages and there have been many instances in the past where murders have been committed in the name of honor. These have been committed by none other than family members including by the parents. But with a legal backing personal liberties will be left with little remedial measures.

Interfaith marriages are banned in many other countries too. In Hitler's time, marriage between Christians and Jews was banned in Germany. The protagonists of Love Jihad are motivated by such thinking. Golwalkar, a leading RSS ideologue, wrote in praise of Hitler in "We Or Our Nationhood Defined", "...To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races - the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by".

No wonder atrocities against minorities have increased. Dr. Kafeel Khan was put behind the bars for no reason. He was exonerated by the Allahabad High Court, but who will own the responsibility of his plight and the crisis his family had to go through? In many places, mobs have lynched people without any reason, whether in the name of beef or something else.

The whole issue of Love Jihad smacks of bias against women. Their right to choose a partner is being deprived. It is also against the accepted values of Hindu traditions of 'Swayamvar' as depicted in the epic Ramayana. This is not only flouting the present constitutional values but also negating the medical science which confirms the equality of gender.

Today's generation will have to see things in the proper perspective and fight against this kind of parochial thinking. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Of sick corporations

Editor,
Your Friday column (ST Nov 13, 2020) was incisive. Hats off to you! You have the gift of the pen as you have the courage to speak out the bitter truth. A good section of people of Meghalaya do not see eye to eye with your many stand on public issues. But then, I suspect they privately admire you for what you are because you are the only one who has been championing the cause of the people without being self-centred. I doff my hat to you! I totally agree with you that Meghalaya has developed a political culture that is self-defeating. The points you made about MTDC and MeCEL are worth pondering about. Why have a Corporation if it is incapable of earning profit out of tourism? Prior to pandemic, Meghalaya had a booming tourism business. Everybody has earned a fair share of profit. Hotels, restaurants, taxi operators, small traders around the popular tourist spots, all have prospered. Then, why should MTDC be an exception? I think there has come for the common people to rise as one to call the bluff of the political class. We cannot hide the rot any more.

I wish to bring to your kind attention that our educated, qualified children

who were working outside the state before the coronavirus pandemic broke out, are today in a state of penury. A qualified man, who used to earn Rs 50,000 in the metros, is today fetching only 12,000 per month. Is this fair? Is this why we fought for a separate state?

Yours etc.,
Mitchel Lyngdoh
Via email

Mysterious Coronavirus

Editor,
We are thankful to Mr Sanbor Shullai, MLA South Shillong, who surprised the House on November 11, the last day of the Assembly session, claiming that he had found a cure to Covid-19. He narrated his encounter with the beggars in his constituency. "How come you are not scared of coronavirus?" he asked them. He then went further and said, "You never brush your teeth, nor bathe and neither you wear masks and you sleep on the roadside. Are you not afraid?" "No" they said, "There is a God." This old age wisdom has come from no other than the poor, simple, neglected people who are considered the scum of society.

In the corona virus we have a level playing field; it respects no person whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated. But there is also mystery about it. A wife

tested positive but her children and the husband who sleep and eat with her tested negative. An elderly person who has no history of contact with anyone managed to contact the virus. Two tests of the same person in a matter of five days gave two different results. How do you explain all this? Modern science tries to explain that it's all because of the immune system of an individual. How come one has a strong immune system while another has a weak system? As humans we surrender. Only God knows everything. I'm reminded of a chemistry professor who asked the fastidious students how they can explain a black cow eating green grass and giving out white milk.

Coming back to the wise answer given by the beggars, we should acknowledge that simple minds could receive truths that learned minds cannot absorb. It is possible to be so learned that in the end we cannot see the woods for the trees. What is God like? Jesus said if you want to see the mind of God, the heart of God, the nature of God, look at me. In acknowledging the poor people of his time, who see God in Jesus, he said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and the clever and have revealed them to babes. (Math. 11:25) It is very appropriate that Shullai ended his speech in

the house by saying, "Let us pray for each other."

Yours etc
Torist Mark,
Via email

Stop illegal collection from trucks

Editor,
The past few weeks have seen reports about the coal issue in our beloved state. As a resident of this state, I feel I must make my opinion heard to the Government of the day. It is really strange that even in today's day and age, there seems to be no solution to the illegal collection of toll from trucks plying on the national highways in Meghalaya, when all it requires is a single Executive Order by the government that all weighbridges or check-gates authorised by the Government or the District Councils to levy and collect fees/tolls/royalty/cess/etc. should prominently display, at the place of operation, the following information - a) reference of the legal sanction to levy/collect, b) on whom and what items are applicable for levy, c) the different rates of levy, and d) contact information of authority designated to address grievances 24/7. Over and above, the Executive Order should prohibit receipt of any payment in cash and instead accept only digital payments (where options

are many). Already we have seen these two operations being made effective at the NHAI Toll Plaza at Paham-Mawlein, Ri Bhoi District and since all other weighbridges/check-gates are located on similar national highways, they should perhaps follow suit sans any privileges. Whilst the Executive Order may be in waiting, the trucks on the national highways can for the moment get an updated list with specific location of the authorised weighbridges/check-gates where compliance is required and at what sanctioned rates. We've seen how such pdf files or photos have gone viral on social media.

Even then, there's always the devil that won't be caught working on the national highways as he imposes diversions to suspicious lay-byes or halts trucks off location. For that, I'm sure many others are better placed to suggest tactful interventions.

Yours etc
Jeremiah S.
Via email

Kudos Airtel

Editor,
In today's life and with emerging technologies we need to get our work done faster and better and having a good mobile service provider with good quality calls and data network is a boon.

Through this letter, I would like to appreciate Airtel's open network. I have

been an Airtel subscriber for many years now and it has been a good experience. However, there was a time when its data network had gone from good to worse, and I was quite disappointed by this.

Then I came to know about the open network that Airtel projects or shows its network coverage in a particular place.

I called the open network team and raised a complaint. Their response was indeed incredible and the best and they were a delight to talk to. They told me that my data issue can only be corrected by installing a tower and they asked me for a few months time to erect a new tower, and on top of that as compensation for my problem they waived my monthly rental by Rs 100 - a move I really appreciate because it is customer-centric. Then within a month's time my data network was restored with high speed internet of which I am so thankful to Airtel. I also have SIM cards other operators but they don't even bother to respond and provide a resolution to my problems.

That is why Airtel really proved themselves winners in the telecom industry and outnumbered others operators' subscriber base.

I express my gratitude to the Airtel Open Network Team for doing a great job! Kudos to them.

Yours etc.,
Dr Channmiki Ezra Laloo,
Via Email

"It does not manifest so that you can believe in it. You believe in it so that it can manifest."
--- Lauren Zimmerman

The Shillong Times

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Saving Shillong's Rivers

THE unprecedented heavy rains this summer lasted longer than usual and resulted in major flash-floods in the low lying areas of Pynthor-Umkhrah. One of the reasons for the floods is also because Meghalaya has no Land Use Policy and the swamp areas that earlier were used for rice cultivation have now turned into residential and commercial areas even while the Umkhrah river has been encroached without any questioning. Many attempts have been made by different groups to clean the two major rivers flowing through the city of Shillong – the Umkhrah and Unshyrypi but such efforts have not been sustained due to lack of resources. In 2013 the Water Resources Department had prepared a detailed project report (DPR) of Rs 42 crore which was later revised to Rs 50 crore. The project is named 'Flood Control on Flash Floods Along the Banks of Umkhrah and Umshyrypi Rivers,' which includes installation of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs). These STPs are of two sizes – the smaller one for a few households costing Rs 3.5 lakh while the bigger STPs for about 300-400 households would cost Rs 15-16 lakh. This DPR was moving around until 2017 after which it suddenly lost traction and no one knows if the money for the project from the Central Water Resources Department has come here and been utilized or whether it has been shelved.

In the interim the Districts Councils too had jumped into the fray and stated that the rivers are under their jurisdiction and therefore they would take on the cleaning of these rivers. But that too remained a short-lived idea since the Councils have no steady resources. Hence the rivers remain orphaned with only intermittent efforts being made to save them. Meanwhile these rivers are used as dumping grounds. Their tributaries flowing through different localities falling under different Dorbar Shnong are also treated as garbage carriers. The rivers have both been encroached upon and used for sewage disposal. Earlier efforts by the Urban Affairs Department and the Shillong Municipality to compel all those living along the rivers to construct proper latrines and stop the flow of sewage into the rivers remain non-compliant. It is evident that a multi-pronged effort to clean the rivers is a much needed endeavour. The Dorbar Shnong being the main stakeholders should be taken on board and different groups that have taken it upon themselves to do the regular clean-up need to become partner stakeholders too. This is the first time that different groups such as the Team Jiva and Greentech Foundation are taking on the task of cleaning up Shillong on a daily basis with rare responsibility. This is the right time for the Government to revive the above project before a calamity in the form of a major flood hits the low lying areas of Shillong.

TO THE EDITOR

Are we still digitally divided?

Editor,
As per reports by the Economic Times a digital survey conducted by Lady Shriram College (LSR) to which 1,450 of the college's 2,000 students sent their response, clearly showed that nearly 30 percent of its students did not have a laptop of their own while 40 per cent said they were attending online classes without a proper internet connection. This pandemic has made matters worse for students and individuals working from home. As a matter of fact, some areas in Shillong are without a proper internet connection and forget about 4G, the average speed is 200-600Kbps and that too if it's stable. Yes FTTH (Fibre Optic Internet) has been made feasible but limited only in the major areas of the city. This has caused a hindrance to many especially students. So what is the response of our Government in the Centre and the State?
Over the last decade,

governments have been trying to improve internet access in the country. In 2011, the BharatNet (Through BSNL) project was launched to connect 0.25 million panchayats through optical fibre FTTH services (100 MBPS) and to connect India's villages. Its implementation began only in 2014. The initial deadline was March 2019 but since only 0.12 million panchayats had been connected by then, the deadline was extended to August 2021.
Also, lack of internet literacy is a stumbling block to many as this is the first time India as a whole needs to be well acquainted with IT (Information Technology). Knowledge of internet usage is an essential necessity, equivalent to reading and writing. Digital literacy is an important mechanism to pull the future generation from the continuously rising income divide, in turn saving them from poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic is one occasion where a huge youth population suffered. We do not know what the future will bring upon the world; the least we can do is keep our citizens connected through

technology.
Yours etc.,
Dr Chanmiki Ezra Laloo
Via email

Pandemic impact on education.

Editor,
Other than Solomon Morris's article on the impact of the pandemic on education and parents' response to the crisis I have seen very little being talked about this issue. But as a teacher I can say the impact is far reaching. In fact in the education scenario we can safely say that a whole year is lost for those in the rural areas of this country where internet is a huge challenge and at best unstable. Besides there is a huge population that has no smart phone through which teachers can communicate to their students. People are trying to survive and a phone at this juncture is a luxury item. But the Government of Meghalaya is not understanding this and therefore not even proposing a better way to teach and reach the rural students many of whom are

now working in the fields or helping their parents at home.
Education the long distance way is a huge challenge. There has to be an eco-system for receiving what is taught and to be able to interact and ask questions from the teacher. The practice of giving lessons to students over WhatsApp and asking them to submit their work is a poor substitute for classroom learning. The school and classroom environment is a social space; a space for interaction between students and for them to share their stories; their tiffin, their little experiences etc. All this has not suddenly stopped and it's possible that when students meet their mates next year they may not know how to start a conversation. One wonders also on the impact on the mind and the mental health of the child.
To be with grown-ups only for nearly nine months and to be under observation all the time is very painful for children. The other day a young girl told me that she is fed up of being at home and being

constantly corrected or told to go and study. The girl was bored stiff and you could see that she was yearning for human company of her age but here she is stuck in a home in a residential complex which does not allow anyone to come out to play in the courtyard because of the need for social distancing. Of all that children are deprived of during the pandemic, human contact is the most felt one. It takes away the joy of growing up and the human contact and their need to confide in their peers the things they cannot do with a grown-up even if those are parents.
I sincerely wish that some studies are conducted by some local agency/college/university on the psychological impact of Covid19 on young school students and to seek out the children's views on how they wish the Education Department should look at their predicament. I can bet that whenever the schools open next, there will be a very huge educational gap between rural Meghalaya and the urban centres. Students from rural areas will become misfits because

(a) their parents can't help them with their studies (b) their teachers don't visit them at their homes to take stock of their learning progress and what hardships they encounter.
Imagine students learning science without any laboratory work or experiments. How will they learn basic chemistry and physics or botany? Come to think of it this year will take the highest toll on children than on any other age groups and we have not even begun to brainstorm about how to re-integrate them into the classroom in a new normal situation where physical distancing is the rule and not the exception. And should anyone contact Covid in the class what panic there will be. It all sounds ominous but I am just thinking aloud and I wish other teachers too would share their views here so we can learn from one another.
Yours etc.,
Emily Ryntathiag.
Via email

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

Congress should make deep introspection
A return to Nehruvian ideology has become imperative

By Binoy Viswam

Election outcome in Bihar is neither an end nor a beginning. It is to be considered as an important landmark in the ongoing battle to decide the destiny of India. The battle was and is to decide whether India should continue as a secular democracy or a theocratic oligarchy. BJP that represents the second option could manage a narrow technical victory.

Maha Gathbandhan. To certain extent the casteist equations were sidelined, according to poll observers. Kamay, davayi, padtayi were the concepts on which Maha Gathbandhan approached the people. That doesn't mean that the politics of caste and sub caste has disappeared from

With clarity of vision and deep understanding of the importance of a united resistance, the left parties worked out the complexities of coalition politics. As far as CPI is concerned, maximum sacrifice was made at the time of seat sharing, fully aware of the inevitability of such a broad-

taking in Bihar, because its performance did affect the overall prospects of Gathbandhan. They could win only 19 seats. After tight bargain Congress contested 70 seats, which was beyond their capacity. Had the grand old national party been a bit more realistic, the result in Bihar might have been different. Unfortunately, even after the failure of MGB, for



(PTI Photo)

The people's discontent was reflected emphatically in the outcome. The wafer-thin victory could provide only 12,768 (0.03 per cent) votes margin for the BJP alliance. Their vote share decreased by 12 percent compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. RJD leading the Maha Gathbandhan came out as the biggest party in the state assembly with 75 seats.

The election unveiled multiple internal conflicts that have become the essential character of BJP-JDU alliance. Still, it proved the efficacy of the RSS strategy to divide the anti-NDA votes. Bihar once again proved that parties like AIMIM, BSP and SDPI are more than willing to play to the tune of Parivar strategists. They could float two alliances that caused critical losses for the Maha Gathbandhan's political tally. Though they accuse each other, those parties wedded to religious extremism, are unhesitant to help each other, of course covertly at crucial moments.

The positive effect of Bihar elections is the change it made in the dynamics of Bihar politics. Real issues of life, like unemployment, health care and education, were advanced to the fore by

Bihar polity. The long-term impact of Bihar electioneering would be a matter of further analysis. Not only for psephologists, more so for political forces.

Maha Gathbandhan was an inevitable need of Bihar. The fascist onslaught of the RSS ideology has been causing serious threats to the very existence of secular India. They unleash naked attacks on constitutional principles. Workers and peasants' rights are robbed away. Lives of Dalits, minorities and women are thrown to unending miseries. It is high time to caution the ruling classes that 'poor lives matter'.

In the name of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the RSS, subservient to global capital, is spreading the red carpet for FDI in all segments of the Indian economy. The COVID19 days unmasked the Modi government's total negligence of the concerns of the downtrodden, including lakhs of migrant labourers, such as those from Bihar and other parts of India. It was in response to these realities that the left parties came forward to strengthen Maha Gathbandhan. The left joining the front gave a new orientation to Gathbandhan and credibility to the fight it has undertaken. That was visible in the battlefield of Bihar, this time.

based resistance platform comprising of secular, democratic, left forces. As the first party which was striving hard for this political line for long, for the CPI this sacrifice was possible though difficult. The Communist Party knows quite well who the main enemy is. That understanding is the cardinal issue in charting out the strategy and tactics of any serious political battle.

During Bihar elections, the Communist parties -- CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) in general -- rose to the challenges and played their role positively. The overall electoral performance of Maha Gathbandhan in many areas was successful due to the committed cadre base of the left parties. The strike rate registered by the CPI(ML) was commendable. CPI(M) also could achieve 50 percent success rate. CPI could win 2 seats with 33 percent success rate. With this mandate of the people the left parties would make its distinctive presence in Bihar Assembly, fighting for the rights of the downtrodden. At the same time, they would do the necessary introspection on their own performance in this serious struggle.

The Congress, as the second biggest contingent in the MGB, is expected to make a meticulous stock

which its contribution was not insignificant, the Congress response was disappointing. Till date it has not got into a soul-searching mood to make the necessary corrections. Instead, those in its top leadership find pleasure in discussing comparatively trivial issues. They fail to understand the gravity of the present situation and the role their party is supposed to play in facing the challenges.

In fact, Congress is going through a crisis, which is not only organizational but more ideological. Replacement of somebody from inside or outside the family will not solve the crisis. It is cut off from the masses even in its traditional strongholds. The Dalits, the minorities and the poor lost their confidence in Congress due to obvious reasons. Since they embarked on the neo liberal policy of global capital, the Congress party began to deviate from its Gandhian-Nehru legacy. If Congress is serious about its coming back, it has to fight the RSS-led Parivar ideologically and politically. Secular India expects Congress to rediscover the Nehruvian ideology and fine tuning of it to the present needs. Bihar results call upon Congress to open their eyes before it is too late. (IPA Service)

Paradigm shift in education systems: Bane or boon?

By Fahd Hazarika

The year 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic have been nothing less than a nemesis for all mankind, but they have made one thing abundantly clear, and that is the fact that technology is the only answer to all our current miseries, constrictions and incompetence. While every soul on earth, every business, every little activity has suffered equally, as a citizen of humanity, it is the future of education that worries me the most.

The reason? Physical presence of students and teachers inside a classroom on a regular basis isn't a certainty anymore. Luckily, that is also not the only option anymore. Unluckily, the alternatives provided by Information & Communication Technologies are not completely ready and nor are the teachers and students who are supposed to use them. In fact, technology, as presently utilized in schools and colleges, is more of a problem than a solution, especially in the context of India.

Not every Indian teacher or student is adept at using computers and smart

his own invention once said, "Have I done the world good, or have I added a menace?" And to top it all, ancient Greeks, it is said, were afraid of something as fundamental to the human mind as writing because it would produce forgetfulness, Socrates believed.

So basically, it is a historically established fact that no change, however sensible, that eventually got adopted and accepted by the society, was initially welcomed by those who lived through the transition. Very similar is the condition of the human race in this post pandemic world. We have newer, advanced and ever evolving communication technologies, but we're either afraid of futuristic advancements, or just unsure about whether the change will bring about more productivity in anything that we do.

Yes, it's hard to understand the notion of leaving behind the conventional classroom, especially if it's to face this vast space called the Internet. Does this mean that there is no hope? Absolutely not! A lot will change as community online teaching emerges as



(PTI Photo)

phones. Hundreds and thousands of students in particular do not even possess smart phones. For those who do, there are additional issues of connectivity. Some believe that body language of students can't be understood and interactive activities can't be arranged online, because of which communication sessions are ineffective. Then there is a problem of lack of attention when it comes to young kids because there is no one to check on them. While the list of technical, financial, logistical and geographical reasons why teachers (barring a small fraction of those belonging to high-end schools situated in urban areas) are struggling to deliver the goods in the online medium is endless, it is the adoption and acceptance in the mind that seems to be the bigger hurdle.

This poses another question – Does the average human mind react similarly to all kinds of change, especially, when it's sudden? Not too long ago, when concepts like e-commerce and online retailing had been introduced, they were greeted by consumer responses like - "It's not a real store", "they'll misuse all our data" and "what about credit card theft?" and other 'negative' responses. Today, here we are with some of the biggest e-commerce giants ruling the roost worldwide. Even regular meals that could easily have been prepared in our kitchens today are being ordered online.

Going further back in time, the telephone was at first criticized for 'invasion' of privacy! Not just that, Guglielmo Marconi, inventor of Radio, doubting

an option worldwide. An infrastructure that can cater to the needs of students and teachers in the remotest corners of the country will not only address technical gaps but will also produce acceptability. Stakeholders, particularly students, are skeptical because they aren't confident that online services will be accessible to one and all. That confidence has to be built through preparation and inclusiveness.

Every student/teacher must feel that they belong. Everyone must feel connected, empowered. Online systems are not only required for providing additional academic support upon return of normalcy, but also for conducting regular classes in case of similar emergencies in the future. As online teaching grows in relevance and acceptance and stakeholders get increasingly familiar with the medium, we might witness an emphatic emergence of centralized teaching systems across the entire country. Once this idea grows, students and teachers will have more flexibility, more options to choose from, ability to access classrooms from anywhere in the world and that will definitely be more time and cost effective in comparison to traditional methods of imparting education.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that the mental transformation from a familiar and time tested teaching methodology to a whole new virtual world of teaching is not going to be easy; nor was it meant to be, but with the luxury of leveraging technology in education suddenly becoming a necessity, the writing is on the wall.

TURNING WASTE TO SUSTAINABILITY

Paperman is a multifaceted waste management enterprise initiated by Mathew Jose that looks at society meeting the challenge greater sustainability.



By Michael Gallant

As India's population grows, so does the amount of trash it produces, and greater the challenge of dealing with waste. This is the problem that the Chennai-based social enterprise, Paperman, was created to address. "With rising urbanisation and global consumption patterns, waste management is a critical sector that needs a bold vision and innovation," says Mathew Jose, Paperman's founder and chief executive officer. "Since 2010, Paperman has been continuously innovating to improve the waste management ecosystem in South India."

Paperman's innovations include a mobile phone app that connects hundreds of specially trained *kabadiwalas* to thousands of households, empowering them to work together to keep waste out of trash bins and landfills. Beyond such door-step recycling efforts, Paperman has played a key role in implementing recycling programmes in over 200 schools and institutions in South India. More than 300,000 children have participated in awareness campaigns

that encourage more recycling and less trash. At a broader scale, Paperman consults with local government bodies and multinational corporations on ways to increase recycling and minimize what ends up in landfills.

Jose and his team also provide a combination of solutions and software tools that help large organisations sort and recycle materials, track their sustainability efforts and fulfil their waste management requirements.

Paperman has kept more than one million kilograms of waste out of landfills, and this number is expected to grow exponentially. But the organization's viability was never guaranteed.

Jose says that he began the company as a 21-year-old with very limited technical knowledge about waste management and recycling. While his lack of experience initially made success a challenge, "the journey really pushed me to be a better leader every day," he says. And, approaching the problem from a fresh perspective proved to be a strength.

Looking at the industry from the outside allowed Jose "to build a more unique and cost-effective business model for waste management, compared to the model deployed by large waste management companies. This also translated into better service at a cheaper cost for our clients."

Local government bodies, a main category of clients for Paperman, are now better able to plan and execute effective waste management strategies, Jose describes. Similarly, Paperman makes it easier for multinational companies to meet their corporate requirements for sustainability.

Jose recently brought fresh knowledge to his work at Paperman, through his participation in the U.S. State Department's **International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)**. Through the exchange programme, he visited the United States to learn more about managing refuse and recycling in urban



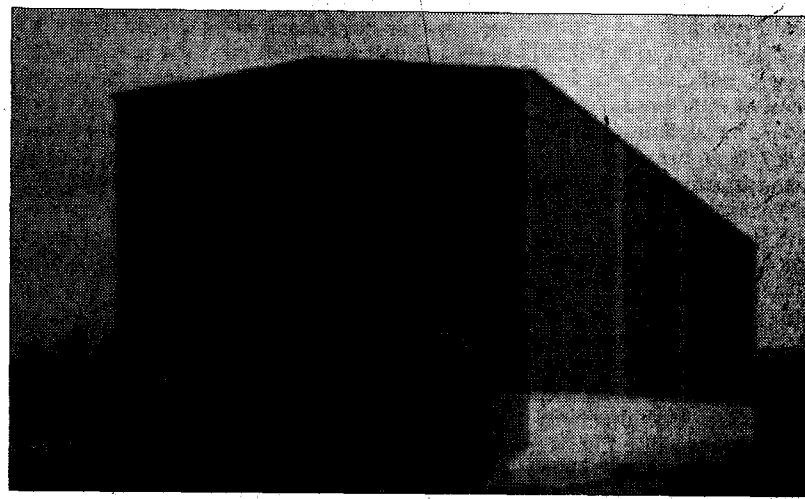
areas. "The experience of seeing how a city like New York handles its waste really helped me understand new technologies and management strategies that are important for the sector," says Jose. "The programme has also helped me establish new collaborations for scaling up our organization's work."

Like other enterprises across India, the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted Paperman too and prompted it to initiate a number of steps. For instance, with the plastics market crashing, the organisation decided to provide weekly fixed price assurance so that its partners could work without worrying about price fluctuations. In addition, the top management took salary cuts, to enable the organisation to retain all its frontline staff.

Paperman also initiated other measures like mandating hand sanitising before entering or leaving its warehouse premises and organising weekly meetings with its workforce on how to keep their families and neighbourhoods safe from Coronavirus.

In the years ahead, Jose expects Paperman's reach and capabilities to continue growing. "Over the next five to ten years, we hope to build on our waste recycling capacities," he says. "Our larger goal is to build a strong, ethical and effective leadership team that will be able to truly clean up the world."

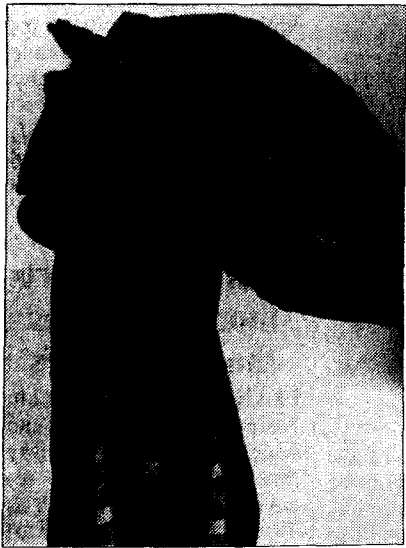
Beyond any single company, country, or environment-friendly initiative, Jose says that the core value of sustainability is one that everyone around the world must live by. He urges everyone



to think about the planet when you build a new product or service, or buy home, car or clothes. India needs bold leadership to give clean living spaces for its 1.3 billion people." (SPAN-TWF)

Winter wraps from Kashmir Valley

With winter approaching, one promptly retrieves the woollens and shawls that spell 'Kashmir', lovingly stored in boxes with mothballs in summer. Here is a lowdown on the rich heritage of Kashmiri woollen handicrafts.

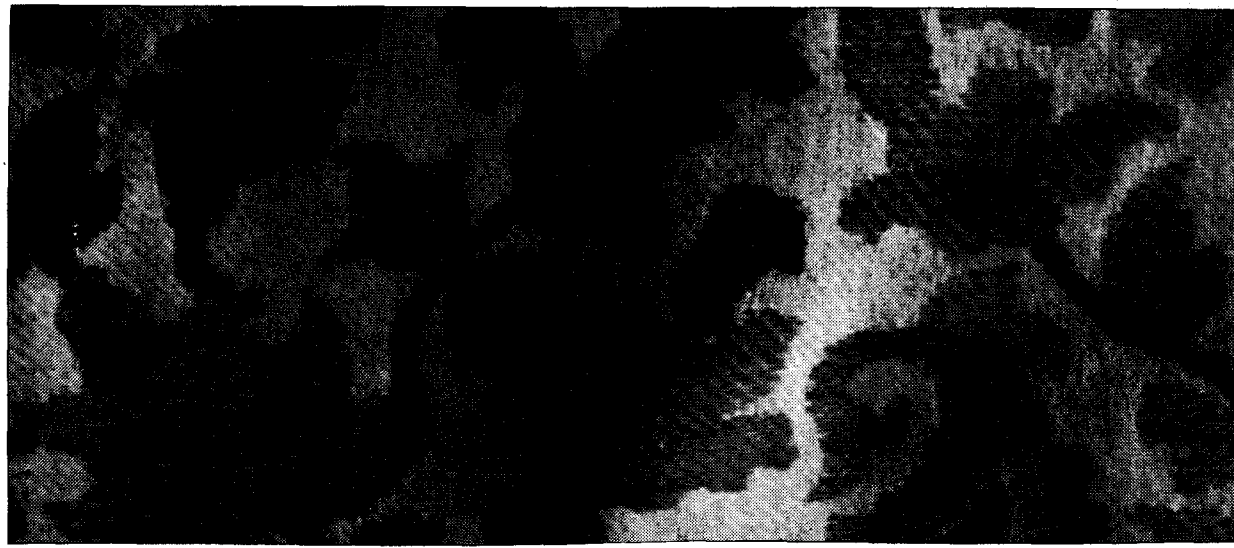


By Anju Munshi

Kashmir, the name evokes images of *kahwa* tea, *kangri* - the earthen fire pot to keep warm in the chilling cold, and of course, the famous weaves spelling warmth. Those colourful shawls, caps, jackets, scarves, stoles and *phirans* keep cold at bay.

Long before thermals came into use to keep the body warm, Kashmiris have had cherished a treasure trove of clothes that speak of tradition and ingenuity. Hand crafted by skilled artisans, the versatile pieces can go with western and ethnic wear equally well even today. Among shawls, Pashmina and Shahtoosh reign supreme. Then there are the tweed jackets, embroidered *phirans*, stylish waistcoats, mufflers, scarves, gloves, caps - all functional pieces that keep a person warm and comfortable but are statements in beauty too, adding to India's famed handicrafts milieu.

Ensembles are often family heirlooms passed from generation to generation, especially during weddings of children. "Pashmina, Jamawar and Toosh shawls are known to bring magic to a daughter's trousseau and the status of the family is judged by the kind of shawls that she is given by



her parents," says Bimla Dulloo, a teacher from Delhi.

Whether it is a handcrafted shawl or fine *sozni* or *kani* embroidered shawl - names depending on the needlework, the basic fabric is Pashmina which is an important symbol of Kashmiri identity. "It also builds a sense of well-being," says Jahnavi Mattoo, a homemaker from Meerut. She owns three pashmina *sozni* embroidered shawls given by her mother and two by her mother-in-law at her wedding. "I show them off with pride among my friends and relatives during get-togethers," she smiles.

Investing in a pashmina shawl is a matter of wisdom and pride because they are long lasting. In olden times the bridal attire was composed of a pashmina sari with fine embroidery. Even today, a couple of them make an important statement for a daughter's wedding.

Most of the pashmina wool is derived from the sheep of Ladakh's Changtang area. Known for its harsh and arid landscape with little vegetation, it induces the animals to produce an undercoat in order to insulate themselves against the bone-chilling weather. This soft coating under their bellies is six times finer than human hair and is used to making the expensive

pashmina wool.

Skilled weavers from Central Asia transformed the sheep's mane into a soft winter wear and the story goes that it was tough to tell which was the right side from that of the under-surface of the shawl, says Mohammad Ali Soz, a local craftsman. The original embroidery of a pashmina shawl and the workmanship is so intricate and time consuming that one needs much more time to get it finished. This explains the exclusivity and the high price that it entails.

Kashmiri shawl weaving tradition began with the Mughals in the 16th century. Mughal and Iranian kings travelled to British court where it acquired the stature of royalty and headed straight to the queen's wardrobe.

Jamawar shawl is a landscape of fine art and taste, mixing history and floral patterns on the pashmina and is reversible most of the times - so intricate and fine is this art.

Some twenty years ago, this *dotarafa* double-sided embroidery was a rage but with political turmoil in the valley, many weavers and artisans either died or did not want to continue with the family occupation. The weaver community of Kashmir suddenly vanished, laments Soz. This craft is also dying because of the cheap foreign

imports and the next generation that is disinterested in learning the skill.

Tweed, a virgin wool product, is another warm and a durable fabric that is tailored into long winter coats, blazers, *phirans*, waistcoats and even trousers for the warmth it provides and versatility. The warm textile traditions have been incorporated by many designers in their collections in their capes, drapes and also in the designing of *phirans*, not as wide and long, but with slits, ideal for lounge wear and everyday use.

Shahtoosh is the king of the wool. It is now a banned item because the wool's source - the Chiru, is an endangered species. A shawl made of shahtoosh is known to be so fine as to be able to pass through a ring and hence the name, 'ring shawl'.

Raffal is a popular and less expensive wool. There are various kinds of embroideries that adorn its work. The finer embroidery is time-consuming and is generally reserved for expensive shawls, but for *kurtas*, *phirans*, skirts and jackets *crewel* or chain, stitch work is more popular.

Tilla which means silver and gold embroidery, is customary wear for weddings.

Today many fake and semi pashmina outlets have found their way into



the market. There are many who claim that they can turn out pashmina shawls and other cashmere woollen garments at half the price but the experts warn against such a buy because with time the softness and the warmth both wear off. "Some of the shawls, stoles and scarves being marketed as pashmina are likely to be inferior as they are made from acrylics regular wool and even cotton," says Soz. The fakes are equally soft and it is difficult to differentiate without an expert eye. Some even have a tag of being made

in China, says Mirza Danish, a shop owner in Kolkata's famous New Market.

Upholstery and curtains for winter usage is made of cotton twill, says Qayoom of **Pumposh Kashmir Shawl Emporium** in New Market. Strewn with *crewel* embroidered flowers in many colours, the curtains look stunning. There are customised bedcovers, cushions, etc. with colourful Chinar leaves which can banish the wintry chill magically.

(Trans World Features)

A SOLO TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO SWITZERLAND!

By Puja Gupta

Travelling alone can be the most therapeutic form of self-indulgence! By traveling alone, one can engage with their new surroundings unfiltered by the prejudices, tastes, or preferences of a traveling companion and connect with the soul of the place by hanging out with the locals. Switzerland is a solo traveller's haven, one of the safest and easiest places to navigate - the sheer variety of things to see and do ensures that your solo trip is a memorable one, especially if it's your first!

Here are some of the activities we recommend you should add to your itinerary!

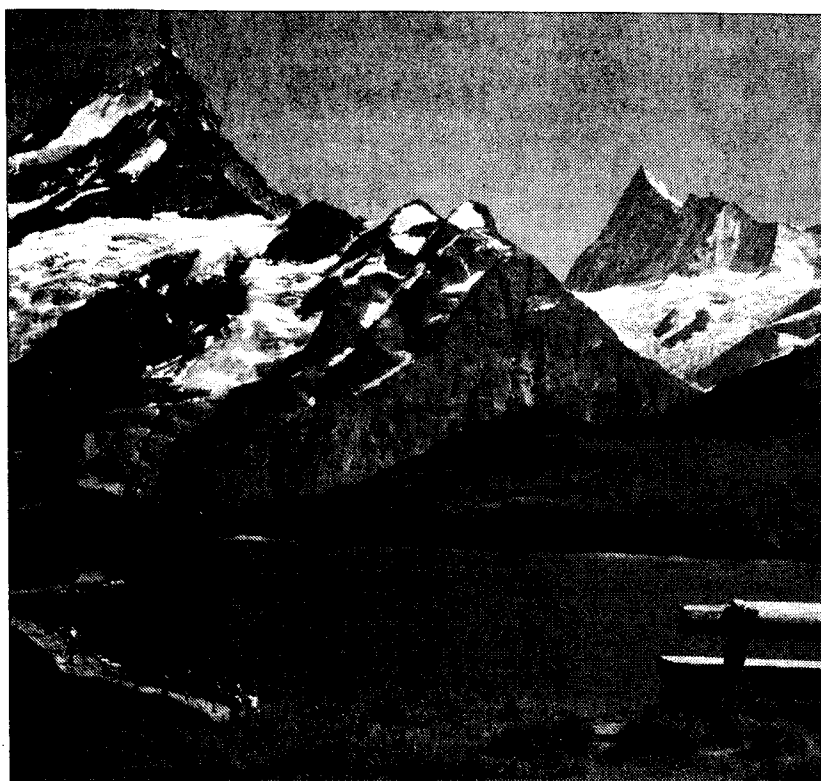
Not just a place to stay, but to experience:

Switzerland has a number of reasonably priced youth hostels around the country that are clean, safe, centrally located and with a choice of single room, double room and bunk beds with central kitchens and lobbies and lounges - perfect if you're looking to meet other travellers. Other than hostels, travellers can choose to stay in single rooms available at lower rates than double rooms, in most hotels-whether budget, mid-priced or luxury.

The ultimate travel partner- The Swiss Travel Pass:

When travelling solo, a Swiss Travel Pass is a boon! Swiss Travel System makes traveling alone in Switzerland trouble-free with their efficient network of public transport- from the high-speed and famously punctual trains to buses, boats and trams. The Swiss Travel pass offers exciting discounts on most mountain excursions and gives you a free entry to almost 400 museums!

A part of the country's heritage and history, Switzerland's panoramic train routes are among the most beautiful rail routes in the world. To experience Switzerland's majestic mountain scenery, idyllic valleys and villages; along crystal-clear lakes and ice-blue glaciers - a journey on **The Glacier Express**, or **The Bernina Express** is highly recommended!



Adventure Escapades:

With the stunning landscapes and action-packed activities, Switzerland will surely unravel the hidden adrenaline junkie in you! Whether you choose to jet ski over crystal blue waters, dive from the sky into lush green valleys or ski down steep terrains of the snow-capped Alps, there's an adventure to suit every person when in Switzerland. We recommend trying mountain biking or e-biking or sliding down the fastest **Toboggan Run** in Pilatus.

The best part? Your daring escapades aren't limited to just one season. Whether you plan your trip in the summer, autumn or winter, Switzerland will always welcome you with towering alpine peaks, emerald green valleys and shimmering blue lakes!

Gastronomic Adventures:

In Switzerland- cheese and chocolate will be your go-to choice of food. But Switzerland's local cuisine has the influence of 3 different cultures- German, French and Italian, so whether you are a meat lover or vegan, you

will never run out of options to eat!

If you are on a budget, many restaurants offer a "meal of the day" which includes a salad/soup, a choice of 2 or 3 main courses and a dessert. Many mountain excursions offer a 'picnic' option where you can carry your own meal. Another must try when traveling to the country is Swiss Wine; one of the country's best kept secrets is that almost all regions in Switzerland produce their own wines. The Viognier, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay from Lake Geneva region and Merlot Bianco from Ticino are particularly well known. However, if you consider yourself a wine connoisseur, a trip to the Lavaux Vineyards is a must!

When you are done trying the rich wines and scrumptious Swiss Delicacies and are craving a taste of home, you can try one of the many amazing Indian restaurants in the country.

Swiss Cities- the fusion of old with the new!

Swiss cities are a true wonder! Surrounded by the spectacular scenery that dominates Switzerland's land-

scape, the cities embody quality of life, urban flair and are perfect to base yourself to explore when travelling independently.

Zurich is a perfect example of a Swiss city, which is a blend of the old and new! While the old town will show you the rich history, the newer parts will cater to your young spirit with the best of Zurich nightlife with trendy bars and clubs. Any cosmopolitan swiss city such as Zurich or Geneva, will fill your calendar with festivals, fireworks, and al fresco fun, where you can meet different people and make connections for life!

And the best thing is that a 10-minute train ride can take you into countryside, so compact are even the biggest of cities in Switzerland.

Idyllic countryside landscape:

The picturesque villages of Switzerland have made for some of the most gorgeous backdrops of our Bollywood movies! Tucked in the lap of the Alps and surrounding valleys, these villages offer you a chance to unwind or pair up with other tourists and experience local life and culture!

In addition to being a paradise for hikers in summer and skiers in the winter, every village offers a multitude of attractions and mountain excursions throughout the year!

Rewarding mountain excursions:

The snow-covered peaks with panoramic viewpoints, thousands of hiking trails and many other alpine highlights make Switzerland an established destination for different mountain excursions. The journey to the mountain tops is either on board a cogwheel train, a cable car or the world's steepest funicular, is a unique experience in itself.

When in Switzerland, you have to try the golden round trip to Lucerne's home mountain Mt. Pilatus or experience the world's first revolving cable car - Titlis Rotair while heading up Mt. Titlis! A fun visit to the snow park at Jungfraujoch - Top of Europe or discovering the Glacier palace at Matterhorn Glacier Paradise will also make your day eventful!

(puja.g@ians.in)

Gun Island now now available in Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam

Widening its reach, Jnanpith Award winner Amitav Ghosh's masterful novel, "Gun Island", which seamlessly brings together a man's self-discovery, the fading folklore of the Sundarbans and the most pressing malaises of our times will now be available in its Hindi, Marathi and Malayalam translations, enabling writers to cross the linguistic barriers they were born into.

"It is a matter of the greatest pleasure and pride for me that 'Gun Island' is appearing in Hindi, Marathi and Malayalam. India is a richly multilingual country, where every language, including English, has absorbed a wide range of influences. Translations, therefore, play a very important role in Indian literary life," Ghosh said.

"Through translations it sometimes happens that a writer can cross linguistic boundaries and become a homegrown writer in literary cultures other than those that they were born into. I was living in Kerala in 1983, when I started writing my first novel.

"I was delighted to discover then that many Keralans thought of Sarat Chandra as a writer who had written in Malayalam. I have since discovered that this is true also of many people who read Saratbabu in Hindi and Marathi. This is, I think, the greatest tribute that can be paid to a writer," he added.

He also thanked the translators, Maneesha Taneja, Ashlesha Gore and K. T. Radhakrishnan "for the painstaking work they have put in", saying the translations "are all of the highest quality".

"Adeptly connecting a forgotten folktale of Bengal with present-day events whose reverberations can be felt across continents, this riveting tale is sure to appeal to a wide spectrum of readers, no matter which language they read it in," Minakshi Thakur, Publisher, Eka, an imprint of Westland Publications, said.

"Bundook" or Gun is a common word, but one which turns Deen Datta's world upside down. A dealer of rare books, Deen is used to a quiet life spent indoors, but as his once-solid beliefs begin to shift, he is forced to



set out on an extraordinary journey; one that takes him from India to Los Angeles and Venice via a tangled route through the memories and experiences of those he meets along the way.

There is Piya, a fellow Bengali-American who sets his journey in motion; Tipu, an entrepreneurial young man who opens Deen's eyes to the realities of growing up in today's world; Rafi, with his desperate attempt to help someone in need; and Cinta, an old friend who provides the missing link in the story they are all a part of. It is a journey which will upend everything he thought he knew about himself, about the Bengali legends of his childhood and about the world around him.

"Gun Island" is a beautifully realised novel which effortlessly spans space and time. It is the story of a world on the brink, of increasing displacement and unstoppable transition. But it is also a story of hope, of a man whose faith in the world and the future is restored by two remarkable women.

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956. He grew up in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. He studied at the universities of Delhi and Oxford and published the first of eight novels, "The Circle of Reason", in 1986. The first novel in his Ibis trilogy, "Sea of Poppies", was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. (IANS)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, November 22, 2020

Moon square Sun on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results for the whole year. You will not get the benefit of your efforts and hard work. The health of your mother, mother-in-law might be a cause of worry. Drive vehicle carefully. Abide by traffic rules. You will be troubled by some minor illness. There will be financial concerns and a tight situation. You will think of a job change. While talking on the phone use chosen words. If you are in Government job, you should refrain from taking unilateral decisions. Your family members will keep supporting you. Friends will remain on your side. Husband and wife will share amazing bonding. Marriage of a family member will get fixed. This year you will do some work that will bring you criticism, but there is no need to get anxious. You will emerge winner in the end.

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. New friendships are likely to emerge during this time, supportive and easygoing ones.

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)

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. Your position of power and authority is maintained

despite many changes all around. You should maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way otherwise you will become frustrated and dull. Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. Health problemsThis 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. 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.

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 to 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

Data Science as Career Option

Data Science

By Ranjan K Baruah

When we learn computers we also hear a lot about 'data'. I am not trying to explain anything in academic perspectives but when we hear data we think something related to the system or computers. Apart from computer's world, we use the term 'data' as databases have become a common word for many who are into marketing or business. We have witnessed the Pandemic situation and life was not normal this year when there was full lock down everywhere. Jobs were lost and nothing new could be seen. Now post Pandemic there will be many challenges for the job aspirants in all over the country. We have to prepare ourselves for the jobs and one area where we could see more potential and opportunities is in the field of Data Science.

Data science is an interdisciplinary field that uses scientific methods, processes, algorithms and systems to extract knowledge and insights from many structural and unstructured data. It is related to data mining, machine learning and big data. It is a "concept to unify statistics, data analysis and their related methods" in order to "understand and analyze actual phenomena" with data. It uses techniques and theories drawn from many fields within

the context of mathematics, statistics, computer science, domain knowledge and information science.

We are talking about an option which is going to have more demands in near future. There is no shadow of doubt that Data Science is one of the fastest-growing and popular fields right now. Companies across various sectors of the industry are experimenting with and adopting Data Science technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, and Natural Language Processing. As a result, the demand for qualified and skilled Data Science professionals is going to increase all over the countries and more importantly in leading cities and metros where there are main offices of big companies or corporations.

Many courses are available in the country including online mode. Through online mode is available but there are institutes which offer full time regular courses in the field of Data Science.

There are courses like Business Analytics Certification Program, Post Graduate Certification in Data Science, Post Graduate Diploma in Data Science, Master of Science in Data Science, Advance Programme in Data Science, etc. The courses offered by different institutes are well equipped

and well designed looking at the needs of the market and making aspirants ready for the job market. It covers fields such as Big Data, Machine Learning, Business Intelligence, Predictive Analytics, Data Visualization, Statistics & Optimisation, Natural Language Processing, Data Visualisation, etc.

Corporate and business houses need data scientists which brings more demand for aspirants who are trained in this field. Companies can make better decisions by extracting and analyzing data. Companies have their own requirements and use data accordingly which enables data scientists to get placement. Students coming from science backgrounds can excel easily by becoming data scientists. Students from North East may also take up courses related to Data Science and work in different cities or metros but they must also possess certain employability skills to be successful in this field. It's a new field for many but Pandemic has taught us that if we do not cope up with times then we shall be left behind.

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

“In our country religion is not different from philosophy and religion & philosophy don’t differ from science.”
--- Virchand Raghavji Gandhi

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No. 98 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2020

A step closer to the vaccine
THE Covid pandemic scenario remains scary even though there were hints of a let-up in recent weeks. With India recording nine million plus Covid Positive cases as last count, the optimism about an early resumption of public activities in full is again on the wane. In principal, schooling will remain hit for more time. Worldwide, the Covid infection figures totalled to around 58,00,000 by now. The US is struggling hard with the pandemic; so is Europe; and India is in a difficult plight as well. The Diwali revelry apparently added to the worries as cities including Delhi are now on a new alert. In this grim scenario, the silver lining is the announcement by various pharma giants that their anti-Covid vaccines are showing good results. Two pharma firms have said that their experiments showed 90 to 95 per cent success vis-à-vis the response from volunteers who took the jabs. While plans here are to administer the vaccine to health workers and the elderly first, they being the most vulnerable to the virus infection, the general public can expect to get it from April. Areas that are mostly free from Covid spread might wait and vulnerable areas like Mumbai and Delhi might get it in the first stage itself. Progressively, in a matter of months, the vaccines could reach all. The government is planning to reach it free, or at nominal rates, while a pharma firm has said it could be sold at Rs 1000 for two jabs required for a patient. The storage and distribution patterns are now being put in order.

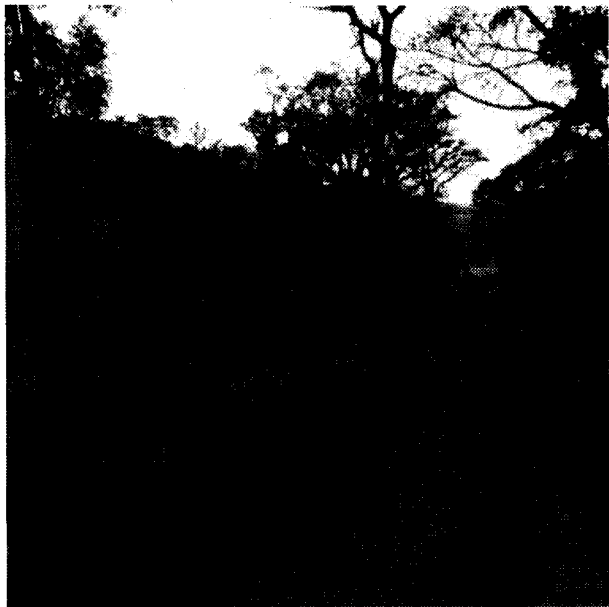
Now, capital Delhi came up with harsher steps to check the Covid spread and raised the fine for not wearing the face mask in public places to a hefty Rs 2,000. Gujarat has imposed night curfew in principal commercial town Ahmedabad during the weekend till Monday morning. Rajasthan reimposed restrictions since Saturday. Night curfew has been imposed on five districts in Madhya Pradesh including capital Bhopal. The Maharashtra government changed its decision to reopen schools in cities like Mumbai, where classes will not resume till the end of this year. Union Health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan himself expressed optimism that the vaccine could be reaching people in a matter of three months or so. By then, several vaccines might be in circulation, as very many pharma companies across the world are working on introduction of safe and effective vaccines. Regulatory approvals are a must, though, before they are marketed. Hope is that the new vaccines will not have side-effects; a worry that might initially hold back many from having a jab.

Jañtia kings’ tradition of keeping giants

The Pnar and War people who lived in the erstwhile kingdom of Jañtia have a rich tradition and tales. One such story is the legend about the many ‘ki Mar’. The general definition of the Mars is that of men who can perform extraordinary feats and in most cases stories have it that the Mars are giants among men. The notion that one has about the Mars is the biblical Goliath and one would like to believe that giants would be the common English term that would best describe the Mars of Jañtia hills. But in reality Mars are not necessarily giants; they are men who possess super powers or someone who can perform extraordinary feats. Legend also has it that the Mars in the court of the Jañtia kings came from different parts of hill portions of the erstwhile kingdom.

The common stories connected with most of the Mars are those about their involvement in erecting of monoliths or carting huge stones from one place to another. A case in point is that of u Mar Phalangki of Nartiang and Bir Nongpoh of Nongtalang. Part of the story about u Mar Phalangki is almost identical with the story of u Bir Nongpoh in that they both carries a huge stone over their heads to protect themselves from ‘incessant rains. The only difference is that Mar Phalangki carried a stone from Raliang to Nartiang and Bir Nongpoh carried a stone from Jañtiapur to Nongtalang. Both stones can be seen till date in the two villages which also stand as testimonies to the stories. In War Jañtia area the stone used by the Pnar in the game called ‘kynitiñ or rah mookhras’ are called ‘shmia Mar’ which means stones of the Mars. U Sajar Nangli is another legendary figure in the folk tradition of the Pnars of Jañtia hills and there are many monuments associated with his story. One such monument which testifies to his size is located at Daistong village. On the top of a hill in Daistong village there are three usual flat stones which are unlike the Mawkynthei or dolmen which one could see elsewhere in the Khasi Jañtia hills. The three

stones are placed like steps parallel to one another. The flat stones are called ‘ki kjet u Sajar’ because on one of the flat stones there is an imprint of a huge human foot which is about one foot long. Legend has it that the image is the imprint of the feet of u Sajar hence the stones are called ‘ki kjet u Sajar’ or the feet of u Sajar. Other Mars may not be of the size of giants, but they are men who can perform extraordinary feats, such as when the king would ask them to show their strength by pulling a standing tree from its roots or wrestling with an elephant which the Jañtia kings had in plenty. The



case in point is the story of u Ran Nangti, who in order to test his power, the king of the day put him to many tests. One of the tests was when he was asked to cut a huge tree using an ordinary sword which he did without any difficulty. It was said that for the final test, he ultimately asked for the divine sword. Legend has it that he was able to use the divine sword to cut the iron rod which the king’s men cleverly hid under a banana tree and that is considered to be an extraordinary feat that he had achieved. Mar Phalangki’s name is associated with the tallest monolith in Nartiang and the name of u Luh Laskor from Nangbah village is also associated with the construction of the royal path or ‘ka luti syiem’ from Jañtiapur to Nartiang. Legend has it that the hills portion of the path was constructed by the duo u Luh and u Mar Phalangki

but the path which slopes towards the plains was constructed by another Mar named u Bailon Khyriem of Thangbuli village. One can understand the strength and imagine their size if one visit these paths and observes the sheer size of the monoliths and the stones bridges that they built all along the path. No ordinary human can build those stone bridges especially during the time when people had to do everything with their bare hands and using only human strength without the support of any kind of machines. Not only kings have the tradition of keeping Mars; in the past even elekas too



have stories about their own Mars. In the not so distant past when the elekas or the raids were always in conflict with each other, elekas too have their own Mars or legendary figures, who achieved extraordinary feats. Some of the few local mars are the likes of u Chai Ramut of eleka Nongjingi who became famous in their battle against the eleka Nangbah. It is said that raid Mukhla also had their own Mars. The people of raid Jwai fondly remember some of their legendary figures like u Tongkha and u Buidkha. The monolith in Jawmuisiang, Jowai is another testimony to the extraordinary feat performed by the duo on behalf of eleka Jowai. The story has it that the two played an important role in the battle of raid Jowai against the king of Malngiang. Interestingly, apart from stories of male legends, Jañtia also has beautiful

stories about queens with extraordinary powers whose name is ‘Ka Syiem Latympang’ of ka hima Manar. The first time that this scribe heard about u Ter Kyndiah is during a maiden visit to the royal Bathing ghat at Syndai village. The Rupasor bathing ghat has an elephant’s head sculpted on a rock. Unfortunately the trunk of one of the elephants is found broken. It was later that one learnt that the broken trunk has to do with the story of u Ter Kyndiah another important legendary figure of the Pnar. U Ter Kyndiah is said to be a man of tall stature who is a little over 6 feet tall. He was well-built and had a big tummy. It is also believed that he lived in the mid eighteenth century perhaps in the heydays of the Jañtia kingdom. He was a trader by profession and visited different markets every week. Like anybody else he engaged in multiple professions and also worked as a mason apart from working in his paddy field as a farmer.

His name and fame spread in the hills and plains and the king invited him to Jañtiapur it is said one day on his return from Jañtiapur he was very sad for unknown reasons. On his way back to Jowai on reaching Syndai where Rupasor is located, he went to the elephant sculpted on a rock and with his bare hands broke the elephant’s trunk. He then threw the broken trunk and till today at Rupasor one of the images of an elephant sculpted on a rock is without a trunk. Another incident which provides an idea about his strength was an incident when one fine winter morning while he was basking in the sun, a bamboo which grew near where he was sitting obstructed the sun. He then went and pulled and uprooted the entire cluster of bamboos.

This is not an exhaustive list of the Mars and the legendary figures of the Pnar; there are also stories about u Railong and other legendary figures in Jañtia hills, like the brother u Joh and u Kat Ymbon of Shangppung. The Pnar and the War of Jañtia still have many stories of their heroes. Hopefully the stories will be brought to light one day. Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

Booming ‘G’ technology, deteriorating ecosystem

By Tirtha Acharya

Life is a sojourn between birth and death; therefore, to understand the essence of life, and to extract the elixir out of it, one needs to have patience, and let life take its own course. As human beings, we are gifted with the capacity of reasoning; let’s not exploit this quality for our vested interests. Using this attribute for the betterment of humanity makes this world a better place to live in and makes life easier for every being. This planet earth is not meant for human beings only; it is for all beings that are created by nature. In our daily lives we are interdependent on each other, and if by chance the harmonization among these aspects is disturbed that would paralyze the entire system. Similarly, the gift of nature such as mountains, rivers, flora and fauna, which exist in this world have special roles to play. Being indifferent to these aspects of nature will make life difficult. Excessive use of carbon radiation of the towers. Is it not our responsibility to protect these birds from being extinct? We brag about our achievements in the field of science, but a tiny virus hasn’t only crushed the so-called advanced world, but also has proved how insignificant and trivial are the human achievements against the power of nature. Similarly, there are many instances like the devastating tsunami of Japan; deadly wildfires in Australia, massive earthquakes in Nepal which are some of the supernatural instances that have claimed many lives and made many people homeless. Science may have developed or invented some of the technologies that may alert the scientists about the probable threats, but do they have any technology to avert them from happening? I know undermining scientific developments and inventions may not be a prudent idea, because the tool which I am using to



products, deforestation, urbanization and machines may seem to have made life easier and sophisticated, but their impact on nature is becoming a grave concern to all of us including the flora and fauna. Scientists and experts on the subject are now warning the concerned authorities to be aware of the situation and take stringent action to stop the world from deteriorating even further. Don’t we want our progeny to witness the grandeur of nature? We are being insensible in misusing our power and being arrogant to become better than the others. Jealousy is one of the factors that has made us void and has led us to believe that the world will not exist after we are gone. It is paradoxical to assume that it is not too late, and we still have time to protect this planet. Let me relate a movie 2.0 that I watched recently. Though it is a fiction movie, some of the issues raised in the movie were sensitive and insightful. We watch movies, read books, listen to speeches delivered by prominent figures and momentarily praise them but eventually ignore the messages they try to relate in connection with the degrading condition of our ecosystem. The movie which I watched a few months back was also trying to warn people by portraying the issue of excessive installation of cell phone towers being a threat to birds. Let me take you back to 20 years ago. I still remember hearing the chirping of birds waking me up from my sleep, but these days we hardly get such an ambience in the morning because the birds are being killed by the scattering

express my idea is a gift of science; the medicines which I take are the noble inventions; and the inventions of train or plane have made this world a global village. However, deep down, we know how natural resources and nature have been exploited in the name of scientific discoveries to achieve momentary pleasure and relief. Similarly, the race among the “5 G” network favoring nations like Korea, the USA, and China to adopt this technology because of its greater speed transmission, a lower latency and therefore greater capacity for remote execution and so on and so forth. But have the IT professionals and companies involved in creating this latest technology informed the users about the negative aspects associated with it? As has been mentioned, this technology will provide greater speed but it will inevitably cause a large usage of energy among the consumers, which is one of the main contributors to climate change. Additionally, manufacturing and maintenance of this technology produces waste that could have detrimental effects on the environment. Besides installations of transmission towers and the radiation transmitted through them could be harmful to birds and to the ecosystem. Therefore, to save our ecosystem and to save the world from further degradation, policymakers should come up with a policy that could take science and nature in a balanced way to make this world a better place to live in. Email: tirthu42@gmail.com

TO THE EDITOR

Re-opening schools a priority

Editor,
The letter captioned, “Pandemic impact on education” by Emily Ryntathiang (ST Nov 21, 2020) correctly depicts the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young school students particularly in Meghalaya. There is an urgent need to resume classroom teaching instead of providing assignments through WhatsApp or online mode, hitherto being done since the onset of the pandemic. We have to realize that the pandemic is not going to end in the near future and we should strive to accept the new normal. As such, Government should immediately reopen the schools by overcoming the fear-psychosis of Covid-19. In this regard, we should take a cue from Ramakrishna Mission which has gone ahead on its own and re-opened all schools from lower primary to higher classes, in both rural and urban areas under their management about a month back without waiting for Government’s directive. In fact, they have also enhanced the school hours and made every Saturday a

working day just to compensate the loss the students have suffered during the last eight months. Their action is laudable since they have given priority to students’ well-being over the fear of pandemic. Their action seems more justified since not a single positive case of infection of students has been reported from any of their schools in the past one month or so. Through your esteemed daily, I would like to draw the attention of the Hon’ble Education Minister, Government of Meghalaya, Government run schools and schools managed by missionary organizations to emulate the bold step taken by Ramakrishna Mission and re-open all schools in Meghalaya at the earliest keeping in mind the future of our children. Yours etc., R Chyrmang Shillong-4

Action points to protect Meghalaya tribals

Editor,
I appreciate the pressure groups of Meghalaya for pressuring the Central Government to implement

the ‘Inner line Permit (ILP)’ in the entire state Meghalaya. Their demand is great to keep Meghalaya isolated! However, before implementing ILP in Meghalaya the following measures should be taken:
1. Shift NEIGRIHS from Shillong as many non-tribal patients are coming from neighbouring Tripura, Assam, etc. for treatment as this hospital is inviting non-tribal patients from above mentioned areas.
2. Shift IIM from Shillong since this institution is inviting non-tribal students and faculty from other parts of country.
3. Shift NEEPCO from Shillong as non-tribal people are coming to Shillong and polluting Meghalaya. Meghalaya Power Distribution Corporation can take care of Meghalaya.
4. Shift NEC from Shillong since non-tribals employees are coming to Shillong, as a result Meghalaya is turning into a cosmopolitan state. It is unwanted by the CoMSO.
5. Shift the National Institute of Fashion Technology from Shillong since many professors and students from other parts of India are coming to Shillong with their

advanced scientific and technological ideas for the betterment of humankind. It should be prohibited in Meghalaya.
6. Shift BSNL, FCI and Post master General of Northeast from Shillong for the same problem- many employees are non-tribals.
7. Shift all headquarters of the military/para military and CRPF from Shillong. Let MLP 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th battalions fight with Bangladeshi soldiers and protect the boundaries of Meghalaya.
8. Meghalaya Government should stop advertising for Tourism. All the tourists are non-tribals and contribute much to the economy of Meghalaya.
9. Permanently close down the Umroi Airport. No outsiders (non-tribals) should be allowed to come to Shillong.
10. NEHU should stop recruiting non-tribal teaching staff and stop admitting non-tribal students because they bring scientific, technological and liberal ideas. This is outside influence and should be prohibited.
11. Dismantle Byrniehat Bridge and Malidior Bridge. These are the main culprits bringing in non-tribals from other parts of India to Shillong.
12. Internet should be

completely shut down and should not be allowed in Meghalaya because it also brings outside influence. These above measures can keep local people safe and protected from outside influence. Let the people of Meghalaya take advantage of Central Government’s handout (as they have been getting for many decades even when people from other parts of India are working hard to support the lavish life style of the tribals. Let the people of Meghalaya live happily ever after in their own little paradise. Yours etc, Chakshekar Reddy, Bengaluru

Shillong needs a shopping mall!
Editor,
The importance of a shopping mall is mainly for people to get out of their houses for a while and do something entertaining. It will be more convenient for the people living within the State to have one central location to do all their shopping rather than to drive many miles to Guwahati or Kolkata just to buy different types of products for their personal needs. The idea of having a ‘Smart City’ is highly

recommended in the state since the shopping mall would be constructed based on an eco-friendly method having greenery and clean surroundings thereby leading to a pollution-free atmosphere. ‘Employment’ is the main criteria as many people in the state are still unemployed while some of them have lost their jobs. Setting up a shopping mall would boost the economy of the state, reduce corruption and prevent financial crisis. Malls can provide jobs to a number of youths in the state who face difficulty in setting up their own businesses due to lack of ideas, paucity of funds for initial investment, difficulty in finding sponsorship to name a few. Hence I would urge the State Government to kindly consider taking up the shopping mall project. Government can consider whether it should be constructed in the heart of the city or on the outskirts. Yours etc., Alvinston Process Syiem, 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.

"Art doesn't transform. It just plain forms."
— Roy Lichtenstein

The Shillong Times

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MDA coalition on slippery path

THE coalition dharma was born in Meghalaya where astute politicians formed governments under different acronyms. There was an unwritten code where coalition partners showed due deference to one another. Meghalaya never had pre-poll alliances. Such alliances were made after elections. Before the elections each party went to the polls with its own set of promises; its own manifesto and ideology. The regional parties would lambast the national parties for missing the nuance of governance that regional parties claim they had. National parties would scorn at the regional parties for their divisive nature and their lack of cohesion. Regional parties in Meghalaya have never been able to fight elections under a single banner. That in itself is an indicator of what regional political brinkmanship is. Despite several attempts at unity the regional parties always fell apart like ninepins. National parties on the other hand had more discipline as they were guided by a high command in Delhi. This is why national parties have always had a field day in Meghalaya because although they would fall short of the magic number for forming a government, in the 'first past the post' system, national parties always came in as the single largest party and would then look to form coalitions with regional parties and independents. Meghalaya also has the record of having an Independent MLA as the chief minister.

Meghalaya is therefore no stranger to coalitions. So what makes the NPP-led MDA coalition so tenuous? Why is the BJP a coalition partner with just two MLAs always taking a broad swipe at the Government? It has come to a point where the NPP State President and Rajya Sabha member even said that the BJP would not be invited to the MDA meetings henceforth. It is true that coalition partners don't discuss issues pertaining to the government in the public sphere. For months now the BJP President and its Spokes-person have been launching a broadside against the Government and embarrassing it. The main grouse of the BJP is about the large scale corruption in the Garo Hills District Council. Now the State BJP is even suggesting that it would seek the intervention of the Home Ministry on this issue as it involves serious diversion of funds to different projects which are not visible or tangible even while the staff of the Council has been denied their salaries for over two years. The BJP is eyeing the Garo Hills District Council elections which are now overdue and their raking up the issue of corruption in the Council is sure to win them brownie points. However, this repeated attack by the BJP has dented the cordial relationship between the coalition partners in the Government. How long this will continue is unsure but it's no longer smooth sailing for the MDA unless the BJP in-charge Meghalaya helps mend the rift.

Sonia's committees will have little impact on rejuvenation of Congress

Party needs radical transformation to meet challenge from BJP

By Arun Srivastava

Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has constituted a number of committees and put the so called rebels in these committees. Through this move an impression is being created that the dissident leaders, like Kapil Sibal, Shashi Tharoor, P Chidambaram are opposing the leadership for sharing power. Loyalist to the leadership systematically tried to create the impression that these leaders are out to grab the office of the party president obviously with the aim to become the future prime minister.

One must appreciate the imaginary skill of the loyalists. While it has been an astute move to deflect the criticism and protect Rahul Gandhi from humiliation, it also aimed at smearing the leaders who raised the issue of revival and rejuvenation of the party.

It is a debatable issue whether at all these 23 leaders who had written letter to the Congress chief about rejuvenating the party could at all be described as dissidents. Before describing them as dissidents, the loyalists and the leadership must know the real meaning of dissident. The word dissident is used when a person or group of persons oppose the policy of the party. They were not opposing the policy of the party. In this case they were expressing their anguish at the style of the functioning of the leadership. They had expressed their fear that the party would be decimated if no serious move is undertaken to revive and rejuvenate the party. They were feeling frustrated at the inability of the party to evolve a mechanism to fight the misuse of the Modi government.

Unfortunately the loyalists, resorting to the highest form of sycophancy, projected this demand as a move to dethrone Rahul Gandhi. They ought to have realised that Rahul had already resigned and is sulking at home. These leaders were of the view that Rahul must review his stand and stage a comeback. In case he is not willing then in that case somebody should take the charge. The party cannot continue to be headless.

This arbitrary functioning of Rahul has inflicted a massive damage to the organisation.

Only for the sake of registering his presence, he used to issue occasional statements. At no stage did he make any sincere effort to synchronise the voice of protest against Modi. No doubt through his occasional attacks he has been embarrassing Modi, but what benefit the party was getting out of these occasional outbursts. Modi certainly does not take him seriously. Ordinary Congress workers, down to the level of block, were feeling frustrated. They enthusiastically respond to his outbursts, but there is complete absence of a mechanism to channelize it, give in a shape and implement it at the ground level. This malaise has been haunting the organisation and the cadres.

The result of the Bihar assembly elections simply endorses it. The party failed to exploit the ground swell. Rahul has miserably failed to strengthen the organisation. If there had been an agile organisation in Bihar the party must have won many seats, at least succeeded in retaining its 27 seats it had in previous house.

Least to speak of the so-called dissident leaders, even the loyalists are not sure about the timing and process of Rahul Gandhi's return as party president. He must throw out the premonition that Congress cannot survive without him, if he stops commenting on the functioning of Modi. There is no doubt none of the 23 leaders have all India stature. But a new president must strive to coordinate the function of the party at all India basis, give a direction to its functioning, activate the workers, which Rahul has not been doing.

To counter Modi it is imperative that the Congress must have an agile and dynamic president who can coordinate the functioning nationally. At a time when the politics has been radicalised, it is more im-

perative. With BJP under Modi resorting to this nature of politics there is no other party which can challenge the BJP. MIM of Owaisi has also been pursuing this line. In fact almost all the smaller parties in the states have been following this political line.

This nature of politics will ultimately harm the political institution and damage the political structure of the country. If the Congress has been a vibrant organisation in the states, then this nature of politics could have been checked to a greater extent. It is wrong to say that the older leaders of Congress were not willing to take the BJP, especially Modi head on. The Congress must reply what it did to check the Modi government from adopting the three bills relating to citizenship issue. The Congress might have opposed it on the floor of the parliament, but it did it hit the street as was done by the Shaheen Bagh protesters. What prevented the Congress to identify itself with the people. Was it afraid of losing the Hindu votes. Unfortunately by maintaining a passive silence it has lost the credibility of being the pioneer of the secular forces and BJPism.

The BJP which has been maintaining silence on this issue in recent days, is planning to implement it just ahead of the Bengal election. Ironically the Congress is still busy with the polemics whether to have seat adjustment with the CPI(M) and TMC. Central security agencies have been conducting an analysis of the demographic and economic profiles of populations along the Bangladesh border, especially pockets with sizeable concentrations of Muslims in Bengal. The survey has already triggered fears of religious profiling ahead of the Bengal Assembly elections next year. Such a survey is bound to send a wrong signal to the minority community because of the prevalence of a sharp anti-Muslim narrative and could trigger apprehensions of being systematically spied on and

investigated.

Congress hopes that the Muslims will support it. But on its part it has not been sensitive to the issues which affects Muslims or Dalits or other minorities. In the Independent India for the first time the labourers and the daily workers have to face immense humiliation and insult at the hands of the government. The country witnessed a vertical divide between the capitalist order and the proletariat; the Modi government was more concerned to serve its rich and middle class friends during the pandemic, than taking care of the poor labourers. The Congress should have identified it with the aspiration of the poor. But it failed.

One is not sure whether the Congress leadership is aware of the changing character of the RSS itself. The RSS has brought about massive change in its ideological approach and orientation. The new ideological mantra is "Savarkarism". Their strategy to push the Muslims at the periphery of the politics and political structure of the country is the basic ingredient of this ideology. The Congress, particularly Rahul Gandhi must realise that Modi is not at all bothered by any criticism for his failure to put the economic functioning and economy on track. He is also not concerned about the spike in coronavirus. His primary mission is to clean the path for transforming India into Hindu Rashtra or Bharatvarsha.

The committees formed by Sonia Gandhi would function like shadow ministries, as is prevalent in the UK, but these will cease to have any impact on the Modi government or on Modi himself. It is unlikely that these committees' reports and assessments will succeed in cornering the government. The Congress has consistently criticised the government's handling of the economy over the years, alleging wrong measures were being taken and expert advice was being ignored. But Modi has not taken them seriously. (IPA Service)

R&D Technology

Upgradation vital for revival

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

India's manufacturing expertise is not very efficient and cost competitive, even compared with the emerging economies. As such, there have been efforts by the government to modernise manufacturing technologies and make it more innovative. Recently, the production-linked incentive scheme in 10 manufacturing sectors to a total of 13 has been aimed in this direction.

At the outset, it's important to clarify that this idea of self-reliance is not about a return to Nehruvian import substitution or autarkic isolationism. The government has emphasised that the vision includes active participation in post-COVID global supply chains as well as the need to attract foreign direct investment.

The aim obviously is to boost manufacturing, investment and employment through targeted State support to domestic and foreign firms for local production for such a vast market. The focus has to be on manufacturing low growth with an export bias through market protection, subsidies and other interventions, several of which has been outlined in the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' policy. Though self-reliance is being rightly stressed as India is now being seen as an emerging economy, the allocation of Rs 6000 crore for Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana and Rs 900 crore for department of biotechnology for corona virus vaccine research seems inadequate.

The five key features of the Yojana are: one, it would be operational during October 2020 to June 2021; two, it would incentivise creation of new employment opportunities during COVID recovery phase; three, the employment scheme would be effective from October and will be applicable to eligible new employees joining the EPFO-registered establishments; four, it would benefit those who exited these concerns during the pandemic and drawing monthly wages of less than Rs 15,000 and five, the Central government will subsidise the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) contributions for two years.

The point that needs to be made note of is that all-round manufacturing has to be modernised, even in rural industries so that products turn quality conscious and competitive, both at national and global markets. There are many products and equipments that are still imported but can easily be manufactured in the country through minor R&D efforts. Even sophisticated products need no longer be imported and if necessary can be manufactured in the country with foreign technology.

Let us look at the example of China. It has moved far ahead with its sharp focus on self-reliance in technology and innovation, challenging the might of the US. With thrust on manufacturing, Chinese products have entered markets across countries, including India. Over the years, Beijing has paid lot more attention on technology upgradation on products and equipments so as to make these acceptable at global levels.

India is at a critical juncture with several factors having hindered growth. A three-year slowdown and presently Covid-19 pandemic has further retarded manufacturing growth, slow rise in output share, capacity slack, failure to attract Greenfield foreign direct investments and slower trend export growth. An investment slowdown and the inability to reverse the graph is indeed alarming and this needs to be addressed.

The change in strategy necessitated is to attract investment and generate employment. Thus there are

expectations on increasing efficiency, productivity and improving all-round quality. If necessary, special incentives need to be given to increase public-private collaboration in areas where State technology along with efficiency of the private sector can work wonders.

Moreover in the recent geo-political environment, there are reports of some firms coming to India from China and the economic situation has to be made conducive. In fact, all-round efforts are needed at attract foreign investment but special thrust would be necessary towards technology upgradation.

However, the task of moving towards self reliance is not as easy as our political leaders point out for electoral and other gains. There is need to be more serious and evolve a strategic plan of action in gearing up research in selected sectors with academia-industry collaboration and fixing up specific targets. This only will enable transfer of technology so that production and productivity improves and become more quality conscious.

As is well known, there is ample scope in sectors like defence, IT and electronics, shipbuilding, mining etc. It is understood that in the defence sector, there are plans to curb imports in a variety of products and curb imports while also exporting to some selected countries. Some collaborations have been envisaged and the one with Israel has already taken shape. However, in the shipbuilding sector, India has made some advance and may, in coming years, start exporting ships, even warships.

Experts in the field are of the opinion that the inclusion of high demand, high technology items such as semi-conductor fab, IoT devices and ACC batteries in the newly announced Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme is expected to boost India's capacities and catapult it among major manufacturing hubs. As regards the mining sector, legislative amendments are proposed to The Mines & Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957 as structural reforms may boost private investments for accelerating growth and employment opportunities.

Additionally, the government proposes to nearly double its oil refining capacity in the next five years and reduce both imports and carbon footprint by 30-35 per cent by increasing the use of natural gas four times this decade, as stated by Prime Minister Modi recently at the convocation ceremony of Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University.

Investment bankers are optimistic about slight rise in GDP but even if it happens, to boost up manufacturing, big investments are required. The government can't depend upon the private sector solely and will need to shell out resources.

The key question is the ability to attract foreign investments and global technology companies who would be willing to set up units in the country, preferably in collaboration with Indian companies working in similar areas. There is need for the government to focus on companies such as Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers, Hindustan Aeronautics, ISRO, IRCON etc. and ensure further technology upgradation to make their global presence felt.

It is not expected of the private sector, except a few, to be much advanced and make the country a manufacturing hub. Apart from extending various types of facilities, some of which have already been announced, technical and financial collaborations would help achieve the objective of self-reliance in a big way. —INFA

TO THE EDITOR

No shopping mall in the city please

Editor,

Whatever shopping mall may come up, it must not be constructed in Proper Shillong. Construct it out of town. Shillong needs to de-congest. And the sooner the better for all Shillongites. Barik is a wooded area. Let it be preserved and be the lungs of the city.

Jobs are important, but not at the expense of the environment. Furthermore, whenever the Government undertakes a real estate project, invariably the completion is never in sight. An example is the Crowborough Hotel which began in 1984. Let's not go down that road again.

Hence if any shopping mall is to be constructed let it be a private enterprise. The Government must only govern and nothing else. When governance is good, Meghalaya has the potential to transform itself into a beautiful oasis.

Yours etc.,
Tyrone D'Brass
Tura.

Rethink the idea of a shopping mall

Editor,

It was interesting to read the letter to the editor writ-

ten by a certain Alvinson Process Syiem titled, "Shillong needs a shopping mall" (ST Nov 23, 2020). In the letter, it is pertinent to note that the author made no mention of the proposed Barik Shopping Mall, so as readers it would be only reasonable to assume that he was speaking of shopping malls in general. The stand of the majority of right thinking citizens is clear on this issue, i.e. Barik is not an ideal place to set up any commercial venture, that too at the scale of a mall that the government intends to create. Perhaps with the completion of the ISBT at Mawiong, the land of the Meghalaya Transport Corporation (MTC) at Khyndailak can be considered as a viable location for this proposed mega-mall. This is just one suggestion amongst many that others in positions of authority are far capable of giving to the government - options which are based on sound logic and acceptable to all sections of society. That having been said, as an informed citizen of this state, there are a few points in the Mr Syiem's letter which I feel it needs to be rebutted, else it may encourage the Government to act further on their proposed plans.

Firstly, the author claimed in his letter that "setting up a shopping mall would boost the economy of the state, reduce corruption and prevent financial crisis". Any informed citizen knows straightaway that such fantastic claims

are not based on any empirical findings. One shopping mall even at the scale of a Phoenix Mall set up in the greater Shillong area would hardly contribute significantly to State's overall GDP. If the State Government relies on setting up commercial ventures such as a mall for their income, then something must be terribly wrong with their management of the economy. As to claims that a shopping mall would reduce corruption or pull the State out of a financial crisis, well let's just say that the inverse is bound to happen based on past experiences.

The author must consider whether stall allocation in the said mall will be free and fair and whether any lobbying for stalls will or will not exist. Besides this point, a shopping mall can also be used as a focal point for money laundering but that's a debate for some other day. The idea of setting up a shopping mall is always a welcome idea for truly it would cater to the needs of the growing middle class sections of the state, but in perspective the Government should consider various other factors such as location, damage to the environment, pollution, traffic chaos, and above all, health in the process.

Let's not forget that the proposed Barik Mall will hardly be a few metres away from the Civil Hospital, Shillong.

Yours etc.
Jeremiah S.
Via email

Drug menace going hi-tech

Editor,

The drug menace is a serious concern of society now. Honestly speaking, it is eating into the very strength of the social fabric. The recent Bollywood cases should make all our parent fraternity more vigilant. I wish to bring to the attention of the Narcotics Department of the Police and the Defence authorities in the Cantonment areas, about the rampant drug abuse near the premises of Shiv temple of Madhav Khola, and other nearby "secluded" places.

On my recent visit to the temple, I noticed three boys smoking dope in the open. They were probably around 22 years of age. On my inquiry from persons around I got to know more inside details which sent a chill down my spine. Till about three months ago the periphery of the temple would look like a "mela" as several groups of junkies from outside would flock to the temple area and sit in a huddle to have their quota of dope. That lasted till midnight. But, thanks to the watchful eyes of the village people and the Headman, probably from Lawsohtun, who chased them away.

What I have learnt is that many groups of youths, including elderly people, from distant places, would converge at the vicinity of this sacred temple. Each indi-

vidual group of youths would gather around to prepare their dope and such other narcotic substances - that would go several rounds. One group would leave and other groups would make an entry - thus this cycle would go on till late night. Some addicts from faraway places would come in their expensive vehicles to get a high. They would cause all kinds of noises disturbing the peaceful atmosphere of the holy place. It was never safe for women and children to visit the temple in the afternoon/evening. However, after repeated complaints by the residents around the Headman and the village youth members had driven those drug addicts away from the temple area. The Government should take note of this commendable initiative taken by the village community.

Here arises a million-dollar question. Where have those addicts gone? Have they given up doing drugs now? It's totally immature to say so. Those addicts have moved to other hideouts - non-descript and untrodden spots. Jungles or any enclosed, hidden areas are their chosen places for such drug rendezvous these days. I was informed all this by an old addict who is now doing B.Sc. at a reputed college. Being an old sinner and a talented student, he made the point that it is the mobile phone that has become the best interface in such hush-hush drug abuses. The addicts themselves

peddle the drugs which are mostly imported. Any new locations for the meeting/trading are fixed by SMS or on WhatsApp. Everything has become easy due to mobile phones. The boy further adds that wrong friendships and peer pressure also contribute towards the drug culture that has misled many youngsters these days.

One wonders what advanced gadgets will our police and narcotic departments come up with to crack down on the drug addicts/peddlers using sophisticated digital aids. Police can't easily outsmart these "hopping" druggies. The more serious question is how so many narcotic substances are available in the State, and how are they so easily traded around? This calls for serious brainstorming. Have those illegal drugs not been brought in from various entry points? It clearly shows the laxity of our concerned departments. I think the government should consider passing a special ILP on drugs in the Assembly, no joking. We would need to have "robust check-gates" at every strategic point. Parental responsibility and vigilance is called for much more now than ever before. We can't remain complacent when the younger generation is falling prey to dangerous drugs. "Availability" is one of the root causes of evil.

Yours etc.,
Saili Gwal, Shillong

"Life itself is but the shadow of death, and souls departed but the shadows of the living."
— Thomas Browne

The Shillong Times
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Freedom to marry
COURTS are not always seen as instruments serving a social purpose. Judges go by the rule book, and there are dissenting notes on judgments too. But, an Allahabad High Court order in relation to an inter-religious marriage in Uttar Pradesh has come as a whiff of fresh air in an atmosphere polluted by sectarian upheavals.

Specifically, the court noted that it was not up to the judiciary to interfere in matters of personal relationships. "Interference in personal relationships would constitute a serious encroachment into the right to freedom of choice of two individuals," the court has been quoted as saying in a judgment on Tuesday. The court, in effect, cancelled an FIR filed by the police against a Muslim man for marrying a Hindu girl. This, after the girl's parents had filed a complaint. The two-member bench made it clear that it did not see Priyanka and Salmat as Hindu and Muslim but as two mature individuals who, of their free will and choice, were living happily as husband and wife for over a year.

What apparently irritated the girl's family was also the fact that she had converted to Islam and changed her name to Alia. Fact is we live in a society that, except for the external cosmetics, is deeply divided on the basis of race, religion, caste and colour. National integration will be better served if such barriers fall over time in ways that public life becomes smoother. At the same time, fears on the part of the majority community about attempts by Islamists for Love Jihad needs to be dispelled. The Muslim community in this country conducts themselves in very responsible ways unlike the scene in west Asia etc. The Muslims here are guarding against fundamentalist streaks vitiating social life too. Love Jihad might be only in the mind of some people by way of a fear, or there may be more to it. Such tendencies must be eschewed while at the same time individual freedom must be guarded zealously, be it in the matter of one's choice for marriage or adoption of one or other religious faith of their own volition. Campaign for conversions must be avoided.

The Allahabad high court upheld the Indian Constitution both in letter and spirit. A social cause for national integration is well-served. The only way to exist in India, as former PM Narasimha Rao once famously stated, is to co-exist. India is a mosaic of different religions, races, castes, and communities. Together, they must progress hand-in-hand.

Tarun Gogoi's death a jolt to Congress dream of ousting BJP from Assam

Assam politics heats up as talks for alliance for polls begins

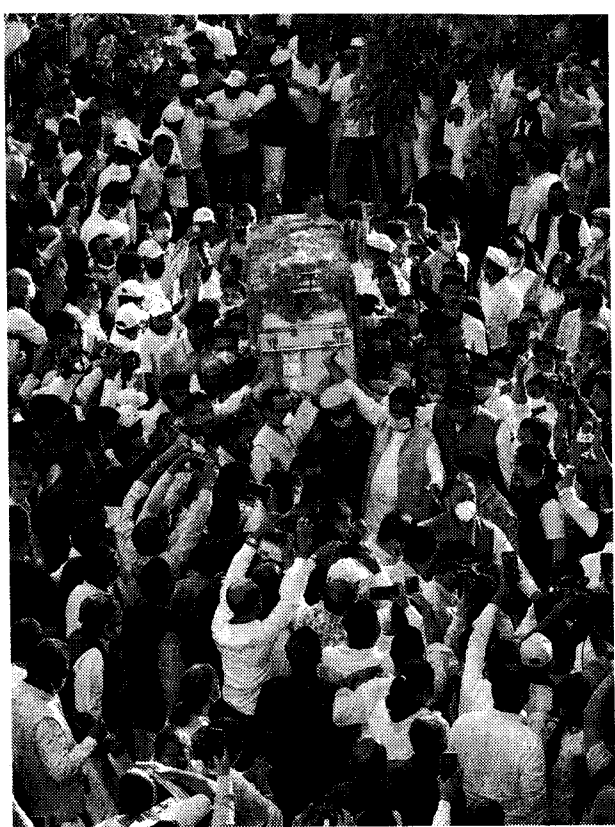
During the 2011 assembly elections of Assam, Congress party thundered back to power with a strong majority by winning 78 seats. This was the third consecutive victory of the grand old party in the north-eastern state. The resounding success came at a time when the incumbent Congress state government was facing charges of corruption. The result came as a surprise to many including the then main opposition party, Assam Gana Parishad — as some exit polls had predicted that the regional party would perform better. Actually, the success was the result of the ongoing peace process initiated by the then UPA government at the centre and at the state by the Congress government led by chief minister Tarun Gogoi, who passed away on Monday evening facing post-Covid-19 complications. He was credited for bringing the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the most dreaded militant organisation of the state, to the negotiating table. This resulted in earning goodwill of the people of Assam who brought his government back to power.

In a state like Assam, which had faced extremism, Tarun Gogoi's efforts in bringing peace to the state earned him a special place in the hearts and minds of the state's citizens. And, for the Congress party, he was its mass leader. At a time when the party is out of power both at the centre and the state, Gogoi was seen by party workers as a hope to dethrone the BJP in the upcoming assembly polls — which are just five months away.

Already, the Congress party has given enough indications to ally with its once arch rival, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) led by Dhubri Lok Sabha MP Badruddin Ajmal, in the upcoming polls to form a grand alliance to defeat the ruling BJP. And Tarun Gogoi himself was part of the process initiated to form a grand alliance of anti-BJP parties in the state under the leadership of the Congress. Importantly, it was Gogoi himself who re-

By Sagarneel Sinha

refused to ally with the AIUDF, which was friendly towards the Congress at the centre, during the 2016 assembly polls and also called the regional party as a commando.



munal one. So, it came as a surprise when the late three time chief minister himself supported the idea of Congress-AIUDF alliance. No doubt, Tarun Gogoi's death is a setback for the grand old party which has

dents' Union (AASU) and Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), isn't keen to join the grand alliance despite repeated appeals by the Congress. BJP is instead busy in attacking the AIUDF. Also the Rajgor Dal hasn't shown any interest in joining the proposed grand alliance. The Congress has also called this new regional party to join the alliance. At a time when there are some murmurs from the opposition camp against the Congress for going slow on the alliance issue, the party is also facing internal pressure for its decision to ally with the AIUDF. Already Biswajit Ray, general secretary of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), has resigned from the party citing displeasure with the party's decision to ally with the AIUDF. The regional party led by Ajmal is seen in the state as a party that serves the interests of Muslim immigrants.

Amid all of these, the Congress party has entered into an electoral pact with the AIUDF in the Bodoland Territorial Council elections. The grand old party is contesting on 13 and the Ajmal's party on 6 out of the 40 seats of the council. Both the parties are hoping for a good result. During the last elections/ Congress failed to open its account while AIUDF fetched four seats. If the two parties contesting together this time perform better, this would definitely strengthen the chances of the alliance between the two parties in the upcoming state elections.

Nevertheless, it can't be denied that prospects of the Congress returning back to power aren't bright — as there is a high probability that the BJP and Rajgor Dal may eat into the anti-BJP votes. But for the Congress workers, the charismatic Tarun Gogoi was the main hope to defeat BJP in the state. Now after his death, the path for the grand old party in its old citadel ahead of the assembly polls would be more challenging. (IPA Service)

Uddhav Thackeray firmly in saddle despite Fadnavis and BJP

By Sushil Kutty

There's something royal sounding about Raosaheb Danve. For those who don't know, he is Minister of State for Consumer Affairs in the Narendra Modi Government and an MP from Maharashtra. He's one of the many BJP Union ministers who is neither seen nor heard in the normal run of things unless it's on the diktats of Prime Minister Narendra Modi or BJP president 'these days' JP Nadda. So, it was that a rather bewildered and perplexed bunch of Indians asked, "Raosaheb Danve, who?" when the rather invisible minister in the largely invisible Modi ministry turned crystal-gazer and Nostradamus combined! Much like Sanjay Raut, Rajya Sabha MP and Saamna editor-in-chief, Raosaheb Danve delivered an ultimatum.

Danve stumbled out of the BJP woodwork and told the world that the Maha Vikas Aghadi Maharashtra government and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's time was up! It was like a court clerk serving notice — a subpoena! Raosaheb Danve gave Uddhav Thackeray and the MVA government three months more, and then it would be kaput, a 'dhobi-pachchaad' like Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath would say.

Raosaheb Danve was addressing a bunch of BJP workers in his neck of the Maharashtra woods — Aurangabad. The BJP minister was campaigning for his party for next month's Legislative Council election to the Aurangabad Graduate constituency. Quite aware of the note of despondency among BJP workers because the Party is out of power, Danve sought to inject some enthusiasm in them. And in today's Maharashtra, this can be done only with a promise to return to power and pelf.

Danve it turns out is also a mathematician. "BJP workers should not think that our government will not come into existence in Maharashtra. We will form the government in the next two-three months. We have worked out the mathematics. We are waiting for the ongoing elections to (the Legislative Council) to get over," Raosaheb, who is MP from Jalna, said on November 23, 2020.

November 23 has its own particular significance for the BJP in Maharashtra. This was the day a year ago when ex-Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and NCP's Ajit Pawar were sworn in as CM and deputy CM by the Maharashtra Governor only to be sworn-out in extra quick time. Since then, the date has stuck in the BJP's gullet and it will come unstuck only when the BJP ousts 'traitor-in-chief minister' Uddhav Thackeray from power.

For sure, it must not have been Raosaheb Danve laying out the bet on his own that the MVA government would be out in "next two-three months." The ultimatum must have been delivered at the behest of powers that be in the BJP in the national capital Delhi. The Devendra Fadnavis-Ajit Pawar government lasted all of 80 hours and there's been no greater shame for the BJP anywhere at any time like that.

Incidentally, Danve's prediction came within hours of Fadnavis telling media in the same Aurangabad area that "at

the fall of the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government", the oath ceremony of the next BJP government would not take place at dawn as it was a year ago, on November 23, 2019. "When the present government in the state collapses, the oath ceremony will not take place at dawn," once-bitten-twice-shy Fadnavis told party workers.

The fact is, the BJP and Fadnavis can't wait to get their hands again on the crown jewel of India, Maharashtra. Getting hold of Maharashtra is worth its weight in gold. As the BJP would know it and Devendra Fadnavis would also know it. Why, even the common-most BJP worker in Maharashtra would know it. Maharashtra is the richest state in the Union of India and Mumbai, its capital, is the financial mother-lode of Bharat, Hindustan — India!

Mumbai is home to a good chunk of the world's billionaires and there's also Bollywood and Parle G and all the other industries which make India. Right now, Mumbai and Maharashtra, like all places in the country bar none, are in the grips of the rampaging coronavirus and Covid-19 is set to remain focus for the government at the Centre, and for the one in the state.

Which is why probably Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and his MVA Government did not reply to Raosaheb Danve and his prediction/ultimatum, untimely as it was. It was only a couple of days before November 23 that CM Uddhav Thackeray addressed Maharashtra and told citizens that a "second wave of Covid-19 would be a tsunami." So, be careful and don't take things lightly, the Chief Minister told his people, the note of desperation loud and clear.

It's not lost on anyone that Uddhav Thackeray has had a testing time ever since he took charge of Maharashtra exactly a year ago. The BJP took the Shiv Sena decision to tie in with the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party as treason on the high seas! So, it was rank opportunism. But, what was it when the BJP tied up with the PDP in J&K — celluloid Mutiny on the Bounty?

It's very easy to label people and parties anti-national. But it's common knowledge that there are neither friends nor enemies in politics. And ideology is a wrap worn at night and stripped at dawn. So, day dawned for the Shiv Sena and the world realized that below the veneer of communalism, there was a layer of whole-green secularism!

And please don't hark back to daddy's firebrand modus operandi. This apple fell way away from the tree and nobody noticed it. Uddhav Thackeray may be seen as unlike Balasaheb Thackeray, but can anybody deny the fact that Uddhav had grown up in the shadow of his father. It cannot be that the father did not know his son!

Today, as Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray fights Covid-19 and its onslaught, it's quite apparent that the BJP cannot dethrone Uddhav Thackeray without Uddhav deciding to oust himself! For, where's the support for BJP going to come from? The Congress! The NCP! Raosaheb Danve knows it, and the BJP knows it. This MVA Government will be around for more than the "next two-three months." (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Onus is on MDA partners, not BJP

Editor,
Your editorial, "MDA coalition on slippery path" (ST Nov 24, 2020) is timely. While you have dwelt on unsavoury political portents witnessed in the recent months, it bears repetition that any coalition comprising such disparate political forces is bound to suffer hiccups. On one end of the spectrum, we see the right wing BJP and on the other there are the regional parties of different hues, each one desperately trying to outdo the other in protecting the interests of the state. The fact that the coalition has survived for two and half years despite some simmering tensions within, is a result of our political class's desire to hold on to power at any cost. We have to admit that the NPP-led coalition's brazen defiance of a call for an independent probe into the allegations brought out by BJP through RTI findings, will go down in the history of Meghalaya as a new low. How can any self respecting Government be so thick-skinned as to ignore the blatant evidence of corruption of funds is beyond comprehension. In other stated, it would have been an open and shut case. Not in Meghalaya these days!

One Minister of the previous government is on bail on serious charges of ma-

nipulations and doctoring of official records for favouring some chosen ones with jobs. And she hasn't thought of political morality to resign. Truly speaking we in this state have accepted corruption in high places. We are surprised by how the NPP-led coalition has resorted to plain subterfuge for preventing a serious probe into the BJP charges of misuse of central funds. Everybody in the state knows in their heart of hearts that what BJP is claiming is true and nothing but true. But then, our political masters are unfazed.

Viewed against this background, I disagree with the concluding sentence of your editorial which puts the onus on BJP in-charge of Meghalaya Dr M Chuba Ao to "help mend the rift". Your prognosis is erroneous. It is not the BJP which should help, it should be NPP and UDP combine which can help the case by agreeing to give the charges a fair trial. If they continue to defy logic and brazen it out, it is unlikely to silence the national party which has zero tolerance for corruption.

Yours etc.,
N K Sharma,
Via email

Laudable initiative

Editor,
It is heartening to know through your paper (ST Nov 19, 2020) that the Gov-

ernment of Meghalaya has proposed to the Centre for setting up the Rabindra Cultural Complex at the Brookside compound, at Ribong in Shillong. This is the highest tribute paid to the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and honouring his maiden visit during October 1919, where Tagore got the plot and theme to subsequently compose his timeless novel "Sesher Kabita" in the background of the picturesque Brookside. I sincerely appreciate the efforts put in by the Shillong civil society and Rabindra admirers who have been in constant touch with the State Government to help materialize this noble objective and a long cherished dream. This will open up vast opportunities to the Rabindra researchers of the entire north eastern states.

Yours etc.,
Arun Kumar Bakshi
Kolkata

DSC needs to wake up!

Editor,
Through this letter, we the candidates would like to express our deep anguish and frustration at the lackadaisical attitude of the District Selection Committee, East Khasi Hills District to complete the recruitment process for the 118 posts of LDA cum Typist which was advertised way back in August 2018. Even after 2 full years, DSC East Khasi Hills is unable to release the final results even though the

screening and typing tests have already been conducted. Why is there such an unreasonable delay? Even the MPSC has started conducting exams, holding interviews and declaring results post lockdown phase, but it seems DSC, East Khasi Hills is still stuck in time. Whenever you knock their doors and enquire as to why there is a delay, their only excuse is that the District Administration is busy handling COVID 19 business. Is this really an acceptable answer? Is the District Administration office so weak that it cannot function as a multi-faceted institution?

The DSC East Khasi Hills should empathise with the lakhs of youth of this state who are suffering greatly due to sharp rise in unemployment and inflation in the market. Hopefully, we expect the LDA cum Typist merit list to be out in a week's time.

Yours etc.,
Jeremiah S.
Via email

Protectionism weakens

Editor,
The letter, 'Action points to protect Meghalaya tribals' by Chakshekar Reddy (ST Nov 23, 2020), is dripping with sarcasm but it also brings to the fore our own needless fears which have been used to hold the irrational population fed on a daily dose of fear of the outsider, as a captive vote

bank. As a Khasi working and living outside Meghalaya I realise that my fellow youth will find it hard to survive in a climate of competition and sheer hard work. Their fear of the outsider is because they don't want to put in any effort in what they do. Those in government employment are lackadaisical and lazy. Their belief is that if there are no outsiders there will be no competition and they can live an easy life with an assured salary.

The problem with Meghalaya is that everyone believes a government job is a birthright. I know many of my peers who got into the MCS and MPS not by merit but because of their parents' political or social clout. I admit that a few might have got in through merit but if the MPSC is itself a body whose members are appointed, not by an independent selection committee but are all political appointees, then how can anyone ever hope for merit to become the final criterion for appointment into the state civil services. It's the same with appointments to other posts too. The Education Scam came to the fore because it was too blatant and outrageous and because the affected teachers went to court. Those who sit for MSC or MPS exams and lose out to the less meritorious are wary of moving court lest they are marked out and would not be able to pass another MPSC conducted exam.

There are some young

people like Pynman Nongtdu of Netfoodish fame whose story had appeared in The Shillong Times some months ago. He is where he is today through sheer hard work and he is not afraid of competition from Swiggly but tries to do better than them. That's the spirit and such youth who run a business have no time to shout slogans about ILP or of isolating Meghalaya to a point where Tourism will no longer be viable because stories of tribal brinkmanship travel fast. In fact, those reports of posterizing campaigns by the KSU terming Bengalis of Meghalaya as Bangladeshis have made us look as bad as the Hindutva fundamentalists we condemn for being intolerant. I can understand that as a tribal community we fear the CAA might give citizenship to many illegal settlers here. But there is a way to take up this issue without getting aggressive or confrontational.

The CAA is an issue that needs to be taken up legally and constitutionally and not through belligerent posturing. None can take the law in their own hands and expect not to pay the price. In Meghalaya though, many have escaped the long arm of the law even after committing heinous crimes. I am glad to have moved out of the shell of protectionism that so many of my peers are comfortably hiding in. But for how long?

Yours etc.,
IG Kharsyntiew,
Bengaluru

"Far from being demeaning to human spiritual values, scientific rationalism is the crowning glory of the human spirit."

— Richard Dawkins

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No.101 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2020

Covid fatigue and impending risks

COVID has so far claimed 110 lives in Meghalaya with 91 deaths in East Khasi Hills alone. This should send warning bells that Covid kills and that the protocols laid down by the state government ought to be strictly followed. But that is far being observed. Despite repeated calls to wear masks when out of the house and especially when in crowded areas such as markets etc., the public seem to have no developed a sort of apathy. Large sections are seen moving around either without masks or with them worn half way down the mouth around the chin area making a mockery of the real purpose of the mask. Every state has now developed its own strategy to make the citizenry comply with Covid19 protocols. In Delhi, mask violators are being put in jail for designated hours. Other states have other measures to ensure compliance. It's only in Meghalaya and its capital city Shillong that there appears to be no effort to enforce the protocols. Those manning sweetmeat shops including those that serve food are seen without masks. Some roadside vendors wear masks, others don't while still others wear them the wrong way. Masking is one protocol which has been a proven deterrent to the Covid19 spread but this carelessness is bound to have dangerous impacts on the health scenario of the state with its fragile health care facilities.

What is also worrying is that those celebrating marriages and other ceremonies are not adhering to the protocols of inviting 50 people only so that there is enough space for social distancing. After the marriage incident at Greenwood resort Khanapara where several people contacted Covid people were careful about not organising weddings and if they did it was restricted to immediate family members but with time this protocol has been watered down and since there is no inspection as to how many guests are invited, people flouted the Government orders with impunity. The same is the case with bereaved families too. People crowd as they normally do and many don't even wear masks, leave alone social distancing. In the beginning the Dorbar Shnong maintained some semblance of vigilance. Now even they are afflicted by Covid fatigue.

One reason why the Covid numbers in Meghalaya are relatively low is because testing is very low. No one is sure as to how many asymptomatic people are moving around and many without masks even as they spread the virus to the community. With time, people have become nonchalant but with the advent of winter, things could worsen here. The rest of the world has gone into second lockdowns. India and least of all Meghalaya cannot afford this. The only way to stop the spread of Covid is for Government to enforce strict Covid protocols which includes heavy fines.

Rights of pedestrians and commuters

By N Hynniewta

The Government has allowed the opening of permanent stalls in Lewduh from the month of June 2020, through the District Administration in co-ordination with the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council and the Syiem of Myllem. Enforcement personnel of these three authorities, join hands to ensure that health protocols issued by the Government are strictly followed. Though very few stalls are opened on alphabetical rotation, customers and consumer's visit was thin while the enforcement personnel were busy the whole period of opening, patrolling all the rows of different stalls.

Street vendors and hawkers also expressed their right to open their business. We all know and are aware of their rights to set up makeshift stalls only at sites identified by the Government but vendors and hawkers tend to overdo their business and indulge in illegal encroachment into spaces meant for the convenience of the general public. During this lockdown due to this strange virus, many establishments, schools, business activities, etc. are closed down for about a hundred days. During this period the hawkers should have looked for alternatives. Plenty of jobs are available and there are many households particularly in Shillong and even in the suburbs of Shillong as well as the Districts headquarters which are in need of helpers like baby-sitting, house-keeping and many other domestic works. Working mothers are complaining that domestic helpers are not available to help them look after the household activities while they are at work. In the villages too, farmers need labourers in their farm lands for tilling and ploughing the fields, paddy transplanting, weeding and ultimately harvesting of crops etc. The complaint is that, there are no labourers available which cause a problem for the farmers to keep up with the seasonal timing of agricultural/horticultural activities etc. All the potential labourers, for performing these activities have migrated to Shillong for easy vending on the footpaths and public thoroughfares.

The problem of hawkers now lies with the Government. When hawkers started their business in unauthorized areas occupying the footpaths, any open spaces and even in the middle of the road as they do in Motphran, the Government ignored it and is too lenient and meek to take action against their illegal encroachment on footpaths, etc. Hawkers are allowed to continue their activities for years together. After a long period of time they became established and settled in their businesses. It is diffi-

cult to evict them and there are NGO's and organizations who support and encourage them instead of counselling and helping them to avoid such illegal encroachment in public places. In fact the Government through the Departments of Social Welfare, Sericulture, Industries, etc. should assist them in vocational activities, giving them training and even providing them with financial assistance in businesses like weaving, handicraft, bamboo craft and even agricultural and horticultural activities.

In Gangtok, Sikkim, when hawkers start occupying the road sides and footpaths for business, they are evicted within minutes. So there is no scope for the hawkers to establish their trades. Some years back the

bridge was dismantled no one protested, thinking that the Government has a better idea of building a modern one as part of the beautification of Motphran but now even the drains have not been repaired. It has become a forgotten scheme. In fact that over-bridge was very useful for pedestrians entering Lewduh.

Now, let us discuss the rights of pedestrians and commuters. For too long pedestrians and commuters are being treated like third class citizens. Actually footpaths are meant for pedestrians only. Hawkers have no right to set up any kind of trade or business on footpaths. Hence, it is high time for the Government to reclaim the footpaths all over Shillong on behalf of the pedestrians. The footpaths from Motphran along G S Road

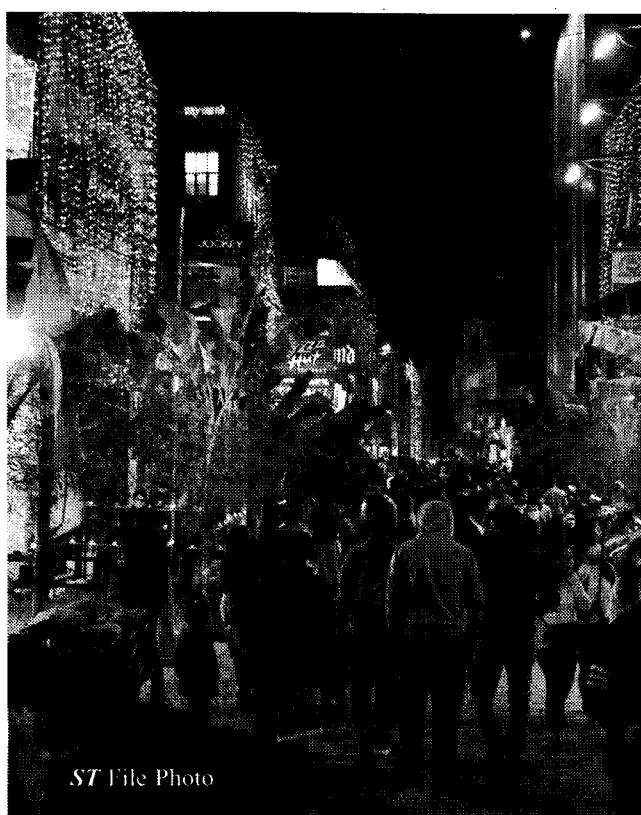
full of large speakers of music system. I wonder if installing of such heavy music system is included in the Permit issued by the Transport Department because this causes great inconvenience to the commuters. It is understood that bus and taxi permits are issued in the interest of the transport operators. It is also noticed that, auto rickshaws in Shillong are fitted with doors like cars to facilitate overloading. They carry 6 - 7 passengers and the windows are decorated with black curtains so that traffic police do not see how many passengers there are inside. Ironically cars are not allowed to paste dark film on windows.

When we travel in the cities of India we don't see an auto rickshaw with doors. The question is whether the rules permit this and whether this is done with the permission of the Transport Department.

The Mawlai bus stop occupied by hawkers about three decades ago or more at Motphran may be reclaimed and a proper shed may be constructed. Further, a taxi stand may also be identified for the interest of the commuters. Overloading in buses and taxis may be checked from time to time by a competent mobile court as being done previously. Overloading in buses and taxis is very dangerous since the heavy load makes it difficult for the drivers to control the vehicle. Then again there is the case of taxis plying to the suburbs of Shillong like Myllem, Mawngap, Smit, Nongkrem, etc., all carrying eight to nine passengers, four in the front seat including the driver and five in the back seat; that too in a Maruti 800. How do we expect the driver to control the vehicle?

In this Pandemic things are going on as per rules; footpaths are relatively clear and spacious, safe and convenient for pedestrians and commuters travel conveniently with loading as per rules but now with more relaxations after the lockdown, hawkers have started their unruly activities again. Even food items like fish, chicken, junk food, etc. are being sold in the open, on the main road and without proper cover. How does the Food Inspectorate approve of this? Is there any guarantee that food items sold on the road or roadside are safe for human consumption? A thorough inspection and supervision is required immediately.

Government ought to be doing its duty without the need for citizen to point out its lapses. Government is mandated to exercise its power and authority and to correct all these wrongs on a war footing.



ST File Photo

Government of Meghalaya through the Urban Affairs Department has undertaken the beautification of Khyndailad and Motphran, imitating the European Cities in our State, which is almost a BPL State, where hawkers dictate terms and conditions to the Government. We do not see any impact of this beautification where several crores of rupees spent have gone to waste. The tiles laid down there have started peeling off one by one. Khyndailad has become dirtier and more crowded day by day. Hawkers occupy the entire sidewalks, leaving very little space for pedestrians to walk on. I would say that the beautification of Khyndailad is like applying those expensive perfumes from Paris on a dead woman's face.

Then the over-bridge at Motphran was dismantled, causing difficulties for pedestrians as this area has become more crowded. Hawkers are multiplying every day. When the over-

to Umsosun on both sides of the road should be free from hawkers. There are instances where hawkers themselves crowd the entire footpath and even block it, making it difficult for the pedestrians to walk safely. Most of the time pedestrians have to walk on the main road alongside vehicles which is dangerous. Thankfully no accident has occurred so far.

Coming to public transport, commuters too, have the right to travel conveniently as per motor vehicle rules and according to the specified capacity of the vehicle, be it a bus or a taxi. All these years, commuters are being asked by the taxi driver or a bus conductor to squeeze in, in every available space both in buses and taxis. People are treated like commodity even while buses and taxis indulge in overloading, thereby violating the standing rules of the Transport Department. There are instances in which taxis refuse to ferry passengers with heavy luggage because the trunk of the taxi is

Covid-affected India needs results, not just high level meetings

Perfect coordination between centre and states is imperative

By Gyan Pathak

Prime Minister chairing a high level meeting with Chief Ministers to review the COVID-19 status and preparedness of response and management in the country has a special significance especially when the 'situation is going out of control', an observation that was made by the Supreme Court of India a day before asking Gujarat, Delhi, Maharashtra, and Assam for a status report within two days. Obviously, we have somewhere gone wrong on our strategies in the past despite several such high level meetings and assurances given therein. Thousands of patients are dying without medical care. Our medical facilities are overwhelmed.

It is why, people feel sandwiched between PM and CMs, especially patients, for whom getting medical care has been too difficult to have in times of need. Hope among the people is generated through such high level meetings, but they are soon frustrated as big promises are not followed by performance on the ground. Considerable time of the high level meeting held on November 24 was spent on distribution strategy of non-existent vaccines, and the Prime Minister indicated even a road map for that. Modalities of non-existent COVID-19 vaccine delivery, distribution, and administration were discussed. "Just like the focus in the fight against COVID has been on saving each and every life, the priority will be to ensure that vaccine reaches everyone," PM said. The language does aim at covering the failure of the government 'saving each and every life', and hence it's merely political. Only sufficient level of medical care could have justified our PM's statement which are not seen anywhere on the ground.

Though the virtual meeting of PM was organized for all the states, special emphasis was on eight states - Haryana, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and West Bengal - where situation on the ground has been worsening. Supreme Court of India had observed a day before in relation to Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Assam that situation seems to be going 'out of control'. The CMs were reported to have provided detailed feedback on the ground situation in their respective states as usual in such meetings. However, what was lacking in the meeting was any leak-proof strategy of ramping up health infrastructure of the states as well as of the Union Government to the required level.

PM knows how little India is spending on health, and also our CMs know how little they are investing in this sector. States are running short of funds and the Union government is also struggling with its revenue collection. Earlier in March and April, when there were only thousands of cases with only hundreds of deaths, government officials were more active than now, when over 1.35 lakh people were dead with over 9.22 million total cases. It is a common knowledge that even officials do not care when you telephone them. The standard advice is - live at home and take care. Even people have become careless all over the country.

In this situation our PM's remark has no value when he says, "our country has faced the pandemic through concerted efforts and in terms of both recovery rate and fatality, the situation in India is better than most other countries". It may enthrall those who are yet to get infection, but ask those who are already infected and had experienced the callousness of the government machinery and failed to access any medical care whatsoever. Had PM compared our medical facilities to that of USA, Europe, Japan etc while getting credit for low fatality rate and recovery, he would have been exposed of his dismal performance. That is why he talked about 'the expansion of the testing and treatment network, PM Cares fund, making ventilators available' that too in vague terms. He said, "Efforts are on to make medical colleges and district hospitals self-sufficient in terms of oxygen generation." He also informed that the process of establishing more than 160 new oxygen plants was underway. When our patients need immediate medical care, a high level meeting discussing future plans in the meeting held for dealing with the 'present frightening scenario' is simply out-focusing. Such political promising has also been resorted to by our CMs.

PM's language included even public preaching while talking about four stages of people's response and their carelessness. It is true that people are developing 'a false notion of security from the virus with increasing recovery rate leading to rise in instances of negligence'. However, the question is who is responsible for that? Of course the government who is repeatedly harping on recovery rate and low fatality rate compared to developed countries in a misplaced comparison without pointing towards India's advantages on account of demography and other natural reasons. The government propaganda is proving self-defeating.

PM's emphasis on greater alacrity and caution by the administration, is an indirect acceptance of dismal performance of administration of our political leadership in the Centre and the States. He noted that it was important to increase tests, ensure better monitoring of patients especially those in home isolation, better equipped health centres at village and community level and keeping running awareness campaigns for safety from the virus. All these have been told in all high level meetings but the performance continues to be dismal.

A press release by the PM office after the high level virtual meeting said that Chief Ministers praised the leadership of the PM and thanked the Central Government for providing necessary assistance in improving health infrastructure in the states. If it is true, why have our CMs been alleging all along that they were not provided sufficient help in their fight with COVID for the last several months? Clearly, PM and CMs have become political in covering their failures to serve people in right earnest, resulting in continuous rise in deaths and number of patients. They discussed how much they were working but did not discuss where their strategies went wrong, and how they were going to repair the damage done. Such meetings seem cosmetic in nature while people need deeply meditated concrete steps to tackle the worsening COVID situation on one hand and the post-COVID challenges on the other. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Over-killing doesn't pay

Editor,

The letter, "Protectionism weakens" by I.G. Kharsyntiew (ST Nov 25, 2020) made refreshing reading. I endorse most of what he said about the mindset of certain section of people of Meghalaya. I have nothing to add to it except that it is time to think seriously about the priorities before the tribal communities of the state. Swami Vivekananda had once said, "Tell me what most of the young people think and I will tell you what's the future of the place." Today, the youth of Meghalaya who have been constantly fed with the emotive call to protect themselves against perceived "onslaught", "exploitation" by the "others", have come to believe

that driving out "others" is their best form of protection. The youth have tended to believe that they must rid the place of "others". That "others" are the sworn enemies of the tribal people's future.

In this regard, since the dawn of Meghalaya step after step has been taken by the governments both in Shillong and Delhi to give a sense of security to the tribal people. In the process, today we have almost cent per cent job reservation for tribals, blanket ban on purchase of land by "others", reservation of 55 seats in the Assembly for the majority tribes, disenfranchising "others" from Khasi Hills District Council elections and many more such protectionism have been brought about through violence and hate mongering. But it seems the thirst is insatiable. Now the de-

mand is for ILP, entry-exit points, residential safety laws - all aimed at protecting the tribals from being overrun by the "others"! As I see it, the governments in the State and the Centre have been bullied into submitting to some arm-twisting tactics of those vested interest who have one single agenda: to keep the "others" at bay.

For "others" like me, there is no issue if the tribes do everything to protect themselves as long as they don't trample upon the rights of "others." Come to think of it, most of the protection measures created by the government are unconstitutional. Although I am not an expert on constitutional law, I can bet my last penny on the argument that job reservation of more than 50% is unlawful; total ban on purchase of land by "others" at least in Shillong is "un-

reasonable", reservation of 55 seats for the majority communities is ultra-vires to the Constitution. Similarly, denial of rights of "others" for participating in a democratic process is plain racism and untenable. I seriously believe that time has come to challenge some of these measures which are bad in law.

The country today has a politically all-powerful regime which has accomplished such "feats" as removal of Article 370 and many more similar measures which were unthinkable a few years ago. I hope that in the greater interest of the country, the Central Government would judicially review these provisions which are unfair and unconstitutional. At the same time, I also appeal to the thinkers and political forces to stop the over-kill on 'othering' lest it turns out to be counter-

productive.

Yours etc.,
A P Singh,
Via email

A pointless effort

Editor,

Appropos the letter by Chaksekhar Reddy (ST Nov 23, 2020), I would reiterate that hundreds of such letters and articles were written in the last 40 years but nothing has changed for the minorities of the state. Here in the state minorities are "timid" voters used only during the time of elections. Yes, seemingly minorities are living peacefully; they enjoy festivals, attend offices, schools, colleges but at the back of their minds they know they have to leave one day permanently. Since 1979 how many families have left Shillong (in particular) per-

manently? Yes about 45% of minorities that are original residents have left and more would leave in the next 2 to 3 years. Government of Meghalaya never wanted to know the reasons or to set up a body to find out the compelling factors

Memoranda, letters, articles have no value in my personal opinion. They have no place for anguish too because minorities in this state have to leave one day permanently and those who would stay back for some more years will live without any dignity and with fear only!

Yours etc.,
Anjan Kumar Das,
Shillong 6

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

"Street art, of course, is political, because it's illegal, so the very act of doing it is an act of defiance."

— Richard Dawkins

The Shillong Times

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Polls in one go

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is back into the theme of One Nation, One Election; meaning Lok Sabha, assembly and civic/local body polls need to be conducted simultaneously. The idea is worth a serious consideration for two reasons. As the PM stressed, the expenses and efforts for elections can be reduced, and governments can single-mindedly concentrate on nation-building for a full five-year term.

From the time the PM raised the matter in his first term in office at the Centre, there have been objections from the Opposition. From the tone and tenor of the comment from the PM this time, it is clear he is convinced about this. He stressed this is not a matter for discussion but implementation. A pre-requisite for this is a change in the Constitution. This requires two-thirds support in both houses of Parliament. The Modi government on its own does not have this luxury. At the same time, the PM and his party have the resources to mobilize support for key bills from parties outside of the NDA. The PM obviously has done the calculations and is convinced that he can see this through even in the Rajya Sabha where the BJP has substantially scaled up its numbers in recent times.

The Opposition had alleged the government was trying to bring in a Presidential system so pronounced in countries like the US. Here, as is evident in the Bihar polls, PM Modi has crisscrossed election-bound state after state almost regularly for campaigns. In May will come the assembly polls in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc, which would take the form of a mini-national poll. In such scenarios, the central government will be hesitant to take strong measures. An instance was a wholesale increase in railway fares, something that the Modi government hesitated to do after it took power first in 2014 in view of the approaching round of assembly polls in Maharashtra, Haryana and Delhi. Any strong decision will have impact on people's mind for a short term while other issues come to the fore as time passes. In a democracy, it is important for leaders to keep the people in good humour. At the same time, strong decisions have to be taken on multiple fronts even as these might initially be frowned upon. National interest, as the PM stressed, is supreme. Configuring the present terms of legislative bodies with the new plan requires a cut in some cases and an extension of term in some others. Yet, this is worth a try.

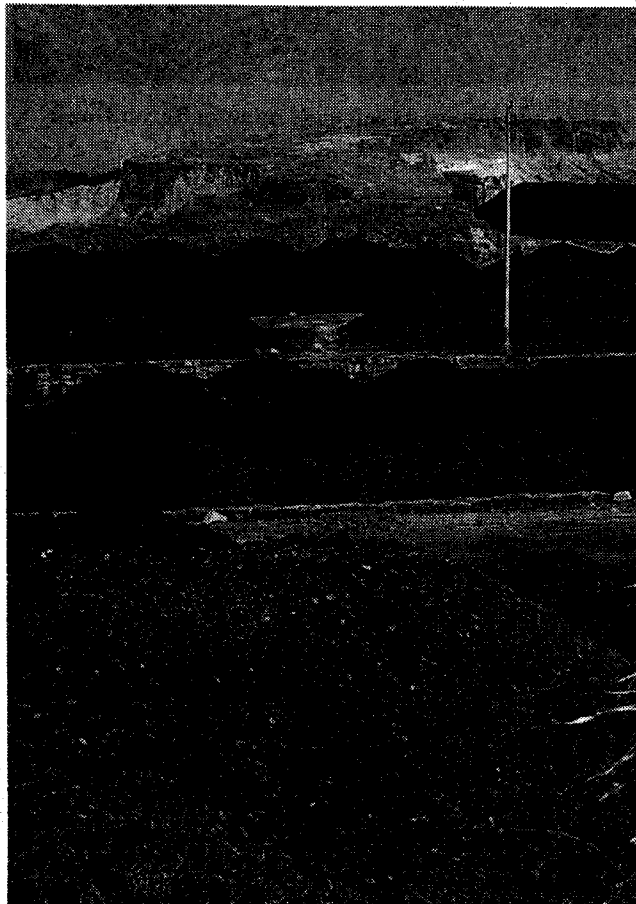
On the path of self deception

By Patricia Mukhim

Hills voted NPP/UDP/Congress. The two BJP MLAs did not win on the Party flag but were judged by their persona. So even in voting, the socio-political nuances and the individual candidate's ability to attend to the personal needs of the constituents play a big role in their winning or losing an election.

In 2018 the Meghalaya Congress was battling anti-incumbency even while the Party was floundering at the national level. It continues to waver without a charismatic leader at the helm and the Party isn't about to

for Mukul Sangma, his family members and party MLAs including the father-son duo of Charles Pynngrope and David Nongrum to join the NPP. Remaining out of power for five years means that funds too would have dwindled. You can't fight elections without money. People like Sniawbhalang Dhar and Prestone Tynsong are having the last laugh for they control the present government. Dhar is cornering all the major contracts apart from facilitating the mining and transportation of coal which is the engine that



change, course other than going downhill. Hence Congress MLAs in Meghalaya are today in a sinking ship. Many of their comrades in Assam are joining the saffron party soon because there's no future for them in the Congress now or in the years to come. Reason? Those leading the Party refuse to cede space to more capable leaders outside the dynasty. So decrepit are the state of affairs in the Congress that people like Mukul Sangma who are otherwise quite cerebral when it comes to politics might have to think out new strategies. To form a regional front is like kite-flying. The regional parties will always be subservient to national parties. So what are the options for Mukul Sangma and his team? Clearly the only option is to join the saffron party which in any case is returning to power in 2024. Why? Because there is no national alternative! It is politically unviable

drives election funding. Tynsong is wielding power in the Khasi-Jaintia region in what is a clear demarcation of political responsibility. AL Hek the BJP MLA and Health Minister is largely marginalised. But with just two MLAs the BJP can hardly wield the whip on its senior partner the NPP. So the MDA ship sails without faltering because no one is really bothered about governance. Sure we hear of schemes being announced and foundation stones galore being laid. But a Government that does not have the wherewithal to even repair the roads in Shillong city can't be said to be conscious of its responsibilities. It's just struggling to arrive at the deadline of 2023.

This government is already tired and has not brought in the changes promised during the elections. The only promise that the MDA Government has delivered on is to allow coal mining and transportation.

That's carrying on in full swing. The Congress can't do a thing about it because it can't hurt a government that is in stoic denial of wrongdoing. And if the Congress meant business it would have called for a CBI enquiry into the illegal coal business. The NPP State President and Rajya Sabha member had made a rather queer statement on television the other day. He took a swipe at city dwelling intellectuals who constantly raise the bogey of illegal coal mining and accused them of being "jealous" of those who created wealth from coal. The devastating impact on the environment because of coal mining does not seem to have registered in the mind of this person with scholarly credentials. His contention that Meghalaya is gifted with coal so that its people become rich and that urbanites should not be jealous of their wealth is ludicrous. The Rajya Sabha MP is perhaps blinded by the fact that Meghalaya today lives unashamedly around the garish symbols of new wealth even as parts of this very city are dotted with stinky slums and overpopulated clusters which seem to provide a collective voyeurism to those in power.

Fact is that the general style of governance in Meghalaya irrespective of Party has supported greed and smugness and the articulate intelligentsia has supported that style by their own incestuous pre-occupation. We are, most of us, living room democrats too guarded about speaking up lest we need to curry favour with those in power. This has brought us to the nadir. So while the poor remain voiceless and therefore without agency the articulate class is complacent, little knowing that complacency is the devil's drug and can produce fatty degeneration of a people.

Whoever will write the political history of Meghalaya twenty years hence will perhaps rue this great let-down of a people by self proclaimed leaders, elected by the sheer power of wealth. No one cared enough to resign from their offices to protest corruption. They all acquiesced silently, the people be damned!

In all of this, one empathises and hopes with those that genuinely believe they can change their fates and that of others and rewrite history by reclaiming their right to drive the fortunes of this state on the fast track. May their tribe increase!

Nagrota encounter Incorrible Pakistan!

By Dr D.K. Giri

On November 19, four terrorists belonging to Jaish-e-Mohammad were gunned down by Indian security forces in an encounter at Nagrota. This was an unusual occurrence as the terrorists had sneaked into India through a tunnel, built at Samba sector of Jammu & Kashmir. Also, ironically, Pakistan, battling to come out of the grey list of FATF (Financial Action Task Force) in February 2021, is still engaged in sponsoring cross-border terrorism. Pakistan is simply incorrigible. New Delhi has rightly launched a timely diplomatic offensive to put it in the dock. The objective, obviously, is to deny Pakistan an exit from FATF grey list, and to reiterate the charge that Pakistan is the hub of terrorism.

Let's get the facts on the recent encounter. Four terrorists travelling to Srinagar in a truck were intercepted at the Ban Toll Plaza in Nagrota. A heavy gun fight with security forces ensued and all four were killed. The attempt by security forces to catch one of them alive didn't succeed. So the information on their whereabouts could be obtained by the things found on their bodies. The forces did a commendable job in tracing their movement and scanning the tunnel.

The underground tunnel was difficult to locate as its mouth was carefully camouflaged with soil and wild plants. The tunnel, 200 meter long, 8 meter deep and 12-14 inches diameter is 160 meters long from the international border and 40 meters long on Pakistan side. According to the BSF spokesman, "It appears that proper engineering effort has gone into making the tunnel, which shows the hand of the establishment (Pakistan)".

True to their valour and spirit, an Indian soldier (Commandant Rathore of 173 Battalion) crawled 150 ft into the tunnel and found packets of biscuits and other food wrappers marked as Lahore-based product with November 17, 2020 as expiry date. With the help of Taiwan-made device, Indian securities agencies have been able to track the exact route the jihadists took. After entering India through the tunnel, they walked nearly 12 kms to the National Highway No.44 to board a truck heading towards Srinagar. On the way, they bypassed an army camp and a railway track. The security forces chased and challenged them near Nagrota.

There is sufficient evidence to nail Pakistan to have sponsored these terrorists. Cement bags used to fortify the route for the terrorists had Pakistani marks. While registering a case in a police station in Nagrota, the list of things found from them consisted of 1.5 lakh INR, wire cutters, Chinese Black Star Pistols and grenades numbering 29, assault rifles, nitrocellulose oil explosives. The forces claim that such explosives were used in the 2019 Pulwama attack. So it appears that terrorists had plans for a major operation in India. Alarmed by the infiltration through the tunnel, the BSF has engaged the special tunnel inspection teams to trawl the international border with Pakistan.

The J&K Police and the BSF are rightly claiming the spotting of the tunnel as a big success. DGP Dilbagh Singh told the press that, "after lot of hard work the Police and the BSF were able to find the tunnel coming from Pakistan's Chakbura Post within 76 hours of the encounter". He also asserted that everything recovered from the slain militants, from phones to shoes, to medicine, all

have Pakistan's imprint. Therefore, there is no escape for Islamabad from its involvement in this incident.

Having established Pakistan hand in the infiltration of JeM terrorists, what is New Delhi doing and is it enough? Evaluating the Indian response, one finds that New Delhi has gone on a diplomatic offensive to hold Pakistan accountable. On 23 November, Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla, who has been quite active recently touring Europe, Nepal and other countries, briefed the envoys of a few important countries including the US, Russia, France and Japan, with a detailed information docket. The same docket has been sent to Indian Missions abroad for briefing respective countries. Shringla focussed on, "implications of the incident (Nagrota) on security diplomacy and the battle against terrorism."

New Delhi summoned the Pakistan's Charge d' Affaires Aftab Hassan Khan on November 21 and warned Pakistan in no uncertain terms. He was told that New Delhi is "committed to take all necessary measures to safeguard its national security". South Block also demanded that Islamabad abstain from supporting terrorists and nurturing terror infrastructure on its territory. It appears that such briefings will continue to be done. Several secretaries in the Ministry will brief Heads of Missions from countries in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

There are conjectures about the timing and the type of the attack. Vested interests, terror networks and Pakistan are wary of India taking new initiatives in J&K and the State normalising into peace and harmony. The government thinks this was no ordinary infiltration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called it a "nefarious attempt to target grassroots level democratic exercises in Jammu & Kashmir". He was obviously alluding to the District Development Councils due to start on November 28.

New Delhi, seeking to apprise the international community, may have a two-fold strategy. The first is to announce to the world that it should acknowledge the grave security risk India is at. It continues to face cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. The second is to put Pakistan on the mat, especially in the context of FATF reviewing the decision on it and to see if it could be black listed.

However, New Delhi should be conscious that internationalising the issue might invite intervention on the resolution of Kashmir issue. One need not fight shy of such eventuality. The stated position so far is that it is bilateral, as per the Shimla Agreement, and it should be resolved by negotiations between New Delhi and Islamabad. But the dialogue has not gone anywhere, in fact, it has not even started. India insists that 'talks and terrorism' cannot go together. Pakistan has to give up cross-border terrorism before it comes to the negotiating table. Islamabad's ridiculous contention is that it is not involved in any terrorism and is willing to talk.

In all fairness, and as a matter of realpolitik, New Delhi should agree to talk to Pakistan with the condition that as they talk, not a single bullet should be fired and not a single terrorist infiltrates into Indian territories. New Delhi is dialoguing with China on border de-escalation whereas China has clearly invaded the no man's land and has been salami-slicing Indian territories. Chinese position is that "we will negotiate but not budge an inch from our occupation". — INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Prompt response of CEO staff

Editor,
At a time when we all have only complaints against errant government departments, it's heartening to know that there are those who do their work sincerely.

My daughter had applied for online enrollment to the electoral rolls recently. After quite a while when no intimation came and the status of the Epic card remained the same, my daughter shot off an email to the CEO's office. To my utter surprise, the staff called us up the next day and listened to our complaints politely and thereafter directed us to go to the DC's office and collect the Card with directions to go to a particular room and meet the staff there by name.

Upon going to the DC's office with not much conviction as one is so used to delayed Government re-

sponse we were prepared for a long wait. However to our surprise, we got our work done within minutes.

My faith in the system has been restored and I would like to give a shout-out to the personnel of the CEO's office for their prompt action. Kudos to them!!

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh
Shillong-14

Allow NRIs to invest in India

Editor,
Every now and then, concern about a 'brain drain' sapping India of her most productive citizens is raised in the media. This phrase refers to the notion that skilled people are leaving India for better career and lifestyle opportunities abroad, leading to a shortage of social capital locally. There is much truth in this concern. India is not anywhere among the most desirable countries to live or work. More people leave India than enter it, as evi-

denced by its negative migration rate. India's popularity among foreigners is low, leading it to have approximately the same migration rate as nations like Kenya and Ghana. This can be contrasted to Australia where more people immigrate into the country than emigrate from it, leading to a positive net migration rate.

Addressing the factors that have caused the mass exodus from India won't happen overnight. These factors largely relate to the fact that India is not by any objective measure a free society. For example, the Heritage Foundation's ranking of economic freedom places India at 120 in the world, which once again places it in the company of backward African economies. Unsurprisingly, India also has a lower Gross Domestic Product per capita than Australia.

What's surprising is that the supposedly 'right-wing' pro-business government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi hasn't yet found a way to tap into the talent of Non-Resident Indians. At-

tracting NRI investment is a no-brainer: by making it easier for NRIs to start a business and invest inside the country, jobs are created for local resident Indians due to the inflow of capital. More jobs mean more income generated, thereby improving standards of living and decreasing poverty. Foreign investment into Indian companies — for example, through the share market — would help local companies raise money for investing in research and development too.

There are two easy ways to make a start on a reform agenda. First, simplify the tax system, and in particular the filing of tax returns, for both resident Indians and NRIs. Australia is a good model: the MyTax system developed by the Australian Tax Office is easy to use even for those that aren't accountants. On the other hand, I spent a couple of days trying to figure out the process to file a tax return online in India. The arcane language didn't help either!

No Indian should have

to spend more than one hour completing their tax return. To help achieve this goal, many economists recommend a flat rate of income tax without complicated deductions. Rather than persisting with a graduated system where earning more income leads to a higher rate of tax payable, everyone should pay the same low tax rate — say 10%. And there should be no deductions whatsoever, so that record-keeping burdens on individuals and businesses is reduced.

Second, remove all restrictions on NRIs investing in Indian companies via the stock exchange. Currently, NRIs must apply for permission with the Reserve Bank as part of the Portfolio Investment Scheme before they can buy shares on the Indian stock exchanges. There are also limits on how many shares NRIs can purchase. These should be scrapped because they prevent companies from raising funds that leads to job-creation and ultimately economic growth.

I would be willing to wager that these two simple

reforms on their own would add at least one percentage point to India's GDP growth rate. I have written directly to Prime Minister Modi with these suggestions in the hope that he will heed my advice. Since 2014, Modi has shown some interest in change by nudging India in the direction of human freedom, for instance, through his efforts at privatisation and the removal of regulations that serve no useful purpose.

The freedom of men and women to trade and engage in voluntary commercial transactions makes parties better off. Indian citizens living abroad are no less patriotic than those currently living in India; they deserve the right to support businesses back home with their dollars.

Yours etc.,
Sukrit Sabhlok,
Via email

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"If you want to succeed you should strike out on new paths, rather than travel the worn paths of accepted success."

— John D. Rockefeller

The Shillong Times

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Corruption a non-issue in Meghalaya

THE Meghalaya BJP's bluster has ended in smoke with their two MLAs deciding that they should not push the matter further. In fact, the visit of the BJP National Vice President and Meghalaya in charge, Dr M Chuba Ao has buried the corruption issue alive. It's now back to business as usual in the MDA with a clear message sent to the coalition partners to either go with the flow or leave the coalition. Let's face facts. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The BJP MLA and health minister in the present government, has survived many coalitions as he himself confessed and to do so one cannot have a spine. He had left BJP, joined Congress and then deserted it yet again to rejoin the BJP. This is possible because in Meghalaya the voters care two hoots about ideology. Any MLA that can service the people and cater to their personal needs need not have a moral compass. Hence the message sent by the voters of Meghalaya is that corruption is kosher as long as their interests are served.

In such a scenario, it is meaningless for leaders of regional parties and for the Congress Party to raise the slogan of the BJP being a communal party threatens to curtail religious freedom and above all of spreading the Hindutva agenda in this predominantly Christian state. It would be a good exercise to see whether people voted who they voted in 2018 based on fears of the BJP coming to power in Meghalaya. Or were all the MLAs who got elected voted for different reasons, some personal, others political? What's interesting is the complete silence of the BJP President, Ernest Mawrie and Vice President Bernard N Marak following the peace deal on Thursday. In any case the BJP was not the only Party to start the hyperbole on the corruption indulged in by the MDA Government. It's a different matter that the BJP stuck to the matter of corruption in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) while remaining silent on the issue of illegal coal mining and transportation.

What happens next will be a matter of interest to political observers and the media only. To the people of Meghalaya, corruption is hardly an issue because it's a way of life. It may matter to the staff of GHADC that have not been paid salaries in over two years. It may matter to the poor whose share of the development pie is eaten up by the creamy layer in politics and bureaucracy but the two categories cannot speak. Their voices don't matter. In the end therefore the corruption issue is virtually a wild goose chase.

TO THE EDITOR

Constitutional guarantees are sacred

Editor,

In his letter captioned "Over-killing doesn't pay" (ST Nov 26), A.P.Singh has held out a veiled threat that the all-powerful Modi Government in Delhi can do anything like removal of Article 370 in J&K and even take away the constitutional rights guaranteed to the tribes of the Northeast under Article 371-A. This is mischievous, to say the least. Firstly, let me convey to the likes of AP Singh that Article 370 may have been annulled for now to deny the Kashmiris their constitutional protection from the government of India, but we might not have heard the last word. In my considered view, it is a betrayal of the Kashmiris by the present government. Not just the Kashmiris who are aggrieved over the bullying tactics of the current rulers in New Delhi, there are many others in this coun-

try who are with the Kashmiris on their rights to special privileges due to the extraordinary situation that brought Jammu & Kashmir to the Indian Dominion. Surely, we haven't heard the last word on Article 370. Who knows what might be the political scenario in Delhi after Modi? No regime lasts forever! Already there are talks that the balkanisation of J&K may be reversed.

The creation of Union Territories to be governed directly from Delhi is a completely undemocratic approach. The purpose of this letter is not to dwell on Kashmir. I simply referred to Kashmir to bring a point home that Modi should think hard before even thinking of abrogating Article 370. I also want to place on record the historical and political perspective of how the loosely placed states in the Northeast were brought under the India Dominion after Independence. To put it mildly, the entire operation by the rulers in Delhi to tag the some of the northeastern states to India remains

wrapped in questionable methods. Taking full advantage of the poorly administered areas like Manipur, Nagaland, Khasi & Jaintia Hills etc and without giving the local indigenous tribes an opportunity to express their will, the job was done almost forcibly. Nagaland, which is currently negotiating with the Government of India on issues of separate "Naga National Flag", Naga National Anthem, among many others, can never be denied the special constitutional privileges, if the state has to remain within India. Similarly, I can't imagine how the Modi government can even think of abrogating Article 371. The NDA Government may try to do so, as is being obliquely suggested by A P Singh, because it has the brute majority in the parliament, but that would be a recipe for disaster.

Let me make it abundantly clear that if the Government of India tries to tweak the special privileges of the small tribes of the Northeast, there would be upheavals that none can

imagine. The likes of A P Singh who have scanty knowledge of the ground realities are better off keeping their mouths shut, unless they want to provoke the tribes.

Yours etc.,
Pynshngain Jyrwa,
Via email

Why bail for a rape accused?

Editor,

The news of former MLA Julius Dorphang being released on bail is very troubling. The man was arrested for raping a minor girl in 2017. Dorphang had first absconded and was arrested from Assam. If he was not guilty of the crime why was he on the run? And why does it have to take over three years for the trial? Why is justice so slow in this country? Is it safe for other minor girls if a rape-accused is out on bail? Is the reason why rape cases are on the rise in Meghalaya and even during Covid times, because the law is apparently lenient towards

those who commit this heinous crime of violating the innocence of the girl-child? That this should happen in a society that is supposedly meant to accord dignity to women, because it's a matrilineal society is a sad paradox.

The Court has perhaps taken a lenient view of the matter because the accused is keeping indifferent health. But does his crime not exceed his need to be released on bail? If a person is being treated at NEIGRIHMS which is the equivalent of AIIMS, New Delhi and is allegedly not recovering and bail is granted so that he could be treated outside the state then does that not mean that Dorphang is being treated as a VIP accused? Are all other prisoners given that same leverage? If not, why this special treatment for Dorphang? When and if the accused recovers from his ailment he will still be out on bail. So what sort of good behaviour has the Court extracted from him?

It is seen that in Meghalaya hundreds of rape cases are lying with the District Council Courts be-

cause the rape was committed by a tribal man on a tribal woman/girl. This was an order from the Meghalaya High Court some years ago. These cases are pending trial for many years now. Where is the justice for women/girls/children who are raped in this State? Should the High Court not be taking a serious view of the matter and reverse the order so that cases from the District Councils come to the High Court for adjudication? For how long do the victims of rape have to wait for justice? And if justice is delayed then why would a rape victim even file an FIR? We had high hopes when this High Court was established. Now those hopes are fast fading especially after Dorphang managed bail.

Yours etc.,
KR Rynthiang,
Via email

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November 26 strike was for defence of democracy and secularism

By Prabhat Patnaik

inoculation of unreason. Unreason must necessarily inform this discourse since the hatred sought to be generated by it needs to be sustained by a narrative that obliterates the distinction between history and mythology and that has scant regard for evidence.

The corporate-financial oligarchy has much to gain from backing this substitution of discourses in the current context of the dead-end that neoliberal capitalism has reached; the economic justification for its hegemony that were being advanced till now have ceased to carry any credibility, not only because there was no "trickle down" even when growth was apparently impressive, but also because this growth itself

course propounded by Hindutva, which played a major role in handing the Modi government a second term in office.

This second term has seen even more systematic, brutal, and concerted attacks on democratic rights, civil liberties, and lives of the people at large, of which the abrogation of Article 370 of the constitution, the denial of promised GST compensation to the states, the enactment of the patently discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act, the three agriculture bills, and the snatching away of workers' rights to a point where the gains made almost a century ago are being reversed, are some glaring instances.

The lockdown announced at a mere four

back to the discourse of material life. For this it has to emphasize the Hindutva discourse even further; it has to manufacture even more outlandish and fantastic tales to embellish this discourse. Ever more far-fetched, even more weird myths have to be invented to keep the people distracted.

Amartya Sen has talked of the need of the Modi government to keep doing spectacular things which do not help the people but which keep them distracted. But even more than what it does, it has to keep inventing stories; and the worse the people's material life becomes under its watch, the more fanciful the stories have to become to keep the Hindutva discourse going, the greater has to be the recourse to unreason.

The anti-democratic and anti-secular nature of the Hindutva forces has been widely noted. In fact democracy, secularism, and all the other constitutional values upon which independent India is founded, presuppose a discourse of reason, whose fundamental hallmark is that it is pre-occupied with the "this sidedness" of life, that it perceives the public domain as being concerned with practical questions of material life. Hence no matter how loudly the Hindutva leaders profess their fidelity to the constitution, the very discourse they propagate precludes any concern for democracy or secularism or the constitution.

Ironically however, notwithstanding all their efforts, a discourse around practical issues keeps coming back, as it must, which only underscores the temporariness of Hindutva ascendancy. The Bihar elections saw once again a resurgence of concern over unemployment, and it is not surprising that notwithstanding the huge resources deployed by the NDA, the opposition alliance did so well (in fact it got a larger popular vote than the NDA). A positive achievement of the Bihar election has been the displacement of the discourse of unreason.

The strike on November 26 carried this process forward. It was the boldest attempt so far to bring back the discourse of reason centre-stage. And since the revival of democracy, of secularism, and constitutional values, hinges upon the revival of a discourse of reason that is necessarily centred on issues of practical life, the November 26 strike was also simultaneously a strike for the defence of democracy and secularism. (IPA Service)

Urban invisibility of Gendered livelihoods

By Dr Samhita Barooah

The Covid 19 pandemic has opened up many truths around us. One such truth about our city is the growth of vendors and hawkers who visit our homes, byelanes or localities even during Covid times. The only voices one could sometimes hear during home quarantine and lockdown periods were that of vegetable, fish, chicken vendors. Earlier we used to hear 'Dorupay wala' vendors from Bihar and UP with all kinds of utility products at dirt cheap prices and mekhela sador selling vendors during the flood season mostly from flood affected districts of Dhemaji and Lakhimpur. But these days we hear about spice sale, food item sale, delivery staff from various companies like swiggy, zomato and all food joints with home delivery services. The vendors from Flipkart, Amazon and other e-commerce outlets also visit our locality occasionally. All these jobs are done by men. Whether it's the rice seller, milk seller, newspaper delivery man, cable tv operator, scrap collectors, gas, mixer, cooker-repairers, waste collector almost all of these jobs are male-dominated within the urban context.

workers before the pandemic hit. Women in these institutions worked as cleaners, waiters, support staff, receptionists, sanitation workers and temporary or faltu labour most of the time. Women with violent homes were trapped with their families where their lives were further degenerated. At least in workplaces, women could ensure economic and emotional survival and respite for some time from their difficult homes but with the pandemic they were further pulled down.

In the urban context of care work, nurses, doctors, teachers, cleaners, sanitation staff and tailors comprise women in considerable numbers. But the pandemic created another set of risks for such women as they had to be in the frontline of service, whether online or offline. Lots of women faced discrimination and isolation from neighbours and housing society members due to fear of them transmitting corona while on their line of duty. Women in banking institutions in urban context also had to face similar problems during this period. Some women staying at home along with their frontline spouses also bore



Jobs like Ola drivers, Uber drivers, auto-rickshaw and cycle rickshaw driving, e-rickshaw driving and street food stalls are also mostly set up by men. Women and other non-binary vendors are not mobile or into delivery business yet. Such predominantly male preference is also due to societal perceptions of stigma and discrimination against non-male genders. All gardeners are male in urban spaces these days. Masons, head construction workers and support staff are also predominantly male. Only a few women construction workers are visible in the urban spaces. Such blatant gendered spaces in the cities have shrunk the skilled and unskilled opportunities for non male workers. With the pandemic lockdown, women are seen more as food and utility stuff beggars at homes. They stay on pavements, outskirts of religious places, parks, under the flyovers, railway platforms, bus station premises and other possible public places along with their families, elders, sick spouses and children and beg during the day to make a living. Most of them used to earn daily wages or from domestic work jobs before the pandemic hit. But with the growing hate, fears and precautions, people in urban homes stopped employing domestic workers for short periods, especially those workers who had to travel long distances from their homes. Women have been bearing the loss of productive labour and increase in their reproductive labour during this period. Recent child delivery of one such woman under the flyover in Guwahati created ripples across social media and news reporting circles.

Women's work in the urban context also got affected due to closure of institutions, hostels, hotels, home based guest houses, malls, showrooms and markets where women somehow managed to find some place as full time or part time

the consequences of getting Covid during this period. Most crucial battles were fought by single women living in isolated home spaces whose lives were confined and had to depend only on state support services while suffering from Covid19. Even urban mothers with young children and lactating mothers had to brave the isolation pangs from their respective children and care support system during this pandemic. Most women shared about being mothers, care workers at home and frontline workers outside homes simultaneously during the pandemic and shared how they had to manage multiple roles in their private, public and professional spaces. But all these remain invisible, unaccounted and non-monetised under the epitomised self of being a mother, daughter, sister, friend, partner, spouse and support staff. Even women's work like cooking, cleaning, washing, making masks and gloves took utmost priority during this period.

Men in urban spaces like Guwahati could manage to be part of mobile livelihoods, community mobilisations, cultural activities and formal construction work with adequate compensation and remuneration. While women and non-binary gender persons entered unrecognised home spaces without any incomes or begged door to door for their survival needs. It is important to understand these nuanced implications on gender, development-centred livelihoods which got severely affected during the Covid pandemic and the existing misogyny in our society despite urbanised, educated and liberated selves. During the fortnight campaign #orangeheworld, protecting, funding, responding and collecting diverse ways of respect, dignity and co-creating opportunities has become mandatory. (The writer teaches in NEHU, Tura campus. Email: samhita.world@gmail.com)

Maradona's chosen home

As the news of Diego Armando Maradona's death hit the headline and the world mourned, the name Tigre also came up. This is where the legend breathed his last. **Ranjita Biswas** remembers her trip to Tigre island

As the news of Maradona's death hit the headline and the world mourned, the name Tigre also came up. This is where he breathed his last. Ranjita Biswas remembers her trip to the Tigre island. Diego Maradona dead. Due to a heart attack at his home in the Tigre island. All at once, even while absorbing the shocking news, the memory of the place floated up in mind.

A couple of years back, I had taken a day trip to Tigre from Buenos Aires when I was there to attend a conference.

Tigre Island, about 35 km from Buenos Aires, is at the mouth of the river Plate. As an Indian, the name Tigre, meaning tiger in Spanish, intrigued me.

I didn't know that Argentina had tigers. Then the mystery was solved when the guide told us the story. It goes like this: When the Spaniards who were to colonise the land later, arrived in the 16th century via the river mouth and saw a jaguar, common to Argentina, they mistook it for a tiger and exclaimed "tigre!" and the name stuck.

This is where Maradona of the magic feet spent his last days, I thought sadly as the news broke, a life gone too soon. During my trip there I had no idea he had his house there.

I remember that at Maipu station in Buenos Aires we boarded a bright, graffiti-style painted train and set off on the "Tren de la costa" line (coastal train) on the way to Tigre. This is a historical route going back to the late

19th century when the British Railways first brought trains to Buenos Aires. The original route lay defunct for some time due to lack of passengers and loss of revenue. Then the government took over and developed it into a kind of "tourist destination train". The two coaches can carry around 200 passengers at a time.

The pretty train ran through an enchanting countryside dotted with hibiscus flower plants and spacious haciendas where some of the city's more well-off citizens live. Eventually we arrived at the little San Isidro station, built in 1891, looking exactly like an old style English railway station.

According to the legend, it was Juan de Garay, founder of the city of Buenos Aires, who opened up this land. At the town's Plaza Mitre you can see a huge neo-Gothic cathedral dedicated to Saint Isidro, the patron saint of Buenos Aires.

As one from Bengal, I regretted that I could not visit the Miralrio estate of Victoria Ocampo on this trip. It is now a cultural centre and not very far from San Isidro either.

This is where Rabindranath Tagore spent two months recuperating from a serious illness while visiting Argentina on a lecture trip. Ocampo, an admirer of his work, played the perfect hostess. She was born into a rich and cultured family and became one of Argentina's foremost intellectuals. She remained Tagore's lifelong friend.

The Tigre, spread over 5,405 square miles, is one of the world's

largest deltas. Interestingly, it does not empty into a sea or ocean; it flows instead into the Río de la Plata, which separates Argentina and Uruguay.

The journey down the waterway starts from the Estación Fluvial terminal on the Río Luján tributary of the Parana river. As it glided on the muddy water it reminded me of Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer. On both sides of the riverbanks pretty holiday homes and resorts came into view. It was also where, on board, I had the best Calamari ever, fresh from the river, lightly fried and served with sautéed vegetables.

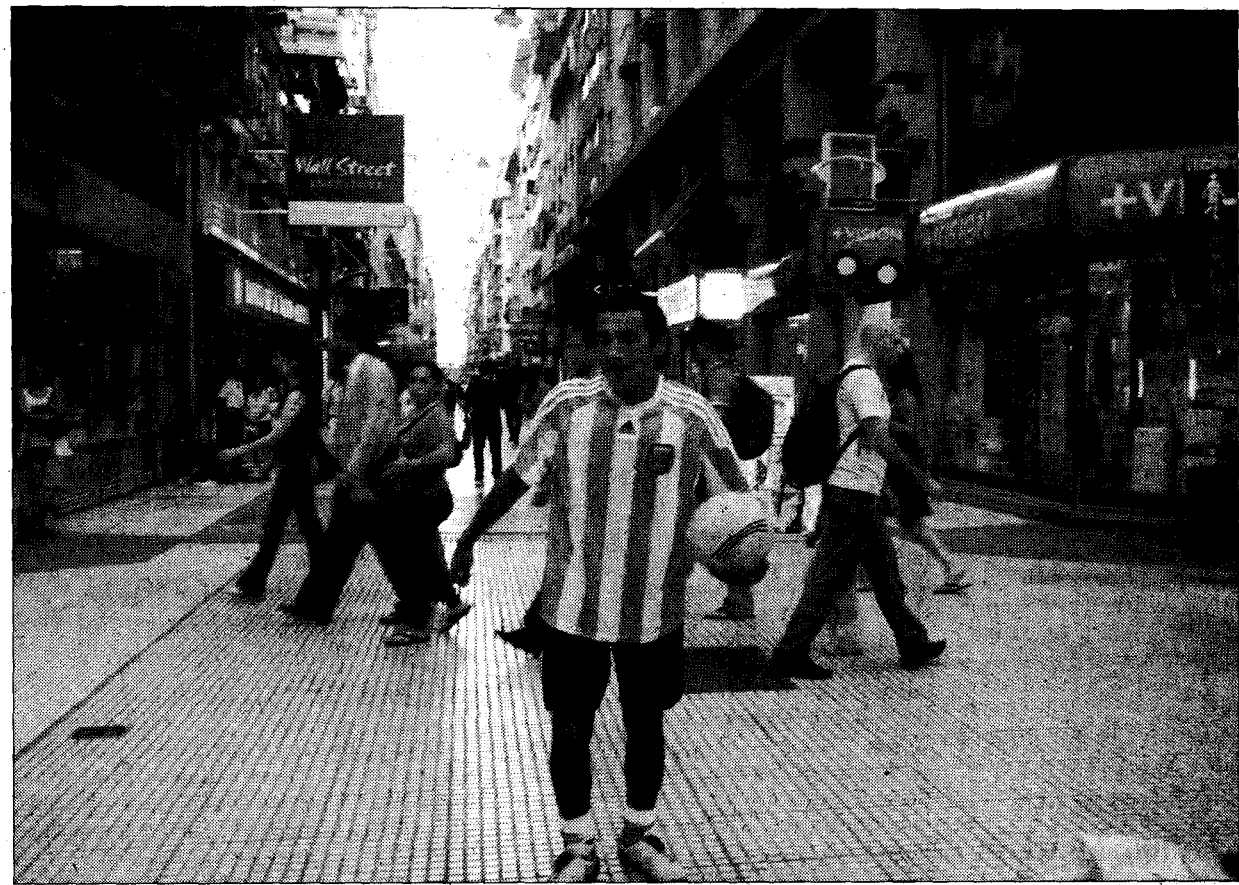
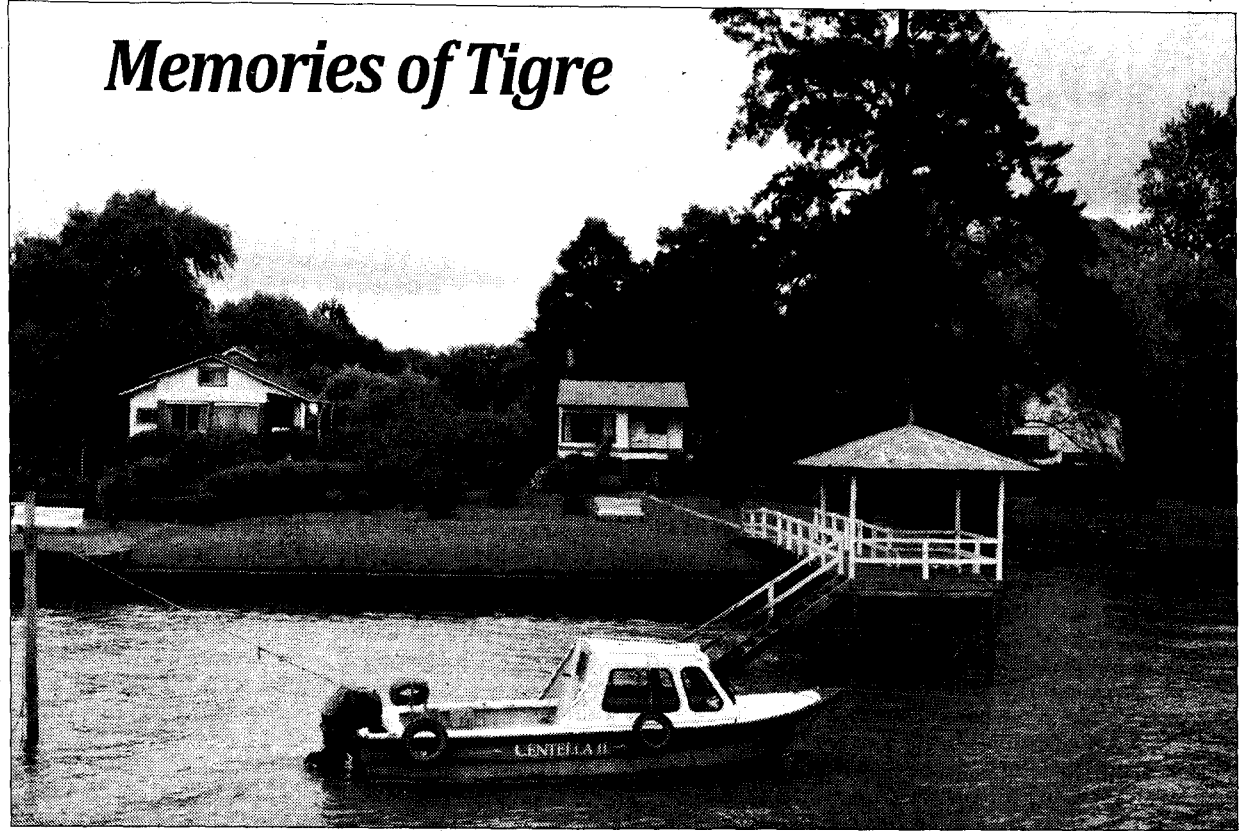
Back in Buenos Aires, while visiting the La Boca (the mouth) river port site on a 'buenosairesbus' hop-on-hop-off bus the commentator pointed out the huge stadium of the 'La Bombonera' of Boca Juniors Club for whom the legendary Diego - the God as fans called him, practised wearing his famous jersey.

The Boca Juniors is one of the biggest soccer teams in Argentina. Football aficionados can buy tickets to watch a game and experience the electrifying atmosphere, or take a special tour of Boca's Passion Museum which also includes a guided tour of the stadium.

It's sure that with Maradona's demise, the grounds which he had dominated once would see many more visitors to pay homage to one of the most scintillating players the 'beautiful game' has ever seen.

(Trans World Features)

Memories of Tigre



(Top) Journey to Tigre. (Below) A street performer in Buenos Aires wears the famous jersey. (Photos by author)

Thanksgiving inspired recipes to get going

The American holiday promotes the idea of being grateful and something Indians love feasting. Chef Mariko Amekodomo, International Culinary Expert from L.A., California shares recipes to roast turkey, fresh baked pies and spiced apple cider filling the air.

When cooking a turkey, there are always many things to consider such as the size of the turkey for the number of guests, will it fit in my oven and will I actually cook it long enough or too long. While I can't answer those questions, I can share my favorite marinades for cooking a turkey at home like a pro.

Brine

Brine preparation for turkey continues to grow in popularity each year, and once you taste it you will definitely know why. The process is simple, get a HUGE container big enough to fit the turkey and enough water to cover it, along with plenty of salt and spices.

When brining, the turkey absorbs extra moisture to help it stay extra juicy. Since it absorbs the salt and spices as well, the turkey meat gets extra seasoned deep inside the meat, not just the surface. The brine solution also breaks down some of the proteins in the turkey, making it more tender.

For the best results from brining, begin the process at least 48 hours before you plan to cook the bird. Before cooking, remove from brine and drain on a large towel. Drying the turkey before cooking assures for a crispy and evenly brown skin. Brined turkey cooks faster, so check often to make sure you don't overcook.

Here's the go-to recipe for the brine. Feel free to add extra herbs and spices such as chili, depending on your tastes.

Classic Turkey Brine Recipe (for a small 6-8kg turkey)

- 1 cup salt
- 1/2 brown sugar or jaggery
- 4L vegetable stock, warm
- 2 tablespoons whole peppercorns
- 1 1/2 teaspoons allspice berries

- 1 1/2 teaspoons chopped ginger

- 1 orange, sliced
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 bunch rosemary
- 1 bunch sage leaves
- 4L water

Combine all of the ingredients (except the extra 4L water) in a large pot and heat until the salt is dissolved. Allow to cool completely. Place turkey in large stock pot or bucket with the cavity facing up. Pour the cool brine into the bucket, and add remaining 4L water just until the turkey is completely submerged. Place bucket into refrigerator for 48-72 hours until it's ready to cook.

Fresh Herb Butter

Herb butter is my 2nd favorite turkey preparation when I don't have time to brine. It's essentially a full flavored fresh herb butter that is inserted underneath the skin so it's absorbed into the meat when cooking. The result is extra rich and flavorful meat and creates a fantastic gravy. This preparation doesn't need to be made ahead of time and you can follow your regular cooking times.

Fresh Herb Butter Recipe (for a small 6-8kg turkey)

- 1kg butter, softened (salted or unsalted. If you use unsalted, add 1 tablespoon salt)



- 1 bunch fresh parsley
- 1 bunch rosemary
- 1 bunch sage
- 1 tablespoon fresh ground pepper
- 20 cloves garlic

Add all ingredients to a food processor or large mixer grinder and blend until well combined. Prepare your turkey in a large roasting pan. Using a sharp knife, make slits in the skin of the turkey and use your fingers to separate the skin from the meat.

With a spoon, take the herb butter and start placing inside the slits and use your fingers to spread it around from the top.

At this point, you'll almost be mas-

saging the turkey with butter so that it is spread evenly. Continue the process until the herb butter is finished and the entire turkey has a layer of butter between the skin and meat. Now it's ready to cook following your preferred time and temperature.

Dry Rub

Lastly, if you want great flavor and don't have time to brine and fresh herb butter is too labor intensive, then I recommend a simple dry rub. It's ready in minutes, has great flavor and easy to customize with your favorite spices.

And I always believe that a turkey can never be too flavorful, so feel free to use the dry rub with brine or herb butter preparations.

Dry Rub Recipe (for a small 6-8kg turkey)

- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 2 teaspoons dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder

Hint: If you don't have the dried herbs, replace with 5 teaspoons Italian seasoning

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Generously brush turkey with olive oil, then rub in the seasoning mixture. Cook following your preferred time and temperature.

(IANS)

Explore Sikh Heritage, Culture through Art

By Siddhi Jain

Revealing vignettes of Sikh heritage founded in its distinctive socio-cultural and visual identity and manifesting a lived faith pictorially, a series of works of art by artist Harshdeep Kaur will go on view from November 30, Guru Nanak Jayanti. The works celebrate cultural nuances of Sikhism and natural landscapes.

The solo exhibition titled 'Engaging With The Ultimate' runs from November 30-December 8 at Delhi-based Arpana Art Gallery. Presented by Dhoomimal Gallery and curated by Dr Seema Bawa, the solo presents a varied mix of canvases showcasing landscapes & figurative works. Her work speaks of the social and natural landscapes that surround our physical and imaginative selves while evoking an intrinsic emotive charm.

The series that sets her work apart is based on Sikh men and women; embedded as it is in her own lived experience, on her observation of the lives of the Sikh people, their festivals and rituals.

"Sikh people and rituals inspire me to create new dimension in Sikh art. The Khalsas wearing kesari turbans; engaged in meditation, working in the fields or as horse riding soldiers, skilled in warfare have left a lasting impression on my art and me," explains Harshdeep.

"Each of my works from portraits, figures & landscapes have one thing in common which is the peaceful nature of it. Looking around at what's happening in the world and how simple things are getting complicated, I wanted my works to speak for themselves. Since childhood, I observed my parents follow a very specific routine of path, Shabad & belief in God and that made me connect with my own self very quickly. That experience was so strong and peaceful that I wanted to show it in my works. This exhibition celebrates the life of Sikh people, their festivals, rituals, the Khalsa's in meditation and also skilled in warfare," the artist told IANSLife.

There are also two contemplative works, Prasad and Prayer that represent the Sikh peoples' communitarian and egalitarian world through



ritual practice of service and meditative silence revealed through the Word, shabd and nama; both leading towards realization of the Ultimate Reality, explains the gallery.

"Another trait marker of the Sikhs is their appearance, especially the turban, especially the Dumala or domala, a turban wound with lesser number of folds, worn by devout members of both genders. Her paintings, big and small format, depict these Dumala wearers not only as devout and committed Sikhs but also bring out their individual and communitarian identity. A slightly whimsical work shows a dumala wearing lady sporting dark glasses and western wear, a mark of the diaspora's struggle to adapt to changing milieu," said the gallery.

Her landscapes explore silent spaces marked by the absence of humans, where it is the trees, birds, lakes and waters that suggest a narrative of peace and calm. Then there are the short poesies painted into a bunch of flowers in bloom or a pair of trees conversing in shadows of dusk, in reflections of forms in still waters.

The natural world has been magnified in her landscape paintings while it has been abstracted in her ink on paper works that use Chinese ink whose adaptability she discovered during a visit to Hong Kong. The play and experimentation with monochromatic tonalities of ink, is seen in her forms, creating lots of depth in figures and landscape both. The visceral feel of the thick handmade paper and canvas surface, splattered with ink and water layers her work with light and shade that for her is intrinsic to experiencing form.

(IANS)

*If you cannot do great things, do
small things in a great way.*
--- Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

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Killing in Tehran

IT's not in us to support terrorism of any kind. Terrorism is today the principal challenge to global peace. Since the past few decades, Islamist fundamentalists through the arms of Al Qaeda, ISIS, Pakistan's ISI, and Afghanistan's Taliban have created a world filled with violence in increasing frequency. The US, Russia and India are among the principal victims of such offensives engaged in by terrorist groups. At the same time, the killing of Iran's top-most nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh at the hands of terrorist groups must be seen from not one, but different angles. Terrorists were apparently commissioned to do a killing. The hands of Israel are suspected to be behind this act. US President Donald Trump might or might not have helped in this act in the context of the clouded US political weather after the presidential polls. Israel is no ordinary nation. A tiny Jewish state sandwiched between hostile Muslim nations, it holds its head high by virtue of its razor-sharp intelligence outreach, good governance and major forays in fields as wide as science, technology and agriculture. Israeli intelligence networks are as lethal as the CIA, which had executed several deadly plans across the globe. The timing of the execution of the Iranian nuclear scientist in capital Tehran was such that it is suspected the CIA used the Israeli external intelligence Mossad for this purpose. Iran has vowed to avenge the murder, but it has no clear clues as yet about whether Israeli or the US was involved in this crime.

The assassination comes in the aftermath of Iran breaching the agreement on limiting the use of uranium, a central requirement for nuclear bomb-making, which it had signed with six major global powers including the US and the EU in 2015. Notably, president-elect Joe Biden has, during his election campaign, promised to revive the deal remaining dead for a year. Hence, many suspect that the killing of the nuclear scientist could be Trump's parting kick to Biden. Trump had unilaterally withdrawn from the deal and imposed fresh sanctions on Iran to curb sale of its oil. Notably, two years ago, a top Iranian leader Major General Qassem Soleimani had been killed in a US airstrike. Put together, Iran could now be expected to extract revenge, and it is worth a serious watch how things could shape up in the West Asian region in the coming weeks or months. Significantly, the present offensive against Iran from the West comes at a time when some Muslim nations like the oil-rich UAE are establishing formal diplomatic relations with Israel.

Community-led tourism in West Jañtia hills District

By H H Mohrmen

We have heard of the different types of tourism such as Eco-tourism, Cultural tourism and what have you, but one rarely hears about community-led tourism. In the context of Meghalaya and in particular the West Jañtia Hills District, most of the successful tourist destinations now are community-led. To begin with, in the tribal community of Meghalaya especially in the Khasi Pnar society, there are two major institutions which play a very vital role in the different aspects of the culture of the people.

The Khasi Pnar or the Hynñew Trep which include the Khasi, the Pnar, the Bhoi, the War and other sub-tribes is a unique community, in the sense that that there are traditional elements which largely influence how the society operates. The Hynñew Trep people may have evolved into a modern society but the two major institutions still have immense influence on how the society functions. The two important institutions which greatly influence the dynamics of the society are the Dorbar Shnong or the village council and the Kur or the Clan. These are very important components of the Pnar society which still have immense control on how the society functions and more importantly, influence the dynamics of the society. They even influence the land ownership or the land tenure system which is being followed by the people in the state and in the War Jañtia area in particular.

One will not be able to understand the society, if one does not understand these two important institutions in great detail. The next question that begs the answer is - what do we mean by community-led tourism. In simple words it means that it is the community which decides what is to be projected and what the unique selling point (USP) of the area is. And it also decides how the same is to be sold in the market.

Generally large parts of land in Jañtia hills are owned by the community which include the Village, the Raid and the clan but as time passed individuals first took ownership of the land where they build their houses and now a large part of land is in the hands of

private owners.

The importance of these two institutions cannot be ignored if one is to understand how the tourist spots at least in West Jañtia hills came into being. To describe the community-led tourism in Jañtia hills, the two case studies that one would like to share is that of Shnongpdeng tourism spot which was led by the Dorbar Shnong or the village council and the Krangshuri waterfall tourist spot which is led by the Buam clan of the Thangbuli and Umladkhur village area. The two case studies also bring to light the truth about how the two institutions at their best can bring so much change in the community and also bring economic

progressive dorbar chnong can bring change to the land and the people.

It may however be reminded that when Shnongpdeng emerged as a popular destination, the major problem that the venture faced was the lack of parking space. There is one clan in the village which owns the land which can be used for parking. When the dorbar chnong and the clan could not come to any understanding, the district administration had to intervene. Arunkumar Kembhavi was then the DC of West Jañtia hills, (late) Donny M. Wallang was the Director DRDA and Isawanda Laloo was then the SDO of Amlarem. Finally the district heads were able



development to the members of the respective community.

Tourism promotion in Shnongpdeng, a village which is near Dawki on the India-Bangladesh border was an initiative of the Dorbar Shnong. Initially it was a collective decision of the community to protest against the District Council's plan to lease the river to private entity for mass catching of fish. This led to the launching of tourism in the village. To keep the wheels rolling the village then constituted a body which was later registered under the Co-operative Societies Act. It is this body which manages the day to day affairs of the tourism business in the village and its members are elected by the general body of the village and are answerable to the same. In this arrangement individuals or families can own their tourist business units, but are under the management of the Cooperative society. Even those members of the community who do not directly benefit from the venture, stand to gain from the profit the dorbar chnong collects. So it is a win-win situation and this is a testimony to how

to convince the two institutions to agree on revenue sharing formula and the parking space was constructed by the district administration.

In what can be called a ripple effect, Darang a village adjacent to Shnongpdeng also followed a similar approach and supported by the District Basin Development Unit West Jañtia hills and SURE Jañtia hills the partner NGO conducted a capacity building program for the community and Darang is now another important tourist spot in the area.

The other case study is the management of the Krangshuri waterfalls and the Sua Ludong which is an extension of the Krangshuri project. In the War Jañtia area of Amlarem sub division, West Jañtia hills district, a large part the land is owned by the clan hence residents of the village can seek permission from the clan to use any land with only a nominal fee which is to be paid to the custodian. In this case the Buam clan of the Thangbuli-Umladkhur area manages the area. All the units in this project are managed and owned by the clan and the people who are engaged in the different units mostly belong to the

same clan. The income from the projects is also being shared by the member of the clan, so in this case community means the clan.

Although the writer has visited Kudengrim before the village was promoted as a tourist destination, but one has not been able to associate with the venture. The truth however is that even this destination is being promoted by the community and in this case the dorbar chnong of Kudengrim.

It may however be reminded that it was F.R. Kharkongor the then DC of Jañtia hills district who on seeing the damage done by coal mining to nature suggested that people should also look beyond Mooing or coal mining for livelihood. Kharkongor cleverly used the prefix 'moo' which in Pnar means stone or rock and said that not only 'mooiong' but 'mootourism' can also provide people with alternative livelihoods. The Shillong Times recently carried out a feature story of community-led tourism in Molamylang village which is located at the heart of the coal mining areas. It is another case of how the community in collaboration with Forest Department and recently the Community-led Landscape Management unit (CLAM) has been able to bring the much needed change to the area.

It is heartening to see that many potential tourist spots are being identified even in the East Jañtia hills. Recently the Chief Minister visited Sahksaw which is upstream of Rynji falls in the same district. What the government and the Chief Minister in particular need to remember is that mining and tourism cannot go together. Sahksaw is part of the river Myntdu and its water used to be contaminated with Acid Mine Drainage (AMD). The change in the water quality we see now is because of the ban on coal mining. The Government has to decide whether it wants tourism or mining. It can't have its cake and eat it too. And the State Government is yet to venture into the immense potential of cave tourism in East Jañtia hills and the tourism potential of Narpuh Wildlife Sanctuary.

One hopes that the Government would at least document the above cases and use the same as case studies to understand how tourism developed in the region.

India must concentrate on finished goods output Exit from China-led RCEP may temporarily help

By Nantoo Banerjee

For now, it appears to be a right decision on India's part to opt out of the China-led 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement to protect the country's immediate industrial and trade interests. After prolonged negotiations for years, the agreement, sans India, was finally passed a fortnight ago. The credit for India's exit from RCEP, however, goes to the right-wing RSS-affiliated Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM), which staunchly fought against India's participation at the final stage of RCEP negotiations, last year. Few were surprised when Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself came to the domestic industry's rescue.

In a way, SJM was also responsible to save the face of industry, including multinational corporations with strong manufacturing base in India, which was highly concerned about facing uneven competition from certain aggressive Asian partners in the local market. Conveniently, large local industrial producers provided a silent consent to the SJM outburst against RCEP. Few were ready to compete with countries such as China, South Korea and Japan for a share of the local market. Already, imported products are flooding the Indian market. Getting increasingly squeezed, many local manufacturers have also turned importers of finished products.

The Covid-19 impact apart, India's economy is in a critical stage. Boasting more than half-a-trillion dollar annual imports, the country offers a great attraction to almost all exporting nations, especially from the Asia-Pacific region. In 2018-19, India's total merchandise imports amounted to US\$514 billion, registering a 10.41 percent growth over the previous fiscal. Of late, the rising volume of imports is deeply eating into the country's financial resources with trade deficits widening year after year.

In 2019, India recorded a massive trade deficit of US\$159.73 billion, the world's third highest after the US and UK. The CIA World Factbook noted India's current account deficit in 2018-19 as also the world's third highest. India's trade deficits with China in 2017-18 and 2018-19 were, respectively, \$63 billion and \$53.56 billion, the largest with any country. Clearly, the Indian economy can't sustain such large annual trade deficits for long. The RCEP agreement will bring down import duties on 80 percent to 90 percent of the goods, along with easier service and investment rules.

The single most important reason for India's reluctance to join RCEP was China. New Delhi is believed to have decided not to join any multilateral trade negotiation where Beijing is a member. India's relationship with China has turned worse since last year. In the last five years, China has made a deep inroad into India's economic system. There was no reciprocal concession from China. In 2018-19, China's two-way merchandise trade with India was \$87.07 billion. Of this, China's exports to India amounted to \$ 70.32 billion. It imported goods worth only \$16.75 billion from India.

China has become the source of nearly 13.70 percent of India's imports across sectors, including

electrical machinery, cell phones, heavy machinery telecom, power, plastic toys, lamps, pharmaceutical ingredients, drugs, home decorative, fertiliser, food and textiles. Although the US is India's largest trading partner, the basic difference between the India-US and India-China trade is that India had a trade surplus of \$16 billion with the US in 2018-19.

Officially, India had opted out of the RCEP dialogue in November, last year, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi surprised all other fellow members of the RCEP participating countries by choosing to drop out of the partnership at the Bangkok summit. The RCEP agreement, the world's biggest trade block, covers close to a third of the global population and about 30 percent of the global gross domestic product.

RCEP will progressively lower tariffs. It aims to counter protectionism, boost investment and allow freer movement of goods within the region. The 15 Asia-Pacific RCEP member-nations are: China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Australia and New Zealand. The new tariff regime will start from 2022 and will see duties go back to 2014 levels. The RCEP negotiations started in November 2012 during the ASEAN summit in Phnom Penh in Cambodia.

Industry in India was never comfortable with RCEP negotiations. The government was under big pressure from the RSS-backed SJM against RCEP. Interestingly, just a month before the prime minister himself announced India's withdrawal from RCEP negotiations, SJM organised a 10-day nationwide protest against India becoming part of such an agreement. SJM's protest programme followed RSS head (sarsangchalak) Mohan Bhagwat's discourse about promoting swadeshi in his annual Dussehra speech, last year.

Bhagwat cautioned the government against rushing into the deal. "The nation is currently facing a crisis in both manufacturing and agriculture which is resulting in job losses in the country. Though the crisis in the manufacturing is due to the lack of a comprehensive industrial policy since 1991," SJM co-convenor Ashwini Mahajan stated. "The free trade agreements (FTAs) India has signed in the last decade play a major role by allowing cheap imports and hollowing out of Indian manufacturing.

In 2018-19, India had a trade deficit with 11 of the 15 RCEP negotiating countries. In the previous year, India had a US\$104-billion trade deficit with RCEP countries and more than half of this was with China." While the WITS (World Integrated Trade Solutions-World Bank) data shows the deteriorating trend in the trade deficit, India's trade balance to total trade ratio deteriorated from -17.5% to -22.6% with respect to ASEAN, -43% to -56.2% for South Korea, and -30% to -44.9% for Japan. RCEP would further deteriorate the situation, argued Mahajan. It seems the RSS push for 'self-reliant' India forced the government to finally pull out of RCEP. However, few will disagree that protectionism is not the best course for lasting industrial self-reliance. It's time that India's industry grows up fast to protect itself. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

KHADC trade license fees

Editor,
I recall reading in your esteemed daily a report last year attributed to Executive Member of KHADC Paul Lyngdoh saying that the trade license fees had not been enhanced since 2005. He was trying to justify the steep rise in the fees. I think the statement is misleading. As a license holder myself, I can vouch for the fact that since 2008 at least five times the fees have been enhanced.

To be specific, in 2008 my firm's fee was Rs 5000; the following year it was raised by another Rs 500 to make it Rs 5500; in 2011, the license fee became Rs 8000; in 2015, it was revised again to make it Rs 13,000. Then, in 2019 when Paul Lyngdoh was EM in-charge trade, the jump was abnormally high at Rs 20,000!

Therefore, either the EM is wrongly informed by his office or he is suppressing the truth. In any case, a four-fold hike in trade license fees in a span of 12 years is most unreasonable, especially at a time when trade and commerce have suffered no end because of COVID pandemic.

In the same report,

Lyngdoh had claimed that by enhancing the fees and bringing about systemic improvement like biometrics, police verification, photo shooting of the licensees in the Council office etc., there would be no harassment to the traders. May I ask, has it helped in plugging loopholes? Has corruption completely vanished? And what about the untold harassment meted to the applicants? It seems, regardless of any foolproof system, the license-seekers are here to suffer financially and mentally.

I therefore urge upon the authorities to reconsider the latest rate revision and put an end to harassment so as to give some relief to the traders.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Lest we forget

Editor,
I was walking with my friend in Khyndai Lad on Friday and when we saw those banners demanding ILP, we end up having small talk about the issue. Then my friend said that in these trying times, the pressure groups should also raise the issue of price rise. She

jokingly remarked that since potato ends up in her tiffin almost every day, the pressure groups should also fight against the rise of the price of potatoes. She knows the inflationary trends since she regularly visits lewduh. She opened up my eyes to the stark reality and grim situation we're living in today.

We're living in inflationary times! We've never experienced such kind of price rise where the prices of almost all goods and services have gone up. About a month ago a taxi driver narrated a story about a person who works in a departmental store in Rynjah. The person was in a dire situation since taxi fare was eating up most of his meagre income. He told the driver that there's no point of going to work since at the end of the month, almost all the salary is spent on traveling expenses.

Hopefully things get better and prices of essential goods and services stabilize and return to normal levels. But we must also remember that hyperinflation is like an epidemic in itself and it can debilitate and ruin an entire nation. In the recent past, Zimbabwe's economy was debilitated by hyperinflation for a long period of time. Right now,

Argentina is in dire straits. The debt situation has reached uncontrollable levels and this has aggravated the inflationary crisis. In 2019, the inflation rate hit its highest level in three decades.

Closer home, the people of Mizoram have been living in hyper-inflationary times for a very long time. When I visited Mizoram a few years back, I was shocked to find that almost all the essential goods were being sold at double the actual rates. And lest we forget, an economic crisis and hyperinflation were two of the main causes that led to the rise of Adolf Hitler. Adolf Hitler's rise to power began in November 1923 and that was when Germany's hyper-inflation reached its highpoint.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

An earnest appeal

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I want to draw the kind attention of all concerned to an urgent matter. The final semester examinations of NEHU undergraduate courses were conducted in the month of October 2020. Though there were

uncountable issues faced by both teachers and students during the examination, the entire teaching fraternity of different colleges came forward and played active roles in making the first ever undergraduate 'online examination' conducted by the university happen. The process of evaluation started late, though, teachers tried their best to meet the deadline of October 30, for declaration of results. However, till date the final semester results of only a few subjects have been declared. Students, parents and teachers are still waiting eagerly for declaration of the results of the remaining subjects.

Unfortunately, there were many universities whose deadlines for submitting final semester mark sheets for admission into Master degree programmes were in the month of November. Many of our students cleared the entrance examinations of those universities, but forfeited their seats only due to delay in declaration of the results by our University. Helpless students are contacting their clueless teachers to enquire when their results will be declared! To add to the worries, many universities have fixed last dates for

submission of mark sheets of final semester examinations in the first week of December for admission into their Master's degree programme. At this point of time, it will be meaningless to discuss as to who is responsible for the delay in announcing the results, but it is time to think about the future of our students- the very reason why all these educational institutes exist.

Through your esteemed daily, as a concerned person may I request all, including teachers, office staff, administrators and officers of colleges and the university, kindly to sacrifice some extra hours from their busy schedule to complete any task, if yet incomplete, in order to declare the results of the remaining subjects at the earliest. We must keep in mind, every other day is a deadline for some of our students to submit their marks to some institutions for higher studies and any further delay in declaration of results will deprive them of the opportunities to get admission into those institutions. Hope we all will go the extra mile in the interest of our students.

Yours etc.,
Devajyoti Bokolia
Shillong-1