

"Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together."

— Booker T. Washington

## The Shillong Times

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### Banning Chinese apps

PREDICTABLY, China is incensed by the Indian government decision on Monday to ban 59 apps – mostly Chinese – including highly popular Tik Tok, WeChat, ShareIt etc. It is learnt that the red nation is verifying this development. The ban on the app, coming in the context of the new tensions on the northern border and killing of 20 Indian soldiers by Chinese PLA, is however linked to internal security concerns as the government has explained. It is safe to assume that both these contexts are behind the present decision. Admittedly, several of these apps are being used by government departments as also private agencies and the general public. In the context of the Chinese offensive, the bonhomie of the recent past between the two nations is passé. China is virtually on the offensive in Ladakh as also elsewhere along the border, and a war-like situation is slowly developing. India is busy acquiring more defence might on an urgent basis, and both the countries are already sending in military reinforcements -- both manpower and equipment of the top order, anticipating a further worsening of the situation any time now. A spark can light the fire, any moment. This is all the more reason for India to be more on the alert against these Chinese apps.

It is easy to ban a set of about 60 Chinese apps altogether from India, but the problem that it would face is, there are no alternatives to look up to in respect of several of these, and India itself cannot produce them soon enough. Instead, if European, American or Japanese technology is to be adopted in IT or other fields too, problem is of the high cost factor. It is in this context that the government will be well-advised to take a clear view of matters before it bans more Chinese products, lest this nation faces serious consequences in terms of daily requirements. The ban on nearly 60 apps, from the security context, is well-appreciated. At the same time, China was quick to take the stand that India is duty-bound to respect and stand by international trading agreements. China is bound to contest the Indian decision, and WTO and other global organisations will be brought into the picture from the Chinese side. Notably, this ban is just a small step considering the overall trade China has with India. Very few Indian products reach China, and hence, the retaliation from the Chinese side too, which is quite likely, will have minimal impact on India.

# War no longer an option today

By Barnes Mawrie

"Si vis pacem para bellum" (If you want peace prepare for war) was Julius Caesar's famous words to the Roman citizens. It looks like human beings of every century still adhere to this dictum. We have seen wars in every decade, some on a grander scale while many more on a smaller scale or localized wars. In the last century, humanity was unfortunate to have borne the brunt of two world wars, World War I from 1914-1918 and World War II from 1939-1945. The human casualty of the former war was about 22 million lives while the latter war which is considered the deadliest conflict in human history, saw the loss of 70-85 million lives. Apart from loss of lives, the destruction to property and

of Italy and Emperor Hirohito of Japan pursued such goals which resulted in World War II. Today another insane leader Xi Jinping of China is taking a leaf from such a terrible history and trying to replicate it. The red dragon has turned into the greedy and ambitious Smaug of Tolkien's trilogy of *The Hobbit*.

The question that comes to mind at this moment is, can humanity afford another great war? Or have we not learnt from mistakes of the past? How sinister modern wars can become is common knowledge of every person. Nuclear arms, WMD and sophisticated weapons of every kind

glory of the ancient Roman Empire. What Xi Jinping and his Communist Party are doing in China today, are a repetition of these despotic aspirations. The way China is going round bossing itself over weaker neighbours and enslaving them with loans and hooky investments, is an immoral method of gaining loyalty and control over them. A despot by nature will not tolerate a competitor or a threat to his sovereignty. What Kim Jong Un in North Korea and Xi in China are doing, is precisely silencing or at worst getting rid of opponents or threats to their positions. In world politics, the US and Europe are perceived as formidable

tanks and weaponry is indicative of their ambition to "rule the world." It seems that such leaders have not learnt from history. They should remember the fate of Hitler, Mussolini, Saddam Hussein and many others. So how do we counteract these despotic threats?

Many feel that the better options to tackle China will be a diplomatic isolation, cyber counter-attack and an economic sanction. It is to India's advantage that there is a China-phobia in the world today. Diplomatic isolation of China would be a cakewalk for India to achieve keeping in mind that many countries like USA, Australia, Japan, Canada, Taiwan and others, are already averse to China. India has taken the right



national economies all over the world was massive. It is rightly said that what civilization builds for centuries can be demolished in days through war. These are the unavoidable consequences of war as we know it.

In these last few years, we are witnessing unending arm conflicts in the Middle East which have led to immense loss of innocent lives and millions more rendered homeless. Today in our very own country and neighbourhood we are seeing conflict brewing between our country and China on LAC issues. Defence experts of both countries are predicting an escalation of conflicts which could possibly lead to war between the two neighbours which consequently could escalate into a global war. It is true that every few decades have always produced despots and insane leaders who would try to exert themselves on the regional or global scenario. Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini

available today, will definitely bring about untold suffering on humanity and may end up in a nuclear holocaust. China under Xi Jinping is on an ambitious plan to become world number one politically, economically and militarily. Despots in world history have displayed the same qualities, namely, pride, arrogance and ambition and their path to achieve is unmistakably through aggression and violence. They trample upon the rights of others even of their own citizens. They prey on weaker countries and build themselves on the ash heap of destruction. President Xi of China possesses all these monstrous qualities and he is in hurry to climb the peak of power.

Adolf Hitler convinced the German people that they were the crème of humanity and that other races are inferior and their extermination would count for nothing. Mussolini told the Italian people that he would restore to them the

opponents to be overcome. China has already achieved a partial victory through economic domination.

Today Chinese made products are flooding the western markets. China has even influenced the west culturally through the media especially through cinema. It is known that Hollywood today depends greatly on Chinese patronage. China censor board dictates Hollywood movies. This influence of China is not difficult to see when we consider how almost every Hollywood movie today has Chinese actors on the sets. When it comes to culinary tastes Chinese food has quite invaded the world. Chinese restaurants are found in every nook and corner of the world. What China is looking at today is military domination. The way China is aggressively advancing in the production of arms and weapons, ranging from long range and short range missiles, fighter planes, unmanned weapons-armed drones to sophisticated

step by banning all Chinese media apps. This would prevent hacking and media domination by China over our citizens. India should take a step further by adopting a cyber counter attack. Finally, we all know that China has become what it is today, because of its economic power. Its GDP is five times that of India and China's economic growth has surpassed that of any country. Western countries and India as well have helped the growth of Chinese economy. Now is the time for the rest of the world to curb Chinese power through economic sanctions. Some countries including India have already done this. When economy is weakened China will be compelled to bow down.

When these steps are taken resolutely without any selfish motives, perhaps the world can achieve its goal without shedding blood. No one wants war anymore because its price is too high. Humanity at all cost must avoid committing the same blunder. Its important to learn lessons from history.

# A case for legalising drugs

By Sean Gabb

The libertarian position on drugs is simply stated. People should have the right to do with themselves as they please. This necessarily includes the right to take any drugs they please – for recreation or for medication. No one else automatically has the right to interfere with such choices, unless they can be shown to involve force or fraud or some attack on the whole community that threatens its dissolution.

Taking drugs in consenting company is not an act of the first kind – it causes no one else the sort of harm against which they can legitimately demand protection. Nor is it an act of the second kind. We are told endlessly that drugs are a danger to social stability – that they lead to crime and degradation and so forth. There is no evidence for this claim.

The British past provides a compelling example. Until 1920, drug use was uncontrolled. Between 1827 and 1859, British opium consumption rose from 17,000lb to 61,000lb. Workmen mixed it in their beer. Gladstone took it in his coffee before speaking. Scott wrote *The Bride of Lammermoor* under its influence. Dickens and Wilkie Collins were both heavy users. Cannabis and heroin were openly on sale. There was no social collapse. There were few

In the first place, the Police need to become a virtual Gestapo if they are to try enforcing laws that create no victim willing to complain and help in any investigation. They need powers to stop and search private people and to search private homes that would never be necessary to stop things like burglary and murder. They need to get involved in entrapment schemes. They are exposed to offers of bribes frequently too large to be turned away. In one way or another, the War on Drugs leads to the corruption of every enforcement agency sent into battle.

And that War cannot be won. The British Customs and Excise have no land border to worry about. They can track every boat and aeroplane that enters British territory. They have far wider powers of investigation than the regular Police. Even so, they themselves estimate that they stop fewer than three per cent of the drugs smuggled into the United Kingdom every year.

In the second place, we have the war on money laundering. Since it is impossible to stop the import and sale of the drugs, attention has switched in recent years to stopping the profits of the trade from being enjoyed. The idea now is to confiscate these profits and use them for further investigations.



deaths from taking drugs. Most deaths involving opium were individual accidents, and even these were negligible – excluding suicides, 104 in 1868 and thereafter to 1901 an annual average of 95. Hardly anyone even recognised that a problem might exist.

The claim that drugs are bad for a society falls. The opposite is true. Criminalisation is bad. All the ills now blamed on drugs are more truly blamed on the illegality of drugs. When drugs are illegal, only criminals will supply them. And when criminals are allowed to dominate an entire market, they will be able – indeed required – to form extended, permanent structures of criminality that could never otherwise exist. They will then make drugs both expensive and dirty.

Drugs will be expensive because bribes, transport inefficiencies, rewards of special risk, and so forth, all raise the costs of bringing drugs to market. Therefore much of the begging, prostitution and street crime that inconvenience Western cities.

Drugs will be dirty because illegal markets lack the usual safeguards of quality. When a can of beer is stamped "8 per cent alcohol by volume", this does not mean anything between 0.5 and 30 per cent. Nor will caustic soda be used to make it fizzy. Brewers have too much to lose by poisoning or defrauding customers. Drug dealers can afford to be less particular.

Therefore frequent overdosing. Therefore poisonous additives. Therefore, the frequent transmission of aids even today by the sharing of dirty needles.

Moving from the costs of the crime resulting from illegality, we come to the costs of enforcement. These also are massive.

However, before the money can be taken, it must be found. This requires surveillance and control over all financial transactions. Because any one of us might be a drug dealer trying to launder dirty money, we must all provide endless documentation when we open bank accounts. We are not allowed to pay in large amounts of cash without facing an inquisition from the bank clerks. Our banking details are open to official inspection virtually on demand.

Just as with drugs, the war on money laundering is also a war on freedom. In this case, it frees the authorities from the requirements of due process. The confiscations of alleged drug money are increasingly made without any pretence of a trial. In America, civil asset forfeiture, has become legalised theft of the plainest kind. In Britain, we are moving towards a similar breach of Common Law rights.

Moreover, the fact that our financial transactions can now be monitored gives the authorities an entirely new power over us. Its means of exercise are not yet in place. But we are moving fast into a world where all our purchases can be stored in a database. We can try to avoid this surveillance by using cash. But there are experiments in both Britain and America to see how anonymous cash can be replaced by cards that leave a record of every transaction. Therefore, on the grounds both of individual freedom and of social utility, there is no argument whatever for continuing with the present War on Drugs. It is a War that benefits only criminals and a few drug enforcement agencies, and that harms every one of the rest of us, whether or not we take drugs.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Uncertainty amidst the pandemic

Editor,  
The 2020 Pandemic has led to a chaotic jumble of social, mental and psychological issues in the lives of the student community, as a whole. While the CBSE, ICSE as well as intermediate year college students breathed a sigh of relief in the recent past with the surety of the status of their examination, a cloud of uncertainty hovers over final year students of various Universities.

While some universities are keeping mum about the conduct of exams for Final Year students, leaving the students completely perplexed, others have opted for the conduct of online exam in the form of an Open Book Examination in spite of not being fully prepared to conduct one (as claimed by the Teachers' Association of a particular University).

Ofcourse, students have to 'pass out' to appear for competitive exams and/or higher studies but they can be 'passed' or 'failed' based on their previous performance as well.

The crux of the matter is that the logic behind promoting

intermediate students based on their previous performance and not the Final Year students is not only discriminatory but also unfair. No doubt, there are universities which are providing the option of giving the exam in the conventional offline mode towards the end of the year and/or when the situation improves. However till when are we supposed to wait, keeping in mind the recent statement of the Chief of the World Health Organisation that the COVID-19 Pandemic "is not even close to being over." It has been almost one week that the students have been eagerly waiting for UGC's new guidelines regarding the examination. Perhaps, the only ray of hope for students right now would be the immediate release of such guidelines as any further uncertainty and trauma in the current context would only take a toll on the mental health of Final Year students.

Yours etc.,  
Loyola Dkhar,  
Via email

#### A case for hawkers

Editor,  
Mawlai MLA's suggestion for allowing one-third of hawkers and street vendors to resume

business is welcome. He is the first public representative to stand by those who eke out a living by hawking and street vending. Therefore, he deserves thumbs up for his political courage to take a stand on this important matter relating to the poor of the State. And he stands out because of the deafening silence of all other 59 MLA!

One of the major dilemmas before the government, I suppose, is: Should we, should we not? It is akin to an unenviable situation: Damned if we do, damned if we don't! One obvious conundrum that haunts the authorities is how to regulate hawking? Since the hawkers are unlicensed, there is no regulation in place, except maybe in Police Bazar area where they are more organised. In all other areas, it is mostly the poverty stricken tribals, mostly women, who sell their perishable produce to make a living. This is the real crux.

In my view, the government and District Council should invite registration of all hawkers area-wise. This exercise will take a few days, but it's worth the gamble. With one stroke, we will know the ground situation. This will enable the government to split the hawkers on a

rotational basis. The bottom line is that the matter brooks no further delay. When all trades and commercial activities have received the green signal what crime have these hapless lot committed? Their only crime is their abject poverty. That we have swelling numbers of hawkers and street vendors in the State today is a horrible reflection on the failure of the powers that be. The government of the day is already appearing like an insensitive monster with no thoughts for the poor who have only hawking as a means of livelihood. It is time for the decision makers not to be obsessed about being politically correct. It pays to use more of hearts and not so much of the head!

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Get a grip on price rise

Editor,  
Your report on the abrupt raising of prices on meat and fish in Shillong (ST June 27, 2020) was timely. It is very strange that we Shillongites never complain or raise our voices at the price hike of essential commodities, taxi and sumo fares etc., as if we are all from Bill Gates family.

That is why a section of people are taking advantage of our weakness. Moreover, our big babus from the Secretariat or the Departments concerned never bother to understand the plight of the poor, ordinary folks. When the Tura Municipal Board could regulate the prices of all varieties of meat then why not in Shillong? It is not enough to take credit for combatting cases of Covid-19 but also to combat this menace of inflationary prices. It is high time that the administration takes serious steps to check price rise. However, we common people too must open our eyes and raise our voices against this evil practice by a section of business people.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Via email

#### Shillong-Dawki road project

Editor,  
The recent news about Defence authorities agreeing to part with land for expansion of Shillong-Dawki Road is heartening. The people of southern parts of Khasi Hills who have suffered for a long, long time because of increasing traffic congestion, will be hoping that they won't have to wait for decades for completion of the project. I

am simply intrigued by the lack of attention of the Meghalaya Government towards its expansion for all these 50 years. This road was built by the British and has remained that way even after Independence. For 50 long years, strangely, nobody pushed for it, while we suffered silently. I don't remember this critical matter ever being raised in the Assembly or even in the District Council. If the Assembly failed to take note of the plight of the travelling public, at least the District Council could have passed a resolution to make it incumbent on the government to go for it more earnestly. Be that as it may, now that the clearance has been obtained from Defence Ministry, let the State Government not get into a slumber again. So many essential projects have suffered because of bureaucratic red-tape that we are worried this project may also suffer further delay at the hands of insensitive officials.

All out effort must be made by all those who have been entrusted with this responsibility for ensuring that this basic need of the large number of people who use this road everyday, is met without any delay.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Via email

*“Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.”*

--- Helen Keller

**The Shillong Times**

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**Railway reforms**

THE Indian Railways, the nation’s largest network of mass and freight transportation and employing as high as 13 lakh hands, is a phenomenon by itself. Fact is also that it failed to grow in a manner that suited the modern times, while the rail networks in several countries in Asia stole a march over us – China and Japan, in particular with their bullet and other high-speed trains. Successive governments here did not take enough interest in the Railways’ modernization, and the priorities were often misplaced and guided by political interests. In this context, the present move by the Union Government to privatize a part of its massive operations is perhaps a way forward to inject dynamism to this ailing sector. The government on Wednesday called for qualification proposals from private entities to run modern-style trains on 109 pairs of routes up and down. What is expected is a private investment of Rs 30,000 crore. When private entities step in, chances are also that the fares for both passenger and freight will be higher, unlike the soft corner that governments have in this respect. Governments, in order to gain the goodwill of the public, kept fares low for many years, though the special service fares like tatkal etc are kept high. It is here that a mix of private and public sectors, separately, will be advantageous. There could be different fare structures for IR trains and privately run trains.

The Modi government’s attempt since 2014 to increase the speed of trains and modernize track systems for this purpose, as also to have bullet trains on a pilot project between Mumbai and Ahmedabad have not gone far. Big dreams were unveiled shortly after Modi, but as usual in this country, things are moving at snail’s pace. Governments are comfortable with the slow pace, but the people are hard-pressed. The bullet train project lost its steam after the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress government took power in Maharashtra, after the BJP was ousted in the last state polls. Maharashtra halted the project even though both the Centre and Gujarat wanted its completion. What message such wanton actions send out to prospective investors in India is clear to all. The fact of the matter is also that Indian Railways, with its colonial past, maintained certain dignity in the way it operated. This, even as corruption was massive in its systems from top to bottom. How private players will make a difference to this is something that needs a close watch.

**Meghalaya’s multiple challenges versus The outdated Social Justice theory**

By Patricia Mukhim

The Galwan Valley encounter in Eastern Ladakh between the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) of China and the Indian Army could not have come at a more inopportune moment. India is battling the Covid-19 pandemic which is surging ahead every day and shows no signs of abating. We hear horror stories from different states about how family members cannot even cremate their loved ones because of a tardy response from the municipal authorities. This report from West Bengal gives us the shivers. We cannot help imagine such worst case scenarios even here in Meghalaya should there be a sudden rise in Covid cases and should we run out of hospital beds, and should our crematoria be overburdened.

How do we tackle such exigencies despite the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 and the Disaster Management Act, 2005. These are action plans whose implementation finally lies with the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy comprises people of all temperaments but many of whom lack the passion for carrying out their jobs with the intention of achieving results. No one rewards results in Government so why should anyone even have passion for what they do? Hence the bureaucracy fails when it comes to taking things to the lowest rung of the societal ladder.

India is reeling from an economic crisis of unimaginable proportions hence the daily jump in prices of diesel and petrol. Prices of essential commodities are already spiraling. No government really has the muscle to keep a check on prices. Those who earn big incomes will never feel the pinch. Unfortunately, it’s the high income elite that have to correct this price escalation. They are ‘The Government.’ If they don’t feel the pinch it is obvious that they will not be concerned with price rise. So they will offer lip service over television. In fact if you are an avid television watcher you would have noticed the daily briefs by the Deputy Chief Minister who is now the de-facto Chief Minister. When he is asked questions on job creation, on the economy on how Covid is being handled, you would think

Meghalaya has no problems at all. The MDA Government has solved every problem. The TV news anchors too are happy with those flippant answers because they too don’t have the time or the inclination to grill anyone. If they do it, they will not get any response from any minister next time around to make an appearance on their TV news channels. We in the media have learnt the art of happy co-existence.

But the pandemic calls for a reality check. If you travel some distance from Shillong you get the feel of Meghalaya’s pulse. Some weeks ago during the lockdown, the farmer’s wholesale market at 5th Mile was thriving. So too the market at 7th Mile across the headquarters of the Eastern Air Command! These suburban markets seemed promising enough to give lewduh a run for its money. Today they are a poor shadow of themselves. On Wednesday when this writer visited the markets they wore a despondent look. Not all the stalls were occupied and the vendors complained that business was at a record low. About 99% of the stall owners were women selling only about 10 kgs of five kinds of vegetables and some tiddits. One wonders how much they make on a daily basis, but it’s certainly not much. On the way to Upper Shillong right from Lummawbah right up to 5th Mile one side of the road is filled with hawkers. Most of them sell fruits, the costs of which are prohibitive. But they must be selling their stuff because day after day they display the same items.

My own observation is that the 7th Mile market is nearly all run by Khasi women with a sprinkling of Khasi men manning a few shops. Those who frequent the market too are all Khasis. Now that lewduh has partially opened and Laitumkhrah is virtually all unlocked, people would not want to make a detour all the way to Upper Shillong for their supplies of vegetables. Besides, the market lacks innovation and the same goods available there are found in the markets of Shillong too. A market has to innovate to survive. If there were some local items not easily found in the markets of Shillong then there might have been some attraction for visitors.

However, there is one indicator that no economist will miss which is that a market has to be patronized by all who have the purchasing power. The 7th Mile market on the contrary, resembles an ethnic bazaar frequented by one ethnic group. A market is a free space which transcends community, race, class, religion, economic status etc. Only then will business thrive. That’s the reason lewduh is bustling with activity. It has an eclectic mix of vendors and buyers. They get along fine. It’s the surly onlookers with an eye on politics who seem to have a grouse against this mixed population in lewduh. Try and turn lewduh into an oligopoly and it will collapse on its own weight. If the world has gone global, Meghalaya cannot introduce economic xenophobia in the marketplace. The market knows only one rule – you sell and let others sell too. The vendors’ loyalty is to the purchaser, no matter her race, tribe or moral ethos.

Meghalaya like the rest of India could face a prolonged economic depression. Should we waste time in communal fracas or should we be thinking more dynamically and as Meghalayans about reviving the economy? There is no place for petty politics in the present situation. People who are used to bringing governance and livelihoods to a halt on a range of “pick and choose issues” should not even think of doing that now. The pandemic has given us time to reflect and we see things differently today. We need survival kits not political rhetoric. The pandemic has created a moral, spiritual and emotional disaster. People are now aware that the several pressure groups dotting our landscape are all surviving by extorting the non-tribal business community here. The burden being put on the non-tribal businessperson is that he/she has exploited the local tribals here. What nonsense is this? In the marketplace people are free to buy from anyone they choose? It’s a competitive space where only those with business acumen will survive. And not every person is cut out for doing business. Period.

This pandemic has to usher in some deep

reflection which has to lead to a mindset change. We cannot cogitate on the same old issues that we have been doing for decades. Meghalaya may be a tribal majority state but it has a substantial non-tribal population. This population has been carrying out phenomenal charitable work by giving out rations to the needy during this pandemic without scanning their community. They continue to feed people every day at the Gurudwara, at City Hut Dhaba at Barapathar and they do it without much fanfare. But do we even recognize this? No we don’t and we don’t also have the sense of responsibility to follow their example and feed hungry mouths elsewhere.

For a long time we have put up with the so-called social justice activists whose real intent is to catapult into power politics. Once there they will abandon all rhetoric and begin their wealth creation programme. We have been harbingering for decades that the end of the world is at hand and that we will be outnumbered by non-tribals. The actual fact is that the non-tribal population is dwindling. So the Social Justice theory of change that was fed to us for decades did not produce actual change. This Social Justice theory built upon the hatred of the other does not fit any political theory. Can anyone of these pressure groups explain how exactly this cultural agitation will lead to legislation that will bring about greater accountability in governance, result in lessening income disparities, and create a better ecology that is sustainable? How will they tackle the big challenges such as landlessness, increasing poverty levels and more women headed households with thousands of under-nourished children and anemic women? I have never heard any of the pressure groups speak on these issues – not even on the gross landlessness that is going to lead to future inter-class warfare. You cannot capitalize from the politics of resentment which we have witnessed since 1979. It has outlived its utility. Post the pandemic people will think differently and they will, hopefully not fall into the same old trap that keeps them in eternal bondage.

**Pandemic China losing grip, paves way for Atmanirbhar Abhiyan**

**Beijing sees its ASEAN clout shrinking**

By Subrata Majumder

Till the outbreak of COVID 19, China was the biggest trade partner of India. Trade increased due to a surge in imports from China. It outsmarted oil rich countries and became the biggest source of imports. Imports from China accounted for over 13.7 percent of India’s total imports in 2019-20.

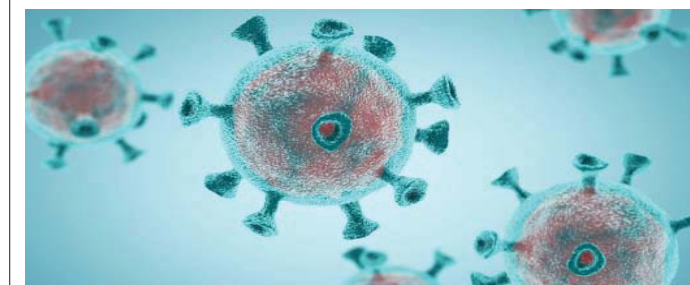
Incidentally, the surge in imports was arrested by the outbreak of COVID 19. Imports from China made a somersault in 2019-20, declining by 6.6 per cent. Reason: pandemic China lost the significance as a stable source for supply chain. Factories were closed and the foreign investors were encouraged to shift their production bases. Electronic and electric items were the major items of imports from China. They accounted for one third of the total imports from China.

There was a close link between imports of electronic items from China and the development of electronic industry in India. China has been the biggest source for import of electronic items for India. It accounted for 40 percent of total imports of electronic items in India. This manifested India’s over-dependence on China for

Chinese goods. India has also gone one step ahead to decimate China’s notorious attempts for acquisition after it was losing grip in the trade predatory. In an amendment in FDI policy, India barred Chinese investment approval through Automatic route.

China is eclipsed by dark days ahead. Before the outbreak, China forecasted “Xiakang Sheui”. In English, it means moderately prosperous society. Epidemic turned pandemic paralyzed Chinese economy. Chinese economy contracted by 6.6 percent in the first quarter of 2020. In 2018, China’s manufacturing industry generated US\$ 4 trillion output and accounted for 30 percent of GDP. It was the global hub for manufacturing, accounting for 28 percent of the global manufacturing output. With the outbreak of COVID 19, China’s manufacturing sector faced an economic loss of US \$ 50 billion.

China lost the aura of producing cheap goods. COVID-19 and currency fluctuations dented China’s hegemony for the global hub for manufacturing. China devalued its currency in August 2019 to offset the appreciation of Chinese



electronic industry. The outbreak of COVID 19 and eventually drop in imports led to a drag in the electronic industry in the country. Nevertheless, the situation was treated as a wake-up call for India and time for development of its own electronic component industry. Given this reinvention, the government of India initiated a new industrial policy, which focused on the development of MSMEs as a core component of Make in India. It unleashed multiple fiscal incentives through liberalization of credit facilities and plunging into a big guarantee for this sector.

Budget 2020-21 also took a proactive approach to India’s self-reliance movement. It hovered between protectionism and liberalization, focusing on the development of MSMEs as the base for supply chain industry. It toyed with the rise and fall of custom duties. It raised custom duties where domestic industries were competitive and lowered the duties for the emerging industries. For example, custom duties were raised on components and parts of mobile phones, electronic motors, home electrical appliances and toys. Conversely, custom duties were reduced on raw materials and components for the auto industry (such as catalytic converters).

PLI (Production Linked Incentive) in India is one of such measures to woo more investment and boost the electronic industry. It has enhanced the incentive from 4 per cent to 6 per cent during COVID 19. The government is hoping for fresh investment from global firms, such as Foxcom Wistron (manufacturer of Apple), Flex, Samsung, Oppo.

Apart COVID 19, the deterioration in the India-China relation due to repeated stand-off in the Ladakh border escalated India-China tension. Countrywide slogans are raised for the boycott of Chinese goods. Juxta posed in stand-off at the border and Atmanirbhar Abhiyan, India is planning to impose stringent quality control measures and high tariff on

currency yuan and the high tariff imposed by the USA. The pandemic prompted many companies to shift their manufacturing bases from China. Japan has already earmarked US\$ 2.2 billion to help its manufacturing shift. Japanese car Mazda shifted a part of its production from Jiangsu in China to Guanajuato in Mexico. Microsoft and Google are looking for Thailand and Vietnam. Prior to COVID 19 outbreak, fear was hovering on Chinese proxy entry in India through ASEAN. China is the biggest trading partner of ASEAN. Over one-fourth of ASEAN imports of electronic items are from China. Both China and India have FTAs with ASEAN. Given this situation, there was every likelihood that China would use China-ASEAN FTA turf to dump goods in India. With the outbreak of COVID 19, which shattered Chinese electronic industry, China’s fear for its backdoor entry has diluted. After the COVID 19 outbreak, Chinese imports surged from ASEAN nations. During the first quarter of 2020, China’s imports from Vietnam and Indonesia rose by 24 percent and 13 percent respectively year-on-year basis.

Not only in India, China is losing its influence in ASEAN – the major network of supply chains. A close look at the trade relation between China and ASEAN reveals that China’s influence in the region is melting. The growth rate of exports to China from the emerging ASEAN countries like Laos, Myanmar Vietnam had outpaced the growth of imports from China. With Belt and Road projects currently under hold, these nations are embroiled in new strategies for their overdependence on China. It is not certain whether COVID 19 will further delay finalization of RCEP after India refused to join in.

To sum up, mega incentives to MSMEs in the economic package to develop its own supply chain and curb on overdependence on China is a timely step for India’s Atmanirbhar Abhiyan. (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

**Prevention a dire need**

Editor, The recent issuance of a set of guidelines/protocols for home isolation of high-risk COVID-19 cases by the state government is greatly appreciated. The high-risk group needs to be properly taken care of. However, as the saying goes, “prevention is better than cure,” so also, strict prohibition of visitors to homes having elderly people and small children, and vice versa, can be considered as a preventive measure, and therefore, the need of the hour. Man is, no doubt, a social animal but “extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures.” The “from home to home” (“na iing ha iing”-in Khasi dialect) mentality needs to be done away with. This complacent mentality (although not recommended at all) might or rather, could have worked when the state was under a complete or total lockdown. However, people need to keep in mind the prevalence of silent carriers or asymptomatic patients of COVID 19 which can be either “us” or “them”. The gradual relaxation of the lockdown rules is at our peril, because of which the well-being of our loved ones should be

our utmost priority. Yours etc., Loyola Dkhar, Via email

**Make India a self-sustaining nation**

Editor, The United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has appreciated India’s decision to ban 59 apps with Chinese links and said it will boost India’s integrity and national security. The Union Information and Technology Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad also invited Indian startups and technical minds to create Made in India apps. These bans present an opportunity for Indian start-ups and bright young minds to leverage their intellectual capability and innovative thinking and come up with good apps. Earlier on, the Central Government launched ‘Make in India’ and ‘Vocal for Local.’ It is creating opportunities for the common man to develop technology, goods, and services at the local level. It would be better that we support government initiatives to make the nation strong and self-sustaining. Yours etc., Amit Singh Kushwaha, Satna, (MP)

**CRPF high handedness**

Editor, At this time of pandemic which has severely affected the daily wage earners and petty shop owners, high handedness of CRPF personnel in the 4th Furlong area of Shillong has caused much consternation amongst the poor and marginalized people of the area and threatening their livelihoods. Last year, CRPF authority had illegally erected barbed wire structures on the PWD road all along the boundary wall of their campus at 4th Furlong area putting the life of motorists and pedestrians in danger. However, on bringing the matter to the notice of state PWD through your esteemed daily (Letter to the editor July, 16 2019 edition) CRPF authority had no other option but to remove the illegal structures. Recently Shillong Traffic Police (STP) has put up a ‘No Parking’ board in the entire stretch of road along the wall of CRPF campus. Since the area is dotted with small shops/kiosks, two-wheeler repairing shops etc, many customers stop their cars/two wheeler for few minutes without

disturbing the free flow of traffic. But the over-enthusiastic CRPF personnel immediately appear in the scene to intimidate and on few occasions have reportedly assaulted the civilians.

Is the CRPF authorised to assault or intimidate civilians for stopping vehicles in a ‘No Parking Zone’? Since STP has put the ‘No Parking’ board it is their duty to take appropriate action against the violators as per the Motor Vehicles Act and the CRPF personnel have no authority whatsoever in this regard. Such illegal action by CRPF needs to be stopped immediately for the sake of civility. Our policy makers were very right while locating barracks of armed and paramilitary forces far away from civilian areas just to avoid such undue interference into civilian domain.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

**China’s coercive diplomacy & India’s response**

Editor, Given China’s unrelenting stance on the Line of Actual Control(LAC) in

Ladakh, India will have to consider a military pushback. India has no option but to use force. Both sides have agreed for limited “de-escalation” from some of the friction points. However, it was during this de-escalation process in the Galwan Valley that the clash occurred. India is now taking the Chinese build-up along the LAC seriously. India has been consistently demanding the restoration of status quo and de-induction of forces built up by China along the LAC.

However, deciding on a military action against China is not easy for India. Such an action could escalate to a full scale war that can result in not only military consequences, but also long-term political, economic and diplomatic impacts. However, the Modi government is not worried about the consequences of a military pushback. Both action and inaction have their consequences. Inaction may have short-term benefits but it has long-term consequences. It is a fact that both inaction and indecision have hurt India’s foreign policy and security interests. True, it is not advisable to consider war against a stronger enemy. But India must be ready to cope with the situation. Three factors that influence

a military action by India need to be considered too. First, China is much more powerful than India but at the LAC the forces are equally strong. Second, India’s weakness is advantageous to it because anything other than a victory will be a loss to China. Finally, avoidance of a war by India may create an impression that it is irresolute and that may embolden China. If China is left unchallenged, it will push India again. India must show resolve if its immediate goal is deterrence.

Adequate military preparation is required for a military pushback. Indian military has traditionally been oriented for defensive military action at the LAC, not offensive. India must also consider the scenario that China does not back down. If such a situation arises, it must follow through with its threat. If not, India will risk damage to its credibility. India must never yield to China’s coercive diplomacy. China has baited India. A quick and emotional response would be a strategic folly. India must counter bait China by the strategy of maintaining the status quo. Yours etc., Venu GS, Via email

*“The last thing they want is a revitalized economy now. I’m not saying the Democrats don’t want a strong economy. Don’t misunderstand. They just don’t want it now.”*

— Rush Limbaugh

## The Shillong Times

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### Reviving Meghalaya’s economy

MEGHALAYA Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has been very articulate on the imperative of reviving the tourism industry which is seen as the alternative to mining and the environmental toll it takes. It would be fair to say that mining is the antithesis to tourism. Meghalaya can have one or the other, not both. Mining has long term ecological consequences for which the future generation of Meghalaya will have to pay a heavy price. We are already seeing some of those devastating effects by way of the river waters turning a turbid blue and resulting in the destruction of riverine life. What’s the use of a dead river? And what else will be destroyed because of mining? These questions need to be answered by the people of Meghalaya. This issue cannot be left to politicians alone. But the question then is who must engage with these issues of our collective survival? Meghalaya has a long history of leaving everything to pressure groups – from opposing uranium mining to opposing the railways. Till date we don’t have pressure groups opposing limestone and coal mining – two very destructive practices which bring short term gains but has already extracted a heavy price on the environment.

If Meghalaya chooses Tourism as its economic mascot then it can no longer vacillate with the Mining Policy. The State will have to see that the Mining Policy does not undercut everything that the Tourism Policy seeks to achieve. These inherent contradictions have to be resolved. In Meghalaya, it is the environment that is the selling point whether we look at adventure tourism, eco-tourism or cultural tourism. Each of these has the environment as the selling point. Would any tourist choose to visit East Jaintia Hills to see the ugly, black landscape that reeks of environmental destruction?

The Government seems optimistic about promoting inter-state tourism. That is not a bad idea considering that many Meghalayans have not visited the length and breadth of their state. However, there has to be a long-term vision for Tourism which must necessarily be sustainable. But Tourism is not a stand-alone economic activity. It has many supporting structures such as human capital which needs to be developed; road infrastructure, air, rail and land connectivity amongst others. Meghalaya is still largely dependent on Guwahati airport for air travel. For years the airport at Umroi and Baljek has made none or very little progress. Big aircrafts cannot land at Umroi although they can land in more challenging airports such as Aizawl. There are issues that a Government which is serious about Meghalaya’s economic growth spurt, post Covid-19, must address.

# Is it possible to turn back the clock?

By Albert Thyriang

In the late 1970s and early 1980s my village was probably already more than 80 per cent Christian. When the rest of the less than 20 per cent indigenous population had their annual harvest festival it was considered sinful for Christians to witness the festive dances. In the church, preachers would repeat that message. The festival was called “Shad ‘Riew Pyrthei” (Dance of the people of the world) and adherents of indigenous religion were called “Riew Pyrthei” (literally meaning people of the world). This is in confirmation with the observation in articles and letters to the editors in this paper and elsewhere that missionaries forbade their faithful to attend the “Behdien Khlam” festival. Before proceeding further it is stated that the terms “Shad ‘Riew Pyrthei” or “Riew Pyrthei” are offensive and should have never been used.

Reminiscing on the years gone by, the foot-paths in my village were ‘littered’ with pig dung as the domesticated animals were allowed to roam free. Today that has completely changed. Cleanliness is close to top-notch. A census will reveal cent per cent literacy. The LP school has now become a higher secondary school with infrastructure equal to average institutions in Shillong. People have easier access to health care. Of course, the 100 plus households have all converted to Christianity. The monoliths were removed and you won’t find a single ‘Ksing’ (traditional drum) in the entire village. My micro testimony is by and large the story of tribal Meghalaya and beyond. Today the Christian population in the state is estimated at 75%. Followers of traditional religion stand at only 8.70%.

Post the Rev Thomas Jones Day commemoration critics have pointed out the irrevocable ‘damage’ done to the religious, cultural and social life of the tribes of ‘Hynniewtrep’ albeit with the commendable transformation particularly in education, literature and health care. Indisputably foreign missionaries brought education, health-care and invented the Khasi Alphabet. However, equally undeniably, they also converted the indigenous population to Christianity and considered this land ‘heathen’ which needed to be civilized and liberated’. The questions asked are, “Was conversion the primary objective and education and health care secondary ones? Or was it the other way round? Were education and health care tools for conversion? Though edu-

cation and health are a blessing, are the cultural, social and religious practices of our fore-parents, to a great extent diminished. We are witnessing a resurgence of the ‘Black movement’ in USA and in European countries like the UK after the murder of George Floyd an African-American. The ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement is reminding the white race of the 400 year history of slavery, social and economic injustices. Blacks are reminding the world of the horrible things that happened to them due to colonisation, exploration and imperialism carried out by whites (should we say synonymous with Christians?). As historical statues were pulled down, toppled, vandalised and defaced, the movement is telling us to relearn and unlearn much of history. Contrary to popular knowledge Christopher Columbus never discovered America because at least 100 million aboriginal people were already living there centuries before Columbus set foot there. Upon his arrival in the Caribbean the Genoa born 15th century explorer seized the Taino natives of the Hispaniola Island to be servants. Later he forced them into slavery in cold mines and plantation, flogged and cut their ears as punishment for ‘unsatisfactory’ work. Columbus and his fellow travellers also brought diseases like small pox and measles devastating the natives to near annihilation. He sent thousands of peaceful Tainos to Spain to be sold. Many perished en route. One estimate says, within 60 years after Columbus landed in the new world, only a few hundred may have survived of the 250,000 Taino natives. As governor and viceroy, Columbus ordered a brutal crackdown in response to natives’ revolt to deter further rebellion. He even ordered mutilated bodies to be paraded in public. Critics say the cruel invader was responsible for a genocide of up to 90% of native population under his rule. Even after such a heinous record he is accorded a federal holiday in October. As we are in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic it is relevant to recall the American plagues of the 16th century. Brought by the European explorers the illnesses, including the deadly smallpox, killed 90% of the indigenous population in the Western Hemisphere. The diseases helped the Spanish forces to conquer the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1519 and the

ter or worse, human interactions effect changes. Some more, some less! Some parts of Jaintia Hills have been influenced by Hinduism. The tribes in the plains of Assam who came into close contact with Vaishnavism have assimilated themselves in that form of Hinduism and changed their cultural practices. They have even forgotten their languages and Assamese has become their mother tongue. Can they go back to the pre-Ahom era? Can the North and South American natives go back to pre-colonisation or pre-Christian period? Can Black Americans go back to the pre-slavery period? Is turning the clock back an option? Critique of history is beneficial but being caught up with the past is deleterious.

Perhaps there are people with aversion for anything ‘foreign’ (Videshi) and who attempt to impose a ‘desi’ ideology. In a vernacular daily there was an article questioning the patriotism of the popular song, “Ri Khasi Ri Khasi” saying the song was composed by Rev. John Roberts and its tune is from the national anthem of Wales titled, “The Land of my Father.” The much revered song has triggered a polarised debate on social media. Why would a song be less patriotic just because the tune is foreign? We have Khasi religious songs whose tunes originate from English, Latin and Hindi hymns. Are they less devotional?

The state has been unsuccessfully making efforts to include the Khasi and Garo languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. In 2018 the Meghalaya Assembly passed a resolution to this effect. An official once revealed the secret for the futile attempts so far. Both the languages are in the Roman Script. Had the two major languages of the state been in Bengali or Assamese script (Devanagari script) then perhaps the duo would have joined the other 22 official languages by now. To fulfil our dream of seeing Khasi and Garo languages in the Eight Schedule should we return to the ‘original’ Devanagari script? Should the text books, novels, plays, poems be re-written in an ‘Indian’ script? Should the local press be in that script? In matters of script, culture and religion is a backward journey possible? Can everything be undone?

(The writer can be contacted at thalbert@rediffmail.com)

# New age and blended learning

By Ananya S Guha

A lot is being discussed on online learning. Some argue that this is here to stay while others say that because of the digital or rural-urban divide this is patently unfair to a large section of rural students. Online learning has been necessitated because schools and colleges have been closed due to the Covid situation. Necessity after all is the mother of invention. Not that online teaching is new, it is used for distance education students both synchronously and asynchronously. This pedagogy includes the radio and television as well, making learning visual and auditory. Open universities like the IGNOU used two way audio and one way video as an additional pedagogy to supplement study texts even as far back as 1992. Conventional education looked askance at such an innovation. The idea was to break barriers of distance by using the radio and television. In fact the Gyan Vani radio broadcasts of the IGNOU was and still is very popular where students from colleges and universities other than that of IGNOU could tune in. This education transcended barriers and reached out to traditional systems of education. With the advent of the internet and the mobile phone, students have access to study material and gradually universities like IGNOU introduced online programmes.

The UGC gave an advisory to universities and colleges to start online courses of a short term nature. This traditional education and distance education had a meeting point through technology interference. Many distance education students are considered to be disadvantaged as they live in rural and remote areas or, alternate between work and study. Thus continuity in learning for such people and ‘drop outs’ was a cardinal principle in distance and open learning.

In fact distance and what is called open learning has a media ensemble of the print material, the audio and video and of course the internet through the various stages of its progress. The printed study texts are the primal form of media intervention- the print media. Then followed the radio and the television and now the mobile phone has captured the imagination of education today using social networking sites. The point is the mobile phone contraption, the smart phone blends auditory and visual processes with the help of the internet to access google or zoom classrooms. Thus technology simulated the classroom. What is happening

today is exactly this simulation and even examinations are conducted online.

The debate between the real and the virtual has taken the turn, of technology not being able to substitute the face to face interaction. The argument runs along these lines: there can be no substitute for the classroom and the school where there is friendliness and peer group interaction. No one is denying that. What is happening today in online pedagogy is because of a necessity. It remains to be seen that once classes resume in traditional settings, how much technology intervention will there be in teaching and learning. School and college students are adept at mobile or computer technology and they are responding to such methods. In fact now they are disadvantaged because of the situation and are ‘distant’ learners. Technology is being used to attenuate this distance. Teachers too are responding positively to such new age learning.

Teaching and learning is basically an intervention in knowledge processes. Such intervention makes the teacher a facilitator of learning, rather than only bombarding the students with notes and information. In online learning the facilitation throws open the vistas of the internet to the students. Facebook and WhatsApp can be used for group interaction and even recorded lectures. The internet must radicalise both school and higher learning, even in what may be called the ‘disinterested pursuit’ of learning that is learning for its own sake. Massive open and online courses have become popular in India and abroad. Such courses can lead to certification or target groups can simply watch the videos and enhance knowledge. This is the pursuit of knowledge in a disinterested vein and for pleasure.

Going back to the argument that the internet does not cater to all target groups and the disadvantaged students living in rural areas because of poor connectivity and affordability, one can counter that technology which is the combination of the traditional media, the radio and the television and now the internet, encapsulated by the mobile, must vigorously augment learning, if pedagogy is to be inventive; and appeal to visual and auditory senses. We are on the brink of a pedagogic revolution and both teachers and students must adapt spontaneously to this new age learning, Covid or no Covid. (The writer can be reached at nnyguha48@gmail.com)

## TO THE EDITOR

### Woodland fire a preventable incident

Editor,

On July 2 evening the house of Dr W Kharshing, of Woodland’s Hospital caught fire. Being from the engineering field I wish to throw some light on this man-made disaster which is one of many such disasters. The State Assembly building went up in flames in 2001, then a few months ago a house in Mairang caught fire and recently the Church of God building and then the incident of Thursday night. They all have one thing in common. They are all Assam Type buildings with well oiled teak or pines and the ceiling made of mattress with cotton cloth which is vulnerable to fire. The buildings are of British era vintage and my findings when one house renewed the electricity cables was that these cables were of the finest insulation of rubber and jacketed by PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride). Of course they

are twin core but the insulation and copper wire looked quite new. So then what is the culprit?

In the 1960’s before Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru built the Jamia Reservoir which was commissioned in 1967, only the Umtrew Hydrel plant under the Colombo project and our Sona Pani (of B.C Roy) were more than sufficient to light the localities of Shillong with electricity bill charged for 1 K.W. By 1975 the demand had shot by leaps and bounds and with stage I progressing to IV, each house in the erstwhile United Khasi & Jaintia Hills demanded not less than 5 Kilowatts with geysers, washing machine, fridges, TVs, sound systems etc.

The sad part is that MeSEB with its shortage of trained linesmen could no longer attend to meter boxes where the most vital item the fuse (in Kit-Kat - porcelain) is installed. It is a type of rewirable fuse. It is the most important and commonly used fuse unit in our day to day lives. It has two parts kit and kat. The part which carries the fuse

element is known as Kit and the fuse base is known as Kat. It can be rewired even if the cut out terminal are energised without taking any safety precautions. It is actively used in electrical appliances and is connected in series with the circuit and protects electrical equipments.

The meter box is then sealed with lead. Tampering with it was punishable by the Electricity Acts worldwide. The fuse is subjected to the whims and fancies of inmates ready to explore with a screw-driver and fitted with an 8cm long copper wire of 2mm. This could handle 80 Amperes of current. So with all electrical appliances in use, overloading takes place. Hence the single core cables melt and at a crucial moment of the fuse snapping, it fails to break the circuit. The well oiled beams catch fire which quickly rises to the dry white ceiling cloth that covers the century old mat. Fire becomes unextinguishable.

After the Qualapatty incident I called up a friend in the MeECL and got a very encouraging piece of infor-

mation. Since last year the MeECL had passed an order not to use Kit-Kat fuses anymore but to employ MCB (Miniature Circuit Breaker). This is a step in the right direction. This can no longer be tampered with. My only prayer to the Government is to extend this scheme to the houses of our poor, albeit free of cost or with substantial subsidy. And the present price (C Category MCB) is not more than Rs 400 (Havell). Inmates can do what they feel like with inter-room Kit-Kats but need not worry any longer as the meter box MCB will do the controlling from the source.

The black box in aircrafts informs scientists and aeronautics engineers about the cause of the air crash and to improve safety. Likewise let us encourage the use of MCB to prevent similar fire disasters in future. Unlike earthquakes, floods, Covid-19 which are natural disasters, a house going up in flames is a preventable disaster. It only needs a logical approach and political will of the government in power.

Yours etc.,  
T N Challam  
Jowai

### Mushrooming speed breakers at Jaiaw Laitdom

Editor,

It is disheartening to see that the civilized denizens of Jaiaw Laitdom asking PWD (Roads) to construct more than 11 numbers of speed breakers in its locality and that too within a distance of 500 metres only from Mawbnyna to Pearly Dew School. Commuters who ply their vehicles from that locality towards Mawli Phudmuri via Umpohliw Bridge find it very difficult to navigate due to congestion of illegal parking of vehicles both day and night along the stretch of the road where traffic moves both ways. God forbid, if any house is gutted or any emergency services to that locality are required it would have been too late before they reach the spot. Moreover, people who pay a visit

to bereaved families and friends find it a very uncomfortable ride as sub-standard speed breakers are mushrooming in every road repairing season.

Why should the PWD entertain such unwanted rumble breakers without following the specifications of the Indian Roads Congress (IRC). Who shall be responsible if someone drags the PWD to court due to vehicle breakdown or miscarriage caused to commuters and pedestrians? People always stumble on the speed breakers especially during the night time as no painting or warning signboard is put up to identify the locations ahead. Why does the local authority turn a blind eye and allow such unwanted constructions to disrupt the riding quality of the commuters? We are all road tax payers, so the PWD (Roads) should not randomly put up speed breakers at the behest of one or two persons just to suit their interests. We request the PWD to dismantle the speed breakers at the earli-

est in order to avoid inconveniences and unforeseen mishaps.

Yours etc,  
Kyrshantor Khongmalai  
Shillong-1

### Constructive criticism

Editor,

Kudos to the Government of Meghalaya and the Deputy Commissioner’s Office, Shillong, for their zeal in combatting the Covid-19 pandemic in the District and the State. My parents who came in last week were all praises for the organised system right from Guwahati airport till being discharged from the institutional quarantine centre. The service has been exemplary, even in the middle of the night. However I would like to bring to your kind notice that there is a lot of delay in the issuance of entry passes, sometimes up to 2-3 days even after uploading all the necessary documents. This creates extra problems because when we

book for the transport transit pass, we have to first wait for confirmation for the entry passes.

This delays the entire process and causes unnecessary hardships to all the genuine residents both in terms of time and money considering they are eagerly waiting to return home after following all the necessary protocols. I understand that your office is very busy and perhaps processing thousands of applications on a daily basis, but I request you to kindly take measures to expedite the confirmation of the entry passes/ transit passes so that genuine applicants are not affected.

These may be taken as constructive criticism so that the administration can further improve its performance and also ensure that both quality and quantity are not compromised while delivering the much appreciated service.

I wish the Govt and District Administration all the best in their untiring efforts.

Yours etc  
Jason K  
Shillong - 1



# The divide that divides

*Lack of universal availability of electronic tools for learning has created a divide between the haves and have-nots*

By Anju Munshi

Recently, a teenage girl from Howrah near Kolkata changed herself because she was unable to attend her online classes. The phone she shared with her family got damaged and could not be repaired during the lockdown as the mobile repairing shop was shut. A good student in an English medium school, she feared she would not be able to keep up with the others and fail.

In the beginning of June, the daughter of a daily wage labourer in Kerala's Malappuram district also took her life for the same reason. A good student, she neither had access to a TV (her father was unable to repair the existing one for lack of money) or a smartphone. Meanwhile, the government's academic session with online classes had started and she despaired.

Vivan (name changed), son of an auto-rickshaw driver studying in Class V in a public school in Kolkata, joined a WhatsApp group created by his school and started online classes. Being dependent on his father for availability of the only smartphone in the family, he lagged behind and after some weeks he lost interest and gave up.

These are only a few instances of how the new mode of learning during this pandemic has affected children from disparate backgrounds thus creating a chasm between the 'have's with

their individual smartphones/laptops/computers and 'have-not's who are not lucky enough. It is not unexpected in a country like India where widely differing economic strata is a reality.

According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, although about 78 per cent of India's 1.3 billion population have mobile phones, teledensity in rural areas is only around 57 per cent.

A study in April by the child rights NGO Smile Foundation among 40,000 children, from Class I to Class XII running across 23 states, finds that about 56 per cent of Indian children lack smartphones. Titled 'Scenario amidst Covid-19: On ground situations and Possible Solutions' it finds that nearly one in eight children lacks access either to smartphones or basic phones.

A recent Unicef report on the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of 600 million children in South Asia says despite measures to use technology for education, a large number of children were likely to miss out on distant learning opportunities as only a quarter of households, that is, 24 per cent is estimated to have access to the internet. It also says that there is a large rural-urban and gender divide in access to internet services.

Lacking access to smartphones, one smartphone per family, usually owned by a working father, unstable network, girls engaged in household work, parents and teachers not

well trained to handle the technological part of the exercise, are some other challenges.

For teachers and schools running online classes, the challenge is no less. "Training, awareness and application are of utmost importance," says Anjana Saha, principal, Mahadevi Birla World Academy, Kolkata.

"The children need to be reassured by the school that even if a class is missed, content doesn't disappear and can be accessed later and from anywhere else and that gadgets are not overwhelmingly indispensable. There should not be any panic. A supportive and strategic approach by the school is crucial."

Meanwhile, the government

has engaged multiple channels for continuity of education including web portals, mobile apps, TV channels, radio and podcasts through platforms such as Diksha, Swayam Prabha, TV channels, E-Pathshala and the National Repository of Open Educational Resources. But experts say the digital divide among the rural and urban, even urban poor, is a fact and online classes is also an operational nightmare.

Girija Kaul, a parent from Delhi's Palam Vihar area, thinks that without provision for electricity 24x7 these facilities are meaningless.

Dina Rastogi, a parent from Mumbai's Dharavi, Asia's big-

gest slum area, opines that the government should provide handsets to all those who cannot afford to buy one and 3G data services should be provided to the maximum number of schools in the villages.

Besides, most of the parents of such disadvantaged children are not equipped to guide their wards. The logistics of getting families set up with the technology are complicated and there's likely to be plenty of trouble-shooting required.

Meena Kak, director, Lakshmi Singhania Academy, Kolkata, feels that schools should have separate time slots for children who share one smart phone in the family.

"Difference in one's learning patterns, uptake skills and gadget access creates an unjust ground. Here we need to customise in a more practical and personal way and then have tailored guidance to home based learning. The most important thing is to maintain a regular contact with students and parents."

"Schools can be a good linking device. We are trying to train our teachers and make them available by phone, messaging, or email every morning to give an individual and a family-like support to the children. This certainly is not an easy time but we need to empathise with the children and address their insecurities," she said.

Anjana Saha contends that the problem could be bridged with compassion and good communication. "No one was prepared for this pandemic. The teachers and the administration are trying to offer the best. In fact we need a strong emotional connect that can bridge this gap. It is not a digital divide but a digital challenge."

Then there is another problem that has cropped up. Now that the lockdown has eased up enough for employees to return to their offices they have to leave children behind making them vulnerable to the dangers of electronic devices.

Internet content is unsupervised too. So not only are they unprotected in the absence of parents but can also not resolve a technical glitch in case any

arises. Also, not all families have a device to spare and in that case the children have to wait till the parents are home. "If gadget unavailability is a problem, then unsupervised children at home is an equal problem," says Saha.

In addition to this, teachers also do not possess superfast WiFi service and efficient routers to ensure good connectivity. "Internet subscription is too expensive and complicated to use for many," says Kavita Sharma, a school teacher from Bengaluru.

There are also those who have used their common sense to reach the lessons to their students innovatively. For example, in a village school in Dumka, Jharkhand, the principal (of the Bankathi Upgraded Middle School) has hit upon the idea of using a network of loudspeakers connected with a microphone used by the teacher. The students can hear the lessons, loud and clear, literally, wherever it is convenient for them to study.

The principal, Shyam K Gandhi, thought of this simple solution while coming to know that 204 out of his 246 students did not have smartphones.

According to reports, attendance has been almost hundred per cent.

Perhaps in these times when online classes seem to stay on for some time to come, and the digital divide is a fact, innovations like these are sorely needed. (TWF)

Images: Unsplash



A study in April by the child rights NGO Smile Foundation among 40,000 children, from Class I to Class XII running across 23 states, finds that about 56 per cent of Indian children lack smartphones

## 'Perception of wedding will change in post-COVID era'

Author Amita Sahaya, whose present book *The Shaadi Story* examines the Indian wedding through a socio-economic and gendered prism, during an interaction with author Kiran Manral, spoke how marriage has been an integral part of a woman's life and how it is changing. India Blooms correspondent Souvik Ghosh brings excerpts:

**You have mentioned in the very start of the book an incident about your family which you have witnessed. Can you tell us a bit more about the incident and what drove you perhaps to write this book?**

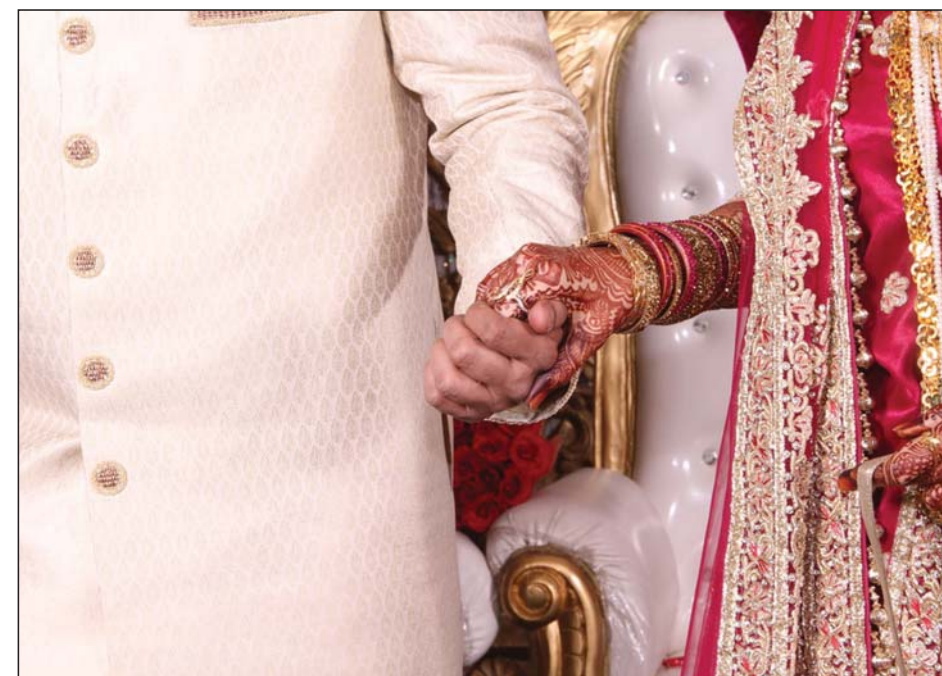
As a small child, I was actually attending my aunt's wedding in a small town in the northern part of India. In the evening, the bride and groom were going around the fire (marriage rituals), a banquet was laid out, a mellifluous sound of the shehnai was played out, and the fragrance of flowers was coming. And suddenly there was an absolute discordant sound coming as if somebody was shouting. People turned around to look at where the sound was coming from. Then (all found) there was a man who was extremely affronted. Well he had been slighted (because) he hadn't got his due as an exalted member of the bride-groom's party. He felt that he had been insulted and therefore he had taken his plate and thrown it on the floor and was threatening to walk out of the wedding. And because he was in some important hierarchical order of

the bridegroom's party, the others sort of looked at him and asked him if they might have to accompany him.

Then came my grandfather, who was my aunt's father, and he took off his turban, the mark of the tradition honour and family prestige, and placed it on the man's feet. The man takes it as his due, he is placated and sort of mollified. What struck me even at that very young age was the larger acceptance of the two roles being played out. The groom's side was kind of reiterating their role in the power structure and the bride's side was accepting their subordinate role. So that in fact really stayed with me, some visceral part of it which also in a way honed my gender lens in later years and it was reflected in the works that I have done.

**In prehistoric days, men and women were on equal footing but as we headed towards the present time, marriage became an important aspect in a woman's life across all cultures and geographies. Why?**

I think there are cultural presets behind it. In many ways, the householders' role as the grihasta is of huge primacy both for men and women and yet contradictory. I always say India or Hinduism is the 'Queen' of contradictions because on one hand grihasta's role is considered so supreme for continuing with progeny and paying obeisance to the ancestors by carrying on the lineage but at the same time 'Brahmacharya'



is considered of supreme importance and given a huge respect. In a way I think there is just a misogynist, patriarchal point of view where a woman's role is considered incomplete until she gets into one major set aim of her life which is to bear progeny.

**Do you think people are changing the rituals in marriages to solemnise?**

I think there is a huge shift happening even though it is not always obvious or apparent because we get bedazzled by all the outer equipments which are meant to project the celebration of a

wedding. People notice the scale of a marriage going up. But in the crux, I find that happening in a very different way from what it was earlier. Some things remain the same while others are changing... The fear factor of inviting bad luck to the changing aspirations of the young couple is something which is very interesting.

**How far do you think liberalisation and Bollywood have influenced the Indian weddings?**

I would rewind back in time to 1994 when India was going through an ab-

solutely economic draft and then liberalisation and the economic boom which followed from there changed so much of India that actually it was unrecognizable in a very positive way. It is something like what is happening with these COVID times in a very short, compressed phase. A whole new paradigm change in the way of looking at things had occurred. Before liberalisation of the economy, the royal weddings were hosted by the Zamindars and not by the middle-class who didn't have the money, was much more spartan, and their aspirations were very well within. With the liberalisation of the economy, the amount of wealth which then came into the pockets of the middle class also led to the huge aspirational change. The world view had changed. Two other factors, films and social media, also brought about the change. Before the emergence of social media, we have never, ever been exposed to people including film stars to whom we look up to. So in a way we turn and twist around and may be dwarfing it a little and then started absorbing it and introducing it in our modest milieus.

**How far do you think weddings have become ecologically conscious?**

The young couples, who are more socially conscious, particularly want to bring an ecologically-conscious wedding. People are having fusion weddings where they are bringing so many elements. Such types of weddings are

increasingly occurring in certain economic segments of society where people from different communities and religions are getting married to each other.

**Are we heading towards smaller weddings in post-Covid world?**

We are now looking at a period where we are hoping the pandemic will be over and the things will be normalised. But what will that norm be? In a way we are living through a real-time scenario which is constantly changing. We are like actors and the audience. We are trying to define paradigms. The very perception of how a wedding is going to take place is going to change. I think weddings are going to change in the next one year or so.

**Given the circumstances, do you think people will opt out of marriage in future?**

I wrote a chapter - 'Singular View' - in my book where the idea was to give the space to the very large number of singles who had chosen to remain as they are for a reason. Also (now) people are remaining single because they are exploring different ways of companionship outside the milieu of a kind of marriage stamp. I had reflected that scenario in the book. But in this counter-stream of a pandemic-oriented time, a lot of young people who would have tried to get married right away, have decided to hold back for now.

# Tribute to three doyens of Indian cinema



Satyajit Ray



Ritwik Ghatak



Mrinal Sen

By Parag Ranjan Dutta

In 1951, legendary French filmmaker Jean Renoir came to India to shoot his film 'The River' (Le Fleuve). The story was about three young girls who lived in Bengal and who fell in love with an American soldier. Late Ramananda Sengupta, India's oldest cinematographer, worked with the master as the operating cameraman. To learn more about the technical photography, Sengupta was sent to London. The same year, 'The River' won the International Award at the Venice film festival.

My father Amar Dutta, a close friend of Sengupta, had a brief stint at Tollywood and had the privilege of working with greats like Bimal Roy, SD Burman and Ritwik Ghatak. Renoir is relevant here because it was him who enthused Satyajit Ray and drew him to the world of cinema.

In the 1950s, a new wave of filmmaking known as parallel cinema, seen as an alternative to the mainstream commercial cinema was started by Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen.

Satyajit Ray began his career as a commercial artist with DJ Keymer, a British advertising agency as a 'junior visualiser' in 1943. After his brief stay there he joined the Signet Press, a publishing house in Calcutta owned by Dilip Kumar Gupta, where his job was to design covers for books. There, Ray designed covers for books like Nehru's Discovery of India. One day he got hold of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's Aam Atir Vepu, the children's version of Panther Panchali, and with this possibly the seeds of destiny of Ray as a filmmaker were sown.

In 1947, he founded the first film club of Calcutta and the first film screened was Battleship Potemkin, a 1925 masterpiece by Sergei Eisenstein. Ray's role as an art director came to an abrupt end after watching Vittorio De Sica's Bicycle Thieves during his visit to London in 1948. De Sica influenced him so much that he thought of making his first feature film Pather Panchali (Song of the Road) using actual locations and non-professional actors as was the case with Bicycle Thieves.

Ray says, "All through my stay in London the lessons of the Bicycle Thieves and neo-realist cinema stayed with me." But he developed his interest of independent filmmaking only after he met Renoir in Calcutta in 1951. He used to meet Renoir very often in his hotel and discussed about filmmaking. These meetings bore fruit soon. The versatile genius directed one of the greatest films, Pather Panchali, ever made in India. This was an adaptation of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's novel of the same name.

On October 27, 1952, Ray shot the first sequence of his epic film, a classic long shot scene of Apu and Durga running across a field to see a passenger train passing by. During the schedule there were several interruptions due to lack of funds and Ray found it difficult to complete his film. A friend of Ray's mother requested then Chief Minister of Bengal Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy to release some fund to complete the film. He agreed and it took three years for the film to see the light of the day. After the premiere on May 3, 1955, at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Pather Panchali was released in Calcutta the same year. Among the guests present at the special screening were Dr Roy and the Prime Minister of India.

Ritwik Ghatak, a genius, was a contemporary of Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen. A lifelong communist, Ghatak was pained much by the partition of Bengal and the struggle of middle class refugee families. He will be remembered for his portrayal of harsh reality, feminism and partition of Bengal. According to critics, Ghatak's Meghe Dhaka Tara, Komal Gandhar and Subarnarekha, known as the partition trilogy, are the most powerful films ever made in the world cinema.

Meghe Dhaka Tara (The Cloud Capped Star), one of his best films, is the story of middle class refugee family. The central character Neeta is a symbol of sacrifice, lost everything, her fiancé, job and finally her health when she contracted tuberculosis. Penultimate sequence of the film was shot in a sanatorium in Shillong. About Meghe Dhaka Tara, the famous film critic Steven Schneider said it is one of the '1000 movies you must see before you die'.

Subarnarekha also narrates the life story of three refugees in Bengal. Some long shots by renowned cinematographer Dilip Ranjan Mukherjee

around an abandoned airfield in Subarnarekha could easily be mistaken as shots seen in European films by great masters.

Mrinal Sen, the celebrated filmmaker, too was a passionate follower of Marxist ideology and his earlier films clearly shows his leftist leniency. Sen successfully utilized the restless political atmosphere of the seventies in Bengal in a number of his films. He expressed his anguish on social inequality and class struggle in his Calcutta trilogy — 'Calcutta 71', 'Interview' and 'Padatik'. Many of his films portrayed poverty, hunger and class struggle between the poor and the urban elites.

Calcutta 71, based on four short stories, narrated the agony of the common people amidst persistent political violence in 70's Bengal. 'Akalor Sandhane (In Search of Famine)', considered by many as Sen's best, is the story of a director and his crew members who go to a village to shoot a film on Bengal famine of 1943. They discovered a harsh reality that there is no need to go in search of the famine as it is ever present in the villages of Bengal.

'Ek Din Pratidin' is the story of struggle of a lower middle class family where the only earning member, a girl do not return the whole night, because of compulsions. Bhuban Shome, a 1969 film by Sen, was a classic deviation from normal and is often regarded by critics as a landmark and the origin of the new Indian cinema.

Bhuban Shome (Utpal Dutt), a high profile railway officer and a very strict bureaucrat, discovers the charm of life when he went on a duck shooting trip and encounters a village tribal woman in a remote village in Gujarat. The countryside, bullock cart drive, simple village folk and sweet Gauri, the village woman who helps him find shooting locations, all changed his vision of life. Even the arid lands of Gujarat come alive with the brilliant photography by KK Mahajan.

The British politician Edward Bulwer-Lytton rightly said, "Genius does what it must, and talent does what it can," so very true when it comes to the doyens of Indian cinema.

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

Photo courtesy: Google Images

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, July 05, 2020

Full moon on your solar return chart is okay and it will bring positive results for you. You will be highly creative and imaginative. And will be acclaimed for your work. You will also get recognition for your efforts. Those in film industry, media, entertainment and fashion industry etc. will get success. Lovebirds too will have a good year. They will see their dreams coming true. And could enter into a wedlock. Students will particularly have a very good year. They will do well in studies. And also get admission in courses/ institutions of their choice. Monetary position will remain excellent and there would be manifold increase in sources of income. You could also plan to visit some travel destination with your family. Overall a very good year.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

A more intense approach to relationships can be expected in this period. It is time to cut the fat by eliminating activities that aren't fulfilling your needs. Hailway measures will not be enough, so dig in and decide where you are going to invest your energy and where you need to pull back. When you concentrate your forces on one task or with one person, you can reach levels of fulfillment you haven't previously known. You would discuss issues objectively with those close to you. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and join new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You would realize that unsolved issues and puzzling situations are now becoming clear. All that is really needed is action, and you have plenty of energy to utilize. Your social life is likely to increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful and helpful people. This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. Your emotional brilliance will shine through as long as you do not react too quickly. There are strong chances of a pilgrimage; you may visit places of worship and holy places. A sense of humor allows free expression without anger or wounded egos.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Realistic levels of optimism and confidence are with you, and you are able to attract fortunate circumstances into your life. Making progress can be difficult but not impossible. You could even feel trapped by your daily routine with the emphasis on getting every task done right. You would rather be doing more exciting things. Someone enters your life on a whirlwind of emotional intensity. Take advantage of the stabilizing results you can obtain just by being extra helpful and caring. The pleasure is in the journey ahead of you, rather than merely in the conquest of the summit. You may feel as if you are running out of time in your quest to free yourself from a challenging situation, but you have more time than you think.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

New responsibilities are likely to present themselves and you would take them more seriously now. You would learn about your own personal strength. You may have to deal with willfulness and issues of power and competition - in others and in yourself. There are likely to be times when you get on edge, volatile, or even threatened. You may be able to get in touch with your internal motivations. A tendency to want to control your life through some form of manipulation would be strong at this time. Meeting with obstacles in your path, however, can force you into the position of using all of your resources to fight back, and you can discover resources you never knew you had in the process.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Matters related to higher education, religion, and publishing proceed smoothly. This is an excellent time to seek advanced training and further your education. You would work in association with well-experienced people and would use your best talents and efficiency. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Financial benefits are stronger than any other time now. Duty and work commitment could come before pleasure, and a tendency to work more or harder is likely. As long as this doesn't reach workaholic levels, you will be just fine. You find yourself more accountable than ever when it comes to your work and output.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

This phase sees your energy and confidence increase dramatically. Things will not go in your favor if you resort to tactics to get what you want. At times, you could have problems staying calm, cool, and collected. Buried resentments

come to the fore and demand to be dealt with. It would be favorable to have good team spirit and be more tactful and obliging with your co-workers as this brings harmony and team spirit at the work place. You spend time with your beloved and go on trips, shopping, fun or even a journey. Intimacy and warmth are powerful stimulants for you during this phase. This is a favorable time to invest in shares, fixed deposits and insurance.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You would be able to see the world in practical terms and structure your life and ambitions accordingly. Opportunities to travel arise and adventure tends to seek you out. Some restlessness is likely, mainly because of a deep feeling of wanderlust. You are more able than ever to see the "big picture" and less inclined to sweat the small stuff. You may be asked to state your intentions or urged to get serious. There would be new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes are on the cards. Your family would be more supportive and harmony and pleasant interactions in your relationships would make you feel comfortable.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

The planetary configuration brings more physical and laborious work. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Outdoor activities appeal more than ever, and an opportunity to travel somewhere exotic could drop into your lap. You have a greater desire to get away, expand your horizons, and broaden your life experiences. This influence often correlates with a time when you are more able to get away from the daily routine—more options open up, or you have more free time to do so. Do not isolate yourself when you're feeling down. People will support you, or at least listen, when you share your feelings.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You are artistic, stylish and your judgment is sound and you would participate in glamorous events. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental and caring. Your domestic life is comfortable as you make the family relaxed and secure and devote time with them. You are full of energy and indulge in arts and crafts. Try to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach when meeting people. You would be recognized and you work would be praised and rewarded. Take advantage of the smooth and magnetic energy. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to build on your energy.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would maintain a balance between emotional feelings and practicality. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You probably should be on the lookout for a tendency to create your own financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. Your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Confidence is the key—faith in the universe and in your ability to do the right thing instinctively will take you places now.

Aquarius: (January 19 - February 18)

You may need to re-adjust your plan of action. Errors in judgment made now are likely due to impulsiveness and in overlooking crucial details. You could have so many new ideas that you do not have time to implement all of them. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You would have the ability to work on financial and monetary pursuits. Good returns from overseas business are on cards. Your style of communication and efforts bring favorable results on your romantic life. You may feel restless at times; eat health food, yoga and meditation are recommended.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You could seek distinction and strive towards perfection in your work. Efficiency should be your goal now. Relationships are dynamic and when a difference arises, you are quick to settle it, and have little patience for sweeping matters under the rug. Your close personal relationships are lively and full of conflicts and resolutions or reconciliation. You would express your sympathetic and compassionate side. The seeds you plant now, you will reap later. Surprises surrounding intimate matters, shared finances and resources and financial support may be in store. You could pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue of monetary gain.

## 'Healthy' job amid restrictions

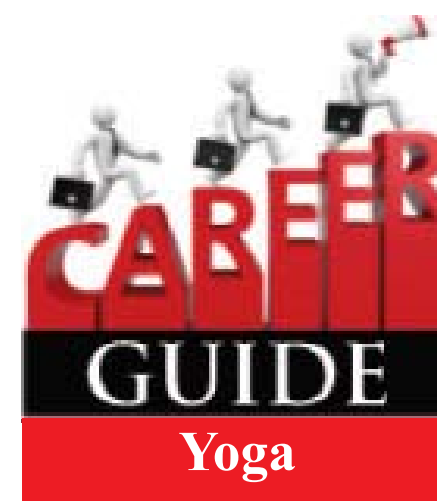
By Ranjan K Baruah

The COVID-19 pandemic means that many of us are staying at home and also working from home. There are people who are sitting down more than we usually do. It has become difficult for many people to come out and do regular exercises as there are containment zones in and around.

There are issues which cannot be seen directly as most might be mental health issues due to the lockdown. People are talking about improving immunity to fight the pandemic and keeping one self fit. Yoga has become demanded during this pandemic as it not only helps in enhancing immunity but also helps in mental well-being. This pandemic and time of crisis, we have seen the importance of yoga that also brings hope as young people may choose yoga as their career.

Yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India. The word 'yoga' derives from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolising the union of body and consciousness. Recognising its universal appeal, on December 11, 2014, the United Nations proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga by resolution 69/131. The International Day of Yoga aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practising yoga.

Students may choose to join courses related to yoga after senior secondary or after graduation as there are post graduation courses too. The key subjects of Yoga Theory include Anatomy, Philosophy, Exercises, Meditation, etc. It is not limited to theory only as it more practical course. There are courses like Bachelors in Arts (Yoga), Masters in Arts (Yoga), PG Diploma in Yoga Therapy and certificate courses in yoga are also available. One may also choose to study Bachelor of Naturopathy & Yogic Sciences



opportunity for employment for individuals who are trained in this field.

The common designation in this profession is yoga instructor, yoga therapist or yoga teacher. But there are scopes in research, academics, corporate, hospitals, retreats, gyms, etc. Yoga studios are popular not only in India but in abroad too. One may get jobs in government sectors or private sectors like in corporate, educational institutions, etc.

The Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy was established as Registered Society on 30th March, 1978 with the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare as President of Governing Body. It is functioning as an autonomous organisation under the newly created Ministry of AYUSH and fully funded by the Ministry for all its activities.

Since inception, the Council is involved in various activities related to the development of these systems in terms of Research, Education, Training and Propagation. There are institutes like Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga apart from many other institutes which offers diploma and advanced diplomas.

Today the entire world is in fear about the pandemic. In this situation, yoga is especially relevant, since its practice leads to both physical and mental well-being. The crisis has brought new hopes for people who want to make career in yoga. There is no doubt the situation will change but the importance of yoga will continue as people want to remain healthy. The best thing is that one may be easily self employed if they have knowledge and qualifications related to yoga.

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

“Our truest life is when we are in our dreams awake.”

--- J. G. Ballard

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Cultural chauvinism versus citizenship

A citizen of every country is entitled to certain fundamental rights even while discharging his citizenship duties. Both are synchronous. One cannot exist without the other. In some states of India, however, there is the concept of ‘son of the soil’ which conveys the underlying meaning that the first settlers or indigenous people have first right over every natural resource, such as land, forests and water and other economic resources. The indigenous people enjoy reservations (positive discrimination) in employment and education meaning that they do not have to compete on a level playing field with the non-indigenous person who is allocated only 20% of the available quota. Attempts by the central government of different dispensations to alter or amend Article 46 of the Constitution which guarantees these special privileges to SCs and STs, is met with loud protests, although the authors of the Indian Constitution have clearly laid down that this would be reviewed every ten years. When Scheduled Tribes are viewed as a category they may appear to be primitive and lacking in education and basic infrastructures such as health and education in the areas they inhabit. But there is a perceptible difference between tribals in North East India and those in the central, southern and eastern belts of India who still live primitive lives. The tribes in the North East have fared educationally and enjoy greater rights over their land etc. But they continue to wallow in victimhood and blame the Centre or other factors for their apparent economic backwardness.

Ironically they also demonstrate a dominant form of cultural chauvinism. They believe that the first right principle should dominate every aspect of life. But India has transitioned into a democracy where all citizens enjoy the same fundamental rights, except that they cannot buy or own property in the tribal states because of the land holding laws of the states here. The tribals do not live in isolation. The different groups of non-tribes who were brought to this region during the British era and settled here consider this their home. But their assimilation into the state of their birth is not allowed to happen. Intermittent communal clashes between tribal (indigenous) and non-tribals have been the hallmark of Meghalaya, often on flimsy grounds. Interestingly the tribes swing between victimhood and domination. This often borders on ethnocentrism or an inflated sense of cultural superiority. There is no space for cultural synthesis. The absence of this synthesis makes one group feel constantly threatened when it is the minority in a particular state. This is also because the sense of nationhood is not all-encompassing. The tribal feels the territory bequeathed by his ancestors is nation to him. The non-tribal with his more advanced ideas of nationhood, democracy et al feels he has equal rights to live with dignity and to access all resources available to the tribal within his own nation. Herein lie the flashpoint. Unless this is resolved the differences will simmer and the flashpoints take on new and dangerous contours.

# The Rainbow of Behdieñkhlam

By HH Mohrmen

The annual Behdieñkhlam festival this year will be an unusual festival. It will be different from the festivals celebrated in the past and perhaps there will be no Behdieñkhlam like this one even in the future. Covid-19 has dimmed the spirit and fervour of the festival but not the true essence of Behdieñkhlam. The major difference is because the prevailing situation demand that all the rituals and religious ceremonies that go with the festival, will be celebrated with the participation of limited numbers of people.

The celebration will be without many of the festivities, but Behdieñkhlam is not only about pomp and gaiety. It is not only about the physical colours which one can see, but it is about the profound elements that make Behdieñkhlam a truly unique festival. This year the commemoration is about celebrating the essence of the Behdieñkhlam festival without the paraphernalia surrounding it.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, just the bare necessities of the festival will be performed this year. The organisers are making sure that the rituals due to God, deities and divinities are completed without compromising the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the government. It is indeed ironic that the celebration to rid off the Khlam (plague) is affected by COVID-19 - the khlam that has affected many countries in the world. The celebrations may not be what they were in the past but the importance of this year's Behdieñkhlam is in its value. This year only the fundamental aspects of the festival are being observed and by a selected few. It is therefore the festival of the invisible colours celebrating the true meaning of the Behdieñkhlam.

First and foremost it is worship of the Almighty and paying obeisance to the deities and the divinities. *Ka knia khang* is paying obeisance to the four guarding deities of the raid Jowai, providing them the annual offerings due to them. It is connecting people with God and with the deities and divinities. It bonds the human soul with spirits and divinities around it. The celebration of the festival is not only a

four-day, three-night affair, because preparation for Behdieñkhlam starts from the month of March each year.

It is therefore heartening to know that in spite of all the challenges posed by the pandemic, the essence of the festival is intact. All the offerings and sacrifices that are required as per tradition have been completed. It is believed that even rites yet to be performed will be completed by the leaders of the Niamtre with the guidance and the blessings of the U Trekirod. The first invisible colour of the Behdieñkhlam is that it is not just a ‘rong’ or festival, but it is a religious festival. Some of the religious rites performed by the elders which is connected to the Behdieñkhlam festival are ‘*ka suit ka choir*’, ‘*ka knia khang*’, ‘*ka knia pyrthat*’, ‘*kdoh sarang*’, ‘*ka knia syiem Aitmar*’ and ‘*pyneit sarang*’ etc. The purity of the rites and sacrifices is testified by the fact that every rite which starts with the tradition of ‘*dih-soopen*’, the elders involved in the ceremonies will have to observe ‘*iat thiah*’ meaning avoiding physical contact with their spouses. This is the first of the seven sacred colours of Behdieñkhlam.

It may be mentioned that the festival has an unpleasant history in the pre independence period. The celebration was stopped by the British rulers for almost two decades. From 1931 till 1947 the celebration of the festival was suspended by them. It was only after attaining independence that preparation for reviving the festival and annual celebrations resumed and celebrations continue till date without fail. The major challenge of reviving and reorganising the festival is because all the pending rites and sacrifices had to be performed. It was difficult but it was ultimately overcome. The festival this year will be different but this too shall pass and next year Behdieñkhlam will be celebrated with the usual fervour. This is because the other important aspects of the Behdieñkhlam is the celebration of the triumph of good over evil.

The term ‘behdieñkhlam’ is made up of three words in Pnar parlance, ‘beh’ literally means to chase or to rid away, ‘dieñ’

means wood or log and ‘khlam’ means plague, epidemic or pestilence. Even if the festival derived its name from the ‘khlam’, it is not solely about the ‘khlam’; it is also about the fulfilment of the covenant. One would have to know the creation story of the Pnar and the role of U woh Lakriah and U Synriang to understand that Behdieñkhlam is more importantly about fulfilling the covenant between U Trekirod and his people (Lamar D. An Insight into Behdieñkhlam, 2015). This is another very important underlying colour of the festival.

Another significant aspect of the festival is that it has a very profound connection with the agrarian culture in the region. Although preparation for Behdieñkhlam starts with ‘*kbai mooknor*’ official announcement of the commencement of preparation for the festival, the ceremony following that is called ‘*ka thoh langdoh*’. This particular ceremony is connected to the agrarian culture of the community. People are prohibited from ploughing or tilling their fields till the ceremony is completed. This is followed by ‘*ka chat thoh*’, which prohibits sowing or planting certain kinds of vegetables without completing the ceremony. The final public activity of the festival also has agrarian connection and that is ‘*ka datlawakor*’ which is similar to a game of football. The ultimate goal is to pray for a good harvest this year.

Another important aspect of the Behdieñkhlam is the home-coming of the children of the raid. During Behdieñkhlam people who owe their origin to raid Jowai but live elsewhere ‘*cha ki ryngkaw para*’ revisit their ancestral home to join in the festival. People of Jowai origin who live in Shillong or Ummulong make it a point to touch-base with the place of their origin. In is a pilgrimage as much as a home-coming of the soul. It is not only about worshipping ‘*ki ryngkaw ki basa*’ of one’s ancestral home, but a return to the land which is the origin of one’s being.

Behdieñkhlam is also about strengthening community bonds starting with the family. This starts

from ‘*ka tip kur tip kha*’, respecting both sides of the family, to the ‘*maia dong maia chong*’ loving one’s community to ‘*ka bhalang uwa boon wa lang*’ common good or well-being of all. This is perhaps the reason why the town was divided into ‘*ki kmai raid*’ and ‘*ki khon raid*’ because though communities are divided, yet they are one. Behdieñkhlam is the time when one sees not only the camaraderie amongst the residents of the dong or localities but the oneness of the people. It is reliving the story of the four divine sisters Ka Wet, Ka Tei, Ka Bon wa ka Doh and how Jowai came to settle in Jowai.

The prayer during Behdieñkhlam is not only about the followers of the Niamtre but for the good of all in the community. It is celebrating the bonds within the community which started with the founding clan ‘*ki sookpoh khatar wyna*’ and the other main clans ‘*ki San syngkong*’, ‘*ki Le kyllung*’, ‘*ki lawchibidi*’ or the ‘*phra kur phra kmai*’ or the eight primary clans.

Behdieñkhlam is also about showing reverence to the ancestors. During the festival different ‘*kur*’ or clan in their different ‘*ung blai*’ would perform the offering of ‘*ka siang ka pha*’ or ‘*ka siang ka phur*’ which is an offering in honour of the departed souls. The preparation is done by ‘*ka kchu ka pliang*’ or the female head of the clan. Other ceremonies conducted at the residence of some kur which starts from the house of the priestess ‘*i iung langdoh*’ is ‘*ka bam tyngkong*’ or eating at the courtyards of some kurs. Bamyngkong is also about showing respect to the people who established raid Jowai. Behdieñkhlam this year is about bringing the heart of the festival to the fore. It is the time when the aesthetic aspects of the festival gives way to the invisible colours or its core values. The pomp and gaiety maybe lacking in the festival this year but the embodiment of many aspects of the religious festival will be completed. Even in the absence of the physical colours the essence of the Behdieñkhlam which is in the spirit will be alive during this celebration. It is the celebration of the seven important elements of the Festival which is the core of Behdieñkhlam.

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# Prospects for India-China trade after Galwan

By Ajit Ranade

Forty years ago India and China had roughly the same economic size, measured as GDP in dollars. Today China is five times bigger. This growth has been mainly due to China’s single-minded focus on exporting to the West. It opened the doors to foreign direct investment, created large-sized special economic zones for such investment, fast tracked approvals, built necessary infrastructure to ensure port and airport connectivity, even large-scale dormitory style accommodation for millions of workers. As a result, foreign companies rushed in, created large scale employment for Chinese workers, and

made China a low labour cost source for exporting to the whole world. Of course, this is a highly simplified version of a complex story. It wasn't only foreigners who were investing. It was S t a t e - o w n e d Chinese enterprises too. The GDP was growing at 10 percent per year, but wages were held nearly constant. So, most of the gains of economic growth was going to capital, not labour, which meant the State. Since the economy had a high savings rate, thanks to a repressed financial sector, the entire amounts saved were re-invested. Thus, China had an investment to GDP ratio

whose patents have expired). These low-cost generics help keep healthcare costs low for India as well as for our trading partners.

The import dependence on China continues. Across sectors, India’s China dependence for its imports is as follows: in electronics 45%, in capital goods including boilers and turbines 32%, in organic chemicals 38%, in furniture 57%, in fertilisers 28%, in automotive parts 25% and in pharmaceuticals API 68%. This import dependency will be very difficult to shrug off in a short while.

India China trade is more than a 100 billion dollars but asymmetrically in favour of China. Similarly, despite a bitter trade war, Sino-US trade is still about 650 billion dollars, though the Americans seem to have been able to tilt it somewhat in their favour. It is not possible for India to do the same with China. That is simply because while India’s dependence is about 35 percent, China’s reciprocal dependence is not even 2 percent. So, we cannot withhold certain key export items just like America can. The only option for India is to wean dependence away from China. This will unfortunately increase the cost for the consumer in



at a peak of more than 50 percent, and even today it is around 44 percent. As a result of high and sustained growth the per capita income of a Chinese citizen is five times that of an Indian. The official poverty rate defined as spending less than two dollars a day, is only 0.5 percent, whereas in India it is 20 percent. The massive shift of labour from agriculture to industry moved nearly two hundred million workers in one generation.

This is the kind of growth story that India would like to emulate. But our political systems are totally different. Even then India implicitly put its faith in investment driven growth, setting up of special economic zones, building infrastructure albeit as public private partnership and so on. These policy efforts have yielded less bountiful results here than for our northern neighbour. But the unspoken desire to emulate Chinese economic growth remains in the minds of policy makers and Indian businessmen.

This was reflected in the growing trade, commercial and investment ties between the two countries. In 2001, India was ranked number 19 as an export destination for Chinese exports. But fifteen years later India’s ranking rose to 6, inching closer to even 5. It showed that the Chinese producer was giving importance to India. Even the Indian entrepreneur was sourcing more and more from China, mainly for the huge cost advantage as compared to Europe or America. In 1999 only 5.8 percent of India’s imports came from China, but that climbed to 41 percent by 2015. So, not just electronics, chemicals, telecom or power equipment but also everything from agarbattis, Ganesha idols and ready-made garments were being imported. Most tellingly India began importing active pharmaceutical intermediates (API) also from China. The API’s are crucial imports required for India’s dynamic and world leading pharmaceutical industry which exports generic drugs (i.e. those

India. Even if China is selling below cost (which is called “dumping” according to WTO rules, and is a crime), the end-user in India enjoys lower priced goods. It is also important to note here the statement by Tim Cook the Chief Executive of Apple, the world’s most valuable company. Apple’s value of production in its Chinese factories is about 220 billion dollars of which about 185 billion dollars is exported. But Cook said that he is in China not because of lower cost, but because he cannot source that talent anywhere else. So, while it may be true that China’s 40 year history of export-led growth

was initially all about low cost labour, an undervalued currency, and perhaps all kinds of subsidies like cheap power, land and capital, the fact now is that China has got an edge in technology and quality as well. In fields like Artificial Intelligence, Electric Cars and

Solar Energy it has emerged as one of the top global players.

So for India this poses a difficult challenge. The border conflict, and the death of soldiers in Ladakh has triggered trade sanctions against China. The banning of Chinese apps was swift and has supposedly hurt the parent Chinese company. A Chinese newspaper quoted a damage in value to the tune of 6 billion dollars. But clearly, border conflicts cannot be solved by trade sanctions. It is not clear what the Chinese stand to gain by their expansionism. They will certainly stand to lose access to a market which is ranked fifth or sixth for them. In a world facing a recession, and slowing international trade why would they hurt their own exporters? Even then the Indian strategy of moving away from Chinese dependence is not going to be easy. Ironically, we had started reducing the trade deficit in the past three years, which was a hopeful sign. All that will have to be reset, in the light of the Ladakh hostilities.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

TO THE EDITOR

## Non-tribal lives matter

Editor,  
I strongly condemn the brutal assault on non tribal youths at Lawsohtun on July 3, 2020 and demand immediate arrest of the culprits. The manner in which the youths were trapped and assaulted confirms that it was a pre-planned racial attack. It is now the responsibility of Police to investigate and identify the miscreants and bring them to book. It is also high time for all right thinking citizens, including intellectuals, social activists and NGOs to come out openly and raise their voices against this despicable act. Many members of our state’s civil society have over the past month supported the ongoing “Black Lives Matter” movement that began due to the racial killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, USA. I sincerely hope that they will also espouse the cause of non-tribals, who have been repeatedly subjected to racial attacks for many years to demonstrate that “Non tribals Lives Matter” in our state.

Yours etc.,  
N.K. Kehar  
Shillong-3

## Is Meghalaya really ready to face Covid19?

Editor,  
At this point when the number of Covid positive cases are increasing day by day, this is a serious and valid question to be asked by every right thinking person. Have we utilised the 3 months lockdown, a sacrifice by many especially the poorest of the poor, in a way to protect the people from this pandemic? Though each one of us has a part to play, the State Government has to ask itself this question seriously. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that the worst is yet to come, so how well prepared are we? Yes so far luck has been on our side and even with much confusion we are still the State with least active cases. However, in this last two to three days we have seen quite a few security forces personnel with inter-state travel history testing positive and adding to active cases in the state. It is of great concern that some of these people stay in rented accommodation and not in their campus which is a huge risk for community spread. Recently a mix up due to

a Covid positive case of a pregnant lady nearly led to lockdown of a hospital. Fortunately an alert administration identified the problem early. Swift contact tracing and decontamination was done with minimal disruption of services. On the other hand Bethany hospital was closed down for a month for a similar contact tracing and decontamination exercise. Unfortunately this problem arose because the pregnant lady concealed critical information (her husband was admitted in another hospital for Covid disease. Earlier when she went to two other city hospitals with labour pains she was turned away when she gave history of husband being admitted for Covid disease.

In the last few days many hospital including government hospitals have turned away any patient suspected to be having co-existing Covid disease by citing one excuse or the other. These patients finally came to NEIGRIHMS hospital for treatment. Why does a premiere Institute with many super specialities department like Cardiology, Urology, CTVS, Neurology, Neuro Surgery to name a few have to admit Covid patients? Why take the risk of closing this

hospital for the sake of few patients with Covid and deny access to patients with others health issues (non Covid)? Maintaining a Covid and non-Covid section in the same hospital is an impossible task. We all know, containing the spread is the only way to fight the disease since there’s no vaccine as of now.

I sincerely believe that a truly dedicated Covid hospital is the need of the hour. The state government has to take the lead. The new building in Civil hospital Shillong is the best location since it is located away from residential areas and is on the National Highway for easy access. Ganesh Das Hospital can take care of Obstetrics and Gynaecology cases with Covid. All other hospitals can contribute by giving treatment for non-Covid cases under cover of MHIS. All unregistered patients should be enrolled into MHIS scheme. It is time for private hospitals to come forward and be counted in this time of pandemic. Another hospital in Tura may be set up to cater to the needs of the people in the western part of the State. This will help in many ways and with a single point of treatment; resource will not be over-stretched and can be specifically spent as

intended. All Covid patients from all other hospitals should be shifted to the dedicated Covid hospital. I cannot imagine what will happen if we really reach a point where all hospitals become containment zones..God forbid.

Further, the rise in prices of essential commodities has to be looked at seriously with needed action at the ground level. Just before the lockdown, 1 kg of broiled chicken was only Rs 200. Now it is Rs 320! Tomato is Rs 80 a kg? Yes we do hear announcements that no one should raise the prices of essential commodities but the question is, would this be enough? A humble submission is that in all market areas including the localities; the rates of items should be displayed by the government in flex printing with a telephone No to call if anyone is found to be charging more than the declared price of the government.

The government has done a very good job in regulating inter-state travel but inter-state movement of patients’ needs better regulation. I sincerely hope that our government, our Covid warriors and people will be able to stand up to the challenge of this Covid pandemic. With good planning we can mitigate its

effects- “together not alone”.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

## Water crisis due to damaged pipelines

Editor,  
In the past whenever there is a heavy downpour, there would also be a breakdown in the main water pipelines at the catchments which would result in disruption in water supply to Shillong City. The Departments concerned hardly took a week to rectify the defects but this time the water supply from Umkhen Source has stopped since June 27 June 2020 and it is now more than a week that we have had to go without water. The notice from the Executive Engineer PHE Greater Shillong Supply Division No-1, came on July 3, 2020 almost a week after the incident. It seems this time the damage caused is extensive and would require more time to repair. We can only hope and pray that the problem is resolved at the earliest, taking into consideration the plight of the consumers.

Yours etc.,  
E S Syiemiong  
Shillong

"Hating people because of their color is wrong. And it doesn't matter which color does the hating. It's just plain wrong."

— Muhammad Ali

## The Shillong Times

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### Covid vaccine

INDIA overtakes Russia to become the third highest country with Covid infection. There is no reason to believe that the world is fighting ably against Covid-19, considering the steady rise in the infections and deaths. India too is perilously close to a likely community spread in some areas, with Sunday seeing the largest-ever rise in infection cases – over 23,000 cases in a single day – while the death toll linked to Covid-19 is nearing the 19,693 mark.

On the positive side, however, the recovery rate in India is steadily going up; currently at over 60 per cent, meaning the graph is showing signs of being reversed. Also, most of India is breathing somewhat easy of late, even while latest trends showed some southern states suddenly showing sudden spikes after a lull in the past few weeks. These states are Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka. Notable is also the fact that among the over 19,000 deaths so far, over 8,000 were logged in Maharashtra alone. Overall, nothing goes to show the scenario is improving.

A significant development on the Covid-19 front is the Bharat Biotech's reported breakthrough in developing a vaccine, which could go on clinical trial at various medical centres from Monday with nod from the Indian Council for Medical Research. ICMR is hopeful of its success, though the problems with developing vaccines through hasty methods are fraught with uncertainties. The success and/or side-effects have to be observed over a long period. Hence rushing with a vaccine at this point and with a deadline set for August 15 for its launch seems premature. The firm, though has a strong base in developing vaccines for several such diseases in the past. Both China and the US have also been into clinical tests of vaccines. Israel is making serious attempts too. Together, it is likely that the present grim scenario and Covid's steady climb can be neutralized sooner than later.

A vaccine is a pre-requisite to getting public life back in active mode. It is also necessary for resumption of classes in schools and colleges, which remain largely disrupted for months. Online classes are as yet an evolving concept and not a substitute to regular classes, at least in the immediate term. Travel too can, hopefully, be in full form once a successful vaccine is developed, which could revitalize the economic sectors across the world.

Covid-19's mighty shadow is bound to linger – if not worsen – for a long time to come. India's infection rate is close to seven lakh, though these are mostly city-specific and region-linked. Various sectors of the economy are functional now, and more could open up if the scenario does not worsen and is kept under control.

# Covid psychology: Ideology, instinct, and need

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

First of all, be very sure that Covid is real. This is stating the obvious to most people, but there are some who deny its existence or importance. Not that we need only real things to worry about. For those who wish to worry, apparitions will do as well. Many examples of superstitions exist in our own tribal societies, leading to suspicion, fear and even violence. But this is not unusual, superstitions exist in all societies, even in supposedly advanced ones. Some of these superstitions go by a newer nomenclature such as science denial, anti-vaxxer, and covidioy.

The realms already written on a disease that has not yet run its course, is encyclopedic in its breadth. Never has so much science been written on one topic in such a short span of time. Revisions and retractions have not stemmed the flow of academic and media coverage. The virus has 'gone viral'. While the focus of science has been mostly biological, the psychological realm is also science, indeed it is part of medical science.

The upshot of our Covid fears, real or imagined, is a gripping of the mind. Apart from physical and social barriers around us, our psyche also erects barricades and withdraws into oneself. We have become self-caged.

#### Safetyism

It starts with 'safetyism', a concept first described by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, an educationist and social psychologist duo. In their book, *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018), they define safetyism as a culture or belief system in which safety (which includes 'emotional safety') has become a dominant value, which means that people become unwilling to make the concessions demanded by practical and moral concerns.

In safetyism, the right of people to feel physically and psychologically safe supersedes core liberal values, like freedom to practice one's traditional lifestyle. Tolerance to other ideologies, religions and cultures are not a given anymore. Behaviours that may have merely offended our sensibilities earlier are now re-interpreted and raised to a level of threat to our personal safety. For example, we may have been repulsed by spitting in the street, but now the droplet infection may give us Covid. But this is a mild example. Safetyism may now arouse prejudice or hate against communities who eat paan, or religious groups who gather for crowded rituals.

With this, liberalism with its tolerance for diversity and respect for 'others' is

becoming diminished. Liberalism also protects civil liberties. In many countries, citizens regard orders to wear masks, or restriction of movement to be an infringement of rights, which cannot be taken away by the state. This may create a confrontation with the police. The rise of rightist ideologies could be partly ascribed to a growing perception that liberal demands for rights will now fail to keep the rest of us 'safe'.

#### Survival instinct

The first need is to survive. Survival is the instinctive driver of evolution. This



urge is embedded in our genes. Richard Dawkins, in his celebrated book "The Selfish Gene" showed that living beings like humans are nothing but a clump of genes that have fought to survive. Even the Covid virus is doing what it does, just to survive.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a pyramid of five levels of human needs. The first level of need is physiological: food and water. The second level is shelter and safety. The third is love and belonging. The homebound migration of poor labourers, was driven by these basic needs.

For the fortunate social classes whose focus is on Maslow's higher levels of self-esteem and self-actualization, Covid is an unexpected threat. Attitudes and behaviours turn to stigmatization and further discrimination against targeted minorities, blaming them and even the poor as irresponsible spreaders.

#### Common sense

Common sense, to Merriam-Webster is, "sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts." Cambridge Dictionary defines it as, "the basic level of practical knowledge and judgment that we all need to help us live in a reasonable and safe way." So common sense is universal knowledge, judgment, and conclusions, that are held without reflection or debate.

One school of philosophy has equated common sense with moral sentiment, which comes from the notion that common sense must lead to community values, which are then incumbent upon us all to abide by. Otherwise the cohesiveness and harmonious relationships of society will be

damaged and all of us will suffer. It also means that we should be pleased with the welfare of others, and empathetic to their misery. So common sense cannot only be for one's self-interest. Common sense, thus, evolves into pragmatic and moral positions.

Common sense gives us a good start to good behaviour. Or does it? Descartes agrees that everyone has a similar and sufficient amount of common sense, but says it is rarely used well. In other words, the mere possession of common sense does not ensure sensible attitudes or

behaviour. Common sense dictates that we wear masks to block the transmission of highly infective viruses. Community values mandate each citizen's cooperation for collective protection. Moral values require us to protect others from illness and harm. Unfortunately, common sense does not always lead to common good because of stubborn outliers who refuse to wear masks.

#### Safetyism and mental health

Health professionals recommended social containment measures to prevent spread of Covid. While many leading epidemiologists advised against total lockdowns on a national scale, lockdowns became the order of the day. Apart from the fear of the pandemic itself, and the economic fallout that affected millions adversely, the lockdown itself has had negative impacts on people's mental health.

Early in the pandemic, the WHO warned of elevated rates of stress and anxiety. The WHO statement noted that, "as new measures and impacts are introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on many people's usual activities, routines or livelihoods – loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, domestic violence and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are also expected to rise." Going beyond these factors the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said in a video message, "The COVID-19 virus is not only attacking our physical health; it is also increasing psychological suffering: grief at the loss of loved ones, shock at the loss of jobs, isolation and restrictions on movement, difficult family dynamics, uncertainty

and fear for the future."

Many countries have reported escalating mental health problems. Canada's national statistical agency noted that a fifth of Canadians aged 15-49 had increased their alcohol consumption since the start of the crisis. Increased addiction behaviours will lead to a rise in "deaths of despair," deaths traced to suicide and the misuse of alcohol and drugs. In the US, as many as 75,000 more people will die from drug or alcohol misuse and suicide. Another US survey found that 14% of people had high levels of psychological distress, compared with an average of 4% during the pre-Covid era.

Mental health services in India were already inadequate before the Covid crisis. The hurdles in accessing mental health care because of Covid restrictions worsens an already difficult situation. We read of suicides every day, but the actual number of severely mentally affected persons is almost impossible to calculate.

According to the India Disease Burden Initiative, the total mental disease burden in the country doubled between 1990-2017 to 197 million Indians, with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder making up the majority of patients. A recent survey by the Indian Psychiatry Society has reported a 20% rise in mental illness since the pandemic started. Higher psychological effects are felt by young people, women, and those with comorbid physical illness, in another study published at the end of May.

But there are others who are at high risk: school children in social isolation and apprehensive about their future, youth who need to finish their degrees and seek employment, handicapped and LGBT persons. We already know about the rise in domestic abuse, the millions driven into life-threatening poverty. A pandemic of mental illness is at hand. It will not receive sufficient attention, because physical illnesses always take precedent over mental disease.

#### More psychology experts needed

The country has 4000 psychiatrists but needs 13,000. Twenty thousand clinical psychologists are needed against 2000 available. We need 50,000 counsellors, compared to about a thousand at present. For psychiatric social workers, the need is 35,000, but only 900 are available. For any young reader, consider a career in psychology. You will be in great demand.

The writer can be reached at glenchristo@yahoo.com

## Indian agriculture entangled in a web of policies Right type of Support post Covid-19 is vital

By Gyan Pathak

COVID-19 has serious implications on agriculture, rural employment, and food security. Policy responses in relation to COVID-19 outbreak include several agriculture policies, agro-food supply chain policies, consumer policies, trade policies and others. However, much more are needed to overcome the crisis it has presented. Moreover, the legacy of problems cannot be left unsolved now without aggravating the agriculture crisis with the new COVID-19 twist and the largest number of stomachs in the world to feed within seven years.

It must also be noted that about two-third of the 1.37 billion of the population of the country live in rural areas, and at just 0.15 ha per capita, agriculture land is very scarce. Agriculture accounts for an estimated 43.9 per cent of employment, but its 14.6 per cent share in GDP indicates that labour productivity remains significantly lower than in the rest of the economy. The productivity gap is also reflected in the evolution of farm incomes, which correspond to less than one-third of non-agriculture income. The share of value added from agriculture has been gradually reduced, but mostly in favour of services rather than manufacturing. Indian agriculture is continuing to diversify towards livestock and away from grain crops.

While grains and milk remain dominant, there has been a gradual change in the composition of production to other crops – such as sugar cane, cotton, fruit and vegetables – as well as certain meat sub-sectors. Livestock output growth has been faster and less volatile than crop production. The sector continues to be dominated by a large number of small-scale farmers, as the national average operational holding size has been in steady decline. Against a background of already growing unemployment and falling GDP, higher prices for selected food items were posing serious concerns even before COVID-19 lockdown, which has now escalated the problem. As a net agro-food exporter, India faces new challenges while imports have been increasing since 2007. Sustained growth in agricultural output has been exerting mounting pressures on natural resources, particularly land and water.

Presently the support to farmers in India is composed of budgetary spending corresponding to only 7.8 per cent of gross farm receipts, positive market price support (MPS) of only +2.0 per cent of gross farm receipts among those commodities which are supported, and a negative MPS of -14.8 per cent among those which are implicitly taxed. Overall, this leads to negative net support of -5.0 per cent of gross farm receipts as producer support estimates (%PSE) in 2017-19. The negative value of the PSE reflects that domestic producers, overall, continue to be implicitly taxed, as budgetary payments to farmers do not offset the price-depressing effect of complex domestic regulations and trade policy measures.

Budgetary transfers to agricultural producers are dominated by subsidies for variable input use, such as fertilisers, electricity, and irrigation water. In turn, public expenditures financing general services to the sector (GSSE), principally for infrastructure-related investments, correspond to just half of the subsidies for variable input use. Total budgetary support (TBSE) is estimated at only 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2017-19.

Mirroring the farm price-depressing effect on producers, the policies provide implicit support to consumers. Policies that affect farm

prices, along with food subsidies under the Targeted Public Distribution System, reduced consumption expenditure by 21.4 per cent as consumer support estimate (%CSE) on average across all commodities in 2017-19.

Main policy changes so far include increased Minimum support prices (MSPs). The application of the direct income transfer scheme Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) – providing an annual payment of Rs 6,000 per farm household – was extended from small-scale farmers (with landholdings up to 2 hectares) to all farmers with land titles. Investments in Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) were also stepped up in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 Union Budgets, including through new schemes in specific sectors such as vegetables (tomatoes, onions, potatoes) and dairy.

However, after an increase in both fertiliser and food subsidies in the 2019-20 Union Budget, the budgetary allocations for these were lowered in the 2020-21 Union Budget by 10.8 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively.

Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2020 by OECD has said that for many products and over most of the period reviewed, Indian farmers have been receiving prices that are lower than the prices prevailing on international markets. It has therefore recommended that the central government should continue the initiatives to reduce domestic marketing inefficiencies and work closer with states and Union Territories (UTs) to thoroughly reform regulations and to foster more efficient and competitive markets, including through initiatives such as the electronic National Agricultural Market (e-NAM). Marketing provisions should be adopted in a harmonised and consistent way across states and should be synchronised with any Minimum Support Price (MSP) system reforms through coherent plans.

India is an important agro-food exporter in a number of commodities. The Agricultural Export Policy (AEP) framework adopted in 2018 has set an important step towards reducing uncertainty and transaction costs throughout supply chains by engaging to avoid the application of export restrictions for organic and processed agricultural products. However, much is needed to be done for its reliability as a supplier and to create a stable and predictable market environment. Together with domestic marketing reforms, moving away from export and import restrictions has the potential to provide farmers and private traders with improved incentives to invest in supply chains.

The large share of employment in agriculture compared to its GDP contribution reflects the persistent productivity gap with other sectors, which translates into low farm incomes. In the short to medium-term, direct cash transfers targeting the incomes of poorest farmers can support their livelihoods in current market conditions. In the long-term, significant structural adjustments needed involving the transition of farm labour to other activities and a process of consolidation towards farm operations sufficiently large to benefit from economies of scale. In this sense, continued reforms in land regulations need to be complemented by investments in key public services to the sector (such as education, training, infrastructure) and the broader enabling environment (including financial services). (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Kill the racist within!

Editor,

At a time when the state, country and the whole world is grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it's disturbing to hear of a situation like the Lawsotun assault incident. While on the one hand, we have the WHO lauding the state for its handling of the Covid crisis, we have incidents like these which raise serious questions about our sense of morality. Innocent youngsters, brutally attacked in the name of territorial onepmanship, all whilst simply enjoying a game of basketball – a matter of utter shame!

We say that people from the mainland are racist towards people from the North East. And yet, when incidents like these occur in our own state, we remain silent and ignore the fact that racism begins with our own narrow-minded thoughts

and actions. How are we, as a society, any different then? It is easy to pass the buck and say that we aren't the ones who committed the crime but by being silent bystanders and not raising our voices to condemn such incidents, we become nothing but accomplices too. It would soothe our conscience, therefore, to speak up for justice, or else, wouldn't we dread sending our youngsters out on their own for fear of a backlash?

Such incidents overshadow all the good which took place at the start of the pandemic when all communities joined hands to fight against this invisible enemy. One can only hope that the culprits are brought to book and such situations never happen again.

Our local representatives and the police should go all out to nab those guilty so that our society can thus return to a semblance of sanity and safety in this "new normal" world. As for us, members of the

society, it's time to wake up from our apathy and take a stand against such evils; it's time that we act instead of merely being propagators of empty words; it's time that we look at ourselves first and kill the racist within!

Yours etc.,  
Angela Lyngdoh  
Shillong-14

#### Enough of targeted violence

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Lawsotun violence leaves five basketball players injured" (ST July 4, 2020) what happened on July 3, 2020 at around 12:30 pm where some local non-indigenous/non-tribal boys playing basketball at Block VI were brutally assaulted with lethal weapons by a group of 20 miscreants with masks on is condemnable. Such inhuman acts deserve stern legal punishment for the criminals. From the incident, it is very clear that it was a

planned attack as the local non-tribal boys who were regularly visiting the basketball court at Lawsotun were first caged by the group of miscreants and then brutally assaulted. Also no reports of any injury are reported from the side of the assaulters, indicating it was a one sided attack.

This is not the first time that the local non-tribal population is being attacked. Time and again such incidents are being reported since decades without much action being taken against the assaulters by the concerned authority. These sections of local non-tribal population have been part and parcel of our state of Meghalaya even before it attained statehood. Indeed, much sacrifice has been made by those sections of the population during our united fight for statehood. After much struggle and demonstration, Meghalaya became a state in 1972 and the said section of population have

contributed for the welfare of the state in different fields from Agriculture to Industry, Education to Administration and so on. Various educational and medical institutions which are functional till date were established by the local non-tribal/non-indigenous population of the State and their contribution for the well being of Meghalaya cannot be overlooked.

I earnestly request the Government of Meghalaya and the Police Force in the State to look after the sorry plight of the said population. Indeed, it is very strange to see that Dr Rajdeep Roy, MP of Silchar had quickly condemned the incident of attack on the five young boys at Lawsotun but it took one whole day for our Hon'ble CM to condemn such an inhuman act.

The silence of our elected MPs and MLAs does not surprise us. In fact every section of the society must condemn such brutal assaults because no community teaches one to harm

others. Such attacks on innocent people without any reason are one of the main factors for the decline of the local non-indigenous population in Meghalaya. The Times of India, of September 7, 2012 reported a drastic fall in Meghalaya's local non-indigenous population. In 1972 the tribal to non-tribal ratio was 80:20 which now stands at 90:10. Is this not an issue that the Government must introspect about? Why the drastic decline in local non-indigenous population over the last 48 years? Such situations in our State might have instigated the Hon'ble Governor of Meghalaya to compare the situation of non-tribals with those of Kashmiri Pandits!

Yours etc.,  
Anil Singh Roka  
Shillong-2

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"Choosing goals that are important to you is one of the most essential things you can do in order to live your dreams."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The Shillong Times

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### Pact for peace

THERE'S good news coming from the northern border region after weeks of tension and encounters between Chinese and Indian soldiers centering around Galwan Valley in Ladakh. Both sides have withdrawn from positions they took control of in the course of the military engagement, it is said, but questions persist about the ground situation there. The pull-out was facilitated also by high-level discussions involving National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his Chinese counterpart. For now, peace has been given a chance. Contentious matters vis-à-vis border disputes are one too many between India and China, and these need be sorted out over the long term. In scenarios where elected governments and Prime Ministers change after every five years, taking these discussions forward to their logical conclusions might not be easy, unless a definite policy is in place. The situation is obviously complicated by the fact that there exist no proper border demarcations between the two countries for the most part. This often gives the excuse to the Chinese to nibble on Indian land in more energetic ways.

Clearly, no one expected the scenario along the northern border to worsen beyond a point in these times of Covid-spread, of which both China and India are victims. There is optimism now that both nations would concentrate on their immediate concerns like controlling the Covid spread and lifting the national economies from the depths to which they have sunk not only here but across the world too. As China is leading the global commerce now, it has much to lose if a war should erupt at this juncture. Questions remain about Xi Jinping's frame of mind. He sought to unleash a tsunami which turned out to be a storm in a tea cup. India is a mighty nation and would not cow down to his threats irrespective of the fact that the Chinese military has about five times the strength of India's. Wars could drain even the most powerful nation's coffers, as was evident in the case of the US after its military engagement in Iraq. There began its struggles on multiple fronts, and the US economy suffered major reverses as George Bush II stepped aside from the scene after eight years of rule. It must be stressed that good sense prevailed on the leaderships of China as well as India to have evaded taking matters to the level of a war. The propensity for intruding into Indian territory will do China no special good unless strategic areas are involved. This is time for both nations to act with maturity.

# Festival tourism vis-a-vis religious festival

By Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah

A festival is an event, a social phenomenon in virtually all human cultures. Festivals have been present in human life since antiquity. Etymologically the term festival is derived from the Latin 'festum'. But originally Latin has two terms for festive events: festum, for "public joy, merriment and revelry" and feria, meaning "abstinence from work in honour of the gods". In social sciences, the definition of festival can be understood from the viewpoints of various disciplines. The sociological definition is 'a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participated directly or indirectly and to varying degrees, by all members of the community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds and sharing the same worldview.

Scholars have defined various types of festivals, generally based on sacred or secular binary. Festivals are generally considered as cultural performances associated with religious traditions. However, we also have festivals which are associated with local entertainment rituals. Such festivals are termed as 'festival tourism'. It is an instrumentalist discourse in which festivals are viewed as tools in tourism, economic development and marketing of places. In Meghalaya, we have many such 'tourism festivals' like the Monolith Festival, Autumn Festival etc., which are lavishly sponsored and promoted by the various government departments. These festivals have different objectives. They are designed to support tourism and attract national and international visitors and crores of rupees are spent for managing such festivals. There is no doubt that these festivals provide incentives for locals and businesses. Here I shall not deal with this genre of festival. My intent is to touch on the function of community festivals with special reference to the Behdeinkhlam Religious festival or Niam Behdeinkhlam of the Jaintias of Meghalaya.

In a religious festival, 'rites' and 'rituals' are considered the building blocks or the units of the festival which have strong ties to myth. In Niam Behdeinkhlam the ritual events are connected to the myth of U Lakriah and the descent of U Niaw Wasa (the Seven huts) through Ka Tangnoob Tangjiri (the golden ladder). During the festival the community

members are reminded of their Golden Age through the myth of U Lakriah. This version of the myth is known in Jaintia Hills. Besides, the origin myth of U Niaw Wasa, the other significant aspect of Behdeinkhlam is the emergence of the founding clan- the Sookpoh Clan. The myth of U Lakriah points to the rules of religious and social conduct which are handed to U Niaw Wasa by U Tre Kiro (God) through U Lakriah. In fact, the story of the origin of Niam Behdeinkhlam is part of the origin myth connected with the appearance of the Jaintias and Khasis in their present location. Thus Behdeinkhlam Religious festival is part of the kinship and belief systems of the Jaintia and Khasi community.



In order to understand the mythological base of Behdeinkhlam one needs to look at its origin. The narrative is as follows:

In the beginning U Tre Kiro (God) created the universe in three layers. The topmost layer called Soorkep is where God rests with the immortal angels (Ki Puri blai). In the second layer called Bneiñ (Heaven) live Ki Khadyrnur Wasa (people of sixteen huts) and the third is called Sla Khyndaw Pyrthai (earth).

One of God's (U Tre Kiro) desire is to send Niaw Wasa to earth through the golden ladder, Ka Tangnoob Tangjiri to live and prosper happily. God selected a leader, U Syiem Lakriah and bestowed him with divine qualities to maintain contact with Him on behalf of Niaw Wasa. U Tre Kiro appeared before U Lakriah in the form of a rainbow. A Rainbow is a symbolic bridge to the divine, a sign of God's covenant. It is a symbol of peace and hope.

When God made the earth, no life was yet in it except rocks, water and air. There was no soil which is essential for cultivation. Therefore, the Niaw Wasa was unhappy. They told Syiem Lakriah that in such a barren place they could not build their huts and could not cultivate. God, therefore, put the earth in order. First, He instructed

the goddess, Ka Bei Rymaw (Earth Mother) to give three basketfuls of soil known as 'ka le khoh le sun' to make the earth cultivable and productive. Thus the earth became green. The Earth became a beautiful place to live in for the Niaw Wasa. Later having seen that Niaw Wasa lived harmoniously and comfortably, God convened a Divine Dorbar (Dorbar Blai) in order to give a moral and ethical basis of living together. He handed over the law of life to the people through His Divine decree (Ki Hukum). This provided the Niaw Wasa with a system of belief called Niamtre. So, the Niaw Wasa was happy. But one day, in the Divine Dorbar, God told them that they would no longer be able to see Him, since His task of creation is completed. He would not come face to face with them.

They were shocked as if struck by a thunder bolt. They were full of tears. Then God told Syiem Lakriah that he would visit them once a year and stay with them for four days and three nights. At this juncture, God asked as to what they would offer Him during His stay. U Syiem Lakriah could not answer. God said that he wanted to see a dance. He told them, they could dance anywhere - be it mud, rock or water. They would feel their thumping heart, which would signify His presence within their hearts, so that they will enjoy good health and prosper in life. It was like a covenant or divine sanction to help the Niaw Wasa. The Niaw Wasa agreed to fulfill it. Then God ordered Syiem Pyrthai (Thunder God), one of the Khatso Wahoh (fourteen elders) to go to earth. He along with U Mookhai, U Mooralong, U Moosniang, U Mootong collectively called Ki Soodwar sooluti (stone deities) and Ka Myntdu, Ka Sati Myntdu, Ka Lamynchi, Ka Sangman, Ka Syntu Ksiar collectively called Ki tawiar takan and U Blai Langdoh, Ka Aitnar, U Moosmai and U Rynghak descended to earth so that they can protect the people and their land.

U Syiem Pyrthai then decided to honour God's instructions, to stay on earth along with his companions, till he brought their four sisters- Ka Bon, Ka Tein, Ka

Wet and Ka Doh to a place called Loom Sooyung at Jwai. Thus emerged the founding clans the Sookpoh, San Syngkong, Challam, Passah and Chullai collectively known as Phra Kur Phra Kmai. From these clans emerged the sacred and secular functionaries or the sacerdotal ruler known as Ki Khatso Wasan. They are U Dalloi, Pator, U Langdoh, Ka Langdoh, U Sangot, U Maji, U Hamamooi, U Myrliangot, Chutia and Dhulia.

To celebrate the settlement of Niaw Wasa on earth, the Niam Behdeinkhlam is performed. It symbolises reverence and thanksgiving to God, the creator. The rites and rituals performed during the festival are eventually directed towards the veneration of legendary ancestors like U Syiem Lakriah and the four sisters, Ka Bon, Ka Tein, Ka Wet and Ka Doh. Prayers are offered to God invoking Him to drive away all the evil spirits. Sacrifices are made to Ki Blai Chnong Blai Raid invoking them to protect from natural calamities and to protect people from famine and diseases. Prayers are also offered to Ka Bei Rymaw for bountiful harvest. Behdeinkhlam is an occasion that brings the Niaw Wasa closer to God and it also explains the concept of the creation of a community and its religion, Niamtre. The rites and rituals are performed to drive away the evil spirits of plague and pestilence. This is a natural practice of the agrarian society. This year in view of the restrictions to contain the spread of Covid 19, and the subsequent restrictions and government advisories, the celebration of Behdeinkhlam is limited to only the observance of rites and rituals that do not involve mass gathering in order to maintain physical distancing. It will be relevant in context of the present health crisis, 'Covid 19', that we celebrate Behdeinkhlam and perform the rituals to drive away all the evil spirits of plague and pestilence.

Our world is facing a great danger that threatens the lives of millions of people due to the growing spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This Behdeinkhlam we call on God, U Tre Kiro to end the pandemic and heal those who are afflicted with the coronavirus.

We call upon all faiths to join us and celebrate Behdeinkhlam and pray for our suffering brethren and ask for quick control of the Corona pandemic currently ravaging the world.

(The writer teaches History at St Edmunds College and can be reached at kyndiahomarlin@gmail.com)

## The end of reality

By Banshaikupar Lyngdoh Mawlong

The world is changing and changing fast. In the blink of an eye, the world as we know it, is now history. Never before have we witnessed such a massive psychological shift in a matter of decade or so. Our world is rapidly descending into a psychological chaos, a conflict of identity. An identity crisis is sweeping humanity. A systematic new identity construction is being rolled out and with it, identity confusion. A clash between the real and the unreal, between the actual and the fake, the physical and the virtual. The line of distinction between the worlds- the actual and the virtual, the real and the fake, is slowly fading. The real vision is blurring.

We are a psychologically confused generation. A generation of 'Jekylls' and 'Hydes'. For instance, we are a generation where an arm-chair environmentalist, who has never planted a single tree, from the comfort of his air-conditioned mansion preaches his gospel to the world on how to preserve the environment. We are living in an era where nature is exploited and fake plastic plants are being treasured and worshipped. The plastic has become real and real living things are slowly



becoming rarer. We decorate our living rooms with poly-made animals, while day in and day out we poison Mother Nature, the 'real' life giver. We mercilessly slaughter everything that moves. As someone rightly said, "we are living in a world where artificial lemon is used as a welcome drink and real lemon is used in finger bowls." Then there's the social media platform where we can hide our 'real' identity to create a 'fake' virtual identity. In fact, the virtual identity has become real and the real is slowly assuming the fake. In fact, our very own existence is defined by our presence in the virtual world. Technology has given us the technique to hide our human flaws and create a utopian perfect self. We have forgotten that these imperfections are the very elements that make us human. We have slowly become less human.

We do not even spare God. In fact, we exploit his physical absence and silence. We are a faithless generation who worship millions of invisible gods and 'corporate' religions. Funnily enough, we 'bravely' vow to protect our gods, our Creator, from anyone who doesn't share the same faith as ours. Religion has become a new adventure to make easy bucks. Our religious domain is today filled with self-anointed messengers of God who 'own' the copyright of divinity and the key to salvation.

We are also creating a never before seen generation; a highly opinionated generation where every Tom, Dick and Harry has an 'expert' opinion on everything; where a tea-seller on the roadside will advise you on nuclear technology, where an opium intoxicated quack will teach you on how to cure deadly infectious diseases, where an uneducated politician will dictate the top bureaucrats how to run the economy. The list is endless. Our Social media 'pundits' and opinions are replacing the real knowledge. The emotional is replacing the rational. We no longer think, but feel. One's status is determined not by how much you actually know but by how much you are pretending to know. You are not concerned about an

issue unless you post about it on social media. Your influence in society is determined not by your academic degree but by how many followers you have on social media and most decisively your bank statement. Your virtual existence has replaced your 'real' existence.

We are living in a world where truthfulness is a rarity. The truth is subjugated, while lies are being systematically propagated as the universal truth by those in power and control. Then there's an academician who rightly points out the corrupt practices prevalent in the government system but he himself does not take his classes regularly and earns unaccounted bucks from private tuition fees. Then we have our self-righteous pressure group leaders who make their fortune from 'extortions' and black contracts. Then arrive our solemn oath-taken noble saviours, the medical practitioners, who cannot serve in rural and poor areas and government hospitals. We are all hypocrites and fakes. We are also a generation where conformity and acceptance is everything. Individual uniqueness and freedom have gone for a toss in

favour of universality, a world of copy-cats and photo-copying. We want to be like so and so. We have forgotten that when we follow the masses, most of the time the 'm' is silent.

We are also living in an era of 'documentation', a self-obsessed generation who document almost every aspect of their shallow achievements. We have filled our profiles with our zero achievement records and forced ourselves to believe that we are not one of those empty shells on the beach. We are drifting away from real efforts and actual achievements. Our minds is being filled with fake news and unfounded information, systematically propagated by those in powers. Like the saying goes, "Tell a lie a 99 times, the 100th time it will become a truth". Factual information has taken a back seat and sponsored fakes news are becoming the order of the day. Then there's our demi-gods, the politicians who, through their mouth-piece news channels and social media platforms, are shamelessly manufacturing the idea of the truth and systematically censoring the truth, so as to methodically indoctrinate the society's perception and worldview to match their image and to suit their power-driven agenda. In fact, our politicians' worth is today measured by their marketing and publicity skills, rather than their statesmanship. We no longer need a leader but an expert publicist, who can convince the trees that an axe is one among them.

We don't need real development but an illusion of development; we no longer need education and books, but festivals and wines. All these to fill our shallow lives! Reality and humanity have been left in the back-burner. In fact, it is becoming extremely impossible to differentiate between what is real and what is not. I think it is safe to say, the fake world is having an edge at this moment and we are witnessing history in the making, the ending of the real world, the Middle Class Reality. And a new identity is emerging - a confused identity.

(The writer is Asst. Professor Union Christian College, Uniam Khwan Meghalaya. Email banda1787@gmail.com)

### TO THE EDITOR

## Don't Shoot the Messenger

Editor,  
I was disturbed to note from the front page of the Shillong Times, July 7, 2020, that an FIR has been filed against its Editor for her comments on the recent Lawsotun assault. This short-sighted attitude only serves to exacerbate an already inflamed issue and does nothing to solve the problem. It is pointless to raise accusing fingers at journalists, most of whom are only carrying out their duties of taking the news to the public. To nitpick on choice of words misses the wood for the trees.

At the centre of the incident seem to be groups of youth. Youth are already going through the strains and stresses of education, job-seeking, and becoming independent citizens of society. The Covid pandemic has imposed further

psychological trauma. Youth aged 15-29 have the highest suicide rate of any age group and this will now rise.

It would be far better if responsible citizens and administrative bodies focused their energies to delve into the roots of the issue and take concrete steps. Education, employment and entertainment are important priorities for youth and we need to support them as they navigate through this most difficult time of their lives. Perhaps traditional bodies and community organizations can come up with ideas to develop our youth, instead of mobilizing them for detrimental purposes.

During the Covid epidemic, the government of Karnataka has inducted students into Covid work. For this they will be given an extra five marks in their examinations. Such ideas and incentives which cost little, need to be thought of.

We need to be ingenious and adaptive in developing our youth.

Inflaming communal passions is easy. It's more worthwhile to set about building a humane and equal society.

Yours etc.,  
Glenn C. Kharkongor,  
Via email

## Not communal at all

Editor,  
Apropos the news item, "FIR against ST Editor", (ST, July 07, 2020), I am of the opinion that the personal comments of Patricia Mukhim, on social media do not merit the contention that they might incite communal feelings unless one chooses to fabricate things to suit their ends. The issue of non-tribal bashing has been going on in these hills since the state came into

being and hasn't stopped. Ms Mukhim could not be more correct when she said that such attackers and trouble mongers since 1979 have never been arrested and even if arrested never been penalized according to law. What is of concern is that lack of penal action against such elements over the years have rather prompted these ugly heads to repeat their crimes and this has earned a bad name for Meghalaya.

If one compares the Lawsotun incident with that in Ichamati, one can see the zeal and with which the wrongdoers were instantly booked in case of the latter whereas in the former, what we know is that the police are still hunting for the masked miscreants. Wonder if one should blame/question police for their inefficiency in the of the Lawsotun incident and pat them for the Ichamati one.

The contention of the Lawsotun Dorbar Shnong, which has filed an FIR against Ms Mukhim is that they fear that her statement could instigate communal conflict and endanger the lives of Khasis living outside the state because her post mentioning the 1979 conflict has already been given a communal colour by some media houses in West Bengal. Why is this bothering them so much? Perhaps the reasons are known to all. The fear of the Dorbar is legitimate but what about the non-tribal brethren here who have been living in perpetual fear. Is that fear not legitimate? Perhaps, it is high time that the tribesmen/women of Meghalaya and North East realize that their repeated offence against non-tribals here may well make them targets elsewhere.

And have we heard a word of condemnation from

the very Dorbar under whose jurisdiction the incident took place? In not condemning such incidents by looking at who the victims are the tribesmen/women here are themselves giving the incident a communal colour and that has always been the case here since statehood. Nonetheless, the police should take the help of the Lawsotun Dorbar Shnong since as Ms Mukhim correctly stated in her post, "the Dorbar Shnong will certainly know the criminal elements in their area and should ideally lead the charge and identify those murderous elements."

Yours etc.  
BC Paul  
Shillong - 4

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*"Heroism on command, senseless violence, and all the loathsome nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism - how passionately I hate them!"*

— Albert Einstein

## The Shillong Times

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### Social responsibility imperative

WE have entered the fourth month of the lockdown and despite the unlocking in certain areas of the economy, there is a persistent sense of unease about moving around in crowded places such as markets and main thoroughfares. The Covid protocols put in place by the district administration of respective districts are very clear by now and people know they have to wear masks to prevent themselves from contacting Covid or from spreading it to others. Even in rural hamlets people are conscious about their responsibilities. Vegetables and other vendors all wear masks; so too the customers and others going about their work. The problem is with the well-heeled, educated lot. Despite clear Government directives on social distancing and the need to avoid unnecessary travel, recently a marriage party from Shillong went to Guwahati with different categories of car passes; some claiming to be going down for health matters. The resort they patronised had one Covid positive worker. And Covid being what it is, some among the 41 have also tested positive. This has created a scare because the 41 people are scattered in different localities of Shillong. The question everyone is asking is why this group of 41 were given permission to go to Guwahati. The other question is, why did the same set of people dupe the Government authorities by giving false reasons for travelling?

On Wednesday, two homes were sealed off in a particular locality of Shillong when one from among the marriage party tested positive. It's possible that other members of the family would have contacted the disease. The sealing off is to prevent any movement and strict home quarantines for the other inmates. Since the disease is extremely contagious it is expected that every person, especially the enlightened, educated ones would follow the social distancing, masking and personal hygiene protocols more rigidly. Unfortunately they are the very ones that throw caution to the winds and exhibit their selfish genes, quite forgetting that they could be the cause for community spread.

Meghalaya has kept its Covid numbers well under control but with the compulsory movement of BSF personnel and others from the armed forces, public sector undertakings and bank employees, keeping vigil over the returnees has become a burden for the Government. Moreover, the presence of the North East Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) where patients come from across the region for medical treatment has become another challenge. A patient from Tripura tested positive and daily, patients from neighbouring Silchar where Covid is raging are coming for treatment.

With Covid, the more the inter-state movement, the higher the chances of it spreading.

# Lawsohtun incident – No to violence

By Albert Thyrniang

The Lawsohtun incident is condemnable. Though the assault on the six non-tribal youths in a basketball court took place on July 3, that is almost a week has passed, what we have now is an FIR against the editor of this newspaper. This speaks volumes of the efficiency/inefficiency of the government and the law enforcing agencies. The culprits are nowhere to be traced. They are still at large.

The attack seems to be pre-planned. The 20 attackers had rods and sticks in their hands. Taking advantage of COVID-19 situation, they had their faces covered with masks to be unrecognised. They had reportedly locked the gate of the venue before beating up the basketball players before making good their escape.

Was the incident

narrow and closed-mindedness.

The Dorbar Shnong of the locality was unnerved by the referred post. To be stunned and upset is normal but to file an FIR with the allegation of inciting communal tension exhibits a mind-set of intolerance to criticism. The said post reads, "...And what about the Dorbar Shnong of the area? Don't they have their eyes and ears to the ground? Don't they know the criminal elements in their jurisdiction? Should they not lead the charge and identify those murderous elements? This is the time to rise above community interests, caste and creed and call out for justice." If the dorbar is unable to take in

their rhetoric of sending back 'illegal immigrants' to Bangladesh thus creating divisions in the society. We have witnessed violent protests over the communal legislation in West Bengal. CAA will play a more divisive role as elections to the state legislature approaches. One section of the community is/will be harassed and threatened because of the draconian law. What have right thinking citizens to say?

On social media complaints are often made that non-tribals do not get jobs and cannot own land in the state. This must be explained as clearly as possible. Job reservation is the policy of the Government of Meghalaya and right of tribals to own land in the state is a provision in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian



communal? Prima facie it looks so. All the wounded victims are from a minority community. Could the 20 assailants be from the majority community? The police will have to make the necessary arrests to determine the motive for the assault. Hope the Block VI violent episode turns out to be a "clash between two groups" with no communal angle as maintained by Lawsohtun Dorbar Shnong.

Some might have jumped the gun in adding "communal colour" on Facebook posts and in live streams but the hate and intolerant reactions are totally unjustified. Social media users called for arrest of the senior journalist and Padma Shri awardee who, in her Facebook post the next day, called out the CM Meghalaya, the DGP and the Dorbar Shnong of the area to act. A local cab driver proudly displayed a poster behind his taxi demanding the arrest of the outspoken columnist who has earlier also upset some of the local pressure groups and NGOs with her acclaimed writings. Her house was even attacked in April 2018 by unidentified miscreants. Other users called for boycotting of Shillong Times. Boycotting a newspaper is no solution. It points to the direction of

such a simple criticism one wonders whether such persons are capable of being in a position of responsibility. No one is beyond criticism and no one is immune to it.

The police have been criticised for their impotence in solving the case. They have picked some individuals but they seem to be no more than mere suspects uninvolved in the incident. No one has been nabbed so far. Then where are the culprits? Why and how are they still roaming free? The success rate of the police in bringing criminal elements to book is not encouraging. In the aftermath of the Sweepers Colony incident arson and stone pelting were on for nights but many escaped the wrath of the law. Prominent individuals in the government alleged the youths were instigated by rival politicians. A well-known citizen of the state even hinted that the trouble makers were paid by certain 'merchants'. We saw neither politicians nor merchants anywhere close to the law.

The Home Minister has warned those who indulge in spreading communal hatred on social media with assurance of stern action. The police too have done the same. But that is just about it. The fact remains that we have seen little ac-

suffering violent instances. Many might have been forced to leave the state. However, comparing the situation here with the exodus of Kashmiri pundits is unwarranted. According to reports Hindus of the Kashmir Valley were forced to flee the valley as they were targeted by JKLF and other Islamist militants in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is estimated that out of 300,000 to 600,000 Hindus in 1990 only 2,000-3,000 were left in the valley in 2016. January 19, 1990 is infamously remembered by Hindu pundits as the tragic "exodus day" as they were inhumanly forced out of Kashmir to take refuge in places like Delhi and Jammu. Was the situation in Meghalaya anywhere near Kashmir? Why must the Governor of the state antagonise the local population and alienate himself from the citizens of the state by his uncalculated comparison?

A section of the Bengali community in Kolkata was rightly alarmed at the Lawsohtun incident and was quick to judge it communal. Perhaps it is proper to remind them that CAB/CAA has virtually split the state of West Bengal right in the middle on the basis of religion. The State has allowed national and regional political leaders to spread venom through

Constitution to safeguard and protect the tribal communities. So there is no point in carrying grievances against the tribes of Meghalaya or the North East as far as job and ownership of land is concerned.

Another common observation made is that it is the non-tribal business community that fills the coffers of the state government. While their contribution in building the state is appreciated it is also a balanced view to state that no one is independent of the state. The non-tribals are able to contribute 'financially' to the state through the taxes because the tribals also enter their shops and business establishments. Again, the large part of the money that the tribals pocket may come from the central government. So interdependence is the key here.

It is heartening to know that efforts by all stakeholders are on to ensure that the Lawsohtun incident does not flare up into another communal tension. At all times, but especially now when the focus is on combating the surge of COVID-19 any skirmish is least wanted.

(The writer can be reached at thalbert@rediffmail.com)

## Covid pandemic has come as a great leveller Dark underbellies of so-called modern societies exposed

By Arjavi Indraneesh

The Covid pandemic has come as a great leveller. It has downed powerful heads of state and the commonest man on the street, irrespective of caste, creed, colour and climate. Covid has held a mirror to the dark underbellies of societies, which have so far remained hidden from public knowledge. It has also unearthed the gross inequalities that have come as a blot on man's claim of progress and prosperity.

In the US, however, Covid has shown clear colour preferences even as it proved how hollow the so-called American dream has turned out to be just as it brought out futility of America's claims of materialistic progress.

According to figures released by independent APM Research Lab, there has been a staggering divide in the Covid death rate between black Americans and the rest of the population, with three times more African-Americans dying from the disease in relation to the white population.

But much worse than that, it threw light on the wretched life the millions of black Americans were leading. In fact, the doles doled out as part of the US stimulus package made many of them better-off compared to their pre-Covid situations.

But much worse than that, it threw light on the wretched life the millions of black Americans were leading. According to a new survey from the Census Bureau quoted by major publications, since the pandemic began an astonishing 20 percent of African-American households with children do not have enough to eat 'sometimes' or 'often'. The survey showed that their share in the population went up by 2 percentage points since the outbreak of the pandemic.

More startling is the fact the doles doled out as part of the US stimulus package made many of them better-off compared to their pre-Covid situations. A paper published by economists at the University of Chicago and the University of Notre Dame even suggested that poverty in the US, as measured on an annual basis, may have actually fallen in April and May, thanks to the extra \$600-a-week payments under the stimulus package.

The Covid outbreak in India also had its startling revelations. The virus infection and the lockdown that

followed brought to light the 'Other India' of millions of migrant labour who were never part of the development agenda of successive Indian governments.

The Modi government has announced a few stimulus packages as part of its Covidsupport initiatives, but there is no way of determining how far these measures are going to make a difference to the plight of these people. Going by past experience, one can safely assume that it will make no difference.

The reverse migration from the urban centres has added millions to the army of rural unemployed people, whose only hope of gainful employment is the Mahatma Gandhi rural employment programme (MGNREGA). With the migrant labourers becoming eligible for participation in the employment guarantee programme, the scheme itself has been overburdened, which is expected to affect all the beneficiaries.

According to published estimates, at least 1.4 lakh poor rural households have already completed their quota of 100 days of work under MGNREGA in the first three months of the year. This means that they will not be eligible for further benefits under the rural employment guarantee scheme for the rest of the year. Another seven lakh households have completed 80 days and are on the verge of running out of work as well, according to the scheme's database.

The original provision for employment guarantee under the scheme is for 100 days. But the scheme contains a provision that in districts affected by drought or other natural disaster the scheme can be extended to allow 150 days of work per household. This was made applicable to the works undertaken during the Covid outbreak as it has been declared a national disaster. With the total outlay for the scheme fixed, the extension is expected to affect the total extent of employment it can provide. Although the 1.4 lakh families may only be a fraction of the 4.6 crore households who have benefited from the scheme this year, it is the poorest families that will be the hardest hit. There have already been demands for the extension of the maximum number of days of employment allowed under the scheme in view of the serious crisis brought about by the national lockdown as part of the fight against Covid. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Abuse of privileges

Editor,

We were just basking in the laurels of the WHO's praises of the state's handling of the Covid crisis and all that has sadly come to naught. Once again the double standards of the powers that have led to the present sorry state of affairs in our city. The state is already in a flurry due to the rising tally of Covid positive patients because of the returnees. However, abuse of power and manipulation of privileges have put our city once again in a tizzy and citizens are in panic mode and nervously awaiting a lockdown call again.

The marriage party that was supposed to use the said passes for medical emergencies and for any death of loved ones took their privilege too far and instead, are now endangering the lives of many. When movement within the state and the city is monitored with a vengeance, how is it that this particular group escaped the long arm of the law is the question that is on our minds. We can only

hope that the scenario doesn't deteriorate and the poor and marginalized of our society do not suffer. For in the end, it's they who bear the brunt of the powers at play. Are those responsible listening?

Yours etc.,  
Angela Lyngdoh  
Shillong-14

#### The India - China tangle

Editor,

India and China agreed that both sides should complete the disengagement process along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) expeditiously. In the first sign of de-escalation of tension, the Chinese army removed tents, vehicles and started to withdraw its troops from the Galwan Valley as decided during high level talks between the two militaries. The Chinese troops started withdrawing from the Galwan Valley hours after national security adviser Ajit Doval spoke to Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi. However, the retreat is yet to be verified on the ground

by the Indian military. Three meetings at the Corps Commander-level have taken place so far to discuss issues related to disengagement at the friction sites along the LAC and de-escalation from the border areas. More meetings are expected both at the military and at the diplomatic level in future to reach mutually agreeable solution and to ensure peace and tranquility along the LAC.

We can only guess what might have prompted China to remove vehicles, tents and withdraw its troops from the Galwan Valley. There are many reasons for this, apart from the high level talks. By attempting to change status quo at the LAC in Ladakh through military moves, China has alienated itself more than ever before in the international circuit. Beijing's quick response to Modi's "the age of expansionism is over" is a clear indication that China has received the message loud and clear. Beijing was quick to respond and it warned India against making any strategic miscalculations in its China policy. In China's

view, India needed to be shown "China's" might just as in 1962. So it planned and executed a localised hit on India. But India's response has not been along expected lines. Indian soldiers retaliated and paid China back in the same coin. This incident sapped the morale of Chinese soldiers. China realised that the present India is entirely different from the one it took on in 1962. It saw a determination from the Indian side to physically and militarily resist all Chinese incursion along the LAC.

Though there are negotiations involving military and civilian officials on both sides, India is not disinclined to military deterrence. Modi extended the battle to the economic front by banning Chinese apps and placing restrictions on Chinese investments in India. Further, India has been taking steps to mobilise international opinion. This is to ensure that Chinese aggression along the LAC is linked to the larger disquiet over the new China dominated global order. The Chinese have

learned the art of "grab first and negotiate". But before the negotiation it creates a situation of hopelessness for the adversary so that it is left with no option but to submit to the Chinese terms. However, China failed to do it this time and it is irritated by India's firmness and resolve. China believed that the PLA could bully the Indian military with its aggressive behaviour. But India today is different from the one in 1962. If India succumbs to pressure, Ladakh will be lost in the near future to a joint Sino-Pak offensive. Eviction is imperative for India to hold off both China and Pakistan from developing a crushing pincer on Ladakh and Siachen. China came with the plan of teaching India a lesson but it met its Waterloo at Galwan. It has lost face both domestically and globally. This might have compelled China to withdraw the forces, though after a delay.

India wants to solve all disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations but it would resist any attempt to challenge its sovereignty. India wants China

to honour various border agreements signed by it to maintain peace and tranquility. However, if China wants war, India will not relent. For inspiration, India must look at countries like Vietnam or Israel. They are not bullied and challenged by other countries because of their armies' resilience. It is likely that India will cement its new friendships including with the European Union and the US. India needs all the friends it can get if it wants to confront China on a sustained basis.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G S  
Via email

#### Rejoinder

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Under construction building poses danger," (ST July 8, 2020), I wish to inform you that the report published in your esteemed paper is biased for the following reasons:

When I approached my neighbours and members of the Dorbar Shnong they had no objections whatsoever to the ongoing construction at my land.

Due to the narrow and congested approach lane all necessary efforts are being taken with due care to avoid any hindrance towards my neighbours and pedestrians passing by.

Lastly, if I have created any inconvenience or any obstacle to anyone I would like them to personally call me on my mobile no 9774007333. I convey my deepest apologies for any inconvenience caused during the ongoing construction process.

Yours etc.,  
Lachlan Liam Kharmalki,  
Via email

#### Unfair statement

Editor,

While agreeing with the rest of the statements by RG Lyngdoh on the Lawsohtun assault, his remark, "It appears that the non-tribals prefer to live with the victimhood syndrome; to retreat inside their cocoons and hit back only when there is a chance to harass non-tribals. Another example is during non-tribal festivals, we are called to participate in, such as in drum-beating competitions etc." The problem here is non-prosecution of criminals, even if caught. A phone call and he is free to carry on with his nefarious activities.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request

"A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams."

--- Les Brown

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.329 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020

### Gangsters and politics

THE nation's most-wanted fugitive, gangster Vikas Dubey, has finally been arrested – after he effortlessly travelled all the way from Kanpur to Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh via Faridabad in Haryana and Kota in Rajasthan; and in a car carrying the UP number plate. The murder of eight policemen in an ambush in a village near Kanpur was the last most heinous crime that he and his men committed a week ago, thereby creating a national outrage. Clearly, he has political patronage. The murder of eight policemen was a dare-devil act and he is bound to face the consequences if only influential politicians do not come to his help. The incident again brings to the fore the kind of lawlessness prevailing in some states in this country even after 70 years of rule by 'desi' leaders. Another state notorious for criminal activities is Bihar. In both these states, gun-running is common in most districts, and almost everyone who is someone carries with him a gun, other than ministers of course. Ministers move around with their gunmen and so are several politicians and crooks who seek police protection if only to demonstrate their importance. Even the capital city of Chandigarh that caters to the states of Punjab and Haryana from what is a Union Territory has gun-wielding cops accompanying most politicians and even relatively insignificant people.

SP stalwart Mulayam Singh carried a gun with him for most part of his life until he got gunmen from the government. That has been part of the feudalistic culture in Uttar Pradesh for long. Successive governments have not been able to make a positive difference to this scenario. Outlaws are part of the politics in UP and Bihar. The scenario was worse under Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam as CMs in these states. Mayawati reined in the outlaws to a large extent when she ruled UP, and they re-surfaced after her exit. If there is a modicum of law and order in Bihar of late, that is thanks to Nitish Kumar, who as CM rounded up criminals on a large scale when he first headed the state government. In other words, he put all of Lalu's outlaws behind the bars. Yet, overall, these states remain as best examples of lawlessness. Bifurcation of erstwhile Bihar and Uttar Pradesh was envisaged to change things for the better with more administrative reach, but the Vikas Dubey is still on the prowl. India cannot be called a civilized nation if no significant improvements are brought about to such situations across states and law and order is implemented in the breach.

# Get over the victimhood

By Patricia Mukhim

You may have lived in a particular society all your life and been part of a community but would still not have understood the underpinnings that drive the society's thought processes; its responses to crises; its reasons for anger; its reactions to provocations. As you grew up, the elders would say that yours was the best society, with an overload of reverence for elders. In fact, we grew up reading aphorisms from Khasi elders that should guide our etiquette and which looked like they came straight out of the nucleus of some benevolent matriarch who can divine the future. But with time you learn that there is a huge difference between an ideal crafted out by your ancestors which could be practiced only if you were born to and lived in a sanitized paradise of sorts, and the blows that your upbringing deals you on a daily basis if you do not belong to that hallowed heritage.

You may be part of a community but divorced from its internal dynamics because of the divisions that shatter the myth of our homogeneity. We are divided by social, economic, educational hierarchies. We may speak the same language but are not communicating because our paths don't cross. There are neat lines drawn between the haves and have-nots; between those pampered by both parents and those nurtured only by a struggling mother.

We love to indulge in reveries of egalitarianism which I, in all my years never experienced but that's a different matter. In a truly egalitarian society why would one or two or five clans own all the land and others remain landless? These inequalities are only sharpening. Post Covid the poverty levels would have skyrocketed unless someone has a very practical and sagacious economic plan to lay out which I am doubtful exists at this point of time.

It is to understand these dichotomies of what constitutes community and society that I picked up the book, "Social and Community Development": An Introduction, by John Eversley. The author rejects the binaries of what constitutes a community and society and the sense of belongingness. In the 19th century, the Nazis and neo-Nazis sold the idea of Blood and Soil which is that ancestry and long term presence in a place are essential to belonging. The other extreme view is that being part of a society or

community is either a personal choice or whether people accept you as part of the community. Eversley believes that characteristics of community and society need to be analysed in terms of what holds them together and who they are keeping out. But what interested me most were his sharp analyses that genocide too is an exercise in community building.

French philosopher Derrida says, no community is possible that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity. Derrida saw community being defensive, aggressive and ultimately self destructive through protecting itself. This idea is further expanded by Roberto Esposito who argues that it is the nature of communities to reject outside bodies. Interestingly, Freud too had argued very forcefully that community based on homogeneity or separating people who are different is

outside of ourselves is responsible for our economic or educational backwardness need to be exposed. Without this narrative they would have no banner to protest and nothing to call out.

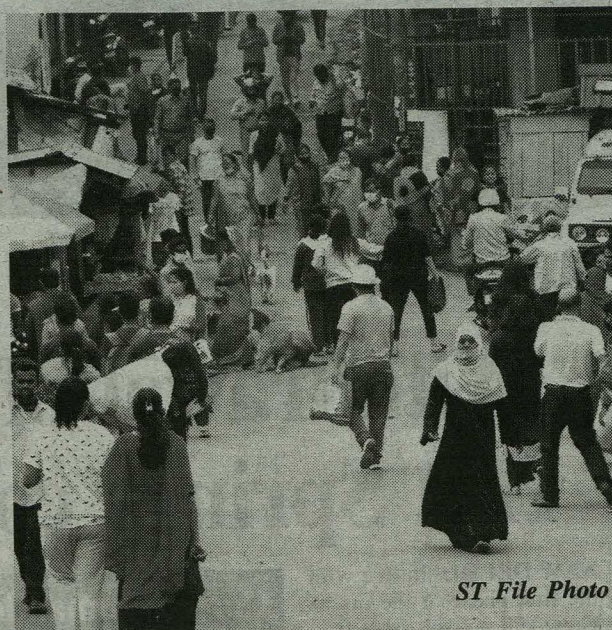
The proclivity to use social media as a tool to shame anyone who has married a non-tribal by downloading pictures and adding sordid comments has become the daily chore of some agent provocateurs. They spread hatred and do that through group Facebook pages that reek of ultra-nationalism. If that love for your community can only be fed by hatred for the other, then it is a very shallow foundation that will crumble and be demolished in a public debate. Unfortunately the authors of such putrid posts live in an echo chamber where they speak among themselves and spew out their toxic narratives through the day. All the complaints to the

reconciliation to take place. Neither victims nor perpetrators can be locked forever into that binary. There are many non-tribals living in Meghalaya today who continue to identify themselves as victims in ways that sabotage their own political agency. There is something about the victim that is disempowering. It is time for victims (and they can be from different communities), to claim their rightful place and demand justice. The very fact that crime takes on a communal colour prevents its solution. A crime is a crime and the state has to deliver and solve all crimes.

Normally studies have shown that ethnic hostilities are not natural but driven by certain political and socio-economic factors. Those looking for political power need to keep this cauldron alive but should that be allowed? If the genesis of the ethnic conflicts is because of the resistance to share scarce resources then the size of the cake has to be bigger. The state and civil societies need to intervene with preventative measures? This would require thinking through on how we form our political communities to begin with. The terms of identity—ethnicity and race in particular—must not be unquestionably assumed. It is not simply an attachment to one's ethnicity or traditions that necessarily lead to conflict but the use to which ethnic identity is put and its mobilization for political purposes.

The problem with the non-tribal community in Meghalaya is that it is a very diverse group with divergent interests and no common objective. They are divided by petty differences and have not been able to throw up a single leader with the credibility and moral integrity to lead without any political ambitions. Till date one has not heard them petitioning even the State Human Rights Commission to look into the atrocities of the recent past and to seek justice. Why do they not want closure? The business community prefers to keep silent and continue paying protection money with some murmuring, after the extortionists have left. Some are out to appease the tribal political leadership here. This is not how one seeks justice. It's time for the non-tribal community here to do some serious introspection. The moral superiority of victimhood has its shelf life.

(The views expressed by the author are personal and do not reflect the views of this newspaper. Email [patricia.mukhim@gmail.com](mailto:patricia.mukhim@gmail.com))



ST File Photo

both impossible and undesirable. Various FB victims have not yielded results.

In all these years, it is ironic that no one has attempted to create the space for honest conversations, considering we have experienced ethno-political conflict for over forty years. People whose parents have borne the brunt of the times still carry the hurt and pain. But there are two problems in trying to bring closure to this psychic pain of victims traumatized by political violence. Now, many young people whose parents left with sad memories have assumed the status of victims and have taken on an identity of their own. The problem is that such identities are susceptible to politicization and abuse. The victims need to be identified and acknowledged as victims. They have to be empowered, for justice and

protect and safeguard the lives of citizens of the state. Yours etc., L.Bala, Shillong-3

### A second debate

Editor, It was only a year back that children were jolted on result day, especially in South Garo Hills. It is rather unfortunate that the workshop on the curriculum and evaluating of text books organised by DERT, Meghalaya as directed by the National Framework Curriculum, Delhi was never respected. Difficult topics were made qualitative and the latest NCERT books on Theory and Lab were prescribed. That was 2005. We succumbed to private publishers, and who approved these books was never known. Whatever be the case our children suffer especially the ones of poor parents who cannot afford to pay tuition fees of Rs 2000 per science subject per month. When I read the 2020

Physics New course Question paper of Class XII, I was aghast and wrote to the Chairman MBOSE Tura, and the Director MBOSE Shillong. But it appears I was only a fault finder.

The fact of the matter is that at long last MBOSE had to call it a day to the Mehta Brothers. Physics 2019 class XII session saw the abrupt jerky introduction of CBSE texts with NCERT curriculum. By what flight of fancy have we sidelined NCERT text books, I fail to understand. Let me tell readers that frequent change of curriculum with private publishers invading each time, had made school bags too heavy to carry. Syllabi from M.Sc pushed to B.Sc then Class XI and XII to IX and X where our children see stars, compounded with no practical work nor activities. Instead we hear our children reading poems. Alas! The NCERT text books proved too difficult to digest. One city school, on its own uses, "Pradeep Fundamental Physics" a bazaar note.

Worse is that the paper setter of Physics new course 2020 set all the 31 questions from that book. None of the questions pertain to the CBSE, ICSE, NCERT, IIT, Boards of W.B, Karnataka, Kerala etc. Objectives are wrong. There is discrepancy of markings and funny circuit analysis with diodes. Students are suffering miserably.

But students should be cheerful. They still have 2 months to compete in NEET and JEE to fix their careers. Making use of lockdown I have collected about 200 problems. Some solved. I shall try to reach them to schools all over the state.

Yours etc., Wandell Passah, Member, 2005 workshop (DERT), National Curriculum Framework Delhi.

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

# Business friendly, environment unfriendly

By Lekha Rattanani

On March 23, as the country faced a complete lockdown that left millions of migrant workers stranded without food and shelter, India's environment ministry put out a draft proposal to amend the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), with a 60-day deadline that has now been extended to August 11 for public comments. The Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2020, seeks to replace the EIA notification of 2006 for all future projects.

The EIA is the backbone of all environmental clearances and sets out a process that assesses the potential environmental impact of a proposed project and decides whether it may or may not proceed or need modification. It has been described by the ministry as a planning tool to integrate environmental concerns into the developmental process from the initial stage. As such, it is supposed to work as a strong and independent gatekeeper of the environment, but in the process the EIA has also acquired the reputation of being a process that delays projects. The underlying principle at work here is preventing irreparable harm that can be caused to sensitive eco systems by unrestrained business activity that uses technology to root out bionetworks that have taken several human lifetimes to evolve and become a part of our wealth of natural resources. The EIA process works thus: following the environmental assessment by an Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), a preliminary report is prepared, on the basis of which the public consultation process is put in place. At this stage, objections to the project, especially from those affected by it, are heard. After a further and final appraisal by the EAC, the project is sent to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, which is the regulatory authority.

All of this brings comfort to those who seek to protect the environment and demand strict enforcement of India's green laws but the entire process is seen as anti-business and a hindrance for faster growth. There have always been strong lobbies against the process of environmental clearance for projects and the changes now being suggested add to fears that this government has found a way to please business at the cost of India's green wealth. This is not to argue that the EIA is always effective in protecting the environment but as a framework, it has stood strong in terms of its intention and its processes.

Consider that a compendium of gazette notifications, office memoranda under EIA notification, 2006, produced by the government runs into over 600 pages. This is a Hindi-English document, and even if you remove any supplicates, the compilation is long and tells us a lot about how the EIA has been changed, cut, corrected, explained and even twisted. The latest of which came on April 15, when an amendment was introduced to ramp up availability and production of bulk drugs within a short span of time in the light of the pandemic. Further, in March 2017, the environment

ministry issued notification, providing a six-month window to get an environmental clearance "as a one-time opportunity" to units which had not obtained prior environmental clearances as was required. This was like an EIA amnesty scheme! The idea, the government announced, "is to take away the economic benefit (if any) derived by the company due to violation and pay for the remediation of damage caused due to violation." It is as if damage to the environment can be paid off and sorted with a fine.

With this backdrop, the worry is that the proposed new version of the EIA under the guise of "streamlining" the process, seeks to clear the way for quite a different kind of unilateral goal – which is "ease of doing business". While ease of doing business is a desirable goal, achieving this and degrading the environment in the process doesn't say much either about the business or about the cost to the nation. Further, this comes at a time when the minister of industry and the minister of environment are one and the same, a clear conflict of interest that strikes at the very root of a framework that for years has been used to fight for the protection of the environment. The new EIA is the work of a government in a hurry to show that it is business friendly.

Take the example under the exemptions from public hearings as stipulated under the EIA norms. The list of exemptions from this process is far longer in the 2020 draft, covering all projects falling under items a dozen of the schedules located within Notified Industrial Estates. What are these schedules? They cover: secondary metallurgical industry, chlor-alkali industry or production of halogens, soda ash, chemical fertilisers and stand alone ammonia plants, manufacturing of acids, pesticides including insecticides, herbicides, weedicides, pest control, etc., and their specific intermediates (excluding formulations), man made fibres manufacturing, petroleum products and petrochemical based processing, synthetic organic chemicals, paints, varnishes, pigments, intermediates, common biomedical waste treatment facilities, common effluent treatment plants. The essence is of easing what is seen as a hurdle in getting the required environmental clearances.

On a more important note, the changes indicate that the BJP at the Centre is unmindful of the concerned voices building into a huge lobby on issues regarding the environment. Young audiences across the country are fired by concerns on the environment and health. In Maharashtra, State minister Aditya Thackeray (son of the Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray) is seen as a young politician tuned into these concerns. It is critical changes in consumption patterns, in healthful choices and in the way more people are conscious about the ingredients that go into products that companies can see the coming change. The BJP cannot. Its blind eye may come at a huge cost to India and its vast, irreplaceable treasure trove of natural resources.

(Lekha Rattanani is the Managing Editor of The Billion Press) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: [editor@thebillionpress.org](mailto:editor@thebillionpress.org))

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Curb on free speech?

Editor, I am deeply pained to learn that an FIR has been lodged by Lawsohtun Dorbar against Patricia Mukhim for her Facebook post on the recent assault of some youths in that area. The fact that such an FIR was lodged simply because Ms Mukhim posed a legitimate question to the Dorbar is disheartening for the freedom of expression in our state. It is also disturbing to note that some NGOs have lent support to the Dorbar's action on the grounds that Ms Mukhim's post would bring about communal tension in the state. Their stand is ironic considering the fact that it is the NGOs who have been trying to create communal unrest and malign other communities by spreading an unfounded fear of retaliatory violence against tribal people in other states of the country. If pressed, the NGOs would be unable to cite a single case of violence against our state's

tribals outside Meghalaya post 1979 that occurred as retaliation for the violence faced by non-tribals, which proves that their apprehension is baseless. Over the decades, we have seen that despite several brutal attacks on non-tribals in Meghalaya, our state's tribals have remained safe and secure in all parts of the country. This attitude displayed by people nationwide is something we should applaud and emulate here, instead of trying to malign them without cause.

Yours etc., N K Kehar, Shillong-3

#### Stop social gatherings

Editor, The recent spike of Covid19 in our state despite the hard work that the government is putting in to contain the spread of the virus, is of great concern for everyone. It looks like the spike will continue. The Government has from time to time, put in place protocols for the general public to

follow so as to contain the spread. As we have seen in the recent past, the spread was mainly due to people violating these protocols and in gatherings such as weddings, funerals and religious activities etc. Fortunately in our state, the churches have been able to take the opportunity of providing online services so as to bring the message of hope and provide solace and spiritual support to their members. Unfortunately, in doing so the churches have violated the protocol where gathering of more than four people is prohibited. I have watched many of these online church services and I can see large groups of people attending the service. This is very dangerous and will put the lives of many people at risk if anyone in the group is asymptomatic as was seen in many parts of the world where the spike increased from a small gathering. May I therefore request the churches to abide by the protocol and for the authorities to take notice of such violations so as to

"Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones."

--- Lord Chesterfield

## The Shillong Times

Vol.No: LXII No.330 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 11, 2020

### Another gangster eliminated

VIKAS Dubey the notorious gangster who caused the massacre of eight policemen in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, last week was killed in an encounter on Friday, according to police officials accompanying him on the journey from Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh to Kanpur. Dubey was killed at a place which was an hour away from Kanpur. The narrative according to the UP, Special Task Force (STF) that was escorting Dubey is that the car in which he was travelling flipped after taking a sudden turn to avoid a herd of cattle and turned turtle. The policemen and Dubey were injured but the latter managed to get out of the vehicle, snatched a gun from an injured policeman and tried to escape. The police team caught up with him and tried to get him to surrender, but he refused and started firing. The police had to fire back in self-defence. The police account however appears to be full of holes.

Dubey limps because he had a rod fitted on one foot after an injury. The question of him running for his life does not arise. As observed by Dr NC Asthana retired IPS officer who countered that the police story of Dubey running out of an overturned vehicle, grabbing a gun and trying to escape while firing at the police with his mask and also dying with the mask still on, was implausible. Different media teams that visited the venue of the alleged encounter killing also found the police story to be inaccurate. And this has a background. Dubey's associates were also killed after they allegedly tried to escape from custody.

Apparently, Vikas Dubey had wanted to surrender hence he announced his name to the temple guards before he entered the Mahakal temple in Ujjain. Dubey had traversed several states unhindered after the massacre of policemen at Kanpur but had probably reached the end of the road after the Yogi Adityanath government razed his house to the ground. He has about 60 criminal cases against him which included murder. He is known to keep company with all shades of politicians, bureaucrats and the police across several states including UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. If due legal procedures has been followed Dubey should have been arrested by following all the norms of safety and sealing all escape routes. He should have been brought to trial and made an example of how the law finally caught up with a dreaded criminal. Most importantly he would have been compelled to name all his accomplices among the politicians, bureaucrats and police. The alleged encounter killing puts paid to all that. This exposes the complete breakdown of law and order in states like UP, Bihar etc., where every government has its secrets to hide and its own set of criminals that it patronises.

# Why India failed to flatten the curve

By Shilajit Kar Bhowmick

The gladiatorial battle against Corona is yet to be over and the long wait for human civilisation's ultimate victory is now exhausting most of us. There is no alternative to inoculation and that is cliché. Nevertheless, India could've overcome the pandemic if the crisis was dealt with pragmatism and preparedness. Definitely, the lockdown is welcome. It is also a fact that the people were finding it difficult to be cocooned and confined. There are students who are familiar with stepping out of their residences for schools, colleges and universities. There are also professionals of multifarious hues who need to step out for earning a livelihood. But should we wish to live happily and healthily, sacrifices have to be made as per the exigencies of the situation. Again on a lighter note, everybody should not be expected to do a Greta Garbo; the Hollywood diva who retired into seclusion at the peak of her career and isolated herself from public view for more than 50 years. However, the lockdown shouldn't have been enforced overnight with sheer impetuosity.

This writer took up the issue with some administrators who enlightened him with their insightful experiences. They feel Modi is always encircled by grovelling loyalists who lack the hardihood to gainsay him. Instead, they parrot his policies and principles, even if it bodes ill for the welfare of the nation. In extraordinary situations such as this, consultations and discussions within the cabinet and with bureaucrats should be given paramount importance. And space should be allotted to contrary opinions as well. The Labour Ministry has a department which is assigned to deal with the migrant labourers ever since the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act came into effect in 1979. But the Department is yet to be visible and voluble during this crisis.

Certainly, Modi is good at implementing decisions which reflects his determination to get things done. But prior to implementation, the decision should've been given several rounds of

thought especially when it shall affect the lives of millions of people.

He should have taken a month's preparation before the first phase of lockdown was enforced at the end of March. The migrant labourers should have been sent back to their respective places. Because as soon as they started moving, the virus registered an unprecedented growth. Take the example of Tripura. Till April 5, the state was revealing under an illusion that it has succeeded in blocking the passage of Corona. But as soon as labourers and students from other states; who are originally inhabitants of this state started pouring in, Tripura woke up from its gleeful reverie. The state emerged out of the illusion that it is impregnable for the pandemic.

On the other hand, the Centre should have suspended domestic and international flights. Owing to the domestic ones, infected passengers started pouring in from one state to the other. And the international flights brought scores of infected patients from abroad.

According to some doctors, the government should have taken preparatory steps and subsequently enforced the lockdown when the pandemic began to spread in Kerala at the end of January. And it goes without saying that the lockdown was not a success as suggested by the rising graph of infections. It would be otherwise if the lockdown was enforced much earlier. This is true of Vietnam, Thailand, Bhutan and Kerala. Kerala Health Minister K K Shailaja was on the alert as early as January 18. The state was ready with tests, contact tracing, isolation and support much before many European countries. But the Modi government took Corona on a serious note when scary events from Italy and Spain became the talk of the globe. Apart from thermal screening of visitors from China, inconsequential steps were taken.

Besides, on April 24, Vinod Paul, member, NITI Aayog and chairperson of the national task force constituted to advise the Modi government on Corona, presented a

mathematical model at a press briefing where he claimed in all his confidence that there would be no cases linked with the virus in India from May 16. But soon we realised that we were building castles in the air. Clearly, the government shouldn't have taken decisions by sitting in an ivory tower. On the other hand, the decision to unlock was equally absurd because according to scientific advice, you can unlock only when there is sustained decrease in the daily number of fresh cases.

The doctors also said that the government was not taking any concrete steps to resolve the migrant labourers' conundrum. They suffered without money and job for two months. Ultimately, they were left to their fate and a majority of them were by now infected. They went out of urban red zones of the country and carried the infection into green rural India.

On the social perspective, the lockdown wasn't able to be enforced on much of the population. To be precise, we have people living in crowded crawls, slums and distant villages. We also have people who were allowed to travel for essential services and people allowed to move around for seasonal harvest. This phenomenon is naturally antagonistic to social distancing. In such situations, preventing the hoi polloi from mingling is a tall order.

On the other hand, there is a huge section of irresponsible people who showed complete disdain for the lockdown and social-distancing norms. Let's take the example of Gollala Mamidada, a village in Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district. There was a birthday party, a cricket match, a wedding and an engagement party with all fanfare. As a result, over 208 cases have been reported in the aforesaid village by June 18.

The Kerala model should've been adopted to tackle Corona because the methods of the state government are a testimony to its pragmatism. To be precise, it started preparing in January itself. It is interesting to note that on January 18, WHO declared that a potential virus is there in Wuhan, China. At that

point of time, it did not declare the virus as a pandemic. But when Kerala's Health Department heard about the novel virus as a new member from the SARS family, the Minister and her officials started giving the matter serious thought.

Kerala also did the best of contact tracing. The Modi government's contact tracing strategy is devised through a smart-phone app in a country where a majority of the population is yet to access a smart-phone.

As expected, the virus came to Kerala. On January 30, the state's first positive case was reported, and in the first week of February, two other cases were reported. But when the samples were tested, all the three infected persons were in the hospital's isolation wards. And thus, no contact and no transmission occurred. At the end of February, people from abroad started coming to Kerala. The surveillance team at the state's airport was solidly alert and they were examining all the returnees.

During the March-April lockdown, fortune smiled on Kerala's efforts. This proves that Modi should have taken a leaf out of the state's book.

But instead he took a lot of vacuous decisions. The lockdown was lifted, air travel was restarted and surface travel was also restarted. People from other parts of the country and the world as well started pouring in and the phenomenon contributed to the rise in cases.

Besides, Modi chose to opt for some PR activities by addressing the nation and asking us to clap for frontline workers or to light candles to dispel the darkness caused by the pandemic. He also claimed to have done this for the sake of morale boosting. But he would've done a far better job if he scaled up testing facilities at the most opportune moment. We had also Whatsapp forwards which propagated the superstition that lighting the candles at a particular hour could help kill the virus. Are we actually living in the 21st century? Quo Vadis; Modern India?

(The writer can be contacted at shilajitkarbhowmik100@gmail.com)

## UP 'encounter' Damn the rule of law

By Insaf

### ROUND THE STATES

Same old story of "an encounter"! Gangster Vikas Dubey, history-sheeter, prime accused in killing of 8 cops in Kanpur and carrying a reward of Rs 5 lakhs on his head, was shot dead on early Friday morning, after he is said to have tried to "escape from police custody". A familiar script: Arrested in Ujjain, MP on Thursday last, Dubey was being brought back by UP's Special Task Force (STF) and Kanpur police when around 7.00 am the vehicle he was travelling overturned, he took advantage, attempted to flee with a cop's service pistol, police asked him to surrender, he refused and fired at police party, the police opened retaliatory firing, he got injured, was taken to a hospital, where he died. Khaalas (finished), as a Bollywood hero would say. But it's not 'The End'. Nagging suspense lingers. Media cars following the police convoy were restricted just before the 'encounter'; a day before a lawyer filed a petition in Supreme Court seeking security for Dubey saying he may be killed in an 'encounter', like his four other accomplices were! It is said, in the past two decades Dubey had backing of various political parties. Questions that beg answers are: Is this Yogi Adityanath's easy way of cracking down on gangsters or is it response to brutal killing of men in khaki or does it confirm a 'cover up' to shield 'politicians' with whom he had collaborated or those who protected him or is it simply UP's encounter raj? There's a clamour for a probe—but to what end. Extra judicial killings or custodial deaths make only headlines.

### Kerala's Smuggling Network

The gold smuggling scandal in God's own country has put the LDF government on the wrong foot. The Opposition in Kerala is demanding Chief Minister Vijayan resigns as his office 'has links to the racket'—30 kg of smuggled gold seized from a diplomatic cargo addressed to UAE Consulate-General Office, Thiruvananthapuram. The removal of Vijayan's Principal Secretary Sivasankar, found in close network of key suspect Swapna Suresh in the racket is not enough to 'exonerate the CMO,' is Congress' clamour. The BJP warns Centre has taken 'serious note' and 'initiated steps to identify the culprits'. But Vijayan has upstaged them. He promptly wrote to PM Modi demanding an 'effective, coordinated' probe by all 'Central agencies' and should cover 'all aspects from source to end of utilisation. Every link of this crime should be unravelled so that such incidents do not occur.' On Thursday last, the Union Home Ministry transferred the case to National Investigation Agency (NIA), citing "serious implications for national security". Stretching it a bit too far, as smuggling of yellow metal from the Middle East is no secret?

### Bihar's Forgotten Children

Bihar's Nitish Kumar government should be embarrassed pink. A report in a national daily on children of Musahari tola in Badbilla village being starved and pushed to rag-picking following closing of the school, serving these meals, reveals the administration's insensitivity. It has been forced to act and issued a state-wide order instructing ration and money through Direct Benefit Transfer be provided to school children for 80 working days, May-July. With over 115 lakh children availing the mid-

day meal scheme, the task is gigantic. The big question is can it deliver? More so as Patna High Court has directed no child is "pushed into or indulges in any activity of rag picking or beggary, more so on the account of lack of food", and appointed amicus curiae in the case. Stating it's a "serious issue of human rights violation", the NHRC has issued notices to Union HRD Ministry and State Chief Secretary to respond within 4 weeks. For starters, parents are to be called to the schools, handed over 8 kg of rice and money sent directly to kids' accounts. Government realises its implementation is not going to be easy so instead it is considering "opening anganwadi centres, or the schools for limited purpose of providing food to the children". How soon?

### Maharashtra's Ray of Hope?

Is Maharashtra, the country's financial capital, raising hope of steady recovery? Its revenue is said to have got a leg-up in June with Rs 19,200 crore as against Rs 10,000 crore in May and Rs 11,500 crore in April. The easing of lockdown, say officials indicates "green shoots" have started to emerge in the economy. With GST collection being Rs 10,400 crore or 54%, businesses are picking up. Tax payments have helped too. And with re-opening of the hospitality sector, i.e. hotels and guest houses with 33% occupancy since Wednesday last, GST collections are expected to go up this month. At same time, it's putting SOPs in place for eateries/restaurants, bed and breakfast outlets and tourism facilities, to resume operations soon. Additionally, the rise in excise duty collections, are expected to cross Rs 1,000 crore this month, following its systematic opening of wine and beer shops since May. However, in the worst-hit State with COVID-19 cases going up to 2.24 lakh-odd, the glimmer of hope gets blurred with its burden of debt—so far it has had to borrow Rs 26,000 crore as its expenditure is double i.e. Rs 52,000 crore! Perhaps adding prudence to the list would additionally help?

### Gujarat Caught On Wrong Foot

Gujarat government's action against migrant workers boomerangs. Its shoddy handling of assisting them to return home invited a hard rap from its High Court. On Tuesday last, the court granted bail to 15 migrant workers, who were arrested on charges of attempt to murder and dacoity on May 17, as they had clashed with the Shapar-Veraval police following delay in their returning to their native place. The administration contested the bail application on grounds that 'private vehicles were damaged, police personnel were threatened and some had instigated others to kill personnel at the spot...' But the court put the onus on the administration saying the chaotic situation could have been avoided had there been proper management. Instead it said there was "utter lack of coordination between police and Nodal Officers, who were selected by the Government to provide support in movement facilitation..." The judge also chose to draw the government's attention to Supreme Court's observation asking States to consider withdrawal of prosecution or complaints under section 51 of the DMA and other related offences lodged against labourers and to be 'humane'. Other States would do well to take a cue and avoid going the Gujarat way. INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

### MeECL in a mess

Editor,  
Is MeECL going the MeSEB way? While the later is died an unnatural death due to mismanagement, the former is facing heavy financial crunch. The MeECL is an old wine in a new bottle. The MeECL was created by turning MeSEB into a corporation so that it would provide better services to the customers. But it has completely failed in its endeavour. There is not a single day when power is not snapped 7 to 8 times. If counted in a year, at least more than one month goes in load shedding sometimes on the plea of there being no water in the Umiam Reservoir and sometimes because of maintenance work. The whole year goes in maintenance procedures. The State Government is also cash starved and is unable to tide over this crisis. How long will the MeECL survive on loans only? If the revenue collection is less than the expenditure for power generation and staff salaries, the management should think of ways and means to detect the lacunae.

It is high time that Government takes a serious view of the overall situation and brings about radical

change in the entire proceedings of the Energy Corporation.

Yours etc.,  
S L Singhania,  
Via email

### Mending Indo-Nepal alliance

Editor,  
It is heartening to learn that both the armies of India and China at the border in Ladakh have withdrawn completely. At the same time, India has reaffirmed its stand that Line of Actual Control (LAC) must be strictly respected and neither side should take any unilateral action to alter it. Reciprocating to Indian appeals, China also echoed similar sentiments. But another thorn in India's flesh is the border issue with Nepal which is annoying India. It may be reminded that Nepal had recently altered its map thereby giving India a heartburn.

Faced with nemesis of a split in Nepal's ruling communist party, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has a harrowing time because of his own agenda where he worked hand in glove with China on the border issue with India. Over the years, Nepal had been spoon-fed by India and it grew rapidly and stood on its feet to bite

the hands that fed it as it found a new neighbour to seek help from. India had been a true friend of Nepal all these years and Nepal's sudden distancing could be either due to familiarity that may have bred contempt or because of its new found love for China. Either ways, it has distanced itself from India.

Another disheartening report is that Nepal on Thursday stopped the transmission of all Indian private news channels except Doordarshan, accusing them of airing reports hurting the country's national sentiment. However, the Nepal government did not officially announce the halting of telecast of Indian news channels. Nevertheless with each passing day the relationship between Indian and Nepal is worsening.

Notwithstanding Nepal's revolting stand and the hatred it propagated against India across Nepal, there is a chance that it all will come to an end like a storm in a tea cup. The anti-India feelings were roused and propagated mainly by its Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli himself as he is a communist. As birds of a feather flock together, communists will always remain comrades but Oli has to pay for his misdeeds of alienating India from the

Nepali hearts but the majority of Nepalis still love India and their hearts are with India. It may be pertinent to note that Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world with the constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. So, Nepal is supposed to be more inclined to India than China, and in that sense, Nepal and China are indeed incongruous and they cannot remain friendly perennially. One day Nepal will have to return to its natural friend and find solace there in a give and take relationship. In short, friendship between China and Nepal is like a borrowed garment which will never fit. The Oli government and some of his party leaders have done much anti-India propaganda and it is high time such government resigned on its own and seeks a fresh mandate from of the people.

Yours etc.,  
TK Nandanam,  
Via email

### Nepal acts irresponsibly

Editor,  
Nepal stopped the transmission of all Indian private news channels and accused them of airing reports hurting the country's national sentiment. This is not a good decision and a matter of grave concern for India. Nepal continues to take actions against India by

violating the bilateral ties. Without initiating any dialogue with India, Nepal acts as an irresponsible neighbour. The Nepal government has also been facing internal conflicts for those resolutions related to India. The need of the hour is for Nepal to leave its narrow ambitions, and restart a healthy relationship with India and establish lasting peace and harmony.

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

### Whither the ordinary train passenger

Editor,  
Profit-pursuing private players are not expected to have a charitable view towards the society. They are not concerned about the welfare of the general population and society. Their single mission is to maximise their profit by hook or by crook. So the private owners of trains, who are scheduled to get identified by 2023, would naturally come up with prohibitive fare structures with glittering amenities which can be accessed by the elite and highly privileged only. However class barriers exist in every sphere of unequal Indian life be it hospitals, schools, higher educational institutions, residential

apartments, hotels, match tickets and what have you. So the same "tradition" of "exclusivity" would naturally enter the domain of Railways too!

But the least that Government should do is not reduce or discard the already existing trains or routes! Let the elite enjoy their day in luxurious trains with their owners laughing all the way to the bank, but that should not come at the expense of the poor and middle class Indians (who form the overwhelming majority among train passengers) as Railways is often their only lifeline due to its financial affordability and/or lack of alternatives. So care must be taken that the ordinary Indians in any route are not compelled to avail the obviously exorbitant privately-run trains or discard railway travel altogether in the eventuality of reduction of existing trains/routes.

Government of a supposedly welfare state should always remember that providing service at affordable rates to the weaker section of the population is its urgent priority and that should not be dispensed with at any cost.

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email



# Exploring oldest art form

Here is a first-hand account by **Nitin Waghela** about the traditional Dokra art of West Bengal and how one can train with the artistes who are facing the challenge of machine-made products

I looked on excitedly as Mangal Karmakar firmly but cautiously hammered away at the mould. As the covering fell away, the figurine of a horse emerged from within. Maybe it will never find a place among the show windows of a crafts emporium but to me it was worth its weight in gold — my first attempt at making a 'dokra' artefact.

On paper, the process seemed simple enough. But in practice, it was exactly the opposite as I found out during my visit to Bikna, a small village in Bankura district of West Bengal, which specialises in the making of Dokra (or Dhokra). It is said to be one of the world's oldest forms of metal casting.

Practised at many places in India, especially the tribal belt of central India, and appreciated for its intrinsic beauty, dokra, like many other traditional art forms, is fighting a losing battle against machine-made goods.

It was during a discussion with Sudhir Karmakar, an artisan from the eponymous district headquarters, which inspired me to try my hand at the art. "I started learning this skill as a 10-year-old urged by my father," he said. In the beginning, he used to make cow bells. But as the demand for these bells declined, he began making figurines, including that of gods and animals.

Today, a two-time state level award winner, he also trains young children so that the art form does not die.

I contacted Bikna's Dokra Hastajata Kutir Silpa Kalyan Samity, an artists' cooperative, to know more about the art. According to some of them, the origin of Dokra art in Bikna goes back to a group of artists who arrived from



Odisha and settled here. The families have a common surname, Karmakar.

Dokra artiste Mangal Karmakar from Bikna agreed to teach me the art. But he warned, "It takes years to set one's hands and attain perfection."

We began by making a basic structure using mud, dried it in the sun and then applied mustard oil to soften the whole structure. It took me one whole day to accomplish what resembled a horse.

The following night, the structure seemed dry enough to start working

with. Next, we used lac to create design patterns over the mould. After that, using heated wax, we created the appendages, such as ears, nose and tail of the horse. Then we covered the horse with two layers of mud — plain and sea mud — leaving a gap between the two layers to pour molten brass.

It was almost dawn by the time we were done. I helped Mangal shut down the workshop and decided to take some rest.

The following morning, I arrived ear-



ly at the workshop. We spent the first half of the day melting locally bought brass in a furnace. The brass was then poured into the gap left in the mould and gap sealed with mud. This mould was placed in the furnace in a straight position. We waited for a yellowish flame to come out of a hole, the signal to remove the structure in a motion that leaves the horse upside-down.

It was an intricate step. It could either lead to wastage of raw material or a well-crafted finished brass horse. The

entire mould was cooled off with water and then the mud covering chipped away.

The heat from the furnace was difficult to bear. So after a wash and a drink of water, we sat down to polish the brass piece with the help of a machine. Mangal had bought the machine for rupees seven thousand and was proud of it.

As Mangal handed over the brass horse to me, I was delighted to have tried my hand at it.

Now as I sit at home, forced by the lockdown, I look at the Dokra horse for solace. Did you know that Bengal Dokra has also earned the prestigious Geographical Indication tag?

It also makes me worried about the plight of the artisans in this pandemic induced lockdown stage. Already faced with stiff competition from mass produced goods, the industry is under further stress owing to the pandemic related lockdown and other restrictions. (IBNS/TWF)

## Good at numbers game? Then go for these jobs

### MATHS MAGIC

By **Kaustov Kashyap**

Does your mind respond really fast to numbers, equations and logics? If so, then you have been bitten by mathematics bug. And if so, then you are not alone.

There are many, who cannot go to sleep without solving some mathematical puzzles as these present a perfect balance between logic and creative flair.

In today's data driven age, when data processing information analysis and trend examination is a norm across careers, it is natural that people with high level of interest and aptitude for mathematics are an asset.

For long, the applicability of mathematics has been limited to research, academia, engineering, IT, econom-

ics and statistics. With advent of new age careers, the prospects of unconventional and exciting careers for mathematics lovers have increased manifold. Here are a few that you can check out if you are in love with numbers —

#### Financial law

Students today have the option of putting their love for mathematics to law and specialize in Financial Law. Financial lawyers find immense application of their skills in the corporate setup and governance, where they help finding financial frauds and illegal tax evasion activities. Financial lawyers also keep a general intelligence on the happenings in the market and seek to understand and imply the legal and financial aspects to mergers, acquisitions and corporate moves.

#### Market research & business analysis

Market research and business analysis present another set of ca-

reers open to people who love mathematics. While market researchers inspect market conditions to analyze potential revenue, including competition mapping and need estimation, business analysts pack a knack for identifying business needs and determining solutions to a wide range of business problems. With the ever changing dynamics of careers, we believe that great numerical skills are going to come in handy, as complex problem solving gains precedence, as a new age skill to have.

#### Operation research

Operation research deals with the application of advance analytical methods to help make better and cost-effective decisions. It is a sub-field of applied mathematics and finds wide use in inventory management, logistics, supply chain and operation management. An operation researcher can use his/her skills to solve complex and vital problems such as those pertaining to transportation and distribution, network flow, scheduling and assignment and

corporate application of the game theory.

#### Mathematical physics

Mathematics lovers are in for an exciting career in this field, which deals with the application of mathematical logic, techniques and methods to address problems in physics. From innovative product development, to analysis, trend identification and inference deduction from monumental chunks of data, mathematical physicists work across industries, and in academia to address problems in physics. They also find application in military, where they focus on the design and development of equipment, computer aided modelling and lab research in bombs and missiles.

#### Biomathematics & biostatistics

These allied fields of biomathematics and biostatistics form an exciting career option for a person who holds equal zeal towards mathematics and biology. While biomathematics deals

with the application of principals of applied mathematics to biological processes and treatments, biostatistics focuses on the application of statistics to biological experimentation such as those in pharmacy, medicine and genetics.

Biomathematicians and Biostatisticians can work in ecology and ecological forecasting, drug experimentation, genetic mapping and population genetics, experimentation design and research, nutrition, environment and healthcare policy formulation and management.

#### Epidemiology

People gifted with numerical and logical skills also find a great career in epidemiology, which is a discipline concerned with the study and analysis of patterns, causes and effects of health, diseases and epidemics. The discipline forms the base for effective public health policy formulation, prevention action and disease control. Epidemiologists control the study design, collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemi-

nation of results.

#### Psychometrics

This field is concerned with the study of theories and techniques of psychological measurement and thus provides an enthralling career option for a mathematics lover.

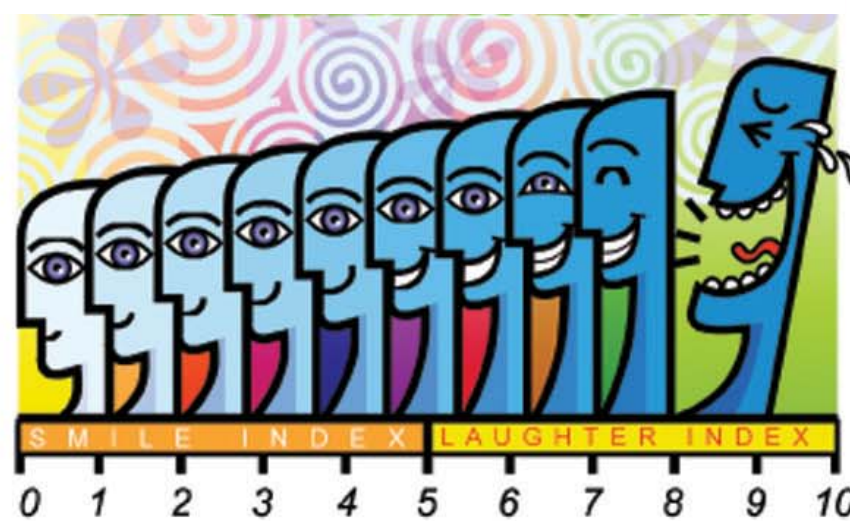
Psychometricians focus on the quantitative analysis, of aptitude levels, personality traits knowledge and skills in a psychological setting. Psychometricians work extensively on test development like GMAT, CAT, SAT, GRE and other standardized competitive examinations. A lot of psychometricians tend to work in human behavior analysis and career development.

Although, conventional careers like actuarial sciences, banking and accountancy, economics and stock broking present significant opportunities for mathematics lover, but most promising and rewarding careers today are the ones with a little sass.

(The author is a career counsellor)

# The Happiness factor

By Dilip Mukerjea



Rate yourself and your organisation on The Happiness Factor chart to the left. If your ratings fall below '0', misery prevails and you don't have joy within you to even offer a smile. If your score is within the Smile Index, you are pleasant, but not necessarily functioning at full throttle in terms of happiness. Once you are joyous within the Laughter Index, there is something right about you and your organisation. Aim for a score of '10' at which point, you are blessed with the capacity to make dreams come true with perfect precision. People who meet you will come away in a state of rhapsodic radiance!

**"Humour, used skillfully, greases the management wheels. It reduces hostility, deflects criticism, relieves tension, improves morale, and helps communicate difficult messages."** - Fabio Sala

Research has discovered that outstanding executives use humour twice as often as average executives. High emotional intelligence is now a requisite for a career boost into top management, especially when coupled with a natural facility with positive or neutral humour. An interesting finding in the surveys conducted revealed that female executives used more humour than their male counterparts. But the quality of humour between men and women differed significantly. Women showed a greater tendency to use humour that expressed caring, warmth, and support; they used significantly less put-down humour than male executives.

The role of business should be to enhance the sum of human happiness.

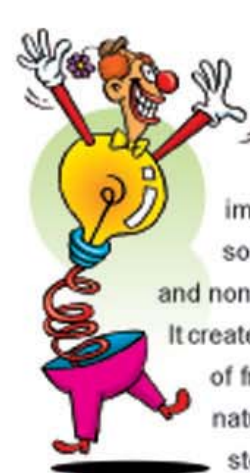


Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. ~ Viktor Frankl

The only thing we can never get enough of is love. The only thing we can never give enough of is love. -- Henry Miller (1891-1980), novelist

Laughter is the food of the soul. We can't live without it. If we don't laugh, we disintegrate, and then we die ... slowly pine away.

Everything we do in life is relative to laughter. To laugh is to love, to laugh is to understand, to laugh is to forgive; we must laugh. The laughter of children is beautiful, and a smile can be devastating. Let me tell you the meaning of a smile.



It costs nothing, it creates much, it enriches those who receive, without impoverishing those who give; it happens in a flash, and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. There are none too rich that can get along without it and none so poor but are richer for its benefits.

It creates happiness in the home, fosters goodwill in a business, and is the countersign of friends. It is rest to the weary, daylight to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and nature's best antidote for trouble, and yet it cannot be begged, bought, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no earthly good to anyone, until it is given away.

So if in the course of the day, your friends may be too tired to give you a smile, why

don't you give them one of yours, for nobody needs a smile more than those who have none left to give.

Smile!

(Irish Folk Wisdom)

L.I.F.E. = Leadership, Innovation, Fellowship, Entrepreneurship

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(The author is L.I.F.E. coach, author, consultant, presenter and learning guide)

Illustration & design by Dilip Mukerjea

# Climate-resilient agriculture in focus

By US Saikia

Weather and climate, though may seem similar, are used in different perspectives.

The word weather is used to define instantaneous condition of the atmosphere. Weather changes frequently. But climate is used to define long-term average of weather conditions in any given location over a long period of time, say 31 years.

Climate is more or less stable during a particular period of time but tends to change periodically. Climate is measured by assessing the patterns of variation in temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, wind, precipitation, atmospheric particle count and other meteorological variables.

In recent times, the most discussed hot topic in all levels of society worldwide is climate change. Though climate change is a natural phenomenon but what is bothering the world is the rapid global climate change, which is posing severe challenges to the living world, threatening their very existence.

The cause of recent phase of rapid climate change is attributed to warming of the global atmosphere, which is termed as global warming. But the recent phase of global warming is the creation of manmade activities.

The impact of climate change is already felt by all of us in one or other form. At the local level, we have already noticed changes in rainfall pattern and distribution, etc. Climate change impacts on agriculture are being witnessed all over the world, but countries like India are more vulnerable in view of the huge population dependent on agriculture, excessive pressure on natural resources and poor coping mechanisms.

The warming trend in India over the past 100 years has indicated an increase of 0.6°C in air temperature. Significant negative impacts have been projected with medium-term climate change (2010-2039).

There are already evidences of negative impacts on yield of wheat, rice, apple etc. in several parts of India due to increased temperature, water stress and reduction in number of rainy days. In the hills of the NE India, the situation may be further worse, as here the agriculture is mostly rain-fed, complex-diverse-resource poor in nature.

Though there are technologies, general farmers do not have enough purchasing power to use them in their condition or technologies inaccessible easily. Besides, damages caused by frequently appearing floods, droughts, cyclones, hailstorms etc. are also taking a huge toll.

With limited option to adapt with, a recent scientific study has revealed that, out of ten most climate vulner-



able districts of NE India, nine are hill districts. The weather is also getting favourable for appearance of many crop and livestock pests and diseases in epidemic form and many outbreaks are being reported from different parts of the North East every year. All of these are making life of human and livestock miserable every passing day and agriculture is increasingly becoming a less dependable and profitable venture.

**Though there are technologies, general farmers do not have enough purchasing power to use them in their condition**

Under such scenarios, brining resilience to agricultural production system is, therefore, critical for ensuring food and nutritional security for all, particularly the resource poor small and marginal farmers who would be affected most. In the absence of planned adaptation, the consequences of long-term climate change could be severe on the livelihood security of the poor people.

Now, how to address the issue of brining resilience into our agricultural production systems?

Resilience is the ability of a system to bounce back to the original condition once the stress or pressure is withdrawn. Planned adaptation is essential to increase the resilience of agricultural production system to cli-

mate change. Several improved agricultural practices evolved over time for diverse agro-ecological regions have potential to enhance climate change adaptation, if deployed prudently.

Management practices that increase agricultural production under adverse climatic conditions also tend to support climate change adaptation because they increase resilience and reduce yield variability under variable climate and extreme events. Some practices which help adapt to climate change in agricultural production system are soil organic carbon build up, in-situ soil moisture conservation, residue incorporation to soil instead of burning, water harvesting and recycling for supplemental irrigation, growing drought and flood tolerant varieties, adoption of water saving technologies, among others.

Use of community lands for fodder production during droughts and floods, improved fodder and feed storage methods, feed supplements, micronutrient use to enhance adaptation to heat stress, preventive vaccination, improved shelters for reducing heat and cold stress in livestock, management of fish ponds during drought and flood are some of the key interventions to bring resilience in livestock and fishery sectors.

Institutional interventions also promote collective action and thereby build resilience among communities. Capacity building by extensive participatory demonstrations of location specific agricultural practices helps the farmers gain access to knowledge and provides confidence to cope with adverse weather conditions.

(The author is Principal Scientist ICAR Research Complex, Umiam) (To be concluded next week)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 12, 2020

Moon sextile Venus on your solar return chart which promises to bring very good results. You will have opportunities galore. Your popularity at your work place will reach dizzy heights. Your peers and colleagues would be talking of you. You would be able to perform fully to your potential thus pleasing your superiors. Your brilliant performance at work place could lead to some bonus, increments or equity share coming your way. Your financial growth will be great. You may plan to buy some new property or some luxury vehicle. You could also give an expensive item to your mate. You will be in fine fettle and in a positive frame of mind. You will plan to undertake some fun filled trip with your family to enjoy moments of togetherness. Family functions will keep you busy. Your social network will grow and keep you in center of attraction.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This week highlights friendship, romance and love in your life. You would be successful in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision. You would express your unique individuality, and if this involves changing careers or jobs, a new relationship, or a new hobby. Your domestic life takes on top priority. Making yourself feel comfortable and secure is paramount, and you have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support with family. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position. Your hobbies, moments spent with family, all come into focus.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You would admire and adapt new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find novel solutions to problems now. Your efforts have been establishing strong professional base which brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace. This would help you to get better perspectives to achieve desired goals. It's time to expand your social and professional circle. Avoid being laid back as any gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your ideas and goals are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and overseas connections is indicated during this phase. Those connected with the media, journalism and arts get an opportunity to showcase their talent. Students in fine arts and related fields attain success and good results. This is the right time to share your loving and personal relationships and share thoughts and ideas and spend good time in the association of your loved one. You are ready to make new beginnings and invest in new business and relationships. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings is therapeutic.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Travel, contact and communication are the keywords of this period. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event in family is celebrated. You are full of hope and enthusiasm as you make new beginnings at work and home. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You are appreciative and caring as you give total support to loved ones through a difficult time. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. Short trips and other forms of communication appeal strongly. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation with outcaste and foreign people and this brings financial growth. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Students of Computer Hardware and Engineering achieve better results during this week. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and adopt new strategies in financial matters. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You would be successful in the fields of creativity, writing and entertainment industry or in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision. You would be able to make an impact on important people. Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake redecorating your office. You may especially enjoy working with a cross section of people. Your ideas are higher than usual,

teaching may be part of the picture, as your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections with new associates indicated during this phase. Students in journalism, law, management and related fields attain success and good results.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation of business associates and this brings financial growth. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. You expand your circle of influence and these new associates would prove to be beneficial in the long run. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. Financial investments yield good gains. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This period highlights friendship, romance, love and children. You give a new approach to love, children and creative projects. A new set-up in existing love affair or a new love affair altogether may be formed. Your professional life brings rewards and recognition. You are working hard and inclined towards more detailed work. An exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible in this period. An opportunity to expand business arrives now. Increased connections and experiences come into picture. This is a period of growth as well as some form of blossoming. Your career, reputation and public life are influenced. This is a very fortunate time to arrange get-togethers, parties and fun. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this phase. You would become more particular about your health and diet.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another service-oriented capacity. Your job could become rather tedious or boring, or working conditions may be poor, tiring and frustrating. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs. You find yourself more accountable than ever when it comes to your work and output. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands of others. This is a good time to belong with a friend or a group who shares your own ideas and thoughts. You would attach yourself to unusual, more spiritual, friends. This is an excellent period for starting new regimens to improve your health and well-being, such as regular exercise, more structured and productive use of your time, and so forth.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It would be wiser to face difficult people and situations rather than avoid them as there would be victory and success in professional ventures. Don't take the one you love granted but show your love and appreciation. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and they would be profitable. Your professional skills, wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. You play the role of the elderly in the family and personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally this week. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delay that prevents you from behaving exactly you want. How willing you're prepared to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success this time. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This is a favorable period for people in sports, media and other related fields. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you are coming across as especially cooperative and graceful. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. It's a good time to join organizations and groups and to attend meetings or social events. This would be a right time to go for long term investments and speculations. This phase brings excellent opportunities for those in creative and related fields. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of desires particularly in your personal and domestic life. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence.

## Time to stand up to China

By Tashi Topgyal

As a second-generation Tibetan exile in India, it is unsettling to see how China continues to disrupt India's security around its border while subjecting the world to a standstill with its secrecy and underhandedness that allowed the COVID-19 virus to blow up into a raging pandemic.

As a Tibetan refugee, I am hopeful that the current Prime Minister Modi led government will stand up to China, unlike its predecessors who played into Chinese hand time and again.

While Tibetans in India are forever beholden to Indian people for giving them asylum and a certain level of freedom that was taken away from us in Tibet, it is time for the Indian government to amend for grievous mistakes it made in condoning China's annexation of Tibet in the mid-20th-century in the name of non-alignment policy.

After the formation of the People's Republic of China led by the Communist Party of China, China encroached into Tibet in the name of liberation.

Tibet entrusted much hope in its ancient neighbour India to spread the word about the serious invasion Tibet was facing and to galvanise the world to deter China. Nehru, in his penchant for non-aligned policy and drive to keep India hassle-free on all fronts, downplayed the critical situation of Tibet in the UN forum and successfully dissuaded any nations from coming to Tibet's rescue.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, in his letter to Nehru on November 7, 1950, expressed great concern for the situation in Tibet. He said that according to him, the final action of the Chinese is just short of perfidy. He raised the concerns the new situation of border

with China would raise as a result of the disappearance of Tibet, as we knew it, and the expansion of China almost up to India's gates. In conclusion, he sought to meet Nehru immediately to discuss these crucial issues in person.

Even though China continued its expansionist attitude and aggression leading to the Doklam stand-off in mid-2017, 60 years after the Panchsheel agreement, it was a relief to have the Modi-led Indian government stand its ground this time.



Had Nehru done the same for Tibet, things would be different not only for the Tibetans but India's stability and growth wouldn't have been disrupted so much as China had done over the years.

Tibetan exile, on their part, walked hand in hand with the Indian army by taking part in the Bangladesh Libera-

tion War of 1971, Siachen War from 1984 to 2003, and Kargil War in 1999.

There are many well-meaning Tibet Support Groups in India and all over the world these days but to have the grassroots support translate into political will, it is incumbent on Indian policymakers to see China for what it is and not for what it says it is.

The world is currently experiencing a reawakening of its dynamics with China, necessitated by the raging pandemic. China's underhandedness in its dealing with the pandemic is very telling in how it has been cracking down upon the people of Tibet, East Turkestan, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

With the world at a standstill, reeling under the stress of containing the spread of the virus, China chooses to encroach into Indian territory in Ladakh where it has captured hundreds of miles of territory over the years.

The US lawmakers had passed a bill demanding setting up of embassy in Lhasa in its updated 'Tibet Policy Act'. The Tibetans across the world hailed the bill and appealed to the US lawmakers to extend the recognition to the whole of Tibet, including the three traditional provinces of Tibet.

With forces coming together to hold China responsible for its double-dealing of COVID-19 virus infection, and economic sanctions and crisis unveiling the simmering internal dissent in China, it is both an opportunity for and the responsibility of India to stand for Tibetans and drop One-China policy and recognise Tibet as an independent country.

(The author is a member of the Tibetan community in Shillong)

Photo courtesy: Pixels

*"Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans."*

--- John Lennon

## The Shillong Times

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### COVID's deadly reach

GOVERNMENTS are at their wits' end when it comes to tackling Covid-19, as the infection figures rise by the minute worldwide, within nations and within cities. The more the world tries to shrug off the menace in of the pandemic, the more its lethality, reach and spread. The latest shock on the Indian side is that top film personalities like the Bachchans – Amitabh, Abhishek and Aishwarya Rai – have been hit alongside a child in the star-studded family. It goes to show that even the well-protected are not safe from Covid's reach. In several cases, how people contracted the virus despite the great care and social isolation they practised for themselves and their families remains a mystery. Worldwide, the scenario remains grim. In the worst-hit US, the daily rise in infection is now of the order of 66,000 – taking the total number of the sick to a high of 3.185 million. In other words, the most-developed nation accounts for one fourth of the total 12.5 million infections worldwide. Worse, the US is reporting some 800 Covid-linked deaths a day.

India has seen a more forceful surge in recent days, with the number of total infected crossing the 8.5 lakh figure by Sunday; its rise being at the daily rate of over 28,000 and deaths in the range of about 600 a day. Some comfort is derived from the fact that the recovery rate is steadily improving at around 63 per cent, and recovery figures are outnumbering the active Covid tally. Maharashtra and Delhi remain among the worst-hit, and Tamil Nadu too, while Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh are battling the situation with further strengthening of the lockdown provisions in a new frenzy both from the government and from the pandemic. A vaccine for Covid-19 is still in the realm of hope. India too is trying to develop its own vaccine via labs of major pharma firms, and time is of essence. Hope is that a vaccine might be a reality a year hence. The problem is how to keep the show going thus far, without a total collapse of the global and national economies. Issues persist too. The call from top philanthropist Bill Gates to plan out a distribution pattern based on equity and wider reach rather than market interests, once a vaccine is ready, points to the likely greed on the part of those from developed nations to seek first priority for use. This, in view of the billions they are putting investing to develop an effective vaccine against the pandemic. Rather, this rather is time to care and share.

# Neglected Jaintia Hills has no RSETI

By HH Mohrmen

Farmers they say are the backbone of the state; they not only help feed the people but they also help sustain the economy of the state. Hence a government which seeks to work for the development of the state must take care of its farmers. There are different ways of reaching out to the farmers. One is by way of improving their skills on the activities that they are currently engaged in by providing them the tools and support they need and by providing them the financial support at their time of need. But in this day and age providing them opportunity to improve their skills to help enhance their income is the most urgent support that the farmers need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added another dimension to the already complex problem of the farmers which the government needs to carefully look at. Post the corona pandemic lockdown farmers need to reinvent themselves in many ways. They have been greatly affected by misfortune. Perhaps their major experience is due to the kind of farming system they practice, which is just to sustain them for a year. The lockdown made them realise that they do not have enough savings to see them through a crisis like this. The government not only needs to help them improve their skills in order to enable them to enhance their income, but it also needs to help them diversify their activities.

Perhaps the number of migrant labourers from Meghalaya who returned from the cities are not unskilled labourers who can go back to farming. Although no study has been done but it is safe to assume that most of the returnees from the state are working in hospitality businesses, call centres or in other services sectors in the cities. Post the pandemic crisis the government needs to immediately provide the farmers, the returnees and even the youths who have to drop out of schools or college with some kind of training. And the only alternative that is easily available is to provide them trainings on different trades which will help them start earning their livelihoods.

Unfortunately it is now obvious that the government is not prepared

for this kind of eventuality. There are not enough training centres to help provide the much needed skills for the farmers and the youths of the state. The lackadaisical attitude of the state government has even deprived the farmers of the opportunity to have training centres at their door steps which is funded by the central government.

Farmers in Jaintia Hills were denied of their right to have Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) at their respective districts because of the laid-back approach of both the concerned banks and the government. RSETI as they are commonly known which has been setup at different districts of the country have helped farmers immensely in their respective areas. But the farmers of these two districts have been deprived of this opportunity. Till date farmers from these two districts who wish to get training to improve their skills and enhance their incomes have to travel to either Uman or Myllem to avail such trainings.

It is very unfortunate that each district is entitled to one RSETI so that farmers can avail training in the institutes close to their home, yet the opportunity was denied to the farmers in many districts in Meghalaya. How does RSETI work? Each institute in the district is to be managed by the bank with active cooperation from the Government of India and the state government. It is mandated that one RSETI is to be established in every district and the lead bank or any selected bank in the district is given the responsibility of creating and managing the RSETI in their respective districts.

The Government of India will provide a one-time assistance of up to a maximum of one crore rupees to the bank to meet the construction of building and infrastructure which will include classrooms, workshops, dormitories and other amenities. The financial support also includes administrative cost and the Institute needs to develop and organise 30-40 skill development programs in each financial year.

The main objective of

establishing the RSETI is to provide training to the rural youths and the trainings are demand driven. The trainings are free of cost and the trainees would only have to pay their travel cost to and from the institute. RSETI are therefore dedicated institutions designed to provide skill training and skill upgradation of the rural youths of their respective districts. Durations of the training varies from short term duration of one week to six weeks. Trainings can be on Agriculture and allied activities, product programs, process program, repair work, beauticians, DTP, general skill development for women etc. Trainings can also be organised on other activities which may include construction, hospitality or any other avenues which solely depend on local requirements.

Another important support that the trainees will be able to have, is credit linkage for starting their own entrepreneurial ventures. Since the trainings are provided by the institute managed by the bank, they are also expected to provide credit support to the trainees. Certificates are also issued to the trainees after the completion of training. This is not only a credential or diploma of completing the training but more importantly it is one very vital document to help the trainees to avail loan from the banks. RSETI in different districts would have been of great help to MGNREGS by providing training to rural folks who have been provided sheds to rear animals or other livelihood activities in order to enhance their incomes.

The first RSETI in the state was set up at Uman Ri Bhoi District by the State Bank of India. The second RSETI in Meghalaya is in West Garo hills district. Recently the RSETI set up by Punjab National Bank at Myllem East Khasi Hills has started providing training to farmers in the area. Unfortunately banks assigned to start RSETI in other districts have not taken the task seriously. In West Jaintia Hills the United Bank of India has been assigned the responsibility to set up the RSETI in the district. Regrettably the project has not even taken off till date. The Bank has been delaying

the process and the Government is turning a blind eye to this very important issue. With regards to another RSETI in the region, it is also not clear which bank is tasked with establishing RSETI in East Jaintia Hills district.

It is also very unfortunate that the banks are not willing to provide this little service to the area where they are doing their business. One also wonders what service the banks provide to the area when the CD ratio of banks in the region is within 35 percent compared to the national average which is over 60 percent. Besides, banks do not have to deduct from their profits to set up RSETI because the funds are provided by the central government.

One of the main objectives of setting the RSETI is also to mitigate unemployment problems in the rural areas. In fact the RSETI concept is based on RUDSETI (Rural Development and Self Employment Training Institute), a society which was established jointly by Syndicate Bank, Canara Bank and Sri Manjunatheswara Trust based at Ujire in Karnataka, but unfortunately this opportunity is being denied to the youths of the different districts of Meghalaya.

Another problem the farmers encountered during the pandemic is marketing their produce. When all of a sudden weekly markets that they used to rely on closed down, they had nowhere to go. But there is a saying that every misfortune offers a lesson for new learning. Perhaps the Government too should try to learn from the crisis and take the opportunity to break the market chain which has all along exploited the farmers. The Government needs to come up with new marketing strategies to help the farmers sell their produce at a much better price and these training can be provided at the existing RSETIs.

Setting RSETI in different districts is a missed opportunity but not lost. One hopes that the government will insist that the respective banks should start establishing these institutes which can also be used by different departments and even KVKs.

## ICMR's research in a rush

By T Jacob John and Jagdish Rattanani

There is much to criticise the ICMR for its recent diktat to deliver a vaccine for COVID-19 caused by S A R S - C o v - 2 , b y Independence Day, August 15. The direction is so deeply and obviously flawed that there is no gainsaying that the ICMR has made itself and India lose respect and credibility. That the purpose was political gains rather than technological advancing is obvious from the proposed date itself.

Science is in pursuit of truth and technology for human welfare, with its strict rules of probity and procedures. Science is nourished by evidence; the unbiased gathering of evidence is sacrosanct. Politics on the other hand is in pursuit of a number of other goals, with some universally accepted norms at least in democracies. Politics can use science if the Lakshman-rekha of non-interference is strictly observed. If the line is crossed, scientists must stand their ground and must not buckle, and wise politicians will back off. They will know that eventually that it is in their own interests, and is not to be seen as unprincipled.

Scientific medicine comes in a package of three elements – Public Health, Healthcare and Research – each with its own ethical principles and norms. Medicine believes in and practices science with its demands of ethics and honesty, and can speak truth to power – politicians in democracies respect such sentiments even when they do not gel well with their own agenda, influenced by both personal and political party interests and ideologies.

If we look to our history, from kings and their palace intrigues to the way colonisation looted our wealth and self-respect, and delivered a bureaucracy born to sing the masters' voice, we can begin to see our weaknesses on demands of duty, character and doing what is right by the people. Self-respect is not taken by the powerful but forfeited by people for various reasons. Activating the 1897 British Epidemic Diseases Act when the pandemic struck this time was not exactly a signal of self-respect and self-reliance, but an admission of 'they knew India better than we' attitude. The Act that Bal Gangadhar Tilak opposed then became the prime weapon of democratic India in 2020! At the same time, not everything of British rule was bad; we must know what to keep and where to discard.

The Indian Council of Medical Research is an example of excellent elements of Briain's legacy. In 1911, the British created the Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) to promote medical research that was conducted by research institutions like King Institute in Chennai (Madras) and Haffkine Institute in Mumbai (Bombay). After independence, IRFA was re-named as the Indian Council of Medical Research. In 2007, the Department of Health Research (DHR) was created under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Secretary to the Government in DHR is simultaneously the Director-General of ICMR also. Has that design, combining a Government Department with the Indian Council of Medical Research, been good, bad or indifferent?

When any branch of the Health Ministry needs answers to problems through research, the DHR is there to conduct, or commission, or encourage and fund the required research – intramural or extramural. Research is integral to scientific medicine, raising the bar constantly on Public Health and Healthcare. As the Health Ministry does not have a Department of Public Health, a few functions of Public Health are handled by the existing Departments, of Health Services and Health

Research. Search hard and deep, and we don't see how the executive wings of the Government have used DHR and ICMR to solve problems identified by them and raised the bars constantly. DHR and ICMR on their part had turned a Nelson's eye on the elephant – the lack of a Department of Public Health and its repercussions on the lack of control over innumerable communicable diseases like cholera, typhoid fever, chickenpox and hepatitis A. As a medical expert at the NitiAyog put it, this is like a veritable zoo, to which a new one called COVID-19 is now added.

When the SARS-CoV-2 hit India, the ICMR's National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, another legacy of colonial times, doubled up for diagnosis, diagnostic reagent-preparation and research. And NIV cultured several isolates of the Coronavirus. One of them was supplied to the Bharat Biotech International Limited in Hyderabad, for the purpose of developing an indigenous vaccine against COVID-19.

We can now see that ICMR has two guiding principles/forces, one as a Government Department and Government-funded institution and second, the principles of scientific medicine – ethics being sacrosanct. Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), the physician known as the father of modern-day pathology, once observed that "medicine... is the science of human beings, has the obligation to point out problems and to attempt their theoretical solution; the politician, the practical anthropologist, must find the means for their actual solution." It follows that the two must work in tandem, demarcating territories.

When this doesn't happen, as is the case in the Indian administrative line up, we can see the tension between the Government's demands and scientific discipline. If the Government wants to declare an indigenous vaccine on 15 August, the tension becomes a dilemma – damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Does not the Government have high calibre advisors on science, technology, vaccine trials and regulatory requirements, or did the Government not want to listen? Vaccine research has both science and uncertainties. The approach of Bharat Biotech, not that of the Ministry of Health, is to develop a vaccine candidate out of inactivated (rendered non-infectious) viruses. There is no guarantee that the product will be safe enough for human use or effective enough to protect the vaccinated from the Coronavirus disease. Until safety is proved in Clinical Trial Phase 1 and immune response efficacy in Phase 2, the product is not yet a vaccine, but merely a candidate. If both Phases are certified successful, Phase 3 can be conducted. Until protective efficacy against COVID-19 is proved in Phase 3, there is no vaccine for launching, only the hope of a vaccine, a lot of hard work and financial investment.

Wishes are not horses – patience is required and the Government should not be seen to be interfering in the technical processes, by which everyone gets a bad name – the entire nation, its scientists, the vaccine industry, the Health Ministry and the Government itself – all for some evanescent moment of imagined glory. Of course, it is the right of the government to push. But it is the duty of the scientific community, led in this case by the ICMR, to politely say why the demand is in violation of its own scientific standards and ethical norms.

(Dr T Jacob John is retired Professor of Clinical Virology, CMC Vellore, and past President of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics. Jagdish Rattanani is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR) (Through The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Appointment of CMD, MeECL

Editor,  
A news report in your esteemed captioned, "Deadline to appoint MeECL Chairman" (ST June 17, 2020) as demanded by the MeECL Joint Action Committee is both rational and legitimate. The Joint Action Committee (JAC) comprising the MeECL Engineers Association, Association of Power Engineers, MeECL Accounts Association etc have put forward their demand to the state government to immediately appoint a senior IAS officer, not below the rank of Addl Chief Secy as Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD) in place of the present incumbent who is a very junior MCS officer. The MeECL being one of the important PSUs of Meghalaya carries the responsibility of supplying power which is an essential service to all, irrespective of financial status, besides being an integral commodity for any developmental activity of the state. For such an important PSU a senior officer with experience and a good human resource management experience is imperative at the helm of affairs.

The appointment of a Joint Secretary of the Power Department to such a crucial post gives an impression

that the Government does not take the affairs of the power sector very seriously. The recent news appearing in the print media with respect to the functioning of MeECL is an indication that all is not well. This languid attitude of the government in the affairs of MeECL may lead to the Corporation becoming dysfunctional and ultimately to privatization, which ordinary citizens of the state fear that it will affect the people in the long run.

It may be stated that since the time of the ASEP the post of the Chief Engineer was treated as equivalent with that of the Chief Engineer in Government institutions like PWD etc. Moreover, when the post of Member Technical was created in the old MeSEB (now MeECL), the status was higher than that of the Chief Engineer. After corporatisation of MeSEB (now MeECL) the post of Member Technical was trifurcated into three entities viz. Director (Distribution), Director (Transmission) and Director (Generation). The status of these three Directors is equivalent to that of the Secretary PWD, Government of Meghalaya. The rank of the Joint Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya is lower not only to the Directors but also to that of the Chief Engineers. Therefore, appointing the Joint Secretary as the CMD in charge of MeECL, is like asking the higher rank

officers to work under their subordinates.

Hence the MeECL Joint Action Committee have rightly demanded what the state Government should have done seven months ago.

Yours etc.,  
R L Lyngdoh,  
M V Kynta,  
& M S Kharkongor,  
Via email

#### In gratitude

Editor,  
I decided to travel to my home - Meghalaya on a caprice when my examinations got cancelled. The officers at Helpdesk were very patient at answering my queries pertaining to the Entry Pass. Next, the personnel deployed at Guwahati Airport were alert, helpful and gave clear directions about the Government taxi to Shillong. The driver was in his PPE, courteous and very kind in passing information about the procedures.

Upon reaching the Byrnihat junction, I was surprised to see the stretch of stalls set up by the State Government to control the spread of Covid-19 in the state. The medical team, policemen and the staff were polite and cautious in the entire screening and testing process. The officials at Umiam check point and at Polo Ground also carried out their duties with utmost diligence.

I was quarantined at IIM Shillong Corona Care

Centre for 3 days. I am very thankful to the entire team there, which is working indefatigably to take care of all the returnees to the state. They were at our beck and call for any assistance.

Currently, I am under home quarantine and I am writing this as a token of gratitude to the State Government headed by Mr Conrad Sangma, the medical fraternity, the policemen, the back-end officials disseminating government orders, information and news updates and all the personnel associated with the task of combating the Coronavirus in Meghalaya.

As a young citizen of the state, I implore upon everyone to cooperate with the 'Corona warriors' who not only deserve the taali, thaali and flowery showers but our dedicated efforts in social distancing and mask etiquettes, if not more. Let us contribute individually to triumph over the deadly Wuhan virus. This is our duty as well as our responsibility.

Yours etc.,  
Priyanka Surana  
Shillong-1

#### US withdraws from WHO

Editor,  
It is ironic that the nation with the highest COVID-19 infection cases and death toll has withdrawn from the UN entity dedicated to the health of the world. US president Donald Trump who had been fiercely and

repeatedly criticising the WHO since COVID-19 outbreak recently reduced funding to it. Now he has pulled out of the WHO. Trump has alleged that the WHO has been functioning at the behest of China, the country which he believes is responsible for the spread of the disease all across the world. China promptly defended the WHO with vehement criticism of the White House move.

The move demonstrates the USA's unilateralism in diplomacy. The country has a tradition of withdrawing from groups and contracts. Ever since Trump assumed office, this tradition has strengthened. There is no denying the fact that the WHO's association with China in the wake of the calamity in Wuhan has not been above suspicion. Obviously, the WHO has always avoided direct criticism of China which in turn has only good words to describe the WHO. The WHO has often reciprocated China's goodwill. Recently it decided to send a team to China to investigate the source of the virus. However, the US move belongs to another category and it is a perfect example for the country pursuing unilateralism. The move also illustrates the foreign policy followed by Trump.

China has said it is unclear where the virus originated and rejected an independent probe. However, it reiterated that it

is working closely with the WHO and will continue to support scientists from all countries to carry out global scientific research on the source and spread of viruses. The rejection of the demand for an independent probe strengthens Trump's criticism that the WHO and China are joined in their response to the pandemic. Trump had said that China ignored their obligations to report the facts about the disease and persuaded the organization to mislead the public about the outbreak.

The USA formally notified the UN of its withdrawal from the WHO, but the pull out won't take effect until 6 July 2021. This suggests that the decision could be reversed by a new president or change of circumstances. Even though the functioning of the WHO is not completely transparent and blameless, it must be borne in mind that it is a UN organ and a world organisation. At a time of health crisis that has affected most of the countries, the pull out of the US from it has considerable implications for the world's united fight against the pandemic. A developed country like the US can do a lot in the fight against the virus. The USA's move will adversely affect developing countries and the ones that have high infection cases and very limited resources and health infrastructure.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Via email

"Learning is not compulsory...  
neither is survival."

-- W. Edwards Deming

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.333 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2020

### Battle Royale in Rajasthan

THE Congress Party and its dynastic structure is facing one challenge after another but refuses to change its style of functioning or to learn any lessons. Sachin Pilot and Jyotiraditya Scindia (until a couple of months) ago were two bright young leaders who could have injected fervour and dynamism among the young leadership in the Party. They are both capable of putting up a challenge to the BJP which is now trying to capture every space occupied by the Congress Party. But that was not allowed to happen because neither Sonia Gandhi nor Rahul Gandhi are willing to vacate the leadership space to be occupied by someone outside of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Even now when the Party is creaking and has lost its moorings, senior Congressmen dare not challenge the leadership. Now there is a clamour for Rahul Gandhi to take on the mantle of leadership. But Rahul Gandhi has proved that even during the biggest crisis of the NDA Government over its handling of the Covid lockdown when the migrant labourers plight became a national spectacle, the Congress could not rise to the occasion except for a few optics.

The Congress lost Madhya Pradesh and now seems all set to lose Rajasthan after a revolt by its Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot. In Madhya Pradesh, Jyotiraditya Scindia was obscured by Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh. It was inevitable that he would leave the Congress and chart out a new leadership role for himself even if it is by joining the BJP. Sachin Pilot too is known to have been sidelined by Ashok Gehlot, another of the old guards and a Sonia Gandhi loyalist. But the nail in the coffin was when a case of sedition was filed against Pilot by his own government. This was Ashok Gehlot's desperate move and it would be naïve to expect Pilot to take it lying down. Both Scindia and Pilot have realised that the dynasty is reluctant to set aside the old guard and to allow young leaders to steer the Party. They no longer want to remain in the shadow of the dynasty.

At the moment there is a drama going on in Delhi and Jaipur. The tug of war and the claims and counter claims carry on. Pilot is asking for a floor test and that should be the deciding factor. Meanwhile the Congress Party has been losing its young and dynamic leaders, most of them close to Rahul Gandhi. Unfortunately, Rahul Gandhi does not call the shots. Each of these leaders have very grim stories to narrate about how they would meet Sonia Gandhi and inform her of goings-on in their states and ask for change of general secretaries in charge of their states, but how she would just turn down their requests as if she had not heard them. This surely is the beginning of the downfall of the Congress Party.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Aftermath of "A Wedding"

Editor,

As fear and uncertainty grip the citizens of our state once again, one cannot help but wonder if the situation would have taken a different turn if those in governance had performed their duties honestly. On the one hand, we have our health workers and the corona warriors like those in the police and other essential staff taxed beyond their limits, the callous behavior of the privileged lot has drawn ire from the general public. The marriage party had gone out of town on the June 27, hoodwinking everyone, leaving all without any inkling of the impending catastrophe.

The members of the party even had the audacity to roam about freely after coming back without paying any heed to their conscience as to what their carelessness would warrant to society. But they did not enjoy this privilege on their own. It was definitely a coercion supported by members of the government. Otherwise how can such abrasive behavior have taken place?

The government was quick to take damage control measures by imposing the lockdown. While we

support the measures imposed, one can only hope that the virus is contained and those responsible for this unmitigated chaos are given the most stringent of punishments so that the public who are made to suffer through no fault of their own get to feel a sense of justice.

Yours etc,  
Angela Lyngdoh,  
Shillong-14

### End of democratic principles

Editor,

When rabid religious dogma gets zealously pursued with the who's who of the polity religiously spewing vitriol against certain communities, many of whom associated with deadly riots and pogroms; the society is certainly pushed further and further away from the noble ideal of secularism. When criticism against Government gets promptly equated with "attack upon nation" and those who refuse to swim with the "mainstream" and dare to question ideology, policies and actions of any outfit get unhesitatingly dubbed as "anti-national"; the liberal concept of Democracy and freedom of expression certainly gets dishonoured most blatantly.

When outfits based on parochial divisive imperial-

The Government of Meghalaya has identified 22 focus sectors and sub-sectors that relate to agriculture and allied activities as part of the post coronavirus economic revival strategy. Considering that a large segment of population is dependent on agriculture, the focus given to this sector to revive the Covid-19 battered economy is an approach that aligns with the views advocated by the American agricultural economist John W. Mellor. This column discusses the "two big ideas" put forward by Mellor in his 2018 book titled 'Agriculture Development and Economic Transformation- Promoting Growth and Poverty Reduction', and moreover attempts to situate his central arguments in the context of the agricultural sector and the larger economy of Meghalaya.

John Mellor, who is in his nineties and currently Professor Emeritus in Cornell University, is widely known for his research in the area of agriculture development and economic transformation of developing countries. He was with Cornell University for 23 years as Professor of Agricultural Economics and Asian Studies. He was also the founding director of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), a position that he held from 1977 to 1990, besides numerous consulting assignments advising governments and aid agencies in Africa and Asia. Mellor first came into prominence with his seminal paper titled 'The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development' published in 1961 in the prestigious journal American Economic Review, followed by the 1976 book titled 'The Economics of Agricultural Development'.

The Two Big Ideas: The first big idea advanced by Mellor in his book is that "The rapid growth of small commercial farmers dominated agriculture accelerates the economic transformation and is essential to the rapid decline in dominantly rural poverty." He argues that small commercial farmers (SCFs) are the key engines for modernization of agriculture as they constitute a group with sufficient land large enough to adopt new technologies and produce significant market surpluses but small and numerous enough to have spending patterns that drive a vibrant rural non-farm sector. Also, unlike large commercial farmers who spend

ist "philosophy" start dominating in a multi-lingual multi-religious heterogeneous country and dream of a time and society when/where a particular religious group and language would call the shots by relegating all norms of linguistic cultural and religious heterogeneity to oblivion. Diversity is bound to receive least respect. And "respect" towards Federalism gets blatantly exposed when none other than the Constitutional safeguards can also be unilaterally abrogated with a state divided into two and demoted to Union Territories without taking the people of the concerned state and their political representatives into confidence!

Hence it hardly evokes any surprise when noble humanitarian progressive ideas of secularism democracy diversity federalism are specifically found to be deleted from the CBSE syllabus in the name of "reducing the stress" of the students hit by Covid-19 crisis and it's after effect. Indeed unfortunate is that society where the young impressionable minds get deprived of ideas concepts principles which hold the potential of expanding their mental horizons and liberalise their mindset!

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email

### Getting agriculture moving for Meghalaya

# Policy responses to Covid-19

By Sumarbin Umdor

mostly on urban and imported capital intensive goods generating few growth multipliers in the local area, the expenditure of SCFs are mostly on labour intensive, non-tradable, rural non-farm goods and services supplied by rural poor which facilitate the development of smaller towns and cities in the local area.

His second big idea is that "Government has a prominent role if small commercial farmer dominated agriculture is to grow rapidly." Here, Mellor strongly advocates for a prominent role for government and public sector in developing economies in modernisation of agriculture through the provisioning of public goods such as rural roads, electricity, education, communication, irrigation, and the development of institutional capacity for farmer centric collaborative research and extension.

Structural Transformation in Meghalaya: Agriculture in Meghalaya and other upland regions of the northeast is undergoing change from a largely subsistence farming to what economists called the first stage of a transformational role in the economy beginning when agricultural labour productivity starts to increase (Timmer, 1998). Over the years, while we are seeing a steady decline in the contribution of agriculture to the GDP of Meghalaya (25% in 2017-18), more than half of rural households (52%) continue to be dependent on this source as their main income. This has created a serious structural imbalance in the economy mainly due to the failure of non-agricultural sectors particularly manufacturing to create opportunity for agricultural labour force. While there has been a lot of policy focus and corresponding resource flow from central and state governments to manufacturing sector in the region, agricultural sector has not had the attention that it deserves considering its pre-dominance in the livelihood of the people of the region (Souza & Ray, 2018).

Policy Implications of Mellor's Big Ideas: Small and marginal farmers with less than 2 hectares of land constitute about 79% of all farmers in Meghalaya and account for 45% of total land holdings and they form the main focus groups for development interventions of central and state govern-

ments. Mellor advocates for a shift in the approach by making the SCFs as core target group for agriculture modernization as they are more dynamic in adopting yield increasing agricultural technologies and also faces less of the many soft farming constraints (including small land holding, market access and information, financial capital, etc.) compared to majority subsistence farmers. In Meghalaya, the SCFs (small medium and medium group of farmers owning land between 2 to 10 hectares) constitute about 21% of farmers but hold 54% of farm land. Mellor's policy calls for the concentration of government's efforts and resources on this group of farmers located in high potential areas.

For a resource poor state like Meghalaya, this strategy makes sense as public resources can be more intensely targeted at a smaller group of farmers located in agronomically favoured areas instead of being thinly spread over a large farmer population. Secondly, the landless and marginal farmers in the state will also benefit from this approach as income generated by the SCFs create open employment opportunities in the rural non-farm sector through development of small towns and trading centres in and around the high potential areas. This disperse urbanisation will be most welcome for Meghalaya which is seeing rural migration mainly to Shillong and Tura which together account for about three fourth of urban population in the state. Mellor also points out that even population in poor resource areas stands to benefit from rapid employment growth in markets and town developed around agronomically-favoured areas, as less migration from these areas will then leave more city urban jobs for migrants from poor resource areas.

Mellor's strongly advocates for key leadership role of government in terms of a clear national vision, strategy, and planning for ushering a transformed agriculture led growth backed by substantive public investment in rural and agricultural infrastructure and support for farmers in term of price policy, financial services and markets. In Meghalaya, the statistics for rural roads in 2017 convey a dismal picture as only about 30 per cent of the

14640 kms rural roads are surfaced. Additionally, the quality and maintenance of surfaced rural roads and the corruption associated with construction and maintenance of roads are major impediments which have to be tackled head on. Importance of public investment in agricultural infrastructure to stimulate the take-off of agricultural businesses has been clearly demonstrated in case of Bihar, where government's effort in setting up of modern cold storages has had a favourable impacts on potato value chains with even small farmers benefitting in terms of higher price in harvest period (Minten, et al, 2014). Another area of public intervention which, according to Mellor, is critical to agriculture modernisation is a strong farmer connected research system and extension services in transforming agriculture in developing region to a commercial venture. However, this vital link is mostly absent in the state.

Poor infrastructure and institutional constraints coupled with low adoption of crop specific production technologies have prevented Meghalaya and the other states in the Northeast from realising the immense growth potential of agriculture. In Meghalaya, crop area expansion rather than productivity accounted for 76 per cent of source of increase in value of crop output (Bithal, 2006). Similarly, in case of potato, which is the second most important food crop next to rice, we find that the yield per hectare is only about 40% of all India average. The above points to the immense potential for increasing agricultural growth and farmer income in the state by improving the yield of key crops and providing the necessary post harvest support.

In conclusion, the approach advocated by Mellor is certainly not without contestation. However, it does provide the state government with a theoretical framework within which its sectoral and sub-sectoral strategies for agriculture growth can be conceptualised and strategized for the economic transformation of the state.

(The writer teaches Economics in NEHU and can be reached at sumdor11@gmail.com)

Yours etc.,  
TK Nandanani,  
Via email

# Some hits out of Meghalaya's Covid predicament

By Avner Pariat

There have been many bio-security lapses and complacency has set in hard in the past month within our society. Now the Covid 19 virus has managed to breach our defenses. Like a great besieger of castles it has been persistent. Like a river eating away at the walls of a ravine it has been unrelenting. There are many lessons to be learnt from this humble 'speck'. In our fear of it, I don't know if we are thinking straight about the long-lasting values of this virulence. I will try to elaborate what I mean.

Firstly, Agricultural (and related) produce grown and sourced locally has been seeing a rise in domestic consumption within the state itself. This has been primarily because of the Lockdowns. Now just because we human beings have declared closures and prohibited various activities from taking place, it doesn't mean that Nature needs to listen to such diktats. Plants still need to sprout, animals still need to grow. During the Lockdowns, we saw a great disruption to old trade relations and agreements. These were not always good things and they did leave negative impacts recently on the lives of those made dependent on them. However a crucial thing happened during the Lockdowns: farmers were forced to start thinking and dealing at a local level. This was a good experiment which we must learn from.

For instance, losing trade from Andhra Pradesh meant that local aqua-farmers could move out from under that vast shadow and we saw their products in the bright light of a fair day. We found that yes, their fish were smaller in size but they were fresher, tastier (in my opinion) and crucially, organic. As a result of these innate strengths, the domestic consumption of locally reared fish grew more than it had in previous years. This is not my own assertion but comes from the Fisheries Department itself.

Now that might sound rosy and optimistic but there is also a catch to the story. Greater sales do not necessarily mean greater returns for the farmers themselves. Currently, owing to the Covid 19 disruption to the Market, many middle-men are forcing the farmers to sell their products at throw-away rates. For instance, cabbage from the Smit area was going for the wonderful sum of Re 2 per kilo! That must be immediately stopped. Such traders are nothing more than robbers and must be dealt with accordingly. However, in general, we should learn from all these lessons and move forward. Rearing and then sheltering local initiatives (especially in Agriculture) from the tremendous onslaught of outside competition can ensure high quality, if not high quantity, products and produce. If given a fair chance and allowed to strengthen, there is no reason to believe that these initiatives wouldn't be able to survive on their own later on.

Another welcome occurrence arising out of this Pandemic has been the emergence of cooperatives in different parts of the state. I had already spoken about the rampant exploitation that our farmers are currently facing. This lack of power on their part has necessitated the creation of fledgling cooperatives. This was quite unheard of prior to the Pandemic. Pre-Covid times were not good times by any stretch of the imagination but these Lockdowns have made things very dire. And out of that hardship, people have had to evolve newer tools. The concerned government departments must really pay close attention to this emerging contingency and fill in the gaps with encouragement, capacity, resources and financial aid. We cannot compete with the scale of mainstream industries and

services and even if we were to concentrate on high-grade quality there would always be a deficiency in output. However we can cut down the gap by joining up together along the lines of collective marketing.

One farmer or service provider on his own can do very little - especially because our land holdings are so small - but a cooperative model would be the way to go if we are to meet targets set before us by clients. It would also reaffirm and rebuild the resilience of our old ways of economic organisation and enhance democratic participation. This, in a nutshell would harken back to the days of true "Tribal Socialism". The political ramifications for any government that could bring this about would be tremendous.

There is also the issue regarding market places which I have talked about before on different forums. This Pandemic has forced us to adhere to social distancing and thus our old ideas of the marketplace of Iewduh or lawmusiang has had to change. Once again, Covid 19 has made the impossible possible! Yes, we may shed tears of nostalgia about the old system but we must also rejoice that we have been given this chance to start anew. The old ieu for all its merits was also overcrowded, dirty, an eyesore and a hazard in more ways than one. For those of us who would have to board an early morning shared taxi to Jowai or Mawsynram it could be a horrible assault on the senses. The overflowing septic-tanks, decaying meat, giant cancer-ridden rats and regular pools of alcoholic puke are not things I remember with fondness. No, sir. The iews hide within their labyrinth many dubious traders and if we have the chance to de-congest and disentangle our farmers from their horrid mesh of exploitation, we must do it swiftly. Iewduh and other marketplaces are not politically neutral spaces. And I am not saying that simply moving away to new locations will change things immediately for the exploited. But if we are able to effect these re-locations to places like Laitkor, Hynniew-Mer and Mawiong we would be taking a step in the right direction. These re-locations must, of course, be followed by rigorous adherence to a fairer farmer-centric system which would itself wield control over these spaces and not have middle-men dictate terms to them as is the case presently.

Lastly, we must talk about another effect that has come out of this Pandemic. And that is the sudden appearance of vast quantities of money which the Modi government has been forced to inject into the flailing economy. In total, Modi has declared a special economic package (Aatman Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan) amounting to about 280 billion dollars. My only question is: where did all this money come from and where was it before? Why was it never deployed when the poor and ailing were crying for assistance? Why was it never infused into our various welfare programmes and services? Now because of this illness, and the uncertainty that has followed it - uncertainty which might blow up ferociously - our leaders in Delhi, on both sides of the aisle, have suddenly become open-hearted and generous. This has shown us that when any government claims that "there is no money" they are telling a blatant lie. There is always money. And we must use this opportunity now to inform and direct Public Spending into crucial areas like Health and bio-security, Agriculture and Rural Development, MSMEs etc.

(The writer can be reached at bankhanshillong@gmail.com for suggestions, comments, discussions readers might have)

### Irresponsible Swiggy

Editor,

On May 30 and July 10, 2020, I placed prepaid orders for groceries and miscellaneous items from Vishal Mega Mart Essentials through Swiggy. In the delivery service on May 10, out of 5 packets of one item ordered only 4 packets were delivered. Again during the delivery on July 10, out of two packets of a particular item ordered only one packet was delivered. While the former issue was resolved after contacting the Swiggy customer care service they have expressed their inability to resolve the latter issue. This is a matter of concern.

Yours etc.  
S. Tiken Singh  
Shillong-3

### India's Covid surge

Editor,

It seems Covid-19 does not spare anyone even celebrities. Bollywood suffered a setback when Amitabh Bachchan, his actor-son Abhishek Bachchan, daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and grand daughter Aradhya and a number of other celebrities tested positive for Covid-19 saddening millions of their fans. It is

pertinent to note that Mumbai is the worst Covid-hit city like Delhi and the atmosphere seems filled with coronavirus. The number of infected patients are only increasing day by day in Mumbai. The situation in Maharashtra and particularly in Mumbai is alarming.

Globally, there have been millions of confirmed cases of Covid-19 and deaths of over 562,617 persons were reported. The pandemic continues its journey of killing more and more people with no vaccine at all to break the cycle of the pandemic. Meanwhile, Russia has become the first nation to complete clinical trials of coronavirus vaccine on humans and the results have proven the medication's effectiveness. Chief researcher Elena Smolyarchuk, who heads the Centre for Clinical research on Medications at Sechenov University said, "The research has been completed and it proved that the vaccine is safe. The volunteers will be discharged on July 15 and July 20." So, it is expected that the first vaccine may come from Russia.

The US accounted for the world's highest number of infections and fatalities. Even in the midst of growing number of coronavirus patients, US President Donald Trump was mocking those who wore mask. Ironically, Trump wore a mask during a visit to a military hospital on

Saturday. Trump was seen in public with the type of facial covering recommended by health officials as a precaution against spreading or becoming infected by the Covid pandemic. Like Brazilian President Bolsonaro, Trump was in a defiant mode and refused to wear a mask. But this time he had to do so at the insistence of health officials.

In India, there is no let up in the fury of the Covid-19 spiral. On Sunday alone there were a record 28,637 new coronavirus cases, taking the nation's overall tally to 8,50,000, while the death toll reached 22,700. But Home Minister Amit Shah sounded optimistic despite the huge number of cases. He said that India was on a strong pedestal in the fight against Covid-19. Taking the prevailing grave situation into account, it may be good for the government to impose a nation-wide lockdown for a week or two weeks to break the chain of the coronavirus. The first country-wide lockdown imposed on March 25 proved to be a premature one as a real lockdown is to be considered right now, when people of the country are suffering from the real pain due to Covid-19.

Yours etc.,  
TK Nandanani,  
Via email

*"Character matters; leadership descends from character."*

--- Phillip Brooks

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.334 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2020

### Oli's Ayodhya taunt

NEPAL's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is hell bent on taking the bull by its horns. It is well-acknowledged that he has no love lost for India, and rather enjoys the company of the Chinese, be it in relation to bilateral relations or in provoking India. The latest taunt from him is on the culture front with a heavy load of religious content. His claim, that Lord Ram's birthplace is near capital Kathmandu in Nepal, not India, might enthrall many. Notably, the whole edifice on which the ruling BJP here built its aura was on reclaiming a mosque and its land in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh from Muslim hands and building a new temple there, on the claim that this was the birthplace of Lord Ram. Sharma Oli, a Hindu ruler himself, is now showing the audacity to tame the BJP and Prime Minister Modi – the poster boy for the Hindutva cause – at one lethal sweep. Reactions from the ruling BJP cannot but be harsh. Oli might rather look for more ways to needle India, like claiming land by a change of map.

Religion was at the centre of a recently developing alienation between India and Nepal. The frenzy with which Nepal decided to change the Constitution and remove the Hindu nation tag from the country and turn it into a secular entity was in tune with the ideology of the Communists who run the nation. However, the pro-Hindutva BJP that led India since 2014 could not stomach this. Notably, until the time when King Birendra was killed in a palace coup around the turn of the century, the two nations maintained excellent relations. Even today, Nepalis do not require any document to cross over to this side of the border, settle down here or engage in gainful work. There indeed are problems on the other side of the border, where Indian settlers in the plains known as Madhes are seeking increased rights. Nepalis hate India's 'big brother' attitude, which led to animosity there even during the time when batches of Indians went there to extend help to earthquake-hit victims some years ago. All these are obviously music to Chinese ears, and President Xi Jinping is bent on edging closer to Nepal through generous support to it in infra projects etc. At the minimum, Xi is encourage Oli to take on India even as the PM's own position in the leadership levels there might be under siege from leaders like Prachanda. The 'Ayodhya' taunt comes as a lethal dose.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Contact tracing and its complexities

Editor,  
It is no understatement to state that the current attempts of the Government to contract trace the first and second contact cases of the 41 wedding related covidots is proving rather an uphill task for the administration. The handicap the Government suffers from is three fold. First, is its reluctance to release the names of the 41 above-mentioned persons. Apparently the official belief is that such an act might cause social stigmatisation. Second, is its shortage in human resources, social reach and time to finish the job within the vitally restricted timeline this tracing mission demands. Third is the public lack of trust in Government and its officials. This lack of confidence makes it distressing for people to divulge information to Government officials especially when it involves personal and confidential information of oneself or of one's relatives and acquaintances. It is therefore becoming increasingly obvious that the Government needs to find and fast, an intermediary who is ready to partner with it; who has its trust and one whom the common people

also have confidence in. The official fear of an adverse relationship between identification and stigmatisation needs to be challenged. The greater worry should be over public well-being and safety. There can be no compromise over the issue and it is Government's responsibility to ensure this. The administration must be in possession of the identity and residential address of each of the above mentioned 41 persons. There is no need to make public the names of the individuals involved. The contact tracing teams formed to identify the primary and secondary contacts from the original 41, can share this information with the Rangbah Shnong concerned. The Rangbah Shnong has the unique aptitude of knowing the minute intimate details of the residents of his own shnong. He generally knows who moves around with whom and people of his locality are more comfortable in discussing related personal issues connected with illness with their headman than with indifferent Government officials. Government must make use of this social capital to make the onerous task of contact tracing that much easier and quicker. It needs to be done in the larger interest of the public at large. It is now more than four months since the onset of Covid 19 and people are

While most of the earthlings are locked inside their homes, fighting an enigmatic battle against an invisible enemy, the novel corona virus, the 'Winds of Change' is blowing across the United States of America, where Black Americans are once again locking horns against a centuries-old enemy, racism. George Floyd's 'I Can't Breathe' (henceforth ICB) plead to the police officers set off the fire which soon engulfed the entire United States. The ICB movement, unlike other racial movements in the past, has today assumed universal significance and potential. Equally encouraging is the support it received from people across the political and geographical divide. Across the globe, the world took to its knees against institutional racism deeply embedded in the veins of our society. What started in Minneapolis as a protest over the death of a black American man, has now earned the reputation of a global movement, gaining solidarity from across the world.

This isn't the first movement that the world has witnessed when it comes to the Black American community demanding fair treatment and recognition. From Lincoln in the 19th Century to Martin Luther King Jr. to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, nothing much has changed for the coloured community. It is the result of systematic racism that has been perpetuated over the years by those who benefited from it. While physical slavery had been abolished in America by the hard-fought 13th Amendment of 1865, psychological and cultural slavery is yet to be rooted out. Just like the invisible novel corona virus, racist tendency resides in our sub-conscious thought process, invisible to the naked eye.

For centuries, racist ideology was being systematically institutionalised by imperialist powers. We were taught that black (coloured) represents inferiority and white symbolises superiority. Ideas were manufactured, history manipulated and educational curriculum engineered to support the racist agenda of imperialism. As Michael Holding rightly put, "History is written by the conqueror, not by those who are conquered. We need to go back and teach both sides of history". The entire recorded history has

starting to realise that the disease is something we cannot just wish away. It's something we have to live with and accept. It was the same with cancer. A few decades ago there was a social stigma attached to this dreaded disease. Now that is no longer there and people openly speak with no hesitation or shame about the onset of cancer. It's the same with Covid 19. It is an ailment, it's here to stay and being open and straightforward about it is one of the best ways to contain the illness. There should be no sense of shame or embarrassment in contracting the disease or in being associated with it. One day a cure or a vaccine will come our way. Till then we have to realise that being secretive about it is the worst approach in curing ourselves and in preventing the spread of the disease.

Yours etc.,  
Toki Blah,  
Via email

Don't sneeze at Government's efforts

Editor,  
We should be grateful that the Government of Meghalaya is leaving no stone unturned to contain the spread of Covid-19. From day one the Chief Minister himself is seemingly very serious in

# Lives Matter!!!

By Banshaikupar Lyngdoh Mawlong

always tried to justify white supremacy and brutality, while wholly ignoring the plight of the so called inferior coloured races. For example, one of the most brutal religious wars of all time, the Crusades, was orchestrated by the 'Christian' white race of Europe against the coloured 'infidels' of Asia and Africa. It's an irony that one of the most spiritual Christian hymns of our age, "Amazing Grace, was written by a slave-ship captain (who of course repented for his sins). Then there's slavery, feudalism and apartheid. The list is endless. In fact, in every corner of the globe, racism is deeply engrained in the society's philosophy and worldview. It has always been a matter of the 'superiors' versus the 'inferiors'. And in most of the cases, the superior is always the majority of that society who dominates and discriminates against the inferior minority. But as one of Euclid's axioms aptly stated, "Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other". Creation or Evolution!!! Whatever the theory of origin, we may believe in, we all came from the same source, equal in spirit and soul.

While it is encouraging to see that the ICB movement is receiving the universal support it deserves, equally true is that there are thousands more 'I Can't Breathe' situations across the globe. Closer home, our 'celebrities' have come together to express their solidarity with the ICB movement of America. Their stand against racism in the West is commendable and must be applauded. But the hypocrisy of it all is that these very same people whom we 'celebrate' hardly voice their stand against the hundreds similar ICB-like situations in our country. More often than not, they choose to ignore and turn a blind eye to the reality in their own kitchen. One notable exceptional statement came from Abhay Doel when he said, "Now that 'woke' Indian celebrities and the middle class stand in solidarity with fighting systemic racism in America, perhaps they'd see how it manifests in their own backyard!"

We have numerous ICB like-situations in India. For instance, women's lives, who constitute almost half of our population, have not always mattered. For centuries, our patriarchal dominated society had justified the inhumane

this respect. Despite being beset by the series of unfortunate virus-related situations, the Chief Minister, along with his ministerial team, has not shown any laxity. In comparison to other states, the fatality rate in Meghalaya is considerably low, with only two death cases so far. The treatment and quarantine facilities in the state are far better. Many returnees have applauded the government for the arrangement.

However, what is disheartening in the state now is the sudden spike in positive cases. This has compelled the Government to call for a second lockdown. Do we really want another round of lockdowns and to continue to suffer as earlier? The Government is already facing a dilemma in trying to resolve the problems of the poor who are suffering endlessly, particularly the farming communities? They have not been able to harvest and sell their produce. This will have a far-reaching impact upon their families. Survival has become the main concern as they have lost their sources of income and other support. The other day I saw a cloth merchant selling French beans and carrots while a hardware dealer is now selling nimki and mithai on the roadside. This is just an example of people's plight and their desperation. Here is my question to

practices of sati, dowry system, female-child infanticide, purdah system and other forms of discrimination against women. While some of these have been prohibited by the legal system, systematic violence against women is still the order of the day as evident from the rising violence against them. And this institutional violence against women will not go away unless we change our worldview. For instance, we are a society where the length of a skirt decides the character of a girl.

Now, what about the lives of the poor? Years of mis-governance, corruption, resources mis-management and development or under-development has given birth to rampant poverty across the country. As a result, landless labourers and slums are swelling and children forced to toil for a living. But their underprivileged lives do not seem to matter at all. Another ICB group in India are the minorities. For decades since independence, minorities like Dalits, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and religious minorities have been left to the peripheries. The thousand-year old caste system has systematically discriminated- religiously, vocationally and culturally, the Dalits and others lower castes. Tribal peoples of North-East India were being called and mocked, in their own country, by racist comments like 'chinky', snake eaters, barbarian, savages, man-eaters, etc. And recently during the Covid-19 lockdown, students from the region were being harassed by the mainland people as 'chinese'. Why? Simply because we look physically similar to the Chinese where the virus originates.

The current pandemic has brought to the fore another category of ICB, the migrant lives. The unequal development in the country, has forced millions of workers from underdeveloped states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc., to migrate to more developed states like Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, and others in search of livelihood. When the Covid induced lockdown was imposed, they were forced to return home, thousands of miles away, on nothing but their bare two feet. The fact that we celebrated the journey of a teen-age girl who drove her ailing father home on bicycle thousands of miles speaks

responsible citizens – "Are we concerned and sensitive towards the predicament of the underprivileged and also the Government administration now?" I think most of us are totally unconcerned. We are more interested in fulfilling our narrow ambitions. How could one have a fascination for celebration and fun when the scourge of death is hovering over our heads? It is brazenly outrageous.

In this unprecedented pandemic crisis, no one has the right to rob others of their right to live free from COVID-19. Is it not a shocker that the entire Bachchan family has been tested positive? It should, in fact, serve to caution one and all against the seriousness of the pandemic. So, until a vaccine is developed, we should not set out into dangerous journeys. Please be supportive and sensitive. Do not sneeze at the Government's efforts for a better tomorrow.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gewali,  
Shillong-2

### Kudos Tympany Club Jowai

Editor,  
Hats off to Tympany Club Jowai for the excellent job done on clearing the footpath at lawmusiang

of the mentality and worldview of our society. The question we must be asking is, why a teen-age girl has to undertake such a long and strenuous journey on her own with no help and support from anyone. Do Migrant lives matter? We do not have the resources to help them, but we have all the funds in the world to buy MLAs in order to topple governments, to fund crony capitalism and to buy LCD TVs for election propaganda.

The last and most important category which deserves mention is the lives of billions other life forms- the plants that creep, the animals that crawl, and the aquatic life that swims beneath the oceans. Their life matters the most. Unlike plants, humans do not manufacture their own food. In fact, no life-form is more dependent on nature than human's. However, we shattered everything that was beautiful and good. We broke the world. It is Man against Creation. The land is dying, the lungs of the earth- the forest is sick, ours skies are growing murkier, our oceans filled with un-capped plastic waste from industrial and urban settlement. We have disrupted the sacred ecological balance. Humans did this!

It is apt to remember that while we are caught in our fashionable condemnation of racism in America, we ought not to be blind to what is unfolding in our own backyards. If we are to join hands authentically with the Black Lives Matter movement, we should look inwardly and find a way to bring about change in our own society, our own ICB movement. We have been living in denial for a long time. We must get rid of egoistic attitudes and self-centred mentality. "All life is supposed to have equal value, but some lives are more valuable than others" can no longer be the philosophy of our society. Indira Gandhi, once said, "One cannot be truly human and civilized unless one looks upon not only all fellow-men but all creation with the eyes of a friend". It's our humane duty to help the ICB groups- the coloured, the minorities, the poor, the underprivileged, the vulnerable, the oppressed and the other life-forms. We shall not stop until they all say, "WE CAN BREATHE". All lives must matter. That's the sacred balance of nature.

(The writer is Asst. Professor Union Christian College, Umiam Khwan, Meghalaya and can be reached at [bandal787@gmail.com](mailto:bandal787@gmail.com))

where vegetable vendors used to occupy the space with no social distancing even in this period of the Covid 19 pandemic. The Jowai Municipal Board from time to time announced that vendors should vacate the pavement yet they failed to obey the orders. Fortunately, now we see spacious lawmusiang which is a good sight. It was the Seifraj Jowai that sheltered the vendors. This commendable job done by the Tympany Club needs to be appreciated. I am sure this will not have a temporary effect. The question arises about the supposed market which had been constructed and which is not even half done I call it 'ka lano iaw'. The foundation stone had been laid down long time ago but it remains incomplete till date. People of Jowai are being fooled by the JHADC. This reminds us that before every election, politicians promise that this market located at the old market would be completed. Instead we can see bushes growing inside the supposed market. Again I say thumbs up Tympany Club!

Yours etc.,  
Concerned citizen of Jowai Town.  
Name withheld on request

## Meghalaya Economic Task Force (METF)

By RV Warjri

I don't want to bore the readers. My conclusion will inform readers what triggered me to write this piece. I am focusing on the subject straight away. Why? To quote Pope Francis - 'Because we are living in an era of change.' In my plain lexicon, I say covitized. Some covitized physiologically. Quite a few dying of Covid. Most of us though still living, are covitized psychologically, to some degree or the other. And the lesser mortals that we are, I will restrict myself only to the material aspects of the era of change.

I am tempted to use the hackneyed cliché, 'convert a crisis into an opportunity.' Opportunity to bring in radical changes and reforms - a departure from the universal propensity for populism only with the aim of winning elections and overriding the needs of the next generation! The Nobel Laureate in Economics, Joseph Stiglitz stressed on the need for ongoing reforms. He talks about pragmatism and "crossing the rivers by feeling the stones." In short, keep on modifying as per the ongoing experience. In fact the economic history of India since 1991 has been a story of successive governments trying to be more reformist than its predecessor. My humble submissions are as follows:

Macro Strategy i) To come out with a development paradigm based on a SWOT analysis that applies to Meghalaya, especially with factors that can be leveraged like the bounty of nature itself, be it climatic, natural resource, soil condition etc. Taking into account the Atmanirbhar or Self Reliant concept; the much needed value addition concept; the Stimulus package announced by the Centre; the liquidity allocation for MSMEs; the need for Start Ups; across the board job creation; and most important the incentives for capital investment and ensuring investment security. The idea is to ensure maximum clarity to stakeholders and private investors. Prime Minister Modi's address at the recent India Global Week in London is an example. He announced the laying of red carpet for global investors.

ii) Need for a land cadastral survey in Meghalaya. The absence of land records is a major hindrance to economic development. Land records mean proper legal documents for landowners which can be used as collateral. Banks can then quickly issue loans for expanding the business, especially in agriculture.

iii) Community driven initiative: The battle against Covid 19 has involved authorities and social entities at all levels. State, Districts, Cities, Towns, and the grass root local bodies in villages and localities. The critical role they play in the door to door operations - be it tracing of the pandemic contacts and enforcing quarantine or supply of essential commodities is path-breaking. The next step is to cash in on the momentum for bigger challenges like using them as a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for all community related economic and social activities. It is, however, not possible to entrust the local bodies with higher responsibilities in their present form because there is no system of a defined authority as well as accountability. The archaic practice of dependence on voluntarism alone in the name of tradition is unsustainable. A structural change would entitle them to the systematic funding from the central government which other local bodies in India have been enjoying. This is where the concept of institutional innovations as expounded by Joseph Stiglitz also applies.

iv) Change of mindset: This applies both to the government as well as to the public. Government should be candid about what it can do and what it cannot do particularly when the State relies for 80% of its financial resource from the centre. Deserving BPL welfareism should go together with tapping income and wealth tax capacity. The era of

blanket exemption in the name of being tribal alone becomes untenable. Sensible and well to do tribals themselves like late Honsen Lyngdoh should volunteer to do so.

Micro-Strategy 1) Data mapping: I compliment the Government of Meghalaya for the initiative to collect data for its Economic Survey 2020. The ad however mentioned about registering by businessmen, entrepreneurs and self employed individuals. Why not do the same for skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled returnees to the State because of Covid 19 and the other professions which have been requested not to register, which include farmers? The State Government website should be the source of a wide range of data and statistics. In the Northeast the states which have more information on their websites are Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim.

ii) Organic Agriculture: PM Modi, while addressing the Indian Chamber of Commerce in Kolkata last month had said that "Northeast can become the organic hub of India and have a global identity." A study could be conducted on the potential of organic cultivation and marketing from Meghalaya. Start by learning from Sikkim or Mizoram. Prof Umor of Economics Deptt, NEHU had also written on the big ideas of renowned Agricultural Economist John W Mellor which focuses on the Small Commercial Farmers (SCF).

iii) The APJ Abdul Kalam Centre, IIM Shillong has been conducting webinars on Tourism, Logistics, BPO, Handloom, Handicrafts, Horticulture etc., - inputs that Meghalaya Government can utilize. BPOs can also take advantage of the Rs 75,000 crore announced by Google CEO Sundar Pichai for digitization in India.

iv) Also growing cottage like enterprises in floriculture, viticulture (fruit wine), food processing can revolve around the community driven activities. My first hand knowledge from the International Potato Research Institute in Lima is that the high moisture potato crop in Meghalaya is ideal for making Vodka.

v) The Meghalaya budget 2020 listed four pillars: Human Development; Primary sector; Infra; Entrepreneurship. All these can be dovetailed under new development paradigm.

vi) The geography of Meghalaya determines that growth and prosperity in the long run is tied to the entire Northeast and further into Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Thailand. The economic integration could be best expressed under the umbrella of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) under the aegis of the Act East Policy.

A few days ago, I was invited by Doordarshan, Shillong for a panel discussion on the (METF). We were just two panellists myself and another academician from NEHU and the moderator. There was none from the Government of Meghalaya despite having confirmed to participate. I found nothing about METF on the Meghalaya Government website. I had to Google media reports and came across impressive semantics like synergistic road map, right policies for investment, high value tourism and formation of an apex committee, an executive committee and a working group. My stated narrative at the discussion was largely guided by my experience, insights and perspective in promoting trade, commerce, investment, technology, etc., into India and from India. That included the mixed economy, the erstwhile Soviet Bloc socialist economy, United States capitalist economy, developing and developed countries.

On this note, I wish the METF works for the benefit of the people of Meghalaya with the ongoing Covid 19 or post Covid 19!  
(Amb. RV Warjri retired is retired diplomat. He can be reached at [rvwarjri@gmail.com](mailto:rvwarjri@gmail.com))

*"The sad fact is that actual artistic oppression - book banning in its many modern forms - is a matter of course in the entertainment industry, especially when the underlying product is declared politically incorrect or runs contrary to the interests of Hollywood's political altar, the Democratic Party."*

— Andrew Breitbart

## The Shillong Times

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### Covid Quandary in Meghalaya

EVER since a distinctive group of Meghalaya citizens attended a marriage ceremony at a resort in Guwahati and some members returned with Covid infection, allegations of serious administrative lapses have rocked the state. It's not for nothing that the Coronavirus (Covid19) is preceded by the term 'novel.' This virus is unpredictable in its behaviour and what adds to the predicament of health workers is that many who test Covid+ive are asymptomatic, which means that they don't present the symptoms and may not fall ill but will go around infecting others. This is exactly the case with the 41 marriage returnees who are now accused of hoodwinking the district administration by seeking a travel pass on grounds of health emergencies but diverted to a marriage location. What is bewildering is how the applications for car passes in such large numbers escaped the vigilant eyes of those processing the applications. The public is rightly incensed that of these 41 marriage attendees, only those that had tested positive had been quarantined while others continued to roam around and visit eating joints and various public places. This utterly reprehensible behaviour is what has angered the public of Meghalaya. In turn there is now a clamour that names of all who test Covid positive henceforth should be made public.

The alibi for not making the names of Covid positive persons public so far is to prevent stigmatization of the infected persons. But by now most Dorbar Shnong have learnt to deal with this challenge and are proactively intervening in their respective localities so that an infected person who may be a health worker in a Covid designated hospital or Corona Care centre is given due space for quarantine without any stigma being attached to the person.

It is evident from the rapid spread of the virus that Meghalaya too should learn to deal with Covid19 in a more hard-nosed manner by preparing the population to accept the hard reality that anyone can contact the virus and if infected to not panic but follow the health protocols. The panic reactions on learning that someone has tested Covid positive must be replaced by a sense of calm acceptance that the recovery rate of the disease in Meghalaya was quite high at over 80% before the recent surge. The recovery rate will go up once those tested Covid+ive complete their quarantine and are re-tested since most of them are asymptomatic. The paranoia about BSF personnel jacking up the Covid figures also needs to be dispelled since the majority of them are healthy and asymptomatic. Moreover, movement of BSF personnel on leave or deputation/transfer has been temporarily shelved.

# Banning a newspaper not in keeping with modern outlook

By Albert Thyrianiang

The press is independent. The press is free. These two related principles of the press/media are an extension of the broader principle of the right to freedom of speech and expression. It is part of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In India, Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression. Unless specified by law, free expression of one's own convictions and opinions through speech, writing, printing, images or any other mode is an ensured right. Any control, interference or restriction from the authorities or groups or individuals that affects the content and circulation of newspapers or other media is anti-freedom of the press.

Now, it is learnt that since 2018 Shillong Times has been 'banned' in West Khasi Hills by KSU and other groups because these groups were unhappy with the reports on the Them Meteor incidents. This action is seen as suppressing the freedom of the press. This is certainly an act of intolerance.

Before proceeding further let me share my own trust with tolerance and intolerance. While in Garo Hills this writer did a few articles on militancy in which he condemned killings, kidnaps, ambushes and the harassments of ordinary citizens by militants. Some of those write-ups had harsh words of condemnation against acts of terror. The denouncement of the Chokpot horror in 2014 in which a mother of four was murdered in cold blood is an example. Friends and family members feared for my safety because of my 'unnecessary involvement'. All the while I was in the very 'den' of the then dreaded rebels. But readers may be surprised that there was absolutely no threat, no intimidation, no warning from any of militant groups. I also believe that the militants never threatened to ban this paper for publishing those critical articles. To say that the gun yielding men did not read English newspapers is not true. They did read. Plus they had their intelligence to keep track of what was being written in the press. Therefore, there is no other way but to say that they respected freedom of the press and were tolerant to hostile opinions.

Surprisingly, the show of intolerance came from other quarters. After my reaction to the first procession of the RSS in Shillong in 2016 a person claiming to be a functionary of that organisation sent a legal notice via Facebook/Messenger (Are legal notices ever sent via Messenger?). The gentleman knew he had no case. Clearly it was an intimidating tactic. Another disappointing instance was after a critical observation on a Church organisation on New Year's day of 2015. A meeting was almost immedi-

ately conveyed and a resolution passed to ask for explanation from the concerned. More recently my article on Adelbert Nongrum's antics in the Legislative Assembly upset a person so much that in his response in a Khasi daily he used filthy language and resorted to personal attacks.

The inference is evident. Were the militant outfits more tolerant that the 'biggest social organisation' in the country? Was that church organisation less tolerant than the militant organisations operating in the same region? Do the KSU and other organisations value freedom of the press less than those militants? It

marriage party in a red zone, that is not God's punishment. If patients test positive because the COVID designated national medical institute does care to follow protocols, that is not God's curse. If people don't wear masks in market places, keep no physical distance while in line at banks, God is not responsible. If the government wants to please church leaders by sanctioning reopening (later back-tracked) of places of worship, don't blame God. If we humans knowingly disregard the law of cause and effect and ignore common sense, God is not at fault.

It is presumed that members of the KSU were once



is troublesome that these questions are even asked.

One of the crucial aspects of education is critical thinking. Critical thinking leads to creative and innovative thinking. So critical thinking is the mother of creativity, innovation and problem solving. Critical thinking goes hand in hand with scientific temper. We have had many instances of lynching in the state over suspicion of being witchcraft practitioners or 'Nongaithlen' and 'Menshohnoh' because of lack of scientific temper. People don't ask the simple question, "What if the person or persons is/are not 'Nongaithlen' or 'Menshohnoh'?" "What if the persons are innocent?" Mobs don't reason, "Let us wait to establish the truth before any action". This unthinking mentality is responsible for unnecessary loss of innocent lives. People take law into their own hands for something they have no proof at all.

Scientific temper combats superstition. By now we are convinced that beating of drums and gongs, lighting of lamps and candles, chanting of 'Go corona go' do not dispel coronavirus. We have seen people attributing the COVID-19 pandemic to God due to unscientific outlook. If people contract the virus by attending a

students. And being a student body representing the student community it is assumed the union appreciates critical thinking. It is taken for granted the organisation is a champion of creative and innovative thinking and stands for scientific attitude. But how is banning a newspaper compatible with promoting the above values? Is banning a newspaper not a suppression of critical thinking and freedom of the press (expression)? Is this not undemocratic? Is this not illegal? Is this not against national and even international laws? Is it not regressive?

West Khasi Hills has a college and a number of Higher Secondary institutions. While on the topic of "Freedom of Speech and Expression (the press)" would not teachers give the example in class that in the district that freedom is curbed because a daily is banned? Would not alert students draw the attention of political science teachers that freedom of the press is restricted in their district because a respected newspaper is barred from circulating by the very organisation that represent them?

A fake letter was allegedly circulating in social media demanding a ban of AASU, KSU, GSU and other groups. The criminal/maliciously forged the signature of the editor of this daily, for which

an FIR has been filed. None agrees with the demand to proscribe the above organisations. NGO leaders in the state often make vocal criticism and charges against the government and other groups they oppose but no one has sought their ban. In the same breath no citizen wants to see a media house banned in any part of the state.

The reason given for the ban of Shillong Times in West Khasi Hills is unjustified. According to reliable sources the paper based its reports on Sweeper Colony incidents on the statements of the CM, an SP and some Rangbah Shnong that most of the stone throwers were youths from West Khasi Hills at the behest of NGOs. Allegations were also rife that the youth were paid cash for their 'night stone pelting duties'. If the NGOs were aggrieved the natural response should have been to issue rejoinders presenting their side of the story. Moreover, the NGOs should have challenged the CM, the SP and the Rangbah Shnong for their statements. The fact that the allegation makers were left off the hook lends credibility to the allegation. Banning a newspaper on the basis of alleged biased reporting is flexing of muscle power. In a civilised world might is not right.

Now reportedly a section of the public wishes to see the ban lifted but the NGOs insist that the editor be dropped from her post. A demand of this nature is contrary to the principles of independence of the press and cannot condoned.

NGOs and associations have their rightful place in the society but they cannot overstep their boundaries. They are not elected to decide for the people. Even elected governments and representatives have their limits. The media cannot be banned for criticism against a government. If so we would have no media outlet by now. Citizens always resist government's attempts to control the media.

The interior areas of West Khasi Hills have long been neglected and underdeveloped. In 2003 this writer had to walk for 8 hours from Shillong to reach Riengmaw, Langmar and the adjoining villages as there was no road. Langpith, the epicentre of many a border clash, has no pucca road. The road to Mawait, a more known centre, remains one of the worst in the state for ages. NGO leadership should demand for more coverage of these ignored areas from newspapers rather than banning them. In the best interests of the district and its people hope the ban is lifted sooner than later. Let the media perform its duties freely and independently.

(The writer can be reached at thalbert@rediffmail.com)

## Black lives matter is now biggest social movement in USA

# More and more white people stand against racism

By Ian Sinclair

Like many people I've followed and been inspired by the extensive news coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests in the US. But I really didn't understand their extraordinary size until I read a recent New York Times analysis.

The women-founded movement began in 2013 with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after George Zimmerman was acquitted when he shot and killed 17-year old African-American Trayvon Martin in Florida. Since then BLM has highlighted and opposed the brutality, injustice and unaccountability that black people experience in the US,

The state of Iowa, Dallas and Denver have banned the use of chokeholds, with the Mile-High City introducing a new policy meaning police officers will have "to alert supervisors any time they point a gun at someone," according to the Denver Post.

Speaking to the BBC Today Programme on June 29, Melina Abdullah, professor of Pan-African Studies at Cal State LA and BLM activist, noted "The number of killings at the hands of police has remained relatively stable" in the US. "However... in cities with strong Black Lives Matter chapters the numbers have dropped dramatically."



especially from the police and legal system.

BLM activists played a leading role in the demonstrations sparked by the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and have led the protests in response to the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis on May 2020.

According to the July 3 New York Times analysis the recent demonstrations peaked on June 6, with half a million people on the streets in nearly 550 locations across the US. Overall, there have been more than 4,700 demonstrations, or an average of 140 per day, since the first protests began in Minneapolis on May 26.

"Four recent polls... suggest that about 15 million to 26 million people in the United States have participated in demonstrations over the death of George Floyd and others in recent weeks," the report notes.

After interviewing academics and crowd-counting experts the New York Times states "These figures would make the recent protests the largest movement in the country's history" — bigger than the civil rights marches of the 1960s and the Women's March of 2017.

"Really, it's hard to overstate the scale of this movement," Deva Woodly, an associate professor of politics at the New School, comments.

Once one comprehends the immense size of the protests, their wide-ranging and deep impacts are less surprising. Across the US cities and police forces have responded by instituting a series of reforms — highlighting how BLM has mainstreamed the concept of "defund the police." In New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to reallocate police funding.

"We're committed to seeing a shift of funding to youth services, to social services, that will happen literally in the course of the next three weeks, but I'm not going to go into detail because it is subject to negotiation, and we want to figure out what makes sense," de Blasio said, according to the New York Times.

Similarly, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announced he would be redirecting \$250 million from the police budget into healthcare, jobs and "healing" programmes for the city's communities of colour, the Los Angeles Times reported in June.

On the national political stage, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has pledged to establish a police oversight board within his first 100 days in office and address institutional racism. And globally, BLM in the US has inspired protests in many countries, including Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Japan, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana and South Africa.

Crucial though these changes are, perhaps the most exciting and important influence of BLM is the impact it has had on US public opinion.

"In my 35 years of polling, I've never seen opinion shift this fast or deeply. We are a different country today than just 30 days ago," Republican pollster Frank Luntz tweeted on June 8.

He was referring to a June 2 Monmouth poll that showed 57 per cent of Americans agreed that police are more likely to use excessive force against African Americans, compared to 33 per cent when asked the same question after the killing of Eric Garner by New York City police in 2014.

In the same survey 76 per cent of Americans, including 71 per cent of white people, said racism and discrimination were "a big problem" in the United States — a 26 percentage-point increase since 2015.

The New York Times notes: "Public opinion on race and criminal justice issues has been steadily moving left since the first [BLM-led] protests ignited over the fatal shootings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown." However, according to the New York Times data from online survey firm Civiqs shows that since the death of Floyd support for Black Lives Matter increased by nearly as much as it had over the previous two years: a majority of Americans support the movement by a 25-point margin, up from a 17-point margin before the most recent wave of protests began.

As the Monmouth poll above highlights, there has been a significant shift in opinion amongst white Americans. This includes views of the police, with the percentage of white Americans who have a very favourable or somewhat favourable impression of police officers dropping from 72 to 61 per cent within a week, according to a survey in early June organised by the Democracy Fund, UCLA and USA Today newspaper. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: Morning Star

## TO THE EDITOR

### Will Covid kill the VIP culture?

Editor,  
On July 14, I watched a news item on a local TV channel showing the dorbar authorities of Umiam Khwan opposing the permission granted by the District Authorities for holding two wedding receptions on July 16 and 25 at Ri Kynjai Resort. The fears and apprehensions of the Dorbar are understandable considering what happened in the aftermath of the Khanapara wedding reception disaster. I, for one am very doubtful that the protocols as prescribed would be followed in letter and spirit at those receptions as many of us common people have experienced first hand the impunity with which VIPs or their relatives flout the laws for

they know that those who enforce the laws are also VIPs who will look the other way when laws are broken.

Just recently suspicions were raised when the Government refused to divulge the contents of a Magisterial Enquiry Report lest the names of erring officers came to light. Journalists who had the temerity of insisting on answers had to bear the brunt of the Government spokesperson's ire. Hence there is an atmosphere of mistrust of the Government as far as its handling of the Covid crisis is concerned and rightly so. In this regard, I have a humble suggestion to make. Allow the Dorbar Shnongs to co-monitor private social events so that some trust is restored in the present confusing situation.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Via email

### Steps to reduce Covid infection

Editor,  
In view of the alarming increase in number of Covid positive infection in the State and Shillong in particular, Government would do well to resort to area wise sanitisation and fogging to constrain the disease to some extent. Even during lockdown people are roaming unhindered without following the due protocols and Standard Operation Procedure (SOP). Other than during the lockdown period, strict maintenance of protocols should be followed. The police patrol party in each area should be authorized to take punitive action against people who are not observing the advisories and

protocols. It has been observed that warnings alone won't serve the purpose and instead heavy fines should be imposed so that the offenders will think twice before defying advisories and protocols.

The above are some suggestions to contain the spread of the Covid19 pandemic. The areas from where the highest number of cases are reported should be made Containment Zones so as not to affect the normal life of the general citizens during the lockdown.

Yours etc.,  
S L Singhania,  
Via email

### Press Freedom not a License to 'Kill'

Editor,  
We are very fortunate

to be living in India where we enjoy the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press where we can freely express our thoughts and our opinions unlike in many of our neighbouring countries where press freedom is restricted to a great extent and in some countries, non-existent altogether. But this freedom of the press should not be taken for granted as a license to 'kill' i.e. to incite, to defame, to ridicule, to pass judgment and so on or to take the role of a judge, jury and executioner. This includes the press all over India and in fact all over the world, where we often hear and read about the term, 'trial by the media' which goes far beyond its jurisdiction.

As the fourth pillar of Democracy, the role of the press to investigate, to in-

form and to educate is very important for ensuring a vibrant democracy. And together with the Right to Information Act (RTI) to help follow-up its investigation, a free press can make sure that cases of instant justice through fake encounters can eventually be prevented, because in the eyes of the law an individual is innocent until proven guilty and when proven guilty, to deliver punishment according to law.

Yours etc.,  
Michael N Syiem,  
Via email

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

*"It has never been my object to record my dreams, just the determination to realize them."*

— Erma Bombeck

## The Shillong Times

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### Diplomacy on wrong track

INDIA is facing quite a few embarrassing moments on the diplomacy front, of late. The abrupt Chinese offensive in Ladakh region has hurt India badly. To add insult to injury, Nepal is sending all the wrong signals, with a vengeance of course. Now, a broad hint has come from Iran that it would sideline India in relation to a rail project India was to jointly execute close to the Afghanistan border as a feeder line for the Chabahar Port Project. Though a broad denial of a report did come from an Iranian official in this respect, what was left unsaid was that the original plan for active involvement of India in the port project might undergo substantial cuts. Clearly, there is more to this than what meets the eye. Admittedly, India halted oil shipment from Iran in view of the US sanctions against Teheran. China has meanwhile established new linkages with Iran in ways that belittle the traditional fraternal ties between Iran and India. In fact, the Iran-Afghan-India joint port project at Chabahar was seen as an answer to Pakistan's China-aided Gwadar Port Project in Balochistan province of Pakistan. Now, there is utter confusion about Chabahar, as far as Indian involvement is concerned.

What must also be noted is the Islamic world as a whole has started seeing India with a blinkered eye after the recent move by New Delhi to come up with a new citizenship Act that allegedly discriminates against Muslims. In sum, the government's aim was to deport lakhs of illegal Bangladeshis, but it took on a communal colour. The support from the Leftists to the student and women-led protests against the CAA gave a new twist to the government's efforts and sent wrong signals to the Islamic world. Overall, the Modi government has bitten more than it can chew, it seems. Diplomacy requires careful steps forward. Perhaps India needs to have a total revamp of its foreign policy framework in the present context. Not to be forgotten are the flip-flop stances vis-à-vis Galwan and what the exact Indian position is. Former diplomats like Shiv Shanker Menon and strategic experts like Brahma Chellaney have been asking the Government to be upfront and not indulge in optics as far as the Galwan-Pangong Tso intrusion is concerned but the MEA seems hell bent on protecting the image of the Modi Government rather than informing the country the plain truth. It is left to the international media and private agencies to tell the world the actual situation prevailing in Eastern Ladakh. There's something very wrong with Indian diplomacy today.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Help! I am a student

Editor,  
I am neither a psychologist nor a doctor nor an academician. I am a concerned parent from the teaching field. My worry is not when the doctors or the researchers around the world come up with a vaccine for Covid 19. I am worried about something which is more important than the vaccine and that is how the future citizens are being shaped up to face the new challenges. Be it the central govt, or the state govt, or any other agencies dealing with education, none have yet been able to give any clear picture for the benefit of the students whom we call the future of the nation. Recently CBSE came up with a reduced 30% syllabus and then MHRD comes up with restricting the screen time for online classes without even trying to find out whether these online classes are helpful or not. Next WHO gives statements that this pandemic is going to stay for some time. So my question to CBSE is, if the situation stays the same as it is presently for few more months will the syllabus be further slashed? If that is so, are we not compromising with the future of each and every child?

The Govt has already issued SOPs for every sector, but why are there no conclusive steps for the education sector? We all know human life is more important than any other

thing in life. The students are really confused about their future; about when the exams are going to be held and will it be usual or will new changes be framed? And if yes then how?

I request the various agencies to declare this year as zero year particularly for the students so that they neither have to compromise on the content nor on limited time and let them resume classes as and when the situation normalises. Let MHRD give responsibilities to all the states to decide their own academic session in consultation with their counterparts, academicians and all other stakeholders and frame it in such a way so that the students going for higher education need not compromise their future. I would like concerned parents or teachers or educationists to kindly respond so that we can assure our child gets the future that we have dreamt for their well being.

Yours etc.,  
Ignatius Rosary  
Via email

#### Save the tourism business

Editor,  
The mental torture that most business-persons engaged in the state's tourism and hospitality industry, including myself, have been subjected to since the lockdown may push us to take extreme steps like taking our own lives. Although none are raising their voice for

The pain caused to the entire world by Covid -19 does not mean that crime has reduced or that corruption has gone off the mindscape of those in power. We still get to read stories of rape and molestation even during these cheerless times. People are assaulted; there are stories of politicians making capital out of the disaster. There was news of a dead child being denied burial in Umran Diary in Ri Bhoi district because of a conflict between two factions of the same church. So if we think that Covid has changed our psyche and made us better humans than we were before the pandemic then we have another think coming.

There is a general sense of hopelessness among those who returned home recently from their respective places of work. Meghalaya is more fortunate in that the bulk of the returnees are students and professionals. Those in the IT industry and other sectors that allow 'work from home' have stayed back as they should be. There is no point panicking and wanting to return home at this juncture. It's critical to hold on to the job, now that they are going to become scarcer. We should actually be proud of these brave young professionals who have decided to brave it out, some in the most infected cities of Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai etc.

Right now the challenge for the Government is to rehabilitate those who have lost their jobs following the closure of the hospitality sector. This requires a determined and focused approach by a team in the Government which should not be burdened with the current Covid work. It also requires intense consultations with a range of stakeholders.

To add to our woes, within the state we have the case of young entrepreneurs in the tourism business who have suddenly lost their incomes but have to still think of paying staff and also paying for the rented premises out of which they run their businesses (guest houses, bed & breakfast,

obvious reasons, I wish to draw the attention of the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Meghalaya, to this very serious issue. The Department has done virtually nothing so far to assuage the crisis. (for the kind information of all concerned, I am sending copies of this letter to a number of relevant central-level offices in New Delhi, including the PMO and the Ministry of Tourism). It is not only about the survival, or prosperity, of a business but it's much more than that. It is a question of life and death for a great number of people — the staff/workers, the owners of hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and motels across the state, and their family members. They are all attached to an industry that has remained a key contributor to the state's economy for almost five decades of its existence, and more so over the past six years since the NGT ban of coal mining in 2014.

You will agree that the success we have achieved so far took a great deal of skills and competence, and years of hard work and perseverance. We became increasingly more conversant, collaborative, and connecting with mainland Indian people with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as foreigners, to build a large customer base by attracting guests (tourists) from across the country, as well as abroad. It is common knowledge that we, the owners of hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, etc., carry out all our

eateries, cafes et al). One can imagine the burden that these young (young in the business and age too) entrepreneurs carry. Thus far, other than an announcement from Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma about 'Covid-resilient tourism,' a phrase that needs some unbundling, we have not heard of a bail-out package for the Tourism sector especially for the smaller enterprises. It is time that all these entrepreneurs come together and engage with Government. Last heard, only hoteliers have been in conversation with government but that's not a fair deal.

The hospitality sector has to be looked at through more holistic lenses. The smaller the businesses the more cushion is needed so that the entrepreneurs don't lose hope and give up. Most of these entrepreneurs had ventured into village tourism and home-stays and were not making a killing but just enough to sustain themselves and their families. Whatever savings they have made these last few years would by now have dwindled since they have been out of work for nearly four months now. The tourism sector is a chain. There are small vendors such as those running tea shops, shops selling artifact and several other knick-knacks which every tourist destination earns from. On a rough estimate about two lakh people are involved in the tourism sector across Meghalaya (if the figures are wrong, please correct me). It's frightening to imagine a future for these people if Covid does not make a hasty exit.

Much has been spoken about the Agriculture, Horticulture and Fisheries sector. We have harped on these sectors for decades without results. Sure the strawberry experiment worked and growers are doing good business; so too the sellers who fleece us the buyers. But all in all the strawberry experiment is a success story. One only wonders why we don't have more upgraded, state of the art processing plants for

activities as tenants from rented establishments. So, in order to not only keep the business afloat but also develop the industry for ourselves and for the state's economic health and vibrancy, we need cooperation and support of our landlords/landladies when we are in a crisis. And, can there a more critical and dreadful situation than the ongoing predicament caused by Covid-19?

The behaviour of these landlords has, on the contrary, been so intimidating that we may be pushed to suicide. As the owner of a guesthouse in a rented building in Sohra, I have had a frightening experience of constant threats from my landlord in these trying times. He has been putting enormous pressure on me to pay the rent despite business having run dry. I have pleaded to let my business survive the crisis first so that I can compensate him as soon as some sort of normalcy returns. But he is in no mood to relent! He insists: either pay the entire outstanding amount or vacate the place leaving behind all the investments made of (my) hard-earned money worth lakhs of rupees in the form of infrastructure, interior design, furniture, and a whole lot of essential items. I fervently request all key government offices/officials, specifically at the decision-making levels, to persuade all such landlords/landladies to cooperate and stand by us in these difficult times so that once normalcy returns we can act in the

best interests of all stakeholders.

By Patricia Mukhim

pineapples, oranges, plums, peaches et al. At the moment there is a glut of pineapples in the market. True they are rather exorbitant at Rs 60-80 a piece but that's because the pandemic leaves us with little choice but to buy it from the first vendor we meet. What we don't see happen is that the growers get very poor returns. It's the vendor who buys from the grower that makes all the money. So when we speak horticulture which is Meghalaya's potential, let us focus on the processing bit where the processed stuff is better than the standard 'Meg' brand where Sohiong jam for instance has completely lost it's original taste of the fruit. There are modern processing methods that retain much of the original flavour of the fruit.

Agriculture too is Meghalaya's strength but only if the markets are better organised. Quite a bit of agricultural products in Meghalaya are organically grown. Only cabbage and cauliflower and now broccoli require both chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Potato requires chemical fertilizers too. Its sad that the state has not yet been able to produce enough organic manure for its crops. Also the marketing has to be better organised. At the farm gate vegetables are sold dirt cheap. Cabbages were apparently sold at Rs 5 a kg to vendors who in turn sold them at Rs 30-40 a kg in the roadsides. This fleecing by middlemen and vendors needs to stop and that can happen if farmer's markets are set up at vantage points across the state.

On Thursday Chief Minister Conrad Sangma spoke of micro management, micro lockdown and quick response to any situation. He also spoke about adaptation. This must be the most realistic suggestion one can think of. Containing small areas where Covid has appeared, rather than a complete lockdown is the answer. Managing those small areas is far more doable than hunting for contacts in a whole containment zone. Indeed, a quick response team to

ensure that those testing Covid+ive are quickly quarantined before they meet more contacts is the key. A vigilant citizenry that reports the arrival of new faces into their localities and who evidently skipped quarantine is the need of the hour. Several such stories of people returning from Guwahati but roaming around irresponsibly are doing the rounds. One is unsure how they got through the strict vigil at the various check gates. Perhaps now that the gates are temporarily closed a stock-taking is necessary to see where the loopholes can be plugged.

The more we watch the behaviour of the Covid virus and observe its spread the more we need to learn 'Adaptation.' The reality today is that it is possible to be infected at some point or the other because some of our family members have to go out to work. Not everyone can work from home. Banks are functioning; government functionaries are working more than ever before; those in the construction business are working at full force. Everyone is playing catch-up. At some point, despite all the precautions (wearing masks, using generous doses of sanitizers, social distancing etc) someone may contact the virus and bring it home. Instead of pushing the panic button it is more sensible to follow the protocols and be quarantined and get tested. This goes for neighbours and people in the locality too. We have played the stigmatization game for far too long. Not everyone who contacts the virus is a covidiot. The 41 people of a marriage party are exceptions. They violated all protocols and have to face penal action. But most of the others who have tested positive have done so because they arrived from hotspots.

So let's leave it at that and stay vigilant yet composed. Panic is no solution.

(Views expressed in these columns are personal and do not reflect the views of the newspaper)

have followed this scrupulously the majority of us do not take things seriously. Hence at such crucial times, we all need to understand that our actions have consequences. A single mistake arising out of our socially irresponsible behaviour won't only cost ourselves but most importantly affect our fellow citizens, our neighbours and community. Hence it is my humble request to all the citizens of Meghalaya to please take things seriously and understand our own roles and responsibilities in limiting the spread and transmission of Covid-19.

The Government has done its best to control and limit the spread of the disease but in the end it is our duty to act as responsible citizens. Last but not the least, my simple advice for all of us is that (a) We should not visit or meet anyone unless it's very urgent and that includes close family as this is for our mutual safety (b) We should not attend any mass gathering, weddings, and the alike (c) Let us cultivate healthy habits and strengthen our immunity by eating a healthy diet including fruits and vegetables, staying hydrated, avoid consumption of rich diet, alcohol and tobacco (d) Let's maintain a daily exercise regime (d) Meditation helps calm the mind and that's important during this pandemic.

Some of the mandatory measures such as wearing masks in public places, social distancing, self isolation or quarantine for both symptomatic and asymptomatic cases and getting tested if showing symptoms are some of the important guidelines we are expected to follow. Apart from this we should also wash our hands frequently with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer. While some

Yours etc.,  
Dr Rilang Iki Bamon  
NEIAH, Shillong

## Viability of crores of msme at stake in India in COVID era Emergency response programme needs much more

By Gyan Pathak

COVID-19 has placed India's already ailing MSME sector in a precarious condition. Majority of 6.33 crores of micro, small, and medium enterprises are facing the question of survival. The World Bank's MSME Emergency Response programme of \$750 million, says that it will be addressing the immediate liquidity and credit needs of some 1.5 million viable MSMEs to help them withstand the impact of the current shock and protect millions of jobs. The Government of India had announced a special package of Rs 3 lakh crore for the same purpose. However, these are too little to overcome the crisis in the sector that has been suffering since demonetization in November 2016. Even before the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown on March 24, millions of MSMEs have already been shut down, and millions of others were struggling for survival.

The question of survival of the MSMEs is an important issue, and we do not know how many of them are still viable, after the total shut down of all the units in the country from March 25 to May 31 due to lockdown

instruments including credit guarantees, but the progress is very slow.

Improving the funding capacity of key market-oriented channels of credit, such as the NBRCs and Small Finance Bank (SFBs) will help them respond to the urgent and varied needs of the MSMEs. The Union Government and RBIs efforts in this regard is not sufficient. It's a dismal state of affairs that only 8 percent of the MSMEs today are served by formal credit channels. In this scenario, financial innovations are required to successfully address the issue. Programmes relating to incentivizing and mainstreaming the use of fintech and digital financial services in the MSME lending and payments must be immediately strengthened. Union government's new initiative of registration of all the MSMEs through a portal is only a small step, but does not guarantee the revival and survival of the units. We have already seen the dismal effectiveness of the registration system for startups. Out of around 50,000 startups, only about 27,000 are registered and getting benefits from the government's programme.



of the country. There is no capital, no labour, and no consumer demand, and total disruption of the supply chain of produced goods. The new definition and provisions for MSMEs do not make distinction of manufacturing and service sector, therefore, we need to include even the total disruption of services as additional factors impacting the recovery of the Indian economy in general and the MSMEs in particular. If the World Bank's figure of viable units of 15 lakh for which they are giving emergency support is of any indication, we can assume the majority of 6.33 crore MSMEs are now not viable at all. The Modi government needs to do much more in this scenario than they have announced.

It must be noted that the MSME sector is the backbone of India's economy — contributing to 30 percent of India's GDP and 40 percent of exports, under severe stress. The sector, which employs about 150-180 million people, is today burdened with cancelled orders, loss of customers and supply chain disruptions — causing a sharp fall in revenues. This cash flow shortage is exacerbated by constraints to accessing finance, potentially leading to solvency problems. The broad-based loss of cash flows has triggered a chain of non-payments throughout the economy, including to the financial sector.

Unlocking liquidity has remained a challenge despite India's financial system benefited from early and decisive measures taken by RBI and the government of India to infuse liquidity into the market. In the current uncertainties about the economic situation due to the increasing number of COVID-19 patients in thousands on a daily basis, lenders remain concerned about borrowers' ability to repay. Government is trying to support by de-risking lending from banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) to MSMEs through a range of

Death rate of startups is very high. About 90 per cent of the startups die within three years of their launch. Moreover, there are 30 unicorn startup companies, out of which 18 have Chinese investors. Emerging troubles with China have also deepened the problems of millions of our MSMEs. If we need quick revival and survival, we must strengthen the financial system. A recent report suggests that the banking crisis is also deepening day by day. It's a bad omen.

The enormity of the task before us can be imagined by the fact that the number of registered MSMEs in FY20 had increased by 18.49 per cent to 25.13 lakh units from 21.21 lakh in FY19, according to government data. The growth rate, however, declined from 39.7 per cent in the last financial year that had increased from 15.17 lakh MSMEs registered in FY18. Overall the number of registered MSMEs in India in the past five years stood at 90.19 lakh. According to the MSME Ministry's FY19 annual report, the MSME sector is dominated by micro-enterprises. India has 6.33 crore MSMEs out of which 6.30 crore — 99.4 per cent are micro-enterprises while 0.52 per cent — 3.31 lakh are medium and 0.007 per cent — 5,000 are medium enterprises.

Government will need to work on various fronts due to disruption caused in the supply chain, warehousing, export credit etc. MSMEs all over India need special attention, however, the states like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, J&K, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, UP, Telangana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra etc need much more due to concentration of MSME clusters.

MSMEs are largely unorganized and in the informal sector. Helping them has remained a tough task for the government and financial institutions. Since 90 per cent of employment in the country depends on this sector, India cannot afford the death rate of MSME units to increase. (IPA Service)

*"Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict."*

--- Henry Winkler

## The Shillong Times

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### Covid subsumes other core issues

HEALTH and education are both important issues that have not been given adequate attention in Meghalaya. Sure, Covid is a health emergency but it is not the only health problem that afflicts people. There are deaths every day in Meghalaya and no one is concerned about the cause of death. Only Covid-related deaths receive attention. Hence it is fair to say that Covid has subsumed all other issues across this country and in Meghalaya too. However, it is heartening to note that Principal Secretary Health, Government of Meghalaya has been keeping vigil on other health concerns such as maternal and infant mortality which continue to be a challenge. He has been conferring with the district heads and health personnel on this issue. Maternal and infant mortality figures in Meghalaya are on the higher side and continue to baffle health care providers. The reasons are primarily anemia and malnutrition among pregnant mothers. This needs attention even in the midst of the pandemic.

Psycho-social problems too are of concern. Domestic violence is on the rise but the handicaps of reporting such violence are too many to circumvent especially during the lockdown. Mental health issues too have either gone unnoticed or unreported and those suffering have had no help whatsoever. In fact, most people have pushed their health problems to the backburner and regular check-ups have dwindled even among the elderly as they shun hospitals and health centres. The Covid protocols insist that the elderly should go out only when very necessary. Besides, the fear of going out of the house and contacting the virus is very real. All this will add up to a strain on the section of population that need regular medication. But those needing the most care are cancer patients and they top the number of deaths worldwide, but they too have been given short shrift on account of the pandemic.

Education is another sector that has not received adequate attention. The messaging from the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) for higher education has been ambivalent and has created more panic among parents and students. It seems clear now that for this year normal classes are out. Alternative teaching methods and online schooling has filled the education vacuum to some extent but the future looks uncertain. No consultations have taken place between the MHRD and the State Education Departments. Discussions on economic stimuli have taken place several times but no clear directives have come from the Union Government on education. It's imperative that state and central government now pay attention to education.

## Admission to reputed Higher Secondary Schools

# A pointless and toxic meritocratic charade

By TFL Mawlong

A normal situation, free from the pandemic, will not happen anytime soon, at least not in 2020. Many stakeholders inveigh against online education (and for good reasons), but like it or not online education (YouTube or online academy) is a game-changer at least for 10+2 science education. It would be interesting to observe how Covid19 would shape and change the enrollment pattern to higher secondary schools given that migrating outside the state is impossible and commuting in Shillong city is becoming 150% costlier. In this article, I would venture to draw the attention of readers towards some critical facts with regards to 10+2 Science Education in the city.

Let me bluntly state that all well established Higher Secondary Schools (HSS) are more or less the same. It does not matter where a student gets admitted for 10+2. Whether it be St Edmund's HSS, or St Anthony's HSS, or Government Boys, or Seven Set HSS, or Laban Boys HSS, etc., the education offered is generally one of a shallow and crass type. They all have that ruthless and selfish expectation from you even while feeding you with incomprehensible crass lessons. So I would say there's nothing glorious about any of them, though, of course, I won't deny, there is something decent in all of them.

Also, but for some fashionable facilities and bourgeois atmosphere in the reputed schools of the city, I can confidently say that the Higher Secondary Schools in small towns like Sohra, Khliehriat, Mairang, and District Headquarters easily match the quality (or the lack of quality) of the city's reputed HSS. Don't be fooled for one instant by the clamour about the Higher Secondary Schools in the city sweeping the first ten positions in HSSLC. I believe many would agree that if the SSLC toppers or high first division students would settle in other less reputed HSS or any HSS in small towns, many of them would still be 'board toppers' in HSSLC if they can summon the will to do so. We have seen science students of lesser-known small-town schools doing quite well despite the lack of privileges (good private tuitions, etc) that their urban counterparts enjoy and despite being academically very poor when they joined the 10+2 science. For instance, Mairang Presbyterian HSS is consistently registering 100% pass with many of them in first division and

distinctions. In the past, there have been HSSLC 12 science toppers from Ramakrishna mission HSS as well. Not that the 'top-ten tag' of students reflects the quality of higher secondary science education in schools, nor does it matter at all these days! So what's pulling students to reputed and expensive HSS?

Let's critically examine the crucial 'pull-factor' in today's enrollment to the 10+2 'Science' stream. The majority of students are choosing the city's reputed HSS over others because they 'consciously or subconsciously' think that these schools can help them crack the medical entrance exam (National Eligibility Entrance Test, NEET) or the engineering entrance exam (Joint Engineering Entrance examination, JEE) apart from giving them a 'solid science education.' Well I'm sorry to disappoint you, but our so-called prestigious HSS 'cannot' assure you a solid science education, let alone help you crack NEET/JEE, 'more than other HSS in Meghalaya could.' So the fatalistic notion that the reputed HSS of the city are the 'Holy Grail of excellent science education' is just a 'myth' that must be busted in the interest of all students.

It is a fact that there are hardly 5-7 students every year who get into MBBS fresh out of schools ever since the introduction of NEET in 2015. And these 5-7 students are almost entirely from BSF, Army Public Shillong, and other private HSS outside Meghalaya. Mind that, students of Meghalaya enjoy an MBBS quota which effectively means that they are to compete only with fellow Khasi-Jaintia, or Garos for the state merit MBBS seats and that means scoring a mere 360 or 50% is more than enough to get an MBSS Seat from the Khasi Jaintia category. Also, the number of students getting into IIT is insignificantly low. In the last 15 years, there are less than 0.3 numbers of students per year (i.e. less than one student in three to four years) who get into IIT. NEET, as such is not as hard as it is made out to be. It only requires plodding the whole year to develop that Sherlockian clarity of basic concepts (you may Google about Sherlock) and constant practice to become perfect with Multiple Choice Questions.

Questions loom: Why is it that hard then for our brightest students (except one or two) in reputed schools to score even 320 out of 720 marks when tribal

students in Manipur or Assam (even if we don't count their best private schools) are scoring 520+ in good numbers? This is observed every year. If the basic concept is strong I don't see why it is difficult to score 400+ marks out of 720 even for above-average students fresh out of school. So don't our schools teach students a conceptual understanding of the basics? We can't say that students are not diligent enough, can we? I would presume our bright and ambitious students in our reputed schools are slogging tirelessly for two years. Paradoxically, not only do they fail to perform well in NEET/JEE, but many of them also have an almost zero conceptual understanding even after scoring 85+ percentages in HSSLC and after two years of attending private tuitions.

There's another thing. If you observe keenly, the 10+2 students in the city have fallen prey to a fashion that is based on consumerism which is enthralling coaching advertisers and marketers. Coaching institutes are routinely marketing in the HSS of the city. Some private schools would finally tie up with the coaching institutes at the full expense of students. And those schools who are avoiding the coaching marketers are busily brainwashing the students to make a sell of their own shambolic coaching service. Either way, our science students are constantly trying to fill up the huge learning gap in school with equally ineffective however-well-meaning coaching centers of Shillong.

And every year students from different districts are migrating to Shillong for 10+2 science education even though good Higher Secondary Schools are available in their vicinity. Perhaps they think that they would at least have access to coaching centers and other private home tuitions in Shillong. But these days, all students, where-ever they are, have equal opportunity to access excellent Online Coaching offered by the best in India and some excellent education channels on YouTube, removing the need for private tuitions.

Hence considering the calamitous impact that Covid19 has had on the economy of thousands of families in Meghalaya, it is not worth it for rural students to migrate even fifty kilometers to scramble for seats in the expensive Higher Secondary Schools of the city. Instead of spending Rs 20,000 - 30,000 in admission fees and more

hidden fees over two years, apart from monthly private tuition fees and living expense in Shillong, I would suggest that parents become wiser: They should instead buy a Rs 20,000 laptop for their son/daughter and any economical but excellent Online Course for NEET/JEE (about Rs 10,000. And there are quite a few out there) and counsel him/her to settle in their town higher secondary schools. I am sure if they can summon the will to work hard, they'll be better placed than their city counterparts who are wasting significant time and money in traffic and in attending the wasteful private tuitions daily.

I am not writing this to forcefully debunk the notion that prestigious schools can help you crack NEET/JEE. I am just trying to show that the 'Holy Grail of an excellent education' is never in our reputed Higher Secondary Schools or Colleges.

To conclude, I would suggest that the Deputy Commissioner's offices in Meghalaya be more proactive in creating education awareness and ensuring a systematic science education in their districts. A DC in a rural district, being more in touch with the people and institutions can initiate many innovative programs in their districts to arm science students with critical ammunition for NEET/JEE. For instance, among other things, a DC can initiate the teacher's convention which would serve as a forum for teachers to discuss and share their experiences, knowledge, and obstacle to prepare students for the cutting-edge entrance exams. In these conventions, teachers could be exposed to the best practices, and well-designed teaching and study materials (which at present, even the reputed schools and coaching centers are oblivious to). The DC can also monitor (using the specially tailored online portal) the student's progress in Government and Government-aided HSS.

A concerted effort is needed to gradually end the lopsided enrollment pattern of students in 10+2. And it matters for science education in Meghalaya. When a 'qualitatively' and a 'quantitatively' uniform enrollment pattern in 10+2 is realized, I reckon a revolution (or evolution!) in Science Education will be set in motion!

I have written this article with honesty and sensitivity  
(The writer can be reached at [tflmawlong@gmail.com](mailto:tflmawlong@gmail.com))

## Rajasthan Verdict Cong its own worst enemy!

By Insaaf

### ROUND THE STATES

The Congress High Command's worry in Rajasthan is far from over. Ushering normalcy or some semblance of order will be a challenge given the big fight between Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his then number two, Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, who has since been stripped of the portfolio as well as Presidency of the Congress Party (PCC), not yet fully over. The entire drama since Monday last ran like a Bollywood thriller, with 'handsome and English-speaking' Pilot ending up as the 'villain' and Gehlot as 'hero', after attempts to topple the government failed miserably. Though Pilot says he's a Congressman and would never join the BJP, Gehlot insists the whole drama was plotted by him along with BJP: IT raids on Gehlot's men; hotel in Gurgaon where Pilot and his herd stayed being declared as COVID quarantine centre; horse trading to tune of 20 crore being offered for an MLA; State BJP planning a meeting, which had to be aborted, etc. It's a different story that the plot failed, but the war is clearly between Pilot and Gehlot, with BJP now in the shadows. What is the future for Pilot is a nagging question in Congress circles, given that keeping him in the State would be difficult, as Gehlot won't simply allow it. However, it appears that Rahul Gandhi has kept the doors open for his friend and will need to work out some face saving for Pilot. Dreams of becoming Chief Minister are over, what can Pilot bargain for? Or rather bargain at all?

#### MP Brutality

The Madhya Pradesh government must hang its head in shame. Corrective measures are not enough, following police brutality in an anti-encroachment drive in Guna district, where farmers were being removed from their farmland to build a college. On Tuesday a Dalit couple drank poison after the police allegedly tried to destroy their crop in that drive. In fact, a video went viral showing cops brutally beating up some of the residents with lathis, a woman pleading and trying to shield the man, a child following the couple and then the couple falling unconscious after consuming poison. A day later, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced removal of Guna Collector and Superintendent of Police from their posts and an inquiry ordered. While the couple is said to have recovered, they have been booked among others for trying to obstruct public officials on duty. Chouhan has assured that action will be taken against the guilty. His predecessor Kamal Nath has hit out and asked "What kind of jungle raj is this?" Valid question, but the incident shouldn't be used to score brownie points, rather to set it right. Is anyone listening?

#### Delhi Spat

They are at it again. Delhi's Lieutenant-governor Anil Baijal and Arvind Kejriwal government differ on appointment of special public prosecutors (SPPs) in the High Court on cases concerning North East Delhi riots in February and anti-CAA protests. While the Delhi police recommended names of six SPPs, to fight the 85 cases, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, holding temporary charge of Home department, rejected this. Instead, he insists government's counsel and team are independent, technically qualified and capable of handling the cases and sent the file back to the Delhi police. Baijal, using his special powers has summoned for the file and matter is expected to reach Rashtrapati Bhavan again. A month ago, similar disagreement was on appointment of 11 public prosecutors by Delhi police in lower courts for NE Delhi riots cases. Citing difference of opinion, the LG chose to refer matter to President Kovind, following which then Home Minister Satyendar Jain approved Delhi Police's panel. Which way will this round go is anybody's guess.

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**BJP Eyeing Jharkhand?**  
Is Jharkhand the next State being eyed by the BJP? The answer is in the affirmative, according to Congress State president and Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon in the coalition government. On Wednesday last, he claimed the saffron party 'tried to entice few Congress MLAs (offered money and posts) during the recently held Rajya Sabha elections in a bid to form the government.' However, he was confident that his and alliance parties MLAs are intact and the BJP will never succeed as their flock 'got elected after fighting the BJP on the street for the people.' But there is no room for complacency despite the fact that the coalition government has a comfortable majority in the 81-member Assembly: the JMM has 29 members, Congress 17 MLAs, and RJD (third partner) a single legislator and BJP 26. Both JMM and BJP managed to send one party candidate each to Rajya Sabha, though Congress candidates couldn't make it. The State BJP President Deepak Prakash has rubbished Oraon's statement saying he is diverting attention of people from the government's handling of the Corona crisis. Set your house in order first, is his advice. The Congress has reason to worry, as the idiom goes once bitten, twice shy!

#### Manipur Drug Cartel?

Manipur is in the throes of an unusual squabble between the government, a woman police officer and the High Court, over a 2018 drug smuggling case. It hit headlines as in a recent affidavit in the High Court, an officer and additional SP, Narcotic Police, Th. Brinda has accused politicians, including a close acquaintance of Chief Minister Biren Singh, and top police officers of being involved in the racket. But she faces a contempt case for her "offensive" remarks on FB allegedly undermining the judiciary after alleged drug kingpin Lhukhosei Zhou was granted a 3-week bail by court of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Zou, then Chairman, Autonomous District Council, Chandel, was arrested in 2018 with "4.6 kg heroin powder and 2,80,200 tablets of 'World is Yours' worth Rs 28 crore." After a year into trial, he jumped bail, was pronounced a proclaimed offender, but has since returned. While CM assures 'the war against drugs will continue and no party involved, whether friend or relative, will be spared under the present BJP regime', Brinda claims pressure is mounting on her from different quarters. Government's war on drugs is an eyewash she says. Will truth prevail?

#### Offer To Plasma Donors

Assam has come up with a plan to lure plasma donors. Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has committed to donors that they will get preferential treatment in government jobs and government schemes. Plus, those who come to the State from outside to donate shall get State guest honour besides flight tickets. Will Sarma's plan have a better success rate than other governments who too are urging people to donate plasma? Statistics need to be watched. INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

## West Bengal in Covid chaos

Editor,  
After spending over three months in Shillong due to the lockdown, I had to return to my workplace in Kolkata. But on reaching Kolkata, I was surprised to see the laxity by the airport authorities. I was expecting it to be stricter than Guwahati airport but it was otherwise. After arriving at Kolkata airport every passenger was only photographed before the exit gate and there was no scanning, no rapid testing and no health protocols and SOPs were followed.

After coming out of the exit gate I booked a cab as usual and on the way I asked the cab driver about the Covid 19 situation in Kolkata. The driver was very frank and bluntly replied that, "you are on your own." The driver's reply came as a shocker to me. Even though lockdown was still enforced I noticed many people walking around in public places; shops were open, and there

were many crowded buses and autos plying on the road. People are just flouting the lockdown without any care. In Shillong and Guwahati when lockdown is enforced it means a curfew. There are complete restrictions on civilian movement, or movement of unauthorized persons and vehicles.

The Mamata Banerjee Government is trying hard to combat and control the spread of this Covid-19 virus. Out of the 23 districts, the worst affected districts in terms of mortality rates are Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, Howrah and South 24 Parganas. The density of population in these districts is also the highest and it requires continuous monitoring by the State health officials. More random testings should be done especially in containment areas. As on date there are around 606 containment zones in West Bengal with North 24 Parganas district having the maximum at 95. It certainly is a herculean task for the concerned authorities. But all the hard work by the

Government will go in vain if there are no stringent actions taken against health protocol violators.

Just a week ago, another lockdown was enforced by the West Bengal government on July 9, 2020 for 7 days which was later extended by 4 more days for containment zones only. But the number of people taking to the streets and the number of vehicles plying on the roads remains the same just like any normal day. A colleague of mine rightly said that Lockdown in West Bengal is enforced only for publicity in both print and electronic media only. It is not being followed in letter and spirit as it should be in every nook and corner and by every individual concerned.

Yours etc.,  
M Hynniewta,  
Via email

## China woos Iran

Editor,  
China's aggressive political and military

standpoint has aroused the ire of the international community. Its aggressive stance ranges from Ladakh in the Himalayas, the South China Sea region and beyond. At the same time China is looking to strengthen its relations with Iran in the Middle East. The initial stages of these relations started during President Xi Jinping's visit to Iran in 2016. There are reports that both the countries have drafted a comprehensive military and trade partnership. The deal makes way for about \$400 billion worth of Chinese investments into Iran's key sectors such as energy and infrastructure. The agreement could also make way for Chinese military bases in Iran.

There have been fierce conflicts between the US and China and the US and Iran. US President, Donald Trump's policy of "maximum pressure" against Tehran has adversely affected India's relations with Iran. India has been trying to balance its relations with the US and

Iran for a long time. When the conflicts between the US and China reach Iran, it would pose challenges to India. During the time of former US president Obama, India had struggled to maintain good relations with Iran. Trump withdrew the US from the Iran nuclear deal and enforced comprehensive sanctions on Iran. The deal was made at a time when the Iranian economy has been crippled by US sanctions.

The deal between China and Iran poses some challenges to India. The Chabahar port project is seen as a bridge between India, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. India and Iran had signed an agreement to construct a rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, along the border with Afghanistan. Now the Iranian government has decided to proceed with the construction own its own, citing delays from the Indian side in funding and starting the project. The railway project was meant to be a part of India's commitment to the trilateral

agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan to build an alternate trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia. There is a possibility that China may take over the construction of the rail line from Chabahar port given the new deal between Iran and China. Iran-China strategic partnership would adversely affect India, not merely due to its relations with Iran but also due to China's access to the Indian Ocean region and possible military arrangements with Iran. China may extend its control along the Pakistan-Iran coast.

All these developments make the upcoming US elections very important. A Trump victory could make things complicated for Iran while a Joe Biden victory may give some relief to Iran. India is more worried about China's strategies than those of Tehran. Whatever may be the future developments, India needs to be watchful and alert.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Via email

# 'Lockdown hampered regular work, field visits'

It is not an easy task to get an appointment with the director of North East Space Application Centre, or NESAC, because there are strict protocols to be followed. But **DR PLN RAJU** is always ready to cooperative to make the process simpler.

The 59-year-old director of Nesac, who describes himself as a "remote sensing application person", is originally from Alakapuram village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. After finishing education from government schools, Raju studied BE in Civil Engineering at Manipal Institute of Technology, Mysore University and finished post graduation (MTech in Remote Sensing) from College of Engineering, Guindy, Anna University.

Raju says his interest in space science grew while studying Remote Sensing "as this technology has so much to offer, benefitting the community". He joined Nesac in 2015 after which he took up several initiatives under the commercial and public domains of space science applications. "As a person, I am on a mission to contribute and spearhead the use of space technology for the north-east, as much as possible during my tenure at NESAC till June 2021," he says.

In an email interview with *The Shillong Times*, Raju speaks about the various NE-specific projects, youth programmes in space science, his experience in Meghalaya and the status of space research in India, among others. Excerpts:

**When did you join NESAC and how long is the tenure? Where were you before this?**

I joined NESAC in October 2015, serving almost for the last five years and my tenure is for one more year, i.e. till June 2021. Earlier to joining NESAC, I was serving at Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Dehradun, completing 28 years of experience working in the area of Remote Sensing and Geoinformatics area.

**What new projects (both commercial and public) have you taken up after joining NESAC?**

The government initiated (Public) Site suitability mapping for sericulture development sponsored by Central Silk Board, GOI.  
 ■ Expansion of Flood Early Warning System alerts for the different States of North East  
 ■ Lightning Early Warning system for North East  
 ■ Space-based inputs for Forest Working Plan preparation  
 ■ Monitoring centrally sponsored schemes like IWMP, PMGSY, NERTPS, NEC sponsored projects for governance and development  
 ■ UAV (drones) Remote Sensing at all State level in North east sponsored by NEC

**Commercial / Public Sector**

■ Implementation of the State of the real-time hydro-meteorological monitoring system in catchment areas upstream of Ranganadi hydroelectric project  
 ■ UAV flying and mapping

**This year was the 60th anniversary of a first weather satellite. Has NESAC introduced any new technology to the better weather forecast?**

Yes, this year is the 60th anniversary of the first weather satellite, i.e., TIROS (Television Infrared Observation Satellite), which was launched by NASA and partners on April 1, 1960. Isro, DOS is one of the first five space-faring nations, developed the expertise and made operational activities like launching rockets (PSLV, GSLV, etc.), building our communication satellites, weather satellites, remote sensing satellites, navigational satellites, and their use, benefitting the country as a whole.

NESAC is effectively using Isro-built weather satellites (INSAT 3D, 3DR) and Doppler Weather Radar (DWR) installed at Cherrapunjee (Shora) in generating rainfall forecast, thunderstorm alerts for northeast.

**How are farmers here benefiting from scientific data, weather warning etc?**

The weather forecast, thunderstorm alerts are made available through NERDRR (North Eastern



Region - Disaster Risk Reduction) portal and disseminated to government officials (agriculture, water resources, and disaster management authorities). NESAC also supports with rainfall forecasting using weather models and alerting government officials and farmers, particularly during floods. Besides, NESAC generate thunderstorm/lightning alerts and inform the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMAs) well in advance for further action from the States NER.

**How is NESAC working to create interest in students about space science?**

You may be aware that ISRO, DOS is creating a lot of interest in students about space science by organising many events at the national level and state level in promoting space science. The prominent among them are:

■ YUVIKA (Young Scientist) programme at the national level by selecting three students of 9th class (on merit) from each state. A total of 108 students provided state-of-the-art training related to space science and technology. NESAC is the nodal center for all eight NE States, in addition to West Bengal. It will be conducted every year from 2019 onwards.

■ 2019 - 2020 is the centenary year of celebrating Father of Indian space programme, Dr Vikram Sarabhai, starting with a national programme organised at SAC, Ahmedabad, on August 12, 2019. As part of the centenary celebrations, NESAC is provided with a space on wheels mobile exhibition bus to organise exhibition cum exciting competitions for school children's in all states of the northeast. A very large number of students visited the space on wheels exhibition bus and participated in competitions. So far, NESAC organised four such events in Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura.

■ ISRO has also planned Isro Cyberspace Competition 2020 (ICC - 2020), made open to all school students (for all classes i.e., 1 to 12) with competitions in drawing, model making, essay completion, and space quiz contest with encouraging prizes for the winners. All are done online and to participate from home during July-August 2020, concluding on the birth anniversary of Dr Vikram Sarabhai on August 12, 2020. NESAC is the nodal point for the North East part of India.

■ Annual state level fair on Science, Mathematics and Environment conducted at Maharani Tulsiwati Girls Higher Secondary School, Agartala, Tripura during January 2-4, 2020.

■ Dr Vikram Sarabhai Centenary Celebrations Program organised at SMIT, Majitar, Rangpo, Sikkim.

■ 27th State Level National Children Science Congress held in Domoona, Assam and Sibsagar College, Sivasagar during November 2-4, 2019.

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**Can you give some details about the recent exhibition and similar other events involving youths?**

NESAC participated in the 2nd Emerging North East 2019 exhibition-cum-conference on February 20-22, 2019, in Guwahati, sponsored by ISRO, DOS based on request from OMPR, ISRO.

■ Space on wheels-Mobile Space Exhibition Bus as part of the Dr Vikram A Sarabhai Centenary Celebration programme, a state of art Mobile Space Museum has been developed by ISRO on a bus. In the "Space Museum on wheel" model of launch vehicles (SLV, ASLV, PSLV, GSLV), satellites (polar and geostationary), Vikash Engine, Cryo stage, RLV-RD, NAVIC, ISRO extra planetary missions etc. have been kept and organised in systematic manner for live interaction / explanation etc. Some of the models are self explanatory using interactive command base software. Large number of visitors including students participated enthusiastically. A team from NESAC along with a Mobile Space Exhibition Bus visited across North East as per the following details:  
 ■ CSIR-NEIST, Jorhat for students and scientists  
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**Many challenges are there (in NE). Poor road connectivity, mountainous terrain, and more importantly, communication links are limited. It is for NESAC to address the challenges in bringing the NE on a par with the mainland of India**

**What is the status of space research in India?**

NESAC's main objective is to expand space applications by user organisations in North East. Nesac is providing support and related research activities in the following areas:

■ Natural Resource Management (agriculture, forestry, ecology, earth science and water resources etc.)  
 ■ Disaster Management Support under NER - DRR  
 ■ Space Science and Meteorology  
 ■ Infrastructure Development  
 ■ Natural Resources Asset mapping and monitoring as part of governance and development Space technology, GIS, GNSS, ICT, web services, IOT, A.I., and DL/ML advancements are playing an important role in providing enhanced space technology appli-

**Space research in India is taking place in a big way. ISRO spearheads it through its centres in the rockery, satellite technology. RESPOND is one of the research initiatives that ISRO is supporting academic institutions in researching the whole spectrum of space**

cation support to the User Community.

■ Space research in India is taking place in a big way. ISRO spearheads it through its centres (VSSC, URSC, LPSC, SAC, IPRC, SDSC, NRSC, etc.) in the rockery, satellite technology (i.e., earth observation, satellite communication, meteorology, planetary science, navigation, etc.). RESPOND is one of the research initiatives that ISRO is supporting academic institutions in researching the whole spectrum of space.

**What are the challenges of working in the North East?**

Many challenges are there. The poor infrastructure (road) connectivity, mountainous, hilly terrain, and more importantly, communication links are limited across the North East. It is for NESAC to address the said challenges in bringing the North East on a par with the mainland of India. Space technology is playing an essential role in implementing many centrally sponsored Schemes and Act East Policy initiatives of the Government of India.

**How was the lockdown period? What were the arrangements made at NESAC?**

The lockdown period was a difficult time for NESAC. The government of India (NDMA, MoHFW, and DOS) and the Government of Meghalaya guidelines were strictly complied with. Nesac has supported developing web portal and mobile apps to fight against Coronavirus in collaboration with Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

**How much work was hampered due to lockdown?**

Lockdown has hampered the regular work at NESAC. It has helped to work online for NESAC. Still, many times our work involves field visits as part of many application projects such as sericulture, agriculture, forestry, urban and water resources. Lockdown has, therefore, hampered an essential component of field visits and precious time. Besides, we could not conduct training programmes due to lockdown.

**Are you working with BSNL for providing SAT phones in border villages where there is no mobile network? How long will it take?**

NESAC is not directly involved with BSNL for satellite-based communication for border/remote, inaccessible villages. As I understand, Isro launched the GSAT-29 communication satellite on November 14, 2018, with a dedicated spot beam in Ku and Ka-band covering North East

and Jammu & Kashmir regions. BSNL is directly in contact with Isro, DOS, for allocation of required bandwidth for connecting around 5,000 gram panchayats in the North East. It is progressing.

**What are the risks/positives involved in providing SAT link in border areas?**

The North East comprises eight states bounded with more than 5,000 km of international boundary with Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. Security is the primary concern for all these states, in addition to difficult mountain and inaccessible terrain. Providing SAT phones will help in strengthening homeland security at the national and state levels in border areas of the North East.

**Coming back to you, were you always interested in space sci-fi books as a child?**

I have served more than 32 years in ISRO. It is my dream to work for Isro. I am very well satisfied in enabling the use of space technology at grassroots/community level, particularly in the northeastern part of India that is very much in need of it.

I am not habituated to read scientific books but always used to think how, as a scientist of ISRO, I am useful for the community.

**What are your hobbies/interests? How would you describe yourself?**

My hobbies are playing games such as table tennis, volleyball, and badminton. I am a marathon runner and participated in half and full marathons after joining NESAC. I have developed the habit of running over the last many years and it has kept me healthy and strong.

I describe myself as a remote sensing (space technology) application person having experience of more than 32 years. Since my posting at NESAC for the last five years, I tried to expand and popularise the use of space technology applications in Northeast among user departments, branding NESAC as Centre of Excellence of ISRO/DOS.

**Have you been around Meghalaya? How do you like Shillong/NE?**

Meghalaya is a very beautiful place with unique tourist places such as Sohra (Cherrapunji), Mawsynram (world's highest rainfall), Asia's cleanest village Mawlynnong, Krem Puri cave (discovered as a the longest cave in India), double living root bridge (only specific to Meghalaya) and rainbow falls etc. I like Shillong, Meghalaya and Northeast as a whole very much.

## Not just an institution



By Br Solomon Morris

Here's where our lives are made, Here's where foundations laid, Here is where we strive to plan our lives for God and country.

SES for St Edmund's, leaders in every field!"

Against the quiet and despairing background of the COVID-19 pandemic, after the endless period of waiting and restless uncertainty, and the disappointing cancellation of the ICSE examinations, our students of ICSE finally had some exhilarating news to celebrate. All 144 students of St Edmund's School cleared the hurdle — 129 students secured more than 60 per cent and 52 scored over 80 per cent.

The results were very good. Congratulations to all our boys, teachers and parents who worked very hard. The boy who topped the ICSE this year was Imad Farouque with 98.8 per cent, followed by Shantanu Agarwal with 98 per cent and Aibannehok Sohliya with 97 per cent.

While these boys get special mention, we are equally proud of all our boys who worked hard to get these incredible results. There are boys who improved dramatically. Some were elated; some broke down out of sheer joy; some 'doubting Thomases' couldn't believe their eyes! But then St Edmund's boys always have the happy knack of rising to the occasion.

Some parents of these same boys approached me at the start of their Year 10 and implored that their sons be spared from participating in concerts, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. Ironically, most of these boys thought otherwise. They wanted to thoroughly enjoy their last year in school with all of the activities and fun time. And did they have fun?

The old adage, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", the origin of which goes back to the 17th century, is so true. Here, in St Edmund's, our academic year is packed with numerous activities. We conduct various events like concerts, sports, carnival, creation week where competitions like quiz, spelling bee, elocution, debates, JAM (Just A Minute), singing, art and craft, cooking, rangoli, power point presentations, movie production, advertisements, wealth out of waste, fashion show, salad show, flower show, origami, one-act plays, sand art, extempore, use of props, miming..... etc. are held.

In addition to these, we have class picnics, overnight camping (thanks to Campfire Trails Organizers), Domestic Excursions, and International Tours. St. Edmund's also organizes the EDMUNDIAN FEST which is a three day-fest involving Inter-School competitions. For the last two years, St. Edmund's has conducted the MUN (Model United Nations).

Then we have the Christian Brothers' Inter-School tournaments held in Anasol (West Bengal) and Kurseong (West Bengal). Some of our boys do play for the Junior State team in Cricket (Arush Rahman and Gavanal) and Badminton. One of our finest golfers is Lakshya Bajaj who won the Statesman Cup in Shillong, the Civics Cup in Guwahati and played the National Junior Golf Tournament in Kolkata. We have some extraordinary talents in singing (Reuben Hadem), music (Borne Jordan with his violin, AddanStoneWarjri, an accomplished pianist; John Lamare, a versatile guitar player; Carl Brennan, another guitarist, just to name a few) and dancing. Last year, we staged the Wizard of Oz. Our boys know that it requires the brain of the Scarecrow, the heart of a Timman, the nerve of a Lion and a homely atmosphere to develop into a rounded personality.

Our boys have participated and won prizes in various Inter-School Science Exhibitions, Debate and Quiz Competitions. School is not just about academics.

Our boys are also put in charge of various activities which are conducted with competence and consummate ease. It is in School that they learn the basics of event management, efficient organization, creative leadership and learning to work with each other. Our Class 9 & 10 boys are presently busy organizing the Online Creation Week amid this pandemic situation. And all our boys from Classes 1 to 10 are involved in some events or the other. It is worth mentioning that the entire Creation Week is managed and run by the 11 Captains and Vice Captains.

At St. Edmund's we provide our children opportunities to lead from the front. We do admit that we have been slow to take up social causes. We need to be more involved in social advocacy issues and environmental projects. We are certainly working on this. We do have social outreach programs undertaken by our boys of Classes 8, 9 and 10. But we feel we could do more. Our Social Justice Cell has been set up and there are about 50 students who are meeting regularly to take up some new projects in the near future. At present the training is going on.

Our teachers have been patient and truly hardworking. They work closely with the boisterous boys and genuinely take interest in them. They strive to maintain the high standards and expect the same from their students. We congratulate and thank all our wonderful teachers who were instrumental in shaping the lives of our children.

We are grateful to God for steering our ship, St Edmund's, with all its people in it — all the past and present Christian Brothers, Sisters who worked in the infirmaries during the boarding school days, the teaching Staff, the Administrative and Support Staff who were great souls, our students and parents - to a voyage of discovery, where together we move "one equal temper of heroic hearts, made weak by time and fate, but strong in will. To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield to the pressures of conformity and mediocrity. God bless all.

(The author is the principal of St Edmund's School)

# Utopia or oblivion

By Dilip Mukerjea

The speed, capacity, and universality of today's marketplace is influencing our species like never before. In many instances, yesterday's science fiction has become today's fact. The forms and shapes of our institutions strive to project a richness, diversity, and individuality that reflects innovation at full throttle. Perhaps. But if our planet is to survive, and humanity is to enjoy continually ascending standards of living, technology cannot be allowed to trump humanity. It must be inspired to serve humankind towards a new consciousness.

**"That's fine. But what are they going to SAY?"** ~ George Bernard Shaw on learning that England and India had been joined by cable.

Stunning medical advances have established the tripling of human longevity, but what use is that if we remain at the level of 'man annihilating man'?

We may never get Utopia, but we could most certainly get Oblivion ... in our lifetime! The solution lies in immediately creating a **global learning culture** ... in which we all get to live, love, learn, and laugh, in harmony! What is the cost of NOT doing so?

## CHOOSE



An Opportunity MindState has staying power. The difference between a risk and an opportunity is how soon you discover it, and the speed with which you act on it towards garnering positive outcomes. To advance our status quo, we need to explore and exploit the unprecedented menu of opportunities for learning, co-creation and collaboration, and innovation and entrepreneurship, across political, economic, scientific, technological, and cultural barriers, borders and boundaries. **The time is now, for us to convert abstract dreams into concrete action.**

L.I.F.E. = Leadership, Innovation, Fellowship, Entrepreneurship

**LIVE passionately**



**LOVE ardently**



**LEARN hungrily**



**LAUGH joyously**

It is the birthright of every individual to be free of bondage.

Never settle for an underdog's life with lame dog excuses!

Never grant permission for fear to enslave you.

There is a story in you that can transform the world... for the better! Break free from the corroding cage that surrounds you, and dare to live!

brainaisance@gmail.com

(The author is L.I.F.E. coach, author, consultant, presenter and learning guide) Illustration & design by Dilip Mukerjea

# New destination for Indians

By CK Nayak

International tours by Indian tourists have taken the worst hit during the COVID 19 pandemic. But some countries would be rather benefited out of it compared to the known tourist destinations like Thailand and other South East Asian countries.

When it comes to international tourist destinations for Indians, Thailand and Singapore are among the popular choices. Going to the US or Europe or Africa is beyond the reach of average Indian tourists.

Here comes Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, neither next door like South-east Asia nor too far like Europe or the US. The half explored small central Asian country at the confluence of Asia and Europe is poised to be the next best alternative for Indian tourists. The climate is comfortable, people are warm and the environment is safe.

With regular flights from New Delhi and a simplified electronic visa procedure for Indian passport holders, tourism from India to Azerbaijan increased 80 per cent in 2019. Off course COVID 19 has thrown a spanner but Azerbaijan might in fact benefit out of it if properly publicised.

Azerbaijan has nine of the world's 11 climatic zones, offering travellers an affordable European experience all year round. Not only this, sporting events are a big way to boost tourism in any country and Azerbaijan has successfully managed to organise the Baku GP, Formula One race over the past few years. This former Soviet Union Republic, Azerbaijan is the ideal destination for more reasons than one.

Baku, its capital is an affluent city with modern infrastructure and still a relatively unexplored desti-



(Clockwise from top) The Caspian Sea beach in Baku; the delegation of journalists



nation.

Baku is witnessing a surge in business events and wedding travel. With over 15 million weddings each year, the Indian wedding, honeymoon and milestone celebrations market offers tremendous potential. Tourism has also become the cornerstone of Azerbaijan's diversified economy.

Baku also hosted the annual plenary session of the World Association of Press Association last September where heads of Press/Media Councils from most parts of the globe attended. There were renowned journalists from various media from different countries, including the correspondent.

Baku is famed for its medieval walled old city, which contains the Palace of the Shirvanshahs, a vast royal complex, and the iconic stone Maiden Tower. Contemporary landmarks include the Zaha Hadid-designed Heydar Aliyev Center, and the Flame Towers, 3 pointed skyscrapers covered with LED screens. Baku, the capital and also the commercial hub of Azerbaijan, is a low-lying

city with coastline along the Caspian Sea.

But among the tourist sites, the must visit is Gobustan, near Baku perhaps with no parallel anywhere. Known as Gobustan State Reserve it is very rich in archaeological monuments, the reserve has more than 6,000 rock carvings. These depict primitive people, animals, battle-pieces, ritual dances, bullfights, boats with armed oarsmen, warriors with lances in their hands, camel caravans, pictures of sun and stars, on the average dating back to 5,000-20,000 years.

Gobustan State Historical and Cultural Reserve acquired national status in 2006. The rock carvings and petroglyphs at the site display mesmerising images of prehistoric life in the Caucasus. The language of the ancient population of Gobustan is disputed, but the petroglyphs still give

information about the lives of people who lived there.

It is also estimated that 300 of the planet's estimated 700 mud volcanoes sit in Gobustan, Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea. Many geologists as well as locals and international tourists trek to such places. Some of them end up happily covered in mud which is thought to have medicinal qualities. In 2001 one mud volcano near Baku made world headlines when it suddenly started spewing flames 49 ft high.

Another attraction is the Gaval Dash, a natural musical stone which can only be found in Gobustan. It produces musical sounds when touched. The sound can be compared with a tambourine. The Gaval Dash have been formed due to the combination of unique climate, oil and gas for which Azerbaijan is famous.

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 19, 2020

Moon conjunct Mercury on your solar return chart. It is okay that will bring very positive results during the year ahead. Your dreams will come true. You will implement new ideas at your workplace. You will have unmatched financial gains. You will like to invest in share market, mutual funds and other financial instruments. You will also make plans to buy a new house or commercial property. You will come in contact with lot of influential persons who will help you immensely in days to come. Business related trips will keep you busy for the whole year. Health of elders in the family will remain good. You will take adequate care and look after them well. Students will excel in studies. Job seekers will get success in their efforts. You will get suitable marriage proposals. Siblings will give full support. Those in politics and social activities will shine. You could start business related to construction, mining and petrochemical.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This week brings good results through your efforts and continuous hard work. You are committed, bold and adventurous right now and avoid delays by proceeding exactly the way that you want to. Your popularity is increasing, and is reinforced by your own ability to cooperate and harmonize. Taking care of business is a focus. You may find your children need more love affection and attention. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to new situations. You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved. A health routine started now is likely to be successful.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Fine arts, drama, fun, glamour and creativity come into focus. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel a part of the whole. This could also be the harbinger of new professional opportunities. It's a great time to make improvements. Your vision is practical right now, and you want to see tangible results for your efforts. Relationships take on a fun aspect and activities with children increase. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive now. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Health will take a turn for the better.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This is the time of year when personal finances and possessions receive maximum attention as your focus is on material affairs and comfort issues. Pour your energy into your work and your finances, and you might just be able to take your ideas to the bank. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused. You might consider furthering your education and hobbies. It is a fabulous time to do so or simply broadening your knowledge in a more informal manner. Some form of pleasant result in your professional life brings rewards and recognition. You feel on top of things with good health and energy at your disposal.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This phase brings fabulous results in domestic matters. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work. You are more attractive when you show your responsibility, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. Media and the arts involve you in creative pastimes while professional ventures and assignments bring financial stability. You are fond of love and admiration. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, arts and writing. You would be infused with positive energy and gain recognition for your talents and hard work.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You can look forward to increased funds and monetary gains as you may earn from investments and insurance done earlier. Your most natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. Work done behind the scenes may be incorporated into your career or public life. Some of you may find that your career is moving towards a more service-oriented direction. There will be times when you feel stressed over details or the job you do and the recognition you get for it. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are headed. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. A sense of humor allows free expression and does wonders for your love life too.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The planetary configuration indicates, an excellent phase for money, career, and romance. Children, romantic trips, hobbies and other forms of communication and making connections appeal strongly. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness and solidarity in

family and friendship. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't get caught up in the past. You feel a great need to push your personal interests and projects forward, and this is a strong time to do so. You are bound to receive gifts and happy financial news.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Sincerity, cooperation and harmony in relationships are highlighted. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. Financial security and enjoyment of the good things in life are important to you, although you also value simple pleasures. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of financial matters with social or public affairs. This is a stable period for love matters and close relationships. You value those who make you feel comfortable, and familiarity is more important to you. You give attention to fitness and health related programs.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This period brings responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations. This is a strong period for analyzing your cash flow, income, and earning power. You are more practical and rational in your approach. With your conscious mind focused on money and possessions, as well as personal values, this can be a strong period for gathering new profitable ideas. Alternatively, it could be a time when you tend to fret over your finances. Conversations tend to be practical rather than frivolous now. Don't isolate yourself when you are feeling down. People will support you, or at least listen, when you share your feelings.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. There will be financial gains and profits from business. Circumstances in life are likely to create a situation where you may have to take the lead in handling complicated situations. You may be placed in a position where you have to make important monetary decisions yourself. If you have a business, it will be difficult to avoid spending lavishly on equipment and office supplies. Work-related travel or reaching out to people is possible now. There could be up-gradation, new responsibilities or transfer. You will have more contacts with authority figures. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are at your most visible during this phase.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This is a time of profitable productivity. There would excellent opportunities for media studies and other related fields. There will be expansive and generous with people around. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now. You are inclined to exert energy and initiative into making money and business dealings. You can be more resourceful than usual at this time, but you could also be inclined to rash decisions or risk-taking with money.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Your popularity increases as you cooperate and harmonize at the workplace and at home. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. It is important to include others rather than to take up projects on your own. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. This is a time of profitable productivity. A matured or an assertive type of individual may come up with challenging offers and new suggestions. You are more motivated to make money now.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You are patient, humble and secured with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. Showing your authority and a "take charge" attitude is important now, but gentleness is important as well. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another service-oriented capacity where you volunteer your services. You are likely to have many ideas and plans going and you might be inclined to scatter your energies as a result. Channelled well, this is a good time to sell your ideas to others, or to present your case. You may be especially busy running errands and communicating with others. More articulate than usual, you may also have a more assertive, self-centered, or provocative communication style.

# Banking on integrated farming

By US Saikia

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK

To overcome the situation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of United Nations recently presented 'Agroecological' approach of farming. The FAO emphasised that Agroecology should be the way to produce enough food for growing population, while protecting natural resources and livelihood and responding to climate change.

The integrated farming system (IFS) is a kind of 'Agroecological approach' which has different complementary components, ensures judicious application of natural resources, soil health restoration and bio-resource flow. It generates round the year employment to the farming family and guarantee food and nutritional security to a great extent. This is, therefore, considered as one of the most climate resilient and sustainable technologies as in case of failure of one of the components, the others perform to ensure livelihood security.

### Building resilience in soil

Soil health is the key property that determines the resilience of crop production under changing climate. A number of interventions are made to build soil carbon, control soil loss due to erosion and enhance water holding capacity of soils, all of which build resilience in soil. Mandatory soil testing is done in all villages to ensure balanced use of chemical fertilisers and improved methods of fertiliser application, matching with crop requirement to reduce nitrous oxide emission.

### Adapted cultivars & cropping systems

Farmers in the villages traditionally grow local varieties of different crops resulting in poor crop productivity due to heat, droughts or floods. Hence, improved, early duration drought, heat and flood tolerant varieties are introduced for achieving optimum yields despite climatic stresses. This varietal shift was carefully promoted by encouraging village level seed production and linking farmers decision-making to weather based agro advisories and contingency planning.

### Rainwater harvesting

Rainwater harvesting and recycling



through farm ponds, restoration of old rainwater harvesting structures in dry-land/rainfed areas, percolation ponds for recharging of open wells, bore wells and injection wells for recharging ground water are taken up for enhancing farm level water storage.

### Water saving technologies

Since climate variability manifests in terms of deficit or excess water, major emphasis was laid on introduction of water saving technologies like direct seeded rice, zero tillage and other resource conservation practices, which also reduce GHG emissions besides saving of water.

Community managed custom hiring centers are set up in each village to access farm machinery for timely sowing/planting. This is an important intervention to deal with variable climate like delay in monsoon, inadequate rains needing replanting of crops.

### Crop contingency plans

To cope with climate variability, ICAR/CRIDA has developed district-level contingency plans for more than 400 rural districts. Operationalisation of these plans during aberrant monsoon years through the district block level extension staff help farmers to cope up with climate variability.

### Livestock and fishery interventions

Use of community lands for fodder production during droughts/floods, improved fodder/feed storage methods, feed supplements, micronutrient use to enhance adaptation to heat stress, preventive vaccination, improved shelters for reducing heat/cold stress in livestock, management of fish

ponds/tanks during water scarcity and excess water are some key interventions in livestock/fishery sector.

### Weather-based agro advisories

Automatic weather stations at KVK experimental farms and mini-weather observatories in project villages are established to record real time weather parameters such as rainfall, temperature and wind speed etc. both to issue customized agro advisories and improve weather literacy among farmers.

### Institutional interventions

Institutional interventions either by strengthening the existing ones or initiating new ones relating to seed bank, fodder bank, commodity groups, custom hiring centre, collective marketing, introduction of weather index based insurance and climate literacy through a village level weather station are introduced to ensure effective adoption of all other interventions and promote community ownership of the entire programme.

A village committee representing all categories of farmers including women and the land less is formed with the approval of Gram Sabha to take all decisions regarding interventions, promote farmers participation and convergence with ongoing Government schemes relevant to climate change adaptation. VCRMC participates in all discussions leading to finalizing interventions, selection of target farmers and area, and liaison with gram panchayat and local elected representatives and maintain all financial transactions under the project.

(The author is Principal Scientist ICAR Research Complex, Umiam)

Concluded

*"Character is what you know you are,  
not what others think you have."*

--- Jim Rohn

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.339 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 20, 2020

### State of justice, State of nation

THE chaos that afflicts India's governance system is by now a gross national embarrassment. Justice R Banumathi, one of the three woman judges of the Supreme Court, only added to this embarrassment when she stated in her farewell address on Saturday that her own family remained a victim of judicial delay and apathy. She cited the case of her father who died when she was at age two in a road mishap, and how her family waited all these years for compensation, which only got mired in legal "complications". If this is the case of an elite educated family, the plight of the ordinary citizens should only be worse. This is the India that shamefully holds its head some 70 years after Independence. Most of the great systems that the British Raj introduced here before it left have by now been taken to their deep depths, while governmental inefficiency, bureaucratic corruption and political loot are the order of the day.

A recent revelation in India Justice Report 2019 was that subordinate courts in the country are clogged with as many as 28 million cases – and that some 2.3 million of these cases are pending for the last 10 years, and 6.7 million cases for five years. Lakhs of cases are pending in each of the high courts and the scenario at the apex court could be equally worse. As the adage goes, justice delayed is justice denied. Worse, whether ordinary people who form some 80 per cent of the billion plus population have the ways and means to fight their cases for so long should be a cause of grave concern. As governments change after every five years, as per democratic norms, bigger issues like these get untouched even when leaders with a so-called 56-inch chest run the nation. Systemic strengths are gradually eroding, and successive governments are taking little interest in setting things right. Governance itself has become a hugely corrupt practice while national interests take a back seat. Democracy's strengths are proving to be its main problems too as is evident from the sense of anarchy that prevails in India's banking and other sectors of the economy. Even Parliament meets are chaotic and marked by routine disruptions instead of discussing issues of national interest. While the Covid pandemic has added to the nation's woes, and things are in a state of paralysis, this is also time for the nation to see how the future can be secured and how survival in the shadow of a behemoth like China could be seriously addressed.

# Lockdown on hindsight

By HH Mohrmen

No doubt the impact of the corona lockdown on the people is multi-dimensional and will definitely be immeasurable. Perhaps no one will be able to establish the extent of negative impact that the lockdown will have on the country, the state or the individual. But one thing is certain – it is the poor and the needy who have been hit the hardest. Some of these stories testify to the fact that they are at the receiving end of the crisis. But the outcome of the lockdown will also be judged by the resilience of the people and particularly the spirit that keeps their hopes alive.

In Meghalaya the first impact that the lockdown had was on the Meghalayan Age tourism festival which was supposed to showcase the state's tourism potential. Unfortunately the project was a non-starter and every rupee spent in the preparation of the festival had gone down the drain. Now fortunately for the organisers and unfortunately for the state and its people, the blame will be on the pandemic but everybody knows that the event was ill-planned. Other event managers have organised music festivals in the same locale and they draw crowd from all over the country and even abroad. The NH7 festival was always a huge success. The Meghalayan Age festival was bound to fail because of the lack of publicity and was ill-timed. Not even the people of West Jaintia Hills were aware of the festival. After the battle against the pandemic is over the Government will have to make public the expenditure and the outcome of organising the Meghalayan age festival at Mukhla West Jaintia Hills.

There are estimates by economist in the country and the world that a large percentage of the country's population will slip back to below poverty line due to the pandemic. This is happening right in front of our eyes. The impact of the lockdown due to the pandemic has already showed its ugly face in the life of the poorer section of the population. Perhaps the section which is hit the hardest is the urban poor whose livelihood depends on what they earn daily. The

category includes the daily wage earners, the porters or coolies, the cobblers, the vendors and the hawkers who are the most vulnerable section. They were the first casualty of the lockdown. They have no savings to even see them through a few weeks so how can we expect them to sail through the pandemic. The government will do itself a service if a study is conducted on how this most vulnerable section of the population is affected by the pandemic.

There are some cases which are living examples of how the plight of the poorer section of the population played out during this time of trials and tribulations. One case in point is a family of four of which the wife is a daily wage earner and the husband is a taxi driver and the two children were below eight years. Although the wife lives in a quarter provided by the employer and was able to work throughout the lockdown period because of the proximity of the quarter to the residence of the employer, the family still has to struggle to make two ends meet because taxis cannot operate during lockdown period.

Another single mother who moved from the village in the Thadlaskin block to Jowai along with her grown-up children for better opportunity was doing well selling tea at lawmusiang market in Jowai. That was until the lockdown happened which dealt a dead blow to the dream. When the lockdown was first lifted, she came to Jowai but only to collect her goods and return to the village because the situation was not favourable for her. She has to pay rent for her house and the shop and has no more savings to continue with the business.

During the lockdown people distributed help and support to the poor and the needy, but the question is whether the help really reached the poor and the most deserving families in the society? With regard to the supplies provided by the MLAs from the MLA special scheme, there were allegations that the support did not reach the deserving families. The reason is because many MLAs entrusted the task of distributing the support to

the party and its leaders and not surprisingly the help went to the wrong hands. It is no surprise that the party cadres tend to favour only those who belong to the party and the deserving families were left out. Even in a locality where I live the support provided by the MLA was distributed by the party cadres instead of the Dorbar Chnong. In the rural areas, some villagers alleged that rice was instead given to those who have many paddy fields and have rice in their granary to last them throughout the year.

The MLAs would have achieved their goal the objective of the government if the support was channelled through the Dorbar Chnong. Each community in the rural areas already have the list of bottom twenty families handy which is part of the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guaranteed Scheme (MGREGS) program. The list consists of the twenty poorest families in the village and that would have been of a great help in deciding the deserving families in this time of crisis. But how many MLAs and MDCs even care to know how schemes like MGREGS function. MLAs and MDCs or any political leaders for that matter are happy that they have done their job in distributing rice which also provides them a photo opportunity to share in the different social media platform or publish in the press. But the question is whether this really serves the purpose of reaching out to the poorest and the most neglected sections of the population. Politicising the work of rice distribution through their party cadres even during a time of global crisis like this is the worst kind of politics that they can play.

The little experience that one has, also gives one the idea that the poor who survive are the ones who are quick to adapt and reinvent themselves. A commercial area like lawmusiang in Jowai town provided them with a living example of how people struggle to survive during the lockdown. There is a case of a shoe store seller turn fish retailer and a dalal who worked as an usher of passengers for the Jowai-Shillong tourist taxis who changed his profession to a coolie to survive the crisis. These are only few examples

of versatile people and how their versatility helped them adapt and change with time, quickly.

Living in a Dorbar Chnong which also looks after the biggest and the oldest market in Jaintia Hills is an opportunity to see firsthand how the Waheh Chnong (head man) and his team help the traders resume their trade when the district administration decided to open trade and commerce in the area. There were news reports in the media about the opening of lawduh and Police Bazaar but no report about lawmusiang because the transition went smoothly without any glitches. Like they say, if a dog bites a man that is not news, but if a man bites a dog, that is news, hence the opening of lawmusiang did not make any headlines. The credit of opening of the market unhindered goes solely to the headman and his committee.

The Waheh Chnong of Dorbar Chnong Tympang lawmusiang implemented the lockdown, provided community quarantine for the chnong's young returnees and simultaneously helped the district administration and the traders in opening up their business activities. It is not easy to deal with hundreds of traders coming from all over Jaintia hills to resume their business. It is even more difficult to help them restart their business and help them adopt to the new normal.

It was a delightful experience to see this happening and knowing that the entire team have done the job voluntarily for weeks together without any complaint. This in fact is the story of all the Dorbar Shnong in the Khasi Jaintia region of the state which have done a commendable job and yeoman's service to the state and its people during the corona lockdown. If there is any valuable lesson to be learned from the pandemic, it is that the spirit of 'bhalang ka imlang ka sahlang, ka bhalang uba bun balang' which is part of the Khasi Pnar value system is still alive in the community. All the Dorbar Shnong performed their duties pro-bono because they all work for the common good which is one of the most important moral principles of the people and an intrinsic part of Hynniew Trep life.

(The writer can be contacted at hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

# Time to coalesce for the future of our students

By Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'

"The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push an agenda. It is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth." The quote by Garry Kasparov has impounded my thoughts lately, and particularly so when never expected that a goodwill action taken by the government towards its CBSE students will become the recipe for malicious propaganda. Given that every time we make efforts to keep education out of politics, but sadly each time education has fallen prey to frivolous power play where a certain section of people, better categorised as relentless publicity-seekers, seek to deplore and treat the vision and actions of the Government, to the utter horror, confusion and pain of our young learners. At present, this section of people is looking at education as a tool to arrive at the elusive (for them) position of dominance and power rather than to empower students with critical thinking, scientific temper, analytical power and creativity that can empower them to blossom to their full potential, abundantly equipped with all the 21st-century skills, and with ethics and integrity.

The unprecedented pandemic has thrown a challenge to the Ministry to not only provide quality education to our students while keeping our focus on learning outcomes intact but also to make a stress-free environment for the students. To do so, the Ministry has been working hard to keep abreast of all the issues related to our student community. I take pride in the team at HRD for taking up and supporting exemplary decisions, such as the provision of mid-day meal to the children even during the vacation period, promoting students based on internal assessment, giving 'Power of Choice' to class 12 students and boosting the e-learning in India.

However, lately, a web of accusations is being created, regarding revision of syllabus of CBSE board influenced by socio-political needs and aspirations. Despite all the false allegations, we at the Ministry, stand committed to the provision of quality education to the next generation under the esteemed leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Some vested interests who are criticizing the 'rationalization of syllabus' are doing so without bothering to "read and understand" the directions, as available on the public domain.

What and why it has been done: Upon innumerable requests received from students, parents, teachers, CBSE was advised to revise the curriculum and reduce the load for students of classes 9 to 12. Though the 'Rationalisation of the curriculum by 30%' has been done, it will the responsibility of the Heads of Schools and Teachers to ensure that the topics that have been reduced are also explained to the students to the extent required to connect different topics. It has been done with the sole purpose of reducing the burden for annual exams in 2021 as there has been a loss of instruction time due to the pandemic. Students will not be tested on these topics for internal assessment and year-end board examination, however, C.B.S.E. has also directed the schools to follow the NCERT Alternate Academic Calendar. This calendar is available in the public domain, and all

topics that are being "sensationalized" to catch attention and traction, are covered in this calendar. This calendar has specific learning plans for each topic based on experiential or activity-based learning, with the help of commonly available resources at homes. As I say, 'ShikshasepheleSuraksha', therefore, in fact, these measures will help in reducing the hassles and stress faced by the students and is a one-time measure for exams, due to the COVID19 pandemic.

How it was done: The process for rationalization is not straight-jacketed as assumed by the so called publicity seekers. A strenuous exercise was carried out following the advice and recommendations of various experts and considering the suggestions received from educationists through our #SyllabusForStudents2020 campaign; more than 1500 expert suggestions were received. The suggestions and expertise of esteemed educationists have helped us do "just rationalization" while keeping the learning outcomes intact. The rationalization has happened across the subjects as opposed to the misconstrued testimonials of the opposition of exclusion of 3-4 topics like nationalism, local government, federalism, etc. To give a few examples, the topics expected in economics are Measures of Dispersion, Balance of Payments Deficit, etc, while in Physics are Heat Engine & Refrigerator, Heat Transfer, Convection & Radiation among others. Similarly, in Maths, Properties of Determinants, Consistency, Inconsistency, and Number of Solutions of System of Linear Equations by Examples and Binomial Probability Distribution. In Biology, portions of Mineral Nutrition, Digestion & Absorption have been exempted for evaluation.

It can be no one's argument that these topics have been exempted by malice or some grand design which only partisan minds can decipher. However, the Ministry of Human Resource Development is committed to quality education and taking bold decisions for empowering and aiding the quality learning processes for our young learners. Education cannot be seen as a mere transmission of knowledge; it has to be understood also as the mechanism to empower students to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative, how to innovate, adapt, and learn in novel situations that everyday challenges of life will keep throwing up. We believe in the 'knowledge of all – for all' and oppose building mere structures of knowledge to overpower our dominance through the curriculum.

We should value the knowledge system to enable our students with righteous knowledge which is experiential, holistic, integrated, learner-centred, and constructive. The discussion should be on the development and empowerment of students rather than using them as power-play and creating a mockery of the system that empowers young lives. Thereby, I humbly request all to step forward to create India as a Knowledge Hub by having constructive deliberations and actions. Let's coalesce our efforts for quality education to the students.

(The author is Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Government of India)

### TO THE EDITOR

## COVID-19 and our immune system

Editor,  
One feels the COVID quarantine centers without the supply of immune boosters is like a kitchen without food. As per the findings so far, COVID-19 is fought only with our stronger "immune system" because as yet we have no appropriate treatment for the virus. Before we go to any battlefield, we must be well-armed first to fight our enemies. Right now, our enemy is the Wuhan virus. We have no other weapon to kill the virus except for better immunity. So, merely keeping people in quarantine, who have been brought in on suspicion of being Covid-positive will make no sense if we do not consider helping them to build their immunity. Moreover, having been locked up in the quarantine centers, that too "away" from the comfort of home, may make some feel awfully lonely and depressed and consequently, they may further "lose" their immunity.

The outer environment usually plays a major role in our anatomy. Depression is inversely proportional to body immunity. Therefore, I urge upon the medical

experts not to shut their eyes to this crucial factor as well.

Of course, there are various herbal preparations and alternative therapies that are recommended to raise the immune system, particularly in helping to cure respiratory sickness. Crushed powder of turmeric, ashwagandha, ginger, holy basil, black pepper... mixed with honey can work wonders. I don't think they are expensive options. Inhalation of steam fortified with specific herbs has a highly "restorative" effect on the vulnerable lungs. Homeopathic medicine such as Arsenic Alb-30 is very much recommended to boost the resistance to the virus and it comes "extremely cheap." 100 ML costing Rs 170 can be administered to a minimum of five thousand people. We cannot ignore the power of Yoga either. It can effectively enhance one's immune system. I wonder why the government is not taking into account all such helpful and easy therapies.

Even in the west the alternative treatments are gaining popularity and are preferred options than the treatment by allopathic medicines which are fraught with side effects. The civilized countries are stretching out their limbs with rhythmic breaths based on yogic aphorisms. The

principal objective of yoga is to "ward off diseases" and diseased thoughts. No wonder, many medical doctors, who truly choose to keep a distance from the side-effects of allopathic medicines, appreciate and opt for the herbal remedies and yoga.

God has never stuffed his natural herbal products with the sap that hurts our biology. While man-made chemical tablets and capsules may heal one part of a sick organ but slowly damage other vital organs. Ironically, a great German physician and researcher Samuel Hahnemann, who coined the term Allopathy, had detested allopathy, favoring the Homeopathic or natural remedies. He always insisted on increasing immunity.

Hence I earnestly feel, if the government can spend thousands of rupees per person at the quarantine and the COVID treatment centers, why not a few hundred more and provide all who test positive or negative with herbal immune boosters and introduce natural therapies as well. Just as they harp on wearing the mask, they should also harp on the importance of immune-boosting therapies. Come what may, we can't afford to leave anything to chance at this juncture. Wuhan

virus can easily catch us "unarmed" when the LAC is so porous, excuse the pun. So, let's build up the "robust WALL" of immunity all along!

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong

## Another lockdown necessary?

Editor,  
Apropos the letter of M. Hynniewta captioned, "West Bengal in Covid crisis" (ST July 18, 2020), perhaps Hynniewta is not aware of the fact that upon the advisory of Central Government India is presently in "unlock" mode (through phases) and West Bengal or Kolkata is also part of this very country! Also what had been imposed from July 9, is not "total lockdown" in Kolkata and suburbs; rather few "containment zones" had been earmarked comprising selected markets, residential complexes or homes. Otherwise there had been no official restriction in the whole city with all offices, business establishments, shopping malls wide open! So it is natural that in a highly populated city like Kolkata; traffic and pedestrians would be in full flow in the streets!

The reason why the lockdown was imposed nationally on March 25 was to prevent the spread of infection from human to human contact. Now with India in "unlocking" mode, the people are all over the streets, markets, malls restaurants, sea beaches, river fronts etc. So obviously infection would also rise which is happening not only in Kolkata or West Bengal but all over the country with the fangs of the virus being deadliest in Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh to mention a few. Previously unaffected Sikkim is also registering a significant jump in the number of infections since the past few weeks! With infection surpassing the million mark and death count exceeding 26,000 the whole country is hit by the Covid crisis.

With India getting more "unlocked" in the coming days the number of infections and deaths are bound to inflate at a dreadful rate. However, there is no doubt that the general public is showing the least sense of responsibility. While many persons are seen sporting masks around the neck or forehead; almost everywhere physical distancing has come to naught either due to callousness or compulsion

(due to overcrowding in depleted number of buses)! Perhaps due to lack of adequate manpower, the offenders are rarely booked for fiddling with their masks! And this is the picture not only in West Bengal; but also in say Delhi Mumbai Bangalore Jabalpur and the cities of USA and around the world!

So what is the solution in India? The only avenue that remains is re-imposition of national lockdown unless the graph of infection registers significant dip with only the amenities providing essential services rendered open. Strict punishment is required to be meted to those who don't maintain protocols. As for the poorest of the poor, street hawkers or wage earners who would lose their income and thereby starve due to stringent lockdown; the Central government should release it's purse. Instead of squandering billions and billions of precious money upon gigantic statues, mass Yoga, temples, Hindi "promotion" or VISTA PROJECT (new capital complex in Delhi); it should be utilised for meeting the basic essential humanitarian needs of the poor during this present crisis.

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email

“Almost half of the population of the world lives in rural regions and mostly in a state of poverty. Such inequalities in human development have been one of the primary reasons for unrest and, in some parts of the world, even violence.”

— A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

## The Shillong Times

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### MBOSE SSLC results

FOR a long time schools from Shillong held sway over the results of the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) exams. In the past few years, however the results have been equitably shared by schools from other districts. This time the first place was taken by a private school in Tura, West Garo Hills. Of the top 20 positions (a total of 37 students with many scoring the same marks), 22 schools are from Shillong and the rest 15 are from different districts of Meghalaya. As many as 6 students shared the 18th position while the 6th, 14th and 15th positions were shared amongst three and the 9th, 12th, 16th, 17th 19th 20th position were shared between two students.

Altogether, 627 schools sent their students for the SSLC this year. The pass percentage in the past four years averaged 53%. This year the pass percentage slipped to 50.31% perhaps because of the confusion created by the pandemic. In terms of pass percentage, West Jaintia Hills scored 69.96%, East Jaintia Hills 69% and East Khasi Hills 68.94%. This also goes to show that education in the other districts is improving or that meritorious students are being retained in the districts instead of moving to Shillong.

The results as a whole leave much to be desired. Out of 627 schools, 73 managed to get 100% pass percentage. At least 7 schools mostly in Garo Hills had a zero pass percentage. To think that a student comes up to Class X and is unable to scale this last hurdle of securing a minimum of 30 marks in 5 or 6 subjects means there is something wrong in the education system or the teaching-learning method. In Meghalaya, not much investment has been made in the remedial teaching methods to address the weak links that students encounter in certain subjects, more often Maths and Science. Remedial teaching is essentially identifying slow learners and providing them with the necessary help and guidance to enable them to overcome their problems, after identifying their areas of difficulty. A remedial teaching class is meant to improve a learning skill or rectify a particular problem area in a student.

Remedial teaching makes education more personalised as it also looks at the psycho-social conditions that hamper learning for a particular child. True, remedial teaching is a challenge in a class of 50-60 students. Hence extra classes, after school hours or before school starts is the way out. Students may not be weak in all subjects; in fact they may be good in some but fare poorly in others. The purpose of teaching is not to treat students as a homogenous group with the same learning capabilities. Like they say, every child is unique..

### TO THE EDITOR

#### No cause for rejoicing

Editor,  
The Senior School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) results were out on Monday. As usual only 50% of students that appeared for their school final exams could clear it. For decades the pass percentage has been around 44-45%. In the past four years it touched 54-55%. This time due to the upheavals caused by Covid perhaps the results have slumped to 50%. Be that as it may, one is distressing to note that the poor results do not cause any concern to successive governments in Meghalaya. No one is bothered about conducting an intensive study to find out the real reasons for the huge percentage of failures. What happens to those who failed? Do they get back into the school system or do they drop out completely

after this failure?

The results have shown that some schools have sent just single digit number of students like 6 students where only 2 passed. In some cases out of 24 students sent only 6 passed and out of 8 only 4 passed. There's a school in Bhaibari, Garo Hills which sent 7 students but none passed. Actually this calls for serious reflection by the parents, who unfortunately play a very passive role in the education of their children and believe that whatever the school does is beyond blame. Teacher absenteeism in the rural schools is a major cause of poor educational outcomes. Parents should be complaining about this. But without regular surprise checks, schools are now functioning as they please. It's time to have local committees to keep a check on the functioning of schools in every locality/village.

### Pandemonics and employment

# Mapping the rural economy of the North East

By Bhagirathi Panda

It has turned out to be a long drawn out night of gloom. The natural and nascent human hope of Covid 19's early demise has transpired to be a nagging despair. For the country as a whole, Covid 19 has brought serious disruptions to life and livelihoods. The North Eastern Region (NER) is no exception. In the initial days of its occurrence, saving lives was the priority for governments and societies. Along with the country, government after Government in the NER went for lockdowns to contain the spread of the deadly virus. For millions of working population, particularly the ones in the informal sector, life got precedence over livelihood. Gradually as it became evident that the virus is not going to leave us soon, prolonging the lockdown was imperative to prepare the necessary infrastructure in terms of men and materials to take care of the hospitalisation and quarantine needs of the affected and to-be-affected populace. After one third of the year had passed, now the reality of livelihood bites us. For these heavy millions and others, 'livelihood for life' is more important than the unintended bite of the pandemic.

We all know the NER is predominantly a rural society and economy. About 80% of its population live in the rural sector. In February 2020 i.e. the pre-lockdown month of the current year, rural unemployment rate for the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura remained at 3.3, 2.8 and 26.2 percent respectively (CMIE). With the onset of Covid 19 and initiation of the programme of complete lockdown, the woes of states like Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Manipur significantly worsened in the month of April and May 2020. The CMIE data for month wise unemployment rate showed a sharp rise for states in the North east. For example, the rural unemployment rate for the month of April 2020 stood at 43.6% and 8.4% respectively for the states of Tripura and Meghalaya. Equivalent data for Assam, and other NE states like Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh are not available.

For Assam the rural unemployment rate remained at 9.6% in the month of May 2020. Data for June 2020 for the states of Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya show rural unemployment rates of 0.0, 18.8 and 1.4 percent respectively. These data require serious analysis and introspection. At first sight, the impression it gives is that rural unemployment rate post unlocking of Covid 19 has eased out compared to pre-Covid 19 situation in the North East. One definite rea-

son for some temporary improvement in the monthly unemployment rate in the rural economy of NER and for that matter for the country as a whole is the expansion of MGNREGA programme. Under the scheme, an average of 3.42 crore people have been provided daily work across the country in June 2020 which is 84 per cent higher than the corresponding period last year (MORD). This is the right move by the central and state Governments to provide immediate employment to the rural masses and thereby give a boost to the depressing consumer demand situation in the rural economy.

However, it is somewhat difficult to completely buy this data and that too in a situation wherein lakhs of reverse migration have taken place in the region. There could be other reasons for such a finding. First of all, the CMIE data base for the NER is based on small sample size. For example, the total number of households covered for the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura happen to be 576, 704 and 464 respectively. Secondly, there would be much disguised unemployment in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors of the rural economy post unlocking-1. Many of the native returnees from outside the region might have been surveyed to be employed in agriculture and possibly in some non-agricultural activities, although practically there might not be much work for them in these activities.

An objective examination of the present and immediate future state of the pandemic affected rural economy in the region, suggestion of social and economic distress. So what about the pandemonics of employment in the NER i.e. the economics to overcome the impact of the pandemic on employment in the rural economy? Contemporary situation of economic development of any economy is fundamentally a tale of the process of structural transformation in the domain of income and employment. Structural transformation primarily refers to a continuous reallocation of labour (can be also other resources including capital) as an important factor of production from low productive sectors to high productive sectors and thereby increasing income and employment. Here we will primarily be reflecting on the employment situation.

Change in the employment structure of a region over time and across space is otherwise called "employment diversification". Coun-

tries which are now regarded as developed economies, have all gone through this process. For example, in most developed countries the share of agriculture in GDP is less than 3%. Similarly agriculture as a source of employment contributes less than 4% to the total employment in such countries. In the NER of India, the share of Agriculture to the average GSDP is approximately 20%, whereas 53% of the workforce is engaged in agriculture as source of livelihood (NSSO, 68th round). This huge imbalance shows the extremely low productivity of agriculture in the NER. This could also reflect the presence of disguised unemployment in the primary sector of the economy of the region. Rural economy of the NER shows a dualism in its economic space. This dualism in terms of sectors and analytical category is composed of the rural farm (agricultural) and non-farm (non-agricultural) sectors. Employment diversification thus is the situation and process of reduction in farm employment and a corresponding increase in non-farm employment. When such diversification happens, because of pull or development factors like increase in agricultural productivity, commercialisation of agriculture, education expansion and skill formation, infrastructural improvements etc. confirms to the structural transformation theory propounded by economists such as Lewis (1954) and Chenery (1960).

My colleague Prof S Umdor had written an insightful article in this column about John Mellor's idea of small commercial farmers (SCFs) and their role in bringing out development induced structural transformation in the economies of the developing countries. Mellor's work is an extension of his earlier seminal farm-non-farm linkage hypothesis developed in 1976. It is time to analyse if such type of pull or development based employment diversification has happened in the NER. Studies undertaken including some by this author reveal that considerable employment diversification has taken place in the region post economic reforms. The share of rural non-farm employment (RNFE) which was 24.7 percent in NER in 1993-94 has increased to 36.5 during 2011-12 (the latest year for which credible data from NSSO are available). However, when we analyse the factors responsible for such employment diversification, we find the role of distress factors such as poverty, landlessness and disguised unemployment being more pronounced compared to pull factors such as increase

in agricultural productivity or infrastructure development.

Against the existence and continuity of such a macro structural situation in the rural economy of NER in the employment front, the addition of the native returnee-migrants because of Covid 19 will distort and depress the rural labour market and thereby will have serious pushing-up effects. The problem may further get aggravated in the short period because of disruptions in the supply, demand and marketing chains affecting particularly the farmers. Farmers are not getting different agricultural inputs because of supply chain disruption. They also find it difficult to sell their products on account of demand depression and marketing links being cut off.

One more important fact that we need to keep in mind when planning for quality employment diversification is the very nature of economic development. As development gets consolidated, the elasticity of job creation (i.e. the percentage change in employment associated with a 1% increase in agricultural income) in agriculture will diminish. Increasing the productivity of agriculture through effective targeting and promotion of SCFs would definitely create more non-farm job opportunities in the rural sector through backward and forward linkages. However, this also needs to be supplemented by augmenting the other developmental factors like infrastructure development, access to credit, skilling and reskilling of the workforce and provision of better governance. These have also been found to be the other critical pull factors leading to the growth of RNFE in the rural economy of NER. Another fact to be taken note of, is that sectors in economies these days do not have exclusive existence. The rural farm is linked to the rural non-farm. The rural non-farm is linked with the urban formal or informal sectors. The rural farm can also be linked with urban formal or informal sectors. Increased technology integration would certainly strengthen the linkages among these sectors and sub-sectors. Establishments in development practice like the Government and the Community should act as catalysts to strengthen such positive linkages so that the rural economy of NER experiences increased development-induced employment diversification.

(The author teaches in the Department of Economics, NEHU, Shillong and can be reached at bhagirathi2@yahoo.co.in)

# Suicide: A much needed dialogue

By Yohana Mawrie

As children we've all had big colourful dreams of how our lives are going to be. Everything seems possible; everything seems like a clear cut road in the eyes of a child. There are people who get to live out their childhood dreams as adults. However, life can be very unpredictable at times and many people have to make new dreams along the way. Being an adult is not easy and I'm sure you will all agree. It's ironic how we could not wait to grow up (at least for some of us). Sometimes it's difficult to see the colours that we visualized as children. Pressures from work, family, society, health etc can blacken everything out. Nevertheless, we get up every morning and are grateful for a brand new day. If only this is the case for everybody! Wouldn't it be lovely if we could all walk hand in hand towards tomorrow with ease?

There are many people who are just like you and me, who struggle daily to just get out of bed. They battle their demons who deny them the strength to see a new day. Some win their battles (by seeking help) while some tragically do not. Every year about 800,000 people die by suicide worldwide (World Health Organisation). About 17 to 20 percent suicide rates are from India. That means every 40 seconds, someone loses their life to suicide. Moreover, there are more than 20 suicide attempts for each suicide. According to the latest data provided by the Meghalaya Police, year 2018 saw 189 suicide deaths which is the highest for the state. In 2005, the number of suicides was 71. That is a 166 percent increase!

The causes of suicide vary from individual to individual. In 2018, 72 individuals died by suicide for causes unknown, 29 individuals due to marriage related problems, 21 individuals due to illness, which showed mental illness to be the leading cause and 16 individuals due to drug or alcohol dependency. Other reasons include love affairs, unemployment, suspected or illicit relations, death of a loved one, family problems, failure in an examination and fall in social reputation. The data also revealed that there is a stark difference in the percentage of men and women who die by suicide. There are more men than women who lose their life to suicide. This should not cloud the fact that the attempt at suicide is much more than the rate that people die by it. The reasons may vary but it is a question that as a society we need to ask 'why'?

In India, there has also been an increase in the suicide rates during this pandemic. It has been reported that there have been more than 300 suicide deaths which were 'non-coronavirus' related. It was triggered by the nationwide lockdown. The causes were distress, fear from contracting COVID-19, starvation, withdrawal symptoms and financial distress. The rate at which suicide is increasing is alarming. Suicide attempt is an act of harming oneself with intent to end one's life but not to die of the attempt. Suicide is an act of harming oneself to end one's life. It is a major health problem that has affected people irrespective of age, education, socio-economic status, religion and gender. People's untimely death is not something we should ridicule, mock or take lightly. It is a serious problem that requires the right kind of help. People who die by suicide feel a deep sense of hopelessness and help-

lessness. Having suicidal ideation is not by choice. Who is at risk? As stated earlier, suicide can happen to anyone. It is important however to know who are more likely to be at risk. i. People who have depression or other mental disorders. ii. Family history of mental disorder. iii. Had previously attempted suicide. iv. Family history of suicide. v. Exposure to others who have died by suicide. vi. Alcohol or drug dependency. vii. Family history of alcohol and drug dependency. viii. Prolonged illness or health related issues. ix. History of abuse, trauma or family violence. x. Stressful event in a person's life such as death of a loved one, end of a relationship, loss of a job, a global pandemic etc.

What are the warning signs? We cannot predict suicide. However majority of suicide cases are not sudden. We can help prevent it by paying attention to the warning signs. : i. Talking about death, wanting to die or killing oneself. ii. Talking about being a burden to others. iii. Feeling hopeless or having no purpose. iv. Excessive sadness or moodiness. v. Dangerous or self-harm behaviour. vi. Withdrawing from loved ones or feeling isolated. vii. Losing interest with what they once considered interesting. viii. Decline in academic performance. ix. Start giving away their belongings for no reason. x. Change in sleeping and eating habits. xi. Behaving recklessly or acting anxious and agitated. xii. Excessive writing or drawing of death related topics.

So how do we help? Recognizing the warning signs is our first step towards helping an individual at risk. Warning signs are a cry for help. If we see some of the warning signs (this may sound controversial), ask the person if they are thinking about killing themselves. Yes ASK. If they are, we need to make sure that we remove all objects that they may use to harm themselves. Be there for them. Talk to them and listen. Be an emotional support system.

To help we need to remove all judgments and preconceived notions that we may have. If we do not understand why people think about suicide, it is important to educate ourselves on the matter. Remember suicide is not a sign of weakness. It is an illness. Hence it is crucial to seek treatment from mental health professionals such as counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists. They are trained to help individuals who see suicide as the only option. They are trained to give the right kind of help. For those who feel there is no way out, please remember that it is only temporary. There is plenty of help. They only need to reach out; talk to someone.

As a society we need to remove the stigma attached to suicide or any mental illness. There can be no change if we are not willing to understand. It is a myth to say that talking about suicide will lead to and encourage suicide. Talking about suicide will actually help reduce the stigma around it. It will encourage people to seek help, to share their stories and to learn healthy coping skills. "Suicide is a layered, complex issue. It's not simple, and we all need to work together" — Jonathan Frecceri. Everyone's life is valuable. We need to address this issue. We need to start a dialogue.

(Yohana Mawrie is Assistant Professor Department of Psychology Martin Luther Christian University Email id: yohana.mawrie@gmail.com)

Yours etc.,  
K Lyngdoh,  
Via email

#### Trump administration's shenanigans

Editor,  
The US administration's decision a few days ago to send home international scholars if their curriculum comprised only online classes in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic triggered shock waves around the world. The decision had put international students in the country in a predicament when the US administration declared that they would have to leave the country in 10 days if their universities opt for online-only classes for the August-December semester. However, at the first hearing of the first of many court challenges from universities and states, the

US government quashed the decision. About 202,000 Indian students study in the US every year and the withdrawal of the decision is a positive sign for them. The revoked directive says that international students will have to take at least one course on campus to reside in the US. American universities that have been closed since March because of COVID-19 outbreak will have to allow on-campus classes to abide by the directive.

For Indian students, the US is the top foreign education destination. 28% of Indian students studying abroad were in the US as on 18 July, 2018. Canada came second with 16% and Australia with 12%. In 2018-19, US had 1.1 million foreign students. China led with 33.7% share, India came second with 18.4% and South Korea came third with 4.8%. US universi-

ties require international students as much as international students seek admission in these universities. International students spend huge amounts of money in the US. They spent \$44.7 billion in the US in 2018-19 on fees and other expenses. Indian students would have spent a huge amount of money. Indians also contribute enormously to the skilled workforce in the US.

Trump's earlier decision had met with fierce opposition from America's many universities that are considerably dependent on the higher fees that foreign students pay. American students opposed the decision because they feared that there would be a hike in their fees to make up for the loss of the fees paid by international students. It was opposed by half million Americans who get employment because of the foreign students. No wonder a lot of lawsuits

challenging the decision were filed. In the face of this fierce opposition, the US administration was forced to withdraw its decision and restore status quo. However, the US administration made it clear that the withdrawal of the decision was tactical and it was not necessarily a wrong that was corrected. Given that Trump is notorious for his unwise decisions, it cannot be predicted what his next step in this regard would be. He hopes to win the presidential election but that seems unlikely. Nevertheless the world must prepare itself for Trump's shenanigans.

Yours etc.,  
GS Venu,  
Via email

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

*"Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."*

— Thomas A. Edison

## The Shillong Times

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### Hopes for a vaccine

FINALLY, after some four months of global scare, signs brightened this week about the success of vaccine trials with University of Oxford reporting first significant success, while several similar attempts are going on at labs around the world. Over 14 such trials are under way, and keenly watched by WHO. India's first candidate, Covaxin, has entered the stage of human trial this past week. Hopes about efficacy of drugs to treat Covid-19 are also high of late. This apart, non-allopathic medical branches like homoeopathy and Ayurveda are also coming up with their own prescriptions. All these, within a matter of a few months! Notably, new vaccines will raise questions of safety even as they are certified to be effective. The long-term effects on the human body need to be ascertained before the final nod comes from responsible national and international health regulators. While these would take time, what needs emphasis is also that these are times when hopes are high that the pandemic can be neutralized sooner than later.

India reported a daily tally of 37,000 Covid infections by latest count, with the total infected so far numbering over 11.5 lakh, and the nation ascending to the third slot in global pandemic growth – after the worst-hit US and Brazil. In a month's time, as per current trends, India could emerge as the worst-hit nation on the global Covid graph. A relief is that, of these, some 7, 30,000 patients have recovered from the virus hit. The death toll remains at a modest 28,000, signifying less of lethality in Indian conditions, and the daily toll being in the order of 580. Tuesday was the third consecutive day the infection tally remained higher than 30,000; and the south is contributing substantially to the rise while Delhi saw a taming; and so did the worst-hit Dharavi in Mumbai. Notable also is the fact that, of the total deaths, nearly half came from Maharashtra alone. The state has also reported about one-fourth of the total infections. Meanwhile most north-eastern states have fewer infections possibly because they are less crowded than the cities. Overall, there is both hope and despair. The rapid pace with which global agencies are working for a vaccine is reassuring. The free-wheeling manner in which the pandemic is turning the world upside down is still a major worry. Economies are in a shambles and the future is unpredictable as long as the virus is alive and kicking or if it makes an exit of its own as did SARS years ago.

### LOOKING BACK

June 28, 1989

### Finance main worry of civic bodies

The poor financial position of Municipalities and inadequacy of municipal laws to deal with encroachment on public land were some of the problems that were common to most municipalities in the country. These were the views expressed by delegates of the Nagar Palika Sammelan held recent at Cuttack in Orissa, according to Mr A H Scott and Mrs Biloris Lyndem Laso, who attended the conference on behalf of the Shillong Municipality.

Mrs Lyndem, speaking at the conference observed that the influx to that towns from rural areas is a problem that would have to be tackled both at the national and state level and advocated that bold measures be initiated to reverse the trend. She said that the North Eastern Urban areas have expanded too rapidly and that the Municipal services find it difficult to cope. In Shillong, she said the

Municipal services have remained more or less stagnant.

She advocated for setting up of a central study team to go into the problems of urban development of hill areas of the north east in order to draw up model municipal legislation taking into consideration existing local institutions. Mr Scott, while expressing concern at the alarming growth rate of the cities especially in the such influx from the villages should be curbed. He pleaded that elected councilors should be paid as the duties and functions they shoulder are no less than those of MPs, MLAs or MDCs. Elected councilors should be given a legitimate means of livelihood so that they could discharge their functions and responsibilities continue to depend primarily on revenue from property taxes which have many loopholes, assessment is often discriminatory and collection unsatisfactory, he said.

# Children and Video Games: A Covid Surge

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

intensity of violence.

### Good or bad?

Oldies tend to decry almost anything new. Even newspapers and TV were condemned as a bad influence when they were introduced. The accusations against video games are that they are addictive, cause social dysfunction such as isolation, and promote violence. Video games encroach on the balance of time for homework and household chores and lead to family arguments.

Some games carry children to extremes like the Blue Whale challenge in 2016 that led to at least 130 teenage suicides. In 2014, a Korean couple, became obsessed with Pirus, a child raising game, playing virtually non-stop. They neglected their own three-month old daughter who died of neglect and starvation.

The early medical literature in the 1980s and 90s reported addictive psychological problems such as depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder, dysfunctional social performance, irregular dietary habits, sleep deprivation, nightmares, and even increased use of alcohol and tobacco. Other studies reported physical problems like wrist and neck pain. The leading mental health institution in the country, NIMHANS in Bangalore, started the Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) clinic for management of addiction due to video games.

It turns out that early reports were anecdotal and overestimated the problem. Addiction is different from habituation. An example of habituation is the psychological yearning for coffee every morning. Addiction on the other hand is a physical dependency, which causes withdrawal symptoms, making the individual sick when deprived of the addictive substance. One part of the AIGA survey evaluated the knowledge of college psychology students in Bangalore, and found that most of them held outdated views on the psychological effects of video games.

Using addiction as a loose term, rather than a scientific definition, may be applicable to a few children that indulge in binge playing. A study from Iowa State University says that 8.5% of children show behavioral addiction, using the term to indicate that these children have lost

balance with other normal teenage activities. They skip homework, family activities, and lie and steal money to cater to their habit. But according to the researchers, one question remained unanswered: "Does poor school performance motivate children to cover their low self-esteem by mastering a video game, or does excessive video playing lead to bad academic performance?"

A recent paper in the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry says that many children find it difficult to sleep because of Covid related anxiety. They are not able to go out, meet friends, play sports and so turn to more screen time.

### Video games are good for children

Recent research reviewed by the American Psychological Association found that playing video games, including shooting games, boost spatial ability and hand-eye coordination. Games improve quick thinking, problem solving, and resilience. It promotes relaxation, positive moods and prevents anxiety. More than 70% of children play with friends, so social isolation is not a danger for most children. A specialized game, Re-Mission, for children with cancer, has a robot that shoots cancer cells and helps children recover faster.

There are cognitive enhancements too. A study by Michigan State University, funded by the National Science Foundation, showed that the more kids played video games, the more creative they were in tasks such as drawing and writing stories. Students who played video games scored higher on the Torrance Creativity Test which uses tasks such as providing a curve and then telling the child to use it to draw "an exciting and interesting picture", about which they have to then write a story. Creativity Research Journal reported enhanced creativity when children played Minecraft.

The Oxford University Internet Institute says that young people who indulged in a moderate video game-playing were associated with better social adjustment than those who had never played or those who were on video games for three hours or more. A Harvard study found increased levels of healthy competitiveness among teens. One recommendation is that children be allowed to play for a while before doing homework. Scoring high points and moving up

a level enhances self-confidence which may carry over to school assignments. A study found that aggression was not related to game content but to frustration at not being able to master the rules and controls within 20 minutes.

A prospective controlled study conducted over an eight-week period, found that college students who were assigned to a video game group attained better adaptability, resourcefulness and communication skills, qualities that are important to success in life.

### Guidelines for parents

1. Provide an allotted time and duration for playing video games. Play can be a reward for completing assigned tasks. This will teach discipline and time management. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time under the age of 1 ½ years, and one hour a day up to 5 years. For older children, a family discussion can set the parameters, but perhaps not more than 3 hours of screen time per day, including video games, and other device-based entertainment.

2. Make sure that the child has a balance of leisure activities like outdoor play and reading.

3. All video games must be approved by parents. Those that have an M (mature) rating are for ages 17 and older, and can contain heavy-duty violence, strong language, and sexual content.

4. Parental review of video games is also important for security reasons. Some games, especially internet-based ones, require users to release personal information, and so make the child vulnerable to online predators.

5. Discuss games with the child. This may provide the opportunity to have meaningful conversations with your child and you can become part of their world. They could play a variety of games including creative games like Minecraft, Lego Worlds, and Super Mario Maker.

6. Encourage them to play with friends or family members. Competitive and team games have social benefits and promote cooperation and healthy interactions. On a flight a few months ago, a woman with a year-old infant was seated next to me. She gave the restless child the airline magazine to look at. Looking at the colorful cover, the child began to move her finger across the page, thinking it was a screen, and became frustrated when the picture didn't change. (glenchristo@yahoo.com)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Wanted uninterrupted power supply

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily I would like to draw the kind attention of the Government of Meghalaya, especially the Meghalaya State Electricity Corporation that due to the prevailing circumstances of COVID-19, the students of Meghalaya are totally dependent on online, digital and virtual classes, tests and examinations. In view of this the parents, students, teachers and guides are compelled to arrange and install high frequency internet connections like broadband, Wi-Fi and fibre etc., to facilitate the children's online classes and studies. The high frequency Internet facilities devices require electricity to power them. Hence the State Government and the Power Department should look into the matter and provide 24x7 electricity without any load shedding or blackout as

experienced in the last few days. The education of our students now hinges on uninterrupted supply of electricity. The Government has to rise to this challenge. Yours etc., HR Nath Shillong -2

### "Unclean" masks more dangerous

Editor,

Finally, the Government has decided to crack the whip on the defaulters who do not care to wear masks properly in public places. The fear of losing Rs 500 has now brought sense into them – more sense than the fear of the dreaded coronavirus. The credit also goes to our patrolling police and defense forces. But I would like to raise another question. Are the authorities checking whether the worn masks are clean or not, or they are just showpieces? It is observed that many in the market areas are

wearing masks that have not been washed even once since they have been purchased. I think the authorities should have prefixed the mask with "clean" as in, "wear a clean mask" instead of just wear a mask. Wearing "unwashed" masks could be more disastrous than wearing no masks. The unclean mask could be a breeding space not just for COVID-19 but also for other viruses as well. One strongly feels here that the government should not overlook the unhealthy habits of some citizens. Even a small negligence by one citizen can lead to mass infection. Yours etc., Salil Gwali, Shillong

not taken in a positive spirit by the central government. Its union ministers and so-called social media gets into the act of trolling them. It shows that the government is unwilling to look into the concerns flagged by the opposition. These acts are neither democratically correct nor politically appropriate. NDA indulges in hypocrisy and its leaders are not very aware of public concerns. The present situation of the country is not good for democracy. Hope the NDA government respects the constitutional and democratic values and will seriously consider issues affecting the masses and which are brought to the attention of the Government by the Opposition. Yours etc., Amit Singh Kushwaha, Satna (M.P.)

### NDA neglects opposition

Editor,

The BJP led NDA Government has neglected the opposition for a long time. Any concerns raised by opposition's leaders are

# Should Meghalaya Have A Casino?

By Avner Pariat

"In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables." John 2:14-15

The economy of Meghalaya is in dire straits according to this (and earlier) governments. There is virtually no source of income to fund the various developmental and welfare activities needed by the state. Manufacturing is almost non-existent and the exemption of Meghalaya's tribal people from the Income Tax Act means that no taxes may be levied upon the population to bolster the Public coffers. The only discernible sources thus far have been from the challans issued against the ecologically-devastating extractive industries like limestone and coal mining. Oh, and let us not forget the income generated from sale of alcohol.

It should come as no surprise therefore that some egg-headed advisors had suggested to the Conrad Sangma government that the best way to expedite a smooth and steady source of bountiful income would be through the creation and operation of a casino somewhere along the border areas with Assam. I think many of our MLAs have been enjoying Macau and Las Vegas a bit too much, it seems they don't want to lose the euphoria and thrill of those places when they come back home. What better way then to re-live those neon memories than by having a casino right in one's backyard!

The casino advocates imagine that gambling would somehow revive the state's fading economy. The casino will create jobs they will no doubt promise. They probably envision an entire sub-division dedicated to this pastime and for High-class retail outlets and swanky restaurants to line the boulevard outside the casino. They think that this proposal will allow an entire economic ecosystem to thrive. But as numerous studies have shown (all easily available on the Internet) money that comes into a casino, stays within the casino. The boulevard will be filled only with broken dreams instead. Liquor stores and pawn shops will mushroom all along its length.

The impact of casinos on local property rates is "unambiguously" negative. Again this data is easily available online. Casinos do not revive economies. They act as parasites upon them. Communities located near a casino will have to deal with severe issues like gambling addiction. And once that happens, economic distress and domestic violence will not be far behind. These are all linked together. As a student studying abroad, I saw firsthand the damage that gambling can wreak on the lives of people. A few of my housemates would go out almost every weekend and their nights would invariably lead them to the large casino downtown. It was as though something magical pulled them towards that building. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, a few of them eventually had to return to their home-countries because they ended up in so much debt that their families could no longer afford to pay for their tuition and stay. They returned empty-handed with no certificates or diplomas to show for. But I still consider them lucky to have had such support systems in the first place. Their friends and families pulled them back from the brink though it was at great financial loss and personal sacrifice. I do not want to see

that happen here in my own (already) problem-ridden state.

The casino advocates will no doubt make all sorts of excuses for their idea. They will probably say that the vices associated with gambling will never be allowed here, that they will somehow beat the odds and regulate it properly. This is hogwash and cannot be done. The very nature and design of the gambling industry itself targets those who can least afford to lose and earns most of its living from people for whom gambling has become an addiction. Researchers have suggested that 75% of casino customers who play occasionally provide only 4% of casino revenues. It's clear that the 96% comes from the gambling addicts who serve as the backbone of any casino.

Perhaps the casino advocates might also say that no "real gambling" will take place on the premises. Only "soft" games like slot-machines and similar devices will be allowed. But modern slot machines are highly addictive psychologically-alluring devices. Today a majority of casinos earn more money from slot-machines than other games on a daily basis. To maintain a state of euphoria, players prolong their time on the machines until they run out of money. And then they end up borrowing more and more and more. Casinos, far from being economic answers, are the mothers of major social calamities. Gambling weighs heaviest upon the poor, the elderly and the lesser-educated.

In addition, there is a very real danger of this casino becoming a criminal's paradise. Crime is a major concern in most gambling hotspots. This is because addiction at its most fundamental level is the same no matter the substance. A person addicted to gambling is more likely to also be drawn to the highs associated with consumption of contraband, risque sex and other illegal activities. And again, higher incidences of prostitution leads to higher incidences of venereal diseases like syphilis and AIDS. It is all connected.

Lastly, casinos, all over the world, are often used by criminals to launder money. Many of our own MLAs belong to different vested interest groups such as the coal, limestone and construction lobbies. Ok, lobby is too nice a word, they're mafia. Mafia is the correct word. This proposed casino could be a dangerous tool for them to "whitewash" their dirty ill-gotten money. By depositing large amounts of cash, playing for a while and exiting early, these mafiamen could approach the casino for a cheque which renders the dirty money totally legitimate as it comes from a seemingly well-regulated organization. This could have a devastating effect on local politics.

Instead of banking all their hopes on a casino, the government should concentrate on getting money from the tax defaulters who are costing our state millions. They are contributing nothing towards our development. It would be far better to give the Industrial Parks and Special Economic Zones over to sustainable and scalable local initiatives. In addition, they might also want to impose a Wealth Tax on the creme-de-la-creme who earn over a certain amount per year. Of course this would mean that many MLAs would also get caught up in such a snare but so be it! These are the radical ideas (which are not so radical) which your Dhar, Pala, Hek and Sangma will never bring up in the Assembly!

(email: abner.pariat@gmail.com)

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"The roots of education are bitter,  
but the fruit is sweet."

—Aristotle

## The Shillong Times

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### Education overhaul needed

THE MBOSE results announced recently reflect the rot in the educational system. The results are a cumulative effect of decades of political interference in appointment of teachers, permanency of tenure without performance outcomes, selection of text books on the basis of pressure from publishers and complete lack of supervision by the Education Department, leading to apathy of school administrators, especially those running on government grants. Private schools cannot afford to slacken because they charge a fee from each student and they also compete with one another, hence their students tend to do well. Parents that can afford to send their children to private schools are also inclined to keenly follow what their children are taught because they want value for money.

The majority of parents that send their children to government funded schools do so as a last resort. In fact given a choice every parent would like to send their kids to private schools because they know that teachers are appointed on merit and not through political clout. The Education Scam some years ago where every politician wanted teachers to be appointed from his/her constituency actually mirrors a society that is so apathetic it would not even protest to call out this outrage. It was left to the teachers who found themselves jettisoned from the merit list in the infamous overwriting with white ink and insertion of names of those candidate favoured by politicians, to take legal resource. It is ironic that while in Haryana the former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, his MLA son Ajay, and three other officials were sentenced to ten years in prison by a special CBI court on charges of illegally recruiting over 3,000 teachers in the state by using forged documents in 2013, here in Meghalaya the offenders continue to remain unpunished for doing the very same thing. Although the number of teachers recruited in Government run schools was relatively lesser in Meghalaya but the very fact that merit was given a wide berth in this state too is demoralizing for teacher candidates and for the whole state.

But expectedly, civil society here remained mute although this action of recruiting teachers based on political influence affects the children of those who rely heavily on government aided institutions. There should have been a clamour by parents to institute an enquiry. But it was only one or two organizations, notably the Civil Society Women's Organisation (CSWO) that actually followed up on this case.

Teaching is not a job — it's a calling that few people have, yet because the remuneration is poor and the salaries so irregularly paid in deficit schools, the best brains opt for secure government employment. All these factors need to be considered and there should be a hands-off policy for politicians to stop meddling with appointment of teachers. In fact anyone doing so deserves public censure.

# The race for space

By Maitphang Syiem

The skies have always fascinated mankind and it's a dream that can never end as it has always kept humans questioning about the enthralling galactical space. The quest for space may be a new thing as it appears to us the common lay people but it is a centuries old journey right from the times of Aristotle, Galileo, Copernicus and many ancient scientists back then. The current development is the precedence and evolution of scientific ideas and methods which they had established before. Let us recollect how the Soviets started it first when they launched Sputnik the first artificial satellite and also sending the first humans into space. The Americans felt that they too should be in the race, so they started their own program when they sent probes into the lunar surface and eventually putting humans into the moon. The words of Neil Armstrong the first man to step on the lunar surface on July 20, 1969, "One step for man, one giant leap for mankind," is truly sensational and since then there was no stopping for mankind in the quest for the galactical space ever.

Space exploration and applications by humans have evolved from time to time and the extent to which the technology that mankind has developed can perhaps even conquer the farthest stars and galaxies of the universe and as we all know that space technology for possible life exploration in Mars and other planets are in continuous process of development by the best brains of the world. We may never know, human settlements in other planets can become a reality in the near future. Mankind has always been in the mission to gather knowledge about the oceans and the depths of the earth, but the mysterious skies have always been a big subject of focus where perhaps all resources are put into. As common lay persons we may ask ourselves why everybody else is venturing into the space, and what does it have in store for us. There can be many scientific reasons, however, let us understand in lay person's terms that when we are on top we can always have a bird's eye view and of course an upper hand in controlling. So the same logic goes as to why we are sending rockets, satellites and probes into the skies.

Many developments have taken place in this domain and technology has become smaller and faster. Can we imagine that our smart phones have a

processing power that is million times faster than the processing power of the computers in the 1950's to launch the space shuttle and rockets into the sky? Space Technology and Space applications has accounted for many things and has brought many benefits to mankind in many fields such as Agriculture, Homeland Security, Defence, Satellite Navigation, Disaster Management, Radio Communication, Telecommunication, Weather monitoring and forecasting, Atmospheric and Environmental Applications, Forestry etc; the list can go on.



Let us recollect some of the recent examples; the IMD reported about the landfall and the movement of tropical cyclones before time. This was possible through the satellite probes that were placed in space. The GPS locations on our smart-phones assisting us when we are commuting is because of the metal eyes that are sending us the signals from above, estimation of forest cover manually would take years to complete but with the earth observatory satellites the job could be completed in less time, telemedicine and tele-education are all possible because of the space based technologies and in particular ISRO has a space based education program with a dedicated satellite called EDUSAT (GSAT-3) wherein education programs are telecast through two way satellite communication which has benefitted the masses. Space based technology is one area of development which perhaps our control-

ling authorities may look at more specifically as it can offer holistic solutions to various areas of development which is of interest for the state and also solutions to issues and challenges. No doubt there has been small developments in this domain but there is more for us to explore, therefore this calls for our controlling authorities to introspect on the potential of the technology that we are yet to completely utilize.

On the other hand we may wonder as we read this and may even perceive that such technology is only available with the rich nations but the

perception is no longer valid as many nations have adopted space technology. Let us also inform ourselves that since the inception of the Indian Space program, our country has left no stone unturned and it has progressed by leaps and bounds. It is a matter of pride that India has the best brains in this domain. We are ranked fifth in the world in terms of Space Technology/ Geospatial Technology and Earth Observatory Technology. We have successfully conducted moon and mars mission, we have a fleet of launchers, IRS (Indian Remote Sensing Satellites) and also an indigenously developed Navigational System called the Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System (NavIC) and our progress is in continuous mode. Huge credit goes to the founding patrons Vikram Sarabhai, Dr Homi Babha, EV Chetnis et al of the erstwhile INCOSPAR back then and now as ISRO to have established the strong found-

ations for the Indian Space program. Looking at the recent developments, the race for space is indeed becoming a hot topic for everyone worldwide. We have seen the recent trends such as the space launches of Elon Musk's Aerospace Company SpaceX, Indian Telecom Giant Bharti Airtel acquiring a UK based satellite company OneWeb to name a few. As such we can see that private players have immensely contributed to this domain. With respect to the Indian Space program, right from its inception, the program has been confined to the government but now there is paradigm shift which is a very positive sign of development. In its recent notification the government has opened its doors for budding Indian private space start-ups and entrepreneurs to this domain, which will definitely be a huge contribution to the nation. This step taken by the central government will boost the young Indian minds to venture into an important technology which is of national importance and perhaps also do away with brain drain. This also goes very well with the concept of "Atmanirbhar" or self reliance. Young Indian minds are willing to put their best if the government opens up equal and transparent opportunities and gives them the facilities to explore. The recent decision by the central government is indeed a noble step. Our controlling authorities may perhaps look into the avenues available. On the other hand, there is a need to familiarize the younger generation with space based technologies perhaps through a comprehensive and interactive education system in both rural and urban areas to understand that there are so many career options. In fact a career in space applications and space technologies is definitely enthralling. This write-up also seeks to enlighten the young readers and to inspire interested minds.

To conclude, the former US President John F Kennedy once said "The exploration of space will go ahead, whether we join it or not. It is one of the great adventures of all time, and no nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in the race for space."

(The writer is a Geospatial Technology Expert and can be reached at maitphangsyiem@gmail.com)

# Worrying signs on the inflation front

By Ajit Ranade

The pandemic has caused the world to go into a deep recession this year. India is no exception. The Indian economy will shrink by about six percent this financial year. Which means that national income will be lower than last year, and every household on an average will have less money to spend. In a recession, demand falls, and so factories remain idle. A lot of the production capacity is unutilised. You can see this across many sectors, including primary ones like steel and cement, or secondary ones like automobiles and washing machines. So, producers are forced to cut prices to boost their sales. Don't be surprised to see large discounts being offered on consumer durable goods. In a falling demand scenario, we should expect prices to fall too. Which means inflation should remain benign? This does not seem to be bearing out.

It may be true that on certain items, like cars and scooters, or televisions and furniture, large discounts are being offered. But since these price reductions are on discretionary spending items, the demand will still be lukewarm, despite the discounts. Many retailers of consumer goods, both durable and non-durable make



robust business during the Diwali and subsequent holiday shopping season. Some retailers probably make sixty to seventy percent of their annual profit in the months between Dussehra and Christmas. That is unlikely to happen this year, since people are cutting back on discretionary spending. When there has been loss of livelihoods, or anxiety about jobs and income, the first thing is to cut back on all non-essential spending. Even weddings, which are a perennial boost to the economy, will be subdued, not just because of the economy, but also to adhere to social distancing needs. If you just keep track of discounts and price drops on such items, you may wrongly conclude that inflation has come down.

The inflation experienced by the common man or woman is based on the items purchased. There has been a marked change in expenditure patterns after the lockdown started in March. These changes may not have been adequately reflected in the basket of consumption goods and services tracked by the government. So, the officially reported consumer price index (CPI) based inflation may be underestimated. Even though it is an imperfect underestimate, the official June inflation was already above 6%, beyond the tolerable band of the Reserve Bank of India. Given that in urban areas many retail outlets, especially malls and restaurants are still shut, the buying pattern has changed considerably. Households may be spending more on food including processed food eaten at home, and less on eating out, clothes, recreation or travel. If their food purchases are facing higher prices, this effect can get hidden or understated if we continue to use the pre-Covid consumption basket to compute the CPI. Hence Professor Alberto Cavallo of Harvard University, used actual data from transactions to compute a "Covid inflation" rate. His research published recently, shows that official CPI understates the Covid-CPI inflation in 10 out of 16 countries that he studied. This gap between official CPI and Covid-CPI

is widening. His data does not include India. Researchers at the State Bank of India extended Professor Cavallo's method to India and have found the same phenomenon. That the official number published by the government is an underestimate. For instance, according to SBI research the actual June inflation could be 7 percent. And in the severe lockdown months of April and May it could have been understated by more than 2 percent.

The fact is that if we focus on items of actual consumption the inflation trend is worrying. In June as per official data, food inflation was running at 7.3%. Pulses, which are a key source of proteins, were rising at 16.7% and fish and meat at 16.2%. Milk prices rose at 8.4% in June. The story of milk is interesting. The demand for milk has actually fallen, as per data from Maharashtra. This is because the demand from the hotel and restaurant industry who are big consumers is sharply down, thanks to the lockdown. As a result, the milk producers in the State claim that they are receiving 10 to 15 rupees per litre less than pre-Covid prices. Their stock remains unsold. According to lead-

ers of the farmers' organisation Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana, out of 1.3 crore litres produced daily, around 52 lakh litres remain unsold. And yet city consumers are facing higher prices for milk delivered at their doorstep. Even the national data on CPI shows milk inflation at above 8%.

In June we also had a sharp increase in diesel prices, which is used to transport food items. This was an administered price increase of 10 rupees a litre, including central excise and road cess. This too will feed into inflation, not just for food products but overall CPI. Despite weak demand, steel companies announced that they were raising prices due to rising input costs. Higher import duties on Chinese goods, probably in retaliation, will feed into overall consumer inflation. Higher levels of non-performing assets i.e. bad loans would mean that banks cannot offer lower interest rates on loans. So, the cost of working capital will remain high or go higher. Additionally, the requirements of hygiene, packaging, and safety would also add to the cost of goods. The throughput of sales will also have to be moderated to observe social distancing.

We thus have to brace for an unusual combination of a recession and rising inflation. With loss of incomes, and rising unaffordability, many households may fall back into poverty and even food insecurity. If there is any illness in a family, Covid-related or not, that is an additional shock. The government must be prepared to avert a hunger crisis by vastly expanding the foodgrain distribution through the PDS, and expanding it to include items like cooking oil and soap too. Farmers' income may need to be supported, in case their remuneration for a bumper crop is inadequate. And of course, a strong fiscal impetus is required to generate demand and jobs and livelihoods.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### TO THE EDITOR

### Who's responsible for this poor show?

Editor,

It's shameful how 10 schools in Meghalaya have scored a "zero" in the SSLC exams. The overall pass percentage has been the lowest in the last five years. Could it be because of the lockdown? But then, when the lockdown started in March, 2020 most of the Board exams were already over. Then what is the cause of this demoralising performance? It's good to hear that the Education Minister has said an enquiry would be made into this dismal performance of some schools. But one wonders what an enquiry will dig out that is unknown to the authorities. The Minister has already admitted that the earlier probe report is yet to be implemented. Then what's the use of another charade? The fact is that we have mastered the art of saying what we don't mean. The authorities know very well that the axiom, "Let the dogs bark, the caravan (of a stable government) will comfortably move on," has been the acceptable thing and this issue will soon be forgotten, at the cost of our

young minds!

Yours etc.,  
D Syiemlieh,  
Shillong-5

### What ails the education system in Garo Hills?

Editor,

For the people of Garo Hills, the MBOSE SSLC exam results this year is both happy and sad, perhaps more on the sad side. Yes, we got the coveted topper from Tura which is another moment of reflected glory. The private school, which has been consistently doing news-making results for many years now, is the exception that proves the rule. The school is a living testimony to the fact that dedication and engagement of qualified teaching staff makes all the difference between success and failure. Hats off to the school authorities for bringing this glory to the entire Garo Hills!

The real purpose of this letter is not to blow the trumpet for anyone but to examine why other schools in Garo Hills are faring so miserably.

Let's admit one thing: to the average Garo there is a strange lack of interest in

education. The parents are nonchalant about their children's education. Parents seldom take care of their children's academic progress. Perhaps many are not academically qualified to delve into complex subjects that are taught in schools. It is also true that most parents think that the Garos are a protected lot with 40% of the government jobs already apportioned for them. Regardless of quality of education or the percentage of marks obtained, everybody is aware that besides, jobs, there are reserved quota of seats for various professional courses. This, to my mind, is the beginning of the undoing of the community.

What the parents are unable to do, should logically rest on the shoulders of the schools and the teachers. But what a pitiable scene our schools demonstrate. First, the quality of teachers in these schools, especially at the primary level, is simply abominable. When under-qualified people, unfit for any other job, become teachers, it is a sure road to self-destruction. Because of reservation the government aided schools are unable to attract good qualified teachers from other communities. And that's where the battle is lost. Most teachers (ex-

ceptions are a few!) seem to be content to do a 'job'. For, their income is not related to performance!

The biggest tragedy is that the Garo children have a weak foundation. It will not be an exaggeration to say that even in the higher classes most of them haven't learnt even to construct a correct sentence in English or are able to solve simple arithmetical problems. If we dilute the issue by saying that these are alien subjects, then what about their basic knowledge of mother tongue? I am sorry to say but the picture is so gloomy that I don't see a way out. We have destroyed the system by political appointments of teachers and manipulative control over the management.

Where do we go from here? What are the redressal mechanisms? It's a Himalayan task to bring education back on the rails. At first, there has to be a societal and political will to not let education be tinkered by anybody for narrow and short-term gains. Stop grants-in-aid to the schools that have scored a shameful 0%. No leniency should be shown to anybody, even if they run around to hold the political apron strings. Secondly, identify a few

promising schools and nurture them. Give them additional facilities and encourage them all the way. Third, the NGOs that claim to champion the cause of the community, must step in to bring about a sense of competitiveness and pride among the youth. Like they say, we can drag the pony to the pond, but it is up to the pony whether to drink the water or not! In this case, there has to be a thrust among the youth, which I am afraid is totally missing. I don't know how other Garo brethren feel about it, but I for one, feel terribly small that in comparison to the Khasis, the Mizos and other tribes who started the journey together, we Garos are probably nowhere!

Thirdly, what about the official machinery? Where is the inspection and supervision? The system has become totally rotten. These may sound like strong words, but for how long can we run away from the bitter truth which has already started to bite us? The system needs an overhaul. The beginning has to be made by taking the first baby step: Make the officers visit the schools and send monthly reports to the higher-ups. Their job is not to push files in the comfort of their office. They must be given time-

bound, achievable and challenging tasks. In case of failure to deliver, they must be made accountable. Of course, Shillong has to keep an eye on these officers.

In fine, we need to think out of the box. One of the revolutionary ideas I hold is to outsource the government funded schools to private entrepreneurs, not necessarily from the State, who have good track record of running educational institutes in the country. There are plenty of private players who have name and fame. Hand over the reins to them on a long-term basis, give them a free hand but monitor their progress. If they are unwilling, why not entrust the task to church missionaries or Ramakrishna Mission? Let our government not be the dog in the manger any more. The ball is in the court of Conrad Sangma, Lakhmen Rymbui and others to stem the rot. It's now or never!

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

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

"Clouds come floating into my life,  
no longer to carry rain or usher storm,  
but to add color to my sunset sky."

--- Oscar Wilde

## The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 24, 2020

### Gehlot's cup of woes

THE political tussle in Rajasthan is turning murkier by the day. With the Congress government headed by Ashok Gehlot struggling to retain power, the matter of dissidence in the party is being shuttled between the Assembly Speaker, the High Court and the Supreme Court, all in a row. Irrespective of what the final court ruling will be, what is clear by now is that Gehlot's days are numbered. What he claims at best is a majority of just one in the 200-member assembly, and as high as 19 MLAs are with Sachin Pilot, the ex-deputy CM who would not settle for anything other than Gehlot's scalp and a change of leadership if he should remain with the Congress party. Herein lies the rub. It's too late for the Congress to have a change of mind and opt for Pilot as CM, as it would be tantamount to a loss of face for the party and a rise in stature for the rebel leader. This could encourage dissidence in the party in other states too, and the ones who flex their muscles will gain the upper hand. This could be scary for both Sonia Gandhi and son Rahul. The Congress is not in a strong position in the state assembly to simply bite the bullet. The principal Opposition, the BJP, is waiting in the wings to grab power in the state that had been its pocket-borough for it for long.

The Rajasthan saga is a sign of the times. What Sachin Pilot plays is outright power politics, and he has shown the gumption to put his interests over and above the party interests. Being young, smart or charming by itself should not mean that a leader can defy the party leadership, in a situation in which he has no serious complaints to raise against the chief minister. That the two were not on talking terms for quite some time is well-known, and this would have affected the functioning of the government too. It was for the central leadership of the party to address this thorny issue and arrive at a final decision before things went out of hand. Pilot took the law into his hands and is dictating to the party that he be made the CM. Politics has lost its ideological moorings long ago, and it is simply personal interests that take the upper hand. So too with the Rajasthan political tussle. This is also proof of the way the Congress as a political establishment is disintegrating.

# Between Medical Ethics and the Public's Right to Know

By Patricia Mukhim

There is a huge debate currently going on between the radical right and liberal left in Meghalaya. And I am talking here not of political partisan stances but the ideological one. The former wants the Government to come clean with names of all who have tested Covid+ive for one reason alone – so that each one of us knows if we have contacted a primary or secondary contact and can go for voluntary testing. The latter, however, feel that the need to know violates medical ethics and leads to stigmatisation of the Covid+ive person who may not be responsible for how he/she got the infection. The majority of us, as usual, swing between the two poles. If those tested positive are our kith and kin we would not want the world to know of it. Reason? We are by nature a secretive society. The patient detected with cancer would prevaricate and obfuscate rather than just say, "I was tested and found to have cancer of the ..... (whatever). The family members too would get the signs and pretty much do the same thing until it becomes the gossip of the town. The point about cancer is, it's not infectious and we can all mind our own businesses and shut up. Not so with Covid! This virus is a puzzle and keeps us flummoxed every single day.

Media reports of hospitals stigmatising people of 'shnongs' where certain areas are cordoned off as containment zones should be taken seriously. Those hospitals should be stripped of their licenses. After all, hospitals are there to provide health care. If health workers are themselves so paranoid then why blame the general public? This is where the publication of names becomes even more necessary because that would address the evil of assumption. Imagine a hospital assuming that every person in Umpling is Covid infected merely because large numbers of BSF personnel residing in a camp in that locality are infected! This is ridiculous!

A short but crisp write-up by Dr Bhaskar Ganguly circulating on social media, says that the medical and scientific world know much more about Covid now than they did in February, 2020 and that conservative treatment with drugs like Remdesivir and Favipiravir have reduced the patient's own immune system from responding in an exaggerated manner resulting in

Cytokine Storm. A Cytokine Storm is an over-production of immune cells and their activating compounds (cytokines), which, in a flu infection, is often associated with a surge of activated immune cells into the lungs. The resulting lung inflammation and fluid build-up can lead to respiratory distress and can be contaminated by a secondary bacterial pneumonia - often enhancing the mortality in patients.

This little-understood phenomenon is thought to occur in at least several types of infections and auto-immune conditions, but appears to be particularly relevant in outbreaks of new flu variants. Cytokine storm is now seen as a likely major cause of mortality in past pandemics - the 1918-20 "Spanish flu," which killed more than 50 million people worldwide -- and the H1N1 "swine flu" and H5N1 "bird flu" of recent years and now Covid (Source: The Scripps Research Institute, US). This stormy immune response not only kills the virus but the patient as well.

Then we come to another drug Dexamethasone. Reports from the National Institute of Health Research UK and the University of Oxford publication (June 16, 2020) says a total of 2104 patients were randomised to receive dexamethasone 6 mg once per day either by mouth or by intravenous injection) for ten days and were compared with 4321 patients randomised to usual care alone. Among the patients who received usual care alone, 28-day mortality was highest in those who required ventilation (41%), intermediate in those patients who required oxygen only (25%), and lowest among those who did not require any respiratory intervention (13%).

Dexamethasone reduced deaths by one-third in ventilated patients and by one fifth in other patients receiving oxygen only. There was no benefit among those patients who did not require respiratory support. Based on these results, one death would be prevented by treatment of around 8 ventilated patients or around 25 patients requiring oxygen alone. Given the public health importance of these results, the researchers are now working to publish the full details as soon as possible.

Peter Horby, Professor of Emerging Infectious Diseases in the Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford, and

one of the Chief Investigators for the trial, said, "Dexamethasone is the first drug to be shown to improve survival in Covid-19. This is an extremely welcome result. The survival benefit is clear and large in those patients who are sick enough to require oxygen treatment, so Dexamethasone should now become standard of care in these patients. Dexamethasone is inexpensive, on the shelf, and can be used immediately to save lives worldwide."

The challenge with Covid-19 is that seven months after its appearance, scientists are yet to arrive at a conclusion on the source of the virus, how the disease is transmitted, why some cases are more severe than others and whether people who have recovered from Covid-19 can get it again. Even in the mode of transmission scientists and doctors are learning new things every day. The WHO recently updated its brief on "Modes of transmission of virus causing Covid-19" and formally acknowledged "evidence emerging" of the airborne spread of the virus. In the brief, the WHO has formally acknowledged the possibility that the Covid-19 virus can remain in the air in crowded indoor spaces, where "short-range aerosol transmission, cannot be ruled out". However, the WHO still maintains that transmission through respiratory droplets — when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or sings — is still the primary mode of transmission of the virus.

WHO also mentions another type of transmission called fomite transmission where the virus is transmitted through infected surfaces — such as door-knobs, elevator buttons, handrails, phones, switches, pens, keyboards and, if not disinfected, even a doctor's stethoscope.

Researchers across the world are also studying whether antibodies developed by the body in response to the virus can provide permanent immunity. Hence plasma therapy is gaining ground in the neighbouring state of Assam and Delhi as a possible cure. A new study by King's College, London has found that those recovering from Covid-19 may have antibodies for only a few months. Upon analyzing the immune response of more than 90 people, the researchers found that antibody levels peaked about three weeks after the onset of symptoms and then started declining. Hence that's the window period when the plasma

ought to be donated. Quite a few have recovered after being given plasma therapy.

Meanwhile, Dr Randeep Guleria, director of AIIMS and one of the experts leading the country's novel coronavirus disease response, has also said cell-mediated immunity, an immune response that does not involve antibodies, may also be protecting the body.

It's pointless to tell people not to get paranoid and to remain calm. There's much that we need to know about how Covid-19 patients are being handled in our own state. Sure we got a detailed report about how the four Covid deceased persons expired and we have to remain content with these medical reports in the absence of any scientific critique. But whether the state can handle a surge in cases remains untested. NEIGRIHMS as far as we know has received no special assistance from the Union Health Ministry to tackle the pandemic. Yet the Institute is responding and doing its utmost. The Shillong Civil Hospital transfers all complicated Covid-19 cases needing ICU facilities and other treatment facilities to NEIGRIHMS. But is the State Government actually concerned about NEIGRIHMS capacity to carry on? Is the State Government sharing its Covid response funds with NEIGRIHMS? This merits some transparency.

Coming to the point about whether naming Covid+ive persons is ethical or not, perhaps here too the medical community ought to take a local rather than a universal view. Considering that Meghalaya is battling to provide isolated quarantine for people testing Covid+ on a daily basis, it might help the rest of us if we know whether we have been in contact with a primary or secondary source. It will also help the government to conserve its resources, trying to track down contacts (many of whom prefer to remain incognito, may even hidden). We have come to a point where any of us could get the virus. A society that is upfront will handle this pandemic better than a secretive one and the Government should not aid and abet this enigma by playing a game of hide and seek with us the public.

Let's not push people to play guessing games each day about, "Who's next?" (Views expressed in this column are personal and do not necessarily reflect the stand of this newspaper).

## Demand prosecution of actual instigators Civil Society members seek free and fair investigation into Delhi riots

By Satyaki Chakraborty

Seventy-two members of the Civil Society including senior government officials, academics, activists and lawyers have sought free and fair investigation into the riots that took place in North East Delhi from February 23 to 26 this year. In their letter sent to the President Ram Nath Kovind, they demanded that the real instigators of the violence and killings should be prosecuted.

The letter contends that the Delhi Police, who are investigating the matter, have allegations of being complicit to the violence caused in riots and also not acting in order to prevent violence in certain places. Further, the letter highlights in detail the instances in which the police refused to act and control the violence during the riots.

The letter mentions clearly that several videos and accounts have emerged that substantiate the complicity of the police during the North East Delhi violence. These videos also record the police directing stone pelting mobs or simply pretending to look away while the violence perpetuated right in front of them. "Most concerning, there is a video from the Khureji protest site of the Police breaking CCTV cameras at a petrol station during the riots. The links

Police knows which complaints and allegations are being pursued and which continue to languish," the letter said.

Another critical point that the letter highlights is the criminalization of dissent and protest. The letter describes, "The probe by the Delhi Police appears to be pursuing a line of inquiry criminalising the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and portraying them as a conspiracy which resulted in the riots in Delhi." Further, it is stated that the very chronology that the chargesheets narrate trace out the events in the sit-in protests across Delhi, in which activists had delivered speeches. The police narrative contends that these speeches were the build up to the riots that followed.

"The protests in the form of 24 hour sit-ins were legitimate, within the framework of the Indian Constitution and were an expression of those aggrieved by the CAA, NPR and NRC. The blocking of roads or chakka jam has a long history in India as an instrument of protest and has been adopted by various movements and even political parties at different points in time. Therefore, the criminalisation of this act and presenting it as part of a



to these videos and accounts are given below. To our knowledge, no enquiry or investigation has been set up by the Delhi Police to probe the role of the policemen, despite these videos being publicly available and also being highlighted by the media." The letter said. Significantly, even after the passage of over four months, not a single FIR has been registered against the Delhi police.

On the topic of custodial torture, the letter strongly asserted the manner in which an accused named Shah Rukh was tormented during interrogation. Shah Rukh's family alleged that they had to pay a bribe of rupees 10,000 in order to prevent the police from beating Shah Rukh during interrogation. "He was later made to sign a confession statement naming Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal of Pinjra Tod who are both under arrest, even though he says he doesn't know either of them and he is not aware of the contents of the statement on which he signed as he couldn't read it due to the injuries to his eyes," the letter urged.

Making a very important point, the letter lays down the absolute inaction regarding the complaints against members of the BJP for their involvement in the violence in North East Delhi. "It is extremely concerning that the Delhi Police has refused to put nearly 700 FIRs registered by it in the public domain. In fact, it has not even made a summary of the FIRs available to citizens. This creates an asymmetry of information and thwarts all attempts at public scrutiny as only the

conspiracy by the Delhi Police is completely unwarranted," the letter states.

It is also pointed out in the letter that activists and students have been unreasonably booked under the stringent provisions of the UAPA. This, the letter suspects, is an attempt in the direction of persecuting the accused persons through the investigation and trial process itself as it is practically very difficult to secure bail under these legislations.

The letter also mentions that the young people who were called in for protests were interrogated in a mala fide manner. The young protesters were allegedly intimidated and were even offered deals in giving statements against activists and those who were involved in the protests.

Declaring these contentions in detail, the letter insisted that the ongoing investigation of the North East Delhi riots did not inspire public confidence. Under the circumstances, the letter urged the President of India that a credible and unbiased probe was crucial to ensure public trust. "The investigation cannot be allowed to become a fishing and roving expedition aimed at causing a chilling effect on dissent and protest in the country. We therefore call upon the Government of India to institute an inquiry into this investigation under the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952, by appointing a sitting/retired judge(s) of the higher judiciary. Further, it must be ensured that officers accused of being complicit in the violence are not involved in the investigation by the Delhi Police." The letter contended. (IPA Service)

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Misplaced arguments against Casino

Editor,  
Apropos the write-up "Should Meghalaya have a Casino?" by Avner Pariat (ST July 22, 2020), I thank the author for his originality of thoughts which may or may not have many takers. No doubt, he has done some Google search and relied on his own perceptions before airing his views. Pariat should have known that the idea of Casino has been doing the rounds for a long time. Recently, Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma made a mention about it in the context of the decline of tourists in the state after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. If I remember correctly, Sangma had specifically mentioned, that the Government would come up with action plans to attract the niche tourists, especially, those from abroad.

As of now, only 10% of Meghalaya's tourists are foreigners (this includes the Bangladeshi tourists). The remaining bulk is accounted

for by the inland tourists. A large segment of the domestic tourists have shoe-string budgets. They prefer budget hotels and leave after a sojourn of two or three days. Relatively, they spend less money, but they make up by their sheer numbers in adding to the local economy. Be that as it may, the idea of having a casino has been turned down by Pariat by dishing out some laughable reasons. His principal argument is that casinos are going to ruin the local people by alluring them to gambling as a habit. He also seems to have suggested that casinos will help the "coal mafia" to make their black money turn white! On both counts, Pariat has erred in his judgment.

First, betting on arrow shooting (thoh tim) has been legalised for over forty years. How many local people have been financially ruined by their gambling instincts? Even in the worst case scenario, it can't be more than a handful. On the other hand, how many families survive out of this unique gambling system of the state? A huge number of bookies, who otherwise have no income source, have been earning their

livelihoods out of betting on archery. The government too is making small but steady earnings.

Secondly, the argument that coal mine-owners would find an ideal way of legalising their black money is simply preposterous. Why on earth should a coal baron need to take the casino route? Isn't he already exempt from paying taxes?

In many countries, including neighbouring Nepal, casinos do exist among very conservative milieu. In Kathmandu, for instance, access to the casino is open only to the foreigners. Their valid passport is the only ticket to entry! In Goa, too, foreigners and non-Goan inland tourists, with valid identity proof, can enjoy gambling at the casinos.

The other arguments put forward by Pariat are simply a figment of his imagination. I need not dwell on those. I am more than certain that Meghalaya will take all precautions not to make Pariat's fears come true! For all I know, the likes of Pariat will not have the good fortune of trying their luck at the proposed casino!

Come to think of it, the idea of a casino in Assam border near Khanapara may not be a bad idea at all. Being close to the border, it is bound to attract tourists and residents from Assam to hone their gambling skills in our State. The only snag is that those genuine tourists who come to spend time in Shillong may not have the urge to travel back and forth to Khanapara just for the lure of Slot machines, Black Jack, Roulette and what have you.

Yours etc.,  
N K Sharma,  
Via email

#### Dubious schools of GH plains belt

Editor,  
Apropos the letter, "What ails the education system in Garo Hills" (ST July 23, 2020), I want to thank the unnamed author for touching upon some of the endemic problems of the education scenario in Garo Hills. While I tend to largely agree with the writer's contentions, I am disappointed that the author missed some glaring aspects of the results of this year's

SSLC exams.

Indeed, when as many as ten schools fail to get even a single candidate to pass the SSLC exam, it becomes a matter of disgrace. Never before has this happened since the creation of Meghalaya 48 years ago. If we take a closer look, at these ten dubious schools, nine are from Garo Hills and one from Mawkyrwat in West Khasi Hills. Further scanning will reveal that seven of these nine schools come under what is commonly known as the plain belts of Garo Hills.

This brings us to the obvious question, why are the schools in the plains belt in such deplorable state? The reasons are varied and unmistakable. The plains belt schools have always been in the news for all the wrong reasons. There is a regular battle between warring groups to take control of the management of these schools. Litigations, charges and counter-charges, fudging of marks, question paper leakage etc follow with predictable regularity. Eventually the group which is well connected politically manages to take control of

things. These politics-ridden schools become a hotbed of nepotism, if not outright corruption. The managing committees by manipulation provide teacher's posts to their kith and kin, irrespective of merit. These schools do everything except provide proper lessons to the children. When teachers are selected for their connections instead of merit and qualification, the effect is bound to show someday. Therefore, it is not surprising that these schools have performed the way they did.

The worry is that there is no possibility whatsoever to rectify the situation. No matter what Chief Minister and Education Minister may say, it will be next to impossible to rein them in because there is no political will to take hard action. God bless our education system!

Yours etc.,  
Bijoy Ch Marak,  
Via email

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

*"Keep smiling, because life is a beautiful thing and there's so much to smile about."*

—Marilyn Monroe

## The Shillong Times

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### Is Lockdown the solution?

SHILLONG will be going into another lockdown for three days from Monday to Wednesday. This poses the question whether this is the only option to control the spread of the Coronavirus. Perhaps in the early stages a few loopholes could have been plugged. The constant movement by BSF personnel has added to the large number of Covid cases. A consultation between the State Government and the Union Home Ministry to temporarily stop the movement of security personnel in view of Covid was called for in the early stages when BSF personnel were first detected with the virus. The BSF camp is inadequate to provide quarantine facilities to their inmates and the spread happened mainly due to the fact that inmates lived in close proximity with shared facilities. The spread was inevitable imminent. A close coordination between the State Government and the Union Home Ministry on how to deal with the challenge in the early days was imperative. What is worse is that BSF personnel live in rented accommodation outside their camps. Hence the propensity for spreading the virus outside the camp and within the communities is very real. The BSF camp was declared a containment area a bit late in the day.

A lockdown imposed on and off is unsettling for economic activities where the poorest get to earn their livelihoods. A lockdown of Shillong brings all economic activities to a grinding halt. Of course Meghalaya is only following in the footsteps of the other states that all believe that a lockdown is the only way to contain the daily spurt in Covid cases. The fact is that Covid has exposed the complete lack of governance in state after state. Also exposed is the poor state of health infrastructure. India is a populous country and physical distancing is the biggest challenge. People lack discipline hence every Government directive to combat Covid has to be enforced by the police. Fines have to be imposed on violators that don't wear masks. Crowding continues at market places despite the daily call to vigilance in these aspects. In Meghalaya, the MDA Government appears to be run by three people – the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and the Health Minister. Other ministers are not visible and give the impression that they are under quarantine. A government functions on collective decision-making. The role of the Opposition Congress too is ambiguous. They blow hot and cold and are not seen to be working in tandem with Government to tackle this health emergency. Political one-upmanship at this time is opportunistic. This has to be mended. All 60 MLAs have to put their heads together to address the pandemic better.

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Why is Congress speaking in forked tongues?

Editor,

There is something very curious about the Congress party in Meghalaya. Their leaders seem to be talking in forked tongues. I am referring to the State Government's COVID management and the Congress response. Recently, Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma called a meeting to brief the opposition on its strategies for fighting the pandemic. They were taken into confidence on the actions being taken on the ground. The government also disclosed the revised micro-management approach with localised lockdowns, instead of blanket lockdown like in April and May.

From the published reports we have seen that Congress endorsed the government plans and actions. In fact, it's spokesperson HM Shangpliang congratulated the government of the day. But a few days later, another Congress leader Zenith Sangma, who is also the younger brother of former CM Mukul Sangma, sang a different tune. He seems to have gone in the completely opposite direction and castigated the government for perceived failure to end COVID in the

state. If the party leaders are unable to see eye to eye or cannot agree whether the government is doing a fair job or not, they why go to town with the divergent views? Maybe, it throws light on the internal feuds in the party, with Shangpliang and group on one side and Sangma Brothers on the other.

Be that as it may, blowing hot and cold on important public issues like COVID sends wrong signal about the state of the Congress.

Yours etc.,  
Banskhem Lyngdoh,  
Shillong-6

#### Education not the only problem in Meghalaya

Editor,  
Apropos the editorial, "Education overhaul needed" (ST July 23, 2020), it appears that the views are based only on perception without proper analyzing the general facts.

Firstly, it is wrong to say that Government schools and other Government aided schools in the State are the last resort for many parents, because, at the end of the day it is the hard work and the resilience of the student which defines success or failure. Of course proper grooming is required, but the will and the desire to succeed lies with the students. There

# Dark Side of Whistleblowing in Meghalaya

By J Sakhkar

*As our country marches into its 73rd year of independence, it is high time we realise that this is not the nation the people who fought tooth and nail for our freedom had dreamt of...*

They say, "honesty is the best policy" but this isn't really true in our Magnificent Meghalaya. Government servants suffer for doing their job with honesty and integrity. This is the cold reality here. For a "Christian State" supposedly tired of corruption in government, we do very little to hold elected representatives with vested interests, accountable. Instead, they suffer constant harassment, loss of professional perks and even death – for speaking the truth. But despite the existence of this dynamic, many conscientious government servants and citizens have bravely come out to present the truth.

As a reminder, in 2010, three women from Jongksha village – Fatima Mynsong, Acquiline Songthiang and Matilda Suting were ostracized for filing RTIs which unearthed wrongdoings in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. These women were debarred from drawing ration from fair price shops, availing benefits from the Anganwadi centre or use public transport. They were also boycotted by the villagers on the order of the traditional tribal village court. Ironically, many of those villagers who boycotted the three women, had been at the receiving end of corruption, allegedly being perpetrated by the village headman.

This is baffling, to say the least, as it seems clear that without courageous people who put the greater good above their own well-being should be admired and maybe even rewarded for speaking up – not reprimanded. I wonder if this mindset is based on a lack of knowledge and understand of what whistleblowing actually is and the benefits that it can have on society as a whole. Our society appears to ostracise those who are brave enough to speak out when there is wrongdoing that needs to be addressed.

In 2015, a Sub-Inspector and Officer-in-Charge of

Patharkmah Outpost, Pearlystone Joshua Marbaniang was murdered for not submitting to corruption. The murder took place on the same day the SI detained 32 trucks that were illegally transporting coal despite the orders against such transportation in Meghalaya by the NGT. Coal mining in the state of Meghalaya has taken place at least since the late 19th century. What began as small-scale, artisanal rather hole coal mining by tribes on their land has over time transformed into a large-scale operation where greed has overtaken grief. Marbaniang's case threatens to unearth the nexus between corrupt police officers and coal mine owners. The then CM of Meghalaya had appointed a "Special Investigation Team" to investigate the murder, but so far only misleading information has emerged from it.

P J Marbaniang's coalgate murder case was remarkable in duration but not in substance. Marbaniang was by no means the first or only person to fall foul of the MLP system. Indeed, his case highlights neatly one of the MLP's dirtiest secrets: that its personnel are reluctant to report abuses or corruption within the law enforcement agency for fear of losing their jobs.

In another example of our state government's failure to root out villains within its ranks is when in early 2019, the Director of NEIGRIHMS, Dr. Devinder Mohan Thappa exposed a nexus between a doctor of the cardiology department and pharmacies located outside the institute. Dr. Thappa alleged that on April 30, a technician working in the radio diagnosis department at NEIGRIHMS who is also the 'left-hand' of the Cardio Head was caught red handed taking possession of surgery equipments from pharmacies outside the institute. Though the entire matter was reported to the vigilance commission and to the Ministry, shockingly Dr. Thappa was asked by the Governing Council to resign or face 'punishment postings'.

The damage the crossfire had done to the NEIGRIHMS governance is severe. Many of us are concerned about current

governance practices, which are being influenced by decisions that appear to be politically motivated but have a long-ranging adverse impact on the system. But as seen time and again, such "honest" decisions has always been taken for "dishonest" purposes or they are not taken at all. The culprits get away simply because the enforcement machinery is busy chasing the honest and does not have the time, energy, or inclination to pursue cases against the real ones.

And finally in June 6 2019, a member of our clan, Iohbianghun Sakhkar was murdered and her body was dumped in a forest outside the city. Two months later, a page on social media platform Facebook posted an anonymous confessional letter (by her colleague) which alleged that the MTDC employee was killed "for trying to expose the corruption and sex racket" in the Corporation of which she was the Assistant Manager. The Facebook page which uploaded the confidential letter was created in the month of August but sources claim the letter (dated 30 June 2019 and addressed to the editor of a local newspaper) had already surfaced on WhatsApp in the month of July. The letter also revealed the name of an engineer and a few others, including a father-daughter duo working as a casual receptionist and a boatman.

After several requests, a few employees of the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation had spoken up about the incident but requested to keep their identity a secret. A reliable source from MTDC said that June 6, 2019 might have been the day Sakhkar wanted to reveal her findings as she had already planned to approach the media in order to expose the wrongdoings which cannot be remedied in any other way. She further stated that 90% of the information she knows is already in the public domain leaked out by the unknown co-worker who wrote the letter. But a glitch in typing down the letter has led the "suspects" to gain an upper hand.

While the CID started their investigation into her murder with the arrest of 2 persons with past criminal records, the miraculous

disappearance of every single piece of evidence related to the case and the stunning drama from the "suspects" at the Shillong Press Club on August 17, 2019 however; indicated strong hints of a cover-up and raised serious suspicion of bigger and more sinister forces at play. Many see it only as a clever attempt to stifle an honest voice.

Despite the eternal tragedy of Sakhkar's passing, what it did was really trigger outrage in the state of Meghalaya with the Sakhkar Clan, CSWO president Agnes Kharshing and MLA Adelbert Nongrum lashing out at the government for failing to properly investigate the various allegations. Besides inspiring others to show the same degree of courage, it even reminded us of the urgent need to demand the immediate implementation of the Whistle Blower's Protection Act in Meghalaya. Cases like these reveal how corrupt practices have led to the dramatic breakdown of confidence and trust in our state - a state where corruption is the cancer at the heart of all our problems.

In an ideal government, leaders would pride themselves on a high level of integrity and would never give citizens reason to need to blow the whistle on malpractices or wrongdoings; however, it's not realistic for us to hold our chests out and say this of our society with any degree of confidence. It's important to keep in mind the bigger picture – and that is that whilst it can be an undoubtedly daunting process to enter into, we must think of the greater good of the state and the general public. As our country marches into its 73rd year of independence, it's high time we realise that this is not the nation the people who fought tooth and nail for our freedom had dreamt of. We must put an end to the all-pervading culture of corruption. We must remain vigilant; and the sacrifice of these brave-hearts must never go in vain.

(www.facebook.com/JusticeForIohbianghunSakhkar .. www.facebook.com/Justice-for-Pearlystone-Joshua-Marbaniang-797434833644254/) (Email: jessica.sakhkar@protonmail.com)

#### Congress survival imperative for democracy

Editor,

The Congress needs a strong central leadership to rebuild the party. It is natural that in a democratic polity, no party can remain in power forever. The BJP remained out of power for ten years (2004-2014). Nevertheless, it could overcome the crisis and come back to power. There are three important factors that have contributed to the crises faced by the Congress. They are weak central leadership, generational discord and ambitious young leaders.

A survey conducted between 2014 and 2019 indicates that while the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been rising over the years, Rahul Gandhi's appeal has been on a steady wane. Even when many unexpected developments posed challenges to the government in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak, Modi's popularity did not decline. But despite Rahul Gandhi's efforts, people did not recognise him as a promising leader. An ailing Sonia Gandhi on her own finds it difficult to solve the crises that the party faces.

Generational discord poses a serious threat to the Congress. A weak central

leadership finds it difficult to solve this problem. The crisis in the Rajasthan unit has only worsened this divide. Younger and elder leaders often fail to understand one another. As a consequence, conflicts develop among them. Elder leaders stake their claims on experience, while the younger ones demand their due citing dynamism.

Ambitious young leaders have caused trouble to the party for a long time. There is no harm in being ambitious in politics. Politics is not considered a social service now. Political parties are in pursuit of power. Ambitious young leaders want to capture top party positions and hold on to them for a long time. Crises are inherent in politics. In some political parties it is more than normal whereas in some others it could be uncommon or subdued. However, the crises the Congress faces is endless. In our democratic politics, the existence of the Congress is of paramount importance because a democratic system is all about choices and alternatives. The resurgence of the Congress depends on the response of the party's top leadership to the above challenges. It must wake up to the situation and resuscitate the party.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS  
Via email

## UGC must revisit guidelines in students interests Coerced examinations during pandemic is ludicrous

By Mohd Kumail Haider

2020 has been about an international health emergency affecting almost every aspect of our routine lifestyles. Students have been particularly affected. As COVID-19 infections double every few days, states like Punjab, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal and Delhi decided against holding final year examinations.

Thinkers and statesmen must pave ways to cope with the pandemic and essentiality of education, but unfortunately that is far from the case. The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development and the University Grants Commission (UGC) are bent on worsening the students' plight.

The UGC had issued guidelines on examinations that propose to conduct the examinations in July 2020. However, the UGC requested its expert committee to revisit the guidelines for examinations and the academic calendar as the number of COVID-19 cases are likely to rise further. The Report of the Expert Committee (OF THE UGC) recommended against scrapping the final semester (or final-year) examinations.

Recent guidelines of the UGC are not clear as to how the so-called "academic credibility, career opportunities and future

students, while cancelling other semester exams, shows its poor understanding of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) adopted by India's universities.

Under the CBCS, the academic years are split into semesters that carry more or less equal weightage towards awarding degrees to graduates. Every semester is equal and independent of other semesters. The central focus placed on examination scores encourages students to engage with their course material primarily as a (somewhat) unwanted necessity, meant only to secure numerically-defined academic success, rather than a fundamental part of their intellectual development.

While one of the central principles of higher education across the world has been to avoid teleological determinism, the Indian system continues to see success and continuity amid a burgeoning pandemic in terms of final exam scores.

The premier universities in India also cater to the academic demands of students from across the border, which poses another issue of difference in time-zone for conducting online exams.

"In these difficult times, as it steps into an uncertain future, the centre needs to



progress of students" can be ensured if the health of such students is given least importance and their lives are obnoxiously put in danger? Any move to ram through a final examination scheme could endanger lives.

Forcing students to appear in the final year University Examination is flagrantly violative of their Right to Life, as enshrined within Article 21 of the Constitution of India. In the case of Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India the court has interpreted the dignity and health within the ambit of life and liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. In Consumer Education and Research Centre v. Union of India (1995 SCC (3) 42), the court had expressly opined that right to health was also an integral factor to lead a meaningful life and for the right to life under Part III.

It is a matter of concern that our education system continues to be examination-centric and these guidelines fail to take into account the fact that the validity of examinations fundamentally depends on its reliability. Most examinations in India merely test an ability to recall facts or information rather than an understanding of those facts or an ability to use them in practical situations. Non-access to the internet, electricity and study materials, as well as a lack of a study environment in homes would only manifest the disparity prevalent in the education system.

What is baffling is the idea that just one semester of examinations (final) will determine the integrity and value of a degree that the students worked hard for six to ten semesters. It is difficult to understand why the last semester examination is so sacrosanct when the curriculum follows the cumulative rather than the hierarchical system.

The UGC's decision to enforce exams for final-year

stand with our youth, not against them."

The whole purpose of university acting as an equaliser will be lost. Students from humble backgrounds and from remote areas would be at a disadvantage. The mental health of students and their anxieties ought to be taken into account. The academic evaluation and examination system should not impact the well-being of the students.

Some large universities have shown commendable alacrity in devising alternatives to evaluate students in the present circumstances, including some academically rigorous technical universities. They have done away with a final examination and chosen a formula that uses best past performance of students. Four Indian Institutes of Technology located in Kanpur, Kharagpur, Mumbai and Roorkee have already decided not to hold final year exams for students in view of the frequently increasing and rapid widespread of COVID-19 in the country and all students were passed en bloc.

India currently has the third highest number of cases in the world. While "higher education" falls in the concurrent list, any decision to reopen institutions and conduct examinations requires careful assessment of local conditions, and is best left to the states.

The coronavirus pandemic is a once-in-a-century event. Students are feeling disenfranchised by the utter disconnect between their problems and decision-makers in the central government. The UGC needs to revisit its guidelines immediately and take a humane and rational approach in this matter. In these difficult times, as it steps into an uncertain future, the centre needs to stand with our youth, not against them. (IPA Service)

## A tribute to the legendary danseuse & remembering the journey of B'wood dance numbers

# Amala Shankar: Living life to the lees

By Ranjita Biswas

She was 94 when I last met her in her apartment in Ballygunge. Though a bit frail, she had been suffering from fever a few days ago. Amala Shankar told me, she was as gracious as ever and was ready for a chat. What was striking was how simple she was with no airs despite being so famous in her heyday as a danseuse and choreographer and carried on her legacy till late into life.

As she departs this world at the age of 101, I remember her twinkling eyes, the joie de vivre she exuded and the razor sharp memory as she reminisced about her childhood in Batajor in Jessore district, now in Bangladesh, and even recited poems. Her family later shifted to erstwhile Calcutta.

Shankar found her métier in the arena of dance and later was an able companion to Uday Shankar who opened a new vista with his creative dance and introduced the western audience to the richness of Indian dance.

Born Amala Nandy, she said she was hugely influenced by her father Akshay Nandy's liberal ideas. "He also believed that women should get an education, opened a school and edited a magazine."

Those were the days of the Swadeshi movement and taking the lead from Mahatma Gandhi's call for self-reliance, she and other children were



even taught how to make salt from locally available material at the call of the Dandi Movement by Gandhi.

At a young age, Nandy travelled to London in 1924 accompanying her father to exhibit his products, gold ornaments with a base of copper, to make it more affordable for ordinary women.

"He was actually offered free passage and hospitality by the British government, but he refused and made his own arrangements though it was not easy," Shankar said with pride. It was these values instilled in her that remained with her in adult life, she said.

Six years later, she was in Paris for

another exhibition where her father participated. The Shankar family, including sitar maestro Ravi Shankar, her brother-in-law, were there. It was a performance by Uday Shankar that changed her life. "It was a divine experience. I felt proud to be an Indian when we were

still ruled by the British," she reminisced.

The love of dance took over her and later she joined the dance school Uday Shankar had established in Almorava in 1942. She later married him, almost two decades older to her. They danced together in *Kalpana* (1948) di-

rected by Uday Shankar. The film was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012, restored by director Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation. And she walked on the red carpet too.

Shankar lived life to the lees, literally. She even performed at the age of 92 enacting the role of King Janaka in a dance drama *Sita Swayamvar*. She showed me the paintings strewn around her in the room. "I was never trained as a painter but I loved it and started painting on my own. Many of these paintings feature as backdrops of dance dramas of our house productions," she informed.

She was an inspiration behind the Uday Shankar Cultural Centre which her son musician Ananda Shankar anchored until his untimely death and carried on by her daughter-in-law dancer Tanushree Shankar, and Mamata Shankar, her dancer-actress daughter who has her own dance school.

Shankar was associated with numerous organisations, like 'Soi', a platform for women writers initiated by late Nabaneta Dev Sen.

With her death a chapter has closed in the performing art arena but she had also inspired many new talents in her lifetime. That is indeed the best gift a guru can receive. (TWF)

(The author is a winner of Sahitya Akademi award for her translation of Assamese literature. She is also the editor of a feature service)



## Dance, dance, dance away

By Shoma A. Chatterjee

The song and dance numbers began as fillers in cinema for an added boost to the entertainment quotient of the film. But slowly, dance evolved into a cultural statement, taking on an important character and sometimes, as a strategic move to create a turning point in the story, or even, to emphasise a quality in a given character.

Fulbright Fellow and academician Anugyan Nag whose fellowship was on Dance in Bombay Cinema: Dance films, Dancing bodies, Choreography and Choreographers writes: "Early Indian cinema showcased gestural and facial expressive movements and gradually evolved into a very sophisticated form with the introduction of the playback technology and the advancement of formal aesthetics of filmmaking."

Indian cinema cannot be imagined without a song-dance number, period. Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* (1948) was the first ever musical film in Indian cinema, written and directed by the dance maestro.

*Chandralekha*, originally made in Tamil, was released worldwide with 609 prints and was a widely viewed Hindi version too. It featured one of the most spectacularly shot dance numbers in the history of Indian cinema. Known as the 'drum dance', it used a huge number of drums making up a dance platform. Then came V Shantaram's *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje* with dance as the sole subject of a film targeted exclusively at the box office. The story was secondary to this dance opus.

The success of a Bollywood performer,

especially of a heroine, is always intertwined with her dancing prowess. One of the most prominent examples is perhaps of the legendary Vyjayanthimala.

No history of Bollywood dance and choreography is ever complete without mentioning this powerhouse of a dancer and actress whose number *Man dole mera tan dole* in Nandlal Jaswantlalji's 1954 film *Nagin* catapulted her to instant stardom.

While she became a screen goddess who never looked back since, capping the fag end of her Bollywood career with films like *Jewel Thief*, her dance moves in Lekh Tandon's 1966 film *Amrapali* is a milestone. Her contemporary Waheed Rehman also was known for her dance. Well, who can forget the unconventionally bold and beautiful Rosie essayed by her in *Guide* and her passion for dance as she rose as a star in the film with a storyline ahead of its time in Hindi cinema.

The most outstanding dance that added meaning and drama to the film was the snake charmer dance performed only on music by Waheeda Rehman in this Vijay Anand film. *Guide* raises dance in Indian mainstream cinema to a high level of aesthetic excellence.

According to Nag, "A large number of films have been made on dance and dancers as the central protagonist of the narrative. The numerous films commonly referred to as the tawari/courtesan films are remembered for their melodious music, lyrical poetry, exquisite costumes and above all the pleasure and spectacle of majestic dance sequences.

Some films had dance as a dramatic strat-

egy to express a catalytic moment in the script. One can recall the *thandava* dance number performed by Sridevi in a film like *Chaalbaaz* as her expression of rebellion against oppression and humiliation by her foster guardians and the 'dance of rage' she executed with beautiful variations in expression and body movements in an ambience of rain and thunder in *Lamhe*.

Hema Malini, another Bollywood heroine known for her classical dancing skills, would be remembered for the Sholay sequence in the villain's den where she danced on broken glass shards to the song *Jab Tak Hai Jaan*.

*Maar Dala*, one of Madhuri Dixit's *kotha* numbers in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas*, reaches beyond the performance adding a different dimension to her love for *Devdas*. The line *maar dala* comes four times over the four stanzas of the song and choreographer Saroj Khan (in picture) created a different way of expressing *maar dala* every time it occurred.

Madhuri expressed *maar dala* through her facial expression and body language in 16 different ways in the song. It gave a new dimension to a *kotha* dance. "She is my best pupil ever who I had to deconstruct completely from her background in Indian classical styles to train her in fusion and Western numbers like hip-hop, salsa, ballroom, Indian folk styles, fusion, item numbers and any other dance style one can imagine," Saroj Khan had said.

### Item numbers

Item numbers in Bollywood films date

back to cabaret queen Helen who left her fans gasping for more with numbers like *Mungda*, *Priya tu*, *Mehbooba* etc. But she was never termed an item girl.

But before Helen was Cuckoo Moray, also credited as Cuckoo or Cukoo, an Anglo-Indian dancer who had sizzled the Indian silver screen and even earned the epithet of rubber girl. She was the dancing queen of the 1940s and 1950s.

In the 1960s Helen's name on film posters got more space than the heroine's. Helen was effortless, she was a born item girl. She had class and her skimpy costumes never looked vulgar on-screen, yet there were oodles of sex appeal.

It was a time when a dance number by Bindu or Aruna Irani was like an insurance policy for the film's success. Bindu's *mera naam hai shabnam* number in *Kati Patang* is remembered till this day. Other dancers who became famous as sensuous dancers not always performed in cabaret style were Madhumati, Lakshmi Chhaya, Padma Khanna, Meena T and Jayashri T among others.

In the past years, leading female stars from Kareena Kapoor to Katrina Kaif through Priyanka Chopra vied with each other to step into item shoes, offering more sizzle and sex than dance.

One example is Aishwarya Rai in *Bunty Aur Bubbly* in the famous *kajarare kajarare tare kaale kaale naina* sending the audience into a frenzy of catcalls pushing up the box office scales for a film that was almost floundering at the box office before the dance was added afterwards.

However, one wonders whether dance in Bollywood had been reduced to sheer gymnastics and acrobatics if reality dance shows are taken as an example. (TWF)

## Smooth ride on Dawki road

By Naba Bhattacharjee

Considering the importance of road connectivity in overall development of the North-East Region (NER), especially in Meghalaya, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation (NHIDC) decided to widen and improve NH-40 starting from Shillong and ending at Dawki. The road provides a vital link to Bangladesh, one of the South-East Asian countries India shares a land boundary with.

The project is located entirely in East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills districts. While screening the socio-economic and environment data and information, it was observed that the indigenous people are present and have collective attachment to the project area. Therefore, there will be adverse impact on majority of the people.

With respect to JICA guidelines for Environmental and Social Considerations, an Indigenous People Plan (IPP) including elements laid out in World Bank's Operational Policy 4.10, it was decided to undertake a social, economic and environment assessment to evaluate the project's

potential positive and adverse effects on the indigenous people and to examine project alternatives where adverse effects may be significant. Accordingly, the assessment was undertaken in 2016.

The study was undertaken by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) responsible for technical cooperation component of Japan's bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme.

The Japanese government are very particular before sanctioning any project. In this regard decision of funding was finally approved after appraisal of all respective studies. The author was appointed by PADECO as advisor to the various studies. On his advice to engage local NGOs and individuals like Eudora Warjri, a dozen local entities were involved in the appraisal stage under monitoring of Enviro Infra Solutions, Meghalaya Chapter, prior to sanction stage. The engineering and structural DPR with alignment etc was prepared by TRANSYS India.

The decision of funding was finally approved after appraisal of all respective studies from 2016-2017.

The section for study for

NH-40 started from Shillong to Dawki, which is a total stretch of 74.6 km. The total distance now stands at 84 km after including five bypasses on the alignment. The first entry point of the study road is on the periphery of the main city and goes on to pass through various rural villages, including forests and agricultural fields; the most distinctive, however, are the deep gorges and precipices which are seen along a major section of the road. The entire section is a one-lane road; the condition of the road is fairly good with few sections being unkempt and ill-maintained. The traffic is especially busy in the entire stretch of the study road since it leads to many tourist destinations in the state.

The following reports were prepared after in-depth study for appraisal by JICA before seeking sanction of the Japanese government.

### Indigenous People's Plan

Indigenous People's Plan ensures that indigenous people present in or with collective attachment to the project area are fully consulted about, and have opportunities to actively participate in, project design and the

determination of project implementation arrangements. The scope and scale of consultation as well as subsequent project planning and documentation processes have been commensurate with the scope and scale of potential project risks and impacts as they may affect Indigenous Peoples.

### Environmental/Forest Clearance

Environmental Clearance was not required for this project as per MoEFCC notification, 2013. However, forest clearance was applicable as alignment passes through forest area from 3rd Mile to 5th Mile in Upper Shillong as forest land diversion was required. The clearance has been granted.

### SIA report and RAP survey

Community survey was conducted in order to collect the baseline data of socio-economy of the project area. The purpose of the community survey was to provide present conditions of the population, local economic and social conditions, and cultural conditions affected not only directly but also indirectly both positively or negatively by



the project. The community survey included general economic indicators and demographic conditions, socio-economic infrastructures, gender equality and women's participation, benefits for persons below the poverty line et al; in the districts directly affected by the project. Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) after detailed household survey was undertaken since displacement of over 157 families was envisaged. Information on Proj-

ect Affected People (PAPs) like inventory of assets, surveys for livelihood, compensation for lost assets and planning of livelihood restoration were highlights of the report.

The success in dedicated compilation of above reports and highlighting all the requisite parameters as per World Bank and JICA guidelines was responsible for sanction of the project.

It was one of the happiest and fulfilling days for me in my pro-

fessional career after giving the final presentation to JICA on all above reports.

I have been traversing this road, blessed with nature's bounty since childhood...improving the connectivity shall open the pristine and unparalleled beauty of our land to the world including huge boost to the trade and commerce.

(The author is a Shillong-based renowned environmentalist)

# Fighting for their future

By Dilip Mukerjea

The recent emergence of the Board Exam results in the State have proven to be a grim revelation: in too many instances, our children are inadequate for the present and unready for the future. We desperately need Learning Leaders and Leading Learners to be nurtured and nourished if our children are to be relevant to the future, not relegated to the past! This calls for an entire revamp of the prevailing education system. Beware, and be aware, of the Ostrich Syndrome! We cannot remain in denial. **EDUCATION IS THE TRANSMISSION OF CIVILISATION!**

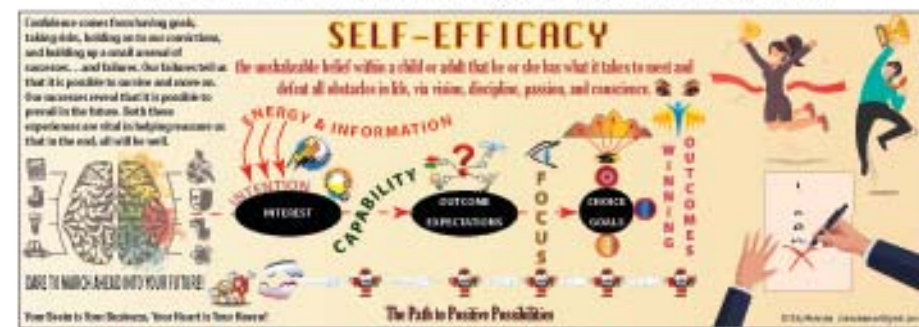


**FACT!** It is not enough for an individual credentialed with one or more degrees in education to be deemed eligible to teach! They need to prove they can teach, and in tandem, that they can learn, and keep on learning. We have to create a powerful nexus between the classroom and the boardroom, if we are to shepherd the present and future generations to be ready for the world of work in the 21st century. Our obsolete approaches to 'education' are a fast-track high-speed highway to obsolescence!

Good teachers need to be given top-notch pay and benefits as they are the sacred custodians of our children. The rest, who do not measure up, need to be enculturated in the ways of learning HOW to learn, and HOW to teach. They need assurances that they will be paid for this initiative, and priority must be given to education: to ignore this mandate will lead to extinction, of lives and livelihoods. Much of what masquerades as our educational 'system' is a stultifying cramming regime going nowhere!

## 10 considerations

- This is the Century of the Brain! We need an array of Brain Skills for Immediate Application...to be future-savvy, future-fluent, future-READY! In an inclusive ecosystem, with no child left behind!
- What you learn will soon become outdated; HOW you learn will last forever!
- Is Your Child Future-Ready? Are YOU Future-Ready?
- Today, being very good is not good enough...you have to be OUTSTANDING!
- Yesterday's world records are today's entry-level requirements. Focus on NOW. Start investing in your child's brain. And in YOUR brain! NO school here is equipped to relevant learning systems!
- We need superlative Learning Skills that go beyond the syllabus and guarantee success, in Life!
- We need Learning Miracles for Children of All Ages. This IS possible. But our institutions are immersed in obsolescence.
- NO campus in the world has this composite of skills: YOURS CAN BE THE FIRST.
- WHY? To move ahead, from stress, to strength, to success, to significance. Into the century ahead!
- This is designed to be your greatest legacy of love: to enable children to become able. So that they can be globally competitive, and winners in an arena of exponential challenges. Your gift to them: Self-Efficacy!



## THE STRATEGIES OF CHAMPION STUDENTS

- (1) They are vision-orientated, and impelled to act as goal-setters and goal-getters, imbued with deep-set images of achievement.
- (2) They are enthusiastic and passionate about what they do in school, as well as after school: they have fallen in love with learning.
- (3) They learn and apply super-smart strategies in their school work.

- (4) They never waste a mistake! The learning acquired from making a mistake is always greater than the cost of the mistake! Result: they profit from every mistake!
- (5) They have consistent support and encouragement from their parents and teachers.

**Do YOUR schools exhibit the above competencies? Are you open to possibilities? Can you afford NOT to do anything about it?**

## CRUCIAL CHALLENGES THAT CONFRONT 'EDUCATION' TODAY:

- (1) Information Overload (causing tremendous confusion and panic)
- (2) Low Speed of Information Processing (causing delays that are unaffordable)
- (3) Poor Retention & Recall: Memory Logjam (thus, learning is sabotaged!)
- (4) Frozen Status Quo: inability to break from the pack!
- (5) Inability to Adapt to Competitive Challenges: Famine of Ideas!
- (6) Inability to read fast, deep, wide, and with varied extensivity (poor knowledge gathering)
- (7) Poor Idea Generation capabilities (stuck in a rut!)
- (8) Poor Articulation Skills (lack of eloquence in expressing thoughts)
- (9) Meagre Knowledge of the Human Brain and how to use it to learn how to learn
- (10) Inability to Move Ahead from Stress, to Strength, to Success! (low motivation)



**Our educators must be the treasured standard-bearers of leadership, fellowship, service, and scholarship, all worthy attributes which not many have.**

**The crucial question all stakeholders in education must now face is: IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU GOING TO FUTURE-PROOF OUR CHILDREN IN ORDER TO MAKE THEM FUTURE-READY?**

(The author is L.I.F.E. coach, author, consultant, presenter and learning guide)  
Illustration & design by Dilip Mukerjea

# Who will save forests?

By Raideep Pathak

On June 5, 2020, World Environment Day, His Holiness the Dalai Lama took to Twitter and called upon citizens of the world to have what he said, "Global responsibility and a proper inner environment within each of us", which he believed, "will contribute to the conservation and protection of our common mother, the Earth, ensuring the survival of life, as we know it, in all its diversity, beauty and sustainability".



An aerial view of the burning oilfield in Baghjan in Upper Assam. Environmentalists talk of the inevitable damage to the nearby Dibru Saikhowa National Park and Maguri-Motapung Beel wetland as irreversible in its effects with carcinogenic oil condensate being spotted as far as 5 km from the site of the disaster. (UB Photos)

The supreme Tibetan leader was indicating towards developing a compassionate heart and nurturing a feeling of mutual coexistence amongst nature, human and wildlife. The Dalai Lama had earlier on April 22 (Earth Day) tweeted: "We can no longer exploit the resources of this earth — the trees, the water and other natural resources — without any care for coming generations. Common sense tells us that unless we change, we won't survive. This Earth Day let's resolve to live in harmony with nature".

Sadly, after less than a month on May 27, a pregnant wild elephant that strayed into the Mannarkatt forest ranges in the Palghat district of Kerala from the Silent Valley National Park in search of food was fed pineapple stuffed with crackers and left to die. This poses a serious question on the conservation of 'biodiversity' which coincidentally also happened to be the theme of this year's Environment Day.

Another similar disaster struck a pregnant cow on June 6 in the Jhanduta area of Bilaspur district in Himachal Pradesh when some people had allegedly tried a disgusting prank with fireworks in the field that shattered the cow's jaw and her face was literally torn apart leaving the poor animal in a pool of blood.

While such appalling incidents are just a minuscule of what happens to most of the animals who run into human habitat, the obvious question is why do these animals move out from their natural habitats to fall into a larger trap of human viciousness? Human penetration into natural surroundings for greed in the name of development despite adequate legislation is causing grave danger to climatic conditions.

Despite the pandemic and the threat of diseases hidden in ice waking up, scientists argue that climate change is melting permafrost soils that have been frozen for thousands of years, releasing ancient viruses and bacteria that, having lain dormant,

are springing back to life. We are ignoring the warning that as the Earth warms, more permafrost will melt opening a Pandora's Box of diseases.

Talking about biodiversity, the United Nations defines biodiversity as: "The foundation that supports all life on land and below water. It affects every aspect of human health... Human actions including deforestation, encroachment on wild-life habitats, intensified agriculture, and acceleration of climate change have pushed nature beyond its limit."

What is also of importance in this context is to note that there are historical evidences of ancient people and tribes protecting their forests and keeping it sacredly secret from the outside world. They have traditionally maintained forest as their place of refuge where humans and other habitats live together and therefore forests became sacrosanct.

Such forests like the sacred groves of Mawphlang, 25 km south east of Shillong, offer the finest example of myth and modernity in perfect harmony. Covering almost 75 hectares of land and like all sacred groves in Ri Hynniewtrep (Khasi and Jaintia Hills) have existed since time immemorial. People believe that their sylvan deities live inside these groves and that they would be offended if anyone causes damage to the plants and animals there.

Also, the Dehing Patkai (Dehing is the name of the river that flows through the forest and Patkai is the hill at the foot of which the wild life sanctuary lies) reserve is believed to be the last remaining contiguous patch of rainforest (also known as the

Jeyapore Rainforest) in the Upper Assam Region. Saleki, which is also a part of the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve, includes sanctuary covering 111.19 sq km of rainforest and several reserve forests in Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam.

While there is a dispute over the proposal for use of 98.59 hectares of land from the Saleki proposed reserve forest land for a coal mining project by North-Eastern Coal Field (NECF), a unit of Coal India Limited and the matter is sub-judice, it isn't wise to comment on the legalities of the said matter.

But it needs to be mentioned that being a completely virgin rainforest, this sanctuary is very rich in biodiversity with almost 47 mammal species, 47 reptile species and 310 butterfly species which have been recorded.

The different trees of this four-layered rainforest are laden with many exotic species of orchids and bromeliads. There is an abundance of ferns, epiphytes, wild banana, orchids, arums, climbers and lianas in this humid forest habitat. Many important tree species such as Hollang, Mekai, Dhuna, Udiyam, Nahar, Samkothal, Bheer, Hollock, Nahor, Au-tenga (elephant apple), different species of Dimoru etc are also found here. The towering Hollong tree which is also the state tree of Assam dominates the emergent layer of this rainforest.

It is a disaster that our greed has overcome our conscience so much that our memories of deadliest natural disasters are short-lived.

It also poses serious questions on the influx of industrialisation that has

crept into the very system of functioning. Our disproportionate development of ends and means has led us towards collapse and extinction. The disaster has befallen on the people and the environment per se at Upper Assam's Baghjan oilfield where since June 9, flames have been emanating.

Environmentalists talk of the inevitable damage to the nearby Dibru Saikhowa National Park and Maguri-Motapung Beel wetland as irreversible in its effects with carcinogenic oil condensate being spotted as far as 5 km from the site of the disaster.

There are innumerable questions that remain unanswered — the first obviously is why such a set-up was permitted to function in so close proximity to an ecologically sensitive area? What were the safety measures formulated and why was there a lax in the overall management/functioning? We must realise that such forests have maintained the balance between human, nature and other species, and, therefore, human intervention will further be disastrous.

Compassion, commitment and connection have been the key factors for the survival of humankind. Kristalina Georgieva, managing director, IMF, recently said, "The best memorial we can build for those who lost their lives in the pandemic is a greener, smarter, fairer world." Are we really moving in this direction? Are we listening?

(The author is programme executive at Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 26, 2020

Moonsquare Mercury on your solar return chart which will bring favorable results for you. You will be developing lot of contacts. And will also come in touch with high and the mighty. They will prove to be very beneficial in times to come. Government related work will also get cleared. Tax disputes with authorities too will be amiably resolved. You will also settle some long pending family dispute tactfully to the satisfaction of all. Your worth will increase. And you will remain a much sought after person in professional and personal circle. Your views will be valued and your suggestions would be implemented at workplace.

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

You are industrious and earnest in all that you do. This attitude bodes well for making good progress at work as the focus is on working relationships, partners, and colleagues. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with friends and family members. Monetary matters seem to weigh you down with their complexities. You are relaxed within and relate well with others at home and at work.

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

Family matters as well as monetary concerns move smoothly but not at the pace you would like them to. Advice from older people in the family or someone close to you would help you finalize your financial plans. You plan for your career, setting goals and objectives and planning the right moves with the larger picture in mind. At home a number of fine developments take place.

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

You establish your authority and take the responsibility. Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you follow your instincts as you seek to enhance your spiritual strength too. You focus on inner growth to keep pace with the assertion of authority and responsibility. This holds true for your personal life too - you realize the strength of the mind. At times you feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. You discuss these aspects with your soul mate as you look to give a practicality to your new learning. Investments and speculation are favoured.

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

This is an excellent phase in which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones as suffering and negativity will be eliminated once you make a significant change in personal relationships. You would expand your social circle and make more contact with groups and friends. Avoid hasty and rash decisions when it comes to change. The matter will need thinking through not procrastination. A can do spirit will help overcome any obstacles that you may encounter.

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

You are ambitious, authoritative and courageous. This period brings for you socializing, romance and stability at the work place. It's an excellent time to make a lifestyle change and you will also improve infrastructure of the office. Any unresolved argument may create rifts in your relationships, take a softer approach in your interactions when comes to the family related matters. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues. Personal relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. You are likely to get back to fitness routines and diet programs to enhance health and energy.

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

You tend to entertain people with your conversation and sense of humor. You may change your personal style to present a glamorous and unconventional image. Your social life would be busy as you would popular among this people. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful by self-efforts and care. People in fine arts, creative line and communication related fields would give a non-traditional blend to their creations and get popularity by the work done. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. There may be minor health ailment troubling you as you need to give more attention to your health.

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

This period brings entertainment, communication and popularity among people and harmonious relations in personal and professional life. Your main focus is love, harmony and unity in family. You are more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. Sharing ideas, talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle any stress that crops up. This is a fabulous time for joining a gym or stepping up exercise and health routines.

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

People in fine arts, creative line and communication related fields would give a non-traditional blend to their creations and gain popularity through their work. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. You tend to entertain people with your conversation and sense of humor. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful by self-efforts, love and care. There may be some minor health ailments as you need to give more attention to your health. Stick to a regular exercise routine and regular pattern of nutritious diet.

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

You would face new circumstances, changes and unfamiliar situations. A positive approach and well-spoken words would benefit as you gain favors from people in authority and power. You may take up new assignments and projects that would bring creativity and innovation of new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. Your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you a big boost of confidence and your personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated. This is an especially spiritual time for you, this is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

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

Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will get you everywhere now. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities and furthering family relations. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

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

You are likely to take your hobbies and talents more seriously. This is an excellent week for materializing a personal hobby and turning it into a business. You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with controversial, professional and family matters. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management to each other. Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. Excellent work opportunities for those working with overseas and you may go out for business dealings. You accept the individuality of loved ones and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

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

You would be able to give an unconventional look to your work and creativity. Your beloved ones, children and hobbies are in prominence. Pleasure and amusement play an important role in personal relations. You would be more sensitive and dedicated to your professional life. You focus on having fun, enjoying romance and expressing yourself creatively. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with family and children, all come into focus. You find joy in expressing your views and ideas with people around you. You are likely to feel good in general, and you tend to spread the joy and happiness. You work hard to meet the goals. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and wellbeing. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

## A blooming job option

By Ranjan K Baruah

Flowers are integral part of any celebration in our society. Whether religious celebration or parties and other events, flowers are being used all the time for decorations. Earlier, we had published about horticulture and in this edition we are publishing another part of horticulture, which is known as floriculture. Like flowers, ornamental plants are associated with our civilisation since time immemorial.

We have seen that people manages their gardens for domestic needs and flower gardening is a hobby for many but we can make it in large scale for commercial purposes. Floriculture is an important branch of horticulture, which deals with cut or loose flowers, ornamental plants, such as foliage plants, trees, shrubs, climbers, palms, bamboo, cacti and succulents, dried flowers, essential oils and landscape gardening.

The floriculture industry in India comprises flower production and trade of flowers, nursery and potted plants, seeds and bulbs, nursery, plant rental services, propagation through tissue culture and essential oils extraction. The industry needs to be enhanced when it comes to the northeastern region. Though there are scopes but many things need to be done, including motivating the youth here.

The Centre has identified floriculture as a sunrise industry and accorded it 100 per cent export-oriented status.

Few recommended plants which can give commercial benefits in the North East include cymbidium, gladiolus, liliium, dendrobium/vandas, anthurium and foliage plants. Few states like Mizoram may focus on rose and other flowers too depend on the conditions. There are not many areas under flowers or ornamental plants in spite of having demand. In the present situation when many youth have returned

subject for more success.

**ICAR DFR:** ICAR-Directorate of Floricultural Research (DFR) is under Indian Council of Agricultural Research and was formally launched on December 10, 2009, during the XIX Group Meeting of All India Coordinated Research Project on Floriculture held at Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi, to promote and strengthen floricultural research and enhance the technological base in floriculture. ICAR-DFR is first of its kind in the country. Initially it was up in IARI campus on temporary basis. Set in February 2014, the directorate was shifted to its new location ie College of Agriculture Campus, Shivajinagar, Pune 411005. Presently, AICRP on floriculture is an integral part of the DFR, having 21 centres comprising 15 budgetary, four institutional and two voluntary centres.

As floriculture brings opportunity, many youth may get engaged in floriculture activities. It may include from plating to marketing and other activities. One may get information from APEDA and other agricultural institutes. Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), is responsible for export promotion and development of floriculture in India.

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to their home state, they may try and get engaged in these options and start new initiatives.

Students may choose to get admission in agriculture universities or courses and take up floriculture as their academic subjects. All those who want to be entrepreneur and want to start business may not study the subject but it is preferable to study the

*“Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond to it.”*  
— Charles Swindoll

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.346 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 27, 2020

### COVID’s continuing grip

THE Covid scenario remains as daunting as it was when India declared a nation-wide shutdown from March 25, as is stated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Mann Ki Baat this Sunday. All hope now rests on a vaccine, the first trial on a human in India having started, in what would now be an anxious wait for weeks for a positive outcome. While the national figure of the dead in the past four months have reached a modest 32,000, the total infection tally is of the order of nearly 14 lakh, taking India to the third top slot in the world, next only to that of the US and Brazil. In fact, the Indian scenario looked tame only when compared to the US. While the poor, again, are the worst-hit, the rich and mighty are mostly well-protected in terms of health, though there are big exceptions like the Bachchans. While politicians more or less braved the Covid threat in India, among rare exceptions of late were Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and a Karnataka minister who have been tested positive. The politicians are safely ensconced in their homes, waiting for the next elections to take place – about which too there is no certainty. By-polls in 56 assembly and one Lok Sabha constituency are likely to wait in view of the present Covid-induced restrictions on public assembly and street shows.

The national daily Covid tally is currently of the order of nearly 50,000 – meaning, India could even overshoot the US figures in a matter of a few months hence, and emerge as the worst-hit nation. While the scenario in Delhi, is showing improvement from weeks of hopelessness there are reports might peak in a week’s time. Reports also say the South – principally Tamil Nadu and Karnataka – might have to wait till September for effecting a downward curve in the Covid graph. In Odisha that lay low for months, the scenario saw a worsening, with its tally threatening to outstrip worse-hit Gujarat and Delhi; and reporting over 1,300 cases a day. Maharashtra, the worst-hit state, continues to report close to 10,000 daily infections, while neighbouring Karnataka, seeing an uptick, reported some 5,000 cases a day. Some of the north-eastern states like Tripura are also facing serious odds and effecting lockdowns, though the region as a whole maintained relative calm so far. Sikkim has reported the first Covid death on Sunday. The overall adverse impact of Covid on the national economy continues to remain the biggest challenge.

# Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on traditions

By H H Mohrmen

The Meghalayan age theory defined by International Commission of Stratigraphy was challenged by Guy Middleton senior researcher at the Czech Institute of Egyptology at Charles University as it was found that the proposed geological time scale has some flaws. The story which was published in the National Geographic magazine issue of September 12, 2018 raised many question with regards to the archaeological theory linked to this new geological time scale. The world is awaiting the counter argument from the proponent of this new time scale which started from 4,200 years ago.

It is now certain that post COVID-19 pandemic we will see the emergence of a new age which will be different from the one we see now. It will not be a surprise that part of the twenty first century which begins from the January 1, 2020 will be a new global time scale. The name of the new time scale will have links with corona virus which has swept the whole world and humbled the leaders of many great nations. The obvious reason is because after the lockdown caused by the corona pandemic the world has changed drastically and it will never be the same again. Changes are seen even in this State where the lockdown has mostly affected the time tested traditions of the people.

In the context of Meghalaya which has a large tribal population, it is obvious that the pandemic has disturbed many prevailing cultures and traditions practiced by the people here. The first instance of the lockdown which affected tradition was the death of an elderly woman in a certain locality in Jowai. Because she died a few days after the lockdown was imposed, the shops were closed so the arrangement for the cremation was per tradition was affected. Ordinarily, in preparation for a cremation the family needs to make many arrangements which include buying assortment of fruits to be used in the traditions of the ‘siang ka pha’ or ‘ka siang ka phur’. This is an offering to the spirit of all the family

members who had passed away. The family have to buy the choicest of fruits available in the market for this, but unfortunately lawmusiang market was closed. Somehow the neighbours and near and dear ones contributed by bringing the fruits from their homes which ensured that the traditional practices went without any hindrance.

The Khasi Pnar people are known for the strong bonds that they have which is visible especially in how they express their sorrow during bereavements. The bond is influenced by the two moral principles that govern the life of the member of the Khasi Pnar society. Firstly, the cardinal principles of the Jaidbyrniew which is ‘ka tip kur tip kha’, (to know your clan members and those of your father’s) mandates that if a relative dies, one must visit the bereaved family not so much to pay homage or show respect to the dead but to be together with the family members and share their grief. Neighbours, friends and others who have no relationship with the family visit the bereaved family because the common principle which is decreed upon every member of the society is to work for ‘ka bhalang ka imlang sahlang or ka bhalang uba bun balang’ (the common good). Amongst the Pnar of Jaintia Hills it is also called ‘ka rap kylliang ka nong kylliang’ or something that one does because one knows that others too, will come to comfort them if the same happens in their family. It is a support system which the community provides to those in need especially during the time of bereavement.

The lockdown due to the pandemic has shattered to pieces this bonding that the community has to empathise when someone in the family or the community dies. Elderly persons, over sixty years of age are forbidden from going out so they cannot visit the bereaved family anymore. Members of families that have elder members in their family and those with comorbidity conditions also avoid going to ‘ka Ing ba iap’ (a bereaved family) to

protect their family members. Friends and relatives refrain from visiting the bereaved family also to maintain the twenty visitors at a time protocol as mandated by the SOP.

The Khasi Pnar also have a tradition where if an elderly person dies, the body will be kept in state for one day so that people can visit the family to pay respects. In Jaintia Hills the Pnar call the tradition ‘i pynchong sngi,’ but the COVID-19 SOP which requires that people maintain physical distance and frequently wash their hands makes people avoid visiting the family unless it is unavoidable. Later when every visitor is required to register to visit the bereaved family this becomes another reason where people are reluctant to visit the bereaved family and to attend the funeral or cremation.

It also becomes an added burden for the bereaved family because they have to keep hand washing points, provide hand sanitizers and keep a register of friends and family visiting during the bereavement. When friends and relatives visit, they also contribute in cash or kind as a gesture of sharing the family’s grief. This is also being affected by the lockdown due to the pandemic. Only close family members visit the bereaved family. There were cases where the village Dorbar prohibited visitors or even relatives of the bereaved family from another village or town to attend the funeral or visit the bereaved family. This comes in the way of family ‘ki kur ki kha’ sharing the grief of losing a member of the family together.

All the weekly markets were stopped and even those which are open do so only selected days of the week. This will not only affect the traditional markets which support the economic activities of the people of the area, but it is also going to affect the concept of counting the traditional eight days a week in the Khasi Pnar calendar. For example Musiang used to be an important day for those who depend on lawmusiang market, similarly Pynsiñ for those who depend on lawpynsiñ

in Wahiajer and Khyllaw for those who depend on the law Sutnga. But now markets are open on designated days according to the western or Julian calendar. Monday, Wednesday or Saturday is replacing Musiang, Pynsiñ or Khyllaw. Most of the weekly markets in the villages are yet to open. This not only deprives the rural people of the area of economic activities at their door steps but this could also be the end of tradition. By tradition, market day is not just for shopping but people engage in other activities too on the day.

During the pandemic lockdown all traditions including festivals have to be stopped or toned down. This year Bamphar which is a traditional theatrical festival of the Pnar was not organised by any community. Communities which used to celebrate Chad Sukra, Nohsakyriat and Rongkusi of the War Jaintia people were kept within bounds or stopped altogether. The two Behdieñkham festival celebrated by raid Jowai and Tuber were organised without any pomp and gaiety. The Tuber Behdieñkham which used to witness more than 60 rongs brought by more than thirty communities from both the east and west Jaintia Hills was a shadow of its former image. Only two ‘rongs’ were symbolically displayed at the biar with only the ‘Langdoh’ or the priest and few elders ‘ki wasan’ taking part in the celebration.

Visiting friends and relatives is another favourite pastime of the people especially in the villages but this is also being affected by the lockdown. But the most important traditional practice of the people is visiting the sick member of the family in the hospital or at home. The lockdown has put brought this to a complete halt as family members refrain from visiting the sick especially the elderly. The lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has definitely had a negative impact on tradition which the people have been practicing from time immemorial.

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## Tamilnadu Governor’s conduct raises questions

By Insaf

### ROUND THE STATES

Is Tamil Nadu Governor undermining the faith and trust attached to the constitutional post, is a question doing the rounds in the legal fraternity. Governor Banwaril Purohit has been sitting on the Cabinet’s recommendation of September 2018 to release all seven life convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Exasperated by Raj Bhavan’s dithering, a division bench of Madras High Court warned on Wednesday last it will be ‘constrained to interfere if the constitutional authority failed to take a decision in a reasonable time.’ It was hearing a habeas corpus petition by one of the convict Perairvalam’s mother seeking 3 months parole on medical grounds and asked the public prosecutor to respond. The court chose to send a strong message that even though the Governor cannot reject the State’s recommendation nor there is a time limit prescribed for a decision to be taken, he simply cannot linger on. Raj Bhavan must communicate its decision soon, or else be prepared for the consequences. The next hearing is on Thursday. Will the push come to a shove?

**Gujarat Police Code**  
It’s incredible. Gujarat police chooses to police itself. An outright clamp down on social media! Its personnel can’t step out of line. In the wake of growing campaigns seeking wage hike for constable rank personnel, State DGP Jha on Monday last, issued a circular titled “Code of Conduct” for ‘members of Police using social media for public and private use’. Viewing the posts as ‘an attempt to create unrest among personnel’ he said “any attempt to break unity of khakhi will not be tolerated and such police personnel who are part of the campaign will face legal and departmental action...” Accordingly, the code notification spells out don’ts: not to post critical comments on government or police department publicly; not post or transmit any service related application; not post any personal opinion while using social media for government work etc. Jha argues ‘police don’t enjoy same rights as citizens or other government staff due to nature of their job. Policing is not an ordinary job, but a service towards society and country. It cannot be compared with any other government job... if someone works in the department without the feeling of service, they cannot serve the society with the best police model...’ Here the critical point would be who defines this “feeling of service”? Speaking against injustice, would be wrong?

**Rajasthan Drama**  
Nagging uncertainty continues in Rajasthan’s political landscape. This time, round two seems to have gone to ‘disgruntled Congress’ Sachin Pilot. On Friday last, Rajasthan High Court ordered status quo to be maintained in disqualification case against him and his flock of 18 other MLAs. Speaker Joshi has been barred from acting on his disqualification notices on basis that Pilot and his supporters didn’t attend the party’s CLP meetings. While Pilot has contesting it saying that a whip can be issued only during Assembly, the matter will be hard again by the SC. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot is getting set to have a session of the State Assembly convened soon to prove his majority, even though opposition BJP has not asked for it. Be that as it may, Gehlot would await a nod from Governor Kalraj Mishra, whom he has been meeting. How soon will Raj Bhavan oblige is big

question. Normally it a notice requires 21 days, but if it’s emergency Assembly can be convened with 24 hours’ notice. Will drama get murkier?

**Monsoon Havoc**  
Monsoon wreaks havoc again. On Thursday last, the flood situation in Assam and Bihar remained grim, with N Bengal showing several rivers in spate of rising. Worse, UNICEF said 2.4 million children may have been affected in floods across the country and need immediate support. In Assam 28.32 lakh people in 26 of its 33 districts have been affected, 1.19 lakh hectares of crop areas damaged and a population of over 26 lakh suffering. In Bihar, about 7.65 lakh have been affected even though no loss of life is reported. Rescue operations are on. However, UNICEF notes over 6 million people across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal have been affected by the floods, including an estimated 2.4 million children. It urges immediate support, more resources and innovative programmes’ to urgently address the challenges that these threats represent particularly to the region’s children. Importantly, Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi too has urged the Centre to find out a permanent solution to this perennial problem of floods, year after year. The question is why can’t we think long-term?

**Manipur Gets Centre Attention**  
New Delhi has found a way to divert attention from the recent political drama as well as gold smuggling case in Manipur. On Thursday last, Prime Minister Modi chose to give a ‘raksha bandhan gift’ to the women in this north-eastern State by laying the foundation stone for over Rs 3000 crore water supply project. This shall give ‘clean drinking water to Greater Imphal and 1,700 villages in Manipur... provide a lifeline to these people, and help women in as many as one lakh families in the state.’ The timing is of interest. Recall last month, in mid-June, the BJP-led government was on the brink with the No 2 in the government withdrawing support. And it was none other than Union Home Minister Amit Shah who had to douse the fire and ensured the 4 NPP MLAs ‘ghar wapas’. But given chequered history, there is no room for complacency. This water supply project, a component of the national ‘Har Ghar Jal’ goal by 2024, should finally bring water in taps of thousands of homes, generate employment but should help Chief Minister Biren Singh flog the point that the State has “developed” under BJP regime. Will the differences get buried? Perhaps, the project would literally make the ruling BJP say that was all water under the bridge!  
**Wear That Mask, Or Else**  
It’s going to pinch your pocket and health, is a stern warning from Jharkhand. A whopping fine up to Rs one lakh and a jail term up to 2 years is what the Cabinet approved to rein in those not wearing mask or spitting in public places. With infection tally up to 6682 on Wednesday last, the Soren government decided to crack the whip. Much harder than other States or cities though. In Ahmedabad it ranges from Rs 200-500, plus it shall penalise owners of paan shops with Rs 10,000 fine if people are caught spitting in its vicinity. So far the Corporation has earned Rs 1.52 crore since May till mid-July with 1.72 lakh persons fined and 94 places sealed for violation of wearing masks/social distancing norms.--- INFA

### TO THE EDITOR

#### Managing Covid-19

Editor,  
Apropos your article ‘Between medical ethics and the public’s right to know’, (ST July 24, 2020) it’s sad to see the chaos with regard to management of Covid-19. Is there really a need to debate on revealing of the names of patients? Between publishing of such a list, the patient would have infected several more. What needs to be focused upon is social distancing, hand sanitization and reducing non-essential activity. Instead all essential activities are being shut down.

While Covid-19 has taken some lives, we shouldn’t forget the fact that people are still dying from heart attacks, liver failure, kidney failure, cancers, etc and mothers are still delivering babies. If we allow our hospitals to be shut down, then what about these patients? It’s sad that the biggest hospital in the state is shut down for several days now, with very little signs of it being opened immediately. With the civil hospital also closed, it’s a matter of time before all medical facilities in Shillong are shut. Where would the poor seek treatment?

While you and the government have rightly appealed to hospitals saying patients from Covid-19 areas should not be stigmatized, have there been enough appeals to the

public not to stigmatize healthcare workers staying in their localities? Without these workers how will the hospitals function? Is it possible for all healthcare workers to stay indefinitely in the hospital?

Corona virus is likely to stay with us for some time and shutting down everything is akin to draining the pond to kill the crocodile. The need of the hour is for the public to be educated to learn to live with this virus. Else, all the fish in the pond would die. I request you to appeal to the public to not stigmatize anyone, because, anyone is likely to contract this disease and if hospitals are shut, where would they go to?

Yours etc.,  
A concerned doctor  
Name withheld on request

#### Stigmatisation at its worst

Editor,  
On July 22, 2020, I went to Supercare Hospital, Shillong to see a doctor for my daughter’s illness as outpatient service. To my dismay I had to stand outside the hospital along with my 9 year old daughter as I was forbidden to enter the hospital. I felt very discriminated by the rules/protocols followed by Supercare Hospital, Shillong. When I told them that I am working in NEIGRIHMS (while being questioned at the screening

area), I was denied entry inside the hospital and was told to wait outside along with my daughter. The hospital staff said that they are only following the Hospital’s rules and guidelines for not allowing me to enter.

After persistently requesting to meet the doctor, I was being sent to wait near the emergency area of the hospital. To my surprise, even when the Doctor came there, my daughter and I were not allowed to enter inside the emergency area and medicine was being prescribed without even examining the patient.

I am not blaming the particular Doctor and staff here. I think they are following “hospital rules or protocols.” I am also not trying to defame the Doctor, staff or the hospital here but I am aggrieved by the rules laid down by the hospital. What if my daughter had some serious problems that would require her being admitted? Will that be denied?

My daughter was operated at Supercare hospital two years ago and I am really thankful to God and the Doctor too that she is in good health now. I wanted to visit the same doctor today since she had some problems, otherwise who would want to take their kids outside the house unnecessarily with this ongoing pandemic.

I would like to request the Government through

*The Shillong Times* to check with the rules or protocols of all the hospitals since I don’t want a similar incident to be repeated with anyone else. My question here is if hospitals (run by literate people) are stigmatising and treating us this way, why are we surprised when common people stigmatise anyone that tests Covid positive.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Business with hospital equipment?

Editor,  
I have been reading your newspaper for several decades now and I find that your paper raises several issues of public interest. Since I am an elderly person who visits NEIGRIHMS regularly for my health problems, I am particularly interested in news relating to that health care centre. In the past couple of weeks I saw a news item relating to purchase of air purifiers or decontaminators by NEIGRIHMS which I later learnt were to be installed on an urgent basis in the two ICUs – one for Covid patients and the other for Covid care of others suffering from other ailments. Since the Coronavirus is spread through respiratory droplets that remain suspended in the air and land on any surface to contaminate it when a person touches that surface,

a decontaminator is vital, keeping in mind the health of nursing staff and doctors who attend on Covid patients.

What I find difficult to understand is why the youth wing of a certain political party should be involved in this acquisition process? Needless to say that the process has to be transparent and for that NEIGRIHMS has a Governing Body and Administrative body that should follow a bidding policy for medical equipment. There are several private hospitals in Meghalaya. They are all acquiring very expensive life-saving equipment. Do the suppliers in their case also have to acquire trading license from the District Councils for supply of those equipment? Hospitals will look at many factors while acquiring equipments but mainly they should consider partnering with a vendor-neutral third party that can help them examine the total cost of ownership of equipment. Inviting an independent consultant to be part of their capital equipment project ensures that no single party is allowed to supply an equipment without a proper review of the purchase and that everyone’s interests and needs are taken into account for the final decision. The role of NEIGRIHMS as the client is also to assist the supplier with the local laws and regulations because it is a Government-owned

institution.

Suspensions arise as to why a political party should interfere in such acquisitions on the plea that the firm supplying the equipment to NEIGRIHMS has not got the mandatory trading license from the KHADC. The other point to note is: how long does it take to get a trading license from KHADC. Many applicants find their applications not being attended to after a wait of several months, sometimes years, even after fulfilling all criteria? Why? Can a hospital wait to get a trade license before getting a life-saving equipment?

Meghalaya has been a happy hunting ground for opportunists of all kinds and most people cave in under pressure because there is a local clique at work which earns from facilitating contracts for business-persons, at a price of course. It is nobody’s case that political parties spend their waking hours trying to find contract and supply work for their office bearers. Look at MeECL and other offices and institutions and check out who the suppliers are. We should get the answers as to why every purchase, especially by vulnerable institutions like NEIGRIHMS are subject to scrutiny from certain NGOs and political party acolytes. This itself tells its own story about the contract-supply-politician nexus in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
B L Kharmuti,  
Shillong-3

"I say there is no darkness but ignorance."

-- William Shakespeare

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.347 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 28, 2020

### The Peoples' President

IT was on July 27, 2015 that President APJ Abdul Kalam breathed his last in this city. He was delivering a lecture at IIM Shillong where he was a visiting faculty and collapsed in the middle of the lecture. That episode marks the single-minded devotion that the late President had for his work and commitment to educating the younger generation. APJ Abdul Kalam served as the 11th President of India from 2002- 2007. Known as the peoples' President and the missile man of India for having led the team that built the Indian ballistic missile and launch vehicle technology, Dr Kalam also played a major role in the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. He was the leading light at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) two of the most important defence establishments of the country. Dr Kalam's happiest moments are spent with young people answering their questions and coming down to their level - a characteristic which very few luminaries possessed. It was this willingness to contribute to the intellectual capital of the country that brought Dr Kalam to IIM Shillong to share his knowledge, wisdom and experiences with the students. The loss of Dr Kalam is something that the country can never replace.

IIM Shillong has rightly created the APJ Abdul Kalam Centre for Policy Research and Analysis which seeks to embody the philosophy of the late President by leveraging knowledge, technology and humanism to achieve sustainable development and a just and equitable social order. The Centre aims to emerge as a state of the art resource centre to assist the states of North East India and other implementing agencies to plan and execute projects more realistically. The Centre also aims to promote innovations and to function as a repository of the best practices in the region, especially in development planning of six critical sectors namely logistics, tourism, horticulture, handicraft, handloom and business process outsourcing. This would cover all the vital areas of development planning, strategizing, analysis and policy formulation.

The Centre was created vide a tripartite agreement between IIM Shillong, the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Ministry for the Development of the North Eastern Region (MDoNER). This Centre aims to network with various institutes across the North Eastern region to come up with a holistic plan of action. Since its establishment four years ago the Centre has been able to liaise with NEC and DoNER to provide an economic roadmap in the above-mentioned key areas of development in the region. Even during this lockdown period the Centre has been regularly engaging in webinars to address the current challenges posed by Covid-19. The hope is that this Centre bridges the knowledge gaps and emerges as a robust policy advocate.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### Indian Education System

Editor,

The education system in the country needs serious reform and the coronavirus pandemic provides an excellent opportunity to implement the same. While we all agree that the current system is very much exam-centric, it has to rise above its present form and a learner-centred system in accordance with the present complexities and dynamics is plausible.

We have seen the SSLC results as well as the pass percentage of different districts and the highly inconsistent performance of some districts vis-à-vis East Khasi Hills. There is a need to introspect and merely blaming the schools or students will not make any significant difference to the overall state of affairs. While some eminent institutions are persistently pushing on conducting exams for students, it exposes the single pillar that our system rests upon, exams. While we don't know if exams will be held and if yes how we are going to be safe from the clutches of the virus, the UGC on its part has continuously given

mixed signals to students but that can be a discussion for another day.

Learning and implementing can have their own forms like making projects, understanding and exploring subjects and doing intensive studies on topics relevant to the situation. The college students who helped the Government and other organizations during this pandemic can be awarded extra marks, not only in the Board or University exams but also for competitive exams. It will go a long way in developing the spirit of voluntarism among students from a young age.

While the future seems ambiguous for the education system in India, it has been caught off guard and uncovered many realities. The most whimsical thing that happened is of course the online learning and digital classes. Should it have taken a pandemic of this scale and a million plus cases for us all to understand the importance of going digital? Mobile phones which have been seen as a curse by many parents, teachers, institutions and almost all the stakeholders involved are today most needed gadgets. The biggest distraction suddenly becomes the most important tool for edu-

It is the seventh month now since the first incident of Covid-19 surfaced. What once was a rumour of a terrible disease in a faraway land has now brought the world on its knees. On our knees, millions of us have been praying, for the safety of Doctors, Nurses and all frontline workers, for our Government and Scientists. Many heroes have emerged through the struggle, heroes whose actions encouraged us and even called us to join in the heroic endeavour within our local communities and spaces. There have also been situations where we see Covid-19 get the better of us. We prayed and spoke up for those who were on the receiving end the migrants, the poor, the weak and the sick.

It is unfortunate to hear about the incidents of hospital workers being turned away by their community and also people being turned away from the hospitals. I don't know the whole story and all the factors that led to such incidents, nor do I want to start a blame game. That is not my intention. As a counseling psychologist, I take this incident as an occasion to talk on certain aspects about us, as human beings and what influences and shapes the way we react and respond to the current situation and, being a huge fan of superheroes, I wish to present all this within the idea of the Heroic.

I want to begin with two interrelated observations. The first is there are some topics, such as death or illness that are not to be talked of, even though they are not "evil". The second observation is that people think that when the times comes they will be able to act in the right manner or do the right thing. When they are put in a place where they need to act courageously, somehow they will be able to do it without preparing for it.

When these two are combined, things do not turn out the way they hope for. Firstly, because we have not talked about it, we are not prepared for it. By not entertaining the various possible situations that may happen with Covid-19, such as, "What happens when I get Covid19, or my kids do?" we are not giving ourselves the opportunity to shape our responses. Secondly, when we are in that situation, we won't necessarily be doing the right thing but the thing that we have always been doing in

# The making of Covid-19 heroes

By David H Blah

similar situations in the past.

One may ask, why is this the case? Well it's because of two things. Firstly, about 40-45% of our daily behaviours are habitual. That means, most of the time we behave and react in an automatic and "seemingly unconscious" way. Secondly, the reactions that these situations elicit and the emotions attached to them have a strong influence on our Behaviour. The survival instinct, with its accompanying emotion - fear, is necessary and a natural instinct but it can also be counterproductive and when it has not been properly formed and shaped, will result in the very opposite. This is not a new thing. Horror or killer movies are full of side-



actors who try to save themselves but actually make silly decisions that lead them to the hands of the enemy. What is crucial for us to note is that our initial reactions shape our subsequent thinking and thus also influence our morals.

The way out of this is to firstly understand the difference between Reacting and Responding to a situation. These two can fall in line with each other, but they can also fall separately from each other. An example of the latter is that there are numerous occasions when we have asked ourselves - "Why did I react in that way? I could have responded better." Secondly, we can shape the way we react by forming our Responses. As we do this, we need to remember that our initial reaction, be it thoughts, emotions or actions, may not be the best or most suitable.

We need to talk about values and morals and the desired ends of our life as individuals. "What kind of life do I want to live? What kind of person do I want to be? How do I want others to treat and respond to me and my family?" It is worth

noting that when we do this, we usually take the side of the one defending and protecting, the one who is still safe from danger. We also need to take the side of those who are already in danger, or who may be perceived by others as being in danger. After this, we need to train our responses by imagining various situations in our heads. We need to talk about it with others and try to practice the response that is based on our values so that we will be prepared when the situation comes. N.T. Wright, explains it like this [paraphrasing him], 'Courage is not born for a single BIG action, but a series of consequent small courageous decisions, so that when the BIG time comes, you will

naturally act courageously because it has become second nature to you'. Every hero has a back story where he/she undergoes a period of training, a period of forming his/her skills and his/her identity. It is because of this "training period" that they are able to instinctively act in such a heroic manner.

Moving from the personal to the social, I want to briefly highlight how a heroic community might look like. I think that when we make decisions, it never takes place just between the person and the situation. It is within social relationships that ethical norms are manifested, prioritized and must be discussed. Such situations are complex and it is never a case of Black and White and I do not seek to offer any ethical suggestion to solve the mystery! What I am interested in is the kind of community that will be able to act in a heroic manner and be able to integrate and heal itself when a part of it is shattered or wounded.

There are two immediate reactions that may drive people to subsequent actions and usually to sustained action along that particular manner. They are the Survival Instinct and the Moralization Instinct. Steven Pinker writes that "Moralization is a psychological state that can be turned on and off like a switch, and when it is on, a distinctive mind-set commandeers our thinking." Moralization makes people think that rules are universal - "It is never Okay to Lie", and that people who break them must be punished. It creates a black and white picture of a complex world and creates splits and fissures rather than bridges.

As stated earlier with regards to the survival instinct, people's moral sense is crucial and natural, but when our mature moral sensibility gets overtaken by this "moralization", to the on-lookers who have not turned on their moralization switch, we will look foolish or childish as we try to tackle a complex situation.

An alternative way of responding is one that is characterized by Bridges that open communication and companionship between different parts of the community, especially those that are on the "Other" side. Ladders helps us reach the top, bridges helps us reach each other. It is within the spaces that Bridges create for us that we can form our community's responses, and in turn our community's reaction. This is where we can heal and grow. When we watch the movie Avengers, we see them fight each other, then work together to defeat the enemy. Anyone can fight with one another, but we need a relationship if we want to settle our differences and work together.

As we form our responses, at an individual and community level, we need to keep on educating ourselves by reading about Covid-19 so that we can dispel unfounded fears and keep on fighting against stigmatizing people associated with it. As we are shaped by our Values, let Information inform our Decisions and Reason shape our Emotions so that we will be able to come out of this successfully. Pimplakrai Village is an example of how a heroic community responded to the situation.

(The writer is Assistant Professor Department of Psychology Martin Luther Christian University. Email: davidhblah@gmail.com)

candidates who appeared that year and passed were not eligible for job interviews. She totally forgot that covid-19 has no politics in it. Lastly, she assured that norms, like sitting arrangements, sanitization, etc would be taken care of. The most striking argument was by the ex-member UGC, M.M Ansari. He said, "we can never examine our students on subjects never taught." That put the last nail on the coffin of the UGC.

On online education, let me tell the readers what the Secretary of Education in the United Kingdom said. "Yes we know there is no substitute to a teacher with a chalk, duster and the black-board, facing his/her students".

With Covid 19 not yet over with its first wave, let us use our hearts and minds to judge whether improper examination is preferable to the physical and mental being of our dear students.

Yours etc.,  
Marbianglang Rymbai,  
Shillong -2

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## Corrupt legislators vitiating Indian electoral politics Voters responsible for weeding them out in polls

By Amulya Ganguli

India has been at the receiving end of adverse comments from the world community on several counts. These include the prolonged incarceration of social activists and the civil unrest on the citizenship measures while inside the country, there is disquiet about the emasculation of autonomous institutions.

But no less disturbing than these politically directed assaults on some of the basic features of a democracy is the creeping erosion of the legislative system, the very lifeblood of an open society. This attrition of the value of the legislatures - the state assemblies and parliament - is the result of a virtual reduction of their members to purchasable commodities.

Because of such essentially commercial transactions in political loyalties, there is a serious danger of the entire legislative system being brought into disrepute, forcing people to lose faith in the democratic process of periodic elections to choose MLAs and MPs.

If it becomes commonplace for a legislator to be induced by a resourceful party with "a kind word and a gun", as the Ameri-

epitome of democracies, being replaced by the whims of the rulers whose motivating factor is mostly political vendetta.

One fallout of this amoral brand of politics is to make a mockery of the world's largest democracy, which has long been India's proud claim to fame. The spectacle of the MLAs being herded together like sheep by their party leaders and ferried to five-star resorts for safe keeping in order to forestall any attempt of poaching by the rival camp would have been amusing if it wasn't seen as a systemic failure.

Mercifully, the numbers of those who escape the dragnet of the party leaders are not too high. It is usually around 20. But they underline the adage of how one rotten apple can spoil the rest. The attitude of these itinerant MLAs travelling from one party to another is one of the crudest form of skullduggery imaginable.

It is up to the voters, of course, to weed them out in the next round of elections. If this does not always happen, it is because various local factors - caste, community, the Robin Hood image of some of the babubalis or strong



man - help them to evade even the threat of "none of the above" button being pressed on the voting machines.

These are also the very same factors which persuade the political parties to choose these tainted candidates. It is a vicious cycle where the "winnability" of the local dons helps them to strike roots in their constituencies and keep the voters and the parties in their grip. Former Prime Minister V.P. Singh was the only one who told an election rally not to vote for candidates with an unsavoury past even if they belonged to his party. No other Indian politician has been so forthright.

But, is this the reason why the Janata Dal has faded out? Given its fate, will any other leader summon the courage to offer the same advice to voters? So, as the MLAs long for greener pastures and the voters helplessly accept the inevitability of supporting them, the intelligentsia can only wring their hands in despair.

Since the self-serving parties have turned down a proposal to bar anyone who has been charge-sheeted from contesting on the grounds that the person may be the victim of false accusations, the Election Commission and the legal system will have to find ways of ensuring that the babubalis are kept out of the election arena. Otherwise, the future of democracy in India will become increasingly dark. (IPA Service)

As a result of these dubious groups working in tandem to feather their own nests, the moral scaffolding of the system is being severely strained with the rule of law, the

*“Life imposes things on you that you can’t control, but you still have the choice of how you’re going to live through this.”*

--- Celine Dion

## The Shillong Times

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### Ayodhya abuzz again

AYODHYA will again be the focus in the coming week. This even as Covid-19 is still on a roll and social life remains mostly paralysed. Religious frenzy coupled with the vigour with which the Modi government is pursuing the Ram Temple plan in what is cited as the birthplace of Lord Ram is bound to make the foundation laying ceremony for the long-awaited temple works a mega event. The presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top guns of the government and ruling party will be an added glamour. Intelligence alert about likely threats from terrorists is unlikely to dampen the bhumi puja. One of the few achievements of the present Modi government is the way it sought to set at rest the long-pending Ayodhya dispute, through the good offices of the Supreme Court. The grievances of the Muslim faithful have been addressed in large part by the grant of acres of land alongside to build a mosque a some distance away from the slot where the erstwhile Babri Masjid stood. Its demolition by a Hindu crowd charged by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Sangh Parivar activists in December, 1992 had accentuated a deep communal divide which is yet to be healed. Yet, this is time to look forward, and see not just the mega Ram Temple project getting completed but also the proposed mosque, in equal grandeur, both standing testimony to the spirit of co-existence.

Notably, the Babri demolition cases are still in court; only the dispute about the ownership of the land has been settled by the apex court. The death of over 2,000 people in the ensuing riots in 1992 is a painful chapter in modern Indian history. It was a failure on the part of the political leadership to have allowed things to reach such a pass, rather than pushing for a negotiated settlement. This is a grim lesson for future generations. In a democracy, discussions are more important than guns and bombs. Questions will naturally arise as to why precious resources should be used for the erection of the Ram temple in these times of Covid-linked economic struggle that people are facing. Indeed this is time to use all available resources for mitigating the sufferings of people. Yet, this is also time to pump money into sectors like construction, which could rev up the market. This is no time to hold back money; and more so of the government. The government must also be liberal in helping to facilitate the rise of the new mosque. In India, to exist is to co-exist.

# The ills in education: Reform the educator first

By Albert Thyrniang

The poor MBOSE, SSLC results were quite a shock and attracted attention from the press and the public. This daily had two editorials in three days, one analysing underwhelming results and the other summarising the cumulative reasons for worst performance in five years. Letters to the editor had diversified opinions.

Apart from the 10 zero pass schools there are 45 schools which recorded 25% or less pass percentage and 14 schools with 30% or below. Altogether 69 schools had a 30% and below pass percentage. Another revealing figure is that out of 71 schools with the initials ‘St.’ only 3 schools secured pass percentage in the 45% range, 3 in the 60% range and 2 between 70-73%. All others had 75% plus. Most scored between 80-99% with 14 of them scoring the perfect 100% pass.

It is a fact that majority of parents send their children to government funded schools as a last resort. Parents who can afford, choose to admit their children to private schools. We all know very well that children of ministers are not in government schools. They are in private English medium schools, probably doing CBSE or ICSE Boards. When the results were declared in Assam, a minister posted the 80% plus results of his two children on Twitter. Both were studying in a posh ICSE school. Children of MLAs, politicians, bureaucrats, government employees and government teachers themselves are not in government schools. In towns you will easily find domestic worker walk to government schools while children of that household are driven to private schools.

So the pathetic results and the general poor quality of education in the state do not pain the above section of the society. Therefore, no overhaul will happen; no radical reforms will take place, no decisive action will be forthcoming and little improvement will be visible. The ‘haves’ in the society have rather a laissez-faire attitude towards the unjust educational scenario so long as their own children get reserved seats in medical, engineering and other professional courses.

Out of compulsion the State Education Minister expressed distress at the 50% failure. He assured a detailed report on the schools that secured zero pass percentage. But he also revealed that the recommendations of a Committee that was set up

last year for Garo Hills were not implemented. What are the recommendations? Why were the recommendations not implemented? How are we to believe that this year’s findings will be taken note by the Government? With all the five districts securing 35% marks and below, Garo Hills needs painful actions.

The threat of the Education Minister to withdraw affiliation and/or stop government funding to the ten dubious adhoc, deficit or government schools which scored a nil was already rebuffed by the Chief Minister who favours pampering the non-performing schools. In Assam when 17 schools recorded zero pass percentage Education Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma declared their closure with immediate effect. In Meghalaya public money will continue to flow into the pockets of the under-performing schools.

Seven of the ten schools are from the plain belts. The area which was infamous for mass copying for a price, is now bringing disrepute to themselves. It is now in the public domain that these schools are highly politicised and are busy with court cases than educating their students. Students will benefit best if the Government takes over these schools for at least 10 years.

The ills in the educational system are no secret. The issue is the refusal to act for political reasons. Take for example the high absenteeism of teachers in government schools at all levels. The Government is well aware of the negligence of teachers. What steps have successive governments taken to stem this criminal action? Has the Government put in place a monitoring system to force unscrupulous teachers to perform their duties? Are Additional District School Officers (ADSEOs) told to make regular visits to Lower Primary (LP) Schools? Are DSEOs made mandatory to visit Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools regularly? Is the DSEL directed to follow up the inspections? Does the Education Secretary further examine the monitoring reports? Does the Minister make sure that genuine monitoring is done and not only in paper? Has any errant teacher been taken to task for being irregular? A surprise visit by DCs instils fear but after a week its business as usual.

There might have been cases when actions were initiated but after these unscrupulous teachers

approach their MLAs or ministers, complaints are dropped. Such teachers also bribe officers to get away scot free. Illiterate and uneducated parents around schools are not empowered to go after unprincipled teachers who get pay without work.

The failure to check the attendance of teachers is the main reason for poor learning. LP teachers promote their children to class VI without the ability to read single syllable words and do single digit addition, subtraction and multiplication. Upper Primary teachers send their students to class IX without teaching them the basic language and arithmetic skills or the three R’s, namely, reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic. Secondary teachers ‘prepare’ their candidates for SSLC examinations only to end up unsuccessful.

Political interference and corruption in teachers’ appointment is an open secret. In fact, every government job is for a price. The Education Scam involving the former Education Minister and the then Director of Education is one case that came to light. A DSEO once narrated to this writer the endless calls from politicians, higher officers and others, known and unknown, prior and post interviews for post in deficit schools. To put an end to this malpractice the Government should conduct interviews in camera with audio recording mandatory.

In a letter to the editor a person, presumably a teacher, squarely blamed students for failures! He claims students are least interested and don’t care to study. Therefore, teachers are helpless. This statement is merits condemnation. It is the job of the teachers to inspire and motivate students. They are paid for it. Teachers who feel helpless and are unable to make their students pass, must quit. There is no point in being there. Why are teachers in private schools with much less remuneration producing far better results than teachers in government and aided schools with a much higher pay? Job security with assured automatic rise in pay scales irrespective of performance is killing education in the state.

Parents may also be ill-equipped to encourage their wards to do well but teachers have to step up and perform their responsible roles. If parents do their part the teachers’ role will be minimal. Unfortunately this is not the case in our generation. So the teachers have to double their efforts.

Much kudos have been showered on the schools which dominated the top 10 positions in HSSLC, Science, Commerce and Arts every year but fail to repeat the feat in SSLC. Does it mean that students of the prestigious institutions are naturally gifted or have parents who afford private tuitions? Does it mean that the credit goes to the parents and not to the school and the teachers? This year, the same school did not record cent percent pass in Science, Commerce, Arts or SSLC. If teachers are able to produce top 10s at will, why is it that they could not make ‘poorer’ students pass? Could it be that parents of these unsuccessful students are less privileged?

This is for a fact. In a rural school all the Plus 2 students scored 40% marks and below in SSLC (those who do well rush to towns). But due to regular classes, insistence on regular attendance by teachers, regular tests and practice examinations the school produced 100% pass in HSSLC with some in first division, many in second division and the rest in third division. This is how dedicated and committed teachers can script success stories. Unfortunately these stories are not highlighted in the media.

As COVID-19 is yet to hit its peak, education and other sectors will go downhill. With half of the year gone by due to the pandemic, 2020 might be a zero academic year. While children with smart-phones, tablets, laptops and desktops linked to internet by 4G continue to learn, learning for children of parents of Lumsiap who have to battle against coronavirus and floods, children of vendors, daily wage earners and farmers who can barely survive has come to a halt. Next year the results might be worse and those affected the most are the marginalised.

Education in Meghalaya needs short term and long term solutions. Long term challenges are improvement in infrastructure, improving communication, streamlining existence of diversified categories of teachers, appointing qualified teachers, etc. Short term solutions are remedial classes and setting in motion a supervision system to weed out teachers’ absenteeism. The rot in education is systemic and complex. We can’t solve all of them at one go. But the reform has to start somewhere. Reforming the educator himself/herself might be the most credible starting point.

(Email: [thalbert@rediffmail.com](mailto:thalbert@rediffmail.com))

# Agriculture a sacred profession

By Barnes Mawrie

With the onset of Corona pandemic, the whole world is experiencing crisis and pain. Millions of people have become unemployed and unemployment stares in the face of every government. In India we are witnessing trails of migrant workers returning back to their homes having lost their jobs in various metropolitan cities. The question arises as to what will these persons do? What is going to happen to them? Can the state governments provide them alternative jobs? Majority of these poor people have no more cash with them and hunger is their unavoidable plight. Many have already died from starvation. It is at this juncture that we realize how essential agriculture is to a community and to a nation.

It is a fact that farmers may not have cash with them but they will never die of hunger because they have food with them. In the Bible we have a situation of a global famine which took place during the days of Joseph. It was at the advice of Joseph the wise man, that Pharaoh ordered a massive cultivation and storing of crops. Thus when the seven years of famine arrived, Egypt had more than required supply of food, so much so that they could sell to other nations as well (Gen 41:47-49).

Since the great Industrial Revolution, there has been an ongoing migration of young people from the rural areas to the cities in search of industrial jobs etc. The craze for cash-based jobs offered by the cities has dealt a death blow to agriculture in general. Northeast India is particularly affected by this socio-economic phenomenon. In most of our states, the rural areas are quite deprived of young people since most of them have migrated to cities in search of jobs or higher education. Consequently, a vast track of agricultural land is lying fallow without any cultivation. Only a small percentage of land in rural areas is being utilized for cultivation and that too is left to the older folks. When crises like the present pandemic come, we feel the negative impacts of such a phenomenon.

A huge population of tribal youth who are migrant workers in different cities of India are returning home without jobs and sources of income. They are going to be an extra burden on their families and on daily sustenance. Due to limited agricultural activities in their

villages, these migrant youth would certainly aggravate the situation. Why are our youth not attracted to agriculture? Why are they crazy about white-collared jobs in the cities?

In western countries farmers are the richest people and agriculture is considered a sacred profession. Unfortunately, in our country it is just the opposite. There is a misconception in our country that agriculture is meant only for illiterate people. The manual labour that cultivation involves is considered in India as a third class profession meant for the low rung population. The same mentality is being nurtured by the youth of our region. We have failed to realize that agriculture is a profession that requires not merely muscle power but intellectual power as well. When an educated person cultivates, he employs a lot of creativity and innovation. He or she is more knowledgeable in the use of modern machineries, hybrid seeds and other advanced technology. Consequently, agriculture would become a very viable profession and it can sustain not only individual families but the state and the region as well.

For Christians it is important not to forget that agriculture is a divinely sanctioned profession since the genesis of humanity. We read in the book of Genesis “the Lord then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Gen 2:15). Even Jesus in the Gospels uses a lot of agricultural imageries like the sower and the seed (Mt 13:1-9); the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13:24-30); the vineyard and the tenants (Mk 12:1-10).

In the medieval age the Benedictine monks in Europe spent a lot of time cultivating the land and they also taught people the art of agriculture, horticulture and apiculture etc. In the Khasi myth of the origin of the Hynniewtrep Hynniewskum, we are told that God decided to send man to Earth for the purpose of “tilling the soil” and looking after Mother Nature. It is evident therefore that agriculture is a noble profession and is closely linked to our own traditional spirituality. Therefore there is a need of rethinking on the part of the youth of Northeast India with regards to the indisputable place that agriculture has in the survival, development and prosperity of a community. Jai Kissan!

## TO THE EDITOR

### Kudos to the brave-heart (I)

Editor,  
Covid19 is spreading like wildfire. Unfortunately, the number of cases in Meghalaya are also spiking up new cases every day. According to medical ethics, Government cannot reveal the names of those testing Covid- positive but many on social media feel that names should be revealed in order to help high risk contacts to get themselves tested. Recently Meban Wahlang from Jaiaw revealed that he tested Covid-positive. That was followed by Shianivia Wahlang who also revealed via social media that she had tested positive for Covid19. In her interview with a news reporter, she said that she is normal and not in any danger. The reason she revealed that she had tested Covid- positive was to help people to avoid unnecessary fear and anxiety. In fact, in the press conference a few days back,

Dr Aman War (DHS) said that a patient who reveals his/her Covid status is to be appreciated.

The above two people are a great example to the rest of us. Others should follow this brave example.

Yours etc.,  
Aiborlang Nongsiej  
Shillong -8

### (II)

Editor,

While the debate is still raging about whether the Government should disclose the names of those who have tested COVID - 19 positive, it was indeed gratifying to read of one, Meban Rider who posted on his Facebook page that he had tested positive and is concerned about people who may have come in contact with him since July 19 last. He requested those contacts to isolate themselves and also get tested. Added to this is the fact that he was cautious enough to take precautions of not exposing himself. I take this opportu-

nity to salute Meban and pray for his speedy recovery. Certainly there are mixed feelings about how a person who has tested positive may be perceived by others. As the disease is highly contagious and no cure has been found yet, people are anxious and fearful. The fear that haunts us the most is that of stigmatisation. As a society and as human beings we tend to be judgmental about almost everything. Hence the fear of being looked at differently, being sneered at and being shunned is very real especially in times like these. Thus, to simply come out in the open to declare to the world that one has been infected by this virus demands a lot of courage.

A person who is able to do that is selfless and generous and one who sees his existence as important but is also respectful of the lives of his fellow human beings which he sees as equally important. Therefore this young man decides to tell the world the state of his

health, to caution and safeguard others. I am jubilant to see that fellow feeling and humanity is still alive in some good souls today. While there isn’t and there cannot be any ill-feeling about those who have not revealed their identity before the general public, one is sure that in their hearts all that they want is not only to be cured but the safety of all especially their near and dear ones. These are very hard times for all of us so let us individually fight COVID 19 together!

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Via email

### ST Reporters: Real Covid heroes

Editor,

I wish to applaud the efforts of ST reporters who have been alleviating the ailment of the underprivileged - from informing local authorities about the plight of poor

families, to bringing out ration card discrimination in Madanring to informing the women stone breakers of Sohra about Government aid.

May your conscientious efforts bear fruit.

Yours etc.,  
Lunn T,  
Via email

### Honour the whistle-blowers

Editor,

Appropos the article "Dark Side of Whistle-blowing in Meghalaya", (ST Jul 25, 2020) by J. Sakhkar, there's a fierce campaign on social media stressing the need to honour whistle-blowers in Meghalaya with an 'Integrity Award'. The motive behind the idea, netizens say, is essentially to provide for the families of those heroes such as (L) Iohbianghuh Sakhkar who make the ultimate sacrifice and end up disabled or diseased as a result of their bravery. The idea has some people feeling it will

encourage good virtues and improve the sense of responsibility in today's indifferent social environment. Moreover, it also shows that the society will never forget those who stand up bravely for the greater good of the general public.

The question emanated from the article is 'Can people in power get away with murder? We all like to complain about frivolous lawsuits, corrupt lawyers, ignorant judges, and lenient sentencing. Most of us probably accept that the justice system in Meghalaya works reasonably well, but occasionally, a case comes along that's so ridiculous and unfair that it makes you want to tear the whole thing down.

There is no doubt that our country is yet to get rid of the VIP culture, but the question here is that many belonging to the ruling class have criminal cases against them; few with serious charges and yet they are able to go scot-free.

However, despite cases against them, only a few get convicted on serious charges; and that after years of lengthy court proceedings. Many are acquitted in absence of solid evidence and they even get accepted in mainstream politics and head lucrative government departments while the dark history of a criminal record is buried deep in the grave of past.

The article has also sparked a debate about the pending Whistle Blowers Protection Act. People have questioned the Modi government for not operationalising the law. The Act, which provides for a statutory framework for concealing the identity of whistle-blowers and protecting them against victimisation, was passed by Parliament in 2014 at the end of the UPA government but was not operationalised as the rules were not framed and the date of the Act coming into force was not notified. It is unfortunate that the Government has

failed to implement the Act, which is an integral part of any effective anti-corruption framework. The failure of the government to operationalise and implement the law has undermined the will of Parliament to provide statutory protection to whistle-blowers.

In the struggle for transparency and accountability, whistle-blowers play an invaluable role. Increasingly, policymakers, media outlets, and many types of civil society organizations recognize the value whistle-blowers provide and the need to protect and honour them. Unfortunately, despite increasing efforts in many jurisdictions, whistle-blowers still fear retaliation and worry about whether their concerns will be addressed.

Yours etc.,  
Shimthun Lyngwa  
Shillong - 8

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“Having a monolithic view of feminism is suffocating.”

— Kimberle Williams Crenshaw

The Shillong Times

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Lockdown a harsh measure

THE Government of Meghalaya has thankfully not extended the lockdown beyond July 29. Why do Governments impose lockdowns in the first place? It's primarily to restrict people's movement and hence their contact with one another. That way transmission of the ubiquitous Covid infection is reduced. The Government of Meghalaya's decision for the three-day lockdown was to enable faster contact tracing with primary and secondary contacts of the index patients. But while health concerns weigh heavily on the Government, the economic concerns and truncated livelihoods cannot be compromised. Moreover, health experts across the country have since advised that social distancing is the best way to prevent infections.

Perhaps one way for Government to achieve better contact tracing without shutting down the city is to encourage those testing Covid positive to declare their names publicly and isolate themselves, even while requesting all who have been in contact with them to come forward for testing. In this task the Dorbar Shnong could be a strong ally by ensuring that those who declare their Covid status are not stigmatized but are lauded for their public spirited action.

The reality today is that the millions who rely on daily wages for their sustenance are morbidly afraid of lockdowns. Government does will not take them too far. And food is not the only necessity. They need cash to pay their children's school fees and for primary health care.

Cities like Pune, Bengaluru, Chennai etc., that have been under lockdown have realised that the numbers of cases have not come down. Health care givers are beginning to realise that the virus is here to stay and a lockdown is just delaying the inevitable. Prof L S Shashidhara, of IISER, Pune said the lockdown is unfortunate and is not going to stop the infection. He said the lockdown will only give some breathing time to augment Covid care centres to provide better care and in making contact tracing more effective. He propagates self-distancing, wearing masks and self-isolation, if a person is found symptomatic. Prof Shashidhara however, warns that those who have symptoms and do not report will continue to spread the infection. If such people report early and isolate themselves it will help reduce the spread of the infection and save lives.

The lockdown has been found by experts to have adverse psychological impact on daily wage earners, small vendors et al for whom staying home adds to the mental agony of facing near starvation and of seeing their children having to go through this painful agony. Governments need to be sensitive to the plight of this most vulnerable group. Besides in a circular economy everyone is affected by the lockdown, some more, some less.

# Meghalaya – the Covid lockdown dilemma

By Toki Blah

Corona or Covid 19 status of the state continues to dominate Meghalaya news channels and sad to say the news grows grimmer and gloomier by the day. The irony is that people thirst and long for news of Covid negativity but all they get is the ever increase of Covid positive cases. Various factors may be responsible for this increase but the real point of worry is a question that hangs heavy in the monsoon air – are we heading towards a community transmission of the disease? Government or the authorities concerned stoutly maintain that we have yet to reach that stage. The administration still continues to depend on the strategy of testing; contact tracing and quarantine, either at home or in pre-designated centres. There is still the belief that the plague can be contained with this approach. Lockdown of the entire city is seen as the answer to enable such tracing to be successfully conducted and to manage the disease. It is not the intention of this write-up to quibble over such a Covid approach. A question however continues to linger unanswered – what do we do if community transmission does happen or has already started? Are we prepared? The focus of this essay therefore is directed towards such an eventuality and its management and is not meant to criticise or demean the good work that the Government has done and achieved so far. Instead it is an attempt to peer into portents of the future and of things to come.

So far, from the official side it is the Government as an institution and the District Administration that have taken a head on confrontation with the disease. In this struggle the Govt has also been ably partnered and assisted by our grass root establishments of governance, the Dorbar Shnong in the Khasi Jaintia Hills and the Nokma and his A'king in the Garo hills. One can say that it is these three institutions, their officers, doctors, health workers, office bearers and voluntary workers that have been in the forefront in Meghalaya's war against the Corona virus. So far the strategy employed has been home and community quarantine for those contact traced. In the process three lockdowns have also been resorted to. Lockdowns however are not people friendly and neither are they business or economically responsive; certainly not for business nor for livelihoods of the poor and daily wage

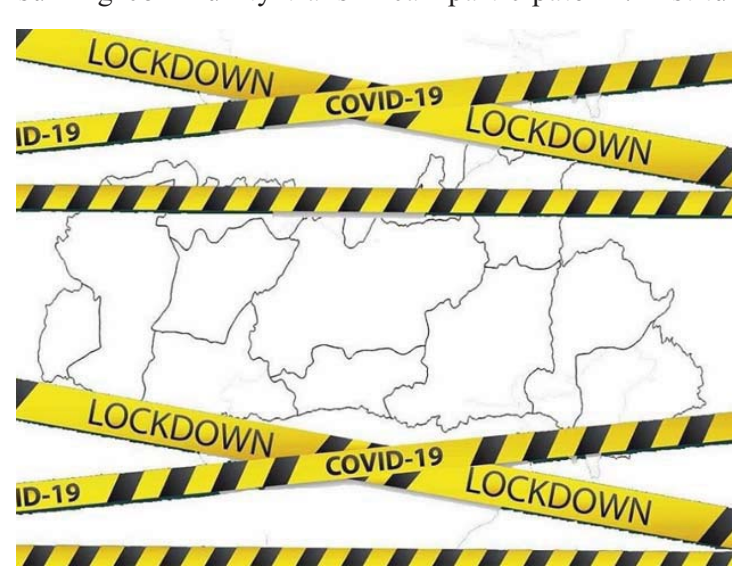
earners. We can't afford to disturb the normal flow of life too frequently or for too long a period. The health of the economy is as important as our physical wellbeing. Yet lockdowns seem to be the only response we can think of when Covid 19 appears to be getting the better of us. So, is there a possibility of a change of strategy or of a paradigm change from overall lockdowns to something else less devastating?

Let us, at this point, accept a hard fact of life and acknowledge the possibility that in the near future, the likelihood of the disease assuming community transmission status cannot be discounted. Do we then resort to another lockdown and more extended lockdowns? Are the current containment practices adequate or can they be improved upon? Can the Government continue with the belief that it and it alone, on its own, manage and contain the plague? Covid 19 is contagious. It spreads in the community and Governments all over are having an uphill struggle to contain this spread. That is its greatest threat and the biggest challenge confronting humanity. The whole world recognises this and the worldwide search right now, together with the hunt for a vaccine, is for a paradigm that can introduce community management and control of the disease. Community management of the disease will actually entail behavioural change in individuals of the society and the society as a whole. In a society like ours it will mean everyone wearing a mask 24x7; keeping social distance; staying at home and desisting from the usual habit of neighbourly visits for a chat and a gossip; discontinuing our usual community habit of gatherings at deaths, weddings and other social events. Question is can the above be enforced and how?

For containment and prevention of spread of the disease, Government had come up with directives on a set of preventive protocols. Unfortunately these are honoured more in the breach than in observance. It happens because people usually take the institution of Government and what it says with a pinch of salt. There is a belief that Government is alien; something foreign; far removed from the day to day concerns of the common man. For community management of Covid to happen in our state, communities need institutions they have faith and confidence in. Institutions they pay heed to. Institutions they can participate in. Institutions that people believe they own and they manage themselves. Community institutions that people can depend on to interact on their behalf on issues that influence their day to day lives. We have them in the form of our traditional grassroots institutions of governance. Government has already recognised the validity of micro management of the disease through containment zones. Incidentally each zone is co-terminous with the jurisdiction of its respective Dorbar. The micro-management of Covid can now be handled at the zone or shnong level instead of an overall lockdown for the entire city, district or state. We have an alternate Covid management paradigm. It can be micro-managed at the Dorbar level.

Dorbars however have a complaint that Government recognises them only when it requires their services. In the fight against Covid 19 the services of the Dorbars are of course crucial but meetings between Government and Dorbars should no longer be ad-hoc in nature but based on a predetermined Covid Management Plan of Action (CoMPA). CoMPA will specifically focus on the empowerment of our Dorbars to make them better and more effective allies in the Government's tussle with Covid 19. The micro-

management concept will greatly depend on CoMPA's ability to predetermine the specific roles for both Dorbars and Government. Firstly the Dorbars come on board with the public respect they enjoy and this asset can be used to enforce the social protocols so desperately needed in the prevention of the spread of the disease. Secondly, not every Covid case needs hospitalisation. Crucial hospital space can be reserved only for critically ill or severe case Covid patients while the less severe can make do with home or community quarantine. Such intermediary Covid aspects can be managed by the Village Covid Management Teams already in place with each shnong, if ably supported by the administration.



In such a scenario the Government reverses its role from an active implementer of Covid Management to that of facilitator of such management, which now will be more community and participatory centric. Government can concentrate on creating or providing infrastructure which is so inadequately lacking or missing. Perhaps a cluster of shnongs (or synjuks where they already exist) can be facilitated through the provisions of doctors for better health care prospects for each synjuk. Government can also start thinking of facilitating the setting up of community Covid quarantine centres for synjuks who do not enjoy such centres. Government can also start thinking on designating a Covid specific hospital for only Covid patients. The present practice of Covid wards in every hospital is causing apprehension, havoc and inconvenience to non-Covid patients and runs the risk of shutdowns of crucial hospital facilities in case of a community outbreak. Nazareth and NEIGRIHMS can be still used as testing centres but let's free them from Covid treatment so as to allow their services, especially the super specialist assets of NEIGRIHMS, for other types of patients. There has to be an overall Plan of action in the fight against Covid. These are some passing thoughts towards less lockdowns for our state. There could be more relevant issues that can be highlighted and more learned and experienced persons could also contribute their thoughts towards this debate. (Email: toki@online.com)

## Behind the screen Lockdown through the eyes of a school teacher

By Donette Sawian

For the past few days, a WhatsApp photo mocking online classes has been doing the rounds. The photo shows a grandmother sitting for online classes while her grandson was playing obviously paying no attention to what was going on in his class. At one glance it brings a smile but the photo portrays other things. The dreaded Corona Virus has put an end to many things we take for granted. Yet among other things, the crisis has not managed to kill the hope of a determined teacher. The physical connection is disrupted but teachers have left no stone unturned to usher in the new normal classroom environment.

The lockdown could not have been expected. And for many teachers it has been an awful experience. But this is not about our grievances. It's about our efforts—that despite a trying period of education being compromised, new techniques of classroom instruction have evolved. Now, technique for many would merely mean sending notes online or through WhatsApp. For a teacher it has come to mean much more...

Over two months ago, we were given the order to start online classes. A few teachers groaned but many were shocked since they did not know how to operate a computer, let alone conduct a class online. Zoom, Google and PDF were words unheard of by most. Yet we tested the unfamiliar waters, made a thousand mistakes and struggled to prepare lessons in a way we were untrained and unprepared for.

In no time, new classes were running regardless of the fact that we had to unlearn a lot of things to learn new ways of instruction. This was challenging, no doubt but not as much as the criticism that came thereafter. Complaints flew to us in the form of phone calls, conversations at the grocer's and even text messages. The complaints ranged from too much work for a child to the lack of it. Or the time children spent in front of the computer screen. Or the misuse of a smart-phone by the smarter young adults.

Having been teaching for many years, we have learnt to take the good with the bad when it comes to dealing with children. But this is something new. In what we call a real classroom, a connection is made when a teacher stands in front of the students. But now one has to work harder to establish that same connection to ensure attention and discipline. Furthermore, while many of us know what it takes to guarantee obedience in a teenager at home, few understand how much it takes to command respect from a class of fifty teenagers at the same time. That too while being physically absent from the classroom. Yet few teachers have been credited for this ability.

A lot of teachers have made a Whatsapp group of their class for worksheets and video lessons. Some claim that this is better since it has a wider reach. Children can use their parents' or guardians' smart-phones for assignments. But here too lies a problem. For though content is available, the delivery has not ensured proper learning and understanding. Quick to judge parents have complained that notes are difficult to copy from a phone and worksheets sent as images are not clear enough. Will anyone lend a listening ear if we say we correct our students' work on a screen too?

As we struggle to take control of the situation, we also learn that a class today includes those whose parents take a hundred percent interest in what the child learns and those who have lost their livelihoods, trying to return home or has problems to feed a family. Given this situation, few are interested in their child's education which results in the child not getting the worksheets and video lessons. But we go on, praying that this maintenance of continuity would gradually bring about productivity. The desire to maintain continuity in the teaching learning process has however brought about another doubt that has clouded the thoughts of parents' and students' alike. An overly anxious father once asked whether this was the way we intended to finish the syllabus. In our sincere effort to continue learning, it is indeed sad to hear about 'completing' the syllabus. The goal is to reach out to our students- to ensure that they know we are still here for them and to try to impart learning. Those who still doubt the system should understand that lessons are planned now not to complete the syllabus but to ensure a minimum learning outcome. Experts today discuss on the potential of virtual classes. We believe them. And while many of us had been using the internet only as a tool for teaching, we are now using it as the only means of teaching. This reflects a commitment. Therefore, arguments on the inability to reach out to the many who can ill afford a smart-phone or a personal computer become unjustified. As educators we have no choice and we are taking a step using the only tool we have in this situation. The gap between the rich and the poor has always been there in education and efforts to bridge that gap are continuously being made. But to say that online classes should be discontinued simply because of their limited reach is to bring up another argument –whether schools should leave their young students astray in the lockdown.

We are among the hundreds of workforce that has been pushed into this new 'working from home' territory. Like all parents, we are also uncertain now because our own children too are going through the same experience.. Thus, from coping with late night lesson preparation to telephonically counseling a worried student, teachers have come a long way. We fight to keep our heads above water and we also wonder about our students who are not a part of our Whatsapp group or do not have access to the internet. What keeps us going is the thought that this pandemic is not permanent, that our schools will reopen, that we will see our students in uniform, that in the hearts of those who say it is not enough- we are trying to give our children hope that this too will soon pass... (Email: donette.sawian81@gmail.com)

TO THE EDITOR

Need to get our economics right

Editor, The article, 'Should Meghalaya have a casino' by Avner Pariat was an enjoyable read. However the article ignores the forward and backward linkages that an economic enterprise has and the revenues that accrue by way of taxes. Most probably there will be tax breaks in the initial period for the casinos. But in the long run tax generation will contribute to the coffers of the state. However, the article does raise an important question: Should the State focus on private consumption to bail the economy out of trouble? Even before Covid-19 disrupted the global economy it was already in recession. This means that spending is already very low. How in such an environment an initiative based on consumption is going to be successful is very difficult to understand? Also such an establishment will attract a certain type of clientele which narrows the scope further. A more sustainable way would be to focus on demand creation which is based on production (agriculture, construc-

tion, and manufacturing) accompanied by wage increases which will put more disposable income in the hands of the local population. An improved financial status of the local populace will then lead to increased spending and investments in the local economy itself. The difference with this kind of spending and investment is that it is driven by internal sources and broad based making it more sustainable. The fear that the investment might migrate is less because it will come from local entrepreneurs who will be less flight-prone than external investors. Most importantly this will ensure that the control of the economy is in local lands while also avoiding concentration of wealth in a few hands. Personally I have no problem with casinos and it does make some economic sense. But it will be a mistake to think that it is going to be the panacea to our economic woes, not at least in times of economic recession. The focus should be on improving the fundamentals of the economy instead, i.e., concentrate on production linked with living wages so that any revival that takes

place should distribute the gains more equitably. Yours etc., Bhogtoram Mawroh, Via email

Are we teaching & assessing our children right?

Editor, Albert Thyrniang's article, 'The ills in education: reform the educator first' (ST July 29, 2020), I concur with the writer's observations. He notes that in a recent letter to the editor, a teacher blamed the students for failure. Our teachers need to be innovative enough to engage with millennial students. We can start by getting to know our children's preferred learning style and tap into their multiple intelligences, so that we as teachers can use varied pedagogy to suit their needs. But does the system provide teachers the space to innovate and invest in their training? The recently declared SSLC results by MBOSE speak for themselves. While it is heartening to note that many students from not so popular urban schools were listed in the top 20 merit list,

on the flip side it was sad to see that the overall pass percentage was only 50.31%. This makes us wonder if we are assessing their learning in the right way. Is the long awaited matric examination the only way to gauge a student's learning? Can we not minimize the weightage of the regurgitation (examination) process that mainly measures memorized knowledge? Can we give more emphasis to internal marking and place the onus of academic judging of the child more on the teacher (teacher led evaluation) who interacts with them on a daily basis? If this change were to happen then proper planning and capacity building of teachers is needed. If there is a will, there is a way. Introspection time is over, our children's lives are at stake; we need to act now! Yours etc., R Jennifer War, MLCU, Shillong

Following Covid-protocols crucial Editor, Apropos the letter 'Stigmatisation at its

worse" (ST July 27, 2020), the writer has narrated his consternation vis-à-vis his visit to Supercare hospital which may be justified. I visited Supercare Hospital on July 15 for a routine check-up. The entry protocol to the hospital was comparatively more stringent and detailed. Although, irritated initially, the importance of adhering to all such protocols are warranted in the present Covid-19 situation. All my details were entered meticulously in standard forms including area of residence, etc, besides being put through the standard diligence checks. On the same day, after interacting with a senior authority of the management, to educate myself on the strict protocols, I was convinced that all possible precautions and safety measures were imperative, since patients visiting the hospital are with ailments other than Covid-19. Although fighting the pandemic is a major priority of health service today, emergencies and health issues, other than Covid, cannot be ignored. Supercare together with other private hospitals and nursing homes, are attending to such patients, who are a bigger number and increas-

ing daily, with government hospitals concentrating mostly on Covid related cases. The precautionary measures have been put in place to ensure safety of all in-patient and out-patient facilities including doctors and other support staff of the hospital. Moreover, as per guidelines of various authorities, doctors and support resources above the age of sixty years are normally advised against attending to patients in person or visiting hospitals etc except in emergencies. It was heartening to be informed that Supercare in its commitment to attain optimal safety is procuring additional latest safety equipment besides ventilators etc. I came out assured but with a worry that if such health centres are closed or sealed for a minor lapse, then what would be the fate of non-Covid patients? All patients need healing. The answer probably lies in all of us dutifully following all SOPs and protocols everywhere, at every step; at home and outside. Yours etc Naba Bhattacharjee Shillong - 4

*“Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of men.”*

— Robert Conklin

## The Shillong Times

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### NEP – Fillip for Education

A question that’s often asked as a counter to ‘What’s wrong with India’s education system’ is: “What’s right with our education system?” With the Union Cabinet giving its green signal to a New Education Policy for the 21st Century, the scenario is set for a major overhaul. Criticism of the new policy will undoubtedly follow but change in the philosophy and delivery of education is overdue. That it took 34 years for the idea of educational reforms to translate into action, speaks of the apathy of the political and bureaucratic class and the laggardly pace at which policy-making happens in this country. One important change is the renaming of the Human Resource and Development Ministry into the Education Ministry. The special features of the new policy include teaching in the mother tongue up to Class V; a single regulatory authority to oversee the entire higher education institutions other than those in the medical and legal fields. There will be common entrance examinations for courses in universities across the board. Notably, high-ranking foreign universities will now be allowed in – something that was being pleaded for long to upgrade standards of Indian universities too. There are quite a few privately funded universities, which are bound to compete with the foreign universities on home ground. Old, established universities have long ceased to become centres of excellence.

What is encouraging is that funding for education will go up from the present figure of 4% to 6% of the GDP. Another salient feature of the education policy is that vocational education could start from class VI and not from Class X as is the present case. A National Technology Education Forum too is to be created to push growth in this sector and enhance technology-related competence of the nation. Also the rigid separation between arts, sciences, curricular and extra-curricular will now be melded to provide a more holistic education. A policy may look good on paper but a lot depends on implementation and the quality of the teaching staff. The education standard of a nation is judged, among other parameters, by the kind of knowledge that the new generation acquires that is experiential and adds to the social capital Indians, despite the 1.35 billion population and tall talk about its Nalanda and Takshila of the past, rarely qualify for a Nobel or any such top international recognition other than those Indians who went to the US or the UK and did research work there. Indian universities are rated at the middle or bottom of universities around the world in international rankings. Big talks will not win a nation laurels. The hope is that NEP will bring in both competition and also provide the academic ecosystem of the best of the west.

#### TO THE EDITOR

### The Fake News Contagion

Editor,  
Superstitious beliefs continue to plague our society despite efforts from various organizations who have used science to eradicate them. Earlier this month, amid the coronavirus pandemic, A local TV news channel aired a story titled “San ngi kynthih iai bteng ka jinghab ki maw ha ting ka Kong Lonti Jyrwa ha Umtrew.” People in the video claimed that baseball-sized (even football-sized) stones pelted at the house from “the unknown” miraculously passed through the solid tin roof without even damaging it. Moreover, they also claimed that stones, potatoes, onions pelted directly at them (even at full impact) could not cause them any harm whatsoever. Medical experts disregarded the idea calling it speculation “unsubstantiated by any concrete evidence.”

That TV news channel isn’t the only media outlet guilty of airing the misleading story; a few

others including are equally guilty. The “crime” is often seen as victimless or irrelevant so long as viewers digest the story itself and form their own conclusions. A study demonstrates that the initial impressions formed from a misleading story can have a measurable influence on a person’s thoughts and intentions, even if that person views enough of the corresponding story to recognize its flaws.

Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had issued an advisory to various entertainment and news channels not to engage in content that encourages superstition and blind belief. This advisory was sent on to media organizations such as News Broadcasters Association (NBA), the Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF) and the Advertising Standards Council of India. A copy of the note was also sent to other media organizations like Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC) - a unit of the government that monitors television and radio content.

The Press Council of

# We All Make Mistakes: It Helps to Accept This Fact

By Patricia Mukhim

For us in the media the coronavirus pandemic has been a blistering roller coaster ride. But when have we ever had a joyride anyway? Is there any other profession, (other than some investment banking – stock market wizard where you look to profit by the minute), where a person is scrutinized so scrupulously? We are accountable for every single news, every day. Do we make mistakes? Perhaps that question must be preceded by this one - “Are we humans or machines?” If we are humans then we are liable to err. That’s why we accept rejoinders that counter our facts as we had gathered them the previous day.

It is said that truth can be a prism, or a rainbow that one sees by looking through it. It depends on the angle, the time of day, and the capabilities of the people involved. Looking for that single truth is murky and frustrating; exasperating and incongruent; incorrigible and just plain exhausting. While one version of the truth can make you serene, someone can come up with a complete opposite of what you thought was his/her truth and which can send you into an apoplectic fit. With age I realise there are different versions of the truth and I am still in the process of beginning to understand that.

As a journalist of some experience one realises on interviewing people in responsible positions that they are never candid. The ambivalence is revealed by the lack of excitement answering queries. You may be speaking to a person on the phone and not see his/her face but you can’t miss the guarded nature of the conversation. When they utter one sentence they have carefully thought out how they will cover up for that sentence in case they are proven wrong. They are always second guessing about the spin the media could give to a story. This is especially true with politicians and bureaucrats. My respect or lack of it, for politicians, bureaucrats, police officials etc., is based on their track records and their honesty/dishonest quotient.

These days as we tackle Covid-19 in varied ways depending on our respective professions there are certain set routines which we are conforming to. The media too is expected to fall into

this routine. So there’s a daily Covid briefing lasting approximately an hour. In that hour if a question is asked to the Deputy Chief Minister which is not run of the mill and which he is not ready to answer, he usually reverts to a wisecrack and tries to put the journalist in his/her place. It’s a subtle warning that one should just listen to the briefing from a Government that knows it all and not question, because journalists are not doctors or scientists and therefore are not expected to know what they are asking about. I find this downright patronizing because, let’s face it, no one has any proprietary knowledge claim on the behaviour of the coronavirus. We are all flummoxed by the number of times that WHO, ICMR, FDA, NIH et al have down a complete turn-around from what they said in January, then March and then June. At one time we were told N95 masks were the safest. Today we are cautioned not to wear them. The only cautionary standard operating procedures (SPOs) that have remained unchanged are (a) social distancing, (b) hand hygiene by washing or using sanitizers (c) wearing masks.

Scientists from WHO are themselves saying one thing, one day and retracting it the next day when confronted with better studies. For instance Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, who leads the emerging disease and zoonosis unit, claimed at one time that spread of coronavirus from people who are asymptomatic (never develop symptoms) is “very rare.” Very soon, a study found that infected people without symptoms were shown to be contagious in a window of time lasting anywhere from three to 12 days, with eight days being the average. So without any apparent symptoms, these virus carriers could continue shedding and spreading Covid-19 for about a week, the study said. Meanwhile, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the US’s infectious disease expert debunked Kerkhove’s statement as “not correct” and pointed out that between 25% and 45% of those infected never show symptoms. As many as 86% of the people initially infected in Wuhan, China became sick from people who were not sick enough

to visit the doctor, scientists found in a paper published in Science (May 1, 2020). These could have been people with no symptoms (asymptomatic) or people who had mild enough symptoms that they caused little concern.

Then we come to treatment of Covid-19. First there was this hype about Hydroxychloroquine being the drug of choice; then we had medical scientists discounting it. Now suddenly Remdesivir injection (a broad spectrum anti-viral medication, with each injection of 100 mg vial costing Rs 4000) seems to be the medication of choice. On July 8, Drug Company Cipla said it would launch the injection in India which would be available through government and hospital channels only. Remdesivir is the only drug approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) treatment of adult and paediatric patients hospitalised with suspected or laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection.

The Drug Controller General of India has in turn approved two anti-viral drugs for treatment of Covid-19 - Remdesivir for Covid-19 patients on oxygen support and Favipiravir for those with mild to moderate symptoms. Favipiravir was launched recently by Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, while Cipla and Hetero introduced Remdesivir. Many experts, however, have raised concerns on their efficacy stating that both these drugs were originally designed to treat other diseases such as skin disease or arthritis.

Added to this confusion is the efficacy of the Covid-19 tests following the conflicting results of a doctor from Nazareth Hospital who was first tested there with the GeneXpert method and was found negative. Pasteur with its RT-PCR test also found the doctor Covid-negative. But NEIGRIHMS with the same test method found his samples positive. More confusion, more discussions. After all, these days Covid is the only topic of discussion

I asked a senior doctor about false negatives and false positives vis-à-vis Covid tests. He said sensitivity and specificity of RT-PCR is about 70% and factors that influence the

results are

- 1) Timing of collection of sample
- 2) Proper technique of collection of sample
- 3) Type of sample-invasive samples like broncho-alveolar lavage (BAL), also known as bronchoalveolar washing (a diagnostic method of the lower respiratory system in which a bronchoscope is passed through the mouth or nose into an appropriate airway in the lungs, with a measured amount of fluid introduced and then collected for examination), and sputum have better yield than throat and nasopharyngeal swabs
- 4) Tests will yield better results before starting anti-virals. Sample should be collected between 5 to 10 days of exposure.
- 5) A lower viral load may not be detected in RT-PCR.
- 6) Cold chain should be maintained
- 7) If processing is delayed beyond 24 hours, sample should be refrigerated.
- 8) Beyond 7 days sample has to be stored at – 80 degrees Centigrade.

After all this, confusion is confounded and we know that the whole world is proceeding on a trial and error method as far as tackling Covid is concerned. Hence mistakes are inevitable. Should doctors, nurses, governments, communities, individuals then be blamed if anything goes wrong? Should people spread conspiracy theories that government is hiding real statistics of Covid patients? If we do so we will only hurt ourselves.

Government could go wrong in their methods and there’s no harm in admitting that. Some lack of coordination between the administration and community institutions is possible. What’s needed is the spirit of cooperation and not of proving who is right and who is wrong. After all, we are all humans. What is upsetting people is that some privileged citizens manage to get past all the strict travel regulations imposed on ordinary mortals. This patronage has to stop!

At this point let’s try and be human. None of us is without fault, more so us in the media although we try our best and have now learnt more scientific terminology in seven months than we have done in all our adult lives.

(Views expressed in this column are personal and do not necessarily reflect the stand of this newspaper).

my concern which I hope would be taken in the right spirit.

Yours etc,  
Shalabas Syiemlieh  
Shillong - 8

### The healthcare saga

Editor,  
Our state is now heaving under the weight of the Covid cases going up every day. Whilst saluting the hard work and immense pressure the health workers are being subjected to round the clock, it would seem that the health care system of the state is in a flurry. Those at the helm of affairs are doing their best we’d like to believe.

However, with recent incidents of patients being turned away because those on duty were apprehensive about the health status of the patient, in this case a pregnant woman who’d come for delivery, speaks volumes for the efficacy of the health care system in our state. The end result being the death of the child in question!

The Director of Health Services was quick to

reiterate an inquiry into the matter but it’s come a little too late for the grieving mother who’s lost her child for no fault of hers except for the fact that she came from a containment zone. Rules and protocol are to be followed as law abiding citizens but what about the humane aspect? Have we lost this too?

With all due respect to the DHS, it’s confusing for us ordinary people when he gives information on the status of the recent death of a person who tested positive for the virus that the death wasn’t due to the virus but other health issues. Please don’t confuse us. We’re already a confused lot as we don’t know who or what we’re fighting against. The enemy is invisible. Give us the bare facts. I’m sure we can handle the truth. Don’t hide behind the facade of some medical jargon we can’t understand.

Once again, I express my appreciation for the untiring efforts of the health workers but again, I request the powers that be to lay the facts bare for all to see.

Yours etc.,  
Angela Lyngdoh  
Shillong -14

## New education policy suffers from ‘back focus error’ Corrections and readjustment have to be empirical

By Gyan Pathak

‘Education is that which liberates’, says the core Indian philosophy of education in Sanskrit, and the ‘basic purpose of education is to make the mind creative and analytical’ says the Greek philosopher Plato. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, in place of focusing on such core philosophies, focused at infinity creating ‘back focus error’ which needs to be corrected or readjusted for the ‘right focus’ if at all we do not want to make humans, mere slaves and tools, non-creative or even destructive, non-analytic or synthetic. Policies must not be based on mere ideas, they must be empirical.

Our Prime Minister and other Union Ministers have resorted to self back-patting on this policy, and accorded it undue praise and epithets like ‘major transformational reforms’, ‘result of largest consultation and discussion process of its kind in the country’, ‘immense potential for better learning and employment outcomes’, ‘most comprehensive, radical, and futuristic’ and so on. It seems they are believing in ‘Barnum Effect’, a psychological condition in which one tends to accept whatever they are told to be true even when they are so vague as to be worthless.

It has been already admitted that the policy is based merely on perceived ideas about educating a child, but not on the basis of scientific study of the real requirement of development of a child into a great human being. The Union Minister of HRD has himself said that ‘2.25 lakh suggestions received after the draft was placed in public domain for consultations’. It makes the government position clear that they are trying to make yet another experiment merely on the basis of ideas and so called suggestions without empirical studies, this time with the future of our children. With the implementation of this policy India will emerge as a great knowledge centre and education destination in the world, says the union minister. This is too heroic a claim when we compare this policy with education policies of the developed countries, where educational institutions rank far ahead than our own.

How it is going to create a ‘new India’ as claimed by the government is shrouded in mystery which only time will reveal. Narendra Modi has promised us a new India by 2022, and we are in the second half of 2020 with crises created by mishandling of COVID-19. All the educational institutions have been closed for the last four months, and there is no chance of their normal operations immediately. Therefore, this new India claim is untrue unless it refers to a very distant time. The policy includes great words in abundance, but lacks clear cut measures as to how they are going to be achieved.

This is the first education policy of the 21st century which replaces the thirty-four year old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. The work on this policy was started in January 2015. It has been claimed that it is built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, this policy is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student. These are all

but claims, because of their being not based on any empirical study of the 21st century needs of multilingual and multicultural Indian children who are greatly suffering from all sorts of inequality.

It has also been claimed that the policy does not recognise any barrier in bringing quality and outcome-based education to each and everyone. It is so vague that it implies nothing. We know that each and every child has its own barrier in their way to emotional, intellectual, physical, or even educational growth. The barriers must be recognized first to remove them. There must be universal and equal education for all, if we want a fair competition among all. One student gets better education and another gets a lower quality of education, but we never talk about ‘fair opportunity of education’, and only talk about ‘fair competition’. It is simply injustice.

The new policy includes children during their most foundational years, that is 3-5 years, for their care and education. We must know that during these years wealthy students go to pre-school, while poor students remain out of school. Many poor students go to anganwadis during these years. For educating a child we need a teacher having ‘diploma-in-education’ or B.Ed. We have lack of such educated teachers, and anganwadis do not have such teachers. Due to lack of finance, we do not have even required number of schools and teachers. We have appointed ‘para-teachers’ and give them meager salaries.

The whole system is exploitative in which the atmosphere of education has suffered. Even in higher education, we have been witnessing coaching classes and private tuitions are flourishing even when we know that tutors there are generally not B.Ed qualified. It speaks about the quality of education in schools and colleges by so called qualified teachers. The policy totally ignores this real ailment of our education system and don’t talk about curing this. Even the best policy can perform worst if that is erroneously conceived and implemented.

New 5+3+3+4 school curriculum will have 12 years of schooling and 3 years of Anganwadi/Pre-schooling. It is just a change for change’s sake, and it ignores the problem of lack of resources, which we cannot provide by 2030, and hence cannot be properly implemented. Emphasis will be on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy and no rigid separation between academic streams, extracurricular, vocational streams in schools will be maintained. Such a synthetic thinking is opposite to analytical thinking in the government. Vocational Education is to start from Class 6 with internships, but we must note that ‘training’ is not ‘education’. Teaching upto at least Grade 5 to be in mother tongue/ regional language, is vague because there is much difference between a mother tongue and a regional language and this will give room for manipulations.

It is not yet known as to how much ‘assessment reforms with 360 degree Holistic Progress Card’ will be effective. Raising GER in higher education to 50 per cent by 2035 is a promise as ‘doubling farmers’ income by 2022’ but is not clear how it can be achieved, especially when higher education has been at receiving end under the BJP rule. It bats for ‘graded autonomy to colleges’ which has been a highly debated issue. (IPA Service)