

"It's the steady, quiet, plodding ones who win in the lifelong race."
— Robert W. Service

The Shillong Times

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Mental Health Policy: An Imperative

MENTAL health or its absence leads to a host of psychological and psychiatric disorders. Much has been spoken on the impact of Covid on the mental health of children, mainly students who were deprived of social contact and also of teachers who had to manage with online classes while managing their homes. Even healthcare givers had a traumatic time coping with stress due to work pressure. But even without Covid, mental health has been a challenge in Meghalaya. Both MIMHANS and SANKER are struggling with the growing number of mental health patients. Today mental health affects people across all classes, professions and genders. The intrusion of technology in the form of social media has only heightened the emotional disequilibrium of the young. Suicides are on the rise because the youth cannot cope with the burgeoning pressures on the educational and professional fronts.

It is therefore heartening that the State Health Department has come up with a Mental Health Policy which will outline the priority areas and constituents that need greater attention. The rise in substance abuse in Meghalaya calls for a targeted intervention after understanding the underlying reasons. Patients needing psychiatric care are tended to by caregivers and counsellors that are specially trained to be empathetic and patient. It takes a lot out of the caregivers and attention has to be paid to their mental health too. A Policy will also hopefully mean allocating adequate resources for this special area of treatment which is often subsumed under the general health care ambit.

In India there is a huge shortfall of psychologists and psychiatrists. Psychologists focus on behaviour and on tracking the sleeping and eating patterns of patients and the environmental stressors so they can get a grip on the kind of treatment a patient needs. Psychologists study the patient's mind and emotions and focus primarily on thoughts, feelings and life experiences. Psychiatrists on the other hand are medical doctors who specialise in the study, diagnoses and treatment of mental health. After due diagnosis, psychiatrists prescribe medication. Because they are medical doctors, psychiatrists may work in tandem with primary care physicians or other specialists. In fact, patients are often referred to psychiatrists by their primary care provider. Psychiatrists can also evaluate underlying medical conditions that may contribute to mental illnesses. A Mental Health Policy will hopefully help bring convergence among all mental health care practitioners in the private and government sector and add to the repository of knowledge about this huge medical challenge that is taking a heavy toll across professions. It is said that workplaces with mentally healthy individuals are more productive. But there are also workplaces that are stressful and where individuals struggle with mental health disorders that go undiagnosed for a long time. Now that a Policy is in place there will also be space for more research that will lead to better interventions.

How Parts of Jaintia Hills were transferred to Mikir Hills in 1951

By Prof. P.M.Passah & Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah

Kapili and Jamuna Valleys. Historically, linguistically and culturally the two tribes are poles apart. The Mikirs or Karbis are rather closer to the Assamese and the Tibeto-Burman group or Bodo as will be seen from historical records quoted below.

The boundaries of the habitat of the Mikirs (Karbhis) can be found in Sir Charles Lyall's notable book, The Mikirs published in 1904 which gives the following boundaries of the Mikir Hills at pp.2-3. "The Mikirs inhabit in greatest strength the hills called after them, the isolated mountainous block which fills the triangle between the Brahmaputra on the north, the Dhansiri valley on the east, and the Kopili and the Jamuna-valleys on the west and south; this tract is now divided between the Nowgong and Sibsagar districts." Sir Lyall further explains clearly in detail about these boundaries and adds, "It is in this hilly country, and in the plains at the base, that the Mikir people are found." On page 5, Sir Lyall further adds, "They (The Mikirs) are, in fact, difficult to group with other branches of the great Tibeto-Burman stock to which they undoubtedly belong."

Besides Sir Lyall, Dr. A.M.Meerwarth's book, The Andamanese, Nicobarese and Hill Tribes of Assam, published in 1919 and republished by Spectrum Publications, Pan Bazar, Gauhati, in 1980 with a New Introduction by Dr. N.N. Acharyya, Professor of History, Gauhati University, also gives an almost identical description of the boundaries of the Mikir Hills at pp.34-35. Dr. Meerwarth also remarks: "It must, however, be said that they (Mikirs) have mixed very much with the Assamese and are rather like them in physical appearance." Dr. Meerwarth also mentions that the Mikirs are also found in Khasi Hills and in the plains of Assam, in the (erstwhile) districts of Nowgong and Sibsagar. They spread to these areas and even across the Brahmaputra to Darrang district, in good numbers in search of work and employment.

The premier Newspaper and very popular Daily since pre-Independence times in the North East 'The Assam Tribune' in its April 11, 1941 issue under the heading 'Sad Lot of The Mikirs', states: "They (The Mikirs) live mostly in the interiors, the slopes of the low hills and mountains called the Mikir Hills which rise pyramid-like between the Nowgong and Sibsagar districts extending on both."

Raj Mohan Nath in his A Background of Assamese Culture, published in 1948, states on page 108 that the Mikirs are "A small tribe apparently of the Bodo origin... live in the hills between the plains of the Sibsagar district and Naga Hills." Nath further states that the whole of the Mikir Hills area was under the full control of different dynasties that ruled Kamrupa

in the past "as testified by the innumerable archaeological finds of Hindu temples and images all over the Mikir Hill area from Parokhoa to Dighalpani on one side and Numaligarh to Deopani on the other."

In Tribes of Assam compiled by S.Barkataki and published in 1969, in Chapter V on 'The Mikirs' supposed to be written by L.S.Ingty, I.A.S.(himself a Mikir vide Acknowledgment in the Book), it is stated at pp.50-53: "Their (Mikirs) main habitat is the hills named after them... The climate of the hills and the contiguous plains inhabited by the Mikirs are not salubrious. In fact, many of the Mikirs living in the plains have become indistinguishable from the Assamese. They have also become bilingual speaking Assamese generally and Mikir at home."

All the above findings have been re-affirmed by the scholars of the Tribal Research Institute, Assam in their publication Tribes of Assam Part -I published as late as 1987. It quoted (vide pp.53-54) three writers: (1) Jygnoram Gogoi who states that the Karbis came down to the plains and settled in the hills Lumbajong lying between Dimapur and Diphu; (2) G.C. Medhi who says that the habitat of the Karbis was in the hilly region between the (erstwhile) Nagaon and Sibsagar districts in and around Kaziranga forest; and (3) N.N. Barua who opines that the area between Dimapur and the Kapili river called Hayong was inhabited by the Karbis and that the entire Kaziranga was within their habitation. Like Sir Lyall and others, the Book also states that the Karbis belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. Thus culturally and socially, the Karbis who follow a patriarchal society must be different from the Jaintias who are an Austric-speaking tribe following the matrilineal custom.

Even Philippe Ramirez in his very recent book, People of the Margins - Across Ethnic Boundaries in North-East India, published in 2014 by Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, writes on page 9, "Karbi (Mikirs) is to be found both in the Karbi (Mikir) hills and in the central Assam plains."

But when the then district of United Mikir & North Cachar Hills was created in April 1951, the then government of Assam denied the Mikirs the plains portion contiguous to their hills and in particular the Lunding's north-east region where the Mikirs are predominantly concentrated. Instead of attaching this plains portion to the new district as demanded by the Mikirs (vide the Minutes of the relevant Commission), the then Assam government had arbitrarily sought to transfer forcibly a large chunk of Jaintia Hills to the Mikir Hills which are a hundred miles apart from each other thereby violated the provisions of the Constitution of India for

the purpose of protecting the Scheduled & Tribal Areas of the respective Tribes and unthinkable deprived the Jaintias a large part of their traditional homeland. By this unconstitutional act, the then government of Assam has set one tribe against the other for which every subsequent government of Assam has to bear perpetual responsibility. This arbitrary action of the then government of Assam has been regarded as the first seed of misunderstanding sown by it which had started to antagonize the hill tribes of Northeast India culminating in the passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 (Act No.55 of 1969) and subsequently the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 (Act No.81 of 1971) by the Parliament which bifurcated the North-east region into 7(seven) states as it stands today.

A popular Newspaper 'The Shillong Times' published a write-up under the caption 'Jaintia 'Refugee' - a New Problem' in its Issue of July 12, 1973 (republished 30 years later in its Issue of June 23, 2003), with a comment: "The Jaintia refugees who had to be evacuated from their homes in the neighbouring villages have found it possible to return to their habitats. That they had at all to evacuate is bad enough; it is worse that the alleged harassment leading to this unfortunate evacuation was perpetrated by members of one hill tribe upon another whatever the provocation in the view of one group and the lack of it in the opinion of another. It is known that the dispute, big or small, had its own origin." True, its origin was none other than the forcible and unconstitutional transfer of a large part of Jaintia Hills to the truncated Mikir Hills. The Central government, it is trusted, will take note of this entire story and will not allow the Jaintias to suffer in their homeland. It may be noted that recently even militant elements have been used occasionally by the Assam police to intimidate the Jaintias and threaten to kidnap them while forcibly harvesting their crops almost every year. Their land records and documents were snatched away from them and destroyed. As a result, the Jaintias cannot live in peace and where they are in good numbers, open quarrels ensue from time to time. It may also be noted that of the five hill tribes recognized by the British, the Jaintias were the smallest in number and occupied the smallest area.

We however hope the Meghalaya government would be able to convince Assam to honour history and to undo its unconstitutional act committed soon after the promulgation of the Indian Constitution, and to agree to the re-transfer. We do accept the five principles as agreed by Assam and Meghalaya viz. historical facts, geographical continuity, administrative convenience, ethnicity, and people's will, in deciding the boundary issues between the two states.

Why we do not need big events?

By Avner Pariat

Recently the Commissioner & Secretary, Tourism Department - Vijay Kumar - was quoted in interviews defending the idea that big events such as the Cherry Blossom Festival and NE Olympic Games must be supported by the Government in order to promote and market Meghalaya as a tourism destination to the rest of India. Now I do not disagree with him. I am from an Advertising background and have had a brief but fruitful experience in the field myself. I still keep in touch with the industry and my old batchmates and colleagues. I see the value of this and I agree that we do need to "brand" Meghalaya better. This much is obvious. However, I have to moderate the ad-man in me because now I am embarking on a political career with a strong emphasis on equality and fairness. I cannot afford to look at these pronouncements nowadays without a degree of reserve and inflection.

One cannot look at such things in isolation of the political and economic setting. Sure, branding the State via these events might raise its external profile but are mega events like these equitable in

Maternity/Paternity leave, do they on-board their employees into a Superannuation/Pension fund? While we are on the subject of employees what is the official stance on employees and their rights? What about creating policy for employees? Who cares about entrepreneurs if they do not share the profits with their employees! I really wish I did not have to still state all these things. I wish the technocracy and bureaucracy stopped thinking about the "best person for the job," and looked instead at what would do, "the greatest good for the greatest number".

These concepts should need no introduction. They are enshrined in the traditional tribal ways of living. Traditional Indigenous communities had concepts about egalitarianism and fair distribution. The Thlen story, for example, shows us the perils of hoarding and primitive accumulation by a few people/families. The solution back then to this problem was to wipe-out the offending family entirely! This is, of course, not what we desire today but the problem was evident even back then, and now the solution must evolve out of



the distribution of government funds? The politician in me utters a clear and loud NO. Remember this is Meghalaya; the government is the sole source of funds here as the tiny private sector cannot or will not move ahead on anything proposed to it. So before doing something involving money, the government, and especially government functionaries, must introspect.

Increasingly every government has become enamoured with events and they have been devoting larger chunks of exchequer money into these activities. Mukul Sangma can try changing his stripes (and party) but he instituted and promoted these events much like the Roman emperors sponsored gladiatorial games as Rome was burning! Conrad Sangma has simply followed in his footsteps. Instead of supporting - through smart financial interventions - the growth and development of the ailing arts and allied sectors, events are pushed as a quick and simplistic solution to the real issues at hand. They plaster over a lot of issues and no long-term solutions are arrived at. The news stories thus are always the same. Big sports events but horrific living quarters for athletes, literary fests but high drop-out rates, sky-high drone shows but also soaring urban poverty, the list of items goes on.

I was critical of Mr Vijay Kumar in a previous article wherein I raised strong exception to this 're-branding' of the Sports and Agriculture departments into YESS Meghalaya and FOCUS respectively. Packaging departments into new shiny entities without fixing the rotting corruption is not going to solve anything.

Over the past few years, we have seen massive accumulation of wealth by a few entrepreneurial contractors but do they offer any benefits like my own former "evil corporate" bosses? Do they pay PF, Health Insurance,

the realisation that Human Greed is eternal. How does a bureaucrat REGULATE these excesses? That is the question. In another Khasi story, there is the tale of Diengie - a giant world tree under whose shadow nothing could grow - and state bureaucrats are responsible for encouraging monopolistic practices by a few players in various sectors who much like Diengie are choking the others (smaller businesses) under them. Is this fair? I do not think so. Human Greed cannot be watered and tended to; it must be cut down like Diengie was.

Before signing off I must raise one example of a successful branding exercise by the Tourism Department in the days before big events. I remember once in Delhi in 2008 being quite happily surprised when I heard a Meghalaya Tourism ad while on the Delhi metro. That was a brilliant stratagem. There you had a captive audience - lakhs of people per day - who were being introduced to this place called Meghalaya and it did not have to cost us crores either! I reckon that those types of interventions would have had a far greater impact on tourist inflow instead of events.

Finally as a politician I must raise an objection to the timing of these events as well. Suddenly it feels like every alternate day there is an event! Coming so close before elections I find this very suspicious and wonder why the other political parties are not calling this out like they should be doing. Maybe it is my imagination but this is surely the first time so many events have come out all at once. I will end this article here now and eagerly wait for some fake account/profile to attack my criticism with a write-up as has been the usual tradition. (Avner Medon Pariat is an MLA candidate from East Shillong constituency)

Letters to the Editor

Why the delay in ILP?

Editor,
The underlying cause of unrest in Meghalaya is a dread of a demographic imbalance. The demographic imbalance problem has persisted for years and there is no end in sight. Even our politicians are content to keep this topic alive so they may use it as a political tool. Since this problem cannot be resolved, it has caused numerous problems and fatalities. If our political leaders are sincere about solving this issue, they can. Let's remind ourselves that the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations (BEFR), 1873 (Inner Line Permit (ILP)) was implemented in 2019 by the Union Government to protect the indigenous population of the State of Manipur. This serves as evidence that the regulation has the deterrent power to safeguard and instill a sense of security.

Why is the Inner Line Permit in Meghalaya not being implemented? The stated regulation is valid and provides protections for our state's indigenous

inhabitants. According to some, if the aforementioned regulation is put into effect, it will have an impact on the tourism industry in our state. However, the regulation doesn't permanently bar people from visiting; they only need to apply for an entry permit. In the modern age, the permit can be easily applied for with the aid of technology, and bonafide Indian citizens will easily obtain it because they have all the necessary documents. However, it will act as a barrier to entry for those who are not Indian citizens and who have entered the country illegally.

There is a wrong perception about the regulation that if implemented all the outsiders will be wiped out but there is no provision in the regulation. It is only a law to regulate influx and it is imperative as it will not only protect the indigenous population but it will insulate the rapid increase of population in our small state. If this chapter is closed, in my opinion I think that all the unrest in our state will come to an end and we strive forward to achieve development and live in peace and harmony with each other.

Yours etc.,
Kenneth Nongte,
Via email

Lessons from ghastly murder of Shradha Walker

Editor,
The ghastly murder of Shradha Walker by her live-in partner raises many uncomfortable questions about relationships built over the virtual world. How this is going to play out in the future in our societies is unpredictable yet ominous. As usual it is the woman who is at the receiving end. It is shocking, almost unbelievable that a person with whom one had shared everything under a single roof could turn predator and hack his female partner into 35 pieces and keep her body parts in the fridge for months together. This is how heartless and satanic humans in this digital age have become. Hope this frightful incident sends a message of alarm to millions of parents across the country. Hope it has also alerted our gullible adolescents who are tempted to look for partners through misleading apps on the net where males/females are assessed in terms of their external oomph instead of the human qualities they possess. What is disgusting is that such devious portals are allowed to do business. Amidst our "silence" they are carrying out their immoral business with a vengeance and thus misguiding our youths.

These applications/sites might even pop up with obscene images as advertisements on our Facebook pages or while checking emails or even visiting news websites. The deeper we delve the dirtier it gets. These portals/apps, all portray women as commodities to be preyed upon. Only a few women's organizations have taken note of these apps but without a concerted effort across the country it is difficult to fight these app honchos.

Another piece of news carried by India Today some days ago says that a boy from Kanpur has threatened to cut a minor girl into pieces if she rejects his proposal for marriage. The boy was later arrested. Human lust has become a serious threat. If a sense of morality were present in the mind of Aaftab Poonawala, he would not have pulled out the dagger to take Shradha's life. Was it a crime for a female to implore upon her male partner to marry her after having lived together for over four years? It is understood that Shradha's insistence on marriage drove Poonawala round the bend. The way girl's body was chopped, put into a freezer and then thrown away part by part can only be done by a mentally ill person. If we go by the reports or cases being handled by lawyers across the country these days, there are endless cases of "sex followed by murder/torture" of vulnerable females. Only a few incidents come to light.

Another concern is what are those things that have "mised" increasing numbers of young girls who easily fall for the wrong persons? Also, what are those things that provoke the man to commit such heinous crimes? Was the Court of law really wise in legalizing live-in relationships in 2006? Could it not foresee that "lust-driven relationship" without "ethics", which is so prevalent, might end up in acrimony and bloodshed as well? It appears that the ruling has only widened the credibility

gap of the judiciary.

The sanctity of marriage should not be trivialized. This will quickly lead to social degeneration. I don't think police investigations and fact finding alone will make people any saner. The government must list the main "causes" and adopt all corrective measures. If possible, the government should consider banning the immoral representation of females on the internet, which is very degrading and which corrupts the minds of people, especially younger children. Yes, all these concerns and challenges should be taken up on a war footing for the future of our vulnerable girls and women. Lastly, one wishes that no grown-up child leaves their parents' homes to go and live with a heartless live-in partner only to face nightmares. We need to wake up before more women are killed in a similar manner.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali
Shillong

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How China's response to zero-COVID protests may affect global business



The recent protests in China against the country's zero-COVID policy have been unprecedented in their scale, intensity and distribution. Protestors numbering in the thousands were reported in dozens of cities. Not since 1989's Tiananmen Square protests has there been such widespread civil disobedience.

The protests do not signify the imminent collapse of the Chinese Communist Party regime, but they are a big challenge to the authority of the party's general secretary Xi Jinping, the president of China. They also have far-reaching implications for China's domestic economy and society, as well as for international firms and the global economy.

International reaction to the protests was a mix of awe at the scale and fear about the consequences. But there was also hope that COVID controls might be loosened further, reopening China and unblocking recent global supply chain bottlenecks.

World stock markets dived initially on the Monday following the first weekend of protests on November 26 and 27. By Tuesday, a massive police presence at protest sites and early arrests of protestors led to a market rebound as foreign investors poured back into Chinese markets.

Investors now appear to have discounted further protests and are reportedly optimistic that Beijing will be forced to change course and open up the economy again. There have already been signs of a loosening of controls, with vice-premier Sun Chunlan quoted as saying the current virus iteration

is less virulent. However, enthusiastic investors risk ignoring the long-term challenges of China's current political culture, domestic economy and outlook for international business.

SHIFTING CHINESE POLICY

At the heart of contemporary political culture in China is regime survival. Xi wants China to be rich and powerful, but believes controlling domestic politics and addressing geopolitical challenges matters most. The economy comes second to security, a view Xi has expressed many times and reiterated at the Party Congress in October. International investors need to realise this because China's domestic economy and politics affect international firms involved with the country, as well as global markets.

So it's important for investors and businesses to note that China is not prepared for a surge in COVID infections. Only two-thirds of the over-60s have had a third booster vaccination, although the government wants to increase this. But opening the economy again could bring a massive increase in deaths because of China's fragile health system, insufficient ICU beds and low natural immunity.

Any economic growth from the lifting of COVID controls is also likely to be short-lived for China. The domestic economy is floundering. Growth has been anaemic since 2020, after discounting initial bounces from periodic loosening. GDP grew just 3% for the first three quarters of 2022 and will miss

the government's target of 5.5%.

House prices and investment have also been on a slide. Apartment prices have been flat or negative for most of the 70 largest cities in China since 2020 – both for new builds and resales. Investment in residential floor space is down 38.5% for the year to October. Property sector woes have squeezed the revenues of local government, which bears the costs of Beijing's dictates to control virus outbreaks.

Meanwhile, for the first ten months of 2022, consumer retail sales were down 0.5% and sales of food services were down 8.1% – although that is better than the 23% year-on-year fall during the spring 2020 lockdowns in Shanghai, Sichuan and Guangdong. And the Purchasing Managers' Index (which gives an idea of how positive the manufacturing and services industries are feeling) declined in October to 49.2 and has been below 50 for six of the first ten months this year. Any number less than 50 indicates the economy is contracting.

CHINA'S GLOBAL ROLE

Internationally, China's role as the motor of the global economy could diminish. The continuing slowing of the Chinese economy – whether COVID controls are lifted or not – and Beijing's prioritising of security over the economy will push international firms to act.

While many firms have already relocated, others have stayed – such as Apple, which gets much of its new iPhone Pro stock from the large Foxconn-

owned plant in Zhengzhou. This plant was the scene of battles between police and workers in November protesting COVID controls and lack of benefits. Apple's share price has held up remarkably well this year, as have those of major carmakers, but all are heavily dependent on China as a market and manufacturing base.

For some politicians in the west, one solution is to accelerate decoupling from China. But doing so is neither feasible nor desirable despite their justified security concerns. Science and technology innovation is international in scope and depends on openness and exchange to a certain extent. It will be difficult to freeze China out if western firms want to share in Chinese growth and developments in these areas.

Recent US efforts to restrict the sale of semi-conductors have come about only because of a belated realisation of how aggressive China has been acquiring technology since the 2000s. Too many people in the west were not reading Xi's speeches in the early 2010s, only waking up around 2016 after Beijing had laid bare its strategy in the Made in China 2025 plan.

The pursuit of profits in China's very-large domestic market has led international firms to neglect the politics of the China marketplace. It's time to realise that the business of government in China ultimately rests on ensuring business serves the interest of the party-state and its goals.

(The Conversation)

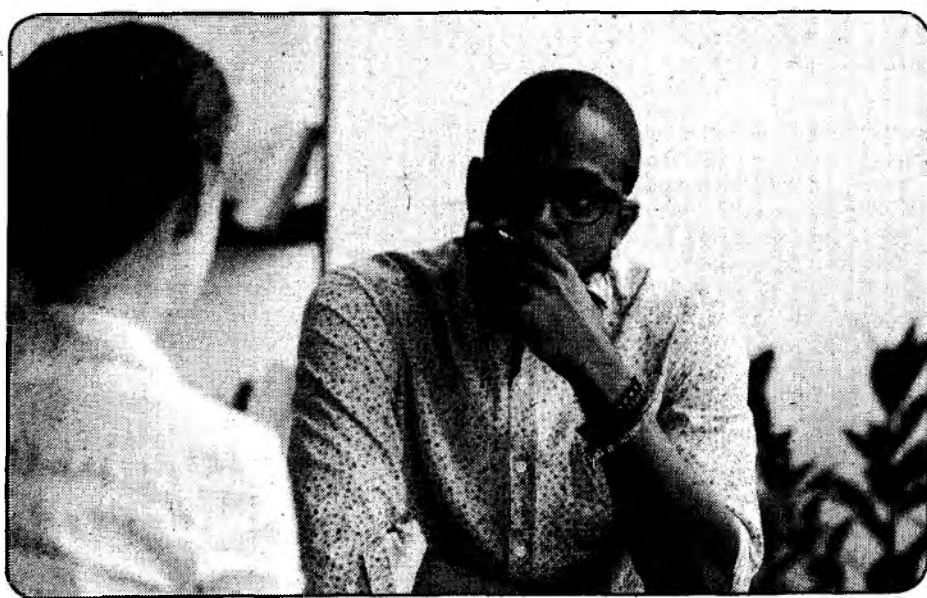
Why you could have 'face-ism'?

It is an extreme tendency to judge people based on their facial features

You've finally got an interview for your dream job. Dozens of applications, dozens of rejection letters – but now you've got a shot at the job you really wanted. In you go. Maybe you shake hands with the person who will decide your future, pour a glass of water to steady your nerves.

But what you don't know is that none of this matters. The second your interviewer set eyes on you, they decided you looked so incompetent and untrustworthy that you would never get this job. Because unfortunately, they are one of a subset of people who new research shows have a disposition to judge extreme personality traits from just a quick view of a person's face.

But this can also, unfortunately, lead to stereotyping – for example, thinking that people with a particular physical characteristic must all be untrustworthy.



appearance.

In a series of online studies with more than 300 participants, Atsunobu Suzuki and colleagues found what they call "face-based trait inferences" (FBTIs). Basically, subjects made a series of personality judgments having taken a brief look at someone's face. While everyone makes FBTIs to some degree, they found that some people only make extreme judgments. This held even when the age, sex and ethnicity of participants were controlled for.

Imagine seeing a certain type of face, perhaps with hard eyes and

masculine features, and immediately getting the impression the person is extremely untrustworthy. Or that someone with more feminine features and larger eyes is incompetent. As Suzuki and colleagues say, this is problematic indeed.

Face up to the problem

We already know unconscious bias is rife in decision-making about new hires. A 2018 study sent separate versions of almost identical CVs to apply for 50 different jobs. The only difference was the name on the CV: Adam Smith on one and Ravindra Thalwal on the other. Ravindra

received about half of the responses compared with his more traditionally British sounding doppelgänger.

One of the leading figures in first impression research, Alexander Todorov, tells us these snap judgments are predictable but usually inaccurate. And we also know that first impressions are usually hard to shake. So this could mean the wrong people are frequently being hired for jobs.

The thing with unconscious bias is you don't realise you're doing it most of the time. It's one of the reasons some companies insist on un-

conscious bias training (although some people still refuse to do it). Unconscious bias training is not some fix-all remedy for discrimination, but even short interventions have been shown to change people's attitudes.

You can design unconscious bias training for prejudices against other physical characteristics such as race, gender and weight. But face-ism seems to be a stereotype that crosses ethnicities, the sexes and physical appearance.

One solution could be to make people aware that they exhibit extreme FBTIs by taking a test similar to the Suzuki experiment. Research has shown that being made aware of your biases can lead to a change of mindset in the short term, but people need extra interventions periodically to make any real behaviour change last.

Maybe just making someone aware that they make extreme personality judgments based on facial appearance will be enough to pull the unconscious bias into the conscious. We're certainly going to have to try; otherwise you might yourself be a victim of face-ism in the future.

(The Conversation)

A look at the Green Mediterranean diet

Diets can be taken up for a variety of reasons, including weight loss, weight gain, hormonal balancing, bodybuilding, and so on... but the final goal should be to maintain a balanced diet for optimal health and nutrition. Living in a world full of information and innovation, there is much to discover, so we explored the trending Green Mediterranean Diet, and compare it to other popular diets such as Keto, Vegan, and Atkins to see how it measures up.

Let's bite in to it and see what the buzz is about.

Green Mediterranean diet: Currently in vogue and the most "healthy diet" popular across the globe nowadays is the Mediterranean diet. This allows for the consumption of nuts, olive oil, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, and fish. It also permits the consumption of dark chocolate and red wine.

But according to recent research, a Mediterranean diet with a "Green" twist could potentially be more effective.

The Green Mediterranean diet is a variant of the Mediterranean diet and is inspired by the eating habits of people in Greece and Italy. Simply put, if you choose a green Mediterranean diet, you must eliminate red and processed meats and eat a lot more leafy green vegetables.

Atkins Diet: The Atkins diet is named after cardiologist Dr. Robert C. Atkins, it is a popular low-carbohydrate eating plan developed in the 1960s. The key to this Atkins diet plan is to avoid food with high carbs, eat as much protein and still lose weight.

While the green MED diet advises against red meat, the Atkins diet allows meat consumption, with the rest of the rules remaining the same on

eating habits.

Vegan Diet: The hospitality business has woken up to the growing popularity of the vegan lifestyle. Many people have adopted it as a result of mounting climate change and animal rights concerns. Vegan diets require less cropland than meat-based diets do, but aside from all the other resources that have an impact on the environment, the vegan lifestyle is also advantageous in terms of health benefits.

Vegans consume only plant-based foods, such as plant-based meat, fruits, greens, nuts, etc. The vegan diets major objectives is to promote weight loss and reduce cholesterol levels in order to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Ketogenic Diet: Dr. Russell Morse Wilder of the Mayo Clinic discovered the Ketogenic diet, also referred to as the "Keto diet." He also created the phrase "ketogenic diet" to describe a diet that encourages you to eat an excessive amount of fat and little to no carbohydrates, resulted in a high quantity of ketone bodies in the blood (ketonemia).

The ketogenic diet was first made available as an epileptic treatment in the 1920s. The diet program first had considerable popularity, but as antiepileptic drug therapy advanced, its use drastically decreased.

Today, people are using the Keto diet to burn fat while fasting and eating any high-fat foods they like, including red meat, fatty fish, nuts, cheese, and butter.

While there is much discussion among health-conscious individuals about the various diets that are advertised in the marketplace, it is important to first speak with your doctor and get guidance on the best diet you should follow. (IANSlife)

Beyond The Universe

By DC Pathak

Science is always in search of an equation for confirming a proposition while Philosophy rises above the details and reaches an empirical deduction through imagination.

Theories of universe combine science and philosophy- the latter inevitably bringing in the idea of God to fill in the unexplained blanks in the man's understanding of universe.

Philosophy sensed that time and space had no beginning or end- which was an attribute of God. Science is struggling with this interpretation but it has already moved to explore space and its lifespan which is a function of time.

It has not put a seal on any aspects of universe beyond the stipulation of scientists that space was still expanding. They have furnished 'infinity' as a part of equation on the advance of both space and time. Infinity can also be envisaged as the answer to what separates 'beginning' from the 'end'.

Seen from the presumed 'end', the point of 'origin' would also be away by infinity. Infinity is science's way of conceptually measuring 'infinite'.

Both space and time are on a course. The question is whether this course was irreversible. However, if something has no beginning nor an end then theoretically these two terminals have to merge to make the process reversible. Infinity is a step towards examining universe from this angle.

Infinity has received acceptance and recognition as an equation of science but has not yet offered an explanation of reversibility of an expanding universe or a retraction in the movement of time. The 'uncertainty' principle is another invention of science which acknowledges that in a non-static universe no positioning of any element thereof could be defined with certainty.

Now, if space has to be expanding in all possible directions and time also must free itself of a linear conceptualisation then science would have to explore how their beginning and end must merge. This merger would have the effect of accommodating both 'infinity' and 'uncertainty' and making the cosmos a constant.

In a sense, the entirety of time and space was equated by philosophy with an omnipresent God. What Science could look at is a theory that would embrace space and time in a 'constant' by using 'infinity' and 'uncertainty' as factors in the equation for proof.

Meanwhile, theories like the 'evolution' of species, 'relativity' and 'action evoking equal but opposite reaction', are all dealing with parts of the 'whole' that universe was. A fundamental discovery is that matter was indestructible - it can only change into energy - and the fact that 'stability' was rooted in high velocity circulatory 'movement' was the case with an atom on the inside.



'Relativity' does not demolish the theory of the absolute as it can exist within the cosmological constant. Equality of 'action' and 'reaction' is a part of the interplay of 'stability' and 'motion'. Even the established interdependence of flora and fauna is a fact which is essentially a detail about how life as a product of 'evolution', was managed.

Science has found answers to many subsidiary queries that arise in a discussion on universe. Hindu Philosophy used the adjective 'Anant' or 'without an end', for the universe - which is also applied to God. Science has to establish that seamless transition was possible between a 'beginning' and the 'end' in relation to space and time to get the universe to measure up to this description.

The challenge for science is that if it worked on a 'part' of the undefined 'whole' then the experiment would find it intrinsically difficult to totally explain the latter and reach definitive terms for that purpose.

This limitation of science can be overcome through imagination - Einstein, perhaps the greatest scientist of all times, famously said that "imagination is more important than knowledge".

In the case of universe, science has to prove that 'end was equal to beginning'. What is that journey that ends where it began from? It perhaps means that motion was an illusion and that what was seen or felt as a moment of the journey was a point that never in fact moves.

'Relativity' explained this at least partly. The thought that what you see is not the reality, is close to the Hindu spirituality's Maya - an illusion or a

dream - believed to be a manifestation of God.

Could a dream be examined by a person who had woken up to sense what part of the dream envisaged reality. The message was that examination of universe should help to focus on 'how it got created'.

Time and space are not measurable as they are everlasting and free from a beginning or an end and human endeavour to examine the universe from within is inherently handicapped but Science has managed to get a part answer in 'infinity' and 'uncertainty' which it has to use to construct the new equation that would link the points of 'origin' and 'termination'.

The remarkable Hindu thought of Pralaya or deluge not only defined an end of the universe but also saw in it its beginning. Again, the proven phenomenon of 'black hole' marks the interconversion of the 'seen' and the 'unseen'. Scientifically speaking since an atom had no length or breadth, any amount of matter can theoretically be condensed into 'nothingness'.

Scientists have thus reached quite a few answers to the puzzles of the universe and reduced the distance between the 'thought' and the 'reality'. The key lies in arriving at the interpretation of space and time that establishes their continuum.

Leading scientists of our times have struck a note of confidence and hope that the status of universe will be defined in scientific terms soon enough once an understanding of its origin in timelessness was reached.

Meanwhile, the power of meditative insight into the cosmos revealed by the ancient sages of India,

deserves a fresh acknowledgement and appreciation by the realm of science. The observation that 'Rome Rome mein Brahmmand hai' - there is an entire solar world in every particle of the body - was startlingly proven by the structure of the atom.

Similarly, the claim that someone could become invisible or 'antardhyan', seemingly is on all-fours with the discovery of science that 'matter' cannot be destroyed - it could only disappear by changing into 'energy'.

Also, the view that human body symbolising 'life' was a product of the five elements of nature - fire, water, earth, air and space - saw the assimilative link between cosmos and the manifestation of life.

In short, what the sage philosophers essentially realised was that universe was without a beginning or an end and that whatever was 'visible' was part of the invisible 'whole'.

Science is to get this meta-physical equation right notwithstanding the limitations of a human mind. Philosophy could be helping science to draw closer to a solution by stipulating that cosmological constant symbolised the 'singularity' of God - the latter representing the 'unseen' whole behind the 'visible' universe.

Universe will remain, in human thought, inseparable from God even after science confirms that universe was a continuum. Science and philosophy would be describing the same wholeness of universe by different names.

(The writer is a former Director of Intelligence Bureau. The views expressed are personal)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 4, 2022

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart. It will give mixed results to you. Take all investment related decisions wisely. There will be a pleasant event or incidence taking place in your life. You will get close to someone special and plan to marry him/her. You will obey the orders of your boss and will make good progress in your job. Your financial side will be strong. You will overcome tensions and confusion that you have with regard to your future. You will win battle in court cases. You will also take some important and solid decisions in your business. Your progress will be fast you will extend your helping hand for someone. You will learn new skills in your work. You will be aware of your potentials and chances for growth. Marriage of a family member will get fixed. You will plan to settle abroad permanently.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Some good news will cheer you up. You will feel delighted at pleasant turn of events. You will witness positive changes in your life. Your earnings too will rise. You will work with lot of passion and will get great results. Your bosses will take care of your needs. You will curtail your expenses and will keep your budget under control. You will share wonderful bonding with your mate. There will be happy atmosphere at home. You will be in a position to take right decisions. Students will perform well in their exams and will study hard. You will also be trying to improve your business situation.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This will be a favorable week for you. You will have a positive change of luck. Students will work hard and will get the results accordingly. Students will get admission in institutes of their liking and choice. You will have ample job opportunities to rise in your profession. You will have support of your bosses and colleagues. Your health will remain perfect. Your life partner will remain your biggest strength in your life. You will also plan to go on an outside trip. You will get full profits of your efforts in business. There will be sweetness in love affairs. You will also explore new avenues for growth in business.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

It will be a wonderful week for you. The time will be money gaining. You will be very cheerful. Students will get the results according to their expectations. You will be hopeful about your bright future. You will have plans to travel in your mind. There will be lovely relation between couples. You will share wonderful bonding. You will come up to the expectation of your bosses. You will remain committed in your work. You will have victory days for official work. You will also sign new business deals. Your income will grow. You will be able to solve your problems swiftly.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You will have money expenditure on luxury and comforts. But it will not bother you much as you desire to make your life smooth. Your government related matters will get resolved. You will take right decisions in your business with the support of your associates. Also don't make your personal views dominate your works. You know the art of right balancing and walking on the tight rope. Because of your gentle nature someone may try to take advantage of it but won't get success. Time is good to start new projects. Your life partner will remain happy with you.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Whatever work you plan will get finished in style. You will have profits and victory in your business/job. Money will never be a big problem. Your partner will also support you a lot. You will give your best contributions in your job and it will show. You will have the support of your friends and well wishers. Drive your vehicle carefully. Students will perform their job well. Married couples will have a loving relationship. You will search for additional sources of income. Lovebirds will have a great time in company of each other. You will concentrate on your business. You will be full of self confidence and will improve. You will have opportunities to rise in your business. There are chances that you will get the job that you have wished for. You will be busy in your work. The time will be energetic and increase your fame and success. Your success will make people envy you but that is not your headache. You will earn more as you put a lot that is not your headache. You will earn more as you put a lot that is not your headache. You will be blessed by teachers and parents. You will keep yourself fit by doing yoga and exercise. Lovebirds will have a great time.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There is possibility of unexpected profits. You will have to work hard and extensively to get success in business. You will also get a big job offer. There is possibility for growth in your job. You will enjoy your time with your friends. You will also plan to go out of station with your family. You will also get yourself

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

The start of the week will be fabulous. A sudden good news from somewhere will cheer you up. There are chances of sudden money profits in your business. You will also come out of a tight situation at your workplace. Your benefits will be manifold. You will also take care of your property related issues. No work will be left unfinished. You can be transferred in your job. Your partner will remain close to you. Do not trust anyone in financial matters. The time will be knowledge gaining. You will get success in love affairs. You will plan to get married. You will extend your circle of interest. Foes will be come your friends. You will get support of your family and friends. Financial conditions will be normal. You will get full credit for your work. Your elders will bless you.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

The time will be totally suitable. You will win the trust of your own people. There will be long travel possibilities. Students will concentrate on their studies. Your business will prosper and flourish. Your dreams will come true to your hard work. Your time will be good. Your health will remain perfect. You will be full of energy and enthusiasm. You will be emotionally strong. You will also do your work with full enthusiasm. Officers will help you. You will earn lot of money. You will give special importance to family and friends. You will remain balanced and grounded. Sudden expenses may upset you but you will take care. Moon will be peace gaining. You will gain mental strength and self confidence.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will witness peace and bliss in your life. Students will be little tensed but there is no need of it as their preparation is good and they will do well. Your hard work will pay you good results. You will be fully alert about your career and future. You will also have the support of your life partner and friends. You will improve your home scenario. Time will be profitable. You will progress at a fast speed. You will finish your struck works. There will be some interview coming up and you will prepare in advance. There will be success in government works. Time is suitable for lovers. Marriage could get finalized. You will purchase new items for house.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will be in a relaxed mood. You will also pay attention to yourself. Your family will support you. You will have a smooth life and will be happy with the way things are turning out for you. You will have lot of self confidence. Time will be suitable. You will have financial stability. Your work will get done at a fast speed. You will have respect and prosperity. You will be successful in business and job. You will do well in your job. There will be a feeling of stability in work. You will get material benefits. You will have a new member in your family and will have happiness from family ties.

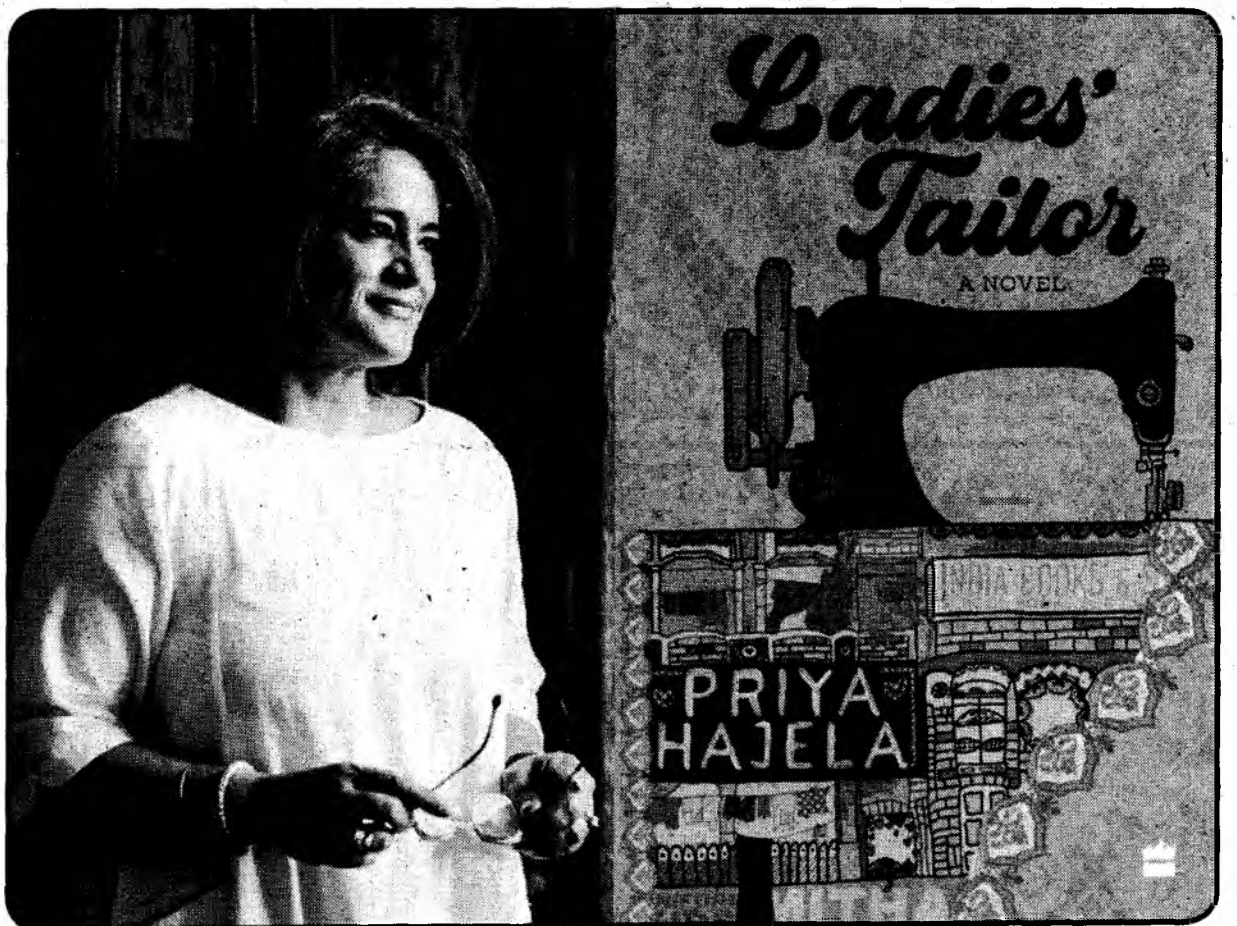
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will remain happy and in a relaxed mood this week. You will plan to go out of station with your family to enjoy your holidays. After a long time you will pay attention to yourself. Your family will support you. There will not be any additional work pressure. You will desire peace and solitude. You will have lot of self belief and confidence in your own abilities. You will have property gains. Legal matters will get resolved. You will wish to live your life in a grand way. You will be emotional meeting an old friend of yours. Do not indulge in over thinking. You will be meeting some inspiring person who will inspire you a lot. All the dispute and differences will be over. You will be full of energy and enthusiasm. Accept everything as God's gift.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Your travels will be pleasant. You will meet lot of persons and exchange your views with them. You will enjoy fruitful discussions. You will get lot of love and respect from all. You will receive a good news. You will have a strong will power for work. You will enlighten people with your wisdom. You will have faith in your own abilities. You will have a relaxing weekend with your family. You will plan to go out for movie, picnic or visit a restaurant. You will perform your tasks well. Your image will be shining in your family. You will focus on your work.

Ladies' Tailor a story of hope, ambition and starting afresh



Journey back in time and experience the refugee spirit as Priya Hajela's *Ladies' Tailor* (HarperCollins) captures you with all its romance, adventure and one mans iron will to not just survive, but thrive with new beginnings.

This is a story that captures a setting and a group of characters that represent the immigrant spirit, the refugee spirit, the spirit of never giving up on what you want and a spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship that to this day is the driving force in Delhi and Punjab.

Ladies' Tailor is a book about Gurdev and his cohort, a group of refugees who travelled east from Pakistan after Partition.

It is a story of falling apart and coming together. It is also a story of that which was torn

asunder and will never be one again — a marriage, a country, a friendship.

The story will take you back in time and catch you by the scruff till your uncertain feet hang off the floor. It will also bring you back to the normalcy of fit and fashion, and of fabric and style.

It will let you settle in and get comfortable with Gurdev and Noor's romance and then take you on a speedy adventure in fast American cars behind enemy lines.

"It's not what sets us apart but what brings us together that's important. How we resist the forces that are intent on separating us is what defines us. How we recover from past transgressions is what carries us forward. *Ladies' Tailor* takes a resolute look at stumbling and making amends, at holding

close and letting go and at turning back in order to move on," says Hajela.

This is a gripping and deeply moving story about reviving humanity in inhuman times and it keeps you floating in the emotions.

Priya Hajela is a fiction writer who lives in Pune and Goa with her husband and two dogs. Her son is a journalist and her daughter is in college in the US. She graduated with an MFA in creative writing from Goddard College in Vermont in 2017 after a 22-year career in the corporate world.

She has written and published several short stories — *An Affair*, *The Tattoo Artist* and *Daughters' Revenge*. She also writes regular lifestyle features for *The Daily Guardian*, Delhi. (IANS)

"Environmental pollution is an incurable disease. It can only be prevented."

—Barry Commoner

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 118 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2022

People and parliament

THE three-week Winter Session of Parliament that started on Wednesday could perhaps be the last session under the same roof of the circular, 95-year-old, two-storied building built by the British Raj as the central legislative assembly complex. A new parliament building and complex under the Central Vista project is almost ready. It is likely the next Budget Session will be held there. The 13,500 crore project that started in 2019, also with residences for the PM and VP, is set for completion in 2026

The nation is at a turning point. This is time for the political class to think anew about the way the Parliament should conduct its business. Political interests must take the back seat and national interests gain precedence. Unfortunately, the reverse is the norm. Most days see the sittings disrupted by noisy "protests" with the result bills are passed and legislations made in a jiffy without the members putting their heads together or discussing matters threadbare. Each hour of parliament means an expenditure of 2.50 crore from the exchequer, or a huge sum of 20 crore a day, which is "drowned" mostly in the cacophony of protests, politically loaded arguments and counter-arguments. With television sets beaming the proceedings, this should not degenerate into a show-off. Such temptations may best be avoided. The Monsoon Session of Lok Sabha had a productivity of less than 50 per cent and Rajya Sabha around 40 per cent. The rest of the time was a washout. The Rajya Sabha met for 38 hours while 47 hours were drowned in disruptions. The Budget Session was about facts and figures, and it did good business. Former presidents and vice presidents have expressed serious concern over the tendency for disruptions but this has become part of this nation's parliamentary/legislative culture. In fact, a scenario is gradually shaping up wherein anyone with clout can get away with their act in any field of public activity.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, a seasoned parliamentarian, has stated on the eve of the present session, "If laws are made in haste, then they attract judicial scrutiny. Therefore, we expect that all important bills are referred to joint/select committees, so that they are carefully examined. We are ready to extend full cooperation in parliamentary processes and debates." The government is seen avoiding legislative scrutiny and taking undue advantage of the "disinterest" in the opposition benches for discussions. Bills are often passed without discussions. When laws are made this way, as Kharge noted, courts pick holes in them and even squash them. It is time both sides "work for the people."

Letters to the Editor

Government's indifference to students' plight

Editor,
The fact that this present MDA government is indifferent to the plight of students is evident from the fact that the students' scholarship had been pending for years. Recently, an amount was released by the government and disbursed to the students. However, only a few students received the scholarships. What about the rest who are anxiously waiting for their due share? Is this gesture of the government a sort of eyewash or an attempt to fool the public? If the government is intent on clearing the scholarships of students, it should do it for all. This part disbursement is only creating bad feelings among students.

In a family where there are three children studying, only one receives scholarship what would the other two feel? This is unnecessarily creating an air of unease in society. It arouses jealousy among those who are deprived of the benefit. If students of other tribal states like Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal or Mizoram are receiving regular scholarships and that too an amount much higher than what our Meghalayan students receive, it means that there is an allotted amount for scholarships with the government. How come our students are treated in this manner, deprived even of their rightful dues? This speaks volume of the government's apathy towards students and towards education in general. This attitude becomes evident in the fact that this government does not consider it a priority to establish a state university at the

The Mukroh horror: The 'We only' attitude can go haywire

By Albert Thyriang

After the unfortunate Mukroh incident normalcy is almost back. The firing, killing six persons and injuring many others, almost soured the relations between Assam and Meghalaya at a time when both states are engaged in parleys to settle the five decade old border dispute. Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma may state otherwise but the root cause of the Mukroh shooting is the thorny border impasse. Assam considers Mukroh part of West Karbi Anglong while Meghalaya insists the village is its own. Assam has set up a forest check gate near Mukroh which Meghalaya claims is within its territory.

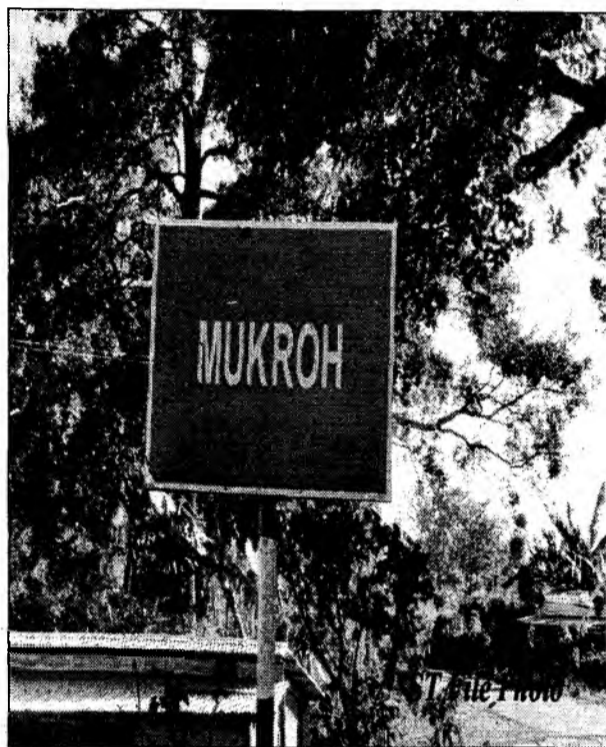
Soon after the sensational shooting, claims and counter claims emerged. In Meghalaya the reports were that the Assam forest guards pursued a truck carrying timber from the village forests. Assam insisted the occupants of the truck were smugglers. Those killed were alleged to be wood lifters. In Meghalaya people accused the Assam police and the foresters of unprovoked firing while the Assam officers defended it, insisting the firing was in self-defence. Reports emanating from Meghalaya claimed the spot of occurrence is well within West Jaintia Hills District of Laskein Block and hence Assam personnel had no business being there while Assam is sure that the location is in its constitutional boundary. That is the reason the OC of Jrikyndeng did not refer to his counterpart in the Meghalaya side. Hence the border issue is both the remote and immediate cause. Reportedly the people of Mukroh have been facing constant harassment from guards at the forest gate near the village. Anger was accumulated for a period of time.

The truth lies somewhere in the middle. From reliable sources it is confirmed that deceased were not smugglers (certainly not all). Secondly, the firing was not totally unprovoked. Sources also say everything was about to be settled. The village leaders and a local Member of Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) were assured that 'captives' would be released. However, all of a sudden there was a provocation by someone which triggered the abrupt firing. Smuggling of wood in the area is also a reality.

The longstanding boundary dispute between the neighbouring states is due to the complicated boundary definition. The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 failed to assign a clear boundary not only to Meghalaya but also to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. The Act of parliament that provides for the establishment of the states of Manipur, Tripura and the formation of the State of Meghalaya and the Union territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh leaves a legacy of disputes between the 'mother' state, Assam and

its 'children'. Specifically with respect to Meghalaya, No. 5 of the Act states that the boundary of the Meghalaya shall be 'the territories that comprised the autonomous State of Meghalaya formed under section 3 of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 (55 of 1969)' which in turn reads, 'Meghalaya shall comprise of tribal areas of the United Khasi Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District.' The United Khasi Jaintia Hills District is defined by sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. To make it simpler the Sixth Schedule states that

(now Karbi Anglong) district. Following an act of the Assembly, the Assam government issued two notifications on April 13, 1951 tagging the two Blocks to Karbi Anglong for administrative convenience. Meghalaya rejects the forceful move contending the areas originally belong to its districts, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Studies have to be made as to why the notifications were issued. Some see it as a step to preserve Kaziranga which was declared a wildlife sanctuary 1950. Allegedly the population in and around the now national park and UNESCO designated World Heritage site were



the area of the United Khasi Jaintia Hills District constitutes the 'kingdoms' of the 25 Khasi states who signed the Instrument of Accession to join with the Indian union in 1947. The United Khasi Jaintia Hills District was later bifurcated into Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC). In Garo Hills there is Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC). The areas of these ADCs basically form Meghalaya's constitutional boundary.

The matter should have been settled there. There should not be any more dispute. But that is not the case. The hill state asserts that the territories of the 'Syiems' extend to the areas claimed by Assam. Denying any encroachment, Assam, on the other hand, says Meghalaya has no record to back its claims. Rendered powerless, the 'Syiems' probably were unable to protect their territories. It did not help that post-Independence Assam administered Meghalaya too. Therefore, we now have the 12 areas of differences (probably more) along the 885 km shared border.

A major part of the dispute stems from the 1951 committee's recommendations headed by the then Assam chief minister, Gopinath Bordoloi seeking the transfer of Block I and II of Jaintia Hills to the then Mikir Hills

given compensation in areas included in Mikir Hills.

The KHADC might have passed a resolution urging the re-transfer of Block-I and II areas to Meghalaya. Groups like the JSU might have also demanded for the same but to resolve the issue is hard. Karbi Anglong will oppose vehemently any move of a re-transfer. However, for a long lasting peace and co-existence probably the best and the wisest approach is the give and take policy. During my two year of stay in Umswai (Block I, 36 km from Mawlasnai), I heard stories of how the Jaintia king used to come once a year in a horse cart to collect taxes from his subjects. As the article the other day indicates practically the whole of the West Karbi Anglong might have been once under the Jaintia kingdom. Names of villages, places, hills, rivers, etc., suggest that. However, it would be unwise to expect that the whole of it is re-attached to Meghalaya. It will simply not happen. It is much more convenient for Umswai villages and many others to remain in Assam. One important note! Nepali villages have come up along the border because of the Shillong violence exodus in 1979 and after. Are we willing to embrace the people we persecuted and committed crimes against? However, Pnar villages in Block I and Khasi villages in Block II are willing to

belong to Meghalaya. It takes large hearts from both sides to make adjustments for a bigger cause. Disputes of two states cannot hold innocent people to ransom denying them their rights.

In the past both the state governments made attempts to resolve the stalemate. No tangible outcomes emerged. In July 2021 headway was made when Meghalaya chief minister, Conrad K Sangma and his Assam counterpart, Himanta Biswa Sarma agreed to move beyond the 'status quo'. The 'easier' six out of 12 areas were taken up. The fruit of the constituted Regional committees that went to the ground for consultations was the MoU signed on 29 March, 2022 between Assam and Meghalaya before union home minister Amit Shah in New Delhi.

The second phase to resolve the remaining six areas including the complicated Block I and II and Langpih were to commence soon. The Mukroh firing will delay the process as the chief minister indicated.

The New Delhi pact was considered as a major achievement of the NPP-led MDA and the BJP government in Meghalaya and Assam respectively. While the Meghalaya CM hailed the agreement as 'historic' his Assam counterpart called on other states in dispute to emulate the two eastern states. Inside and outside the Assemblies both stated that only their government have achieved the impossible and declared in uncertain term to complete the process before 2024 as desired by the Prime Minister. In Meghalaya the target was before the Assembly election 2023.

Amidst protests and dissatisfaction that many Meghalaya villages were 'handed' over to Assam, the allegations that all stakeholders were not consulted, the demand to revisit the memorandum, the CM stood firm. The party that takes most of the credit is the NPP. Party functionaries brag that only its government has accomplished what others have failed. The idea is to take mileage before the February 2023 polls. The plan was to claim that only someone and during his term of office that the border issue are resolved once and for all. It was an over-ambitious move to settle the long and complicated dispute in two years. Now the chief minister and his party plead that politics be kept out of the border, but it was they who began politicising it in the first place.

The attitude of indispensability can go haywire. The state government had to deal with the tense situation, unjustifiably resort to internet shutdown, faced the wrath of agitating groups, cancelled all festivals, contended with the 'embargo' of Assam vehicles, bore the fuel shortage. The 'me alone' mentality and self-glorification has many lessons to teach us. Hopefully, we learn the lesson of interdependence.

On fair Government recruitment

Editor
The contents of a letter under the heading "FSO exam outside the syllabus" (ST, December 7, 2022) if true should disturb everyone concerned. For candidates who have to answer questions outside the declared syllabus is nothing short of a flagrant breach of trust by a government commission set up to conduct fair and transparent recruitment. To clarify that "information about the syllabus was not passed to the question paper setter and the question was set at the highest level," indicates the highest level of callousness and inefficiency. So, to restore some semblance of justice the candidates should demand that the exam be reconducted. But I doubt this will happen

because our young people are too docile and usually vent their frustration when they are among themselves.

On another note: recently we saw an advertisement for 86 contractual posts of junior engineers. Think about it.. 86 posts! Hence, one cannot rule out the possibility that these were initially sanctioned posts or posts rendered vacant through retirements and therefore should be filled up as regular posts. We expect those who demand for an employment policy to dig deep into this or have they lost steam and become lethargic?
Yours etc.,
Samuel Sweet
Shillong - 2.

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.

The election manifesto as a guide to governance

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

In the Meghalaya MLA/MDC/MP elections of recent years, the election manifesto has become less significant or of no significance at all. The number of people who talk about it and especially seek and read it has declined manifold. Perhaps, this is the main reason why the political parties do not give much importance to it. Even if importance is given, the election manifesto is prepared as a mere formality for photo-ops and publicity only. The parties know that hardly anyone will give it a serious thought. The voters too have resigned to the fact that the document is not meant as an implementation and/or monitoring tool. As a result, we tend to know less about the real intentions of the parties and how they plan to operate if in government. It is time to reverse the trend and tell the political parties to get serious on this matter.

To start with, an election manifesto represents the brains of a political party in the context of a particular state/region. It underlines the vision, mission, values and purpose of a party. It also specifically delineates its principles and goals. It mentions specifically how it plans to govern on critical sectors like education, health, youth affairs, sports, environmental protection, law and order, peace and security, etc. The formulation of the action plans requires ground research for them to be valid and reliable. This is what the voters are missing out on if the subject-matter of an election manifesto ceases to be taken seriously. There will be less information on the stand and policies of the political parties on important issues. It is to be noted that no political party remains the same; they always change and evolve with time. In such a case, how are we supposed to compare and vote? It is generally observed that in Meghalaya the voters vote on the basis of the qualities of a candidate and not the party. But, looking at the manner in which the sitting MLAs are changing parties, it would be fair to argue that the age old trend is starting to change drastically. It is because of this situation that the election manifesto has become imperative. There is always talk about being an informed voter. In the absence of a manifesto, how would you be informed about a political party's intent?

In the elections of recent years, it is found that the quality of discourse in campaign meetings has declined. There is less talk on important issues and more on demeaning and deriding the rival candidates. The voters who attend such meetings become mere spectators to some monologue with no scope to counter-question. Many enjoy the bric-a-brac which the candidates throw at each other. Music and dance is everywhere. It is just a futile exercise.

This is what happens when there is no election manifesto. There is no basis for what the candidate/party says and there is no scope for cross-checking. There is no way to evaluate what the sitting candidate/government did during its term of office. When you cannot speak about the past then how can you talk about the future? This gap is to be bridged by an election manifesto. The optimum way of moving forward is that no candidate/party shall be allowed to campaign unless they have a well-drawn out manifesto. When they speak they must do so on the basis of their own manifesto and that of the rival candidates. No character assassination must be allowed. Most importantly, they must not be allowed to talk about what they will do in future and make vague promises until and unless

there is a constituency-wise evaluation of what has been done in the last term. As voters, it is time to get radical!

The generic form of an election manifesto is that it contains policies, promises and plans of a party which would be implemented when it comes to power. It is time to tweak this understanding. Just mere statements are not enough. The party must mention the strategies for implementation. A common statement made in the election manifestos of all the political parties is about 'making education and health sectors of Meghalaya better'. It is important to lay down the strategies of how they will be made better? For every promise, there must be a well-defined strategy of implementation. In education, mention what is going to be done about dilapidated educational infrastructure, grants to aided institutions, timely payment of salary to teachers, upgradation of syllabi, implementation of national education policy, 2020, etc. In health, mention what is going to be done about opening of more PHCs, upgrade of PHCs to CHCs, problems with mid-day meals in schools, etc. Then only will things change. Beyond that, the voters and the people at large must actively take part in holding the candidates and parties accountable. This starts with reading and analysing the manifestos of all the parties as and when they are out. Study the current manifestos in relation to the earlier manifesto and what has happened in Meghalaya in the last five years. In the process, it will not be surprising to find our choice of candidate/party changing.

There is also a need to change the means by which an election manifesto is circulated to the public. In addition to the print document, it would be better if it is also circulated in electronic form. Plus, make the manifesto multilingual. It would be even better if they are also made in the form of info-graphics and video clips. Those who find difficulty in reading can learn a lot through the video clips. We are yet to see a political party which in addition to its own manifesto releases 'another document/clip' which compares its manifesto with the others. Or are the parties scared of over-selling themselves by involving in such an exercise? If that be the case then they have no reason to be in politics. An election manifesto is a guide to governance. The only way to have good governance is to have checks and balances. This can only be achieved if there is a tool to evaluate and monitor performance; a tool which act as a link between the past and future. The long-ignored election manifesto is that tool. It has been hiding in plain sight from the voters. It is time to recognise its value.

In the end, all of the above can be achieved only if the political parties are discouraged from releasing their manifestos at the last moment. In the previous elections it is found that most parties releases them only a few days before polling. How are the voters supposed to read and analyse it? It is a ploy being played by all the political parties just to gain publicity. It would be better if the voters demand from the parties that the manifestos be released by December, 2022 end, so that by the time the election happens in last week February/early March, 2023, the voters would have had enough time to go through it and make an informed decision.

(The writer teaches at NEHU; Email - benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in)

*"To cherish what remains of the Earth
and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate
hope of survival."*

— Wendell Berry

The Shillong Times

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Coal issue: State as offender

THE illegal mining of coal has never stopped since 2014 when the National Green Tribunal banned rat hole mining on account of the pollution it was causing to downstream residents in Assam who depend on rivers flowing from Jaintia Hills for their sustenance. Also rat hole mining violates the human rights of coal miners, many of whom have been buried alive due to sudden flooding of mines. Many of these cases have gone unreported until 15 coal miners were buried alive inside a coal mine in Ksan, East Jaintia Hills in November 2018. Since then the NGT has tried in vain to bring to light the illegal coal mining which flouts all environmental norms and violates the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Act 1957. This Act was further amended in March 2021 thereby lowering the bar in mining regulations. The amended Act removes the distinction between captive mines reserved for end use and non-captive mines. The Act allows captive mines to sell up to 50% of annual mineral production in the open market after meeting their own needs.

Further there is provision for a statutory body—the National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) which will oversee the functioning of the mining sector. The Act introduces an index-based mechanism by developing a National Mineral Index (NMI) to be used for various statutory payments and for future auctions. In the old Act when the mining lease is transferred to a new lessee the statutory clearances issued to the previous lessee are transferred for a period of two years only. The new lessee needs to obtain fresh clearances within the two years. The amended Act changes this provision. It makes the transferred statutory clearances valid throughout the lease period of the new lessee.

Under the amended Act the participation of private players in mining operations with enhanced technology is permitted. Most importantly, if the State Government is not able to complete the auction process within a specified time, the Central Government may take over and conduct such an auction. The Act also says that mines (other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) whose lease has expired, may be allocated to a government company in certain cases. With so many concessions having been made it is ironic that the Government of Meghalaya is resistant to adopting the MMDR Act and legalising the coal trade simply because it wants to appease the coal mafia in the Government. Even the continued operation of the coke units and ferro-alloy plants show that coal is being mined illegally and that all presentations made before the High Court are facetious. When the State turns rogue the judiciary has to blow the whistle.

Letters to the Editor

BJP's flip-flop drama in Meghalaya

Editor,
I watched the local online news channels yesterday where the Meghalaya BJP President, Ernest Mawrie is finding fault with the FOCUS and PRIME programmes initiated by the NPP-led MDA Government of which the BJP is an integral part. This means that the BJP too can distribute the same freebies to its constituents if it wishes to. In fact, Conrad Sangma must be praised for having the political acumen to distribute all these freebies since the past six months or so. Now people are used to getting free money so they will definitely vote the NPP back to power. There is no doubt about that. Who doesn't want money that is not accounted for? The BJP President claims that the NPP is using the resources pumped in by the Modi Government and therefore cannot

claim credit for the schemes. Mawrie should know that all the money in the public treasury comes from tax payers and from GST apart from other revenue channels to which the states are also entitled to get their share in a federal system.

This blame game being played among the coalition partners at the flag end of the MDA government fools no one. The BJP is as much to be blamed for all the scams in the past five years just as it will also earn praise for what the MDA government has achieved. So the BJP and its cohorts should not take the voting public of Meghalaya to be so dim-witted that they can be fooled again and again.

The Meghalaya BJP President also gave a press briefing about the elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh as if people don't know how to judge the election results without him educating us. He of course did not speak about the MCD polls in Delhi which the AAP swept. And when asked as to how the BJP can keep

FIFA World Cup 2022: Why it will be memorable and significant

By Thanggoulen Kipgen

The FIFA World Cup 2022 kicked off in the Al Bayt Stadium in Qatar on November 20, 2022, as the thirty-minute Opening Ceremony wowed billions of football fans worldwide. A number of distinguished guests and celebrities attended the ceremony, including Oscar-winning actor Morgan Freeman, K-pop star Jung Kook from BTS, South Korea, and our very own Vice-President of India, Jagdeep Dhankar. The opening exchange between Freeman and the young Qatari Ghanim Al-Muftah highlights the power of football to bring people of diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds together. Freeman stated, "What unites us is greater than what divides us. We are one big tribe, and the Earth is our tent. Together, we can make the call for everyone to unite."

Twelve years since it received hosting rights, Qatar has been in the spotlight for a variety of reasons. From the exponential expenditure incurred on developing infrastructure, amounting to more than 200 billion dollars, to criticisms over the plight of the migrant workers involved in the construction of stadiums, a poor record on LGBTQ+ rights, and purported corruption involved during the bidding process, the 2022 World Cup has been a nightmare for its host, Qatar. Despite all these issues and concerns, the tournament also offers lots of excitement and zeal.

First, this World Cup is historic, as the largest sporting event in the world has finally arrived in the Middle East and Arab world. Al Jazeera reported, "It is our time to shine." Time magazine asserts that this World Cup provides a rare time of Arab unity. It is a major occasion for the unification of an area that shares deep linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions, but is plagued by political partisanship.

Second, it is the largest sporting event post-pandemic. The postponed 2022 Tokyo Olympics concluded with a number of restrictions and constraints. The absence of spectators, the prohibition on singing and chanting during competitions, and the requirement that all competitors wear masks at all times rendered the event unpopular and disappointing in many ways. After two years of combating the COVID pandemic with rigorous measures in the form of lockdowns and social distancing, this World Cup allows people of different ethnicities, cultures, genders, races, and ages the opportunity to overcome isolation and unite in celebration of the sport.

Third, this quadrennial competition will be the "fi-

nal hurrah" for several of the sport's greatest legends. Some of the biggest stars in the sport, including Neymar Jr, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Karim Benzema, Manuel Neuer, Luka Modric, Robert Lewandowski, Sergio Busquets, and Thiago Silva, will dance in their final moments. The potential absence of these talents at the subsequent World Cup makes this year all the more significant and exciting. The 2022 FIFA World Cup will undoubtedly be unique and historically significant.

Fourth, Jungkook, a 24-year-old member of BTS, sang the official FIFA song, "Dreamers," making him the first Asian artist to perform the official FIFA anthem. The BTS fanbase, commonly known as the BTS ARMY, has been effusive in its admiration of Jungkook's

performance. "Dreamers" also broke the record for the fastest official FIFA World Cup song to reach number one on the iTunes Top Songs chart in at least 102 countries. Spectators around the world cheered not just to celebrate BTS, but also to celebrate the rising profile of Asian talents and excellence.



Last but not least, with rumours that Al-Nassr, a Saudi Arabian club, has given Cristiano Ronaldo a massive contract, the Ronaldo-Messi rivalry in world football is likely to end in Qatar. Assuming this transfer goes through, Ronaldo and Messi will never face each other in a major tournament again until the 2026 World Cup. Both Ronaldo (now 37) and Messi (now 35) are probably too old to play in the next tournament. If destiny is on our side, Portugal and Argentina will face each other in the Final if they win all their remaining matches. Who deserves to be called the GOAT, the Greatest Of All Time? Let the whole world see and judge for themselves.

FIFA World Cup and India
India qualified for the 1950 FIFA World Cup but did not compete for unknown reasons. One explanation was that India did not view the FIFA World Cup as a priority since it was more

interested in competing in the 1951 Asian Games and the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. The second excuse was that there were insufficient funds to travel to Brazil, which seems implausible given that FIFA was willing to cover the trip expenses. Another story stated that FIFA prohibited the Indian squad from playing without footwear. Since 1950, India has not qualified for the World Cup for whatever reason.

Historically, India had performed well in international competitions, reaching the Olympic semi-finals in 1956, winning gold at the Asian Games in 1962, placing third in 1958 and second in 1970, and coming second in the AFC Asian Cup in 1964. After the 1980s, there was a gradual decline in football in India. The rise of cricket and India's victory in

the 1983 cricket world cup was a major factor. As one of the authors of "Awakening the Blue Tigers," Gaurav Gala, explained: "Winning the 1983 Cricket World Cup in England was a major turning point for the sport in India. Four years later, we hosted the World Cup in India, which brought it to the attention of the Indian public". In India, cricket eventually supplanted all other sports. Today, India has a FIFA ranking of 106, which is significantly lower than Iran (20), Japan (24), South Korea (28), Qatar (50), and Saudi Arabia (51), which represented Asia in this competition.

Every football fan wants to know, "When will India, called 'the Blue Tigers,' compete in the World Cup?" India has an abundance of football talents and a huge fan base. During each world cup, one can observe a large fan base that supports countries such as Argentina, Portugal, Germany, and Brasil, among others, and would do anything to demonstrate their devotion for the game. This year in Kerala, a group of friends purchased an old house for Rs 23 lakh in order to watch the World Cup together; a brawl broke out between Brazil and Argentina fans and loyalists erecting enormous cutouts

of Neymar, Ronaldo, and Messi. In the Northeast, hundreds of supporters donning jerseys of their favourite player and country participated in rallies, and offered Christian prayers for their favourite player and team. Even though India is not a participating squad, one may be astonished by the level of football enthusiasm in India.

Despite its current state, Indian football has plenty of potential for improvement. Firstly, India has a population of 1.4 billion, therefore picking the best talents to represent the country shouldn't be difficult. Secondly, the country already has the kind of passion and love for the game that is most evident during every World Cup; all it needs is a trigger and a "road map" to realise this dream. Does India need a trigger to change the course of football the way it did for cricket when they won the World Cup in 1983 or when they hosted the Cricket World Cup in 1987? With installation of the new All India Football Federation (AIFF) leadership recently after FIFA's suspension and the 'road map' for Indian football to be completed by December 2022, Indian football is at a pivotal juncture.

Indian youths may be encouraged to pursue a career in football by the recent success of the Indian Super League (ISL) and the substantial investment in clubs and players. FIFA is also taking an active interest in fostering football's growth in India, knowing well that participation of a country like India in the World Cup will only benefit the sport. Developing fundamental infrastructures like training facilities, youth academies, and state-of-the-art stadiums; training and licensing coaches and match officials; establishing full-fledged junior and senior leagues; and promoting women's football are essential for the growth of football in India.

The existing five spots for the Asian region at the World Cup will be boosted by three more additions for the subsequent event, providing India with a great opportunity to qualify. The country's estimated 200 million football fans would love to cheer for the Blue Tigers at the 2030 World Cup, if not in 2026. All Indians eagerly anticipate the day when they will be able to root for their own country in the world's greatest sporting event. To that end, every Indian hopes that the dream of the Indian football fan who held a banner reading "India Will Play in the World Cup One Day" during a match in Qatar comes true.

*Thanggoulen Kipgen
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has won the elections in Himachal Pradesh but the state has only four parliamentary seats and voters have a different approach for the parliament elections. We have the example of Delhi where BJP had won all the seats in parliament in 2014 and 2019 whereas in the assembly elections AAP won with a thumping majority. AAP is now a national party and it is gradually being considered as a natural replacement for the Congress party. In fact, it will definitely dent the prospects of the Congress party everywhere where it contests the 2024 elections. Finally we can say that the election results have changed the entire political scenario and also proved that our country is a mature democracy.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Jalandhar - 03

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

BJP's big victory in Gujarat all due to Congress lapses

Coming Lok Sabha polls in 2024 are sure to witness bitter fight against saffrons

By Sushil Kutty

Gujarat for Bharatiya Janata Party. Himachal Pradesh went to Congress. Does that spell equal=equal, overall, neither party won, neither party lost? Delhi's 'Big Boss' Aam Aadmi Party failed at both places. And that will rankle. One day right on top of the world, the other day, down in the dumps! Just like the freebies, gone in two minutes!

The big thing is everybody has got something to brag about. The road for 2024 is getting laid and everybody in the reckoning is heading straight for the reckoning. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi has his two "PM terms", AAP is already positioning Arvind Kejriwal as 'Challenger No.1'. The only one away from the madding crowd is Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on his 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'.

That said there is the Delhi story, the Gujarat story and the Himachal story. On December 8, Bilkis Bano lost. It did not matter to the electorate of Gujarat that Bilkis rapists walked free. It did not matter that over 100 were killed in Morbi. It did not matter that Home Minis-

ter Amit Shah resurrected a dark chapter with "we taught them a lesson in 2002".

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The majority of Gujarati Hindus were all for rewarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP with the biggest ever electoral victory. The BJP took the fullest advantage of playing the victim card along with the Hindutva card; claiming that everybody and nobody, had all ganged up against the "people of Gujarat", and were "besmirching Gujarat" and Gujarat all around the world.

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Harry and Meghan: What the first episodes reveal about Meghan's reputation within the royal family

By Laura Clancy

As an expert in the contemporary British monarchy, I watched the first three episodes of *The Duke and Duchess of Sussex's new Netflix docuseries, Harry & Meghan*, closely.

What came across most was how Meghan's gender, race and class intersected in her treatment both by the media and by "the Firm" (an unofficial nickname for the British monarchy and its staff that describes the institution as a business) itself.

As with their 2021 Oprah interview, this documentary is a forum for the couple to account for their treatment by the Firm. These kinds of royal confessionals risk damaging the monarchy, as they cast a light "behind the scenes" of an institution which relies on magic and majesty to maintain its image.

PATRIARCHY AND WOMEN'S BODIES

Princess Diana's traumas in the royal family have been well covered over the decades, including by the Panorama documentary she used to tell her own story in 1995. Like Meghan, Diana spoke about her mental health and a lack of support from the Firm. *Harry & Meghan* also makes comparisons between Diana and Meghan, claiming that both women were hounded by the paparazzi throughout their royal lives.

Meghan talks about "men sitting in cars all the time" outside her house, waiting for her to leave. In any other situation, she says, this would amount to stalking. As Meghan mentions, gender matters here. Celebrities like Britney Spears have spoken out about the unique pressures women face from tabloid intrusion.

The economy surrounding these women encompasses multiple industries, from cosmetic surgery to fashion brands, who benefit from paparazzi exploitation. Britney Spears' body became an economy in itself as paparazzi pictures of her were worth so much money.

For royal women, this takes on a new imperative. The monarchy is reliant on women's bodies for its reproduction – literally, the reproduction of heirs. Royal women's bodies are fetishised as reproductive of the nation, as they birth the next "symbol" of Britishness. This also accounts for the hidden



meaning behind those questions from within the royal family about the colour of Archie's skin – they are asking how "British" (or rather, how white) her baby might look.

It is not just about clothing and branding, but about how royal women's bodies take on meaning that connects femininity and the nation. This is a patriarchal institution that uses women's bodies for its own ends.

RESPECTABILITY POLITICS

As the documentary shows, for Meghan this is not just about gender. Race and class come to play a part in the intersectional pressures she was placed

under. Headlines like the Daily Mail's "(Almost) Straight Outta Compton" are discussed as evidence of the racist coverage of the early days of the couple's relationship.

Meghan also mentions the Firm's discomfort with her acting career. She explains that there are assumptions made about Hollywood and the people who work in it. Acting is seen as too déclassé a profession to marry into the royal family, despite the fact that the Firm operates like a celebrity industry in and of itself.

Around the time of their wedding, tabloids were also representing Meghan's father's (Thomas Markle) side of the family in ways reminiscent

of "white trash" discourses. "White trash" is an American slur (equivalent to the UK's "chav") for an abject working class figure.

The Daily Mail reported on Meghan's aunt and cousin spending the royal wedding wearing cardboard browns in a Burger King, a fast food chain associated with working-class stereotypes. Their meal was positioned in contrast to the upper class and aspirational one taking place at the same time in Windsor.

Black studies scholars like Brittney Cooper have referred to condemnation of the actions of people of colour as "respectability politics". Inclusion into typically white spaces is undertaken through observing white, middle class norms, including being "mainstream, articulate, and clean cut, black but not too black, friendly, upbeat, and accommodating".

Of course, the Firm is perhaps the pinnacle of "respectable": an institution enshrined as the peak of British society. The racism which has plagued Meghan, and the fact she was never allowed to achieve racial uplift, demonstrates how whiteness, gender and upper classness are used to police the boundaries of respectability.

FEMININITY AND THE NATION

Women in the royal family are always subject to more pervasive attention than the men. Princess Diana and Kate Middleton have received intense scrutiny, from what they say and wear to speculation about what's going on in their wombs.

As Harry points out in the documentary, though, Meghan's situation was unique. Meghan's story tells us something fundamental about the British monarchy's relationship to patriarchy and whiteness, and how the two are inseparable.

And media scholar Raka Shome writes in her book, *Diana and Beyond*, white femininity "is always a doing and not a being. It is always pushed and pulled, routed and rerouted to script national desires."

The hounding of Meghan is one site of this push and pull. The scripts of white femininity, and therefore of nation, were fought and continue to be fought, over representations of her. (*The Conversation*)

(The author is a lecturer in Media at Lancaster University)

Pandoravirus: Melting Arctic is releasing ancient germs



Scientists have recently revived several large viruses that had been buried in the frozen Siberian ground (permafrost) for tens of thousands of years. The youngest virus to be revived was a sprightly 27,000 years old. And the oldest – a Pandoravirus – was around 48,500 years old. This is the oldest virus ever to have been revived.

As the world continues to warm, the thawing permafrost is releasing organic matter that has been frozen for millennia, including bacteria and viruses – some that can still reproduce.

This latest work was by a group of scientists from France, Germany and Russia; they managed to reanimate 13 viruses – with such exotic names as Pandoravirus and Pacmanvirus – drawn from seven samples of Siberian permafrost.

Assuming that the samples were not contaminated during extraction (always difficult to guarantee) these would indeed represent viable viruses that had previously only replicated tens of thousands of years ago.

This is not the first time that a

viable virus has been detected in permafrost samples. Earlier studies have reported the detection of a Pithovirus and a Mollivirus.

In their preprint (a study that is yet to be reviewed by other scientists), the authors state that it is "legitimate to ponder the risk of ancient viral particles remaining infectious and getting back into circulation by the thawing of ancient permafrost layers". So what do we know so far about the risk of these so-called "zombie viruses"?

All the viruses cultured so far from such samples are giant DNA viruses that only affect amoebae. They are far from viruses that affect mammals, let alone humans and would be very unlikely to pose a danger to humans.

However, one such large amoebae-infecting virus, called Acanthamoeba polyphaga mimivirus, has been linked to pneumonia in humans. But this association is still far from proven. So it does not appear that the viruses cultured from permafrost samples pose a threat to public health.

A more relevant area of concern

is that as the permafrost thaws it could release the bodies of long-dead people who might have died of an infectious disease and so release that infection back into the world.

The only human infection that has been eradicated globally is smallpox and the reintroduction of smallpox, especially in hard-to-reach locations, could be a global disaster. Evidence of smallpox infection has been detected in bodies from permafrost burials but "only partial gene sequences" so broken bits of virus that could not infect anyone. The smallpox virus does, however, survive well when frozen at -20°C, but still only for a few decades and not centuries.

In the last couple of decades, scientists have exhumed the bodies of people who died from the Spanish flu and were buried in permafrost-affected ground in Alaska and Svalbard, Norway. The influenza virus was able to be sequenced but not cultured from the tissues of these deceased people.

Influenza viruses can survive

frozen for at least a year when frozen but probably not several decades.

Other types of pathogen, such as bacteria, could be a problem, though. Over the years, there have been several outbreaks of anthrax (a bacterial disease that affects livestock and humans) affecting reindeer in Siberia.

There was a particularly large outbreak in 2016 that led to the deaths of 2,350 reindeer. This outbreak coincided with a particularly warm summer, which led to the suggestion that anthrax released from thawing permafrost may have triggered the outbreak.

Identified outbreaks of anthrax affecting reindeer in Siberia date back to 1848. In these outbreaks, humans were also often affected from eating the dead reindeer. But others have highlighted alternative theories for these outbreaks that do not necessarily rely on thawing permafrost, such as stopping anthrax vaccination and overpopulation by reindeer.

Even if permafrost thawing was triggering anthrax outbreaks that had serious effects on the local population, anthrax infection of herbivores is widespread globally, and such local outbreaks are unlikely to trigger a pandemic.

Another concern is whether antimicrobial-resistant organisms could be released into the environment from thawing permafrost. There is good evidence from multiple studies that antimicrobial resistance genes can be detected in samples of permafrost.

Resistance genes are the genetic material that enable bacteria to become resistant to antibiotics and can be spread from one bacterium to another. This should not be surprising as many antimicrobial resistance genes have evolved from soil organisms that predate the antimicrobial era.

However, the environment, especially rivers, is already heavily contaminated with antimicrobial-resistant organisms and resistance genes. So it is doubtful that antimicrobial resistance bacteria thawing from the permafrost would contribute greatly to the already great abundance of antimicrobial resistance genes already in our environment.

(The Conversation)

Message of freedom by Ukrainian choir



From a dank Kyiv bomb shelter to the bright stage lights of Europe's theaters, a Ukrainian youth choir's hymns in praise of freedom offer a kind of healing balm to its war-scarred members.

The Shchedryk ensemble, described as Kyiv's oldest professional children's choir, were in the Danish capital this week for a performance as part of an international tour that also took them to New York's famed Carnegie Hall.

It was supposed to be part of a busy year to celebrate the choir's 50th anniversary. But Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine changed all that, with members scattering inside their homeland and abroad in search of safety. Some members say they have lost friends and family in the fighting.

"It is very difficult to gather the children," said Marianna Sablina, the choir's artistic director and chief conductor, whose mother founded the choir in 1971. Some of the members are "outside the borders of Ukraine, and only about a third of the forum currently lives in Kyiv." Earlier this year, the choir managed to reassemble and began rehearsing in Kyiv's National Palace of Arts.

The vagaries of war often plagued the rehearsals. When Kyiv came under bombardment and suffered power outages, air raid sirens forced the choir to assemble in a darkened bomb shelter, illuminating their sheet music with whatever light source they could find.

"When there are sirens, we go to the shelter and just sing with our phones and flashlights," said 15-year-old choir member Anastasiia Rusina, whose family fled to western Ukraine following the invasion.

"I think that we're kind of getting used to it because it's our job to do. We have a concert, so we just cannot skip any rehearsals," she said.

The audience at Copenhagen's Church of The Holy Ghost recently listened to the soaring voices of the choir, made up mostly teenage girls wearing black and white dresses accented by red and black squares on their sleeves and colorful beads around their necks.

"I sincerely hope that the concert here will send a message of love and hope and also sympathy and support to all Ukrainian families," said Nataliya Popovych, co-founder of Copenhagen's Ukraine House, a civil society organization which brought the group to Denmark. "Hopefully next year, all Ukrainian families will be able to celebrate Christmas properly," she added.

At the core of the performance was the song "Carol of the Bells," perhaps best known from the 1990 Christmas movie *Home Alone*. The carol was originally arranged by Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych in the early 1900s. The choir's name, "Shchedryk," comes from the song's Ukrainian title.

"It's our culture, it's our songs, and it's so amazing that we have a chance to give you this music," 15-year-old Polina Holtseva said. Choir members Rusina and Holtseva said they don't have any concrete career plans. They noted they don't even know what they're going to do tomorrow. But amid the horrors of war, Shchedryk choir has become their "safe place." "We just don't think about the war or our situation. We just sing, we're together with our friends, our family," Rusina said. (*The Associated Press*)

Central govt must not forget why Ambedkar let Art 124(2) be as it is

Article 124(2) of the Constitution lays down that "Every Judge of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal after consultation with such of the Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts in the States as the President may deem necessary for the purpose and shall hold office until he attains the age of sixty five years: Provided that in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of India shall always be consulted."

When this Article was being debated in the Constituent Assembly, the phrase "shall always be consulted" was discussed extensively and Dr B.R. Ambedkar had stated: "There can be no difference of opinion in the house that our Judiciary must both be independent of the Executive and must also be competent in itself. The draft article steers middle course. It does not make the President the supreme and absolute authority in the matter of making appointments. It does not also import the influence of the Legislature. The provision in the Article is that there should be consultation of persons who are ex-hypothesi well-qualified to give proper advice in matters of this sort, and my judgment is that this sort of provision may be regarded as sufficient for the moment."

In the early years of our republic, there were hardly any controversy regarding the appointment process. Between 1970 and 1980, however, questions regarding independence of our judiciary started to be raised especially in view of regular tussle between the central government and Supreme Court and the flash point came in 1980 on the issue of transfer of judges from one high court to the other, when the Supreme Court in S. P. Gupta vs Union of India (known as the First Judges case) recognised the primacy of the president and also held that the word "consultation" in Article 124 does not mean concurrence.

Justice P.N. Bhagwati however, expressed his dissatisfaction with the then existing mode of appointment of judges in India in which the authority to select judges has exclusively been vested 'in a single individual' (the President) whose choice may be incorrect or inadequate and 'may also sometimes be imperceptibly influenced by extraneous or irrelevant considerations.'

Therefore, he proposed that there must be a collegium to make recommendation to the President in regard to appointment of a Supreme Court or high court judge. The rec-

ommending authority should be more broad-based and there should be consultation with wider interests.

In 1993, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in Supreme Court Advocates on Record Association vs Union of India (Second Judges Case) revisited the constitutional scheme of appointment of judges and overruled the majority view in the First Judges Case, giving primacy to President in the matter of appointment of Judges to superior courts.

It was held that the opinion given by the Chief Justice in the consultative process had to be formed taking into account the views of the two senior most judges of the Supreme Court. This would ensure that the opinion of the Chief Justice of India was not merely his individual opinion, but an opinion formed collectively by a body of men at the apex level in the judiciary.

It was also added that the Chief Justice of India is expected to take into account the views of his colleagues in the Supreme Court who are likely to be conversant with the affairs of the concerned high court.

The Chief Justice of India may also ascertain the views of one or more senior judges of that high court whose opinion, according to the Chief Justice of India, is likely to be significant in the formation of his opinion.

This was followed by a presidential reference in 1998 (Third Judges case) wherein the procedural requirement of the collegium system were laid down and the number of senior-most judges of the Supreme Court as the member of the Collegium was increased from two to four. In 2014, the Constitution was amended by the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act 2014 and a National Judicial Appointments Commission and consequently, the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014 was enacted.

The validity of both the constitutional amendment and the Act were challenged by the Supreme Court Advocates on Record Association and the Supreme Court with a 4:1 majority declared the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act 2014 and the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014 unconstitutional and void and held that the system of appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and High Court through the Collegium system will be operative.

In view of all this, the phrase "shall always be consulted" has been judicially held to mean that the consultation shall be as per the recommendations of the Collegium and in

terms of Article 141 of the Constitution, the said position remains the law unless the parliament exercises its authority and changes the position.

The constant criticism of the collegium system by higher functionaries in the Government and repeated attempts to somehow throttle the recommendations of the Collegium by delaying the appointments therefore is uncalled-for, especially when the collegium system is what the existing law prescribes.

One of the major grounds on which collegium system is criticised is that the constitution does not provide for collegium at all and it is basically a system of judges appointing judges which cannot be countenanced at all. The critics, however, forget that a number of doctrines and concepts have crept in our constitution subsequently through the judgments of the Supreme Court which was made the final arbiter of the constitution by our founding fathers.

Thus, when the Supreme Court interprets and holds that "Chief Justice of India shall always be consulted" will mean that instead of one person, a collegium of the Chief Justice and 4 senior most judges shall be consulted and their recommendations shall be given primacy, there is nothing wrong with the same.

Further, the Constituent Assembly itself had debated different modes of appointment in higher judiciary prevalent in different countries and chose to adopt the existing mode being the most suitable as per the conditions prevalent in our country in order to ensure complete separation of power and independence of judiciary.

Any attempt to roll back the system adopted by our founding fathers will have an impact on the independence of the judiciary.

Instead of criticising and adopting an adversarial approach, the executive and judiciary will have to work together to ensure adequate and diverse class representation in the collegium system and at the same time make sure that most meritorious and competent advocates are appointed in the higher judiciary on a timely basis. Both sides will have to understand that this constant tug of war and unrestrained and uncalled-for criticism of the collegium system in this age of social media is only hampering and scandalising the judiciary which is the cornerstone of Rule of Law.

(The author, Kumar Mihir, is an advocate-on-record at the Supreme Court)

Firebrand J'khand poet named in Forbes list of 'Self-Made Women'

Jacinta Kerketta, a poet, writer and freelance journalist in Jharkhand, has been named in the Forbes' list of 'Self-Made Women', among others from India.

Kerketta, who belongs to the Oraon tribe, hails from a village near Hudpos in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand.

For her contributions to contemporary Hindi literature, she has already won several national as well as international awards.

Born in 1983, Kerketta's literary works, focusing mainly around water, forests, soil and Adivasi issues, have received attention all around the world.

She is Jharkhand's first-ever Adivasi poetess whose poems have been published in three languages in the international arena.

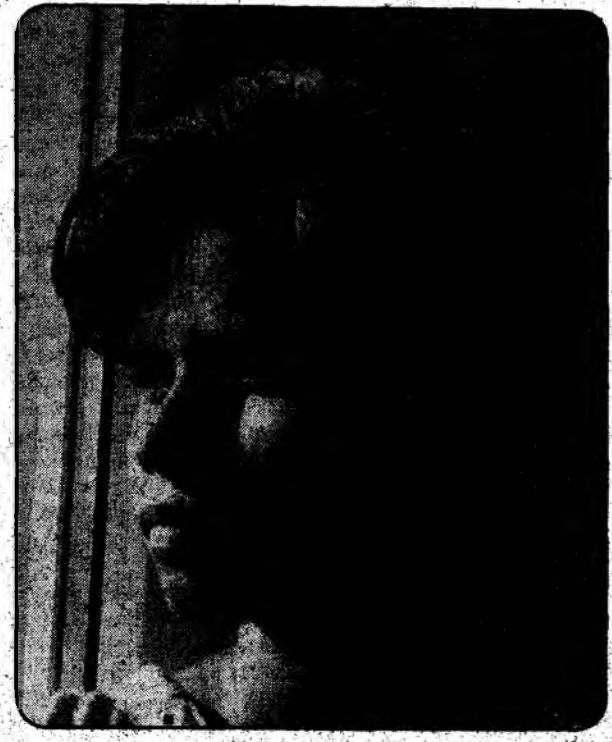
She has also recited poems at universities in Italy, Germany, France and Australia.

Presenting the list of women, Forbes India said on its website that the compilation features women who are breaking stereotypes, dismissing doubters and leading change.

"We looked for candidates who were self-made, and not those who had inherited wealth or position. We looked for those who had hit the headlines or influenced important stories over the past 12 months, and those who had inspiring stories to tell," a write up on Forbes India's webpage noted.

Giving out details, the article mentioned: "The list includes boxing world champion Nikhat Zareen who battled sexism; Leena Nair, the Kolhapur-girl picked to run Chanel, the 112-year-old French luxury house; and Jacinta Kerketta, a poet and independent journalist from Jharkhand who has emerged as one of the strongest voices against Adivasi exploitation; as well as Anju Srivastava, who founded Wingreens Farms, a now-thriving dips and sauces business, in her mid-40s."

The list also features Bollywood actress and co-founder of Kay Beauty Katrina Kaif, digital content creator Kusha Kapila, and SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, among others self-made women achievers. (IANS)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, DECEMBER 11, 2022

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Saturn. You will have money giving days. Your bosses will be impressed with you. Your hopes and expectations will touch new heights. You will achieve your goals and objectives with courage and determination. You will also initiate a dialogue with your colleagues. You will adopt a friendly attitude with people in order to get success in your work. Financial matters will take precedence. You will be attracted towards glamour and spend money. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will get a good news from somewhere. The time will be full of laughter and joy. The deeds of your children will bring good news which will make you feel proud. You will also learn lot of new skills. You will also earn money. You will take part in competitive exams and will be successful.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
The time is fruitful. You will have mental satisfaction as your work gets completed. You will exchange thoughts and information with your colleagues. Your bosses will play an important role. You will make good progress in your job. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will have lot of money gaining days. You will also buy luxurious items. Your siblings will come close to you. You will enjoy good health. You will be in the right direction of your goals. You will also get admission in a prestigious institute. You will enjoy marital bliss. Your partner will come close to you and will give you lot of happiness. You will enjoy a good health. You will also meet an important person.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
There will be opportunities for money earnings. It is said success and failure do not come to us by chance, they are created by ourselves only. You will be fully aware of this and will do your best. You cannot afford to be complacent. You will get opportunities to rise in your job/business. You will enjoy a good health. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. You will be on the right course in your life. Your goals will be achieved. But you will be busy with your work and personal matters. Your fortune will also favor you. You will be bold enough to take tough decisions in your life. You will learn new skills in your job. Your people will support you. You may arrange a small party.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
You will have to face competition in your business and will get success also. You will also apply for a new job. The flow of money will be good. You will be over whelmed with success in your job. You will be relaxed and have good entertaining time. You will spend quality time with your family. You will meet influential persons. The hard work and public contact of the past now will benefit you. You will take care of your family and discharge all responsibilities. You will get your work done by any means. There are chances for contacting friends living far away. You will also make plans to travel abroad. For the family unity and finance will be important.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
You will earn well in your work. Your image will be shining. In this period money will be important to you. You will be delighted by getting huge profits. You will get a pleasant news. You will have no shortage of money. Business activities will keep going as usual. For working ladies time will be favorable. There will be benefits from your partner. Auspicious functions will take place at your house. There will be some animosity between family members, but you will take adequate care of it. A friend will advise you on a property matter. It will be pleasant, money giving and glorious week. Those who are single will plan to get married.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
Your opponents will be active but will be unable to harm you. You will hear a good news about a relative of yours. You will also be able to achieve your goals and ambitions by the strength of your hard work. Old investments will give you profits. You will feel slightly upset on a personal or family matter. You will control your expenditure to avoid debts. You need to apply caution while driving your vehicle. Be careful also in financial dealings. You will also perform your tasks with total honesty and dedication. You will control your toughest situation, calmly and patiently and turn it in your favor by your intelligence and cool approach.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
There will be workloads for you. You will have the urge to increase your income in the future. Be careful about over expenditure. Take adequate care of your diet. Money inflow is there. There will be an increase in materialistic luxury items. You will achieve your material as well as spiritual goals.

There is a hope of some positive changes coming to you. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner. Do not trust strangers as it is not a wise thing to do. Your pending work will get completed. You will be supported by good friends, parent and family.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)
You will pay attention to your work. Your communication skills will be second to none and your relations will improve. Your pending work will be finished quickly with the cooperation of your colleagues. You will also share wonderful bonding with your mate. There are chances that you will attend a wedding or some other family function. You will be socially active and interact with lot of people. People will envy your increasing fame and popularity. You will also undertake business related trips. You will get new and better opportunities in your job. You will also undertake important projects. You will plan your future well and remain careful in money matters. Your health will be taken care of. You will get a big business order. Friends and co-workers will cooperate in every way.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
You will complete your task and that too in style. You will share wonderful bonding with your colleagues. Your bosses will be impressed with you. There are strong possibilities of profits in business. There are chances of starting a new venture in partnership or association. You will be strong in making public relations. You will also take tough decisions in financial matters. You will get a good news from somewhere. Those who are single will get marriage proposals. There will be new investments in some work. You will get success in job related interviews. The family will prosper. You will face every situation very bravely. There will be good compatibility between husband and wife.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
All the problems of career and works will be over one by one. You will get support of your colleagues and bosses. You will enjoy your work. Your work capacity and work efficiency will increase. You will get new opportunities in business. There can be new business and official contracts. Your self confidence will be high. Your name, fame and respect will increase. Your partner will be a source of your strength. Enemies and rivals will be unable to harm you. Pleasant event will take place. Control your anger and anxiety. Students will perform well. They will get great success.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
You will be successful in competitions/exams. The time is favorable for you. You will work with dedication and honesty. You will be principled and broad minded. There will be betterment in your business. Your position, power, status and prestige will grow. Time is turning for betterment. You will have a promotion in your job and success in business. Your time will be fruitful. You will be successful in any work you take up. You may participate in some gathering or party meeting where your presentation or work will be appreciated as the best. This is the time for promotion as high ranking officials in your organization. You will be elated.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
You will go along well with people. You will have profits in share market or some other investment made by you. You will get bonus if you are in government job. Your dominance and power will grow at your workplaces. Your kind nature and soft talks will increase your profits in manitolds. There could be extra income if you work hard in your profession. Your associates/clients will be impressed with you. You will also participate in some party or any other function. It will be a very good time. You will do your hard work. The result of your work will be in your favor because of your wise and patient behavior. You will have wonderful bonding with your spouse.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
The time will be of great results. This is the best time for contacts and dialogues. You will make progress in your job/business. Old disputes will be resolved. At work, there will be more accomplishments and achievements. Routine problems will get resolved. You won't be able to handle a simple matter at your home. You will need guidance of your elders. Opponents will be unable to face you. Property matters will be solved. Your financial position will be improved by raising your income and means. Take decisions wisely in financial matters. There are chances of success in love affairs. Your circle of friends will be wide. You will be in touch with well known people.

'Don Quixote inspired my autobiography'

For former IAS officer Moosa Raza, an Advisor to the Uttar Pradesh Governor in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition, writing his autobiography, "of Giants and Windmills (Niyogi Books) was not only a jog down memory lane but a deep desire to highlight some of the personalities who impressed him and also was an opportunity to talk about some others who thought of themselves as giants but turned out to be only windmills, or rather windbags, on closer acquaintance.

From the teachers who left formative impression on him to the events that left formative impression on our country's socio-political fabric, from finding innovative solutions to issues faced by public servants to being blindsided by the innovative tricks of cunning criminals, Raza's autobiography is an excavation of memories from a life spent in trying to maintain social order in a chaotic and unpredictable country.

"Looking back on my IAS career, I realise that the early officers in the service of independent India, had a unique experience. We were following in the footsteps of our British predecessors while trying to forge a new identity for the administration. Like Don Quixote, who was the inspiration for my autobiography, I encountered many giants, those who laid the foundation for an emerging nation, and tilted at many windmills, who even today are dotted throughout our landscape, blocking out the sun of our nation's success. This book is my homage to all the IAS officers like me, who might find themselves in the pages of my autobiography," Raza says of the book.

During the early decades post India's independence, Raza, a young IAS officer hailing from a small village in Tamil Nadu, was tasked with governing huge, diverse and complex territories in the newly formed state of Gujarat. Raza had the distinction of heading four districts (today's seven) as district magistrate and collector in Gujarat, and rose to become principal secretary to the chief minister of Gujarat.

This book is an elaborately layered account of Raza's experiences and encounters with maharajas, politicians, tribals, tigers and a variety of other inhabitants of the country. With tongue-in-cheek humour, Raza details his head-on collisions with public figures, gold smugglers and bureaucrats, and his attempts to deal with them with tact while trying to hold his own. Raza describes well-known figures, including C.V. Raman, Morarji Desai, Indira Gandhi and others, with a lot of wit, honesty and empathy—they live again in these pages.

Drawing on his experiences in the Indian public sector, Raza throws light on the workings of varied industries, such as fisheries, textiles, chemicals and fertilizers. His first-hand account of the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition, in his capacity as Advisor to the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, reveals



the travails of maintaining social order in a chaotic and unpredictable country.

On publishing the book Trisha De Niyogi, Director and COO, Niyogi Books, says: "This is a significant work and is so much more than simply the memoirs of an IAS officer. Mr Moosa Raza, in his long career, has dealt with famine, smugglers, riots, the Emergency and the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Readers will find much thought-provoking material in this book, which provides many insights into the challenges and promises of modern India."

Moosa Raza was born and brought up in a village in Tamil Nadu that had no electricity, no running water, no flush system and no doors to any house. During the first nine years of his life, he did not know the English alphabet and only learnt rudimentary Urdu. Today he writes poetry in English, Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Arabic. He has already published five books, including two collections of Urdu poems.

An IAS officer of the 1960 cadre, he rose to become a chief secretary of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and secretary to the Government of India. After retirement, he heads a large educational trust with 10,000 students, 600 academic and managerial staff and is the chairman of several private-sector enterprises in Mumbai. He continues to work and write even in his 80s and is deeply committed to the affairs of the nation. (IANS)

"Even when we have physical hardships, we can be very happy."

— Dalai Lama

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 123 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022

Mukroh killings turn memory blip

THERE was much sound and fury when November 22 happened and five able-bodied men from Mukroh village were shot at by Assam Police on the Meghalaya side of the border. VIPs rushed to the place of the incident more for photo-ops than anything else. The Cherry Blossom Festival that had drawn a huge traffic of tourists was called off leading to unscheduled travel plans for many. Now, anyone will think twice about attending any programme in Meghalaya, not least a literature event which is erroneously termed a festival when it is all about discussing issues and books and writers. The idea of blindly copying the phrase "LitFest (Literature Festival) shows a lack of originality. Its as if the word LitFest alone would be a crowd puller. Anyway, the much-hyped Autumn Festival is amongst the jinxed list.

After having brought the state to a halt it would be fair to expect that the pressure groups would continue their demand for the arrest of the trigger-happy Assam policemen and for an independent probe that would be supervised by the Meghalaya High Court since the killings happened within the state boundaries of Meghalaya. But as of now, no one knows what is happening on this case. Without public pressure this case too will be forgotten even as the election drums are beginning to sound loud and furious. This is not the first time that killings have happened at the border and that people have been outraged. Ironically such outrage is short-lived. People move on with their priorities and those who suffer and have their hopes kindled by the presence of so many ostensibly empathetic visitors, now feel abandoned. No one knows whether these families that have lost their loved ones will ever get justice. Merely paying a one-time compensation cannot wipe away the silent tears of loneliness and the bleak future that the survivors have to face.

Assam continues to behave like the proverbial big brother in all such border conflicts and there is no remorse whatsoever at the inhuman crimes committed on November 22 by the police of that state. In the case of Mizoram, though the Assam Police dare not carry out such misadventures even though the Mizos have in recent times, reportedly turned the areas under conflict with Assam as huge garbage dumps, notwithstanding the fact that the area is treated as sacrosanct since five Assam Police personnel had lost their lives at the very spot. These different posturing for different states has to end. Perhaps the Supreme Court should step in and settle the boundary disputes between all the states bordering Assam, once and for all. Only then would justice be delivered.

A Non Economist's Guide to Meghalaya's Economic Crisis

By Angela Rangad

Numbers and phrases that economists and planners throw at us can be confusing. Per Capita Income, Rate of Growth, Unemployment Rate, Net State Domestic Product. But I know that these numbers and phrases have real lives. Food on the table, rent paid, hospital bills taken care of, school fees cleared. So I try to understand in my own way the jargon of Economy. I have always thought that economy needs to be understood in terms of how we as human beings labour to earn our means of survival. Economics needs to answer questions of everyday life. And the answers we seek have to have an ideological perspective so that we can decide on economic policies. As in what would that policy mean? Will it mean just basic food and shelter or will it mean an all round development of our family, community and humanity?

So let me begin by three economic questions that I always ask. Do we have enough to live? Is there enough income to pay for that and how is that income distributed? We can take out as many rallies, write as many headlines, but if we don't situate our angst in these fundamental questions of economic reality, Meghalaya shall see no change.

Seven years ago we were campaigning for an increase in the official minimum wages. We asked a simple question: how much money does a family of four need to survive and we did a survey. We found that a family needed a minimum of Rs. 15,205 rupees per month to barely survive. Obviously we know that the cost of living has gone up in these seven years, things are more expensive. My economist friends tell me that one would need approximately 21,895 rupees now. So where is this income going to come from? As a state do we produce enough to provide for our people? Are there enough well paying jobs?

For instance, Meghalaya is one of the poorest states in India if we compare it vis-a-vis per capita income or the income every resident of Meghalaya would have every year if all the income produced in the state is divided equally amongst them. In 2020-21, the per capita income of Meghalaya was approximately Rs. 80,000 per year. Compared to similar sized states and with simi-

lar geographical conditions like Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura we can clearly see we are poorer. Our state does not have enough income to go around. Rs 82,182 means that every family with two

could be a bit more bearable. But with our per capita income being so low, even with growth in per capita income in 2020, a family can only make approximately Rs. 14000/month if the distribu-

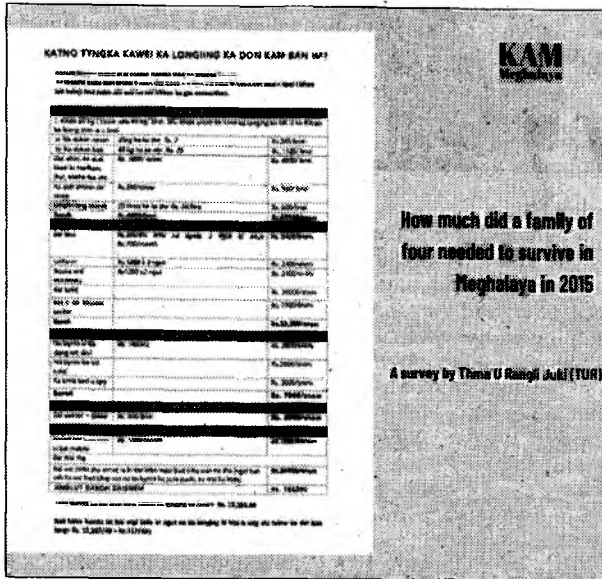
we know that 82000 rupees is not equally distributed amongst the people. That means that out of 82000, for the larger masses there is less to go around. Just ask working people around about the number of people in the family who have to work to sustain themselves and how long their working hours are, and the story of family poverty would strike you hard. And available data corroborates these realities. If we look at Multidimensional Poverty Index for the states we find that one third of our population (32.8%) is poor and experiences deprivation. So extreme inequality is at the very heart of the economic life of Meghalaya.

But we can reduce our poverty, if our economy was growing fast enough. But as RBI said that our Rate of Growth is much below the national average, rather one of the lowest in the country. That means while our population is growing, the wealth in the state is not growing fast enough.

In my campaigns, I have heard people talk about how their lives are becoming more and more difficult. Meghalaya with its hi-level corruption of political-bureaucratic class that corners most of the developmental pie and a society where people can't run their livelihood and small businesses and agriculture in peace means that our economy rather than growing is actually slowing down. That is why more young people are leaving the state for work, more children are getting stunted, more young people are dropping out of education, and more criminal activities like drug peddling is eating our everyday life.

But our MLAs and prospective MLAs are excitedly distributing one time doles rather than working and thinking of policies that shall increase our growth rate and increase per capita income in a way that creates more employment and sustainable amenities and infrastructure for all so that citizens don't have to be desperate for the doles from the politicians. Maybe that's why politicians do not think of economic policies because they want working people to be their slaves. If we don't want to live our lives precariously we need to make economy work for the people. We need to get angry at the numbers.

Economy is finally how we live.



working adults has a notional monthly earning of 13967 rupees or daily income of 456 rupees.

Year	State	Per Capita Income (Rs)
2019-20	INDIA	147,210
2019-20	SIKKIM	4,03,370
2019-20	MIZORAM	1,87,327
2019-20	Tripura	1,28,876
2019-20	MEGHALAYA	82,182
2019-20	BIHAR	46,282

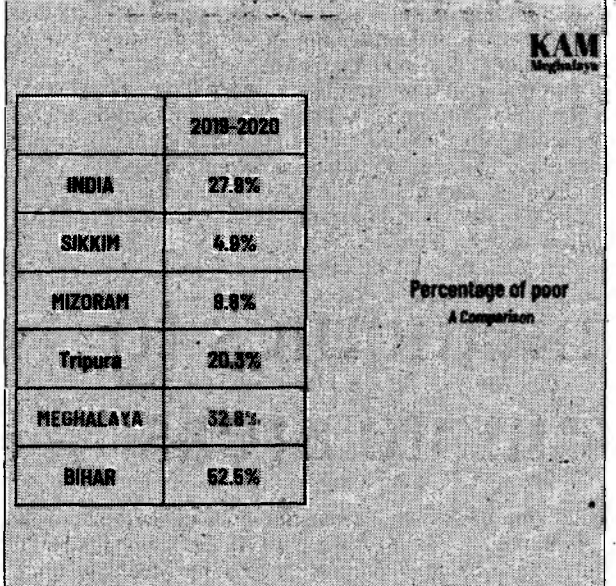
Meghalaya is one of the poorest states

rupees or daily income of 456 rupees.

Even if overall income is not good enough, if the

not the case.

We have a small minority of Meghalayans who can afford to buy Lambo-



cost of living and inflation was low and the distribution of income more equal, life

rhinis, SUVs, erect gleaming glass fronted buildings, have swimming pools, so

Economic Prognosis for Next Year

By Ajit Ranade

There have been a slew of reports and papers on the Indian economy in the past two weeks. The most important one was the government's own release of data on the economy. This was the official growth estimate for the second quarter of this fiscal year, i.e., from July to September from the National Statistical Office. The data comes with a two-month lag and was released at the end of November. The other major report was from the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee. The MPC gave its latest estimate of growth for this fiscal year as well as outlook for inflation. Just a day before the MPC forecast was a report from the World Bank on India's growth for this year and the next. Apart from these reports from reputed and official agencies, was a report on India's decadal prospects, from the global bank Morgan Stanley, which got a lot of publicity. Apart from these reports there were several others with an in-depth analysis of growth performance and prospects, complemented by the constant flow of real-time data such as the stock market, tax collections, passenger and cargo traffic, corporate profitability results and so on.

Are the major reports consistent with each other? Take the MPC of the Reserve Bank of India. The MPC revised growth estimates downwards from 7 to 6.8 percent. It was concerned about the global slowdown, the negative impact on India's exports and headwinds from geopolitical tensions. Added to all this was the tightening of global financial conditions, i.e., higher interest rates and perhaps lower capital flows to emerging market economies like India. MPC said that for the next quarters growth would slow down even further to 4.3 and 4.2 percent respectively. None of this is exceptional. You can't accuse MPC of being unreasonably cautious. By contrast the World Bank revised its estimates of India upward from 6.5 to 6.9 percent, citing improved prospects for the domestic economy. Their respective caution and optimism might appear to be contradictory but their final number estimate of growth in fact has almost converged. So maybe the World Bank was too cautious earlier and hence revised its estimate upward.

The Morgan Stanley report is extraordinarily upbeat. It takes a decadal view and predicts a doubling of the economic size to 8.5 trillion dollars, and also its per capita income. The report is addressed to global stock market investors and tells them that India's rise and growth in its stock market is "once in a generation shift, and (great) opportunity for investors and companies". Since it takes a medium to long term view, you cannot disagree with Morgan Stanley, at least for now, although the Financial Times of London, commenting on this report advises caution to investors. Growth alone does not spell stock market wealth especially for dollar investors. The FT cites the examples of Brazil and China where stocks investors have lost money despite good economic growth.

So, it's best to examine the data as reported by the government itself and then make a prognosis. The second quarter saw economy expanding by 6.3 percent (compared to last year same period), and this rate of expansion was slower than 13.5 percent recorded during April to June. So, the slow-

down is palpable and next two quarters might see even slower growth. In terms of the size of the economy it is only about 7.5 percent bigger than in 2019, which means over the past three years the average growth is barely 2.5 percent per year. This is the impact of the sharp dent during Covid. But over that same period the U.S. economy (with half million Covid deaths) has expanded faster and so has China (with very few deaths, and despite very harsh lockdowns). It is true that even at 6.8 or 6.9 percent, this year India will continue to be the fastest growth economy in the world. Bear in mind that China and U.S.A. together make up 45 percent of the global economy, whereas India's share is 3.5 percent. So, India's growth has to be much higher in order to make a difference in its domestic living standards.

The drivers of economic growth are consumer spending, investments in new capacity and projects, government's fiscal push and exports. The latter clocked negative during October and is badly affected by global recession. In gems, jewellery and engineering, exports were down by more than 20 percent compared to last October. Even software exports which are India's strong point, will be affected by massive layoffs in the tech sector in the United States. As for government's support, since there is no fiscal room to further expand the deficit, it cannot be counted upon to support growth next year. The combined fiscal deficit (States plus Centre) is above 10 percent of the GDP and the debt ratio is also at a high of 90 percent. As for investments, the FM has exhorted the private sector to increase investments.

There are early signs, but overall, the numbers are very sluggish. The recent impressive growth in bank credit should be treated with caution, since much of that growth has come from housing, vehicle loans and retail credit. This accounts for a very small portion of consumers. The real push must come from credit growth to industry and commercial projects. As for consumer spending supporting strong growth, that is hampered by two things: inflation and unemployment. Inflation has been above 6 percent for almost three years. That affects consumers, as they try to cut back on the purchase of discretionary items.

Wholesale price inflation which affects producers and small entrepreneurs is in double digits. The other influence on consumer spending is from unemployment which has now officially climbed to 8 percent. Job anxiety too can curtail consumer spending. So, all four growth drivers - consumers, investors, government, and exports are facing challenges. Hence slower growth during 2023 is to be expected. Added to this are the challenges from the exchange rate, since the trade deficit is large. Interest rates are already rising adding to the cost of borrowing and cost of capital.

India can take solace that its growth rate is higher than most of the other large economies. But in the coming year the focus needs to be on increasing resilience and ensuring that lower growth does not cause more hardship to the poorest in the country.

Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Accountability the need of the hour

Editor,
When Conrad Sangma announced in December last year that JICA has granted Rs 700 crores for the development of the tourism sector in Meghalaya, I had written in these columns that if the amount sanctioned is a loan, then an audit mechanism should be there to ensure that the money is not misused. JICA is the Japanese multilateral organization that provides development assistance to developing countries through grants in aid and concessional loans. Recently someone had accused the current dispensation of misutilization of the loan sanctioned for the tourism sector in the State. According to him, money earmarked for the tourism sector has been used for construction of roads instead. I don't support the political organization he belongs to but if the person raises a valid point, then his argument should not be simply brushed aside just because he's not a resident of Meghalaya.
The residents and the

intelligentsia in our state should be ashamed because it took a person from outside to point out the possible loopholes in the implementation of a loan sanctioned for a critical sector in the state. If the money is properly utilized, then well and good but if there is misutilization then it can have serious ramifications for the state and the future generations. If someone has ever taken a big loan, then they will know the financial burden that the loan will cause even if it is used for the intended purpose. People who have taken such kind of loans will generally feel that there is a heavy weight on their shoulders. Once the loan is repaid, they will immediately feel relieved.

The state of Meghalaya now has a heavy economic burden on its weak shoulder even if the loan taken is used for the intended purpose. Just imagine a situation where the loan taken has not been utilized for the purpose intended; imagine paying crores of rupees as interest payment alone every month for a loan that has been not properly utilized. God only knows what will happen to our state and the future generations. The need of the

hour for a state like Meghalaya is accountability. There should be a strong and efficient audit mechanism that will find out any loopholes in the utilisation of public money for development projects.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Inspiration from great personalities like Phan Nonglait...

Editor,
Apropos of the news item about the unsung heroine of Meghalaya -- Phan Nonglait, "Group appeals for Centre, state recognition to Phan Nonglait" (ST, December 7, 2022), it instantly occurred to me that the story would evoke a lot of responses. People will overwhelmingly come forward in support of the Maitshaphrang Movement.
But I did not notice anything as such except the support from MLA Adelbert Nongrum. This itself is a QUESTION mark. However,

the sacrifices of Phan Nonglait should provoke us to think deeper. We should not think twice but stand with the organization's chairman, Michael Syiem. I agree with Mr Syiem that the courage of Phan Nonglait is less known to many, let alone others from outside this state. Now, I believe, he should not be the lone person to speak of the inspiring contributions of this woman freedom fighter. We all need to sing songs of praises in chorus.

Inspiration from personalities with valour and virtues is essential in society. In the absence of "dignified" role models, the youths may certainly go astray. Whether one agrees or not, amidst the cacophony of social media and entertainment worlds, our children have been choosing the "wrong" people for inspiration. This is detrimental.

Those celebrities, whom our grown-up kids now look upon and whose lifestyles they copy take them away from "reality". Their behavioural attitude and activities are hardly worth emulating. Those entertainment celebrities have risen to fame by doing what they should not. Most of them are self-centred. I will not dig

deeper into it. But what is unfortunate is that the glitter of glamour has blinded our new generation. They are deluded to move away from a value-based world. Needless to say, our children now know more about Shakira, Kim Kardashian, Britney Spears, Sheryn Chopra, Salman Khan... The valourous personalities like Phan Nonglait, Rani Gaidinliu, and Kanaklata hardly appeal to them. This can be ascertained from the "LIKES" they receive on social media compared to the entertainment celebrities. It clearly shows how deluded the new generation is.

Well, just ponder with seriousness the hardship and sacrifices that must have been made by Phan Nonglait two hundred years ago. Those days, hardly any woman could think of leaving the hearth and home. But Phan Nonglait had come out with bows and arrows. She did that to protect these hilly regions. She supported U Tirot Sing and struggled with determination to fight back the enemy forces. Is this not awe-inspiring? Why are such proud historical facts missing from our school textbooks?
It is the responsibility of

the Government, both central and state, to ensure that those great personalities are commemorated in every possible way. Their sacrifices and contributions alone inspire our children to walk on the "righteous" path. Yes, we should erect a number of busts and statues of such heroic women and institute awards in their honour as suggested by Mr Syiem. More importantly, their sacrifices and contributions should be made compulsory subjects in all academic institutions. It would be a good idea if we could name our important hospitals, schools, colleges, roads and other developmental plans and programs under their names. We have named enough in honour of a few "leaders" without any sense. That should be stopped. Let's learn to choose our role models with more sense and discernment.

Yours etc.,
Saili Gwali,
(Member, International Human Rights Commission)
Shillong

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"Anger begins with folly,
and ends with repentance."

— Pythagoras

The Shillong Times

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Pre-election promises surreal

EVERY political party worth its salt is making tall pre-election promises especially to the core constituents – the poor – who are easily influenced by such promises and don't have the wherewithal to understand the nitty gritty of linking the promises to resources available. Researchers in this country have systematically tested whether governments at the state and Centre ignore their own campaign promises. It is imperative to answer this question because the fulfilment of election promises is at the heart of democratic accountability. Their studies find that most promises remained unfulfilled. Naturally citizens expect that the party/parties that win and form the government would mobilize the resources necessary to fulfil the mandate on which they were elected and on which they will also be judged. Too often these promises are a one-off distribution of freebies which do not have a long-term impact. Keeping this in mind it would be expected that political parties and candidates would not make promises they cannot keep. But that's asking for too much.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) promised free electricity in Punjab among other things. The State already has a huge debt burden so its incomprehensible how Punjab will mobilise resources to underwrite the electricity bills especially of farmers. AAP did the same in Gujarat but it appears that the people of Gujarat look for more than just freebies. Ultimately PM Modi's rhetoric won the day. To turn a promise into a deliverable, those in Government must initiate policies around the issues that they believe need addressing and find the resources via those policy/policies. TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's two-day visit has seen a slew of promises. Her meeting with the widows/relatives of those five men killed at Mukroh on November 22 last saw her giving a cash assistance of Rs 5 lakhs each to their widows. She even stated upfront that in such circumstances her government gives both financial assistance and a government job for a family member of the victim. It is possible that another political party will up the TMC promise and say it will do more. Where will all this end?

Poll promises must be realistic and must be made keeping in mind the state's internal resources and external borrowings. In Meghalaya, poll promises are populist in nature and are not designed to serve a long-term purpose. No wonder the socio-economic indicators are all going south, despite the flurry of freebies being distributed by the MDA Government just before the elections. People of Meghalaya must learn to judge each political party from the prism of pragmatism. Money is not free. Poverty is real and poverty at 37% in Meghalaya must be viewed with seriousness. Poverty cannot be alleviated by giving freebies. A robust economic policy that takes on board the needs of different economic constituents is more pragmatic. One shoe does not fit all.

Letters to the Editor

Parliament committee's advisory on collegium

Editor,

After the intense conflicting statements between the supreme court, government and Chairman of Rajya Sabha, now a fourth party has entered the fray – the parliamentary committee, which has asked the executive and judiciary to do some "out-of-the-box thinking" to find a solution to the 'perennial problem' of vacancies in the high courts. In this regard the previous Chief Justice of India, TS Thakur made an emotional appeal to the Prime Minister to fill up the vacancies in the various high courts and supreme court as the huge number of pending cases ultimately adversely impact the common man who still has faith in the judiciary. After the comments of the Parliamentary Committee it is the duty of the concerned parties to find

ways and means to solve this matter amicably without bringing it into the public domain. The news emanating in the media on this issue are disgusting. Moreover, let the confusion be cleared on the collegium after the statement of Law Minister Kiren Rijju that there is no proposal to introduce the Bill of National Judicial Appointments Committee. After the first speech in the Rajya Sabha by the Vice President on this matter now fresh discussions have started. It is well known that no system is full-proof and there is need for amendments with the passage of the time since over one hundred amendments had been made in the Constitution itself. Four players are making statements which contradict each other. For instance the Supreme Court had justified the collegium system whereas government had favoured the National Judicial Appointment Committee. And now the Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha has expressed his own views. Presently, the question arises as to whether a country which

On December 11, 2022 it was widely reported that Meghalaya has been awarded at the national level for achieving the target of operationalising 448 Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) under the Ayushman Bharat Comprehensive Primary Health Coverage programme. A visit to the Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centre page housed under website of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India touts the Ayushman Bharat (AB) program to be an attempt to move away the selective approach to health care to deliver comprehensive range of services spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care. This, it is claimed, will be achieved by creating Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care, which is universal and free to users, with a focus on wellness and the delivery of an expanded range of services closer to the community. In simple words the scope of the existing Primary Health Centres and Sub-centres will



be expanded to include more services apart from "Maternal and Child Health Care Services to include care for non-communicable diseases, palliative and rehabilitative care, oral, eye and ENT care, mental health and first-level care for emergencies and trauma, including free essential drugs and diagnostic services". As for those whose needs are beyond the scope of these HWCs the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), the second component of the program, intends to provide health insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per year to over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families for seeking secondary and tertiary care. On its part, Meghalaya received the award for upgrading 18 Urban Health Centres, 114 Public Health Centres, and 318 sub-centres into HWCs. On the surface, the intention of the Ayushman Bharat (AB) program is praiseworthy and the award received by Meghalaya is especially very opportune coming at a time when multiple reports have revealed the health indicators in the State to be in very bad condition.

One of the important re-

Challenges that plague health sector in Meghalaya

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

ports that highlighted the dire position of Meghalaya regarding health is the 'North Eastern Region District SDG Index: Report & Dashboard 2021-22'. The report ranked the districts of all the states in the North East Region (NER) in terms of achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Overall, Meghalaya was second from last in those rankings. Among the SDGs, the performance of the State under SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being was especially very depressing. In terms of ranking, none of the districts from Meghalaya have performed well enough to be even in the Front Runner category (the second highest ranked after the Performer category). Instead majority of the districts (7 out of 11) are in the Aspirant category, i.e., the lowest category. Only West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi are in the Front Runner category (just above the Aspirant cat-

egory) but are ranked in the mid 70's from among the 103 districts (entire NER) which have been included in the report. Altogether 11 indicators were used to score the performance of each district. As reflected by its ranking the State has done very badly on all those indicators.

Another report, the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-5) also reiterated the deplorable condition of the health sector in Meghalaya. Two of three indicators under Sanitation and seven out of the eight indicators under the Maternal and Child Health have figures lower than the national average. Under Child Feeding Practices and Nutritional Status of children two indicators out of five again have figures worse than the national average. This includes the finding that 46% of the Children under 5 years in the State are stunted. Even though the figures for the remaining three indicators, viz., Breastfeeding children age 6-23 months receiving an adequate diet, Non-breastfeeding children age 6-23 months receiving an adequate diet and Total children age 6-23 months

receiving an adequate diet, are higher than that of the national average, just only around 30% or less of the children consume an adequate diet, i.e., the situation elsewhere is worse. Similarly, though the performance of the State when it comes to Anaemia among Children and Adults is better than the national average, still around half or more of them are anaemic. To be fair it is not only Meghalaya but India itself whose performance under health and nutrition has been very poor. In the recently published and much debated Global Hunger Index 2022 India has been ranked 107th out of 121 countries. The only country in South Asia that has performed worse than India is Afghanistan which has been plagued by political turmoil for many decades. In this context, Meghalaya's performance under health becomes even more glaring. It is here where the Ayushman Bharat (AB) program has to be a little circumspect. Upgrad-

ing to Health and Wellness Centre is a good move but it will be important to see how the implementation of the program pans out over time. Additional services will require increased funding and manpower, something which is always the issue with any government program, especially when spending on social sectors is the prime target for budget cuts.

A very good example of the poor implementation of the health initiatives in Meghalaya has been brought out very starkly by the "State ranking Index for NFSA" report published in June 2022 by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution. The Index attempted to document the status and progress of implementation of NFSA (National Food Security Act) and various reform initiatives across the country and has ranked the states accordingly based on their performance. The Index for ranking the states and UTs is built on three key pillars which covers the end-to-end implementation of NFSA through TPDS (Targeted Public Distribution System). These pillars are: i) NFSA— Coverage, targeting and provisions of the

Act, ii) Delivery platform, and iii) Nutrition initiatives. The National Food Security Act (NFSA), which is a law passed on July 5, 2013 which brought about a rights based approach when it comes to food security in the country. Schemes such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), the Public Distribution System (PDS), and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) are included under the Act. The current version of the Index, however, measures the effectiveness of NFSA implementation majorly through operations and initiatives under TPDS. It does not cover programs and schemes implemented by other Ministries and Departments under NFSA. Here again, Meghalaya is second from the bottom in the country highlighting poor implementation as being one of the main factors for poor health outcomes in the State. The Ayushman Bharat (AB) program will have to learn from this experience.

Apart from the state of health infrastructure there are other factors which need

Hope just a word sans an enterprising spirit & good governance

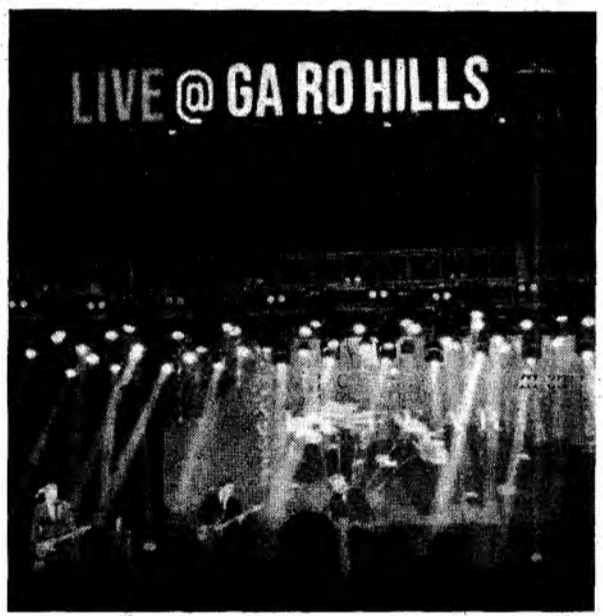
By Gary Marbaniang

Editor,
What's wrong with the MLTR concert in Garo hills? Well as far as I'm concerned, everything is wrong with the concert. First and foremost, the wording in the banner at the concert was wrong; the wording reads as 'live at Garo hills,' when it should have been 'live in Garo hills' or 'live at Baljek, Garo hills.' 'At' is a preposition used when talking about a particular place. Secondly if the concert was a free concert as it was initially planned, then it sends a wrong message to music lovers and it will also have a debilitating effect on budding musicians of the state. Musicians across the globe live for the term, "sold out concert." If the concert of a particular artist is sold out, then it means that a singer has made it considering the cut throat competition that exist in the music industry.

The MLTR concert if it is free will make music lovers in the state especially those in Garo hills feel the need for more free concerts and they will want the music concerts organized by local artists also to be free; musicians in the state are already fighting a losing battle; most of them already feel that it is simply not worth pursuing music as a profession. Such free concerts will be like a

promised land. Having uttered such optimistic words, I think it will be wise to be level headed and expect the worst too. Maybe we should aspire to be like the people of Gurgaon instead. The people of Gurgaon built the city from scratch and they did so in spite of the initial absence of an effective government machinery. An effective government machinery should have been there to facilitate and aid the people who built the city but in spite of the absence of enabling factors and a facilitator, the people of Gurgaon managed to beat the odds. Gurgaon is now one of the most prosperous city in India and the standard of living is at par with some of the wealthiest cities in the world. Resilience and an enterprising spirit are probably the factors that motivated the people of Gurgaon to strive for excellence. The people of Meghalaya especially the young generation should inculcate such values if the State is going to move forward in spite of the absence of good governance.

I've been here in Salt Lake City, Kolkata for almost a week now and this will probably be my last visit to the city. Kolkata and Salt Lake City area in particular has also seen remarkable economic growth over the



death knell to their dreams or aspirations of making music a career. Free concerts in the west are usually organized to raise funds for a particular cause. Live Aid is an example of such a concert. Lastly, the worst part about being wrong as far as making the MLTR concert a free concert is that it was the Government that organized the concert. A free concert does not have any utility; it's simply a waste of public money if it is organized by the Government. The Government should have better things to do; organizing a free concert when the needs of the people are full to the brim shows that the Government has failed the people who elected them.

I bought a book entitled, "India grows at night," by Gurcharan Das a week ago and I finished reading the first chapter today. The book started out with the initial assessment that India grows in spite of the failure of governance; in the first chapter he cited the example of Gurgaon. Gurgaon went on to become a model city for economic growth in spite of the absence of an efficient government machinery in the initial years of its rapid growth. Gurcharan Das opined in the book that India has a strong society and its inhabitants are resilient in nature; the economic reforms in 1991 unlocked the potential that has been lying dormant since independence.

For a state like Meghalaya to grow, we should also be less reliant on the government. Successive governments since 1972 have failed the people. The flame of optimism however should never die and hope should always spring eternal. Hoping against hope that the next government will take the state forward and hopefully they will also lead the people of the State to the

last ten years. Who would have thought that a state that was under Leftist rule a decade ago would see so much investment and growth; however this investment should translate into jobs for the local populace of Kolkata and West Bengal for it to be of any value. Traces of Leftist rule still permeate the city of Kolkata. Austerity and affordability are still hallmarks of the city of Kolkata; probably nowhere in India will one get "chicken thali" that cost only 70 rupees but eventually I guess the traces left behind by the Leftist rule will eventually evaporate and disappear into thin air and the traits of capitalism will permeate every nook and corner of Kolkata.

What Meghalaya desperately needs right now is for its people to come to their senses and realize that the future is in their own hands; its people need to forge an enterprising spirit that is enduring and resilient at the same time. Prosperity and growth should start from the bottom rather than from the top and it should also happen in spite of the absence of good governance. In the long run however, good governance will be needed for growth and development to be sustainable. Meghalaya needs a government that will imbibe the good values of socialism such as austerity and affordability and bind it with the principles of capitalism. If some of you thinks that I'm vouching for Mamata Didi and her party and that I want her and her party to rule Meghalaya, then you will be disappointed because for me personally, I feel Mamata Didi and her party and the people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills are definitely not a match made in heaven nor are they compatible here on earth.

ment in the President's address stating that that there should not be any need for educational qualifications to become a member of a legislative assembly or Parliament. The Government's objection is that the entire process of appointment of judges is opaque and lacks transparency. In the meantime the Supreme Court of India has agreed to hear the plea against the Collegium System of appointment of judges in high courts and the Supreme Court in due course of time. After the advisory by the Parliamentary Committee the issue should be amicably settled.

Yours etc.,
Yashpal Ralhan,
Via email

Politicians must mind their language

Editor,
Recently a candidate of the Congress Party made disparaging remarks that

have hurt the feelings of disabled people. How is it that a person who wants to be elected to the Assembly indulges in such cheap wisecracks. This only shows his lack of sensibilities and that he is unfit to be elected to the legislature. Can we imagine such an insensitive person heading the Social Welfare Department? Political parties are actually so desperate to get candidates that they don't care what sort of person they are welcoming to their parties. Some are what we would call in Khasi – ki khynnah kai- with no qualities of head or heart. How do we expect such people to lead this desperate State?

Then we have the case of the Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya – Prestone Tynsong who needs to keep a handle on his tongue. Recently he called the spokesperson of the TMC a 'psycho.' Does Tynsong even understand the meaning of psycho? Psycho is a slang term for someone who is mentally unstable or afflicted with a psychosis. In other words Tynsong is labelling

the TMC spokesperson as an insane person merely because he raises hell on the acts of omission and commission of the MDA Government.

Indecency seems to be the hallmark of all politicians in Meghalaya. They indulge in gutter language and expect to be speaking at public functions or to young students when they don't even know the nuance of language. Truly, in terms of political vocabulary Meghalaya's politicians score very high. Even in the Assembly – a sacrosanct space and the seat of democracy an MLA uttered expletives thereby demeaning himself and the entire legislature. They will surely go down in the book of world records for foul language.

Yours etc.,
Joanne Lyngdoh,
Via email

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"He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery."

— Harold Wilson

The Shillong Times

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Rao party in Delhi

POLITICS is the art of the possible and often a circus without a ring. The formal start of functioning of a new political entity, the Bharat Rashtriya Samiti (BRS) of Telangana chief minister K Chandrababoo Naidu in the national capital on Thursday is by no means an earth-shaking event. One who does not have a national appeal, like Rao, can dare to start a national party on the strength of his money power. Unlike Rao, Mamata Banerjee had acquired individual clout at the national level before she sought a pan-India role. She was a Union Minister too. Sans these, Rao has stated he is aiming at a "top job" in Delhi after the next polls. With this end in view, he's scouting around and establishing linkages with regional party leaders.

The age of ideology is a thing of the past. Showmanship has become a prerequisite to win elections and yet the people are clever too. Rao is no businessman and his family had modest means. Today, after being chief minister of the Telangana state that he helped create by a bifurcation of the undivided Andhra Pradesh in 2014, it's virtually a family rule there. His son is the second-in-command, his nephew the third most important minister in government and daughter a top party and governmental functionary even after her humiliating defeat in the last Lok Sabha elections. Allegations are that the family is today sitting plum on huge stocks of wealth. The political strategy he had adopted was to create vote banks and make a success out of it mainly as his own community formed only four per cent of the state's population. After the farmers' successful agitation against the farm reform laws of the Centre in the northern states — not in the South where there was not even a whimper of it — he saw another opportunity. He is positioning himself as the "farmer leader" of the nation. Out of the blue, he had sent cheques to the families of the farmers who lost their lives during the farmers' agitation in Punjab, Haryana etc. And now comes his national political foray.

Speculations are also that Rao wants to create "space" for his son as the next CM in Telangana while he sought a "top post" in Delhi after the next parliament polls — in order for the family to have the best of both worlds. Curiously, another Telugu pretender who made such a push before the last Lok Sabha polls, Chandrababoo Naidu, had lost the CM's post in Andhra Pradesh and is stinking after the YSRC Party came from behind and seized power.

Letters to the Editor

Martyrs at the borders; revelers in the city

Editor, Every Meghalayan should hang his/her head in shame when we think of the plight of our brothers and sisters who live at the borders. The recent incident at Mukroh is one of many such incidents which have occurred in the past. But said to say that our governments have never taken any resolute action to address this perennial issue. The complacency and indifference of the government towards the border population has been capitalised by Assam, which is boldly encroaching into our territory. The Assam police would never dare to take a step into the territory of Nagaland or Mizoram because the governments of these states are very patriotic and they would not hesitate to respond in full at sea in many instances. In fact, it is the Nagas who are gaining territories of Assam and not vice versa. Meghalaya has become an easy target and a toothless victim of encroachment by it from Assam or from Bangladesh. Every Khasi knows that we have lost a large portion of land in Ri Bhoi area due to the frequent encroachments from Assam. One wonders what MoI has been made between the CM of Meghalaya and his Assam counterpart in the recent border talks. The continuing harassment of our people at the borders prove that the talks have only emboldened the Assam government. The government's decision to set up police outposts in border towns, is actually only a half-measure solution to a border constituency who resides in the far-flung village? I don't think so because our Netas have mansions in Shillong and perhaps they only pay fleeting visits to their people on rare occasions. Now that election campaigns are coming, definitely they will be found in the villages every other day. Once they win the election, not even their shadows remain in their villages. Should not there be a rule that every MLA and MLC representing rural constituencies (especially border areas) ought to reside at least a quarter of a year in their constituencies? Perhaps this will make them know, understand and feel the suffering and deprivation of the poor people. If so, they would understand the urgency of having good roads, regular electricity and adequate communication facilities. As of today they are not feeling the pinch in their people's shoes and so they continue to remain indifferent and unconcerned to the sufferings of the rural people.

Let us wait and see what steps the MDA Government takes in the aftermath of Mukroh. Yours etc, Barne Mawrie sdb, Via email

We all want CHANGE: We HOPE for CHANGE but how

By Patricia Mukhim

We humans push ourselves from day to day because we nurture fond hopes that things will be better. Now that we are bracing ourselves for the biggest circus of democracy — the 2023 elections we are all yearning desperately for CHANGE. There are of course cynics and the 'can't be cured hopefuls' (what a terrific match) who are already counting constituencies and have predicted that we will have the same government of the NPP-UDP combine. When asked if they are writing off the BJP they quip that BJP might win just the two old seats and those are people who gauge the public pulse sitting in the comfort of their homes because it's too strenuous to undertake a hurriedly dangerous crater in the middle of what was once a road.

These days its more engaging to have a conversation with younger people because they move around and have their ears to the ground. So yes, we all want CHANGE but who will lead the change. I just read Ken Blanchard's book "Who Killed Change?" which is a provocative read on why change is difficult. Blanchard personalizes "Change" and turns him into a character that is surrounded by a host of characters that all want Change to die. They include Culture, Commitment, Sponsorship, Plan, Budget, Urgency, Vision, Communication, Performance Management, Accountability, Trainer, Incentive and the Change Leadership Team itself. In dramatic form, Change was finally killed in an organization and how all the above dramatic personae were involved in one way or the other in the murder of Change. Blanchard demonstrates with rare insights how difficult it is to bring change. Culture or our way of doing things, of reasoning of coming to conclusions, forming opinions and acting in certain ways are so much part of our consciousness that we are afraid of stepping out of this known behaviour. So while it is easy to talk of change, how much we are personally willing to change our habits, thoughts, and tease out all the ingrained ideas that make us quickly form our deep-seated opinions!

If we are ourselves resistant to changing our deeply ingrained habits, including the presence of an armed force in the form of a Border Police Force, would you set up police outposts in border towns, is actually only a half-measure solution to a border constituency who resides in the far-flung village? I don't think so because our Netas have mansions in Shillong and perhaps they only pay fleeting visits to their people on rare occasions. Now that election campaigns are coming, definitely they will be found in the villages every other day. Once they win the election, not even their shadows remain in their villages. Should not there be a rule that every MLA and MLC representing rural constituencies (especially border areas) ought to reside at least a quarter of a year in their constituencies? Perhaps this will make them know, understand and feel the suffering and deprivation of the poor people. If so, they would understand the urgency of having good roads, regular electricity and adequate communication facilities. As of today they are not feeling the pinch in their people's shoes and so they continue to remain indifferent and unconcerned to the sufferings of the rural people. Let us wait and see what steps the MDA Government takes in the aftermath of Mukroh. Yours etc, Barne Mawrie sdb, Via email

Old pension scheme & Himachal election results!

Editor, It was no less amazing to state that the Congress party lost the state of Himachal Pradesh at the recently announced election outcome on December 8, 2022. The elements of this wonderful success was on account of the fact that even as most of the eminent media channels had given the BJP a clear edge over

Sadly even in reserved forests where forest guards are posted, trees are regularly felled. And does anyone want a change here? No, we are comfortable with the status quo.

There are a batch of young and enterprising candidates entering the fray this time. They have the benefit of having worked and studied outside the state and seem enthusiastic enough to bring that CHANGE that many yearn for. Unfortunately, they are not from the same party, they belong to different parties, so how will they converge to bring about a coalition that is concerned about the rural areas of Meghalaya. This is a matter that is being avidly discussed in tea shops and forums.

Let's remember that people in Meghalaya don't vote party or ideology. It is about the person. In urban constituencies people require regular supply of water, electricity, roads and smooth traffic. Of course the youth need jobs so anyone who can show how she/he has convincing ideas about job creation outside the state is sure to win votes. In rural areas there are huge development gaps. Roads are in poor shape so communication is a dilemma. New faces with fresh ideas should be given an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in finance management, in rural entrepreneurship especially in places where there is over-dependence on subsistence farming and clearing off forests for timber. The rate at which trees are being cut in all the Jaintia Hills either for firewood, timber or for producing charcoal is frightening. If you talk about this rampant deforestation people say, "What will we do then if we can't even cut ourselves? How do we earn?" The clutch of environmental conservation rules and laws become a joke in the face of this lived reality. All kinds of schemes such as the Joint Forest Management scheme and others like it are good for official records. They don't work on the ground and there's no supervisory mechanism either. That's how good laws are in Meghalaya. I sometimes wonder why we need such a huge secretariat and a Department for Environment and Forests when the State has control on only 4-5% of forests? Aren't the Forest officials under-worked?

Frankly speaking people are not interested in the same rhetoric from over-exposed faces. They want to see fresh ideas and a new vision for Meghalaya — a vision that we never crafted in 50 years. What a shame! The CHANGE we need in 2023 are the following: Stop electing businessmen to the State Legislature; They use their positions only to improve their own wealth ranking and their productive time is spent in getting government businesses.

Stop electing uneducated men-women: An uneducated person does not understand how a pathetically inadequate education system can pull down generations of youth. Also an uneducated person is easily misled by shrewd bureaucrats who actually tell them how to do things instead of the other way round. Stop electing those with a history of corruption: Some in the present MDA Government have blazed a trail in corruption. Now in the last leg of their tenure as MLAs and MPs they are trying to do a whitewash job. If we continue to elect these same people, we are normalizing corruption as a sine qua non in bureaucracy have learnt to do. So who do we elect then? Elect people who have their own ideas to set and will not waste their elected speeches on castigating their rivals. Elect new faces and give them a try at legislation for 5 years rather than the tried, tested and found wanting variety. Elect those with care and concern for the environment which is fast losing its capacity for regeneration. Its high time we do a Performance Management Test on our sitting legislators regarding the behaviour and results that will enable change.

Why can't the people of Meghalaya ask the North Eastern Hill University to design a Performance Management Test on the current set of legislators? What has this University done as well as to its societal and political life outside the campus? What is the Political Science and Sociology Department doing to enlighten us on voting behaviour and its long-term consequences on the development of the State? We the people of Meghalaya have the right to ask the NEHU and other institutions set up here if they have added value to the State of Meghalaya and to its people. Elections are not just a farce. They must mean something and all institutions must converge to build up a more robust public opinion on who and how to vote.

If we want CHANGE in 2023 we need to work hard on the ground. Mere talk and wishful thinking won't work! Many opine that the soon to be held Assembly elections in Meghalaya, any political party that favours the said old pension plan of action in respect of the state's employees may garner rich dividends in terms of vote share given that in my wide interactions with all Meghalaya's employees who have joined services post 31st March, 2010, the dead line when Government of Meghalaya nullified forth with pension infrastructure. These persons are deeply aggrieved for being denied the pensionary advantages as availed by their senior counterparts. Additionally, most of the political pundits I've spoken to believe that for the rehabilitation of old pension plan in Meghalaya the only parties that can bring home this benefit are the Congress or TMC of Mamta Banerjee as virtually all the BJP ruled states have brought through the pension scheme.

Yours etc, Jerome K Diengdoh, Via email

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Great Nicobar Mega Project: Recipe for disaster?

By Chiranjib Haldar

If we accept the premise that ecological concerns are as worthy as developmental needs, then the decision to have a transhipment terminal, an international greenfield airport or a solar power plant or even a township must be weighed by its ecological detriment. The final environmental clearance for the Great Nicobar infrastructure project by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change was inevitable. As a precursor, large swaths of coastal landmass, including portions of the Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve and Galathea Bay, were stripped of their protected status or demarcated to make way for the project envisaged by the NITI Aayog and approved by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation.

Deeds were cleared for 'the holistic development of Great Nicobar Islands' as the ministry suggests, despite red flags on one of the world's most sensitive archipelagos. Concerns over ecology, rights of the indigenous communities, tectonic volatility and vulnerability of the island towards disaster — which bore fruit of the 2004 tsunami have all been put on the backburner. The mega project envisages an International Container Transhipment Terminal, a greenfield international airport, a township and a gas and solar power plant. Nearly 244 sq km of this lush green forestland, declared a biosphere reserve in 1989 and included in UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Program in 2013, though forest and environmental clearances and independent approvals and follow separate procedures, they are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. There is a compensatory afforestation programme to balance the felling of 8.5 lakh trees in pristine rainforests but the trees would be planted in non-modified forest land in faraway Haryana. In addition to this festering ecological wound, there would be an irreparable loss of 10 to 12 hectares of mangrove cover in an immensely rich and diverse ecosystem in the world. With an expanse of over 1,000 sq km, Great Nicobar Islands is a biodiversity hotspot and one of the best-preserved tropical rainforests in the world. Environmentalists have warned that this will result in drastic and devastating changes to the ecology and sociology of the islands.

Great Nicobar is home to hundreds of rare species of flora and fauna, including endemic ones, some of them listed as 'vulnerable' in the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list of threatened species. Though mitigation measures as a strim location of coral reefs have been proposed, experts and palaeontologists feel thousands of reefs would be destroyed for ever. Conservationists and biodiversity experts have objected strongly to this project as they fear it will pull the island's ecosystem in peril. So, despite the hype, is the Great Nicobar project a monumental folly, a flagship endeavour being sold under a misleading nomenclature of 'holistic development'. The numerous concerns include hazards of developing a township on seismically volatile landmass, impact on coastal nesting sites of vulnerable sea turtles, devastating loss of emerald green forest cover, geological volatility of these secluded islands has just been brushed under the carpet.

Varieties of the project assert that the idea is to leverage the locational advantage of being on the international sea route and develop Great Nicobar as a sustainable, green, global destination for business, trade and leisure. They feel the union territory can truly participate in the regional and global maritime economy by becoming a major player in cargo transhipment. The terminal would attract the existing traffic of Indian Navy's and will boost tourist traffic currently zeroing in at Port Blair. Great Nicobar Island lies on a major seismic fault line and building a mega shipyard and airport in this location may be an ecological disaster. The islands have experienced over 400 minor earthquakes in the last decade and seismologists are worried about the future. Great Nicobar is aerially close to Banda Aceh in Indonesia, the epicentre of the December 2004 tsunami that caused unprecedented damage. The coastline nearly 300 km long is still scarred by the tsunami, and the house at Indira Point is still submerged in the Andaman Sea indicating land subsidence of 3 to 4 metres. After the completion of the port, should any seismic activity occur or snowball, it would result in spilling of oil and chemicals spelling doom for the regional environment.

There are future recipes for disaster which would augment once the Great Nicobar project hinges towards completion. The Environmental Impact Assessment report says over 6 lakh people in the island's future up from little more than 8000. Can we imagine how this manifold repopulating will burst the fragile island at its seams? The present sparse population is relying under scarcity of drinking water despite heavy rainfall, Shompens and Nicobarese, the two indigenous tribal communities inhabiting Great Nicobar would be further displaced, a process set in motion after the 2004 tsunami. The indigenous tribes fear that with the development bandwagon finally zooming on Great Nicobar, settlers from the mainland will infringe on their rights and livelihood. It may be ironical that we can foresee the destruction of some of the finest tropical rainforests in the world at a time when India opined at the recent Sharm-el-Sheikh COP 27 Climate Conference that it was 'a part of the solution and not the problem'. Many ecologists have criticised the government for envisioning this colossal and natural catastrophe in the making. Years back, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro had relaxed laws and regulations that have caused the Amazon rainforests. Once he set the ball rolling, landgrabbers, miners and loggers had a free run in the pristine Amazon rainforests. Environment Support Groups have alleged that India has given clearance to a project that makes a mockery of the Forest Conservation Act where the rights of the indigenous people who are supporters of the Act, the use of forest land have been stamped out. Strategic, imperative, ecological concerns may have been overruled.

The writer is a commentator on society and politics.

"Time and the hour run through the roughest day." —William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

Dangers of tall promises

THE BJP's South Shillong MLA has thrown an open challenge to the people of Meghalaya to give the BJP a majority and allow it to form the next government so that they can get all their demands fulfilled. The dangers of making such blanket promises to the electorate on the eve of the elections is that they are populist in nature and defy the norms of pragmatism. What's the use of the Inner Line Permit if Meghalaya cannot create jobs for its own people? What happens if the people of Meghalaya come up with a laundry list of demands and get a firm commitment from the BJP to deliver on those demands in exchange for their votes? Will the BJP High Command be able to deliver all those promises or a platter? The problem with the BJP leadership in Meghalaya is that on their own they have limited appeal and have to piggy-back on the popularity of Prime Minister Modi. They have made people believe that the Modi Government which they are sure will return in 2024 will be able to do the impossible. Can the State BJP leadership promise employment and if so, how many jobs will they create? Can the BJP leaders in Meghalaya resolve the border disputes? Have they been in the forefront on this issue considering that Assam is also a BJP-ruled state? Is it not high time for the BJP to lay out its vision for Meghalaya?

Interestingly the BJP MLA is dangling a carrot that is most likely to be swallowed by pressure groups and their acolytes — the Inner Line Permit (ILP) — which they believe is a solution to many problems that plague Meghalaya today. Instead of promising to introduce an instrument that could have regressive consequences, why does the BJP not talk of better agricultural production and making Meghalaya self-sufficient in meat and fish production which it is currently importing in large quantities? Meghalaya's core economy is agriculture and this sector is not sexy so we don't hear loudmouths making demands for better, more sustainable agricultural practices especially in the light of climate change. The BJP has never said a word on the illegal coal mining which is creating havoc for the environment. The BJP is silent on the onslaught on the environment due to rampant stone quarrying and sand mining from rivers. The BJP has also been silent on coke units that function without permission. Why is the Party silent on critical issues and focussing on an instrument that is unlikely to yield any advantage to the State? Meghalaya requires investment in non-polluting industries of which tourism is just one of them. That investment must come from outside the State. What are the BJP's views on this issue and other issues related to the economic growth of Meghalaya?

Moroccan Miracle: Triumph of the Football Migrant

By Rajdeep Sardesai

In a World Cup soccer tournament of astonishing twists and turns, the unmistakable take-away is simply this: the football world is now becoming 'flat', a metaphor for an increasingly level playing field in the most competitive of sports. The dramatic rise of Morocco, the first African team to reach the World Cup semi-finals, is proof that a new order is emerging in the sport, one shaped by forces linked to changing patterns of globalization.



It isn't as if this is the first time a rank outsider has made it to the top bracket of a World Cup. In 2002, South Korea were surprise semi-finalists while unfancied Turkey finished third. African countries like Cameroon, Senegal and Algeria have upset some of the world's best teams in the past. Go back even further in time to North Korea defeating the mighty Italians in 1966. Yet, in many instances, these were seen as fluke victories that didn't signal a paradigm shift in sporting power. Morocco's incredible run is very different, built around a system that signals the transformative nature of sport. The most striking feature of the Moroccan success story is the fact that fourteen members of their 26 member squad were born outside Morocco, a majority of them from the mushrooming migrant communities in Europe and beyond who have been at the heart of their achievements. Before the tournament began, the hugely influential Hakim Ziyech was probably the only globally recognized Moroccan player because he is part of London's blue chip club, Chelsea. But now, the likes of Canadian-born goalkeeper Younes Boukou, Madrid-born Achraf Hakimi, Dutch-born Sofyan Amrabat and French-born Sofiane Boufal, have become stars in their own right, typifying an indomitable spirit that has been the hallmark of the Moroccan performance.

It is this triumph of the Moroccan migrant in football that illuminates just how sport can break boundaries that politics often struggles to contain. There are an estimated five million Moroccan migrants in Europe alone, part of a wider 25 million plus Arab immigrant population across the continent. Their strong presence has encouraged far-right politicians across European countries to create a climate of mutual suspicion, even hostility, between Arab Muslims and mainstream European society. A dominant narrative has pigeonholed Arab Muslim immigrants as sporting culture where skill matters above all else. Even the English, whose football ecosystem was once seen as not inclusive enough, have nurtured a team that is far more representative of a 'new' multi-cultural Britain. Just contrast the 'whites only' 1966 World Cup winning English team with the young guns who shone at the 2022 tournament. Then be it Bukayo Saka, born of Nigerian parents or Raheem Sterling, born in Jamaica, or Jude Bellingham and Marcus Rashford, English fortunes and even their style of play has been transformed by the rise of 'ironic black

North Indian migrants from UP and Bihar were bashed up in Mumbai by workers from Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena. Or indeed how students from the north east were beaten up a few years ago for not speaking in Kannada. Or how Kashmiris have been victims of 'hate and bigotry in different parts of India. Truth is, inter-state and global migration has contributed immensely to greater prosperity across geographies. The north Indian migrants who drive small and medium businesses and the service sector in Mumbai and Bihar out of poverty. The wave of Indian migrants to the Gulf countries have not

only built the infrastructure of those countries including the showpiece football stadium in Qatar — but also created a robust remittance economy that has transformed the landscape of states like Kerala. Remittances from the vast global Indian diaspora to their home country were the highest in the world at \$89 billion or 3% of GDP in 2021 according to the World Bank. Which is why the triumph of the football migrant is a powerful message to India and a globalizing world: countries that creatively promote mobility of talent across regions and nations are the ones that will grow and prosper. What Moroccan football has done today, the rest of the world must do tomorrow.

Post-script: There is an eternal question asked ahead of every World Cup cycle: when will India qualify for the World Cup soccer finals? Unlikely in the near future but perhaps one day when a mass sport is taken to every street corner, like it happened with cricket. And yes, when equal opportunity to play is available to every child. Till then, let's rejoice in living the ultimate Moroccan underdog dream. (The writer is a senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeep.sardesai52@gmail.com)

Round The States

By Insaaf

Tawang Face-Off 'Not 1962', but strategy missing

It's not 1962 anymore. An assertion by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday last should bolster confidence at least among his people, after the attempt by Chinese troops to unilaterally change the LAC in the State's Yangtze valley of Tawang sector. In a micro blogging site, he wrote: "Yangtze under my Assembly constituency (Maktok) and every year I meet the army jawans and villagers of the area. It's not 1962 anymore. If anyone tries to trespass, our brave soldiers will give a befitting reply. They don't reply to raising of bricks with mere sticks, they do so with iron rods." This, after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh informed Parliament that the "Indian troops bravely thwarted the Chinese PLA attempt and there were no fatalities or serious casualties to the Indian troops... The ensuing face off led to a physical scuffle in which the Indian Army bravely prevented the PLA from transgressing into our territory and compelled them to return to their positions..." He then as a minister, national security and defence experts seek more — a clear vision and an impressive strategy to deal with the China challenge, instead of merely reacting to each crisis as it emerges. The recent clash took place two-and-a-half years after the toxic encounter between the two sides in the Galwan Valley, Ladakh in June 2020. The border face-off may have been managed for now, but in the long run Delhi needs to resolve the border issue with a belligerent strategy, which is determined to pursue its territorial claims along the disputed border. Nagging insecurity among the local populace in Arunachal and Ladakh needs to be effectively removed. It's not asking for too much!

Bihar's 'Rising Son'

The actor-producer-turned-politician Udhayanidhi Stalin can be said to be the DMK's 'Rising Son'. His induction as Minister of Youth Welfare and Sports Development in Tamil Nadu cabinet can be said to be by father and Chief Minister M K Stalin has opposition AIADMK charging its rival of surpassing the Congress in family feud succession. But Stalin's line of succession as laid out or criticism about 'family rule' or 'dynasty rule' is not new to Indian politics. Various chief ministers and leaders have inducted their sons into positions of power. Be that as it may, Udhayanidhi's induction was expected in the assembly polls May 2021 and it comes through as he returns from films. And now that Stalin has gone through the local politics in Arunachal and Ladakh needs to be effectively removed. It's not asking for too much!

Students' Suicide

The alleged suicides of three students taking coaching for NEET at a center in Kota, Rajasthan has put the spotlight on the larger and grim issue of human rights, according to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Taking suo moto notice of the two separate incidents within 12 hours, the NHRC has sent notices to Rajasthan government, Union secretary of higher education, and chairperson. NHRC particularly observed the growing pressure that teenagers face 'at private institutes in the city for limited seats in pursuing technical and medical education.' In its opinion there's need to 'regulate private coaching institutes'. For these are areas of very hefty amount. Students, from across the country, are staying in hostel-paying guests' houses with a high expectation of success. "Off hand with no action! Incidentally, Kota has become a hub of private coaching centres for aspirants of NEET. The NHRC has asked the three authorities to spell out a regulatory mechanism to control private coaching institutions, a National Action Plan of a experiential increase of seats and initiating some progressive and student-friendly mechanism to get success in NEET, among other issues. Will it percolate down to a concrete roadmap or just another futile exercise? — INFA

Letters to the Editor

Why suddenly so active leaders?

Have you noticed dear readers that there has been a sudden nod of activities in our state by our leaders - the rampant inaugurations, laying of foundation stones, various distributions of umbrellas, sewing machines, etc. tournaments, festivals and what have you? Do you not wonder why the same politicians (or the ruling politicians) have been in deep slumber for four and a half years and have awakened six months or so before the elections? Are we so ignorant to get carried away by leaders who put up a show only to return to power so they can rob us and our magnificent state for the next five years all over again? Do we not question ourselves as to how they can afford to buy luxurious cars and mansions worth crores of rupees with their salaries? They're even using religion as a tool now to draw naive voters. They publicise their personal visits to churches and institutions, and their meetings with the leaders of these institutions just to woo the adherent of these churches. Well, let's not forget that huge party that was held on a certain Sunday last month for the first time in the history of our State when all the young ones chose to attend the said party instead of services. And if you haven't yet asked these questions above, start doing so now! Trust me, you will find your answers on who to choose as your representative in the upcoming elections otherwise we are doomed forever - unending traffic, no parking lots, fallen domes, illegal mining of coal, stone, sand, etc, zero employment, teachers begging for their rightful salary, dilapidated markets... the list will go on!

Are we going to set ourselves up for another five years of mis-governance? Yours etc., Namrta Chettri Via email

Landmark decision by SC on corrupt officials

A five-judge constitutional bench had delivered a landmark judgement on corrupt officials and had clarified that "the court has discretion to raise the presumption of facts and the accused has the right to rebut the presumption but in the absence of a rebuttal the presumption stands. It is generally seen that such corrupt officials do manage the witnesses and get off scot free but after this decision the court will take into consideration circumstantial evidence. There may be cases where the witness is dead or

is not inescapable and police have to use their expertise to reach a conclusive end.

The SC bench said that in the event of the complainant turns hostile or has died or is unable to provide his evidence during the trial, the demand of legal gratification can be proved by letting in the evidence of any other witness either orally or via documentary evidence or the prosecution can prove the case by circumstantial evidence.

"The trial does not abate nor does it result in an order of acquittal of the public servant," the bench said. The apex court's verdict came while examining the issue whether in the absence of direct or primary evidence of demand of bribe, inferential deduction of guilt of a public servant can be drawn based on other evidence. This is a much needed judgement concerning that corruption by public servants in this country is overwhelmingly high.

The apex court remarked further, "We hope that the prosecution makes sincere efforts to ensure that corrupt public servants are booked since corruption is eroding the body politic like cancer.

When direct evidence is unavailable owing to the death of a witness or a witness turning hostile, it is permissible to draw an inference of culpability or guilt of a public servant on the basis of other evidence adduced by the prosecution. Corruption by public servants has become a gigantic problem; no aspect of governance is untouched," remarked the bench further, noting that "large-scale corruption retards nation-building activity."

Making it clear that some direct proof of an offer, demand or acceptance of a bribe is needed, the court has noted that if either aspect is proved through direct evidence, the remaining aspects can be proved through circumstantial evidence also. Particularly, if

there is proof of the offer of a bribe and the acceptance of a bribe, the court has said that it is not necessary to prove that the bribe was demanded.

A constitution bench has shared power with him for years, and RDS Deputy CM Tejash Yadav, gave a very hypocritical and took a decision without worrying about votes." Point well made, but will it be taken?

Centre & Border Row

Embrassment with the border-row escalating in two of its States, Karnataka and Maharashtra, BJP top brass has had to step in. On Wednesday last, Union Home Minister Amit Shah asked Chief Ministers Basavaraj Bommai and Eknath Shinde to set up a six-member joint ministerial panel to address issues and not make any claims till Supreme Court gives its verdict. The issue he chastised 'can't be settled on the streets, but only through constitutional means.' The after violence erupted in Belgaoli and ad-

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 this requisite detail will be published.

Pink: The fashion's colour of controversies

From the blush pink of royal mistresses to the hot pink of tabloid party girls, pink has gained a reputation for being a provocative colour for those who dare to wear it.

Despite its various shades and the complexities of its cultural significance, it is a colour that is often branded with the same connotations of feminine frivolity and excess — whether girlish and innocent or womanly and erotic.

So much so that worshippers at a North London church were ordered to remove pink chairs after an ecclesiastical judge claimed that the choice of colour scheme could "cause puzzlement".

This pink panic invites the question: why is pink so controversial?

A brief glimpse at its rather colourful history in the Western world reveals associations that both shape and challenge what pink means.

PINK'S PAST

According to historian Valerie Steele, the birth of pink in modern fashion began in the 18th century. By this period, pink had become the colour of choice among courtly elites of the Western world, including royalty and aristocrats.

Developments in dye making and the French court's penchant for cutting-edge garments provided the perfect pairing to begin pink's success as an emerging fashion staple.

Perhaps the most instrumental influence on pink's power was Madame de Pompadour — the mistress of King Louis XV. She was often portrayed by the painter François Boucher sporting her signature pink gowns and shoes, most notably in his 1759 piece *Madame de Pompadour*.

In his 1758 painting, *Madame de Pompadour at Her Toilette*, she is shown applying rouge from a



box of cosmetics — the blushed cheeks implying female sexuality. For Steele, the colour pink in this period becomes attached to both the frivolity of French high fashion and the eroticising of white femininity.

From the 18th century court to the 20th century home, pink gained further traction in the 1950s.

As British professor of design history Penny Sparke writes: "Linked with the idea of female childhood, [pink] represented the emphasis on distinctive gendering that underpinned 1950s society, ensuring that women were women and men were men."

Whether adorning first ladies,

Hollywood stars or housewives, pink in this era represented a traditional femininity grounded in fixed gender roles.

Marilyn Monroe's iconic pink gown in *Grease-Lamp Fever Blondes* (1953) paired with her typecast "dumb blonde" film roles and her pin-up past work together to reinforce the star as a sex symbol to be desired by audiences.

As film scholar Richard Dyer argues, Monroe represented the epitome of sex in conservative 1950s American society.

On the other end of the scale, the first lady of the United States Mamie Eisenhower — wife of president Dwight D. Eisenhower

(1953-1961) — cultivated an image of the ideal housewife through her famous "First Lady Pink" looks.

Her stunning 1953 inaugural outfit was a sparkling pink gown embroidered with more than 2,000 rhinestones. She was well-known for her love of all things pink and transformed the White House with this colourful décor, so much so that the household staff called it a "Pink Palace".

PINK AND PROTEST

Beyond the 1950s, pink moved away from its associations of conformity and took on a new purpose: resistance.

Paul Simonon, bassist for

English punk band The Clash, famously said that "pink is the only true rock and roll colour".

We can certainly see this in the way that punk musicians reappraised the sweet and girlish connotations of pink to create subversive performances.

For her 1999 performance at Glastonbury, Hole's Courtney Love — notorious for her raw and raucous vocals — unexpectedly swapped her rebellious grunge girl look for a pink cosmic of ballet slippers and fairy wings.

Pink is also the colour of feminist activism.

The 2017 women's march saw protesters taking to streets in pink "pussy hats".

They were responding to a recording of then president Donald Trump, in which he boasted about grabbing women "by the pussy".

This explicit connection between pink, female genitalia and activism is a feminist statement that emphasises women's lack of autonomy over their own bodies in a patriarchal society.

PINK RECLAIMED

The connotations of pink are not fixed, but malleable. Whether worn by film stars, musicians or celebrities, the colour takes on new meanings through irony and reclamation.

The 2001 film *Legally Blonde* subverts the gendered "dumb blonde" stereotypes associated with wearing pink by following the successes of a sorority girl who goes to law school.

When Madonna donned her pink *Material Girl* look, she positioned herself as the new Marilyn Monroe: a blonde bombshell for the era of Second Wave Feminism. She reworked Monroe's tragic stardom into a narrative about female empowerment and survival.

On TikTok, the #Bimbo trend involves feminine-presenting content creators finding inspiration in the once derogatory "bimbo" label. Their videos reclaim the label as a playful aesthetic and a new feminist lifestyle.

Despite its longstanding associations with feminine frivolity and excess, pink consistently proves itself to be a transgressive colour. It moves with the times and does not shy away from parodying its own past.

If Paris Hilton's surprise runway appearance earlier this year in sparkling pink Versace bridal wear tells us anything, it's that pink should never be underestimated. It still has the power to shock, fascinate and make a statement. (*The Conversation*)

What can friendship survive?



By Sukant Deepak

She says a novel has a number of starting points, and for a long time she was been interested in the idea of childhood friendships and how they are so different. "In 2016, in America there was Trump and in Britain, Brexit. I started hearing a lot of people saying things, like 'Oh! there are so many things falling apart and I cannot talk to them (friends) because they are on the other side... I found myself thinking about who can friendships survive,'"

award-winning British-Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie tells *ANS*. Her latest novel 'Best of Friends' (Bloomsbury Publishing), a book about friendship, power, morality, and loyalty, follows its title characters from their Pakistani girlhoods to their adult lives in England. She adds that in friendships, one may choose to just ignore the points of difference and focus on the similarities — but what happens if that source of difference cannot be ignored anymore? "So it started in that way and it was more abstract. And then, I was writing an article on Pakistan's women's cricket team, and I felt this tingling in my fingers, and strong memories hit me. It was such a crucial point and I had the idea — I must begin in Karachi. So I suppose all those

things came together."

The author, who won the 2018 Women's Prize for Fiction (*Home Fire*) and has to her credit novels including 'In the City by the Sea', 'Salt and Saffron', 'Kartography', 'Broken Verses', 'Burnt Shadows', 'A God in Every Stone' and 'Home Fire' says that something she is just not interested in deciphering which characters in her works share similarities with those in her life. "Because when I start associating that, they become someone else, and it's very hard to see them as people. In the back of my brain, I am using my life experiences and the people I have met as inspiration, and it's not just from one person. While for some people, the joy of writing comes from real-life people who they take their inspiration from, in my case, I am still that child who wants to make things up."

Shamsie, born into a family of intellectuals in Karachi — where everyone read, wrote and talked about books, something she took to early on, remembers, "Books were as much a part of life as food was. When you learn that early on, it sets in on you. Now, we are lucky that there are a lot of young writers coming out of Pakistan and it (writing) is one of the things you might want to do with your life. Growing up, it was very different. There were very few who would write in

English and they seemed like an exception. That I had a mother who would sit at a desk and write sentences made me think -- this is something I can do with your life."

Talk to her about major Indian publishing houses working with Pakistani writers and she says that around a decade back, it was fashionable to say 'Pakistani writing is cool', but the first people who were publishing them were in India.

"And it makes sense of course as we are tied to each other in so many ways. It is hard to get across the border and novels became a way to know each other. A lot of the infrastructure was created due to Indian publishing which I think is wonderful."

Now living in England for a long time, does the distance from Karachi, where many of her works are based, helps her understand that city by the sea better? She asserts, "To write about Karachi from this distance, and in 2022, I do not think I am in a better position than someone who is physically there. Time does something interesting, and I can look back at Karachi in 1988. The interesting thing is the distance that comes with time rather than a sort of a physical moving away."

Talking about her mentor, Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali, who she studied from both as an undergraduate and graduate student, she remembers, "After his death, there's like an internalized version of him who tells me, 'Okay, you have written a bad sentence and need to delete it, erase it from your memory'. When I took some poetry classes with him, that freed my prose. I learned to pay attention to every word. An important thing he taught was to read the writing out loud."

For her, a book 'comes' slowly... she comes to a point where she has not written for some time but then there is an inkling. And then months go by when something very slight forms. "I sit down and I am stuck for a long time. My beginnings are slow because I do not know what I am doing at times. And then, five days in a week, I am at my desk for hours. The deeper I get into a novel, the more it flows," she concludes. (*ANS*)

Welcoming guests into the House of Socrates

Le Bristol Paris prepares an immersive transformation, welcoming guests into the 'house of Socrates' for the festive season with scintillating dinner, unforgettable dining, and gifts galore.

Enchanting Christmas scenography

This Christmas, Oetker Collection's Parisian Palace, will reach peak coziness with festivities hosted by the hotel's resident feline, Socrate. Renowned French interior design firm, Studio Jbjorg, is overseeing an immersive decor of the hotel's common spaces, taking its cues from Le Bristol Paris' rich history to create a festive dream-cape inspired by travel, opulence, and glamour with a touch of playfulness.

The experience begins with Christmas trees lining the exterior entryway and leading indoors to a potted pine forest — all consciously lit with eco-friendly candles or LED string lights.

The lobby, Socrate's customary domain, will be illuminated by a cascade of 500 crystal pendants to be draped from the ceiling, casting its infinite reflection on the surface of a mirror-topped central table.

The surrounding pines, decorated in gold

baubles and white tassels, will feature beautifully wrapped gifts at their base whilst a series of handmade Socrate sculptures will play hide-and-seek throughout the scene like Christmas elves in a charming tribute to this festive season's gracious host.

Le Bristol's courtyard garden, for its part, will



be dressed for the occasion in pine trees and an original 'Amour Toujours' neon light feature, custom created for Le Bristol Paris by calligraphy sculptor Valentine Herrenschildt.

Holiday dining

Triple Michelin-starred Epicure and one Michelin-starred 114 Faubourg have announced their respective menus for Christmas and New Year's Eve dinners, which will take diners on an exquisite gastronomic journey.

At Epicure, the seven-course menu features wild turbot and Bresse

chicken with lobster for

Dear Santa... Every gift giver will find something to delight their loved ones at Le Bristol Paris. From Spa Le Prairie, there's the beloved Cavivar Signature treatment or the Bonpoint Tendresse duo treatment for the face or body — a relaxing moment to share between parents and child.

One can never go wrong with a gift voucher for an elegant dinner at Epicure or a cozy tea time at Cafe Antoinette. For small surprises, a visit to L'Epicuric du Bristol will reward you with a collection of delightful treasures, like the seasonal Buche de Noel by Head Pastry Chef Pascal Hainig, available from December 20th-26th.

The Gabriela Hearst Christmas pop-up boutique in the hotel lobby presents, until early January 2023, a curated selection from the designer's eponymous collection. (*ANS*)

Danteo and his team a six-course menu around pasture-raised guinea fowl in a chestnut crust for Christmas and, for New Year's, a succulent young pigeon terrine. Each menu will feature a unique and delicate dessert by Le Bristol Paris' pastry team.

At Epicure, the seven-

course menu features wild turbot and Bresse

chicken with lobster for

the occasion in pine trees and an original 'Amour Toujours' neon light feature, custom created for Le Bristol Paris by calligraphy sculptor Valentine Herrenschildt.

Morocco at the 22 FFA WC: Six forces behind a history-making performance

Despite losing to defending champions France in the final four, history was made by Morocco at the 2022 men's football World Cup in Qatar. They became the first African and first Arab team to advance to a semi-final at the tournament.

The Atlas Lions, endowed with impeccable organisation and defensive will, creative midfield passing, speedy offence and the rousing racket of its fans, broke the elusive World Cup glass ceiling against Portugal to face France. The sound of the Moroccan fans was a lifeblood coursing through the first World Cup to be staged in the Arab world. As magical as Morocco's progress seemed, one should not ignore the fact that no team had scored against them (save for an own goal while defeating Canada) until France did. The team stamped its authority with unimaginable flair and controlled composure.

There are six notable forces that drove their success. **1. Team spirit:** Morocco demonstrated the ultimate collective team spirit to eliminate higher ranked teams that boasted a generous supply of star individual talents - Belgium, Spain, Portugal. What Morocco lacked in star players was compensated by sheer desire to win and technical application by the whole team.

Their quarter-final goal, coming after repeated fouls, was a sure, was scored in the 42nd minute. Some good touches led to Yahya Attiaf Allah fielding the ball, controlling it and then sending a cross into the box. The cross of En-Nesry seemed to rise forever above the outstretched hands of the tall Portuguese defenders, to head it in from the centre. The fluid passing was beautiful to watch, leaving Portugal bewildered and eliciting pandemonium in the stadium that rippled around the world.

2. Driven by history: Motivated by a desire to go past the quarter-final, African sides to reach World Cup quarter-finals. Cameroon in 1990, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana in 2010 - had gone out in the

most painful manner, in overtime. In each of these cases, the African teams lacked the composure to see through their leads.

The Atlas Lions defended with all of their hearts and then scored, preventing any possibility of overtime. Egypt's and striker Walid Cheddira being sent off after a second yellow card did not destabilise the defensive rhythm of the team. Portugal, including star player Cristiano Ronaldo, could not find the equaliser. From the beginning, the Moroccan looked determined that history would be made.



3. Defences win championships: Until the semi-finals, Morocco had remained unbeaten. In the round of 16, they eliminated Spain on penalty kicks, where their goalkeeper Yassine Bounou made huge saves to propel them to the quarter-finals. The elimination of Portugal, just like Spain, came on the back of a solid defence that had conceded no goals.

It is often said that defences win championships. If that's the case then Morocco has the qualifications to compete and win at the highest level. But, against France, they could not summon sufficient self belief and energy to handle the onslaught for

long stretches of time. Their ball possession had been 22% against Spain and 23% against Portugal, which speaks to their defensive discipline and efficient execution at scoring. The low possession percentages also show that having plenty of ball possession is not a guarantee for victory. However, taking leads also allows the team to narrow spaces, forcing the opposition to run more - and then hit on the counter attack.

4. Fans are the 12th player: Morocco found itself in the unique position of carrying the dual hopes of the Arab region as well as the African continent.

Their matches felt like home games, with the team's supporters dominating in the stands. The Moroccan fans cheered the team, jeered their opponents and relentlessly willed on their heroes. After the final whistle in the quarter-final, the stadium erupted as thousands jumped up and down, hugging and embracing. With fans acting as the 12th player for Morocco, it would not be a big shock if the Atlas Lions can dig deep and mount one more upset in the bronze medal playoff against Croatia. For Morocco, playing for the third time in historic and they have already opened a new chapter in the

history of the World Cup.

5. Star performers: Despite the pressure of bearing the burden of history, the Atlas Lions demonstrated that they had the technical and tactical capacity to cope. Indeed, the team was steady, organised, serene, defensively sound, creative in midfield and smart and efficient in attack. Bounou, Achraf Hakimi, Azzedine Ounahi, Romain Saiss, Sofyan Amrabat, En-Nesry and Hakim Ziyech were Morocco's stand out performers. However, an injury to Saiss was a big blow to their hopes in the semi-final. Historically, Morocco has been a trailblazer at the World Cup for Africa and were not fazed by Spain and Portugal. They gave a good account of themselves against France. This team has raised the ceiling for African teams and send out a notice to the rest of the world that they can compete with the best.

6. Local coaching: Morocco's Cinderella story at the 2022 World Cup had a lot to do with coach Walid Regragui, who installed an effective defend-and-counter style that none of their opponents until France came close to solving.

Regragui ingeniously set up and steered the team to the semi-finals and, in the process, changed the false narrative that local African coaches are not equal to the task of mastering team success at this level. Indeed Regragui's side showed that an African coach can creatively harness both the skills and the wills of the players to achieve national glory.

Eyes on the trophy: The 2022 World Cup has been characterised by unexpected upsets and exceptional entertainment for fans. One of the goals of world football body Fifa is to continue growing the game. Morocco's qualification for a semi-final spot was a breakthrough in demonstrating that parity is emerging. There was a big portion of the world's population that would have erupted with joy and tears if team Morocco had their name engraved on the trophy. Morocco showed that it's possible for an African team to win the World Cup in the near future. *(The Conversation)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhanbi Sunday, DECEMBER 18, 2022

Moon's square Mercury in your 10th return chart. You will have mental satisfaction. Your wish and dream will be fulfilled. God will bless all your wishes. Your heart will be happy as you have lot of prosperity and growth in your life. Your income will increase. Jupiter and Saturn will give you progress in your business and job. You will have holiday plans. Your income will rise. Government officials will be happy. Friends and associates will get delighted. When alone you will do good analysis. You will start a new partnership in business. You will also make plans for love and have money for your children's career and marriage. You will feel love among your closest ones. Your peace will be high in knowledge matters. **Aries (March 21 - April 20)**

You will get filled with happiness and bliss. You will be well placed in your job. Your income will also increase. You will be happy in your life. In your work and home in yourself. You will also enjoy yourself fully. You will run your business efficiently. You will still miss your partner. You will focus all your energies to complete your work. Here planets will be in motion. Your responsibility will be more when you will be able to manage well. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner/spouse. You will have mutual admiration and love for each other. Put aside your ego in your work, otherwise, your decisions can go wrong. You could be overwhelmed at times. Just focus on high things in a simple and relaxed manner. Help will be forthcoming from every corner. **Taurus (April 21 - May 21)**

To do or not to do. You could be caught in a dilemma. But the time will be in your favor. You will be able to apply yourself and take all appropriate decisions. You will have a good grip on your business and go well. You will also get pleasure and happiness. Your business will flourish. You will also enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. There will be growth in your business affairs. You will be satisfied with what you do. Results will follow later on. You will also see cooperation of your colleagues. You will seek support in the matters of filling your long term wishes. Dreams and ambitions. You will also come closer to your relatives. You will do your best to strengthen the relations. You will be grateful in your approach and behavior. **Gemini (May 22 - June 21)**

The time is auspicious for you. You will be filled with hopes and desire to do well. You will get happiness from your spouse and family members. Your friends will also be with you. You will also try out new things in your work/profession. You will also achieve something fulfilling. You will also get the honor you deserve. This is the right time to play a big deal. You will get whatever you wish with your communication skills. You will be much ahead of others because of your talent and hard work. You will have the support and love of your family. Also you will plan to buy a new house or vehicle. You will organize your time table and daily routine. Your health will be perfect. **Cancer (June 22 - July 22)**

The time will be of mental satisfaction. This is the time to make gains. You will exchange your thoughts and information. You always play an important role in your progress. You will also get respect and support of your colleagues. You will be given a prestigious position in your organization. You will have money savings days. You will also have good health. You will be in the right decision of your goals. You will aim lot of money. Some women will make gains in your organization. You will have money. But you will have no friends and nothing to worry about. You will emerge even more stronger. You will have to face competition in your business but it will only bring out best in you. **Leo (July 23 - August 23)**

Things will turn in the right direction for you. You will have gains in business/work. Your mate will get enhanced. You will get huge profits in your business. You will also get a good marriage to your spouse. A person whom you meet by chance will prove to be lucky for you. Your work will get done with ease. Business activities will go on as usual. You will share wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. Children will listen to you. You will be filling your responsibilities to family very well. You will get an approval letter to your mate. Students will know doing well. Your friend's advice is a properly made one. **Virgo (August 24 - September 23)**

You will be a prosperous man. You will spend the week in the best way. You will spend lavishly and enjoy yourself with family members. You will also plan to go out of station for a holiday. Travel trip with your family. New plans will be envisaged. You will be inspiring your work with enthusiasm and energy. Your peers and bosses will support you. Travels related to work will be

successful. The contacts and relations with different people will open doors to success. You will have lot of self confidence. You will be happy with your achievements. You will be concerned about your children, parents and other family members. This shows the kind mindset sets of yours. You will manage the things well. **Libra (September 24 - October 23)**

It is a favorable time period. The results which you feel were taking a long time to come will be forthcoming now. You will value your relationship with life and make the best decisions. You will be busy with different activities related to business and home. An elderly person whom you meet all of a sudden will open the doors of progress for you. You will be open minded and flexible in your approach. You will resolve some family differences with your siblings. There will be a change of heart from both sides. You will show interest in politics and social issues. You will get more opportunities to grow in your business/job. Everyone will admire your work. There will be only and love in the family. Your friends and colleagues will cooperate with you. **Scorpio (October 24 - November 23)**

It will be a peaceful work. You will do more hard work and labor in your career/business. Your career will be with progressive people. You will make best use of them. In this process you will start to gain a lot and they will prove fruitful to you. You need to take care of your health. You will also go on a travel destination with your family and take a little break from work. You will bargain from a position of strength in your business and will take right decisions. There will be an improvement in your business globally. You will take part in social meetings. You will undertake the sentiments and feeling of your partner well and will address each other. You will try to meet expectations of your elders and siblings. **Sagittarius (November 24 - December 23)**

It will be a successful week for you. Your resolution and dream will get enhanced. Your earnings will be good and you will defeat your main aim. You will get success in your work/profession. You will also finish some important work quickly. You will have a conversation with people on a variety of issues. You will get good returns from investments made by you. You will be with your family. Your spouse/partner will help or inspire you. You will also do some creative work. You will have the caliber to do work efficiently. You will think about the proximity of the family. Business conditions will be favorable. **Capricorn (December 24 - January 23)**

You will be a lot more happy now than ever. Positivity will be all over you. You will have more gains in your business. You will solve several issues at your workplace. You will find yourself surrounded by many colleagues. But you will ultimately come out as winner. There will be a peaceful and cordial atmosphere in business and on the home front. Talks carry of your deal. You need to drive your vehicle carefully. A plan, you wish in the mind could be in reality if you do not apply yourself well. Don't get deceived by someone who buying an expensive item which will be of little use for you. But you will be delighted to meet some old friend of yours in a chance encounter. **Jan 24 - Feb 18**

The time will be full of gains and profits. You will have contacts with new people in your work. You will also be full of self confidence. You will also be able to achieve what looks impossible. You will want to finish your work on your own or with the help of your colleagues. Even they will support you fully. You will have the caliber of hard work and will see people showing keen interest in your ideas and work. Relations with your life partner will be smoother. You will get along well with her/him. You could also get involved in a relative's function and will be welcomed warmly by one and all. You will do shopping and will relax with your family members. **Feb 19 - March 20**

Some new plans will be taking shape in your mind which you will want to finish off as the earliest. You will be the person who your work will be. There will be new opportunities to make progress in your job/business. Your opponents will try to push you in the corner but they will not be able to do so. You will make lot of money. You will help some old relatives or friends. You will also welcome guests at your home. There will be excitement and auspicious news from somewhere. Your advisors will surround you if you own a house. You will plan to renovate it. There are chances of getting a house. Bill or lend. Your performance in interview exams will be good. You will focus a party to friends and family.

Stay safe from cyber frauds during year-end sales

The year-end is just around the corner, and with that, comes the plethora of sales from fashion houses and e-commerce websites trying to make our holiday season ready. The year-end clearance sales and discounts and customers looking to indulge in some retail therapy give scammers ample avenues to carry out their fraudulent activities. Here are five tips from Truecaller on how to stay protected against financial fraud during the year-end sales:

Be vigilant about suspicious logins, messages
Most shopping and e-commerce websites ask their users to create an account to access their collection or place orders. When creating an account, users have to provide an e-mail address and a phone number on which they receive updates on the latest offers, the orders they have placed, and exciting deals they can avail of. These modes of communication can be incredibly useful for users to track the orders being placed, as well as their login activity. Very often, scammers can get access to account information, log into user accounts, and place orders using the stored payment options. Being vigilant about suspicious logins and order messages allows users to be informed when there is suspicious activity, or when there is an order that they have not placed, which can then be immediately reported to the support team of that particular website or to a local police authority if a monetary transaction has been carried out.

Only browse secure and authorized websites
One of the most common tactics being used by scammers to steal information is by providing a link to a website that looks similar to a secure and authorized website, with slight modifications that are unnoticeable at first glance. For example, a scammer may send an email to a person containing the logo and link of a commonly used website about an order they have placed or a bill that is due. However, upon inspection, one will be able to notice that the website URLs often have an additional letter or extension in them, to mimic a look of a common website. When a user clicks the link, they are often directed to illegal or phishing websites that ask for payment or personal information, which is then misused by the scammers. The easiest way to note whether a website is secure is by looking at the URL. Authorized websites will usually have a logo before the 'HTTPS' and will have the exact name or extension that the website is known for.

Never share OTPs with others
To combat scammers from using the payment information of others, banks all over India have initiated a two-factor authentication mode. While this has helped combat scams and misuse of financial information to a certain extent, it can still be exploited if a user shares their OTP with others. It is incredibly important to never share your One-Time password with anyone and only use it if you are in the process of placing an order, and on a trusted website or app. If you have received an OTP that you haven't initiated, it is important to change your account passwords immediately and notify your bank about this unauthorised transaction. It is also a common policy for employees of an e-commerce website to never ask for OTPs from customers, and representatives asking for an OTP should always be viewed as a red flag and reported.

Don't save your payment details on websites
While you may trust certain commonly used websites or platforms, it is always advised to never save your payment details, even if you plan to purchase products from them in the future. This is because if a site is compromised in any way, saved cards and payment information can easily be exploited and accessed by those trying to gain access to mass information. It is also important to note that when you save information on a particular website, they are also storing in your browser data on your computer or phone, and in the event that those are compromised, a scammer or a hacker can easily get access to this information.

Only pick up calls from verified businesses
Phone scams have become some of the most common tactics that scammers often employ because of the lack of security systems with regard to telephonic conversations. Communication platforms like Truecaller can be a helpful tool in identifying calls from verified businesses and raising an alarm about scam calls. It is also important to make sure that you do not pick up calls from foreign registered numbers or suspicious-looking numbers like the ones that start with digits other than 0 or 9. In case, for some instances, you do pick up a call from this, make sure that you stay vigilant, don't share OTP, or follow suspicious instructions being told from the other side. If you do notice any suspicious behavior from a caller, it is important to report them so that proper action can be taken against them and to save others from falling from similar scams in the future. *(ANSJife)*

"The one exclusive sign of thorough knowledge is the power of teaching."
—Aristotle

The Shillong Times

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Left only in name

THE Left in India is in an existential crisis. Globally, the Left is identified with the cause of the underlings, the socially weak, the poor. Here, it is represented mainly by the two Communist parties — the CPI and the CPI-M — apart from the CPI-ML and other Maoist outfits as also a host of name-sake parties. The two Communist parties have shared power in Bengal, Tripura and Kerala, the last of which is the only live red outfit today. Elsewhere, the Left is withering away as their leadership fails to inspire.

The CPI-M and the CPI make their presence felt not by action but by media circus. The leadership of the two parties think and speak in English, the language of the elite. They are not comfortable with Hindi. Worse, they have hardly been taking up the causes of the poor, other than organising the working classes, collecting annual levies and "minting" money. The CPI-M's CITU has a stated membership of 60 lakh; and the 'evy it collects each year apart from a host of other collections is mind-boggling. Curiously, they "fight" these days mainly for more benefits to the government employees, bank executives and the like, exposing their ideological bankruptcy and degeneration. Even as the two Communist parties are politically at a dead end, they are "well-endowed". This is making serious political pursuits a matter of little importance to them. Reason why they are "fighting" with NOTA or Invalid Votes to gain the upper hand, as was evident also in the present round of polls in Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi MCD. The only exception is Kerala, where the party is still in good form, though perceptions are that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will, by his questionable styles, lay out another burial ground for the Communists.

For success in politics, sincerity to the cause is important. People are not fools. They catch on what interests them. Point to ponder: why, not even Muslims vote for the CPI-M even as it advocates their causes. Empty slogans or mouthing ideology from AC rooms will not take a party forward. Worse, when a bunch of leaders with no mass contact rely entirely on the media to hold forth and prove their presence, the party is set on the road to extinction. The West Bengal and Tripura drubbings did not help the CPI-M leadership wake up. Its leaders foolishly pose themselves as movers and shakers. Flushed with money, the party holds its central committee/paliburo meetings in the national capital frequently; its leaders flying down in style from state capitals at the drop of a hat. For what, many wonder.

Letters to the Editor

India's mathematical prowess mesmerized Laplace, Einstein...

Lalitor,

Indians have been pioneers in many fields, especially where it involves grey matter. Mathematics is no different. India's love affair with mathematics is millennia old and forms the very foundation of many scientific inventions and discoveries. These proud facts were passionately acknowledged and eulogized by great thinkers like Francis Voltaire and Pierre-Simon Laplace about three hundred years ago. Yes, precision and calculation go hand in hand in India. No language is more precise than Sanskrit in expressing anything imaginable without ambiguity. After realizing the depth of Indian treatises, a top American philosopher William James exclaimed, "From the Vedas, we learn the practical art of surgery, medicine, music, house building under which mechanized art is included. They are an encyclopedia of every aspect of life, culture, religion, science, ethics, law, cosmology and meteorology."

Well, the mathematical discoveries were made on Indian soil thousands of years before the Europeans found their so-called break-

throughs. Even after realizing that Indians had long made many mathematical discoveries, they continued to conveniently ignore these facts and used the Roman numeral system, which was increasingly criticized for being inherently clumsy. Al-Khwarizmi, a Persian polymath of the 9th Century and Leonardo Bonacci, an Italian mathematical genius of the 12th Century, are some of the important persons who struggled hard to introduce the Indian system of numbers in European countries.

India's zero has the power to turn a pauper into a prince and vice versa. The buck doesn't stop there. The ancient Indian saints also made significant contributions to algebra, trigonometry, algorithm, negative numbers, square root and cube root, to name a few. In the famous book "The Universal History of Numbers", eminent French historian of mathematics Georges Ifrah says just that. "A thousand years ahead of Europeans, Indian savants knew that the ZERO and the INFINITY were mutually inverse notions." Lancelot Thomas Hogben, a British medical statistician and zoologist, seconded Ifrah. "In the whole history of Mathematics, there has been no more REVOLUTIONARY step than the one which the Indians made when they invented the sign 0 for the

Transparency and Bureaucratic Tendency to Hide Everything

By Avner Pariat

ema and not a single soul has so far offered a solution to the problem of obstruction through abstraction" which is what modern bureaucracy

In this never-ending back-and-forth, the Administration came out with a counter clarification of its own. Which attempted to clear up what happened to the 632 crore and why Vijay Kumar IAS was not to be blamed for implicated in any wrongdoing. To be honest, the clarification was not very clear. It did not really do what it was intended to do. As someone had correctly pointed out - let the facts and figures come out into the public domain and let an audit be undertaken.

seems to be all about. In spite of the tremendous strides we have made in technology and the latest democratic potential of digital communications, in Meghalaya it would seem, these wonderful tools are of no use. Many bureaucrats talk about "open economy," and "opening up Meghalaya" but in reality, people are left

However, the political turmoil which Saket has created is a bit of a distraction from the real issue at hand. We are now obsessed with a single IAS officer but we have not talked about the system which he is a part of. To do that would be anathema and not a single soul has so far offered a solution to the problem of "obstruction through abstraction" which is what modern bureaucracy seems to be all about.

in the dark and nothing of any real importance is ever shared with the common person. Proclamations are made from the highest level and we, lowly citizens and slime eaters, must simply obey and never question why something needs to be done

Voters respect the manifesto

Edin,

Malikarjun Khadge passed the first limus test by helping Congress win the assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh which has a tradition of changing governments after every five years. Whatever guarantees the Congress party had promised to the voters paid rich dividends. Let's take two guarantees — the first is implementation of old pension scheme and second is payment of rupees 1500 to every female above eighteen years. The Congress is in power in two states Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and in both states old pension scheme is implemented and the voters positively responded to this guarantee. The second point of payment to females proved fruitful. It is interesting to note that Malikarjun Khadge today declared that the same ten guarantees will be implemented in Karnataka assembly elections which will be held in May 2023. The Bharat Jodo Yatra passed through many parts of Karnataka and the results of the assembly elections will prove whether the Yatra made any impact.

The BJP is treating all the above as frebies yet the party has to take such issues seriously otherwise, they can prove costly for the BJP. Now take the performance

every single thing done by any and all departments?

Age now calling for tenders to create a master plan for an administrative city in the New Shillong Township (NST) when it should be the job of the PWD, Urban Affairs or Municipal departments?

Why is the State Sports Council calling for tenders to create Centres for Excellence for horticultural/agricultural products when it should be carried out by the Directorate of Agriculture?

Can our doubts be clarified by a single proclamation? And even if they do so, can our masters JUSTIFY that these are all essential expenditures and/or actions? Some within the higher sections of the government do not want to give up that control which extends itself over our very lives. At the risk of sounding like a Friedmanite, I have to admit that releasing Meghalaya from this excessive Bureaucratic Control must be an immediate non-partisan election issue. As politically conscious citizens, we must continue to strive in this dark, to remove the obstructions before us.

Anyone who follows The Shillong Times closely will see that I have been writing about the issue of transparency for a while now and that is because I am very concerned about it. This is why in my own election campaign I have made one big promise and that is to always hold regular public meetings every 3 months with all the constituency. Our team has christened them Constituency Clinics — because just as we need clinics to check-up on the health of the people, we also need "clinics" to check up on the constituency as well. During these meetings, we will present report cards to the public about what we have been doing for them and their families. They will be simple and uncomplicated because we don't want to hide anything from anyone.

We — the public — must confront the grim reality that administrative posts that were a rebuke of a few power-brokers who will fight — tooth and nail — to maintain the status quo. But like the old Basille, we must stand up eventually if we are to realise our cherished dream for a democratic, free and just society.

Should Parliament codify basic structure doctrine?

By Manish Tewari

The recent stand-off between the judiciary and the executive on judicial appointments and the law minister's public advice to the Supreme Court not to hear bail matters and frivolous public interest litigations are issues that go to the very heart of our constitutional jurisprudence.

Perhaps the law minister has not heard about the golden triangle of rights, Articles 14, 19 and 21 that lie at the heart of the Indian Constitution and very much constitutes its soul. Perhaps the minister has not read Justice Krishna Aiyer's ground-breaking dictum that bail should be the rule and jail the exception. However this stand-off raises some more pertinent questions, the first and foremost being the very longevity of the basic structure doctrine that hangs by a 7-6 slender majority in the Rameswaram Bharatiya matter, whereby the Supreme Court of India held that certain parts of the Constitution lay beyond the amending powers of Parliament.

How transcendental is the basic structure doctrine? Could it be that one day we find ourselves without the basic structure, leaving the door open for a super-majority in Parliament to amend the Constitution as it wishes? It is ironic to say that the basic structure doctrine is a judge-made one.

Although Kesavananda v. State of Kerala (1973) SCR Supp 1 is thought to be its originator, it was in Galak Nath v. State of Punjab AIR 1967 SC 1643 where its seeds were planted. In Galak Nath, the Supreme Court held that fundamental rights in the Constitution were of a "transcendental" character and, therefore, could not be amended away. Then in Kesavananda, the majority held inter alia that "the power to amend does not include the power to alter the basic structure or framework of the Constitution so as to change its identity".

Simply stated, the basic structure doctrine posits that any constitutional amendment passed by a legislature can be voided if it infringes certain basic features of the Constitution. What are these basic features? Justice Sikri in Kesavananda characterised the following as basic features: supremacy of the Constitution, republican and democratic form of government, secular character of the republic, separation of powers, and federalism.

In essence, what the basic structure doctrine does is to provide a bulwark against the destruction of those features of the Constitution which provide its identity. Indeed, these features under-considered the framers' work while drafting its various provisions. It is natural then that these features ought to continue till the time the Constitution remains. It is the promise on which the functioning of our polity rests. And as long as the Constitution carries on, the polity will endure.

The "eternity limits" of the kind explicated by the basic structure doctrine are, therefore, critical in ensuring the continuity of the original Constitution. Justice Khanna wrote thus: "If the Basic Structure is retained, the old Constitution would be considered to be continuing even though other provisions have undergone changes."

Such implicit unamendability of the basic structure doctrine is the heart of the matter. The concept of unamendability — the notion that courts can invalidate an amendment even though it was duly passed by the legislature by an overwhelming majority or even unanimously in the case of the Constitution amendment re-

ating the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) — is a corollary of the consent power which gave birth to the Constitution.

There, however, are arguments against the basic structure doctrine. These voices are becoming increasingly strident. I'm bolded perhaps by how the United States Supreme Court decided in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* 19-1392, 597 U.S. (2022), critics of the basic structure doctrine would hope one day Kesavananda will be reviewed and the doctrine discarded. First, it is important to underscore the context of the abortion decisions of the United States Supreme Court. *Roe v. Wade* decided 7-2 when the court had a liberal majority on the bench and Planned Parenthood v. Casey was decided 6-3 when a conservative majority sat on the bench. Second, the partisan nature of the United States Supreme Court should make it unfit for comparisons with India at least in the current context.

There is, however, a more robust critique of the basic structure doctrine with which I have struggled for long. It is that in Parliament to amend the Constitution as it wishes? It is ironic to say that the basic structure doctrine is a judge-made one.

The idea that judicial review of constitutional amendments is undemocratic is underpinned by the erroneous assumption that judges are going against the people. While, in truth, what judges do when they invalidate an amendment or a statute for violating the Constitution is that they keep faith with the original Constitution. As Yanis Roznai puts it, they are vindicating the will of the people and not deferring it.

The basic structure doctrine is a feature of modern and progressive democracy. Of the 74 world constitutions enacted from 1789 to 2015, modern constitutions are more likely to include unamendable parts. While only 17 per cent of the world's constitutions from 1789 to 1944 had unamendable provisions, 27 percent of constitutions enacted from 1945 have such explicit provisions.

However, to effectively protect the doctrine for eternity, it is imperative to set it into stone by amending the Constitution and putting the judicially recognised basic features into the constitutional text itself. This makes it much easier for the judiciary as well because the basic structure doctrine would have definite shape. For instance, Article 79(3) of the German Basic Law lists the provisions that cannot be amended, including Article 1, which declares human dignity to be inviolable.

Bangladesh recognised the doctrine in its original Constitution when the old Constitution would be considered to be continuing even though other provisions have undergone changes."

(The writer is MP, Lok Sabha and former Minister, IAS)

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.

"War is never a lasting solution for any problem."
— A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

The Shillong Times

Vol No 153 No 130 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2022

The year 2022 is remarkable for Meghalaya as the State celebrates 50 years of its existence. Much has been talked about the sacrifices and achievements of the pioneers and citizens. A few of them had been recognized and praised, while legions of men and women will remain unsung in the horizon.

Though the State is no longer the same as it was 50 years ago, development is sporadic and distribution of wealth is unequal. Morose, the degeneration of moral and ethical values in all aspects of socio-economic and political life and the manifest injustice is deplorable. The State and community are profoundly religious in which every second or third person is either a "symptom basant" (Church elder) or an active leader of "ka Kynhun Niam Tynrai" (Traditional Faith) or is a member of Sat Sangat. However, there is a complete disconnect between our professed faith or spirituality and socio-political reality, whereby corruption and criminality are rife and offenders have no qualms. In fact, illegality is now being formalized and normalized in the State. Whereas the commoners are being gripped by fear and uncertainty, the othering of others is causing deep psychological impact and the cloud of uncertainty is hovering over us.

Against this backdrop and in honour of our past leaders who were men and women of great intellect and integrity I wish to reproduce here the Christmas Message of Prof G.G Swell, the statesman par excellence and I thank the Editor of Shillong Times for the consent to publish it along with my introduction to it. The family of Professor G.G Swell runs the museum in his honour at Laitkynsew.

In the political and economic context of his time, Professor G.G Swell wrote to the Nation and the World about the core values of Christianity. As a citizen of a free and secular nation he expressed his core belief in the public square and even called for the renewal of our being.

Once again Christmas, which is the season of Joy,

So far, so good. The problem today is not that land is alienated to non-tribals but that large swathes of land in the rural areas, particularly in districts that are known to be the rice bowl of the state such as Ri Bhoi district are being owned by absentee landlords and are used for commercial farming purposes including for mono-cropping — tea being one of the crops. Apart from that, agricultural land is also used to promote resorts. The challenge here is that Meghalaya does not have a Land Use Policy. Hence any person owning farmland can use that to set up a factory, to carry out stone and sand quarrying and even mining of limestone. It is common to see agricultural land being converted to habitations including for building institutions. At this rate the weakest in the society without financial clout will not be able to own even a homestead. Landlessness is growing at a rapid pace. It is curious that this issue has never found mention in the Assembly and neither has the imperative for a cadastral survey. What are the MLAs afraid to discover? Or will the truth that will be uncovered hurt them too?

What Christianity Means to Me: Christmas Message of (L) Prof GG Swell

By Kyrsohr Pynrhuh

is here. And the Angel said to them, "Be not afraid; I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all the people: for to you is born this day... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). But how do people feel the Joy in the midst of fear and suffering? There are so much corruption and injustice in the State and so, inequality is sharply rising and the widening gap between the haves and have nots is perturbing. How do we celebrate the joy of Christmas in the State where nearly 33% of the populace are living in abject poverty? But yet we celebrate the joy of the season with the spirit of determination to challenge the powers and principalities of darkness and doom! The joy and hope of Christmas must be shared with others and that we reaffirm our commitment to Truth and Justice. The State of Meghalaya must be renewed and reclaimed from the hands of a few who are hell bent to sell everything which we possess, including our life and being, for their own selfish gains.

Professor G.G Swell was born to a pious Christian family in Laitkynsew, a Village near Sohra and he rose to become the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha twice, one from 9 December 1969 to 27 December 1970 and the second time from 27 March 1971 to 18 January 1977. He was the disciplinarian who firmly committed to probity in public life. His 16-point programme for the development of Meghalaya was to be guided by the principle of moral leadership. He stressed on the character of leadership and envisioned that, "The implementation of any programme is primarily and mainly with the leadership of the State... if this leadership is corroded by vices the corrupt and sap its strength, vitality and will, the best of programmes will remain but a scrap of paper. It is the duty of the people of the State to ensure that its leadership is healthy, pure and dynamic." (16 Point Programme for Meghalaya, New Delhi 1964 Feb 1973).

Modi Govt avoiding discussion on Tawang in parliament Nation and opposition deserve to know what actually happened

By Sushil Kutty

Congress Member of Parliament Manish Tewari wants a discussion in the Lok Sabha on the 'border situation with China, the Line of Actual Control, which is a euphemism for not having a recognized border. Tewari, who has established himself as a military affairs expert over the years has given an adjournment motion notice, which should be welcomed because otherwise the Modi government would let bygones be bygones and forget and forgive China. The gist of Tewari's argument is that the Union government cannot let China go unquestioned and that China's attempts to infringe the LAC have been left unchallenged; that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "seared" of China.

What takes the cake is that trade with China has been thriving like there is no tomorrow, like if India stopped trading with China...



the saffron flower will droop, whether it die. The Congress MP wants the government to agree to a discussion on Chinese incursions and not get into a fruitless altercation; give the government an excuse to slither out of a debate on an issue of national importance. As it is, the

Tewari was speaking for the entire Opposition. The people of India have a right to know why PLA soldiers were getting into fisticuffs with Indian soldiers at the LAC, first at Galwan, and now at the Yangtse, what does the PLA want? Why is Prime Minister Narendra Modi playing deaf and dumb; does the government know what China wants and what China hopes to gain from infiltrating the LAC? Has India lost territory to China because of these incursions?

government is on the mat, and trying hard to brush the contentious issue under the carpet.

"I demand that this House suspend Zero Hour and other relevant rules relating to Question Hour and other businesses of the day to have a detailed discussion on the grave situation at the border with China in the Tawang sector in Arunachal Pradesh." Tewari wrote in a letter. "This is the first physical clash between the two armies since August 2020 which took place at Kinchik La in eastern Ladakh. We have had the Hon'ble Defence Minister give a statement. However, there are crucial questions that need to be asked."

Tewari was speaking for the entire Opposition. The people of India have a right to know why PLA soldiers were getting into fisticuffs with Indian soldiers at the LAC, first at Galwan, and now at the Yangtse, what does the PLA want? Why is Prime Minister Narendra Modi playing deaf and dumb; does the government know what China wants and what China hopes to gain from infiltrating the LAC? Has India lost territory to China because of these incursions? If yes, does the government of India have a plan to get the

from \$27.3 billion to \$52.4 billion.

The fact is, Chinese President Xi Jinping knows he has an easy thing going when Modi doesn't take any hard and China decisions. From Galwan in eastern Ladakh to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh is nearly 2,500 km and China has built massive infrastructure on its side of the LAC even as India has been playing catch-up. There is also considerable troop build up on the Chinese side of the LAC. Again, India has been only reacting to the Chinese "initiatives."

All said and done, it is unlikely the Modi government will accede to a discussion. The Winter Session will continue till 29 December, and Tewari can count the number of days and still fail. In 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw pamphlets and smoke-bombs into the Delhi Central Legislative Assembly. Then, 93 years ago, Bhagat Singh said, "If the deaf are to hear, the sound has to be very loud." Today, India is independent, and has an elected government, yet, Manish Tewari asking for an adjournment motion on China, is like Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt making loud attempt to "make the deaf hear." (IPJ Service)

Letters to the Editor

Effective & participative MLAs in the Assembly

Editor,
As a journalist I have been fortunate to witness the Meghalaya Assembly Sessions from the Press Gallery regularly since 1985-86 onwards till 2022. I would carefully take notes of all that transpired in the House and what business was transacted during the period and accordingly I reported that for the print media. However, from December 2020 up to 2022, I could not be present in the House to witness the proceedings due to my physical disability. Prior to 1985-86, I witnessed some sessions from the visitors' gallery only. The participation by the then members in the deliberations was worth listening to. Members were informed and educated on issues and engaged with a great deal of wit and humour too. There was never a dull moment. Besides, the Assembly debates were of a very high standard. It revealed the depth of knowledge and calibre of the Members of the House then. Also, the attendance of members was nearly always 100 percent. It was from 1985-86 up to 1992 that the quality of debates and participation of members had considerably deteriorated. But from 1993 to 2020 the debates have been reduced to bor-

ing and staccato questions and answers and even the attendance too fell much to be desired with members caring to be present in the House. I also witnessed that it had become customary for many important questions concerning critical issues raised by members to lapse due to the absence of the members concerned. Too often the Opposition lacked co-ordination and strategies in taking up important issues to counter the ruling dispensation. In the House we had the Zero Hour Notices, the Call Attention Motions, Confidence Motions, No Confidence Motions, Censure Motions, Resolutions, Government Bills, Private Members' Bills, etc. What I have witnessed is that Zero Hour Notices, Censure Motions and No Confidence Motions were used very sparingly by the Opposition when they should instead resort to these motions laid down in the rule book to pin down the ruling party. Another glaring aspect was that the majority of the demands for grants by the government were quilled because of too many Cut Motions that could not be taken up in the House within the time available before the timeline fixed for passing of all the grants during the sessions. This again was due to the absence of strategy by the Opposition.

But the most appalling drawback that I have observed is that members, especially those from the Opposition would amend the

days' sessions without doing their homework and informing themselves in-depth on the issues at hand. This despite having receiving the fixed calendar approved by the Business Advisory Committee well in advance. Another glaring scene that I have witnessed was that even the ministers came to the House without due preparation for replies to the questions submitted well in advance. They also could not reply to supplementary questions put by members. They just replied haphazardly or unsatisfactorily and resorted to delaying tactics for requesting for notices. Again, quite a number of ministers could not communicate clearly and were not audible despite the mics provided right in front of their seats and close to their mouths. They just mumbled and fumbled and beat about the bush to devote time to the deliberations apart from frequently participating in the debates in George Bankyitewling Lyngdoh Mawphlang of Umroi Constituency, Sangthlyimzoma Constituency, Angpaneng Lyngdoh, Lanumchek Constituency, Conrad K. Sangma, South Turdu Constituency, Dr Mukul Sangma, South Constituency, Mayrabinth System, Nangphoh Constituency and Presone Tynsong, Pynursla Constituency, while those who always remained active and participated in the deliberations in the house are Professors T. Sawmike, Mawli Constituency, Mr. Saleng Sangma, Gomboge Con-

stituency, Zenith Sangma, Rangakona Constituency and Rakkam Sangma, Rangakona Constituency. Only a few participated very little in the discussions in the House while some others might not even get pass marks if found marks were to be allocated by the House itself.

With the passage of years fewer Assembly sessions are held. This trend is not at all healthy for the State. For the hallmark of the Meghalaya Assembly is that no private Bills were piloted by Members of the Opposition after 1985-86. Even new legislations were rarely brought to the House by successive governments.

This gives us an idea of the health of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly!

Yours etc.,
Philip Marweh,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-2.

Deplorable Katgodown Road at JB Cantt.

Editor,
The stretch of around two hundred metres of road from the junction of Barapahar - Jhalapahar (Taxi Stand) towards the National Highway is in a deplorable condition for the past many years. Since the past portion of the road falls under the Shillong Cantonment area, perhaps the State Government chooses not to carry

out the periodical repairs. As a result, lots of potholes have developed in this stretch of our very feeder road to the villages around it. One side of the road is always congested with parked vehicles and the other side of it is the business centre, which has sprung up during the last ten years. Due to the numerous potholes, it is extremely difficult even for pedestrians to commute through this road. Vehicular drivers, especially of small-wheeled vehicles and two-wheelers are finding it a tough task plying over it due to the degraded condition of this lifeline. When people line up for mid-day meals, distributed by the Ardhendu Choudhari Charitable Trust, the road becomes choke-a-line and due to the deep and large potholes coupled with disguised speed breakers it becomes even more difficult to pass through it.

Incidentally, the Cantonment Board of Shillong has chosen to name this road after our Gurudev and put up a signboard calling this road "Babindra Nath Tagore Marg." The Cantonment Board ensure that the condition of this particular road is befitting to the names of the person after whom it is named - the great Nobel Laureate.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong-2

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

"Think big thoughts but relish small pleasures."

— H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXV No. 131 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2022

Return of COVID-19

IT'S not time yet to wish Covid-19 away. Reports from China, the originator of the deadly epidemic, present a scary picture in recent days. Crematoriums in capital Beijing and elsewhere are seeing unprecedented large arrivals of the Covid-affected dead even as the government speaks no word on casualties. "It is Spring 2020 all over again," is how an epidemiologist viewed the situation. The situation took on the worst form after President Xi, worried over the economic fallout, did away with the lockdown in most cities this month and signaled a departure from his harsh "Zero Covid" regime. For him there was no other go; for the tougher it got, the worse the plight of the people and they stormed the streets to curse the controls on public life. Even a dictatorship could not stem the tide of protests.

Warning has come from authoritative sources that the world better be in readiness for a fresh bout of the Covid-19 spread. Some 60 per cent of the Chinese population and 10 per cent of the world might get hit fresh in the next three months. This, at a time when we were heaving a sigh of relief, economies were getting back to usual mode after two years of total devastation and life was getting back to normal almost everywhere. China's struggle however carried on. The World Bank has revised its growth forecast for China this year from 4.3 to 2.7 per cent - meaning a halving of China's own GDP target of 5.5 per cent. The Covid-related hits and fall in property prices together hurt China badly. India, on the other hand, has less of a worry now. It recorded two deaths and 135 infections, the lowest level so far, a day ago - its total deaths due to Covid-infection rising to 5.30 lakh. India is in recovery mode after its economy contracted 6.6 per cent in the last fiscal. Yet, the imponderables are there. Another hit by the pandemic could upset Indian calculations of a steady recovery while the global economy is punctured also by the war in Ukraine.

Epidemics, deadly though, are seen as a natural way of controlling population growth. The theory propounded by Thomas Robert Malthus had it that epidemics, wars and famines would result in a balancing between population growth and food availability. Wars are killing people even now, but the scale of such fatalities is down due to a multiplicity of checks including the coming into being of the United Nations after World War-II. The main challenge to human existence lingers in the form of pestilence/epidemics as China has demonstrated.

State of the economy in Meghalaya: Challenges and dangers ahead

By Bhogtaron Mawroh and Tarun Bhanariya

The recent figures released by the Reserve Bank of India revealed that during the 2011-12 to 2017-2018 period, Meghalaya's economy was the slowest among all the State and Union territories in the country. This was based on the State's Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR), i.e., an average measure of growth over a time period. While during the same period, the average national CAGR was over 4% it was just under 2% for Meghalaya. What made it more embarrassing was that all the seven states from the North East Region (NER) had a CAGR of more than 4% with Meghalaya being an anomaly in the entire region. The growing economy means that an increasing amount of goods and services is being created in the economy. When this is measured in monetary value it is known as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for states, like Meghalaya. If the GDP is slow or contracting it has negative consequences on the spending power of the Government (derived through taxes and other revenue extractive measures) and consequently on job creation in the economy (directly through government jobs or indirectly through creating favourable conditions, i.e., tax breaks, subsidies, infrastructure build-out).

In fact, there are indications that give an idea about the scale of difficulties the citizens are already facing because of a slow growing economy. The Reserve Bank of India has data on the 'Per Capita Net State Domestic Product', i.e., value created in the economy distributed equally among all the people in the State. The data show that the average amount of money that would accrue to every individual in the State is Rs. 82,182/- or Rs. 6,848/- per month (again fourth from the bottom). Recently the Government of Meghalaya released the revised rates of minimum wages - for Unskilled it is Rs. 381/-, for Semi-skilled Rs. 432/-, for Skilled Rs. 483/- and for highly skilled Rs. 534/-. This means that assuming that the worker is able to work for 22 days in a month, the total potential income for an average worker ranges from Rs. 8382/- to Rs. 11,748/-, higher than the Per Capita Net State Domestic Product. Comparing both the figures, i.e., the Per Capita Net State Domestic Product and total (potential) income earned through the revised rates of minimum wages, it appears that the

amount of value produced in the economy is severely inadequate to provide the population with decent jobs. In such a situation, the employers will have an inordinate amount of power over their employees. It is not surprising that people are forced to work in underpaid jobs because they have no option. What makes the situation even more glaring is that figure of Rs. 82,182/- of 2020-2021 is lower than the 2015-2016 figure of Rs. 82,653/-, i.e., Per Capita Net State Domestic Product has actually gone down in Meghalaya. This, of course, could be because of the contraction of the economy due to COVID-19. It is, nonetheless, a sign of the highly distressing state of affairs in the State. There is another concern which must figure promi-

In Meghalaya, the 2011 Census reported 76% of the rural households to be landless. Because of such high inequality, the share from the total income for the majority of the population in the State is going to be very low - a very alarming situation.

nently when the impacts of the flagging economy on the rural population are being discussed. It is the issue of inequality. Recently, the 'State of Inequality in India Report' was released by the World Bank, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM). It stated that in India the top 1% of the population carries the total income earned, while the top 10% accounts for one-third of all incomes earned. Oxfam International has also stated that the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth in Meghalaya. The State's reported 76% of the rural households to be landless. Because of such high inequality, the share from the total income for the majority of the population in the State is going to be very low - a very alarming situation. There are already reports which highlight the problems aggravating the citizens of Meghalaya because of the poor performance of the economy. The most damning was the 'North Eastern Region District SDG Index: Report & Dashboard 2021-22'. The report ranked the districts of all the states in the North East Region (NER)

Division among tribals in Tripura significant for 2023 polls Ruling BJP to be hit most if Tipra Motha Group further expands base

By Ashis Bhawan

As the pre assembly poll campaign warms up in Tripura the state seems to be heading for a sharper ethnic divide in 2023 between the majority Bengali and native tribal groups. New poll entrants Tipra Motha (TM) fighting for a greater separate Tripura (Tirapaland)-state, have confirmed the worst fears of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by calling for a greater tribal consolidation.

It has appealed to BJP's tribal ally Indigenous Peoples' Front of Tripura (IPFT) to support and join the movement for separate statehood. The state BJP unit has not been particularly surprised, its leaders had earlier expressed their anxieties about the TM's political motives. There has been no immediate reaction from the ruling BJP which has already announced plans to maintain its present alignment with the IPFT and ruled out any understanding with the TM.

In 2018 the BJP got a majority for the first time in the state assembly polls along with its ally IPFT defeating the Left Front. The isolation of the CPI(M) from the tribals led to the defeat of the Front. The

In recent times, Tripura has undergone spells of sporadic political violence, but the TM's tentative initial steps have been provocative. Non tribals and Muslims have been present in significant numbers at its mass meetings. TM leader Pradyot Debbarma has taken care to insist that the party is not targeting non tribals in any way.

tribals constitute 31 per cent of the population of Tripura. In recent times, Tripura has undergone spells of sporadic political violence, but the TM's tentative initial steps have not been provocative. Non tribals and Muslims have been present in significant numbers at its mass meetings. TM leader Pradyot Debbarma has taken care to insist that the party is not targeting non tribals in any way. It will pursue its objectives in the Constitutional way.

Its approach so far remains a contrast with the more aggressive assertion shown by the IPFT, which also conducted an agitation for separate statehood some years ago. There had occurred much tension and some violence at the time. Its alignment with the ruling BJP has somewhat blunted the earlier sharper edge of the IPFT's agitation for separate statehood following its participation in the process of administrative district re-division. Understandably, there has been noticeable support for the TM according to Tripura-based media reports, among the new generation of aspirant tribal youths, most of whom are a rule more proficient in the use of English, not to mention the internet, than their older family members and relatives. The recent victory of the TM in the Tribal Autonomous district council elections, where the party won an impressive 18 out of 28 seats, with an aggregate vote share of 47% was a clear sign that the new outfit could not be taken lightly by other political rivals, especially by the IPFT. Under the 6th schedule provisions, the Tripura Autonomous tribal district council enjoys considerably wider powers than similar autonomous bodies anywhere in the Northeast. In part, the credit goes to the CPI(M), which was ruling the state earlier, as it dealt far more generously with long-standing tribal

sentiments and demands than most ruling parties, under the auster leadership of veteran leaders Datarath Debbarma and Nripen Chakravarty. In recent times, even as they renew their bid to win back power they lost to the BJP in 2018, the CPI(M) and its allies, according to observers, are feeling a bit side-lined. The unexpected defeat of Left Front Government under Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, despite his personal integrity, continues to rankle. The state of centrally sponsored, infra-related connectivity schemes, new rail and road development projects and trade linkages with Bangladesh have certainly taken Tripura's economy to a new level. The Central Government has also helped reduce travelling time between Tripura and West Bengal by helping arrange better communication through Bangladesh. This has helped the BJP in launching an aggressive 'pro-development campaign'. Its domestic governance record, according to the CPI(M), the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and other opposition parties, has been wretched. Democratic

Letters to the Editor

Down down UDP!

Editor, The first list of candidates by the grand old party in regional politics, the United Democratic Party, is an utter disappointment. Not only is there no woman candidate in this day and age but they've managed to even overthrow their founding member, Himo M Lanong, the one person left from regional politics who has remained loyal to the party, region and the very principles it was founded on.

Unfortunately, now it remains a party of spineless politicians following on the tailcoats of a corrupt puppet leader whose ultimate ambition is to covet the CM's chair, in the event the party makes it to a majority that is, which I highly doubt.

I am reminded of that one editorial on this paper few years back which spoke of an analogy of how cracks from Meghalaya are sowing in open buckets because the chances of their crawling out is next to impossible as they would pull each other down every time one of them makes an attempt to climb the top. Sadly, this analogy does not apply only to politics in Meghalaya but in all

other spheres as well! Gone are the days when politics was based on good principles, integrity and respect. How can we trust a party that is not even open to including women as candidates in the 21st century and of betraying its own founder?

Yours etc., Namrata Chettri Shillong-1

Dilapidated condition of footpath

Editor, Footpaths or pavements are important for the safety of pedestrians walking on the road especially near the national highways where people are prone to accidents and mishaps. Through this letter I would like to draw the attention of the concerned department to the portion of pavement (around twenty meters) near the Jalaputra creek stand along GS road which has remained broken for a long time with no signs of any repair being undertaken. As a result pedestrians are compelled to walk on the highway and expose themselves to danger. As prevention is better than cure, safety of the public should be the top priority

of Public Welfare Departments working in the state. I hope this request reaches the ears of the concerned departments and necessary actions would be taken as soon as possible.

Yours etc., Bhanudaya Upadhyaya Shillong-2

Low turnout in elections undermine democracy

Editor, The Election Commission of India (ECI) has expressed concern over the low turnout in elections which is detrimental to democracy. Low voter turnout has its own consequences as India is the world's largest democracy. Low voter turnout is devastating for democracy as it means that people are not accurately represented. If we continue to allow low voter turnout to persist without trying to get more people involved, then this democracy that we prize ourselves for will cease to exist. But there are things we can do to prevent this. One way to increase voter turnout is to increase citizens' interest in politics. When people feel more con-

cerned to their politicians and the laws they pass, they are more likely to show their support or disapproval. The ECI had taken many appreciable steps in this regard. Even for a single voter a polling booth had been established. For disabled people arrangements had been made so that they can cast their votes from their residence. Ions for PwDs had been nominated. Now all polling stations are being set up at the ground floor with minimum required facilities being provided at each polling station. Also, every candidate has to publish his/her criminal records in the newspaper.

In the Municipal Corporation election of Belthi too there was low voting percentage, whereas this time there was intense canvassing by all the parties and various chief ministers and central ministers participated in the electioneering. But residents of our cities seem to be less interested in turning out to vote. The urban areas of Gujarat recorded lower percentage of votes due to urban apathy. Similarly, during the recently concluded assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh, the urban constituency of Shimla recorded the lowest voting at 62.53% (less by 13 percentage points) as against the state average

of 75.6%. Cities in Gujarat have exhibited a similar trend of urban apathy during the first phase of voting for the assembly elections on December 1, thus pulling down the voting percentage. This lack of participation in the democratic process has provoked Chief Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar to appeal to the voters of Gujarat to come out in large numbers during the second phase of voting on December 5, so as to compensate for low voting figures in the first phase. But even after this strong appeal by the CEC no impact was seen in the second phase.

This is not a recent phenomenon though. Voting percentages have been going down over the years in urban areas in all parts of the country, even though all governments spend a proportionately higher amount of money for development of these very areas. Also, urban areas enjoy more media coverage, leading to their issues being highlighted across different platforms, that results in the governments allocating more attention and resources to resolving them. Another reason for this is different platforms, that results in the governments allocating more attention and resources to resolving them. Another reason for this is different platforms, that results in the governments allocating more attention and resources to resolving them.

to rural regions. What is happening in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh can be observed in other states of India too. Despite a substantial number of young people joining the ranks of voters every year, the voting percentage is not seeing a proportional rise. On one day, there is no paucity of criminals, my vote is not going to make a difference; what is the guarantee that the person I vote for will not quit the party and join another, etc.? What we need to realise is that each vote has the potential to make a significant difference, especially in a small state like Goa where winning margins are often in the hundreds. If you don't turn out to vote and are stuck with a bad administration or government, it is your fault too. The worst thing is that you are stuck with it for the next five years. Think about this before you decide not to go out to vote on polling day!

Yours etc., Yash Patil Raiganj, Va email

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"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." —Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 22, No. 13, SHILLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2022

Mukroh out of sight, not out of mind

THOSE who know Mukroh also know that the Forest Beat Office of the Assam Government is constructed well within Meghalaya's territory. The pertinent question is how was Assam allowed to have its administrative units within Meghalaya? Why was this not pointed out at the time when the Forest Beat Office was being set up? Why this lackadaisical attitude by successive governments of Meghalaya and by those who represented Mookaiak constituency in the past? This has been the problem of Meghalaya — that MLAs are not briefed about the plight of their constituents because they don't live in the distant villages and only visit those villages occasionally.

Now that Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has assured that the Forest Beat House would not be allowed to be reconstructed if it is within Meghalaya's territory and that talks are going on with the Assam Chief Minister on this matter it remains to be seen how far the neighbouring state actually adheres to its commitment. Informal conversations between two Chief Ministers do not mean much because those conversations are privy only to the two personalities. Any talks on the border issue and not just Mukroh must involve the cabinet ministers and the MLAs, MDCs and the traditional heads of the area. The two states are governed by two different sets of frameworks. Whereas in Assam the Chief Minister has the last word on any and all issues including that of the Councils. It is unheard of that the District Councils in Assam and the State Government have ever had a run-in on any issue. Such is not the case with Meghalaya with multiple tiers of governance which can often be a stumbling block when it comes to project execution. Add to these multiple tiers of governance other factors that put constant pressure on government even when development projects such as bringing the railway line to Bymnat for instance, are sought to be implemented.

It is for the first time that some progress has been made on the border issue even if there are allegations that Meghalaya has lost much land especially in areas in the Garo Hills bordering Assam and also in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. What is of concern is that the people of Mukroh live in constant fear of another attack from Assam Police who had the audacity to come right Mukroh village to shoot down villagers at close range. While the reconstruction of the scene that occurred on November 22 is marked by a certain opacity and the enquiry is ongoing, the fear of the people of Mukroh is palpable because their famulands lie in areas claimed by the West Karbi Anglong District Council. This is a matter that the Chief Minister should be seized of.

Letters to the Editor

Why so many foundation stones now?

Idior. It's no surprise that the majority of the voters are gullible and easily forgetful of the acts of omission and commission of this present Government under the leadership of the NPP. And now behind the elections are knocking at our doors and MLAs are ransacking and skelter to lay foundation stones in every corner of this God forsaken state. Many don't seem to question why this is happening only at the end of the 5-year term of the MDA Government and why this Government needs to shell out incentives in cash and in kind? Where is the benchmark to assess and quantify the cost of such projects which till date have not really reached the intended recipients and also the outcomes of short-sighted ventures like FOCUS or

YESS and other things in the works. Might it not happen that when a new government is formed all these frebies would stop and an accountability mechanism will be put in place? For how long can a poor state continue to distribute frebies managed by teams of all kinds? Yours etc., Dominic Stadlin Wankar Via email

If only foundation stones could speak

Idior. The frenetic pace at which foundation stones and inaugurations of projects is being undertaken by ministers of this MDA Government is unprecedented. Where are the funds going to come from for the projects for which the foundation stones are laid? And why have so many

Musings at this Christmas of Our Love

By Debasish Chowdhury

We are yet again back in the closing month of the year. A long with it has returned the winter chill. The deep azure in the skies of Shillong, the quiet still city, at sunset almost too has returned to its routine pattern. As such, by midday, the bright azure of the morning sky gets dissolved in the hue of a gloomy, shaggy of grey. At each dawn, the blooming cherries are still there to paint the skyline in bright pink but the dazzling morning brings with it almost invariably getting watered down into a shade of dull grey by noon. The traffic on the city roads is clogging with her morning pulses teeming with people of diverse hues. Some of them are tourists, many are vendors, few are visitors from abroad and scores of window shoppers are making the market resemble what they truly are. Each day by dusk, the city centre shapes up as an open opera with young musical enthusiasts up and ready on the pavement to enthral the passers by with their musical renditions. Decorative merchant outlets are keeping their doors wide open to lure the prospective customers even though a rather coy look of sellers minding the counters reflect that the business is hardly that brisk as it ought to be in the prime of the festive season.

Christmas is a befitting time to invite ourselves to introspect as to how the maladies afflicting us could be redressed. Opinions do differ depending on the perspective from which one looks at an issue but all may perhaps converge to agree on the point that empathy and compassion can substantially help us in handling much of our predicaments.

Yet, it is Christmas time and everyone around, out from the clutches of a devastating pandemic, seeks to have a grand celebration. Ringing church bells, gleaming streets in brightly decorated balconies by the roadside at each sunset perhaps are revealing expressions of this societal desire. Tiny girls dressed up as little angels; a jovial Santa Clause with his flowing white beard in red robes may not yet be frequenting the streets at dusk dancing their way down to church but are expectedly awaited. Beneath the facade of festivity, the general mood, however, seems somewhat subdued. Burdened on many fronts by the dreary mundane, people, it seems, are straggling hard to revivify their festive spirit.

The unprecedented pandemic had already played havoc in the lives and livelihood earning capability of countless people all over. Disoriented employment scopes have made life miserable especially for those who are in the low income category and find engagement in the unorganised sector where earning is a direct function of the regular economic activities. Incidentally, this happens to be the largest contingent of the people in our society. Ever escalating price levels of basic consumer commodities have made things even harder for many to enthusiastically partake and enjoy the approaching festival. Livelihood, earning of course is a serious concern but educating the children too is no less worrying for many. Some years before,

Shillong was considered the educational hub of the entire north-east and even beyond. As of now, many of the city's premier institutions show distinct trends of a downturn. The performance profile of some of the premier institutions of higher learning that have, in recent years, submitted themselves for re-assessment and reaccreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) underwent sharp decline in their respective gradings. Institutions that once held the top slot have been relegated to an average grade. Given grading by the national body is any indicator, the falling standards hardly begot a debate.

Ministry of Education, Government of India generally the Performance Grading Index (PGI) of the States and UTs on a year to year basis. It considers five distinct domains to undertake such an evaluation, namely: classifying Domain-I inputs as 'Learning Outcomes and Quality'; Domain-II as

special all around inhabited by a warm hearted as also welcoming people has been the mainstay of her tourist attraction. This image of a salubrious and charming tourist destination did undertake a beating in recent times thanks to the frequent violence and disruption in civil life resulting, at times, from provocation but more often to the frustration of especially the youth of the land. Such disruptions did not veer out of control into a full-fledged law and order issue but they severely impaired the reputation of the state as a warm and inviting tourist location. The consequent loss to the state exchequer as also the fringe workers surviving on tourism has indeed been immense.

Flourishing on the works that besiege the state is hardly gratifying. This fleeting detour into a few of them is only to make us alive to the reality that festivals are little more than mere entertainment. They offer excellent opportunities to create harmony. Festivals also serve

as effective platforms for cultural exchanges, besides providing and passing down of traditional cultural identities to the posterity. Festivals are opportunities to mutually understand and share our cultures thereby helping us foster friendship amongst people of diverse cultural hues. India, in general, had always celebrated festivals in this spirit. Inter-religious, inter-ethnic participations have always been the glitter atop our glories.

Christmas is a befitting time to invite ourselves to introspect as to how the maladies afflicting us could be redressed. Opinions do differ depending on the perspective from which one looks at an issue but all may perhaps converge to agree on the point that empathy and compassion can substantially help us in handling much of our predicaments. Sonam Wangehuk, an engineer by profession from Ladakh may share our thoughts on this. In 1988, he, inspired by his mother, established a school for the kids considered rejected by the society at large and it tracked national attention. His novel innovations in quest of sustainable solutions in difficult terrain such as the 'Ice

Stupas' and 'Solar Heated Mud Huts' later put him on the global radar. "More than inspiration," said he, "it was empathy that led me to find solutions in areas that had been plaguing the lives of common people. Be it the water issue or education for children, these were people in need, and I was driven to find an irrevocable empathy to resolve their issues."

People of the ilk of Wangehuk are our hopes at a time that, despite its inherent unmatched developments in science and technology, actually seems so hard to live in. Wangehuk is not a celebrity in the ordinary sense but those of us who had seen the movie '3 Idiots', may take delight in knowing that he was the inspiration behind making of the unforgettable character of Phunsukh Wanglu in that film. Christmas celebrations can unfold in an enabling and illuminating perspective to us if we direct our inspiration from empathetic go-getters such as Sri Wangehuk.

At a personal level, Christmas this year has a special significance to me. In all probability, this would be my last Christmas celebration in my birth city. After serving for almost four decades in different academic institutions, it is almost time for me to say adieu to my beloved city. In general, teachers and academic administrators here are yet not under the cover of any social security scheme. As such, sustenance after retirement in this city with its steep cost of living, for a retired teacher, especially a 'dikhbar' without an inherited ancestral home, is a formidable challenge. A humble teacher, no matter how long he stays in the city, is neither eligible nor enabled to have a small cottage of his own to spend his remaining days in this city or to invest himself into a farm for a new destination in the midst of people we have never lived with, as such, seems to be a most uphill, however, and arduous task. It is not simply because it happens to be my birth place but also for making me whatever I am.

Depending pairings usually are tinged with a spirit of sadness and are unbefitting of Christmas time. Christmas is a wonderful occasion to remember the scores of friends who adorned this life and enriched it in so many ways and to thank them all for the colours they have added in this mundane life by making it livable all these years. In thankfully acknowledging their unique contributions, may I wish all here on Earth and in a human culture, God shows that he has admirably decided to identify himself with human beings and not merely with humans but with the rest of creation itself. To identify oneself with someone or something is a voluntary act motivated by love and predilection. Therefore when God identified himself with our existence in the world, he voluntarily chose our planet in preference to others. He could have been incarnated in other planets in the form of other beings, probably those whom we call "aliens." But the fact that he preferred us to the rest of his creation, speaks volumes of his love for our world and everything in it.

Thus by inference we may say that our world has been doubly blessed and sanctified by the birth of Christ because Mother Earth had received in her bosom the creator God. The implication of which is clear that our world is sacred and everything in it and therefore they should be respected and treated with dignity. What we see today is man's loss of the sense of sacredness of Mother Nature due to his sinful ways which result from his pride, greed and ambition. The horrific destruction of Mother Nature by humans, is an act of defiance and rebellion against God himself. The impact of climate change today, in the form of rising temperatures, droughts, flashfloods, bushfires, furious cyclones etc, are to be seen as God's punishment for these acts of man.

Ecological Significance of Christmas

By Barnes Mawrie

We are living in an era when we are facing problems of global warming and climate change. There are more environmental concerns today than any other kind of conference. The whole world is gripped with the issue of climate change. The COP version has reached 27 recently with the latest one in Egypt. Today humanity has woken up like from a nightmare and suddenly realized that there is a great threat to its very survival. The impact of climate change has become so disastrous that human beings have no option but to change their attitudes and behaviour towards their natural environment. We have to switch over from an attitude of exploitation to contribution, from individual amassing to collective well-being. Human beings have almost exhausted Mother Earth of all her resources and above all that, they have polluted her to such an extent that she is permanently wounded and since the Earth is an organism, hurting her is hurting ourselves. Human beings are digging the ground beneath their feet. If ecological disasters continue to grow as they do today, we may not need WMD (weapons of mass destruction) to exterminate us.

Let me bring forward a reflection on the ecological significance of Christmas as to how we can use this time to make us realize how truly we have acted with regard to our relationship with Mother Nature. There are two important signs of Christmas where we witness an asymbiosis between the three realities — the divine, the human and nature.

First of all, Christmas celebrates the incarnation of God among men. Christ the Son of God assumed a human form to insert himself into a human world. By doing this, God is telling humanity that he values us as being born here on Earth and in a human culture. God shows that he has admirably decided to identify himself with human beings and not merely with humans but with the rest of creation itself. To identify oneself with someone or something is a voluntary act motivated by love and predilection. Therefore when God identified himself with our existence in the world, he voluntarily chose our planet in preference to others. He could have been incarnated in other planets in the form of other beings, probably those whom we call "aliens." But the fact that he preferred us to the rest of his creation, speaks volumes of his love for our world and everything in it.

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Secondly, when Christ was born in Bethlehem there was an act of solidarity by the whole cosmos. We are told that on the day Christ was born, a special star appeared in the sky to mark the event. Astronomers have proven that the strange star was actually the conjunction of planets which happens once in hundreds of years. Miraculously such a conjunction took place exactly on the day Christ was born. The coming in line of the planets created an extra illumination which appeared on that day as a very bright star, known since then as the "star of Bethlehem." Thus we see how the cosmos itself displayed its solidarity with this wonderful event and paid homage to the Son of God. Besides this, it is ecologically significant that Christ was born not in a palace or in a mansion, but instead, he was born in a stable in the presence of animals. Those who came to pay homage to the child Jesus were the shepherds along with their sheep. The significance of this is clear, namely, that we human beings are called to live in solidarity and harmony with the other species of life. Even during his three years of public ministry, Jesus showed a close connection with his natural environment.

Roads littered with party flags and flexes

Idior. Each time a political personality comes to Shillong bunnings are put up at the Public Razer Rotary and all public places and some cars to pick up those bunnings and to dispose of them off the next day. First it was Mamata Banerjee the TMC superno who had the idea. It was the BJP's turn with bunnings of Prime Minister Modi being picked up by JP Nanda the BJP President and the local BJP leaders. As of yesterday I saw that most of those bunnings made of flexes were half torn and the torn part of the flex with peoples' faces was stepped upon by pedestrians. No political party ever takes responsibility for disposing off these flags and bunnings which marily land up in drains and clogs them. This is the antithesis to the Swachh Bharat programme. I am surprised that the PM has not yet awakened to this crisis caused by these flags that are abandoned after the event. This is true of the TMC and the NPP too. Sometimes one wonders who pays for all those bunnings of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma across the State advertising the MDA Government's achievements. Students of St Edmund's are told to internalize the motto of the School, "Facta non-verba," meaning actions speak louder than words. Sadly even those former students of St Edmund's who are currently in politics seem to have forgotten what their Alma Mater taught them. One wonders therefore, as to how much of the education they received actually impacts on the behaviour of the students who go on to occupy positions of power and authority. Apparently the impact is nil. Yours etc., Alexandra Dexter, Via email

"Be on the alert to recognize your prime at whatever time of your life it may occur."

The Shillong Times

Merit, inclusiveness

INDIA boasts about being the world's largest democracy... Merit, inclusiveness

Note the point noticed and raised by a parliamentary committee on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, during the present sitting of Parliament...

Mukroh carnage cannot be forgotten

The editorial "Out of sight out of mind" cannot be easily applied to the carnage which happened on November 22, 2022 morning in Mukroh the border village of West Jaintia Hills District in which six precious lives were lost...

Whither Democracy and Humanity? - Hope amidst the Disquiet

By Rosmi Goswami

As we mark a decade of the horrific and tragic Nerbhaya incident of December 2012 several events race through the country...

Workforce globally to face great hardship in 2023. Emergence of new COVID-19 casts shadow on labour market

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Workforce the world over would face greater hardship in 2023. IMF has already sounded alarm over the global situation in their latest World Economic Outlook...

War and peace

War-torn Ukraine is thus suffering from unprecedented grief and distress. What case passing day, Russian President Vladimir Putin has only embodied himself in the persona of hardened cruelty...

Need for urgent Covid protocols

The NUCLEAR press buttons might be set off by mavericks whose minds are always at war. Yours etc., Sali Grewal, Shillong

Articles and letters

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

"There's just some magic in truth and honesty and openness." —Frank Ocean

The Shillong Times

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MDA – A strange coalition

THERE is no end to the antics of members of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA). Levelling allegations against their major partner the National Peoples' Party (NPP) is a favourite pastime. First it was the BJP and its string of allegations of corruption against the NPP. This was followed by the United Democratic Party (UDP) which has in recent times blamed the Government of which they are a part of, for some of the farmer related schemes such as FOCUS and FOCUS+ etc. The latest to throw muck at the NPP is the MLA of Mawkynrew, Banteidor Lyngdoh. He has accused the NPP of dangling a Rs 5 crore bait before him to join the Party. Naturally the Party President, Conrad Sangma who also heads the coalition has flatly denied the allegations as he should. Why would he admit that his Party is wooing sitting legislators from other parties to strengthen the hands of the NPP? In politics denial is the name of the game.

While adherence to certain core principles are expected from the members of a coalition who are supposed to carry equal praise or blame for the way in which the State has been run for the past five years, are expected, such is not the case with the present set of legislators. The UDP did the same class act even when it was a partner with the Mukul Sangma led Congress government. It blamed the former CM for not consulting it in everything that the Government did. If that was the case the simple thing for the UDP to have done then was to get out of the government and not remain a part of the circus while tattling about it. This is being repeated even with the present coalition. It shows a breach of trust when a partner is accused of something that is a result of a joint decision.

The UDP has itself to blame for allowing the NPP to run away with the trophy. When it had the opportunity at the beginning of its love affair with the NPP, to draft out a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) based on its promise to the people in its manifesto, it was slack. The UDP blamed senior UDP member BM Laning for not coming out with the CMP which he was entrusted to work on. The CMP would have allowed the UDP to claim some of the schemes as its own brainwave. As of now FOCUS, PRME and schemes with a string of acronyms are seemingly the initiatives of the NPP while the UDP was caught napping. The less spoken about the BJP, the better. The Party has not pulled out of the Government hence its bluff is called out again and again. As they say there is honour even among thieves. In the MDA even that is missing. Clearly the MDA is a marriage of inconvenience.

Letters to the Editor

State Reservation Policy

Editor, With reference to the news item, "Turn State Reservation Policy into Act: HITO to State Government" (S1 December 20, 2022), it is heartening to note the decision of the Organisation to take legal action in case the Government does not turn the Policy into an Act. In this connection, the moot question arises, as to whether there is any Act in any State of India which splits the reserved quota purposely earmarked for the backward community or tribe in ST, SC or OBC? Virtually, nowhere in India is the reserved quota divided or bifurcated. The recent hike of the reservation for SC & ST categories in the State of Karnataka as tabled in the State Legislative Assembly (ST dated 21st December 2022) did not spell out that the quota be split or be divided further despite there being rich and poor, educated and illiterate among each reserved category in that State. As such, the reserved quota of 80% for Meghalaya's ST cannot be split or bifurcated. There should be an open competition for appointment to government jobs or for seats in educational

institutes. The bifurcation of the reserved quota of 80% between the Garo ST and Khasi Jaintia ST is illegal and against the basic structure of the Constitution of India. This should be done away with before the present Policy becomes an Act. The opinion of the MIC, Paul Lyngdoh not endorsing the bifurcation of the state but advocating for review of the Reservation Policy that should be population-based (S1 December 16, 2022), should be based as per the census 1992 for which the Garo reserved only 25% quota out of 80% whereas the Khasi, Jaintia, Bhoi and War etc. known as Hymwretwep ST deserved 55%. As such, the shortfall of Hymwretwep quota and excess of Garo quota needs to be adjusted w.e.f. 1972. As a result, another Rowler System needs to be reviewed and compiled afresh so that justice is meted out to deserving Hymwretwep ST. If the review and revamp of the existing Reservation Policy based on the above formula creates more complications then I reiterate there is no alternative but to have a peaceful bifurcation of the State. Yours etc, Svelana Wankar Shillong-1

Elon Musk a big social junkie; can't live without tweeting

By Arun Kumar Shrivastav

Elon Musk asked his 122 million followers through a poll on Twitter whether he should step down as the chief executive of the social media giant he bought for \$44 billion on October 28. Out of the total 17 million votes, 57.5% favored him stepping down while 42.5% polled against the move. Before the poll, Musk had promised that he would abide by the

Musk, suspended, evoking angry reactions from different quarters, including European Union and the United Nations. In yet another controversial decision, Musk has banned the use of rival social media—chiefly Facebook and Instagram—on its platform. Now, Twitter users can't add

Jobs who was focused on creating the next generation of computing devices with his eyes set on greatness in everything he made, Musk's attention covers a lot more space. His interest ranges from electric cars to space travel to blockchain technology. It's very difficult to understand what he wants to achieve through Twitter. As far as a social media



outcome but he did not give a timeline.

Twitter, which is the "town square" of the world where people share information, ideas, and opinions, is also the place where breaking news first breaks out. After its purchase by the 51-year-old billionaire, Twitter is consi-

links from these social media to their tweets.

To answer the question of whether Elon Musk should continue as the chief executive of Twitter, there are at least two schools of opinion.

First, Musk spent a fortune to buy Twitter and his

In the latest, Musk got the Twitter accounts of some journalists who were covering Twitter, and by default Musk, suspended, evoking angry reactions from different quarters, including European Union and the United Nations. In yet another controversial decision, Musk has banned the use of rival social media—chiefly Facebook and Instagram—on its platform. Now, Twitter users can't add links from these social media to their tweets.

timely in the news for what Musk has been up to.

First, the lay-off of Twitter employees saw nearly 90% of them being ousted within days of Musk taking control. Then, his plans to shunt up revenues clashed with big advertisers, hitting Twitter's revenues by as much as 90%. He somehow managed to bring the advertisers back to Twitter but the idea that his presence at Twitter can be inimical to its profitability became evident.

In the latest, Musk got the Twitter accounts of some journalists who were covering Twitter, and by default

bid came out of the blue, leaving the entire Twitter community in shock and awe. His ability to collect funds to close such a high-budget corporate buyout underscores his capability and determination. He has certainly not bought Twitter to let it run as it is. Musk must have seen the potential of huge profits in buying Twitter for \$44 billion. It is now that he must try everything in his book to make Twitter live up to its potential and pay off Musk's risky bet in buying it. For this reason, Musk must stay put at the Twitter headquarters to introduce changes that he

technologies can understand. To bring these ideas into reality and to make them successful, Twitter needs Musk as the chief executive.

In the second possibility, can Musk get his plans implemented sitting outside the Twitter headquarters? It's possible... but! Apple not only survived but even thrived after the demise of its charismatic founder and CEO Steve Jobs. Apple Inc. under the leadership of Tim Cook is the world's most valuable company today. 11 years since Jobs left the world. Musk's successors can run Twitter better. But unlike

platform is concerned, everyone would want it to be a less noisy place and far less overwhelmed by the presence of someone like Musk who never refuses a chance to make news. Twitter users would want their time on social media to continue as before. They should be able

to chat with each other and exchange ideas and opinions without the flux of the entire platform making one toggle shift to another. With Musk there in the CEO's chair, the latter option is the only certainty. Can Musk let Twitter be Twitter, and refrain from trying to make it everything that he needs in his life?

As far as we can gather, more than an entrepreneur Musk is a social junkie who can't live outside of Twitter. It's probable that he may spend more time at Twitter than at Tesla, SpaceX, or Neuralink. (IPA Service)

Netaji Subhas Bose's daughter worried about threat to India's secular ethos

By Sankar Ray

Dr. Anita Bose Pfaff, daughter of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, and family friend, has expressed her dismay at the erosion of secular values in India in the recent period and how her father had always fought for building India as a secular state. In an interview at her home in Germany, Dr. Pfaff said "I can talk about my father's political and personal practices in this context. As I said earlier, the independent India that Subhash Chandra dreamed of was a secular state. But he himself was a theist, religious man. This is very important. Religion is a private matter, but the state must be secular."

According to her, the rights and dignity of all citizens must be protected. If it is not in any country, then it is sad. The salience of division is against my father's political practice and ideology. When he took the risky submarine journey, he was accompanied by a Muslim. His last flight was also accompanied by a Muslim. There was no place for any religious salutation in the INA, only one salutation—Jai Hind. It is important to keep these words in mind," she said.

Dr. Bose Pfaff, was interviewed by Arka Bhaduri of Kolkata-based web daily Nagorik dot net. She completed 80 years last November-end

this year by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. She got the letter of invitation to attend it just five days before the inauguration. "I didn't go to the opening ceremony. I also don't understand why September 8 was chosen. Subhash Chandra Bose has nothing to do with that date." However, she didn't reveal the reasons for not coming over to Delhi to be there on that date.

Dr. Bose Pfaff made no bones of her chagrin towards a half-hearted recognition to her father and INA she thinks India's struggle for freedom was achieved by both non-violent and violent means "India's freedom struggle had two streams. One stream believed in non-violent methods, the other an uncompromising struggle. My father was the brightest representative of the second line. For many decades there has been a propaganda that India's independence was due to non-violence. It's not right. The role of armed freedom fighters is also great. The historic struggle of Azad Hind Fauj under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose will forever remain written in bright letters in the history of freedom struggle. During the trial of the revolutionary fighters of the INA in the Red Fort, the entire country was in an uproar."



had been a professor of economics at the University of Augsburg while her husband, Dr. Martin Pfaff was a member of German federal parliament, Bundestag, representing Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany). She was the first woman's representative to the University of Augsburg.

While maintaining taciturnity, no being an Indian citizen, she couldn't hide her concern for India which she considers as her own country, she said unhesitatingly, "I want to say one more thing Subhash Chandra Bose dreamed of an independent, secular India. Religious differences had no place in his INA. His ideology is totally incompatible with communal politics. The politics of religious segregation and the ideas of Subhas Chandra Bose are contradictory.

The daughter of the leader of the Indian National Army reminded that "the rights and dignity of all citizens must be protected. If it is not in any country, then it is sad. The politics of division is against my father's political practice and ideology". While taking the risky submarine journey, thereafter he never returned to his wife and two-year old daughter, he was accompanied by a Muslim. His last flight was also accompanied by a Muslim. There was no place for any religious salutation in the INA, only one salutation—Jai Hind," she assertedly pointed out.

She expressed her happiness over the installation of a statue of her father as a patriot in New Delhi in place of King George V. It was inaugurated on September 8

manding their release. They namics at the University of Augsburg while her husband, Dr. Martin Pfaff was a member of German federal parliament, Bundestag, representing Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany). She was the first woman's representative to the University of Augsburg.

While maintaining taciturnity, no being an Indian citizen, she couldn't hide her concern for India which she considers as her own country, she said unhesitatingly, "I want to say one more thing Subhash Chandra Bose dreamed of an independent, secular India. Religious differences had no place in his INA. His ideology is totally incompatible with communal politics. The politics of religious segregation and the ideas of Subhas Chandra Bose are contradictory.

The daughter of the leader of the Indian National Army reminded that "the rights and dignity of all citizens must be protected. If it is not in any country, then it is sad. The politics of division is against my father's political practice and ideology". While taking the risky submarine journey, thereafter he never returned to his wife and two-year old daughter, he was accompanied by a Muslim. His last flight was also accompanied by a Muslim. There was no place for any religious salutation in the INA, only one salutation—Jai Hind," she assertedly pointed out.

She expressed her happiness over the installation of a statue of her father as a patriot in New Delhi in place of King George V. It was inaugurated on September 8

My pros to the cons of Christmas commercialization

Editor, Christmas is the season of love, miracles and new beginnings. It marks the birth of Jesus Christ biblically. Our old Santa Claus and Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer is what instantly pops up when the word "Christmas" is heard. We tend to forget the real meaning of this season. Yes, of course, looking pretty does boost our confidence but what brings the soul at peace (to me) is the art of forgiving and love. This season teaches us the art of gift giving but it may as well imply that gift giving can be a way to reconcile with a loved one. Personally, I think words and actions are more effective compared to gift giving. This season brings warmth and happiness but it as well brings the urge to compare our homes. A home isn't supposed to be held on the pedestal of competition, rather it should be held close to our hearts, a healthy escape from anything stressful.

As a growing adolescent I've always expected gifts from my family during Christmas. I had to pause to realize how ungrateful I was. As I got, I wanted more just like how one craves gifts good times and experiences

The COVID threat

Editor, Evolution has once again triumphed as the cases of the new strain from China have raised alarm in India and parts of the world. At some point we have let our guards down, and this comes at a time of pre-Christmas celebratory mood across the world. While social gathering is gaining momentum, fear should be the last to trickle into the psyche of the crowd, but neither should denial nor complacency rule the roost. As we are learning to live with the virus the need of the hour is proper surveillance, face masks, vaccines and following COVID appropriate behaviour. Dr Jonathan Quick, in his book, "The End of Epidemics," says proper communications, local engagement and consistent readiness are some tools in the box to aid us in the fight against any lethal disease or pandemic.

Yours etc, Christopher Galphob, Shillong-10

We have a right to good roads

Editor, My family and I have been living between Shillong and our native village at Mawson under Mawkwat W&RD Block, SWKH,

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

Merry or scary? Santa's 'Ho ho ho' mirrors our own ambiguous relationship to laughter

Here it is again: the merry, festive Christmas season with its glitter balls, tinsel and the typical "Ho Ho Ho!" Holding onto his red belly, Santa grins and laughs at us from everywhere. Like Halloween pumpkins and clowns, Santa is one of our most popular cultural symbols associated with laughter. In fact, Father Christmas, clowns and demonic veggic visages have more in common than you might think! And our pop culture depictions of Santa's laughter tell us a lot about the pitfalls and promises of humour, and the not obvious links between humour and laughter.

Santa's laughter is often benign. In the 1970 fantasy musical *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town*, almost every one of the jolly gent's good deeds is accompanied with laughter, be it distributing the toys to children in the unwelcoming Sombertown or melting the heart of the Winter Warlock. The laughter thus underscores the niceness of Santa's activities and adds a cheerful element to the gloomy urban and forest landscapes. Santa's laughter can also be used to improve the educational system on Mars in the 1964 film *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*.

The surreal 1959 Mexican fantasy film *Santa Claus vs. the Devil* is another great example. The film, which is hilariously outrageous from today's perspective, shows Father Christmas as a good-natured, chubby bloke who lives in space and hardly says a word. Whether he peeks into children's rooms on Earth through his cosmic telescope or gives them knockout drugs so that he can hand out his presents undisturbed, his sole comment and universal reaction to everything is a juicy "Ho ho ho!"

This full-bellied "jolly old gentleman" might be a slacker 364 days a year, but he's generally perceived as a harmless creature. His laughter seems to be inseparable from the festive Christmas atmosphere and is one of the most important audio stimuli in any holiday film. However, even the most good-natured cinematic Santa can't help playing tricks on the devil and laughing heartily as they succeed. Thus he signals happiness, but also reveals that he and his laughter are not as harmless as they seem to be at the first sight.

THE GLOOMIER SIDE OF SANTA

In stories where Santa is a laughing killer robot (e.g., in the *Futurama* episode "Xmas") or acrobatically, and in large numbers, attacks a simple family



man played by Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Jingle all the Way*), the not always benign nature of Santa's laughter becomes even more obvious. Unlike in many other cases, humour and laughter here are not meant to foster social cohesion and community spirit. They rather signal the power one has over enemies, the malicious enjoyment of their failures or even an intention to kill them.

In these cases, Santa's laughter echoes the deadly laughter of Joker and other comic villains: it is a psychological weapon, yet another way to attack and defeat. Laughter is often accompanied with a grin, and baring the teeth can easily become threatening ("smiling" Halloween pumpkins do give us shivers!). In fact, these maliciously laughing monsters can surface before Christmas, adding a frightening layer to this holiday. Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas* illustrates how evil creatures might try to hijack Christmas – including hijacking Santa's laughter, which is clearly recognisable but sounds all the more scary when we hear it from a Pumpkin King Skellington. Such laughter has no connection to humour and comes rather closer to the risus sardonicus.

The different shades of Santa's laughter mirror the various roles that laughter plays in human societies. It can represent and provide enjoyment but it can also have a darker side: when laughing at someone (as opposed to with them), we exclude them from the group, humiliate and denigrate them. Laughter can signal agreement, embarrassment, superiority, aggression – and paradoxically, these feelings can be mixed all together in the single utterance of laughter. Thus there is no clear line between merry and scary in our laughter.

Just like Santas and monsters, we enjoy the ambiguity of our laughter and know that sometimes it can tell much more than a thousand words.

Laughter is often tightly connected to humour, but it is even stronger connected to human relationships. The time and context of our laughter – or, on the contrary, our unlaughter when we want to show explicitly that we are not amused – are also of crucial importance.

So keep an eye on your Santa this weekend and watch out if he is a benign "Ho Ho Ho!" dude or a side-splitting Joker Santa. And as you laugh at or with him, think of how much your laughter can mean to you and the people around you.

(The Conversation)

EkWomen launches first podcast series



New age digital entertainment and technology company JetSynthesys along with Warner Music India and Spotify has launched EkWomen's first podcast series that enthralled listeners with heart-warming stories of inspiring South Asian origin women. The series is conceived and produced by Medha Jaishankar (formerly at BBC World and Reliance Entertainment) and host Monika Pael (Midday, Uppercrust, and JetSynthesys' Daily Hinduisim video series) along with Sheetal Bapat, Head - Social Impact, JetSynthesys. The podcast launch was celebrated in Pune, yesterday, in the presence of Anu Aga, Bollywood choreographer Rupita Vaidya, JetSynthesys Founder Rajan Navani, Suman Tai, and Alpna Kirloskar, business-woman Uma Ganesh, author Sudha Menon, food consultant Karen Anand among other well-known women.

A global podcasting, networking, and mentoring space for women, EkWomen will feature uplifting stories about the struggles and successes of interviewees like celebrity Chef Maneet Chauhan, Shalini Vadhera, serial entrepreneur and founder of cosmetics firm Global Goddess Beauty; Shaheen Mistri - CEO of Teach for India and founder

of Akanksha, Payal Kadakia - founder and executive chairman of Class Pass; Yoga Gura Ira Trivedi; award-winning author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni; Seema Anand - storyteller and mythologist; Bollywood choreographer Rupita Vaidya and award-winning science journalist Bijal Trivedi, among others.

Talking about the launch, Rajan Navani, CEO and Founder, JetSynthesys said, "We are happy to launch JetSynthesys' EkWomen podcast with Warner Music India. Diversity and inclusion are the key focus areas under Jet Social Impact where we aim to scale impact through enterprise and innovation. EkWomen is a global sisterhood platform for women to inspire and get inspired. I appreciate Medha and Monika's vision in bringing this idea to life. We look forward to seeing the response the episodes will be receiving and we hope they provide some thought-provoking take-aways for all."

Leading the initiative, Medha Jaishankar, Producer, EkWomen, said, "I have always been an ardent supporter of women empowerment and wanted to bring to the fore front stories of their struggles and success so they reach a larger audience. Monika and I are happy the podcast is now alive and grateful

for the support of Rajan, Sheetal, Warner Music India, Spotify, and all our interviewees. I hope the audience enjoys the conversations as much as we did."

"As a community, EkWomen seeks to empower and mentor women, and inspire others to follow their own path to success. The project enabled us to connect with diverse South Asian women and hear their motivational stories. We are excited to share their experiences with people across the globe and hope listeners find the stories as interesting as we did while recording them," added Monika Patel, Host, of EkWomen.

Sheetal Bapat, Head - of Social Impact, JetSynthesys said, "It is an honour to be a part of this team and be able to share such insightful conversations with the world. At Jet Social Impact one of our goals has always been to create social networks and communities to shift narratives and create an impact and this is just the right step in that direction. I hope the audience also finds something that they can relate to in these stories leading to feeling inspired and encouraged to strive to do bigger things."

The podcast can be streamed on Spotify. (IANS/ije)

Cooking up a storm with Gary Mehigan

Renowned for being one of the original judges of the highly rated television show, *MasterChef Australia*, celebrity *MasterChef* Gary Mehigan is no stranger to food enthusiasts.

The Chambers at Taj Mahal, New Delhi, India's very first exclusive business club, presented *Rendezvous with Chef?* Gary Mehigan in the national capital. The celebrated chef created an exquisite gastronomic experience designed to engage and entertain members of The Chambers at the iconic landmark hotel located in Lutyens' Delhi - the heart of the Indian capital, synonymous with renowned, timeless experiences and unparalleled hospitality for over four glorious decades.

At the bespoke evening, patrons of the club were treated to a five course epicurean odyssey of signature Asian flavours created by the *MasterChef* himself, thoughtfully paired with a selection of fine beverages.

Gary says he feels blessed in his career, as it has allowed him to travel, indulge his passions and meet some extraordinary people. He is captivated by beautiful produce and has a lasting admiration for the people who grow, rear and craft wonderful things, treating each ingredient with love and respect. Each flavour was created to cater to the Indian palate while introducing South East Asian inspired delicacies served as beautifully plated fine dining cuisine.

Gary has been part of television since 1997. Since then he has been an integral part of shows like *Hoys Weekend* and of course 12 years of *MasterChef Australia*. Junior *MasterChef*, *MasterChef All-Stars* and *Celebrity MasterChef*. Gary's TV audience stretches around the globe, and his series *Far Flung* and *Masters of Taste*, have well and truly cemented him as one of the most watched TV Chefs in history.

Gary recently moved to the Seven Network in Australia, where he has the opportunity to develop new shows with his mate Matt Preston, and host a new TV

series called "Plate of Origin" which will launch later in 2020, alongside Matt and Manu Feildel. But there is more to Gary, than television and food, so 2 years ago he started his own Podcast series, "A Plate to call Home." The series was one of the first original series for Podcast One Australia, when they first launched in Australia, and he has interviewed an array of interesting Chefs, Foodies and Food Producers, from all walks of life.

Born and brought up in the UK, in a little place called Hayling Island on the South Coast of England, his Dad was an Engineer, Mum an artist and grandfather a chef and teacher. Gary marks the two Michelin star restaurants that were the most formative in his early career, as The Connaught Hotel under Michel Boucard where he worked for almost 4 years and Le Souffle at The Hyde Park Intercontinental under Peter Krumberg.

He moved to Australia in 1991 where he worked at Burnham Beches, Browns Restaurant and Sofitel Melbourne before venturing into business at the age of 31. He then started Fenix Restaurant.

years and 12 series later, Gary became part of our daily viewing, when it comes to food. *MasterChef Australia* series 2 was the highest rating show on Australian television of all time and the show has inspired a new generation of young cooks to embrace food and cooking.

On what he cooked for *Rendezvous*, Gary said: "They got a taste of what I'm enjoying eating right now, what I'm cooking regularly at home South-East Asian cuisine. I love dishes noodle and barbecue chicken. I love to eat a very simple lamb salad put together with some fresh vegetables, the *Rendezvous* was a little snapshot of what I love eating. It's like a keema pao, with some Malaysian curry made of jackfruit, great mango peanut salad. We cooked fish and prawns with sauces and pickles, so there was a mix of home ingredients and we kept the heat up to impress the Indian palate." (IANS/Ije)



Our ancestor's pets



Cats had a bad reputation in the middle ages. Their presumed links with paganism and witchcraft meant they were often treated with suspicion.

But despite their association with the supernatural, medieval manuscripts showcase surprisingly playful images of our furry friends.

From these (often very funny) portrayals, we can learn a lot about medieval attitudes towards cats - not least that they were a central fixture of daily medieval life. In the middle ages, men and women were often identified by the animals they kept.

Pet monkeys, for example, were considered exotic and a sign that the owner was wealthy, because they had been imported from distant lands.

Pets became part of the personal identity of the nobility.

Keeping an animal that was lavished with attention, affection and high-quality food in return for no functional purpose - other

than companionship - signified high status.

It was not unusual for high-status men and women in the middle ages to have their portrait completed in the company of a pet, most commonly cats and dogs, to signify their elevated status.

It is commonplace to see images of cats in iconography of feasts and other domestic spaces, which appears to reflect their status as a pet in the medieval household.

In Pietro Lorenzetti's Last Supper (above), a cat sits by the fire while a small dog licks a plate of leftovers on the ground.

The cat and dog play no narrative role in the scene, but instead signal to the viewer that this is a domestic space.

Similarly, in the miniature of a Dutch Book of Hours (a common type of prayer book in the middle ages that marked the divisions of the day with specific prayers), a man and woman feature in a cosy household scene while a well-

looked-after cat gazes on from the middle left-hand corner.

Again, the cat is not the centre of the image nor the focus of the composition, but it is accepted in this medieval domestic space.

Just like today, medieval families gave their cats names.

A 13th-century cat in Beaulieu Abbey, for example, was called "Mite" according to the green ink lettering that appears above a doodle of said cat in the margins of a medieval manuscript.

Royal treatment Cats were well cared for in the medieval household. In the early 13th century, there is mention in the accounts for the manor at Cuxham (Oxfordshire) of cheese being bought for a cat, which suggests that they were not left to fend for themselves.

In fact, the 14th-century queen of France, Isabeau of Hainaut, spent excessive amounts of money on accessories for her pets.

In 1387, she commissioned a collar embroidered with pearls



and fastened by a gold buckle for her pet squirrel.

In 1406, bright green cloth was bought to make a special cover for her cat. Cats were also common companions for scholars and eulogies about cats were not uncommon in the 16th century.

In one poem, a cat is described as a scholar's light and dearest companion.

Eulogies such as this suggest a strong emotional attachment to pet cats, and show how cats not only cheered up their masters but provided welcome distractions from the hard mental craft of reading and writing.

Cats are found in abundance as a status symbol in medieval religious spaces. There are lots of medieval manuscripts that feature, for example, illuminations (small images) of nuns with cats, and cats frequently appear as doodles in the margins of Books



of Hours.

But there is also much criticism about the keeping of cats in medieval sermon literature.

The 14th-century English preacher John Bromyard considered them useless and considered accessories of the rich that benefited while the poor went hungry.

Cats are also recorded as being associated with the devil.

Their stealth and cunning when hunting for mice was admired - but this did not always translate into qualities desirable for companionship.

These associations led to the killing of some cats, which had detrimental effects during the Black Death and other middle age plagues, when more cats may have reduced flea-infested rat populations.

Because of these associations, many thought that cats had no

place in the sacred spaces of religious orders.

There do not seem to have been any formal rules, however, stating that members of religious communities were not allowed to keep cats - and the constant criticism of the practice perhaps suggests that pet cats were common.

Even if they were not always considered as socially acceptable in religious communities, cats were still clearly well looked after. This is evident in the playful images we see of them in monasteries.

For the most part, cats were quite at home in the medieval household. And as their playful depiction in many medieval manuscripts and artwork makes clear, our medieval ancestors' relationships with these animals were not too different from our own. *(The Conversation)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 25, 2022

Birth Day Forecast

Moon sends Jupiter on your solar return chart. Time is golden. It is totally suitable. You will cross all the hurdles with your self confidence. Obstacles will get removed. You will flourish with courage. Your work will be spent laboriously. Efforts and hard work will give you favorable results. You will make impressive work possible through your creative talent. You will get good job/business offers. You will gain in money matters. You will also do business and work with integrity and sincerity. Your power and status in society will increase. Relationships and kindness in business will be beneficial to you. Financial situations will be favorable. Your marriage could get finalized. Asuspicious functions will keep taking place. You will get to go out of station with your family.

This week for you!

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You will earn well. Your efforts will pay off in this direction. You will witness growth in your business. You will also enjoy stability in your job. You will be able to finish your work in time. This will give you a lot of respect and fame. You will also have expansion plans in your business and you will work in partnership. Time will be favorable for you. There will be sweetness in marital relations. You will be very busy with your home affairs too. Don't let your business secrets to other people. Students will perform well. You will also get admission in institutes of your own choice. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. Marriage of a family member will get fixed all a sudden.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will have money gains. You will also be kept busy in your work and it will be a bit difficult for you to give time to your family. But still you will try to take out time for yourself and be with your family. This will boost your performance and also make you very determined. Your losses will be minimal in life. Some decisions may be given to you as a result. Concentrate just on your goals. You will reach your destination. You will have such confidence in your own abilities that you will finish your work much ahead of others. You will have no shortage of money and will buy expensive items for your family.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) The time is suitable to start new projects. You will have lot of money gaining days. Your health will also be at its best. You will gain lot of experience by two ways. Through job. You will interact with people and doing things on your own. You will happily watch things unfolding in your life. This will help you to move ahead. You will avoid any to argue with your colleagues and neighbors. You will share wonderful bonding with your life partner and family members. You will have the curiosity to learn and doing something new. You will be happy with your own people. Peace and harmony will prevail in family relations.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) The time is just right to do things in your own ways and relations. Your performance in the interview exams will be upto the mark and as expected of you. You will be successful. The same is also true about you as it is your luck which is on your side. You will have new work starts for business and expansion. Your income will also rise. You will have your own days of success. You will have money in finishing your work you want to. Now members will be added to the family. Auspicious functions will take place. You will finish your work with enthusiasm, excitement and lot of hope. Your partners will support you all along.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It will turn out to be a wonderful week. Students will concentrate on studies and will get good results. Your business activities will speed up. You will have no tensions about your future. You will also have no shortage of funds. You will buy lot of items for your household needs. You will move forward in your life. You will have the blessings of your superiors. You will also have the support of your loved ones. You will enjoy their company all along. Your family will support you. You will make new environments. Your children will be a cause of delight for you.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 23) The time will be in your favor. A problem or two here and there will not make too much difference for you. You will get out things to your perfection. You will also finish your plans very effectively keeping in mind interests of others. Your bosses expect a lot from you and you will not disappoint anyone. You may face money problems to start with but things will

be in your favor pretty soon. Students will concentrate on their studies. You will have the cooperation of your family members. Your school partners will get along with you very well. After getting success in your work all your tensions and problems will be a thing of the past. You will get victory in legal battles.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) Your rating expires which will crop up suddenly will be a cause of concern for you. You will need to remain focused and get along with the things. Keeping your financial conditions in mind you will talk to your family members to cut down unnecessary expenses. Sweet and sour experiences will be useful for them. You will also have to understand this fact very well that our desires and emotions are there in no end. Government employees will put their hard work and labor and complete their work in time. You can also plan a business trip. Travel will be smooth. You will also plan to start a new business with your partner. You will also meet a lot of new persons connected to your work.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 23) You will make irreplaceable work possible through your labor, creativity and dedication. You will also get lot of appreciation for it. You will also get success in love affairs. You can also get promoted in your job/business. You will also make new friends. You will also be socially active. And interact with lot of people. Those who are in politics, media, sports and entertainment industry will do very well and also get lot of fame and fame. Some misunderstandings that you had with your partner will get removed. Your long standing work that was struck up will get complete. You will have growth as your business. Legal matters will get resolved. You will also solve property disputes.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) Money and wealth will keep coming. You will have financial gains. It is time of great profits in your business. You will do well in your profession. Those who were planning a job change and were in two minds about it can now take an appropriate decision. Your income will rise. Hence you can invest in a good place. You will also get along very well with your life partner. He/she may disagree with you on a matter or two. But that will not bother you much. You will have appreciation in your mind about your image coming up in the cloud at your workplace. But your fears are unfounded.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You need to learn some lessons from mistakes made by you. It is a time to move ahead in your life. Your past should not hold you back. Your desires will get fulfilled. However, you will have to take care of your friends. Moving forward with experienced people will grow to be helpful for you. You will also get a good job/business offer. You will make changes to your way of working. You will keep your bosses happy. You will also work hard to manage things in your family. Your life will be back on track. You will witness happiness in your family life but you will solve them. Some persons may help you when you need a rest. Those who are single will get marriage proposals.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) Your work load will increase. You will also be get under lot of pressure and may face some tensions too. But you will keep working hard and come out winner. Don't allow any conflict by side out of your hands. People will appreciate and recognize your talent and ability. You will be come in contact with some influential and prominent persons. They will help you a lot. You will also have gains in your business. You will make profits out of property deals. Your relationship with associates and partners will improve. Your projects will be accepted at your workplace. You will connect with people very well. Your heart and mind are fixed on a piece of work. You will not rest until your complete it.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) Some guesses will be on at your home. Students will concentrate on their studies. There will be favorable conditions in business or job. You will make best use of opportunities that are presented to you. By God's grace your work will also give you financial gains. Don't give importance to people who are jealous of you. You will have the support of your family. You will also explore new areas of business and plan a major expansion. You will meet new people and exchange your views with them. You will also meet some prominent personality.

115th National Day in the Kingdom of Happiness

On December 17, 2022, the Kingdom of Bhutan gathered to commemorate its 115th National Day. All Bhutanese take great delight in celebrating the country's National Day, which is a significant annual event. The primary event this year was hosted in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan, while celebrations were held all around the nation (and even to Bhutanese living overseas).

The National Day is celebrated in commemoration of the coronation of the first King of Bhutan, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, on this day in 1907. Bhutan has never been colonized in its history, and on December 17, 1907, the country was united as one nation under one leadership in the form of the monarchy. Bhutanese people love their King, and the monarchy enjoys much deserved respect in the Himalayan kingdom. Bhutan has been blessed with the extraordinary and visionary leadership of the Wangchuck Dynasty.

The major policies of Bhutan have always been guided by the vision of The Kings who have and continue to work tirelessly to ensure the country's peace, prosperity and happiness of its citizens. The development philosophy of the Kingdom of Bhutan, namely 'Gross National Happiness' is also one of the legacies of the Monarchy, introduced by His Majesty the Fourth King and is aimed towards sustainable and balanced development that is integral to social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the nation and its people.

Similarly, His Majesty the Fourth King also had a vision for the nation's tourist strategy. When Bhutan first opened its doors to tourism in the 1970s, the nation made a conscious and deliberate decision to pursue "High Value, Low Volume" tourism. Ironically, it was also a moment when the global economy was struggling. As a result of this visionary programme, which is now admired and valued by many people around the world, Bhutan now has a strong "Brand Bhutan" that is nurtured by its values, virtues, and essence.

In order to forge a new path following the pandemic and strengthen the nation's fundamental philosophy of pursuing sustainable growth, Bhutan has revised its tourist policy.

The Sustainable Development Fee (SDF), which supports initiatives promoting Bhutan's economic, social, environmental, and cultural development, increased from USD 65 to USD 200 per person per night. Bhutan is speeding up its efforts to maintain its status as one of just a few carbon-negative countries in the world since it is a country that is sensitive to the consequences of climate change, experiencing melting glaciers, floods, and unpredict-

able weather patterns) (in 2021, Bhutan sequestered 9.4M tonnes of carbon against its emission capacity of 3.8M tonnes).

The Kingdom also unveiled a new brand, "Bhutan Believe", which embodies its resolve to concentrate on laying the groundwork for future generations and adjusting its trajectory to keep pace with modern advancements. A fresh vision for the Kingdom and its goals for the next generation are intended by the new brand. It is also helpful for those seeking an exceptional and once-in-a-lifetime travel experience.

The new Brand Bhutan is centred on the next generation, the nation's future guardians, as Bhutan is undergoing a dramatic transformational journey under the personal direction of His Majesty The King across all sectors, including the public service, tourism, education, and many others.

During the National Day event, Bhutan's Orders, Decorations, and Medals are awarded to recognize groups and individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the country. There is always much anticipation for the awards.

"This day has profound significance in the lives of every Bhutanese. We gather to remember and pay respects to our great forefathers who worked tirelessly for the wellbeing of our country and people and who ensured to hand over a strong and sovereign nation to us. It is the day where all the generations come together to not only rejoice, but reflect and pass our solemn vows, recommit to the cause of the nation and rededicate to building a better future," said Dorji Dhabdul, the Director General of the Department of Tourism.

We congratulate all Bhutanese on this wonderful occasion," he concluded.

The event also featured a mega cultural bonanza with traditional performances by the Royal Academy of Performing Arts and other groups selected by a committee which coordinates the celebrations, as well as a concert featuring popular Bhutanese performers. *(IANShife)*



"Pessimism leads to weakness, optimism to power."

— William James

The Shillong Times

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Assam CM and Mukroh firing

ON November 22, this year Assam Police who were allegedly trying to apprehend timber smugglers from Mukroh village in Meghalaya fired from close range at the villagers who had come out in large numbers to protect the three men from the village who were apprehended but were not timber smugglers. The driver and handyman of the truck carrying the timber had already escaped. Villagers of Mukroh said the three men who were detained by Assam Police were returning from their rice fields after they heard gunshots (the tyres of the truck carrying timber were shot at). They were running for their lives when they were arrested. This is the version of the villagers of Mukroh.

Following this incident, the Assam CM had said that Assam Police should not have fired indiscriminately and without provocation. He had also stated that a special investigation team (SIT) would investigate the firing that killed 5 villagers. Union Home Minister, Amit Shah also stated that the CBI would inquire into the matter. Interestingly, on Saturday December 24, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma went back on his word. He categorically stated in the Assam Assembly that the police firing in Mukroh on November 22 was an act of self-defence by Assam Police and was necessitated to protect government properties.

It would appear that the Assam CM has already come to his own conclusions about the reason for the death of five Mukroh villagers even before the investigation agencies could get to the root of the firing incident. In the melee of November 22, a forest guard from Assam was also killed. Sarma who also holds the Home portfolio was answering to a starred question in the Assembly. He categorically stated that the Assam Forest official was attacked and killed by 'miscreants' from Meghalaya following which the Assam Police fired in self defence. Sarma relied on a report by the Superintendent of Police, West Karbi Anglong District. While the villagers of Mukroh say they live in constant fear of intimidation earlier by Karbi militants and now by Assam Police, the Assam CM says 'miscreants' from Meghalaya have been creating law and order problems along the inter-state border. These claims and counter-claims have created bad blood and have turned into a battle of who blinks first. The Assam CM cannot take a stand on a matter that is pending investigation. The Meghalaya CM should make his stand clear on this. Is he going to allow Assam to be the judge, jury and executioner in this case? What is the status of the enquiry if any? These questions need to be answered to the people of Meghalaya because as of now it appears that Assam is calling all the shots on the border issue.

Letters to the Editor

Taliban's ban on education of women

Editor, The Taliban banning University education for women is both cruel and soul crushing. This decision is against the spirit of Islam, and this prohibition has no place in Islam. The Quran commands all Muslims, Surah 96: Al- Alaq: 1-5. This passage reads: "Recall in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created - created humankind out of a germ-cell. Read - for thy Sustainer is the most bountiful one who has taught humankind the use of the pen - taught a human being what he did not know!" This verse links the human ability to read, to know and to write, to divine bounty. That knowledge has been at the core of the Islamic worldview from the very beginning. The virtue of knowledge is amplified by Prophet Muhammad, who said the ink of a scholar is greater than the blood of a martyr, thus bestowing a degree of honor on teachers, writers and scholars.

He encouraged Muslims to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave. After the victory of Badr, in the year 624, he migrated to Medina, where he began a program to erase illiteracy among Muslims. He found that many prisoners of war, who were Meccans, were literate, and he made their release conditional: Each prisoner must teach 10 Muslims how to read and write. The Taliban's repulsive treatment of women, denying them the rights enshrined in the Quran, snubs 1,400 years of the history of Muslim women being held up as intellectual luminaries. They are denying the legacy of Khadijah, the entrepreneur who financed the Prophet's mission, and Fatima Al-Fihri, who established a mosque that developed into Al-Qarawiyun University in Morocco, recognized as the oldest continuously operating university in the world. Women have been active in the field of medicine since the time of the Prophet. Rufida al-Aslamia (b.620) is arguably the first known female nurse and surgeon. She established mobile caravans to serve her community during war and peacetime.

Needed a National Party in Power at the Centre to run Meghalaya

By Gregory F. Shullai

Secular credentials based on the seriously misinterpreted idea of Hindutva that is (and rightly so) linked with the Party. Let me remove the misconceptions. Basically Hindutva seeks to maintain the identity of the culture of the people east of the Indus and that includes us. It has no religious connotation at all - zero in fact. Only the intellectuals understand this and are capable of removing this stigma of a word foreign to everyone here in the North East where the peoples' conception of Sanskrit is so foreign, in fact as foreign as anything they've ever heard. But the intellectuals are as always slow to respond and move around with feet of clay. It takes time for them to embed themselves to openly declare that the National Party ruling at the Centre is a Political Party and not a religious denomination. We must, it seems to me, discover the subtle difference between the BJP and any other National Party and lay aside once and for all the hybrid concept of the BJP and religion.



Forwards to me on this matter let me state a simple fact. Nothing is harder for a person than to conceal a political party impersonally. I mean to see it as an object and not a person. And because of that when the people who are expected to steer a Party, abandon themselves to the course of events instead the Party becomes a residue of what it originally was. This is what happened to the Indian National Congress - it became empty of further progress although there was a time when it was full and rich, and instead of discovering new progressive strategies it distracted its focus and sought to represent the important elements that the BJP stood for as unimportant and when it did not succeed it attacked those elements all the more severely when it still does not succeed it attacked

budget allocation? Is it right for us to repay loans that have been misused and made people rich at the expense of progress and development in our State? Definitely not! Just the thought of this debt-trap can make anyone ill and practically alienate them from good temperment till they see where the solution lies. No Party can claim that it has the resources to manage this catastrophe but a Party in power at the Centre can if it so wishes.

After a careful introduction of the natural investment means we're in and searching for an answer to it I finally arrived at the only one and that is to reduce the demand sense to me. The BJP believes it has the wherewithal to wipe out these debts within the first year if it is brought to power in the State, and to come to power in the State it needs at least 20% of the votes to win. The ball is in the peoples' court.

Secondly the traffic jams in and around Shillong require that huge infra structural investments must be made to tackle this problem. Is there any Party that can be bold enough to even mention a solution and the source of the money to mitigate the problem? Not apart from the Party in power at the Centre. Thirdly, and controversially, can any Party claim that it has the ability to introduce the LLP in the State? No again, apart from the Party in power at the Centre. Fourthly, can any Party say with confidence that it can bring about the bifurcation of Meghalaya into Garo and a Khasi-Jaintia State? Impossible, except if it is a Party in power at the Centre!

There are many, many more issues, but more I will not say but let me see my dear brothers and sisters what your frank answers will be to these few necessities among the dozens more that the people raise time and time again because my answer to them is to bring to power in Meghalaya the Party that is in power at the Centre - bring in the Bharatiya Janata Party.

(The writer is Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party Meghalaya. These are the views of the writer. The Shillong Times in no way subscribes to any political ideology)

Free PDS raises uncomfortable questions

By Ajit Ranade

Christmas brought cheer to 81 crore Indians as the government announced that it was making all food grain distributed under the Public Distribution System (PDS) completely free for one year. Each person would get 5 kilos of rice or wheat or coarse cereals every month free. The PDS is a sixty-year-old system meant predominantly for the poor. It sells food at subsidised prices. It is understood as the network of ration shops around the country. The word "ration" means allocating a scarce commodity in small portions so that everyone gets something. India had huge shortages of food till the early 1960's and had to go with a begging bowl to Western nations. Security meant that food price inflation could go sky high. Henceforth came the PDS and ration shops. The government also introduced the concept of minimum support price (MSP) scheme for crops, along with a big and assured procurement scheme to incentivise farm-

ers to increase domestic production. Then came the green revolution, basically in the States of Punjab and Haryana. So, India became self-sufficient in food production and even started exporting wheat and rice. The PDS however continued to expand because it caters to the poor. It was revamped in 1992 and again in 1997 for better targeting of backward districts. However, it was clear that a large amount of government procurement was translating into better distribution (despite the PDS) and better nutrition. There were also stories of leakage as cheap food grain was stolen from ration shops and sold in the open market for a profit. The poor people who lined up at ration shops were often told that the stocks are finished. Come next week. Or next month. The hapless poor who stood in long lines only to be turned away, had no legal recourse. There was no legal penalty for ration shops which were stocked out. nor was there any penalty for the government. This was the background to the National Food Security Act of 2013 also called the Right to Food. It was passed as a constitutional guarantee, and culminated after decades long movement led by activists who went to the Supreme Court. The activists said that despite a mountain of food grain in government granaries, there was still widespread starvation and malnutrition. Hence the PDS mechanism was strengthened by the NFSA by placing a legal obligation on the government to provide subsidised food. Under the NFSA, three fourths of the rural families and one half of urban families would receive rice, wheat and coarse cereal at 3.2 and 1 rupee a kilo respectively. How successful the NFSA has been is a matter of debate and separate discussion. The recent low ranking of India in the World Hunger Index led to a lot of controversy and charges of conspiring to malign India's image. Much was made about the subtle difference between hunger and malnutrition. But during Covid the Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMKAY) was launched to give free food grains to each person who were already covered by the NFSA. So, this Covid-time scheme too reached (or is supposed to have reached)

81 crore Indians. It was extended six times since May 2020, and is about to expire in December 2022. The total estimated expenditure on it has been 4.5 trillion rupees so far. This scheme has run parallel to the PDS. The government has distributed more than 55 million tonnes of free food grain in the past two years. Now the PMKAY has been shut down, and the PDS has had to make totally free for one year. Several questions arise. Firstly, if the PDS can be used to distribute free food, why was the PDS not used during Covid instead of launching a new scheme called PMKAY? In fact, that same Covid-time scheme is continuing under the name of free food. If the PDS requires ration cards, while PMKAY did not, surely the PDS could have been widened during Covid? Since a lot of the poor do not yet have ration cards, and since their ration cards are not expected at other places, there has been talk of "one

India had huge shortages of food till the early 1960's and had to go with a begging bowl to Western nations. Security meant that food price inflation could go sky high."

nation one ration card". This is especially true for migrant workers and their families. So, this scheme could have been rolled out during Covid, thus stamping out the effectiveness of the PDS. Of course, in the current extension the cost of free food grain will be borne by the Centre and not the States. Secondly, why is the government not unloading 44 million tonnes of food grain from its stocks into the private market procurement was strongly recommended by a member of the Niti Aayog. This would surely dampen food price inflation. Cereal inflation is running at 13 percent and wheat inflation is 20 percent. When free food is given away, how will the government prevent re-sale of that same food grain by the beneficiaries for a profit? Such re-sale is entirely possible given such high inflation. Would it not be better to involve market traders? Nobel laureate Amartya Sen had famously said that market traders make available scarce food grain more efficiently and promptly than government ever could. Famines and shortages are prevented because of quick inflow facilitated by private traders. Hence the long movement led by activists who went to the Supreme Court. The activists said that despite a mountain of food grain in government granaries, there was still widespread starvation and malnutrition. Hence the PDS mechanism was strengthened by the NFSA by placing a legal obligation on the government to provide subsidised food. Under the NFSA, three fourths of the rural families and one half of urban families would receive rice, wheat and coarse cereal at 3.2 and 1 rupee a kilo respectively. How successful the NFSA has been is a matter of debate and separate discussion. The recent low ranking of India in the World Hunger Index led to a lot of controversy and charges of conspiring to malign India's image. Much was made about the subtle difference between hunger and malnutrition. But during Covid the Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMKAY) was launched to give free food grains to each person who were already covered by the NFSA. So, this Covid-time scheme too reached (or is supposed to have reached)

Yours etc., M.Haque (Advocate) Shilling-6

Live and let live

Editor, The visit of American President Biden is still alive in the minds of Indians when he openly criticized the attacks on Christians in the country and also quoted the clauses of the Constitution which provide for freedom to adopt any religion of a person's choice. In Orissa the political alignment was broken by the BJP on the issue of attacks on Christians and even a Christian religious leader was miserably burnt. This year the G20 session is being hosted by India and in this regard many programmes will be held. In the month of March such a programme will be held in Amritsar. The country will have to be more cautious about loose talk on religious intolerance. If any leader issues statements about such incidents then the very purpose of organising the G-20 Conference in the country will be defeated. Stern action

should be taken against such fundamentalists who are engaged in narrow politics without caring for national interests. BJP should immediately stop propagating the anti-minority slogans. The country had faced anguish after the Arab countries had reacted adversely following the statement of Nupur Sharma a BJP leader. Even the Supreme Court had to make strong remarks against such elements who incite violence and harm the social fabric of the country. Yours etc., Yash Pal Raihan. Via email

Why is BJP delaying in announcing candidates?

Editor, All political parties barring the BJP have announced their candidates for the forthcoming LLAs elections scheduled to be held in February 2023. In Shillong North the other candidates have marched ahead in the campaign while

the BJP is still twiddling its thumbs. Will this not be a setback for the Party? In any case what is the BJP waiting for? Is the Party assessing the winnability of the candidates first? Other than AL Hek and Sanbor Shullai the sitting MLAs we the voting public are not sure who the BJP candidates for different constituencies are going to be. This is quite a setback for the candidates wanting to contest the elections. In Meghalaya it is a known fact that the BJP has only a peripheral hold on state politics and has not been able to improve its position since 2018 except very marginally. Prime Minister Modi's visit does not seem to have given the State BJP a shot in the arm. In some constituencies there are two contenders for the tickets. The inability to decide candidates quickly could harm the Party irreparably. Yours etc., Marlin Syngkott. Via email

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

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted writer in Shillong. Contact: The Billam Press) (email: editor@theshillontimes.org)

"Find a place inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain." — Joseph Campbell

The Shillong Times

'Show' against corruption

GOOD actions from the government deserve acknowledgement and appreciation. The dismissal of 10 corrupt senior officials of the Telecom department by minister Ashwini Vaishnaw this past week, for example, though a small gesture considering the sweep of corruption in government right down to village panchayat levels, is demonstrative of the Modi Government's intent to address corruption. The anti-corruption bureaucrats themselves are seen to be hugely corrupt. The recent scandals about the CBI and ED, involving their top bosses, signify a sense of hopelessness. Vaishnaw had driven out some 40 senior officials from the railways in the past. Question is, why only Vaishnaw. A government statement in Parliament earlier this year claimed some 400 officers of the central government had been dismissed for reasons of corruption or inefficiency in the eight years of the Modi government. This works out to an average of 50 officers a year — rather, a sugar-coating for a bitter pill, to fool the public. Many dismissed officials approach court and obtain favourable verdict after being suspended and sitting at home for years and then having a windfall of being awarded the entire wages for the period they were kept out of service. Our systems lack teeth when it comes to handling influential persons. Courts, hopefully, will act in a more resolute manner in future as controlling corruption is a prerequisite to national well-being and growth.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi strode into power in Delhi in 2014 with a promise to check corruption. There have been no significant cases of corruption at the ministerial level in his government(s) in Delhi or in Gujarat so far though there has been large-scale fund collections at top level perhaps for party work and electioneering. Yet, since no major corruption case has surfaced about the Modi government at the Centre so far, perceptions are that he has brought down corruption at the highest level. But, word is also that corruption at the central secretariat level is so huge and massive that even state government departments earmark, "pay", and get files moving in Delhi vis-a-vis central-sponsored developmental projects. Such a rot has set in. Modi has not acted tough against the bureaucracy from the very start. All through his governance, he is more or less "tolerating" the bureaucracy and their corruption. Add to this the perceived loaf by regional satraps running governments, state after state; or cases like that of RS Yeddyurappa in Karnataka. Dismissing a few officials one year after year, by itself, serves no meaningful purpose. This is nothing more than a routine show. The fight against corruption should start, first and foremost, from the PM's level.

Letters to the Editor

Historicity of Karbi Anglong District Formation

It was interesting to read Elwin Taron's two part article published on two consecutive days of your esteemed Daily (ST Dec. 6-7, 2022) under the caption, "Revisiting the Historicity of Karbi Anglong District Formation - I & II." The sum and substance of the article is that just before the British suddenly granted independence to India in August 1947, the first two governors of Assam province, the highly placed bureaucrats and many enlightened people then had wished that a separate district for the Mikirs (now Karbis) could have been created. If the British could have accomplished what they had wished, the people of Jaintia Hills would not have suffered as they do during the last more than 75 years now. The British would not have transferred freshly the areas under Blocks I & II of Jaintia Hills which they had earmarked and assigned for the Jaintias and which the Constituent Assembly of India had ratified for being protected under the Constitution of the new Republic of India.

The British knew full well the geography of all hilly regions occupied by the respective tribes in the northeast. They could have tagged the plains areas predominantly occupied by the Mikirs at the base of their hilly country as very clearly depicted by Sir Charles Lyall in his classic and notable book on 'The Mikirs' about which Taron has not spoken a single word. After all, geography is always behind any history of human settlement. Mr KS Teng the then MI A of Mikir Hills and member of the commission for creation of the new division of United Mikir and N C Hills refused to sign the commission report at the first instance as the said plains area was not included as demanded by the Mikirs. He signed in the next morning and kept the people guessing as to what had happened overnight. Since then the Karbis have exacted to raise their demands for tagging the fertile plains area predominantly occupied by them. They could have continued their demands in form of Blocks I & II (the so-called West Mikir Hills district) which belongs to Jaintia Hills as originally assigned by the British. We need not use (or misuse) the word 'truncated' as it was used by the wayfarers of the National Geographical Society of India which they desired to

Will BJP's election juggernaut get hit by bearded Rahul Gandhi in 2023? Sangh Parivar & Modi-Shah duo ending the year with both confidence and anxiety

By Sushil Kutty

The Bharatiya Janata Party, the election winning machine, is closing the year a little rough for the wear, despite the resounding win in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home-state Gujarat, where fellow Gujarati, Home Minister Amit Shah, contributed his two bit with a threat and a promise, both rolled into one, reminding the electorate of both religious denominations that lessons forgotten can be taught all over again, so help me God!

It worked! With Modi, the BJP mascot for all seasons, and henceforth, for all municipal elections, too, addressing over 40 rallies, and undertaking as many as 8 roadshows, begging, and pleading to the Hindu part of the electorate to reward

near Himachal. Two last, one won! This isn't how a voracious election-winning juggernaut pulls down the shutters on a year. Early in 2022, Uttar Pradesh was won, but not with the finesse expected from a party of the BJP's repute. But then, there was the consolation that the Congress was finished, almost.

Also, if it wasn't for Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh would have slipped through the gaps as easily as Akhilesh Yadav and the Samajwadi Party had supposed being Samajwadi socialists. The Bharatiya Janata Party sustains and stays in the reckoning because its adver-

cheapest fuel to keep winning elections, free rations for hungry mouths. Going into 2023, the latest instalment of free rations, have been announced, targeting 80 crore aching bellies. Free rations won the BJP Uttar Pradesh, and Ibarahis are a burgeoning number strewn across India.

Union Minister of Food & Public Distribution Piyush Goyal and BJP IT cell head, the Modi-Shah duo, did not help smacking their lips in anticipation when announcing on Twitter the 2023 schedule of distribution of free rations to the electorate paid for with taxpayer money fleeced from the public exchequer.

The beauty is they cannot jettison him because there is TINA to reckon with. The hardcore BJP voters are living on the promise that one day, the sooner the better, Yogi Adityanath will ascend the throne and do what Modi could do but did not do!

To them Modi and Shah are laggards, and slackers, on a different agenda. The Modi-Shah combine, knowing that TINA will vote for the BJP, doesn't matter for what and why, is studiously wooing the PanMadia Muslim voters if this angers the hardcore Hindu voter. Modi and Shah are on the long haul. For now there are a slew of 2023 elections to fight and win and then there is the big one



him, their fellow Gujarati, their tallest Gujarati, with the biggest electoral victory ever in Gujarat history. The electorate gave him his wish and it helped because the other two elections, Delhi-MCD and Jhilmachal Pradesh, went down the tube and the Modi-Shah juggernaut could only salvage Gujarat.

Overall, at the end of 2022, it was a mixed bag for the BJP. The BJP got the year spots equally divided. Arvind Kejriwal's AAP got the Delhi MCD, the Congress wrested Jhilmachal Pradesh and Modi's BJP got to keep Gujarat.

The BJP has a vehicle for change but the change that it brings about is skewed and two-faced, one delirious, everything that's permanent to a few crony capitalists, and the other that is transient, monthly handouts, to the vast majority, the Great Unwashed.

The BJP is a vehicle for change but the change that it brings about is skewed and two-faced, one delirious, everything that's permanent to a few crony capitalists, and the other that is transient, monthly handouts, to the vast majority, the Great Unwashed.

Universal health care coverage by 2022 failed in India Public health suffered with rising costs and privatisation push

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Universal health coverage (UHC) by 2022 has miserably failed in India. The year that is closing to an end, rather brought a costlier healthcare with price hike of essential medicines, equipment and services. Deterioration of public healthcare system continued, and the country moved further toward privatisation of district hospitals. Public health suffered in between unaffordable cost of private hospitals and increased difficulties in getting quality healthcare in public health facilities.

Universal health coverage (UHC) by 2022 has miserably failed in India. The year that is closing to an end, rather brought a costlier healthcare with price hike of essential medicines, equipment and services. Deterioration of public healthcare system continued, and the country moved further toward privatisation of district hospitals. Public health suffered in between unaffordable cost of private hospitals and increased difficulties in getting quality healthcare in public health facilities.

"The Centre has been urging the states to adopt the idea of selling district hospitals to private companies since the middle of the pandemic in 2021, when people were dying even without access to hospitals and healthcare system in any of the public and private health facilities."

Modi. The Centre has been trying to sell district hospitals to private companies, and five states either bought or supported by the BJP have already started the process by October 2022. Those states are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Meghalaya. It means, with PM Modi's penchant for privatization, India might be moving towards faster privatization of public healthcare system of the country.

of drugs, which had already gone up by 15-20 per cent in the last few years. The two years of the pandemic have shown how India's healthcare system was unable to cope with which the country suffered unprecedented loss of lives and livelihoods. However, the Modi government provided a budget of only Rs 86,200.65 crore in the Union Budget 2022-23, much less than the country required. Budget allocation was 10 per cent more than the previous year, but it was a matter of great concern that the spending on 'medical and public health' was reduced to Rs 74,320 crore in 2021-22 to Rs 41,011 crore in 2022-23. Government explanation for the reduction of Rs 33,809 crore was "lower requirement of vaccination" against COVID-19.

well known for his invention of AC current motor, was heavily inspired from the ideas and philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. There is another prominent figure of the west J.D. Salinger, one of the noted American writers of the 20th century who too was deeply influenced by Indian Philosophy. In his biography written by Kenneth Slawenski, he mentions how Salinger and his wife both were influenced by Paramahansa Yogananda's - "The Autobiography of a Yogi". Interestingly this book was a big motivation in the life of Apple's founder Steve Jobs.

It's not a great moment of joy and, at the same time, a great moment to reflect on ourselves and how we are losing out on our rich history in an attempt to mimic the west. It's a high time that we start looking back at our rich literary books and understand their meanings in deeper ways so as to derive the hidden meanings from them which are relevant in the present context as well.

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

Yours etc., Prof. R.V. Bhowmik, Mooslynglat, Jowai

Indian wisdom inspired many

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. These are the words that Swami Vivekananda spoke at the Chicago Conference in 1893. These words act as a mirror to highlight the worth of our ancient Indian wisdom.

In today's time when we look up to the west for any kind of breakthrough discoveries, be it in the field of science, arts, literature or philosophy we should not forget that our Indian ancestors, too, were highly learned. They proposed many scientific and literary theories, be it from the invention of zero to Pythagoras. From geometry to medicine and philosophy. Ancient Indian sages were never less than others; rather they always had the upper hand in many such fields. Though their contributions

is unforgettable but due to the lack of research, we are easily led into believing that everything western is correct and accurate and look at anything remotely associated to India with suspicion. The article 'India's mathematical prowess mesmerized Laplace, Einstein.' (ST Dec 19, 2022) by Sushil Kutty is an eye opener in this regard as it talks about how mathematically advanced our Indian ancestors were at a time when the west was just beginning to evolve.

Yours etc., Bhanudaya Upacharya Shillong-2

"There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness."

—Josh Billings

The Shillong Times

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'Missed' revolutions

INTERESTINGLY, both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi these days speak on a common subject — the 'revolutions' India missed or failed to catch up with. The PM's references were to the first, second and third industrial revolutions (IRs). He said India could not take advantage of the first and lagged behind in the second and third IRs; that we cannot afford to miss the next and must build further on infrastructure. Rahul Gandhi, in an interview during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, said we missed a latest in the making — the drone revolution.

The first IR that came about in the 1760-1840 period in Britain marked the shift to machines from the era of handmade products. British Rule in India started thereafter. The first train ran in India in 1853. The second was the technological revolution started shortly before the 20th century that had stressed on electrification and steam power resulting in mass production. Independent India under Jawaharlal Nehru took some advantage in terms of steel plants, but Nehru's socialist policies had also killed the spirit of enterprise. The third IR was in the form of the IT-digital revolution, wherein Rajiv Gandhi's leadership at that juncture helped India position itself in a robust manner. In between, under the Nehru-Indira Gandhi era came the Green Revolution which hiked up foodgrain production and the White Revolution resulting in a major rise in milk production. India also had the Telecom revolution, wherein with help from technocrat Sam Pitroda the nation's archaic telecommunications sector was modernized — another credit to the Rajiv Gandhi period. The Vajpayee government, initiated infrastructure development, starting the modernization of the national highways network. The Manmohan Singh period modernized the airports and ports systems. The Modi government followed up on these in more active ways. China is making major leaps in the drone sector, producing and marketing it to other countries as well. This and the civil aviation sector as a whole have huge scope for future growth.

Put together, India's gains are substantive. But it is yet to cover a lot of ground, evident also in its low export volumes: China having six times that of India's. Our exports have seen a quantum leap in the past few years, of the order of 30 per cent, but Chinese exports grew six times higher than that of India, based on its feverish push in both manufacturing and innovation/invention fields. India's gross expenditure on Research and Development is \$43 per capita, among the lowest in the world and forming 0.66 percent of the GDP. Worse, this percentage is showing a downward trend. The top spenders are the US, China, Japan and Germany.

U Kiang Nangbah: The book in a nutshell

By H.H. Mohrmen

The book 'U Kiang Nangbah: The warrior with the stealth of the tiger' launched recently owes it all to one incident that happened a decade ago. The book would not have seen the light of day if it is not for one prominent professor in the state. Ten years ago Seil Jaijithia, Shillong organized a celebration to mark the 150 death anniversary of U Kiang Nangbah, which was held at St Edmunds College. While delivering his lecture, one wise professor said, "U Kiang Nangbah is yet to meet his biographer." I recall feeling as if the professor was looking at me and his piercing eyes were staring straight into my eye.

The deep voice of the professor of history still echoes in my mind today and he is none other than the Professor David Reade Sylemlich. I didn't know until then that there are ample resources to work on the Jaitia rebellion led by U Kiang Nangbah. It was only after I did a little study and scratched the surface bit by bit that I found a gold mine of information on the revolt.

Prof Sylemlich in his speech hinted about the available resources, and in some way pointed his fingers in the direction of the treasures. Thus the journey began this day.

U Kiang Nangbah was a rebel who remained elusive to the British from the beginning till the last and the respect that he was given by his followers can be found in the records. To the locals, he was a hero, a legend who almost achieved a mythical status. Since the people who consider him a hero have not had their language written, much of what we know about him is in oral form. There are at least two versions of the story about U Kiang's origin. But a commonly accepted story is that U Kiang belongs to the Sookpoh khad-ar wrynai clan and the Nangbah clan came from the Syngkon sub-clan of the Sookpoh. He was an ordinary young man who answered the call to defend his motherland even though he was not even a daloai and he had no military training. He was respected by all and the rebels during the fight not only chose him to be their leader but also gave him the respect befitting the daloai of Jowai.

Many stories in the oral traditions described the fine qualities of U Kiang Nangbah. One particular story which best describes his passionate zeal to fight for truth, justice, and freedom was the story of the doloai of a doloai Manik Pakyemta at Mynkyoi Pydi, Looemprdi lengpiah, Jowai. U Kiang was also a noble son-

uncle was at the forefront of the Jaitia rebellion against the British before the 1862 rebellion.

The balancing act

The challenge in writing about the legendary figure is to balance the written records with the oral narratives. If we rely too much on the written records then one would fall into the trap of being biased and one-sided as the story is only written by the victors. The catch is if we depend too much on oral narrative there is always a tendency to mystify the story as the hero turns into a legend and a mythical figure.

The truth is there are no written records about the rebellion except those maintained by officers of the British government and no local sources than those recorded by the British that

reliable on Christmas eve is really shameful. Are we living in some god-less banana republic or is this Shillong? Can any decent society tolerate such lawless behavior? The most important question is — Where were the police that Christmas eve? Now this is the latest and most frequent question being asked in polite society? Where are the police when we need them? Most people believe the Home Department has failed the public but the party has the Home Minister belongs to, vehemently denies such accusations. Not surprising because accountability is not the forte of our political class. The utter shamelessness in one's inability to perform is condoned. What a mess we have created for ourselves!

How have these things been allowed to happen to us? If we care to answer truthfully then we must admit that Meghalaya has discarded governance and if governance is for the good of the people, then those

one side of the story, obviously the government side of the story. These stories portrayed a Kiang Nangbah only from the colonial angle and the way the British eye him. So if we depend solely on written records then U Kiang is but a troublemaker, a rebel or to be more precise a villain in the story who dared to challenge the British raj.

Thankfully we have oral traditions and stories as the local people knew and understood them. Of course, these stories cannot be corroborated with written sources but there is ample natural and traditional evidence some of which are available to this day to substantiate these stories.

The Conflict Zone

The rebellion achieved the impossible which also took the British by surprise in that it was able to unite the hill tribes portion of the erstwhile Jaitia Kingdom. Except for a few clerks which maintained neutrality, the fight happened in almost every part of the hills. From Nungghyit, Barato to Myrso, to Ankoi and Nongbaroh, to Shang-pung and Raliang the rebels were found to give the British a tough fight. Even in the clerks where the daloai remained neutral, people joined the rebellion and battles happened even in those areas. The fight between the soldiers and the rebels also happened in the villages on the foothills rendering what is now Bangladesh.

The Capture of U Kiang

The oral stories blamed U Long Suinga and his accomplices for betraying the cause by providing information to the soldiers a story that is also corroborated by official documents. The records also provided starting information that the accomplice was not as the oral narratives mention — the daloai of Jowai. Instead it was the daloai of Nartiang. The daloai of Nartiang is considered to be the 'kungvasan' among the local people or the first among equals amongst the daloai, but unfortunately, he was part of the company that betrayed the information. The trial of U Kiang was also reported to their high-ups and how U Kiang was pronounced guilty by the company and subsequently hanged was also recorded.

Conclusion

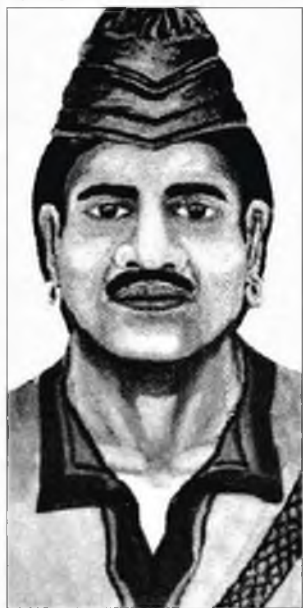
The book is expected to be an eye-opener for those who are interested in local history. There is scope for more work on the life of U Kiang Nangbah, especially in placing the oral puzzle in the written squares available. One hope is that scholars will begin to study local history and bring that history to light which would otherwise be neglected.

state and its people.

All of this is because we have allowed politics to be played solely to elect politicians and parties to power without tasking them with their ability to govern. Elections are being contested to bring people to power while how they intend to carry out that power has never been asked. As an electorate we have forgotten that accountability, fairness and transparency is the blood that sustains democracy. It seems that 2023 will follow the same trajectory. For some of us it is so sad to see a state that we fought for with might and soul be sold down the drain by power hungry maniacs.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer. If they are not to be printed, only letters with the signature details will be published.



We Christians are Indians and part of 'Bharatiya ethos'

By M Chuba Ao

There are an estimated 28 million Christians living in India. Christianity is India's third-largest religion after Hinduism and Islam in a population of 1.35 billion people. Religion-wise population breakup in India is Hinduism — an estimated 79.8%, Islam 14.2%, Christianity 2.3%, Sikhism 1.7%, Buddhism 0.7%, Jainism 0.4%, and others 0.65%. While there is no clear majority denomination among Indian Christians, most of the Christians identify themselves as Catholics followed by Baptists.

It is believed that Christianity was first introduced to India nearly two thousand years ago by St. Thomas who was a disciple of Jesus. However, the spread of Christianity in India began much later, from the 16th century onwards, with the arrival of European missionaries. The earliest of these missionaries were Portuguese and the Dutch followed by French and the British. Gradually, Christianity also made its entry into the north-east frontiers of India in the 17th Century when American Baptists started proselytizing the local Assamese people in Sadiya. Soon, it started spreading into the other parts of north-eastern region.

Though Christianity is a minority religion in India, people of the faith have been making crucial and vital contributions to nation building since centuries in the field of education, social service, economy, literature, health care etc. Christian missionaries can be considered the pioneers of the Indian education system that we see today. The missionaries preached in the native languages and also

used English to introduce the local people to Western ideas. This led to growth of modern vernacular education as well as English language. The Europeans were also among the first promoters of women's education in India. Today, all the states with large Christian population enjoy healthy literacy rates. In fact, a vast number of the prominent citizens of Assam and present have received their education from one of the plethora of Christian missionary schools dotting the landscape of India. In the social space, western ideas inspired the social reformers of the written squares, valuing socially ill practices such as sati, female infanticide, purdah, polygamy etc.

Christian missionaries from the very beginning worked towards abolishing these anti-social systems. In the economic space, there is hardly any state or a region of the country which has not been influenced by the works of Verghese Kurien. Known as the father of White Revolution in India, he transformed the dairy sector of India making it a self-sustaining industry and largest rural employment sector providing a third of all rural income. There are many other Christians who have made such equally vital contributions in diverse businesses.

Proud but 'shy' Christians:

While these achievements make me swell with pride as a Christian, I can also easily say that Christians are often 'shy' of their contributions and rather peculiarly tend to behave defensively. I fail to understand such a predicament. Yes indeed, some kinds of complexities have been compounded by irrational linking of Christianity with negative aspects of colonial history. But Christianity or not, we Christians and our employments cherished Indian freedom as much as it was done by a Hindu or a Muslim brother in 1947. Ordinary

Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, this party has always believed in the virtues of secularism and true socialism. BJP's concept of secularism is akin to the Father of the Nation where he thought all religions were equal. The State should be secular to protect all subjects. Advani ji himself was a product of a Christian school, St. Xavier's High School of Karachi in un-divided Akhand India. Union Minister and my year-long principal, Pt. Goyal did schooling from Don Bosco High School, Manuanga in Mumbai. Former Punjab Governor J.R. Jacob was born in a Christian family originally from Iraq. At the age of nine, Jacob Christian missionaries from St. Xavier's School, a boarding school in Kurseong near Darjeeling. By citing these antecedents, I am laying emphasis on the spirit of inclusiveness and Bharatiya spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam that the Party embodies. Narendra Modi has been crystal clear and very articulate on the matter by urging people to appreciate the importance of self-discipline and the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. His slogan 'Sabka Saath and Sabka Vikas' is essentially based on the doctrine that all are equal in rights and progress in a multi-religious and multi-lingual India is based on the doctrine of equality of the human race. And so why must Christians presume that BJP will be against them? It is a fatuous argument, therefore, that Christianity as a religion and the BJP as a political entity are in a state of confrontation. Nation building cannot be done by irrational linking of religion and politics. We cannot say — my India and you are not Indian kind of rhetoric. The BJP is never anti-Christian.

(The author, M Chuba Ao is national vice president, BJP. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

The monster we have created for ourselves

Editor,

A friend rang up the other day and after all the usual formalities of questions and answers on health, family and general well being of all, the rather state but yet ever present drama of politics popped up. Just look at the headlines of all the local newspapers, three fourths of the news is all about the subject under discussion. Yes we love to talk, hear about and gossip about politics.

True or false, it has had been backstabbed. Some in his own party say it's simply Karma). Yes politics is dirty, no doubt but it is that filthy, that foul, putrid, loathsome moral corruption is what makes the subject so attractive to a society that brands itself as "ka Jaijithwets up brew up Blet" (a community that believes in both God and man). We just love to talk about politics because most of it is made, created and committed by honourable members of our own society; by people we love to know to for whom we love to bend over backwards for by persons we rush to for personal favours; by stalwarts, loyal and faithful members of the various churches that dot the countryside. Yes Politics is such an attractive subject simply because of its repulsive hypocrisy.

So the corollary that follows is what has politics done for us, as a community as a State? Have we benefited from 50 years of statehood?

All of us have indulged in politics (everyone has cast votes, discussed politics and elected politicians present and past) for the last 50 years and so the question is justified. What do we have to show for it? Well if reports on the development index of states in the country are to be believed (all governments of Meghalaya have discarded such reports as outright lies) then Meghalaya just happens, and surprisingly without much effort, to always figure last in almost every aspect. If we happen to have any index on governance then the State has also managed to cover itself in dishonest, embarrassment and shame because of the regular (never periodical) scams and scandals by our elected high and mighty. If the truths told and accepted regarding about a failed state and failed by the very people we have elected to uplift us.

A current video post of the sort of activities that was allowed to happen in Khy-

dabad on Christmas eve is really shameful. Are we living in some god-less banana republic or is this Shillong? Can any decent society tolerate such lawless behavior? The most important question is — Where were the police that Christmas eve? Now this is the latest and most frequent question being asked in polite society? Where are the police when we need them? Most people believe the Home Department has failed the public but the party has the Home Minister belongs to, vehemently denies such accusations. Not surprising because accountability is not the forte of our political class. The utter shamelessness in one's inability to perform is condoned. What a mess we have created for ourselves!

How have these things been allowed to happen to us? If we care to answer truthfully then we must admit that Meghalaya has discarded governance and if governance is for the good of the people, then those

responsible for governance, our elected politicians have abandoned the people who elected them. The charge made in this letter against the political system; the political class (to whichever party they belong to) and our individual politicians is that they have turned their backs on the very electorate that elected them; left the people high and dry and that their main interest is simply in self-interest and self preservation. To cling on to power, come what may. Our worst enemies are our politicians and the system they follow. We are in the mess we are in because of this class of people. They have let the state and its people down. We have been betrayed by the very people we put our faith in. There, it has finally been said and said in the open. Unfortunately it happens to be the truth and the continuous political drama that used to entertain has now become a poison that no longer amuses but a parasite that sucks the strength and vitality of the

"Forgiveness says you are given another chance to make a new beginning."

— Desmond Tutu

The Shillong Times

Of rowdy Christmas celebrations

IT is unfortunate that every religious observance today is marked by rowdiness, sexually explicit dances and lewd remarks which amount to debauchery and are a slur on the sanctity of the occasion. The fact that Christmas itself is reduced to a display of wealth marked by blinking lights that deck nearly every home even while many families are barely able to have two square meals reveals the crassness of society today... a society marked by inequality and inequity both.

That downtown Shillong (Police Bazar) has become the scene of ugly browls and even lewd bodily display with no one to stop the rowdies suggests that the rule of law in the State and the city are on a downslide. Every person does what she/wants to without a care as to the impact their actions would have on the entire society and on the younger generation that is able to view those obnoxious videos of people who evidently are out of their minds either because they are high on drugs or too sozzled with booze.

Our rehabilitation centres and there are too few of them, are bursting at the seams with young and elderly having to check in for treatment and detoxification. No one really cares about the plight of this population. Perhaps what's on display at Police Bazar are the actions of troubled minds. If what happened on Christmas eve is a forerun of things to come, what will New Year's eve be like?

Letters to the Editor

Change demands hard work

The write-up of Patricia Mukhim which appeared in your esteemed daily on Dec 16, 2022 under the caption "We all want CHANGE" we hope for CHANGE, but how, is a thought provoking one. This article, so painstakingly written, is indeed food for thought, for us readers.

In a coalition government as we have seen, no party takes responsibility should something go wrong or there is a mishap between in governance. The coalition partners, to escape responsibility, openly and freely, blame the government, with a false sense of impunity, quite forgetting that they are also part of it.

formation MLAs and even ministers, are seen concentrating, on themselves only on appeasing the people of their respective constituencies. The reason for their doing so is well known to us. As a result, the state as a whole suffers from death and dearth of development and progress.

So, it is of utmost necessity to avoid such a fractured verdict in the upcoming election. This can be done only when we vote for the party, which has fielded adequate number of candidates, in our 60-member assembly, so that such party can form a government of its own.

This change so suggested in our voting behaviour is not easy to bring about. This is because a large chunk of voters are just illiterate enough to put their signature on the dotted line. They do not understand the nitty-gritty of how our government runs. They consider freedoms as an important incentive for voting.

Unfortunately, they are the deciding factor in electing candidates in any constituency. In such a background, the educated and enlightened ones, desirous of change, have to take an active part in educating and persuading such ignorant voters at least in their own neighbourhood regarding whom to cast their vote for.

As 2022 draws to a close, it's time once again for a prayer for India ahead of a new year. Where the mind is withheld and the head is held high... Where India takes the threat posed by China seriously as a 'united' country, not where the political response is marked by a juvenile and frankly self-defeating 'tu tu main main' argument with government and opposition accusing each other of being in collusion with the Chinese.

Where the army is kept out of the ugly political slug-fest supported in a bravely protecting our borders on icy climes. Where when things go wrong in 2022 we don't blame it on Nehru's failings in 1962. Where parliament is a forum for informed debate on matters of national



importance, where mikes of opposition MPs are not switched off even as the cameras focus relentlessly on the treasury benches. Where parliament sessions are not consigned to being a mere ritual, where the opposition doesn't disrupt and the government doesn't dictate but both sides learn to talk to rather than talk at each other.

Where the executive and judiciary don't confront each other but recognize their constitutional limits. Where judges appointments are not held up only because the government wants to prove a point. Where judicial independence is not compromised by ministers publicly attacking judges. Where the judiciary stands up to protect the rights of citizens in all cases and not selectively.

formation MLAs and even ministers, are seen concentrating, on themselves only on appeasing the people of their respective constituencies. The reason for their doing so is well known to us. As a result, the state as a whole suffers from death and dearth of development and progress.

Christmas not for unholy parties

Editor, December 25 is the happiest day for Christians. It is this day on which Lord Jesus had taken birth. I feel not only Christians but even people from other faiths should also consider this as an auspicious day. All should observe this day with a complete purity of heart and mind. It is indeed a good idea to do some charity and help the needy and poor on this day.

While the country is noticed during Christmas eve these days? Certain people throw special parties with booze. They want to jazz up this occasion with all vulgar dance, wild revelry and much more. The depraved video that went viral recently, in fact, is just the tip of the iceberg.

A Prayer for 2023

By Rajdeep Sardesai

'anti-national'. Where the Election Commission acts as a neutral umpire and doesn't gear its actions to suit the party in power. Where elected representatives don't switch sides only for ministerial benefit.

Where we cant have a financial system that writes off heli loans for corporate India but a farmer has his tractor seized for defaulting on a single loan instalment. Where small and micro industries get the same benefits from banks that a well-networked large business does.

Where a rational discussion on the economy calls for more facts, less spin-doctoring. Where all is not doom and gloom but neither can we worry ourselves for the rest of the world to become a recurring mantra.



talk of ease of doing business, and then let the taxmen target businesses. Where government recruitment exams aren't endlessly delayed and when they are held we don't have paper leaks every year that compromise the careers of lakhs of young Indians.

Where our political party's welfare agenda cannot become another party's 'road', where political parties should make election promises that can be delivered rather than spin a freebie culture that will only bankrupt the exchequer.

Where the colour of a dress that an actor wears in a film is hardly reason

to seek a ban on the film. Where in a plural society, no one has a monopoly on colour choices, where saffron can be pious and beautiful at the same time. Where the targeting of an Indian Muslim superstar is called out for the unalloyed bigotry it represents.

Where self-styled cultural vigilantes can't become the sole guardians of a millennial civilization and its value systems. Where a government doesn't promote a film that fits in with its propaganda machine while censoring those that don't.

Where special media doesn't buy into an official narrative. Where tolerance and accommodation of the 'other' becomes a symbol of our unique diversity.



Where Indian corporate barons with entrenched political interests don't sermonize on freedom of speech while effecting hostile takeovers of media companies. Where prime time TV shows don't profit from communal polarisation but provide their viewers with knowledge and not noise.

Where the cricket, football and badminton final rounds are held when they are held we don't have paper leaks every year that compromise the careers of lakhs of young Indians.

Where the colour of a dress that an actor wears in a film is hardly reason

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Can we keep religion aside, please?

By Dominick "Dauni Rising" Rymbai

December 30, 2022 is the 160th Death Anniversary of the Indian freedom fighter, U. Wah Kiang Nangbah, the Aam Aadmi leader of the Jantia Rebellion (1860-1863). Reading through Rev. III Mohanna's debut English work U. Kiang Nangbah, one can say the main causes of the rebellion were economic hardships (imposition of Tissue tax on the Aam Aadmi) and cultural domination (banning of traditional festivals) by the white man. It has nothing to do with religion, per se.

Love and Hate. Two powerful emotions that can bring out the best and the worst in us, humans. And then religion, creed, religious denomination, faith or by whatever word a Thebanus describes it, as usual, creeps into the picture. In our ancient hills we call them, many a beautiful love story has been rained by that decided word that can bring out the best and the worst in us, humans.

Where our political party's welfare agenda cannot become another party's 'road', where political parties should make election promises that can be delivered rather than spin a freebie culture that will only bankrupt the exchequer.

Where the cricket, football and badminton final rounds are held when they are held we don't have paper leaks every year that compromise the careers of lakhs of young Indians.

Where the colour of a dress that an actor wears in a film is hardly reason

Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS). This was years before the Centre launched the PM Jan Arogya Scheme. An MHA by training and a former entrepreneur, no one understands better the hardships and obstacles faced by our budding entrepreneurs, the job creators rather than job-seekers. Many an entrepreneur will be grateful for the PRIME Start-Up Hubs and the support ecosystem they provide. And that's why, on March 23, one hopes the new/old government will continue with the MHIS.

It's an in-thing for the thinking (and/or thinking too) public to bring bricks and non-constructive criticisms at the state bureaucracy that implemented the MHIS scheme and PRIME Start-Up project. But successful implementation of MHIS from January 2013 onwards, due credit should go to Mr. DP Wahlang, IAS (then Commissioner & Secretary) and Mr. Syntim, IAS (then Secretary to Government of Meghalaya and their teams. For PRIME Start-Up, the names of Mr. Vijay Kumar D. IAS (present Commissioner and Secretary) and Cyril VD Dengdoh, IAS (present Secretary) of Planning Department and their teams, come to mind.

In the interest of transparency, the credibility of the aforementioned elected representatives and bureaucrats should be open for discussion. Their work should.

The Flag, our National Flag

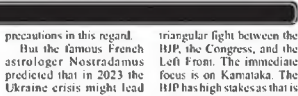
Some attribute the affront to the majority community to the largest minority and the white to the other minorities. The Chakma symbolises all the tribes (50% of States) working together to achieve greatness as envisioned by our Founder. He was joyfully later by 2047. The size of each colour in the flag being equal as enshrined in our Constitution. One fails to understand why many attribute the affront only with our Prime Minister and the main tiding party of the Centre. He is the PM of our Republic, just of the 37.36% of the total voters who voted for his party in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Objectively speaking, the Centre has been working overtime since its formation to reach NEIGRIMS in record time.

Oh, this age of anonymity! The social media where insults/threats are issued right, left and centre. To live and die for a Cause, to be proud of one's religion, to be a member of one's religious beliefs, the warrior U. Wah Kiang Nangbah has proved that one can.

As 2022 ends and 2023 beckons, Stung's Let Your Soul Be Your Flag (Mercy's Falling, 1996) resonates through the mind. There is a lingering fear of another phase-of-the pandemic.

Hoping against Hope. There is Hope. Hoping & Praying for a Better Future. P.S.: The writer is a Hymnwriter/Choir leader from Shillong, with Roots of Origin from present-day Tuberville in East Jamaica Hills District. His immediate relatives are permanently settled in Topy, St. John's, Hallelujah Baptist Roman Catholic, he was deeply influenced by the Bishop's (Grammes) of Topy.

Governance is a continuous process. That one can easily conclude from the usual main-named healthy Assembly debates between our former CM (the present Leader of Opposition) and our present CM. A former director of Zilaik PHC, our former CM understands well the debt-laden, out-of-pocket expenses of politicians and their families. In December 2012, the Government of Meghalaya launched one of India's first Universal Health Coverage scheme, the Meghalaya



triangular fight between the BJP, Congress, and the Left Front. The immediate focus is on Karnataka. The BJP has high stakes that is the only state where the BJP is ruling in the south. The Congress-JDS combine has a chance to wrest the government from the BJP. Will Congress revive its strength? Will Rahul Gandhi emerge stronger? The Hirmachal Pradesh win this month has boosted the morale of the Congress. It has allowed a chance for Congress to unite the Opposition. The opposition parties have realised that Modi will get a third term unless they combine. They will decide on the prime ministerial candidate expected after the polls. There are at least half-a-dozen contenders, mostly the elite regional separatist Mamona Banerjee, KCR, and Arvind Kejriwal. The government has to take a firm decision on the old pension scheme.

On the foreign front many bold decisions are expected from the country. Overall, 2023 looks promising in most spheres. Your etc., Yash Raj Pant Via email

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

Expectations in the new year. Editor, There are many expectations in 2023 for the country such as the G20 session, fresh outbreak COVID, assembly elections in nine states and expected recession in the world and political performance of Rahul Gandhi etc., and in nutshell next year will be crucial for India on several counts. COVID's new variant test the doorstep of the country and it had expanded in China creating havoc in that country. India has already started taking

