

"When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves."

-- Viktor E. Frankl

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Sena, Grand Strategy

THE wheel has turned full circle. After nine days of high drama, five-star shifts from city to city and suspense by the hour, power returns to the old BJP-Sena combine, but with a difference. The baton will be wielded by rebel Sena leader Eknath Shinde, who proved beyond doubt that outgoing chief minister Uddhav Thackeray was no match to him. The decades-long hold of the Bal Thackeray family on Mumbai and Maharashtra has been shattered beyond doubt, with Uddhav falling by the wayside and his son Aditya too weak to call the shots in the near future. The BJP seized the initiative.

Naming of Shinde as chief minister and a stepping-aside of former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis formed part of a grand BJP strategy, even as the party held double the number of legislators compared to the Shiv Sena. This is the way to ensure stability for the new government in the remaining two years. The Shiv Sena (Balasaheb) led by Shinde can feel reassured and be in a dominant position, while the BJP legislators will pose no problem to the new government as long as the equations between the Sena (B) and the BJP remain good. Instead, if the BJP took the CM's post now, there is every chance that a scheming Sharad Pawar of the NCP -- a prompter and beneficiary of the 2019 break-up between the Shiv Sena and the BJP -- would find it easy to topple the government. He has too much of filthy funds. With the Sena rebels getting more than what's their due, they could now confidently project themselves as the real Sena. This meant the Uddhav Thackeray edifice could crumble like a pack of cards.

If the Shiv Sena led by Uddhav stabbed the BJP in its back after the 2019 polls, the BJP now gave it back in the same coin. There is little doubt that Shinde would not have come this far without backroom games from the BJP leadership, principally former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis. Fadnavis will now have to take the back-seat but this is not to under-estimate the hold of the BJP in the new power equations. Matoshree, the centre of the Sena edifice in Mumbai, always carried with it a huge aura among the Shiv Sainiks. It could now look like a haunted structure. Eknath Shinde, who started life as an auto rickshaw boy, has gained a lot of clout among the rank and file of the Shiv Sena in recent years. That may keep him in good stead at least for now.

News as it is delivered: Of Media, Politics and 'Power'

By Patricia Mukhim

The word 'Power; in the caption has nothing to do with power as we understand it in today's context. Power is the energy that comes to our homes through cables. In other words, 'electricity.' I am not doing a spin here. It's just how we in the media weave our narratives. Before I come to the point of 'Power' let me also clarify that when we report news, we quote political personalities including their choicest vocabulary. If anyone is offended then please sue the personality that has offended and not shoot the messenger.

The media world is as crazy as politics is because one follows the other and each thrives on the other. If the media is to fulfil its democratic role it should offer a wide variety of opinions and perspectives to encourage citizens to choose from among them in evaluating public policies.

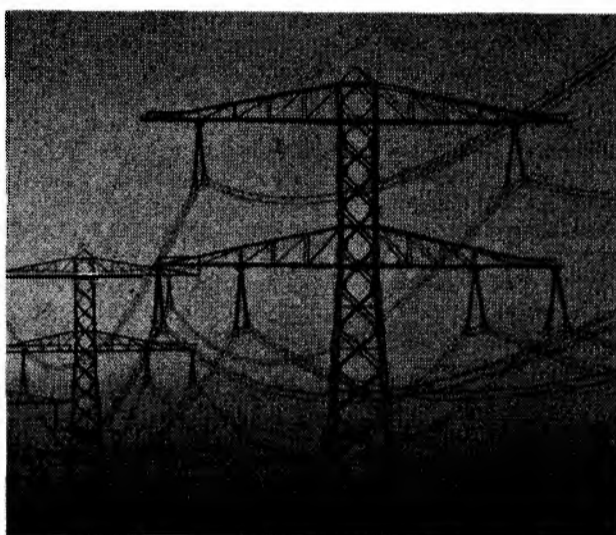
If the media allows politicians to set the public agenda, what will ultimately happen is that politicians will narrow public discussion and diminish democracy. This is what is happening in our State. Perhaps the only democratic section that allows the public voice of dissent is the "letters to the editor" section where anguished citizens can have their say and rave and rant at will. This section actually informs us as to what is wrong with governance rather than the news about which politician said what.

If we have observed carefully, in the present MDA Government nearly all queries on important issues of governance are tackled by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma himself. His deputy reduces serious issues to trivia hence he is not taken seriously. The Deputy CM is in charge of the Power Department yet it took the CM to brief the media on what's gone wrong with the Power Sector and what the Government is trying to do. Essentially what the CM tells us about the Power Sector is that just juggling officials will not work. Hence Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) will now have experienced professionals drawn from the open market to repair the Corporation. What one fails to understand is how a bankrupt Corporation is going to bankroll these professionals who will have to be paid salaries that the corporate world does.

In the early 1990's when

the Meghalaya State Electricity Board first launched into a semi-corporatized model, it had a full time Chairman in Mr VS Jafa who set the groundwork towards crafting a revenue model for the Board that would make it sustainable. But even Jafa had to admit that the transmission and distribution losses were what was turning the Board into a leaking tap. At that time some private firms had been shopping around in Meghalaya to find out if they could take on the T&D part of the Board. But as always, such attempts at partial privatisation

Monthly salaries to (a) technical staff (b) non-technical/clerical staff (5) Payment for vehicles on hire and total no of vehicles owned by MeECL (6) Up to date valuation of MeECL assets and their market value (7) Status of the Smart Meter programme (8) How many households have been smart-metered and are paying bills based on bills generated by Smart Meters (8) How are people managing to read their Smart Meters when the power is shut down and the internet plays fast and loose? These are not state secrets and their



were demonised and seen as attempts to sell off the family silver to knives and fortune hunters. Now we have come to a point where the inevitable will have to be delivered to us the naïve public as a bitter pill. The MeECL is so deeply entrenched in debt and ineptitude that resuscitating it is near impossible. Pumping in the crores no longer works. The Corporation seems to be guzzling money that goes into a dark hole and nothing is known thereafter. Its balance sheets are never made public. It's a state-owned Corporation with the State being the only shareholder. And the money put in by the State is the taxpayers' money, hence public money, and the State owes the public that much transparency.

For starters we would be interested to know the following (1) monthly income of MeECL from sale of power to constituents/customers from all sectors domestic and commercial (2) Monthly payment to power suppliers -- NEEP/Power Grid/etc. (3) Total number of technical and non-technical/clerical staff and fourth graders (4)

disclosure would not lead to any compromise to national security.

It would appear that even those at the higher echelons of the bureaucracy have become highly philosophical and attribute the breakdown of the system at Leshka and elsewhere as Murphy's law being at work. Murphy's law states that, "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." Another interpretation of Murphy's law is also that if there are two or more ways to do something, and one of those ways can result in a catastrophe, then someone will do it. So in the end no one is really responsible for all the goof-ups in the MeECL. What they don't goof up on is in collecting the monthly dues. For those of us in the business of churning news and therefore of being information-stressed we need all our inner strength to avoid exhaustion, anxiety and depression. As news churners we rarely discuss this despair but we all feel the same. We don't know what to say that is positive. So, we keep our conversations to our gardens, our families, books and mov-

ies and some light gossip such as which minion of which minister has bought a 7 crore home in Lachumiere -- a prime location that only the very affluent can afford. That minion was just an employee and before that was operating tourist taxis or some such job. These sorts of information are not 'gossips' really. They are down to earth real life stories and they point to the rapid degeneration of political decency. Yet as journalists we don't want to make one another feel hopeless and helpless. Our symptoms resemble those of combat fatigue.

Information overload can make us vulnerable to despair. We understand the brokenness and the sorrow in our own communities in the distant rural outback of Meghalaya. We are also fully aware of all the things we cannot change. Staying focused on the light in the world is hard work. Sometimes we risk losing our ability to think clearly or experience life completely. We lose our vitality and sense of direction. We cannot help others. We cannot fix anything. Yet we cannot allow ourselves to drown in despair because we still have to be of service to others.

And just to correct the perception, we are not heroes/heroines either. We try in small ways to make a difference each day. We may not be able to change the world but believe we can change our little backyards by engaging in cleaning up rivers and planting trees.

At times even us hardened souls are shell-shocked by the kind of news and wheeling-dealings we get to hear. "Are we hearing correctly? We ask. And then realise we have to toughen ourselves and develop better coping skills and not get sucked in by dystopia. Lao-Tse expresses this point in his poem that says, "If there is to be peace in the world/There must be peace in the nations," and ends with "If there is to be peace in the home/There must be peace in the heart." Lao Tse lived a long time ago. What peace can anyone have when the person is unsure of the next meal? When the IT professional or a 'work from home' person finds himself/herself out of 'Power' for two or more hours and is completely switched off from the world, he/she cannot be at peace.

Fifty years of Meghalaya. We have indeed come a long way!

Tribal as President Not just electoral politics

By Sagarneel Sinha

At a time when the country is celebrating its 75 years of independence, it is really heartening that a tribal and a woman, Droupadi Murmu, is set to get elected as the President of India. Belonging to the Santhal community, she hails from Odisha and is a self-made leader, who was Minister in Odisha government and later became Governor of Jharkhand. Nominated by the BJP-led NDA, the largest bloc in the electoral college that elects the President, and with BJD and YSR Congress, ruling parties in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh respectively extending support Murmu's victory is just a matter of time. The presidential elections would be held on July 18 and the results would be out on July 21.

Sceptics, however, are refusing to view this beyond symbolism. They argue that the post of President is a ceremonial one and the nomination of a tribal is just an eyewash. True, the post is mostly ceremonial and the power rests with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, but that doesn't mean the President has no powers. One of the crucial powers vested in that in case of a hung Lok Sabha, it is the President who has the authority to elect the Prime Minister and also dismiss the government if it doesn't have the majority in the Lok Sabha.

BJP is also focussing on Jharkhand, a State with a significant tribal population, where the party lost in the 2019 Assembly polls due to erosion in tribal support. There are other States such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Gujarat with significant tribal populations.

The critics are also missing the point that the nomination of a tribal to the President's post isn't just about electoral politics. The ideological parent of the BJP, the RSS-led Sangh Parivar, has been trying to get a foothold for decades among the backward sections, particularly the Dalits and the Scheduled Tribes. It has been working tirelessly to spread the ideology of Hindutva among these marginalised sections.

By nominating a tribal, the Sangh Parivar wants to clearly convey the message that the Scheduled Tribes have the right to occupy the highest post of the country, which never happened in the past 75 years. Although the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have been able to gain a foothold among these marginalised sections, their target is to consolidate their presence. Also, there are areas where the party and the Sangh still have to grow -- the tribal dominated-areas in the Northeast.

In recent times, the BJP



The Opposition parties and the Left-leaning intellectuals claim the policies of the present dispensation, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, haven't been fair to the marginalised sections of the country. And opting for a tribal for the top post is just an act of symbolism by the BJP. Their assessment is simply refusing to see the changes happening on the ground.

Over the last years, the BJP has increased its support among the marginalised sections. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, 44% of tribals, according to the Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey, voted for the BJP. Back in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the figure of tribals voting for the saffron party was 38%. Not only tribals, but the BJP has also been able to increase its support among the Dalits. According to CSDS-Lokniti, it got 33% vote of the Dalits in the 2019 polls, an increase of 9% in comparison to 2014.

The Left and the liberals choose not to accept the bitter fact that the BJP is no more a Brahmanical party or a party of the "upper-castes". A significant chunk of the backward sections of the society today are its voters. Not only is the BJP ruling at the Centre but in majority of the States because of the tacit support it is getting from these backward sections. So it's quite natural the BJP sees its responsibility to address their issues and aspirations.

At the same time, the Left and the liberals aren't wrong when they say Murmu's nomination has a lot to do with electoral politics. Given the tribal population in many States, of course, this decision is taken by looking at the electoral interests of the party. In a democracy, this isn't wrong either. As Murmu hails from Odisha, it is no secret that the BJP is eyeing this eastern State ruled by Naveen Patnaik. Additionally, the calculated move is also taken to ensure electoral benefits in two neighbouring eastern States -- Jharkhand and West Bengal.

In tribal areas of West Bengal, the BJP got electoral benefits in the 2019 polls but failed to keep that momentum in the 2021 Assembly polls. Similarly, the

has successfully penetrated here, as seen in this year's Manipur Assembly polls. However, BJP's electoral victory has little to do with the party's Hindutva ideology and both are aware of it. That's the reason, the BJP chose Murmu out of a list of 20 probable's this time. Last time, it had nominated Ramnath Kovind, a Dalit, to enter Rashtrapati Bhavan.

On the other hand, the Opposition -- Congress, Trinamool Congress, CPM, NCP etc -- has nominated former BJP leader Yashwant Sinha, who was a Central minister in Vajpayee government. He quit the party as he felt ignored by the "New BJP". Sinha's nomination hasn't gone down well within the Opposition too. The supporters of CPM are questioning the party for supporting a former BJP leader and a candidate sponsored by their arch-rival Mamata Banerjee, TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister. After quitting BJP last year, Sinha had joined ITM. The tribal party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha is unlikely to him as it can't be seen to vote against one of its own. Mayawati's BSP has already announced her support for Murmu.

As the parties can't issue whips in this election, the Opposition camp is worried that some, particularly tribal MLAs and MPs, may vote with the ruling NDA camp. The only achievement for the Opposition camp is that this time Telangana Chief Minister KCR's Telangana Rashtra Samithi has extended support to Sinha, though last time it had supported NDA's candidate.

That the BJP-led NDA has the upper hand in the presidential polls was known to all. The Opposition, could have at least sent a correct political message by nominating a better candidate than Sinha. But it failed to do so, clearly showing their hopelessness and desperation to just fight the BJP without an alternative agenda. On the other hand, supported by its Hindutva agenda, the BJP by choosing Murmu has sent a loud and clear message: it cares about the marginalised sections and is serious about women empowerment. The election of the country's next President is to prove it. --- INFA

Letters to the Editor

Kite-flying with waste management

Editor,
The other day, I saw a tender floated by Shillong Municipal Board inviting bids for setting up of low capacity municipal waste processing units at 4 locations around Shillong. What really caught my attention is the technology proposed to be adopted in these 4 units. It's called Induced Heat Based Process, Oxygenation Plasma State Technology. Wow, must be a mind-boggling process. When we have failed even to operate a simple process called composting or an even simpler process called vermi-composting, we are now thinking of venturing into field of thermodynamics. What Govt. of Meghalaya should do is to select the most suitable technology based on its own capacity instead of being dictated by fly by wire operators. In case of any doubts, the government should check up as to how many plants are operating in India using this technology and using municipal solid waste as the feed stock.

As far as my knowledge goes, not a single plant is successfully operating in the country using municipal solid waste. Looking at the selection one tends to wonder whether Govt. of Meghalaya is striving to meet European emission standards. Instead, we should try to find out what happened to the com-

posting plants set up a few years back in Tura, Nongpoh and Shillong at considerable cost or for that matter how our waste to energy plant inaugurated recently at Tura with a lot of fanfare with South Korean assistance is functioning today. If this waste to energy or RDF plant functions satisfactorily and if the product meets the standards as laid down in the guidelines for the usage of refuse derived fuel in various industries published by the Ministry of Urban Development, this would be a much better solution in our other towns than pursuing technology which is much beyond our capacity and means. It is certainly good to explore new technologies to address the ever increasing municipal waste problem in our cities and towns but looking at our track record and performance, it is best to adopt process which are simple, low cost and workable in our conditions.

My humble request to Govt. of Meghalaya is be practical and not get carried away by high sounding names. Instead concentrate on household level segregation, set up recycling units for the recyclable materials and start decentralized composting with involvement of local communities and self-help groups. On a priority basis identify and acquire land for waste processing units in all our towns. The possibility of setting up plants for refuse-derived fuel pellets can be explored further. In all probability, the

new technology if pursued will turn out to be more of a wasteful expenditure than a solution.

Yours etc.,
B. Dutta
Shillong 1

Pedestrians' woes

Editor,
It has been a little more than a week now that a tree fell across the road between Umshyrpi Bridge and Lumwabah Crossing in Upper Shillong. Consequently, the railing on the footpath along the stretch also collapsed on the footpath thus blocking the way of the pedestrians who have to come down on the road to avoid the debris lying on the footpath. Though the tree was immediately removed, the debris from the railing still remains on the footpath till date.

As the traffic on both sides of this road is always busy, and as many people especially students use this footpath to commute to their schools, colleges and workplaces, the safety of the pedestrians is put at risk by making them walk along a busy road instead of the footpath.

I am surprised to note that even after a week has passed, none of the concerned authorities are taking any action to clear the debris be it the Local MLA who is a Cabinet minister, the MDC, those who used to and who plan to contest the election from the area, the traffic

police who have to monitor the traffic flow, the leaders of the locality and others. Ironically, even the Chief Minister and his convoy along with some government officials passed through this road on the way to a function nearby on Monday the 27th June 2022 but they failed to notice the problem of the common people.

Being one among the regular pedestrians using this footpath, I am at a loss for words to describe the irresponsibility and insensitivity of the concerned authorities. However, I will still request them to act before something unfortunate happens.

Yours etc.,
B J Syiemlieh,
Via email

NEHU's absurd timelines and time tables

Editor,
The relevant decision-making body of NEHU for exams related affairs appears to be going through some kind of a midlife crisis as it continues to make one absurd decision after the other. The first of these rather stringent and yet impractical decisions concerns the pressure placed on colleges to finish corrections of several hundreds of scripts, per department, in a matter of a few days, without having given any thought at all to the plight of colleges with a

higher enrolment of students per class. While the need to release the results of the 6th Semester students at the earliest is appreciated and understood, one cannot understand why the corrections of the 2nd and 4th Semester scripts need to be completed at breakneck speed since they will continue to remain in college for at least another year. Does the university know something about these semesters that the colleges don't? Are the entry and exit facilities of the NEP going to be implemented this year so that the results of the 2nd and 4th semester students must be released immediately?

The second decision that is equally perplexing pertains to that of the examination of the post-graduate programmes. There are no gaps in between papers of any of the exams to be held for the post-graduate students. And the exams (theory and practical) have been scheduled to go on continuously for almost two weeks without any breaks. This decision to rush things and complete everything by the middle of July 2022 is beginning to raise a lot of eyebrows and many are beginning to wonder at the reasons for such insensible handling of matters relating to something as crucial as exams.

And the most astonishing thing to note is that the university does not see it necessary to explain its actions and decisions and proceeds to act in a most authoritarian manner.

I hope that these are iso-

lated incidents and not an indication of more drastic and illogical policies to be introduced by NEHU in the days to come.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

On 'Ko Mei-Ramew'- ITM Theme song

Editor,
Apropos the news piece "Summer Salt releases its new album" published on June 30, 2022 in the Shillong Times, we would like to clarify that the quote shared by Pius Rance, NESFAS Executive Director, was interpreted incorrectly. Summersalt was not the one that produced the ITM theme song 'Ko Mei-Ramew', but it was only Kit Shangpliang (a member of Summersalt), along with other local artistes from Meghalaya that were part of that song. NESFAS were responsible for producing the said theme song. We highly appreciate the immediate action taken by the team from ST in rectifying the statement in the news piece available on the website.

Yours etc.,
Alethea Kordor Lyngdoh
Lead Associate,
Communications, NESFAS

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

"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."

— Confucius

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 2, 2022

Why The Targeted Attacks

FOR a while now, people, particularly non-tribals passing through Jaiaw – a prominent locality of Shillong have been attacked by so-called "miscreants." These miscreants appear to be faceless and nameless because they get away with impunity after such attacks. In this aspect the role of the Dorbar Shnong comes into question. The Dorbar Shnong have always maintained that they are in control of the situation within their jurisdictions. In fact, the unwritten code is for police to inform the Dorbar Shnong that they are advancing to a locality to pick up certain suspects for questioning. Normally the Dorbar Shnong should be in a position to know who these 'miscreants' that waylay unsuspecting passers-by are, and the reason for the attacks. Each Dorbar Shnong is headed by a Rangbah Shnong and some localities have more than one Rangbah Shnong because of their size and population. The Shnong are further divided into Dongs headed by a Rangbah Dong. In a particular Dong nearly everyone knows everyone else. It's possible to identify the regular trouble makers. Some Dorbar Shnong also have the Village Defence Party (VDP) that are paid a modest honorarium. They are to ensure that the Dong/Shnong is trouble free and to identify trouble makers and inform the Dorbar Shnong about them. It is good that the VDP of Jaiaw have managed to zero in on the assaulters and that they are now under police custody.

Interestingly, some of the arrested are juveniles hence their case might be treated with leniency. But how do juveniles have driving licenses and afford to drive scooters and motorbikes? Clearly there is a social collapse here since juveniles are supposed to be at home studying in the evening under parental supervision. And if they are missing from home then their parents should be on the lookout for them. Parental responsibility appears lacking or non-existent. From the series of attacks that these youths have been involved in, it appears to have become a pattern. These youth appear to be members of some pressure groups that believe that Meghalaya must live in isolation and that anyone from outside the state coming here for any reason is an interloper who has to be dealt with through violent means.

The newly joined Director General of Police, Dr LR Bishnoi has led the way by walking through some troubled localities with his men and also reassuring people that police are doing their job. This is intended to restore peoples' faith in the police. Dorbar Shnongs too would do well to work in conjunction with the police to maintain law and order in their respective localities. Hopefully, such incidents that are a slur on the fair name of Meghalaya are dealt with swiftly and strictly.

Meghalaya missing out on the railways advantage

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The Romans built roads, The British built railways and navigated the seas. These two facts are testament to the power of transportation. With it one can expand its reach, impose oneself through trade and might, conquer the world and create massive empires. Meghalaya does not like to learn from such magnificent historical lessons. Forget railway connectivity to Shillong. Even the railway track from Tetelia (Assam) to Byrnihat has been halted since 2017-18. In the grand plans of the central government to connect all the state capitals of north-east India by railways by 2023-24, Meghalaya is missing out. The discourse on railways has become overshadowed by the issue of influx. One might say that xenophobia has become synonymous with railways. The entire project is stalled simply because no one in the ruling dispensation is willing to reason with the pressure groups or tackle them head-on. In the process, Meghalaya is missing out on the immense advantages and the development that the railways bring.

The biggest advantage of railways is that it can transport goods in bulk. In doing so, the cost of goods as sold in the market tends to become more economical. Most of the goods transported through trains are subjected to a GST of 5% only. Not to mention the variety of goods that would be available for the consumers to choose from. In addition, the time taken for transportation is shorter as compared to roadways and much secure too. These factors are supposed to be the primary basis upon which the argument for railways in Meghalaya is made. Development depends upon trade and commerce. The railways will augment this to a great extent. The variety of goods available in the market will lead to a more vibrant business environment through the interaction between supply and demand. The result is growth. For example, through railways the supply of perishables (like vegetables and meat), non-perishables (like utensils and clothing) and tangibles (like vehicles and machinery) will increase manifold. This will enrich the consumers and also the exchequer of the state government through GST. It is economical to bring in eatables like rice, meat, vegetables, etc from other states through railways as compared to roads. In recent times, the prices of commodities have been skyrocketing

In Shillong and other towns. One of the reasons for this is the high road transportation cost. To this end, the railway can help a lot.

In relation to movement of people, the railways offer comfort and ease of travel. People who travel from various parts of the country can disembark at their very own town/city that they belong to without the hassle of getting down at Guwahati and taking a bus/sumo for onward travel. The ease of travel within Meghalaya is even more exciting to think of. For example, people who would

'RailYatri' online orders can be taken and then the food/beverages can be supplied on the go at a designated station. Not to mention the chances that would open up in the formal sector as permanent workers of Indian Railways. At a time when the central government is investing in railway expansion, it is frustrating that we prefer to look the other way!

In the context of tourism, the future looks dire. The basic logistical requirement for a robust and growing tourism sector is transportation. With the airport still being a strug-

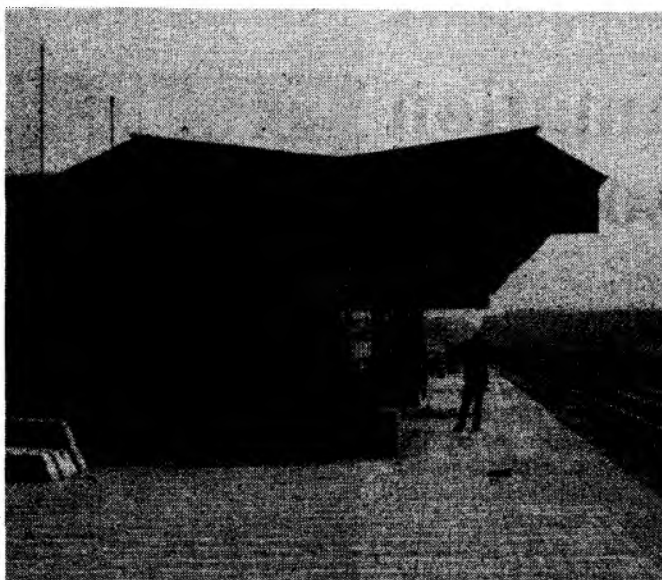
for the inflow of tourist. Fine, it is agreed that the tourism attractions of Meghalaya have their own 'unique selling proposition' which will always find clients. However, it must also be factored in that the development of a railway circuit in the north-east will provide stiffer competition from other attractions of the region. The far-flung places of the region will suddenly come into the tourism market. This is how the tourism business environment will change in the coming years. Do we see this? What is our mitigation strategy? Anyway we look at this conundrum, the only solution lies in embracing the railways.

Amidst the advantage of railways, the opposition by the pressure groups and prominently led by Khasi Students Union (KSU) is puzzling. The protest is short-sighted when in truth the benefits of a railway far outweigh the concerns. The only card being played by them is the influx issue. Not to be disingenuous, but influx will always be there whether there be railways or not. It is time for the youth to see beyond the xenophobia of influx and grasp the real picture for what it is. Identify the scope of progress and growth. It would be better if KSU and others do a cost-benefit study on railways by applying an independent and unbiased brains trust so as to make a better judgment on their continued opposition to the project. If the study is done honestly, it can be said with 100% certainty that the protest would die down.

In addition, the bargaining of ILP against railways is preposterous. There is no advantage in this positioning. If anything, it portrays the people in a very poor light. To many it seems as though we are anti-development. What if the central government says that there would be no more new educational, village development, social service projects, etc., in Meghalaya till it accepts railways? Now, who holds the trump card here? Definitely, not KSU! For the benefit of the poor, the youth and the rank and file of Meghalaya, KSU may seriously revisit its call of opposition to the railways.

In the end, a larger discourse is required on the issue. The people should speak up. The irrationality of pressure groups and placating behavior of the state government is deplorable. The xenophobia of 'influx' must not be allowed to rust an entire intervention/propeller of growth and well-being!

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



like to move between Tura and Shillong and vice versa can comfortable avail of the railways through chair cars like the Shatabdi Express. Travel in comfort with the best services in-house and cover the distance in around four hours only. Surely, people must find this extremely attractive. It is difficult to understand as to why we do not

gling project and road connectivity being expensive and time consuming, Meghalaya tourism now stares at a very uncertain future. There has always been talk of a need of a tourism circuit connecting the important cultural, historical and leisure attractions of north-east India. Till date, this has never come to fruition mainly because the con-

"The biggest advantage of railways is that it can transport goods in bulk. In doing so, the cost of goods as sold in the market tends to become more economical. Most of the goods transported through trains are subjected to a GST of 5% only."

see this very simple but enormous advantage. In addition, the railways will bring many employment opportunities. The numerous stations on route will provide scope for establishing of small business enterprises. Further, those who are trained in food and beverages services can find a platform for applying their trade and earn a livelihood. Through mobile apps like

nectivity between the states of the region is lacking. The constant-need for changing means of transportation between air, rail and road is too cumbersome for many. Now, with this massive expansion of railways in north-east India many hitherto unconnected/unexplored places will be easily accessible. With Meghalaya being outside this picture, it does not bode well

BJP Juggernaut on the roll – whither Congress?

Dysfunctional Leadership Bodes ill for Opposition Unity

By Nitya Chakraborty

The BJP juggernaut is on the roll. As the second half of the 2022 calendar year begins, the opposition parties remain toothless and rudderless. Right now, BJP has begun its three-day national executive session at Hyderabad. The buoyant leadership is focusing on the next assembly elections in Karnataka due early next year. The takeover of Maharashtra government is complete with the regime change on June 30 following resignation of the Shiv Sena Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. Uddhav was emerging as a capable leader of the anti-BJP forces. His downfall is a big setback to the MVA in the state as also the overall opposition at national level.

On the eve of the presidential elections, the NDA has been able to secure the support of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, the JD(S) of Karnataka. Both are in the anti-BJP opposition camp and were signatories to the statement endorsing Jaswant Sinha as the common opposition candidate. This cleavage in opposition is expected to have its impact far beyond the presidential elections, BSP chief Maya-

candidates. The Congress organisation in Gujarat is non-functioning. The state leadership of the Congress is no match to the state leadership of the BJP. Further, the central war room of BJP is constantly monitoring the developments regarding the poll planning under the guidance of none other than Amit Shah. In Himachal, the Congress polling machinery is much better compared to Gujarat but from July onwards, the BJP leadership is organising a massive poll campaign in Himachal. Sangh Parivar outfits are working overtime to ensure the success of the party candidates.

The Congress is scheduled to hold its election to the post of president in August this year. No indication is there that it is postponed. But if it is held, it will certainly disturb the schedule of the Congress leaders for participation in campaigns for state assembly elections. Already, the Congress is much behind in campaign and there are no valid reasons for spending valuable time for this stage-managed party elections. Sonia must choose some senior leaders who will be addressing meetings



wati has also supported the candidature of Droupadi Murmu but that was expected, she was keeping distance from the anti-BJP opposition most of the times.

What are the latest signals from the current political developments? First, the NDA candidate Droupadi Murmu will win handsomely on July 18 presidential elections exposing disunity in the opposition camp. Second, the formation of the BJP-Shinde group government in Maharashtra will embolden the BJP leadership to apply the Maharashtra model to Jharkhand. BJP will try to bring in JMM led by Soren again into alliance with the BJP. Third, in Karnataka, the BJP will target the MLAs of JD(S) to switch over to the BJP side before the assembly elections. BJP will like to ensure that the JD(S) does not have a total alliance with the Congress to challenge BJP in the next assembly elections.

As against this well strategized planning of the BJP, what is the opposition doing? The principal opposition party the Congress is showing no signs of turn-around to combat the BJP juggernaut. The Congress president Sonia Gandhi is really unwell. All these developments are certainly having an impact on her health. Further, she is under strain due to the summons by the enforcement directorate on National Herald issue. She is a director of the concerned company. She has to appear and reply to queries. The same with the de facto Congress head Rahul Gandhi. He has to appear again before ED this month. RSS circles and some TV channels are spreading airbrush ED will be arresting Rahul after the next ED meeting. All these must have affected Rahul's proper functioning as the leader of the Congress Party.

The elections to the state assemblies of Gujarat and Himachal are due by the end of the year. BJP has completed all the planning and preparations for the assembly polls. Booth Committees have been set up and instructions have been issued in elaborate terms on how to ensure victory of the

apart from Rahul. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the most popular leader in the BJP camp, but the Party has thrown up many young leaders who are addressing public meetings. Congress should not depend on only one leader- Rahul Gandhi for public meetings.

As regards the non-Congress parties in the opposition, the situation is much better. Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee is solidly functioning in the state. It is expanding at the cost of the BJP. In the recent elections to Darjeeling based GTA, the BJP suffered big defeats in its strongholds in North Bengal. All indications are that the BJP seats will go down drastically in the next Lok Sabha elections from Bengal. Regarding DMK, Chief Minister M K Stalin is reigning supreme and he is guiding the front of anti-BJP parties including the Congress and Left with maturity. In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front led by P Vijayan is firmly in the saddle. LDF is sure to do much better in the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 at the cost of the Congress seats. NCP is strong in Maharashtra despite the fall of the MVA government.

It is apparent that the 2024 Lok Sabha prospects have become dimmer due to recent political developments. Opposition turn-around before Lok Sabha elections depends on the scale of the Congress success. In 2004 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress led the opposition and formed the government. No political leader expected Vajpayee's defeat after the India Shining campaign. But it happened. Congress campaign Aam Admi Hath ka Sath clicked. Now again less than two years before the 2024 elections, the Congress organisers at all levels have to go to those Aam Aadmi. They are a much more suffering lot compared to 2004 elections. They are seething with anger against the present BJP regime, but they have to be poached. This connect with suffering and aggrieved masses will only decide whether any change will be taking place after 2024 polls. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Operation Clean-up & dealing with garbage dumpers

Editor,
Some people have visionary ideas for the welfare of the society. But very few have both ideas and "enthusiasm." Enthusiasm alone helps one to open the doors and set out on a mission with determination. Look at what the members of 'Operation Clean-Up' have done in the span of three years in Shillong. It is not just commendable but it is highly "inspirational". First conceived by The Shillong Times, now this mission has attracted many other organizations, including school students. They primarily aim at nursing the "injuries" caused to Mother nature in various ways. They have also taken up the hard challenge to clean stenchy riversides for that matter.

Of course, the regular cleaning drives by OCU involves not just cleaning the environment around. The efforts of these enthusiastic members have contributed immensely in enhancing their personal perspective to look at nature and appreciate its beauty. That will go

a long way in self-evolution as well. One strongly feels that like Kiddies Corner Secondary School other front-ranking schools such as St. Edmunds, St. Anthony's, All Saints, Loreto Convent, St. Johns, Nongthymmai Nepali Schools and so on also should follow suit. Undoubtedly, at this critical juncture of climate change such awareness alone ensures the sunshine tomorrow!

Here I can't help but share the most sickeningly contrary activities that have been contributing to festering the wounds of the ecology. The countless drains and streams that pass along this town not only carry the water but they have been forced to carry all kinds of garbage. Who is to blame? Have those mountains of garbage that include broken parts of furniture, bottles, clothes, sacks etc., not choked the environment? I think that such shameless people who dump garbage into the rivers must see and realize how the members of 'Operation Clean-Up' sweat to clear what they have dumped with insane disregard.

The question today is how long will society tolerate this blatant offence of dumping garbage in the drains and streams. I think the administration must crack the whip. The vigilant members of OCU must take a firm stand and shout out against the

disgusting proclivities! It would be worthwhile if the members would take the help of the authorities concerned to deal with such nasty offenders in the town. This will be a great step forward. I am sure our environment-conscious Deputy Commissioner, Ms Isawanda Laloo and the present DGP – Sri LR Bishnoi will support the idea wholeheartedly. The enforcement agencies must pull up all those errant folks who treat the drain as "dustbins". The administration must immediately "impose a hefty fine" as penalty on the environmental polluters. In my eyes, it is one of the greatest sins of the modern times.

I find it very relevant to rerun the extracts from my previous letter – "Yes, we have taken enough selfies, now let's also secretly take the photos of the offenders/dumpers that hurt our environment by throwing garbage in the drains. Those photo/video clippings should be shared with the Deputy Commissioner, Shillong Municipality, Police Department and Pollution Control Board in confidence. Those photo clippings should be put up on the notice board and on the official websites. I hope this will certainly act as a "big deterrent", making them hide their faces in shame. We can live tomorrow only when we do not let others mess

with the environment today." --- (ST, Dated 14th Sept 2021 "Penalty for dumping garbage in drains").

There should be zero tolerance for environment polluters. The efforts of the OCU should not go down the drain.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

Ri-Bhoi plundered in broad daylight

Editor,
Thanks to the Ri Bhoi Social Media, the conduct of the Indradhanush Gas Grid Ltd (IGGL) was exposed. According to the Rangbah Shnong of one of either the two villages viz Umdon Nongthli and Khongwing Rongkhli, he received a personal letter from one Mr Kyndiah (govt official) regarding the proposed laying of gas pipeline through the above-mentioned villages sometime in early 2021. He kept this information to himself. It was only recently when IGGL started doing the survey and digging work that the affected villagers began to contact the Rangbah Shnong who never in his wildest imagination expected that the letter he received was a matter of life

and death. He was deeply worried as part of his land was an orchard and the other was where he cultivated broomstick and these would be lost forever.

The IGGL started in 2018 is a joint venture of OIL, IOCL, ONGC, GAIL and NRL. It is a project for implementing the Hydro-Carbon Vision 2030 for North East India as per the Ministry of Petroleum, 2016. The idea is to allow access to clean fuel and accelerate the growth of North East India by leveraging the region's hydro-carbon potential.

One can only assume that there were no public discussions and awareness creation about this project. It came like a bolt from the blue. The RBYDSO (Ri Bhoi Youth Departmental and Social Organisation) took note of the matter and approached the DC Nongpoh, RPUTtopadhay on June 28 last. Unfortunately, the DC quickly excused himself on grounds of previous engagement and asked the ADC R Kharbikhiew to resolve the matter. Alas! The ADC could not do anything about it.

Strangely enough there was no land acquisition and compensation which should have been followed as per law. How come the villagers, unmindful as all villagers are, were asked to produce their EPIC, Aadhar and PAN card when they were yet

to have a public hearing to decide whether to grant the land or not. And very shockingly the land rate which is to be determined by the Revenue Department cannot happen now as the Company has already started developing the land. How could the MDA Government allow such a massive exploration as this without compensating the land owners?

The pipeline it is learnt is to also pass through Jaintia Hills. Right now with public representatives not caring a damn, it remains to be seen if the fate of ordinary Jaintias too will be the same as that of the Ri Bhoi people.

When poor, innocent villagers are duped by government officials then nothing can be done to save them. Meanwhile one can only wish the RBYDSO and the people of Ri Bhoi all the best. After all, they are unfortunate to be living in a State where public representatives do not care for their people except just a few weeks before election.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Via email

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

Uddhav Thackeray and India's Hindutva narrative

Tail of the Tiger tracks the personal and political journey of Uddhav Thackeray against the backdrop of the changing narrative of Hindutva, and new connotations to Hindutvas sub-national plot, with the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a new Hindu Hriday Samrat. It is the story of one of the biggest upheavals in Indian politics where breaking a 30-year-old alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Shiv Sena joined Sonia Gandhi's camp, holding Sharad Pawar's finger after the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly elections)

Uddhav Thackeray's decision to snap ties with the BJP and align with the Congress and the NCP in Maharashtra needs to be understood against the backdrop of the political narrative built by Balasaheb, revered by hardcore Hindu nationalists and Sainiks as the Hindu Hriday Samrat (monarch of the Hindu heart), and the emergence of Narendra Modi.

Balasaheb claimed that the Thackerays had been proponents of Hindutva ever since his father Keshav Thackeray started a movement in 1922. Balasaheb claimed that he was only taking forward his father's push for Hindutva. But Balasaheb coloured his father's reformist Hindutva agenda an even darker saffron after the latter's death in 1973.

The 1987 Vile Parle by-poll was one of the turning points in Hindutva politics. The Shiv Sena decided to contest the seat after the death of the sitting Vile Parle MLA, Hans Bhugra. It fielded the Mumbai mayor, Dr Ramesh Prabhoo, as a 'Shiv Sena independent' candidate because at the time the Sena had not yet been recognised as a political party.

This was the first time Balasaheb fiercely and openly sought votes in the name of religion. In one campaign speech, he said, 'We are fighting this election for the protection of Hinduism. Therefore, we do not care for the votes of the Muslims. This country belongs to Hindus and will remain so.' A banner with

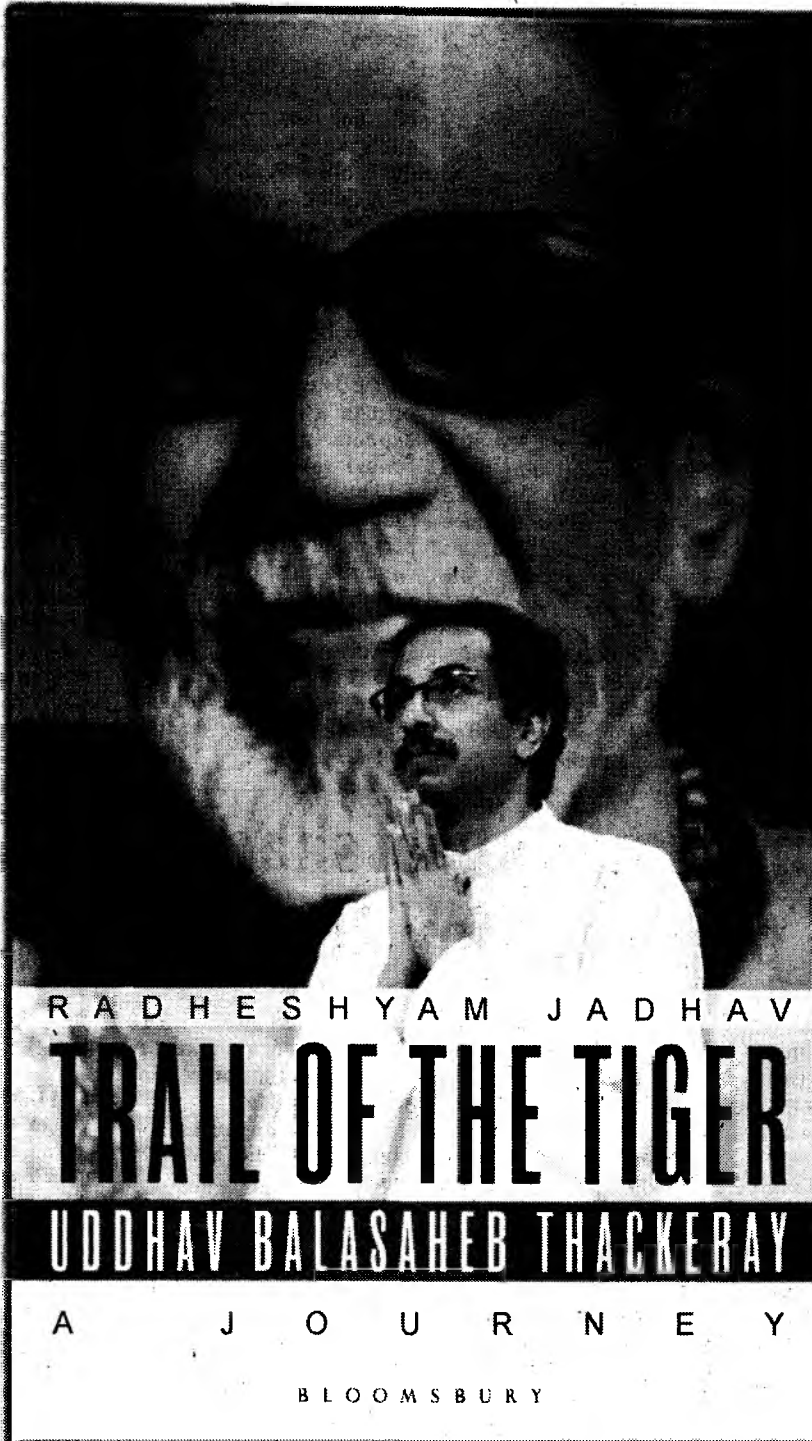
the slogan 'Garva se kaho hum Hindu hain' was displayed on the dais. Balasaheb claimed that Hindutva was in danger and Shiv Sena would be its saviour. He appealed to voters to vote for the victory of Hindutva.

'You will find Hindu temples underneath if all the mosques are dug out [up]. Anybody who stands against the Hindus should be shown or worshipped with shoes,' Balasaheb said. He brought Lord Ram into the election arena too, 'We have come with the ideology of Hinduism. Shiv Sena will implement this ideology. Though this country belongs to Hindus, Ram and Krishna are insulted.' The electoral narrative appeared to work -- Shiv Sena won the by-election.

The defeated candidate, Congress leader Prabhakar Kunte, took the matter of the communal speeches to the Bombay High Court which declared Prabhoo's election void as per the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The court named Balasaheb for the commission of corrupt practices under the Act. Prabhoo approached the Supreme Court which upheld the high court's judgment and concluded that Balasaheb's three speeches amounted to corrupt practices under the Act. Since votes were sought in the name of Prabhoo, he too was declared a part of the corrupt practices. The Election Commission stripped Balasaheb of voting rights for six years.

The Supreme Court, in its judgment, said that the offending speeches made by Balasaheb violated and eroded India's secular polity. 'We say this with the fervent hope that our observation has some chastening effect in the future election campaigns,' the court added. The Supreme Court Bench, comprising Justice Jagdish Verma, N P Singh and K Venkataswami, said that it had to record its distress at the communal speeches given by top political leaders. It added that given the likely impact of such speeches, leaders need to be more circumspect

An excerpt from *Trail of The Tiger: Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray - A Journey by Radheshyam Jadhav*



in how they address voters during campaigns. But Balasaheb had already set the tone for all hardcore Hindu nationalist leaders to follow. He even questioned the court's judgment.

Balasaheb's Hindutva turned even more ferocious after the 1987 by-polls. Interestingly, the BJP was not with the Sena -- or the Hindutva agenda -- in this election; it had opted to support a Janta Dal candidate who championed secularism. After this election, the Sena fought and won the Aurangabad civic election, again using the Hindutva line. Thackeray led the way for the BJP on Hindutva, noted Prakash Akolkar in his book *Jai Maharashtra*, which documents Shiv Sena's history.

The BJP was forced to abandon its Gandhian socialism after Balasaheb's strategy won the popular vote. Balasaheb did not just introduce hardcore Hindutva narrative into India's electoral politics but also placed Lord Ram at its centre, as mentioned earlier. During the Vile Parle elections, the Sena objected to how Dr B R Ambedkar spoke of Ram and Krishna in his writings, especially Riddles in Hinduism. The government of Maharashtra was publishing his collated works and the Sena objected to this. For Balasaheb, the Vile Parle election verdict was the victory of Ram and Krishna and a 'licence' for the formation of a 'Hindu Rashtra'. It was God's wish to put this 'licence' in his hands, said Balasaheb, and claimed that the process of building the Hindu Rashtra would begin from Maharashtra before spreading across India.⁶

Hindutva and nationalism proved to be powerful political tools and the Sena wore its 1987 victory, and the subsequent court reproof, as a badge of honour. According to Uddhav, 1987 gave a specific 'direction' to Indian politics. He claimed that the Sena propelled Hindutva politics long before the BJP. 'That election (1987) showed that India needs the

Hindutva ideology and that this ideology can lead to electoral victory. Then the BJP also realised it. Honourable Advanisaheb started the rath yatra,' Uddhav said in an interview in Saamana.

He pointed out that Pramod Mahajan and Gopinath Munde joined the Hindutva bandwagon after this, starting the era of the Sena-BJP alliance. After 1987, Balasaheb talked about hardcore Hindutva without worrying about the political or legal consequences. His popularity soared as the media broadcast his sensational statements to a national audience. He became, for his followers, the 'Hindu Hriday Samrat'.

The year 1992 was a decisive chapter in India's politics. The demolition of the Babri mosque gave BJP a stronger hold on Hindutva. Riots broke out in Mumbai in December 1992 and January 1993, killing about 900 and injuring around 2,036. The Sena's role in the riots was highlighted by the Srikrishna Commission appointed by the Maharashtra government to probe the riots. The panel named Balasaheb in its report.

Saamana was spewing fire and Mumbai was gripped by fear. It was around this time that the BJP leader Sunder Singh Bhandari claimed that the Babri mosque was demolished by the Sena cadre. Sujata Anandan, a reporter with a national wire service, called Balasaheb for a reaction to this statement and reported that he sounded 'flummoxed' when he heard about it. He asked her to call him back for a response and later said, 'Well, if my Shiv Sainiks have brought down the mosque, I can only be proud of them.'

Anandan further claims that Balasaheb knew that no Shiv Sainik was present in Ayodhya during the demolition. However, Bhandari had given away an ace to Balasaheb -- he became the hero of hardcore Hindus, boasting that his men demolished the mosque. This line was repeated often by Uddhav and the rest of the Sena. (IANS)

Selected Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist Art go online

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES AND THEIR FOLLOWERS



SYMBOLIST ART



The Isabel Goldsmith Collection: Selected Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist Art, which spans more than 40 years of collecting, is accessible online till July 14 as a part of London's Classic Week Summer edition.

The collection, which consists of 87 pieces, addresses topics such as sleep, dreams, the after-life, spirituality, beauty, literature, and classical subjects. The star lot of the auction, *The return of Orpheus* by Sidney Harold Meteyard (estimate: 200,000-300,000 pounds), as well as pieces by Edward Burne-Jones, John Roddam Spencer-Stanhope, Simeon Solomon, Evelyn De Morgan, and Henry Ryland are included in the collection of Pre-Raphaelites and their adherents' works.

Levy-Dhurmer, Fernand Khnopff, and George Frederic Watts are among the symbolist artists whose works are on display, and there are also several Scandinavian landscapes in the sale. With estimates ranging from 600 to 300,000 pounds, the collection is expected to realise in excess of

1 million pounds. The pre-sale view will be open to the public from July 9 to 14.

Peter Brown, Senior Director, International Specialist, Victorian, Pre-Raphaelite and British Impressionist Art, 19th-Century European Art, Christie's commented: "Isabel Goldsmith has long impressed me with the curiosity and delight with which she encounters works of art. Hers is a singular vision: many of these Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist pictures carry a mystical or spiritual dimension. This is an intriguing sale, full of the unexpected, which delights the eye and presents the market with rare opportunities to acquire notable works by Burne-Jones, De Morgan and Watts, and Khnopff, Stevens, and Levy-Dhurmer. Watts' *The Open Door* (estimate: 10,000-15,000 pounds) is sold to benefit Watts Gallery - Artists' Village."

The Return of Orpheus by Sidney Harold Meteyard, which is estimated to sell for between 200,000 pounds and 300,000 dollars

is illustrated on page one with an in-person archive shot from 1992, commands the highest price. From left to right, additional highlights include Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones' *Luna* (estimate: 70,000-100,000 pounds), Simeon Solomon's *Death Awakening Sleep* (estimate: 10,000-15,000), Evelyn De Morgan's *The Field of the Slain* (estimate: 30,000-50,000 pounds), and Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones' *Study for the Head of Medusa* for "The Finding of Medusa" (1876) (estimate: 15,000-25,000 pounds).

Highlights include Fernand Khnopff's *La Medusa endormie*, ca. 1896 (estimate: 80,000-120,000 pounds, illustrated on page 1), *Ophelie (Ophelia)*, 1887 by Alfred Stevens (estimate: 60,000-100,000 pounds), *La bourrasque*, 1897 by Lucien Levy-Dhurmer (estimate: 100,000-150,000 pounds), and *The Search-Light* by Evelyn De Morgan (estimate: 70,000-100,000 pounds). (IANSLife)

Are white spots on skin a cause for concern?

The most worrying concerns of people in India and the Indian subcontinent are related to white or yellowish lesions of skin diseases. Clinically similar disorders commonly seen in children include vitiligo, pityriasis alba (PA), and polymorphic lucite (PLE). Dermatologist Dr. Vidushi Jain, Medical Director of Dermalinks, explains the causes and treatments to keep your skin protected in the summer.

A skin disorder called Pityriasis Alba, which typically affects children's faces, is very frequent. Although it has been suggested that atopic dermatitis is the source of pityriasis alba, its exact cause is uncertain. In addition to being red, pink, or white in colour, the lesions might be circular, oval, or irregular in shape. Usually, on the face and arms, many patches may be seen at once. From a few months to over a year, the rash's length can vary. Multiple lesions may occur.

The lesions are obvious on those with darker skin. Patients with lighter skin will notice the rash more frequently during the summer months as their skin tans. Young children are most often affected but pityriasis alba tends to go away with time. The loss of pigment here unlike vitiligo is not permanent and recovers with time.

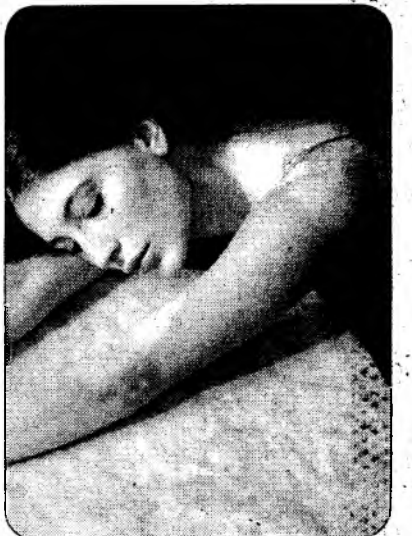
Cure - Pityriasis alba can sometimes resolve on its own without the need for medication. To keep moisture in the skin, a moisturiser cream or lotion may be advised. To minimise inflammation and discomfort, a low-dose topical corticosteroid may also be recommended.

The polymorphic light eruption is a typical post-inflammatory syndrome that most frequently affects parts of the body that are exposed to light, such as the forearms and nape of the neck. When it resolves, the skin may appear a little white in the spots. The patches are unstructured, lack distinct edges, and have very light brown colouring. It is a postponed hypersensitive reaction to UV radiation and occasionally to visible light as well.

Cure - They come back every

summer, and using steroid creams for a prolonged period of time to reduce the redness can sometimes leave skin with white blotches.

Vitiligo is primarily distinguished from congenital skin lesions by ac-



quired, well-defined, depigmented small to large patches on the skin, the wet areas like the mouth, genitals, and/or white hair. Numerous autoimmune illnesses are usually linked to it. The most frequent connection among kids is Hashimoto's thyroiditis.

It has an incidence rate of 0.1 per cent to 2 per cent and occurs everywhere. The quality of life for those who suffer from vitiligo is significantly impacted by this serious skin condition. Although the exact causes of this syndrome are unknown, it appears that genetic, immunological, and neurological factors interact to cause it.

Cure - The therapy of vitiligo includes educating and reassuring young patients and their parents about the disease, thyroid testing, avoiding trigger factors, topical medication, and proper follow-up. By using self-tanning dyes and camouflage gear, one can improve their appearance. Although unpredictable, vitiligo frequently progresses over time. Children tend to have spontaneous repigmentation the most (10-20 per cent), however, it usually only affects parts of the skin that are exposed to the sun. (IANSLife)

Indian desserts through the centuries

An interview with chef, columnist and food writer Rajyasree Sen

Religion might well be the opiate of the masses in India, but maybe the plethora of desserts offered in the name of religion have a role to play in it, says chef, columnist and food writer Rajyasree Sen, adding that in today's political climate, there are few moments as satisfying as Hindus craving for some creamy sheer korma during Eid, or Punjabis asking their Bengali friends for mishti doi.

And the fact that Muslim cooks bake the Christmas cake in Calcutta ("no, I will not refer to it as Kolkata") for a largely Hindu clientele to celebrate a Christian festival proves that when it comes to desserts and mithai - and maybe conveniently - the barriers drop away; one of the biggest reasons to celebrate the sweets of India, she maintains.

"I've been writing on food for a while now, almost 15 years I'd say. And it all started with me opening my Bengali and Anglo-Indian restaurant, Brown Sahib in New Delhi in 2007 (it shut down a decade ago). The thought behind the restaurant was to serve authentic Calcutta cuisine and to replicate some of the dishes I had grown up eating at home - keema chops, stuffed crabs, smoked hilsa, prawn malai curry. I have a background in journalism and with my interest in cooking, ingredients and in the history of foods and flavours, it was only natural that I'd be writing on food," Sen told LANS in an interview of her book, *The Sweet Kitchen - Tales & Recipes of India's Favourite Desserts*.

She was the Wall Street Journal India's food columnist for years, and has written columns on food for a variety of publications and also



scripted many food shows for Fox, *Nat Geo* and *Discovery*. Thus, when approached to write on the history and cultural influences on Indian sweets - a topic which surprisingly hasn't been written about in detail in any one book - the outcome presents readers with some interesting anecdotes, historical facts and tid-bits about sweets in India, and introduces them to some sweets which they might not be familiar with.

Considerable research went into the book. "As I mentioned, for a country which loves sweets as much as India does - and has a plethora of sweets unique to different communities and regions, it was quite surprising that there was no one definitive book, even academic, on sweets in India. I've referred to old texts, books, articles, recipes and spoken to people to discover and confirm much of what you will discover in the book," Sen explained.

As a result of her extensive research, Sen discovered historical facts she was not aware of or had even considered. For instance, which desserts must we thank the Persians, the Mughals, the Portuguese, and the French for? While

she knew that a sweet had been created for Lady Canning in Bengal, she had no idea which Mughal emperor to thank for bringing halwa to India, or the Sikh connection to the creation of kaju barfi. She has also tried to demystify the very controversial question of whether Bengal made the rosogolla first, or if the credit goes to Odisha. She also discovered that daulat ki chaat, an airy, churned milk dessert available only during the cold winter of North India, has a Mughal origin.

Beginning with *Sandesh: Muse of the Bengal Renaissance*, Sen takes the reader through 13 chapters to discover *Rosogolla: Who Stole My Cheese, The Christmas Cake: Cultural Chameleon, Payasam, Payesh, Kheer: The Three Avatars of Sweet Pudding, Halwa: The Arab Who Strayed onto the Indian Palate, Barfi: When Art Outdoes Nature, Gulab Jamun: Everybody's Celebration Sweetmeat, Jalebi: Sweet Lord of the Rings, Daulat Ki Chaat: The Lingering Taste of Old Delhi, Misthi Doi, Shrikhand, Bhapa Doi: Haute Culture Curd, Goan Sweets: Gems from an Indigenous Pastelaria, Firinghee Sweets: Delicious*

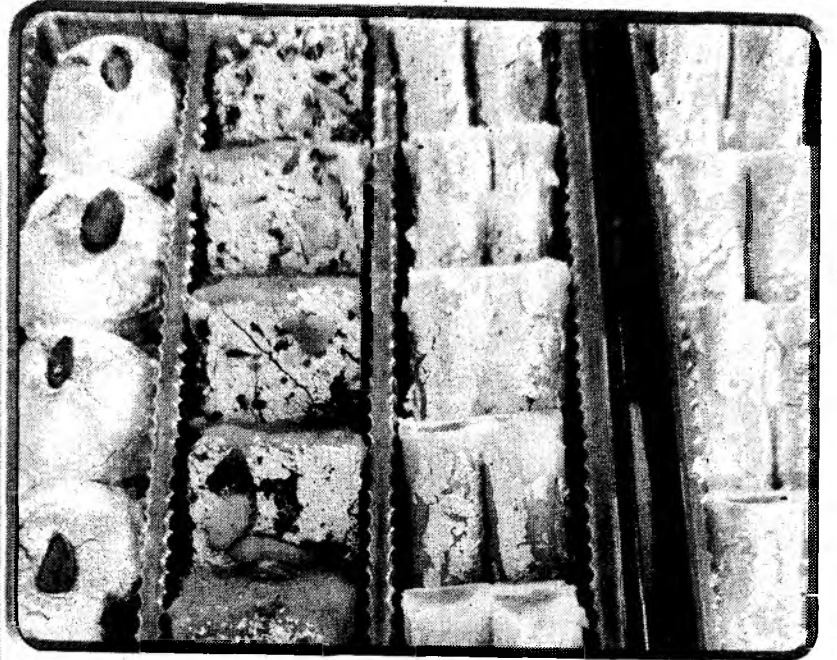
Relics of the Raj, and 'In God's Name: Sweetmeats and Culutral Congeniality'.

Each of these chapters contains a short introduction of the sweet, details of the ingredients, the method of making, the preparation time and the number of people it serves.

Sen also discovered that sweets are not strictly vegetarian -- they can also be made with meat and eggs.

"For example, there are some non-vegetarian variants of halwa such as gosht halwa and ande ka halwa which are worth mentioning," she said.

"Giving a whole new meaning to the word 'sweet meat', the gosht halwa is a translucent, succulent dessert soaked in ghee and cooked with tender lamb mince. The recipe is referred to in old Persian recipe books, and khansamas who worked in Old Delhi homes have recreated the dish from memory, turning out a delightful dessert prepared by cooking meat for hours by stirring it with milk and sugar till it amalgamates into a thick halwa which is then flavoured with saffron and cardamom. This preparation is sup-



Rajyasree Sen

posed to have originated in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh.

"Ande ka halwa, or egg halwa, is made by cracking eggs into a pan with ghee, milk, sugar, and dried fruits. The mixture is cooked until a thick custard forms, which is then sprinkled with saffron. Most Indian halwas, however, use grains, such as the suji halwa and atta halwa," Sen explained.

She earnestly hopes the book will serve the purpose of breaking down barriers. "Like all good meals are supposed to do, this book should

bring people to the same table and help create an understanding and appreciation of other communities and peoples.

After all, if we love their foods, we can surely extend some affection towards them as well," she elaborated.

What next? What will her next book be on?

"Who knows, maybe I'll write a historical espionage! I'd love to write a book on Bengali cuisine with recipes. Let's see, time will tell," Sen concluded. (LANSlife)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 3, 2022

Moon is opposite Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results. You will be in a position of authority at your workplace. And will be assertive and also able to execute decisions. You will get opportunities for growth in your profession. Your prestige and fame will also have good opportunities for expansion and increasing profits. You will get offers for collaboration or partnership. You will be able to get your work done from government officials. And also get contracts/tenders. Your income will be good. And you will focus on saving for future. Your colleagues and friends would support you. There will be joyous atmosphere in the family. Marriage will take place. You would be planning to go for a travel destination with family. Partner would support you.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

There are strong chances of money gains. You will make new investments. The worries you were having regarding your job and business will come to an end. Your financial position will remain sound and strong. Your opponents will put obstacles in your path but you will cross all of them and move forward on the path of progress. You will also decorate your house and workplace. You will also update yourself. It will be a money receiving week. You will also receive good news. You will earn money in excess of what you need are. Husband and wife will have wonderful bonding. You will be in search of something new. This time is full of fun and entertainment.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You will be full of enthusiasm. You will get new job/business offers. Your foes and opponents will be unable to harm you. You will have the upper edge. The wheels of your life will slowly get back on track. People will give importance to your advice. You will try and make efforts to fulfill your desires. You will get good news from some relative of yours. Government related matters will gain momentum. There will be satisfaction in your mind regarding your efforts. Marital relations will be cordial. You will be busy with your family members. You will also meet one of your old friends. You will be happy remembering some old events. You will get a chance of going to meetings and conferences. You will take your work seriously.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will fulfill your obligations with diligence. You will be praised a lot for this. There are full chances of getting fame and respect. You will be busy with literature and creative works and busy in study. You will achieve the goals that you had set for yourself. You will get sympathy of your colleagues. You will get profits in your business with your intelligence and wisdom. Irrespective of any situations, you will be able to find positivity in them. Keep a control over your words. Otherwise matters may go out of hands. Students will get results according to their expectations. The orbit of the Moon in your horoscope will open the doors of profits for you. Your relationship with higher officials will become cordial and from time to time. You will derive benefits from them.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It will be a wonderful week. Your relationship with your boss and seniors will be good. The advice of a colleague can make your luck shine. Your income too will rise. You will have a positive attitude towards your work and family. You will also keep alive your creative instincts. Your opponents will be unable to trouble you much. You will also make plans to go for a job change. You will do well in your business and there are strong chances of getting money in business. You will be busy in preparing for festivals. You will also meet new people and make lot of friends. You will make every impossible task possible with your efforts. You will also have wonderful time with your partner/spouse. You will also get success in court cases and legal matters. You will feel a new energy inside you. Work will get done with ease. Auspicious functions will take place in your family.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The whole week will be grand in terms of results. A little bit of difference with your life partner is possible that will end quickly. You need to take care of your health. Doing meditation and exercises will be helpful for you. You will do well in your job and business. You will have monetary gains. Your confidence will also grow. You will regain your prestige. You will also fulfill commitments made to friends. You will also establish a balance between your earnings and expenses. You will have a wonderful time. Take the advice of people seriously. You will discharge your responsibilities with great ease. There will be progress on the work front. Travels abroad are indicated. It might be possible to get your work done from officials. Stay away from controversies.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will take your work and business to dizzy heights. You will take care of interests of your subordinates. You will nourish those who are dependent on you. You will make good progress in your job/business. You will be successful in whatever you do and will move forward. You

will develop contact with those who are equal in status to you. Students will do well in exams. Love mates will have a wonderful time and will understand feelings of each other. You will take part in social activities with lot of keenness and interest. The results of some work will be obtained now. Government related work will get done with ease. You will get the benefit of new contacts. You might have to change decisions made in haste.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It will be a wonderful week for you. You will move on the road to success and bliss. Something unexpected will take place which will take place which will prove to be an eye opener for you. You will experience psychological happiness and comfort. You will play the role of a leader. Your mind will be at ease because all your desired tasks will finish on time. You will try to improve your image before others. It is good to be selfish at times. You will remain financially strong. You will also decorate your house and workplace. You will also update yourself. It will be a money receiving week. You will also receive good news. You will earn money in excess of what you need are. Husband and wife will have wonderful bonding. You will be in search of something new. This time is full of fun and entertainment.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be a normal time period with your tasks taking place at the normal pace. You will be full of excitement and joy. The doubts you were having in your mind will get cleared. You will do all your jobs joyfully. You will also receive extra earnings. All tasks done to earn money will be successful. Unemployed persons will get new job openings. There will be peace in your family. Your friends and relatives will prove to be useful. The tasks in your hand will be successful. Your problems will get solved. Your time will reverse and change for good. You will feel relaxed. You will have the support of your loved ones. Your work will gain pace. A sense of gentleness will mix in your life.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will gain lot of peace and happiness in family ties. You will also spend time with your family. You will also be more receptive towards new ideas in your work. You will also develop interest towards astrology and religious deeds. You will have monetary gains. Saturn being in its own house Aquarius will open the doors of success and prosperity for you. You will be full of vigour and enthusiasm. You will get an opportunity to attend some marriage function. Happiness and prosperity will be in abundance. You will take inspiration from someone and will easily achieve your objectives. Your efficiency and dexterity will improve. It is a time for achievements. Your thoughts will get highlighted through the medium of writings.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will feel happy and complete amidst your family members. Situation will be in your favor in the family. You will get lot of name, fame and respect for your deeds. You will succeed in getting back your lost prestige. You will look for goodness in everyone. You will make more and more efforts for achieving success at work. Your income will increase. You will acquire a high position in your organization. You will enjoy as per your wish. Your prestige among your family and friends will increase. You will demonstrate excellence in all aspects of life. You will decorate your house and also bring changes in yourself. Time will pass happily. Financial condition will be strong. You may remain busy in some festival celebration. Your image before others will be good.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will get a lot of monetary benefits. You will get opportunities to rise in your present job/business. Major monetary transactions will also materialize. You will be socially active. You will also show enthusiasm in some new projects. Your work will yield positive results. Take care in matters of land, house etc. Matters held up in government offices will be resolved. You will lead life in a different style. You will also find solution to a burning problem with family members help which will make you feel relieved. You will do a lot of shopping for your family members. Your efforts will give you good rewards. You will also be attracted towards dialogue, agreements and communication.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will make good progress in your job. Time will pass splendidly. Business will give good profits. Your time is brilliant. You will make use of modern means of communication which will make your work easier. You will show your intelligence at your work. Jupiter will help you in moving ahead bravely and without any fear. God's blessings will be with you. Your area of contacts will grow. You will receive support from your family members. The jobs will get opportunities to find a job for themselves. You will complete all your tasks with your intelligence and reasoning. You will undertake new ventures to make money. In this endeavour, you will get the full support of your friends and well wishers.

Indian architecture receives global recognition



By N Lothungbeni Humtsoe

Indian architecture has always been adored and held in high regard for its par excellence. Yet India fell behind in the discourse ever since the English conquest and the subsequent years after the end of the freedom struggle.

The architecture that was built during the colonial rule was mostly designed by the British architects, and the contribution of the Indian architects seldom found recognition. Besides, the architectural practices of the era were not "contextualised" as per the Indian environment.

After India attained Independence, the resource was scarce and the onus was on building the economy from the scratch rather than aspiring for architectural brilliance for sustainability. But from the 1970s, the architectural practices found fresh vision in the hands of the then new-age architects, yet global recognition remained uncherished until now.

For the first time, India was invited to demonstrate its architectural prowess on the prestigious podium of the London Festival of Architecture. Dikshu Kukreja, Managing Principal of CP Kukreja Architects and a world-renowned urban planner, was invited to represent India on this occasion. Kukreja presented an exhibition titled "50 Years of the Built Environment," in which he

examined the evolution of Indian architecture and design practices over the last five decades.

The exhibition marked the gracious presence of the eminent author and director of the Nehru Centre (London) Amish Tripathi and the Director of the LFA, Rosa Rogina, amongst other notable dignitaries.

On being the first Indian representative at Europe's biggest architecture festival, Kukreja says "It brings me immense joy to see contemporary Indian Architecture being received well, globally. It is a matter that is very close to my heart. It is not just about creating buildings, but how our buildings influence society. The honour of showcasing Indian Architecture through the works of C.P. Kukreja Architects at the ongoing London festival of architecture, not only puts India on the map in terms of architecture and infrastructural development but also provides great insights for visitors from all around the world to find opportunities of foreign investments in our country in terms of infrastructure. The exhibition goes a long way in showcasing the scales and opportunities that are coming up in India in terms of urban development and this provides a promising vision for the world to consider India as a favourable investment destination."

At the exhibition, Kukreja explored the landmark buildings from the 1970s and 80s which contributed to the birth of a unique architectural identity for a newly independent India. Further, he elucidated on the 1990s and 2000s architectural practices through exploratory and investigative projects, which unleashed the experimental zeal and broke the conventions-as the economic liberalisation ushered in endless possibilities in terms of new-age materials and technology. Moving into the 21st century Kukreja discussed the contemporary practices in the field of Indian architecture at the forefront of cutting-edge innovation and sustainability, while being rooted in the local context. Amish Tripathi observes "When I looked at the projects, I noticed how we could learn from the way they've used local materials and local traditions when it came to designing their projects." Reflecting on the current situation in India, Tripathi says "Many of our Indian cities have become urban heat islands because the architecture that's being used there, is not conducive to our climate. The traditional Indian architecture acknowledges the context and climate it is placed. It is cost-effective, reduces energy consumption, and has always been environmentally friendly." (LANSlife)

"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."

—Malcolm Forbes

The Shillong Times

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Courts, delayed justice

AS Chief Justice of India, Justice NV Ramana, held forth before a gathering of Indian diaspora, his main stress was that the Judiciary is answerable only to the Constitution. What he meant, and rightly so, was that politicians – or the executive manifested in government or the Opposition – need not expect the Judiciary to toe its line. Rightly so, yet fact is, as long as the judiciary takes strong positions based on Constitutional tenets, the executive and the politicians hardly ever questioned it except in a situation related to Emergency. Backroom manipulations might be attempted at, and it is up to the judiciary to draw a line. The Indian judiciary is given sufficient freedom to conduct itself in a dignified manner. But if judges opt to allow themselves to be manipulated, the fault lies with them; not with the executive. At the same time, no pillar of democracy should expect to be a law unto itself. A sense of understanding of the ground realities is a must. The people are watching; and this by itself is a guarantee against any interference.

Curiously, it is a practice for CJIs, one after another, to keep pontificating but conveniently skirting the central issues. Justice Ramana in his long speech failed to touch upon the most pressing need of the hour in the dispensation of justice. Cases in courts and even the investigations go on for unending years before the final verdict is given. Justice delayed is justice denied. Our courts dispense with justice with the speed of a snail. This is the most painful aspect of our judicial system and there seems no commitment to rectify this malaise. Neither the CJIs nor the successive governments ever bothered much.

It is worth a thought how many of the litigants can afford to fight a case through the judiciary's layers for 20 years or more. As per a recent reckoning, over five crore cases were clogging the system; and judges are still not throwing their hands up. Delaying a case for longer terms suits everyone, but bleeds those who approach courts with a grievance. This situation however helps India's corrupt bureaucrats and politicians. Investigating agencies keep probing and courts keep postponing hearings. Many verdicts come after one dies – as had famously happened also in the corruption case involving J Jayalalitha that ran through courts for many years. The merry-go-round should end if justice dispensation has to be meaningful. Judicial reforms is the way forward. What it requires is the will on the part of the executive and those heading the judiciary. Empty rhetoric takes us nowhere.

Meghalaya and Waste Management

By H H Mohrmen

In spite of all the hue and cry about the waste problem in Jowai, the state it seems is still in a dilemma not knowing what to do with the waste that it produces. The reason is that despite the Solid Waste Management Rule 2016 mandating that every state should come up with a policy on waste management, Meghalaya is yet to have one. On the other hand it is heartening to know that the waste imbroglio in Jowai has not only reached the august house and the bench of the High Court but educational institutions in the two districts had taken up the issue for discussion in their colleges.

Colleges are not Ivory towers

Colleges and universities are often blamed to be living in their own comfort zones; of ignoring local issues and spending time on providing education and issuing diplomas and degrees only. But the two colleges in Jaitia hills have made a difference by engaging students, faculty and public in discussing important issues. Recently two colleges, Jaintia Eastern College, Khliehriat and Thomas Jones College, Jowai organized a debate and seminar respectively to discuss the subject of waste. JEC in collaboration with the Jaintia Tourism and Environment Society, Jowai organized a debate to discuss the feasibility of dumping waste to reclaim the abandoned or exhausted coal mines in the region. TJC organized a one day regional seminar to discuss on the issue of waste in Jaitia hills where heads and faculty members from different colleges in the two districts, the wahch chong, public and the students took part in the program.

Lack of awareness amongst the public

When this scribe who gave a keynote address at the seminar at TJC asked the audience in the hall who among them is aware of the Solid Waste Management Rule 2016 to raise their hands, less than the numbers of finger in one hand raised their hands. Treemi Lamare and PhD scholar at NEHU found that although people in and around Jowai have started talking about segregation of waste, but very few have even heard about the SWMR 2016. Here are some of the

salient features of the SWM rule 2016.

Solid Waste Management Rule 2016

The Government revamped the Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules 2000 and notified the new Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 on April 8, 2016. The SWM Rules, 2016 shall apply to every urban local body, out-growths in urban agglomerations, census towns as declared by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India etc. Central government organisations, places of pilgrims, religious and historical importance as may be notified by respective State government from time to time

Duties of domestic waste generators

The rule says that every waste generator shall segregate and store the waste generated by them in three separate streams namely biodegradable, non biodegradable and domestic hazardous wastes in suitable bins and handover segregated wastes to authorized waste pickers or waste collectors as per the directions or notification by the local authorities from time to time. The generator should securely wrap the used sanitary waste like diapers, sanitary pads etc., in the pouches provided by the manufacturers or brand owners of these products or in a suitable wrapping material as instructed by the local authorities.

Pay for service and prohibition against burning of waste

All waste generators shall pay user fees for solid waste management, as specified in the bye-laws of the local bodies. Every street vendor shall keep suitable containers for storage of waste generated during the course of their activity and shall deposit such waste at waste storage depot or container or vehicle as notified by the local body. All resident welfare and market associations shall, in partnership with the local body, ensure segregation of waste at source. No waste generator shall throw, burn or bury the solid waste generated, on streets, open public spaces outside his premises or in the

drain or water bodies.

Responsibility of Events Organisers

No person shall organise an event or gathering of more than one hundred persons at any unlicensed place without intimating the local body. The organisers of such events shall ensure segregation of waste at source and handing over of segregated waste to waste collectors or agencies as specified by the local body. Therefore fete, church conferences or faith group gatherings or any gathering with more than one hundred people also are to follow the rules.

Construction materials and demolition waste

There is a separate rule with regard to construction and demolition material. It stated that the generator should store separately construction and demolition waste, as and when generated, in his own premises and shall dispose off as per the Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules, 2016.

Duties of the industrial units located in the area

The rule says that all industrial units using fuel and located within one hundred km from a solid waste based refuse derived fuel (RDF) plant shall make arrangements to replace at least five percent of their fuel requirement by refuse derived fuel produced from the area. Non recyclable waste having calorific value of 1500 K/cal/kg or more shall not be disposed of on landfills and shall only be utilised for generating energy either or through refuse derived fuel or by giving away as feed stock for preparing refuse derived fuel. It is also mandated that high calorific wastes shall be used for co-processing in cement or thermal power plants. We have many cement plants in the state and the government should direct the industries to use the waste as RDF in their units.

State leadership is not aware of SWM rule

The rule has specified that it is the duty of the Secretary-in-charge, Urban Development in the States to prepare a state policy and solid waste management strategy for the state. The same should be

done in consultation with stakeholders including representatives of waste pickers, self help groups and similar groups working in the field of waste management. It should also acknowledge the primary role played by the informal sector of waste pickers, waste collectors and recycling industry in reducing waste and provide broad guidelines regarding integration of waste pickers or informal waste collectors in the waste management system.

The State policy and strategy on solid waste management, should lay emphasis on waste reduction, reuse, recycling, recovery and optimum utilisation of various components of solid waste. This is to ensure minimisation of waste going to the landfill and minimise impact of solid waste on human health and environment. Sadly the state is yet to have its own waste management policy.

Solid waste management in hilly areas

The SWM rule 2016 has special regulations with regards to states in the hilly areas. Even if the duties and responsibilities of the local authorities shall be the same as mentioned in rule 15, it however had an additional clause which says that construction of landfill on the hill shall be avoided. It also says that suitable land shall be identified in the plain areas down the hill within 25 kilometers for setting up a sanitary landfill. In a discussion over a cup of tea during the seminar break one of the senior citizens asked 'if the political leaders in the state are aware of the rules with regards to landfill in the hilly region because they would have to be careful with suggesting locations for such landfills.

Take-aways from the seminar

The two take-aways from the seminar are to pressure the government to have its own State Waste Management rules and to make people aware of the 2016 rules. The Jowai impasse has drawn attention to the fact that the state is in urgent need of a waste management policy. The second take-away is that all the waste generators should start segregating their waste as it is the only option to manage our waste.

A fit case of judicial accountability getting ignored Controversial remarks not part of vacation bench's order

By K Raveendran

It is all very well that the petition moved by former BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma for combining all the FIRs registered against her in different parts of the country for her offending remarks about Prophet Mohammed has been dismissed by a Supreme Court vacation bench in a two-line order.

It goes a long way to protect the credibility of the highest court of the land that some of the highly emotional remarks made by the judges during the hearing of the petition are not part of the final order.

According to the established law, delivered in a judgment by a regular bench of the Supreme Court, comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah, the remarks made by judges are not part of the judicial records and therefore do not

Chief Justice N V Ramana has been approached for the withdrawal of 'uncalled for' remarks by the vacation bench. A letter to this effect went to the extent of alleging that the judges' remarks linking Sharma's comment with the beheading of Kanhaiya Lal in Udaipur justified the brutal act and amounted to giving clean chit to the killers.

The judges seemed to have been carried away by the protests against Nupur Sharma's remarks to the extent of refusing to apply uniform standards to her petition, in the process straying into areas that were not related even remotely. When it was pointed out on behalf of the former BJP leader, facing national and international wrath, that there is precedent of FIRs being combined as had happened in the case of



matter. In fact, Justice Chandrachud's bench had expressed strongly against remarks made by judges during hearing being taken as the final word. The bench went to the extent of saying that judicial accountability is lost where oral regimes prevail and emphasised that the judges should speak through their judgments and orders and not through oral directions. 'The written order is what is binding and enforceable'.

The bench issued the important ruling in a petition by the Election Commission challenging a remark made by the Madras High Court that a case of murder must be registered against the commission for causing covid to surge by allowing elections to take place in four states and one union territory.

While there is no doubt that the remarks made by Nupur Sharma in a television channel debate about Gyanvapi mosque were by all means revolting to the nation's collective conscience, some of the oral remarks made by the vacation bench, comprising Justices Surya Kant and JB Pardiwala, appeared to have strayed from the line of judicial accountability into highly subjective emotional responses.

Already, demands have surfaced for the withdrawal of some of the observations, which media units all over the country have celebrated with gay abandon, bringing serious setback to the Indian government's bid to calm nerves of important partners in the Arab Muslim world over the highly damaging remarks made by the now sacked BJP spokesperson.

Republic Arbab Goswami, since she is fearing physical danger to herself, the judges said Arbab Goswami was a journalist and such privileges are not available to a party spokesperson. The vacation bench judges seemed to have overlooked to the fact that the laws applicable to a journalist are the same as those that may be applied to any other citizen.

Even more objectionable was the questioning by the judges of Nupur Sharma's alleged 'arrogance' in approaching the Supreme Court directly rather than going to a magistrate. A court has to go by the law of the land and decide the matter before it accordingly.

If the petition is fit to be allowed, it should be allowed and if it deserved to be rejected it should be done so on the basis of the applicable law and there is no need to go into the state of mind of the petitioners, except when that particular state of mind itself is the main consideration. The judges clearly exceeded their brief in this.

The bench questioning television debates on issues that are sub-judice is also out of sync with the reality in which every second issue in public life is these days pending consideration of one court or the other. Going by the vacation bench's logic, the current developments in Maharashtra should be a strictly no-go for the media as the Shiv Sena rebel MLAs' case is before the Supreme Court and promises to be there for some more time. Surely, it does not build up a case for journalists to go on vacation! (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

BJP'S manipulative master stroke

Editor,
With the BJP's choice of Droupadi Murmu as their presidential candidate, the BJP has once again outwitted the Opposition. It is evident that the BJP led NDA government had sensed the danger of losing out the highest office of the country to the Opposition and have cunningly have dealt master stroke by choosing a tribal woman as their candidate. Now it looks like a foregone conclusion that Droupadi would be the clear winner and perhaps with a big margin over Yaswant Sinha.

Two factors are in favour of the BJP candidate – firstly she is a woman and that itself is a plus point to her candidature and secondly, she is a tribal woman (belonging to the Santhal Community) and being the first tribal to occupy the topmost office in the country, will undoubtedly guarantee her victory. Had the opposition done the same before their opponents it would have been a different matter. As a tribal person I feel proud and happy that finally a tribal would be seen at Raisina Hill as the president of the country. However, critically reading into it, I see this as a hypocritical act of the BJP because it is evident to every sensible person that they are doing this not for love of tribal people but for their selfish motives.

Being a member of the BJP rank, Mrs. Droupadi would undoubtedly be a puppet in the hands of the government. Everyone knows that this would be an inevitable outcome.

Clearly this is a fight between safeguarding the secularism of our Constitution championed by the Opposition and the manipulative politics perpetrated by the BJP led NDA. In my opinion, to safeguard our democracy, it is important to choose non-political persons as candidates to the topmost office. Late President Abdul Kalam was such a candidate and as a matter of fact, he could not be manipulated by any political party and he staunchly safeguarded the integrity of our Constitution. Since these seen only political persons assuming the role of the President of the country; persons who only towed the line of their parties. This same political manipulation would continue if Droupadi is elected. She would have no voice to oppose any Bill passed by the government even if that Bill goes against the interests of the democratic system itself.

Perhaps the lacuna of our Constitution is to leave open the topmost post of the country to political manipulations. Consequently, the president becomes a mere pawn in the chess game of political parties. Had the Constitution provided that no person affiliated to any political party whatsoever, be permitted to enter the contest, the situation would have been different today.

The post of president should have been left to more worthy candidates like renowned academicians, scientists, lawyers, philanthropists, social activists or eminent independent-thinking bureaucrats. As of today, the office of president of the Republic remains largely a nominal office as he or she has to succumb to political pressures of the ruling government. Let us sit and watch how intelligently and responsibly our MPs and MLAs who constitute the electoral college, will vote on July 18. Will good sense prevail over party pressure? Jai Hind!

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb
Via email

Teachers weeping: Government evades responsibility

Editor,
Under the leadership of the NPP, the state government has tried its best to suppress, exploit, and intimidate the teaching community at different levels. Now, the Ad-hoc school teachers are agitating to demand their rights. It's ridiculous that the government seems to push its responsibility to the Management Committees of schools to act against the agitating teachers. The actual ball is in the government's court, but they are trying to pass it to others instead of coming out with a just solution. It is not surprising that the NPP-led government has the habit of blaming others for its wrongdoings. Is this government

perfect? No, not at all; perfectionism does not exist in human creation. The government must understand that by blaming others for its wrong deeds it is demonstrating that it is avoiding responsibility. It doesn't accept accountability when committing mistakes, although people recognize it. The government of the day used a shortcut method to play safely, "it is a quick escape from guilt." Blame is an excellent tactic when the government feels defensive.

The government should judge the actual crisis of the teachers rather than base it's actions on their agitation. It doesn't take a serious decision on the Ad-hoc school teachers. The government is instead trying to flex its muscles to dominate every section of people in the state. It is an act of harassment and an insult to the teaching community as a whole. Surprisingly, the "Party Riewlum" (regional parties) seem to be indifferent to the matter at hand, and they are voiceless and show no courage to speak about the issue before the NPP leadership.

Yours, etc.
Batskhem Mawlein
Shillong-2

Draining of state's resources

Editor,
Apart from questionable recruitment of so-called experts by the state government now and also in the past there's this mindless

unnecessary expenditure on the appointment of retired government officials as Chairpersons in various vague commissions or the other. These retired officials care two hoots about teachers who are not given their dues despite being lowly paid. The government should stop forthwith any such unwarranted expenditure which is putting a strain on the public exchequer.

Yours etc.,
Fearless Warjri,
Via email

Single use plastic banned...but?

Editor,
It's great and quite impressive to see shopkeepers refusing to offer plastic bags to carry groceries etc. Having said this, I personally see a few businesses still actively handing over items in plastic bags in deference to customer's requests. This isn't the first time that single-use plastics have been banned, however, every time, it's the end users who collectively stood strong to deny, oppose and not follow such a needed action which perhaps is the loudest topic of the generation of today.

Of all the pictures and videos shared celebrating "World Environment Day", here's where the actual game is. This is a call to everyone to strictly obey and follow the norm. "A NO should mean NO" and if there's anyone who's still offering plastic/s with loving gestures, one

must strongly REFUSE and COUNSEL that individual/owner/shop etc.

One must also be concerned to understand that "paper" and using more of paper bags will mean more trees being cut, which will have a direct impact on the environment. Hence Government must promote more cottage and small-scale industries intending to produce more cloth bags and packs, which can create employment for many, as well as serving the end user/s in the best way possible.

Some cities had been considerably successful on this count because of the strong norms followed by the citizenry and also sustaining the discipline of no shortcuts and off-the-table requests.

Henceforth I will be more responsible to carry my own bag, and never use or promote plastic bag/s. It's a "promise" to myself, to others and everyone around and only when everyone abides by the rule will we see a change for the better and this time around we will be proud of making a genuine contribution towards the environment or mother planet.

!!! "LET'S DO IT, BECAUSE IF WE DON'T, there's NONE who will"!!!

Yours etc.,
Priyankur Nandy,
MakeSomeoneSmile,
Via email

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

"Hatred is something peculiar. You will always find it strongest and most violent where there is the lowest degree of culture."

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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NEIGRIHMS needs advocates

NEWS that the North East Indira Gandhi Regional Institute for Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) is reeling from overload of patients with few staff and operation theatres. Being the only super-speciality hospital in Meghalaya and being patronised by patients across the region, the services provided by NEIGRIHMS are in great demand but there are some administrative structures that need to be remedied by the Union Ministry for Health & Family Welfare. Whereas IAS officers posted to the North East are paid special allowances and in the case of Meghalaya even their income tax is exempted, the doctors posted to NEIGRIHMS coming in from different states of the country ought to be appropriately compensated and incentivised, else why would they give up their positions elsewhere and come to Meghalaya where the best of educational facilities for their children are not available. Add to that the adverse socio-political milieu which does not favour so-called "outsiders," so why would anyone want to stick their necks out? Over several years, NEIGRIHMS also has not had directors with the calibre to wrestle with the Union Home Ministry on a better deal for the Institution. The Director is best placed to be the advocate for the Institution in Delhi and to also manage the staff and faculty so that they give their best.

The present Director, Dr Nalin Mehta has his pulse on the problems and is trying his utmost to bring the Institute up to the desired level but he also cannot prevent doctors from leaving for greener pastures which the AIIMS, Guwahati seems to offer. What is visible here is the preferential treatment given by the Union Government to BJP-ruled states. NEIGRIHMS was started by the Congress Government and that could be the reasons for its neglect. Meghalaya being the host state, it is regrettable that successive governments never took keen interest in the affairs of NEIGRIHMS and have not played the role of staunch advocates of the Institute.

NEIGRIHMS was established by the Government of India in 1987 but by the time it could be set up and start operating from its own premises at Mawdiangdiang in 2007, much time had passed. Effectively therefore NEIGRIHMS has functioned as a full-fledged facility for about 15 years. The MBBS teaching programme started in 2008 and several batches of graduates have passed out from the Institute. What is needed now is a push to get the Union Health Ministry to turn its benevolent eyes towards NEIGRIHMS which has a lot of promise and is soon coming up with its Cancer Care wing amongst other Departments.

Is every non-indigenous person in Meghalaya an invader?

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

We read or rather studied in history books about invaders and marauders who invaded foreign lands to expand their political or economic empires and enslaved those communities they invaded. The Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies, which was popularly known as the East India Company was founded in 1600. The Company gained foothold in India with the establishment of a factory in Masulipatnam on the eastern coast in 1611 and the grant of rights to establish a factory in Surat in 1612 by the emperor Jehangir. The turning point in the history of the British East India company were the victories in the battles of Plassey and Buxar in 1757 and 1764 respectively, which finally enabled the merchants of London to consolidate their powers in India. By the Government of India Act 1858, which gave the Crown of England the suzerain power, they (merchants) cemented their reign in India for 200 years and Mr L.G Shullai, (Khasi political historian) wryly described it as, "Ki Nongkhall ki kylla Nongsynshar" (The Merchants who became Rulers).

The British East India Company extended their interests in the North Eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent via the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. There are just two celebrated stories of resistance against the British being projected in these hills, namely, the Nongkhaw rebellion in 1829 which was led by the Syiem Tirot Sing and the Jaintia rebellion in 1860 led by the commoner known as u Kiang Nangbah. Interestingly we tend to forget Syiem Bormanick of Hima Shyllong, the first Khasi Syiem who put up a formidable challenge against British expansionism and who marched to Dimuria or Doomerah and confronted the officials of the East India company for illegally taking over the revenue collection at Doomerah without the consent of the Hima in 1828.

For hundred twenty-one years the entire region of Hynniewtrep was under the British Imperialists and we have had our own share of miseries and pains under the British yoke. But yet in our own ways and ingenuities resisted against the mighty British Empire, challenged the corrupt and exploitative representatives of the Merchants of London who worked as political agents cum judges and administrators etc.

On the eve of India's independence and as per the Independence Act 1947, the Hynniewtrep people and their relatively small Hima or native States numbering 25 of them had the liberty to choose to either join with India or Pakistan or to remain independent. The third option was not a viable one as they were small in size and would not have been able to survive on their own nor withstand

any external aggression even if they stood united as one single entity. Therefore, the Khasi native States opted to accede to the Dominion of India and separately signed the Instrument of Accession between 1947 and 1948.

The British rule has had an adverse impact on tribal life, culture, religion, governance and politics, land and natural resources etc. But after Independence things were redirected towards massive transformation with the adoption of the Constitution in 1950 and its foundational values of justice, equality, plurality and democracy. There is no denying the fact that during the course of framing the Constitution and Constituent Assembly

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sessions (December 1946 to November 1949) there were sharp differences within the Hynniewtrep community with regards to the position of the Khasi tribal community within the larger Indian State vis a vis the plight and future of the Khasi native States.

Were the Hynniewtrep people able to negotiate and address their issues and aspirations for self-determination within the framework of the Constituent Assembly? It is still debatable. There were mainly two political divisions, viz, the Federation of Khasi States, which included all the 25 native States and

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other individuals and the Khasi Jaintia Federated State under the patronage of Rev J.J.M Nichols Roy. The former, were not compromising on the status of Khasi States as per the terms of Agreement or Instrument of Accession (IOA) signed by them. In fact, the Myllem State represented by Sati Raja filed a case against the Dominion of India in the Federal Court in 1949 and sought for transfer of suzerain power to the Hima or State of Myllem.

But due to political exigencies withdrew the case in the larger interests of India. The latter felt content with the mechanisms provided under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for safeguarding the tribal rights. Prior to this it was expressed and resolved in the mass gathering held on 2 August 1946, in Students' Field Jaiaw Shillong thus; "Be it resolved that this unprecedented and great gathering where thousands of representatives from Khasi States and British Areas are present from all parts of the District express their ardent desire and demand that they should be united into one Khasi-Jaintia Federated State along the lines planned by Rev J.J.M Nichols Roy, and

its own actions. We are today reeling under the perception that the miniscule tribal community will be overwhelmed by populous communities from outside. No doubt, there are anxieties that small tribes (including Hynniewtrep) face about losing their culture, identity and livelihood but this anxiety cannot be removed by criminalities. Protections given by the Indian Constitution for the indigenous community are not in any way opposed to the rights of peace and security that non-indigenous people and workers are supposed to enjoy within the State. Moreover, it is worrying that laws that offer protection for the life, Land and Livelihoods of the indigenous people are being weakened by indigenous people themselves for their self-aggrandizing capitalist greed.

The rising incidents of crime against non-indigenous daily laborers across the city is alarming. There are unreported incidents that tourists too are being targeted. Talking of tourism which now seems to be booming in the State, it must be noted that tourism does not only mean rainfall, water falls, mountains, rivers, canyons, dresses, statues, viewpoints etc but there are also visitors, both foreign and domestic, whose interest is to meet face to face with people in order to learn and engage with our ethos and culture. Should we beat up every visitor or every worker when he/she sets foot into our localities and count them as invaders? Reza M. Sheeba Seydeek, a student from Kerala, who faced the unprovoked attack in Jaiaw area recently penned down as follows, "The social issues and their (Khasis) grievances regarding their social security, job, land ownership, and culture all should be protected and are genuine. Meghalaya government... and the authorities who neglect the tribes are only responsible for this (attack). The socio-political issues faced by them should be put forward by political organisations with progressive politics and... not through mobocracy." Very well observed by a scholar of social science who was in the state for a brief period as an internee with some NGO.

I sincerely appeal to one and all, especially my tribesmen and women, young and old alike - let us work towards a democratic solution to the problems plaguing the Community. We begin by separating targeted violence from normal fights. Also, we should not be denying the existence of targeted violence; instead we should condemn it. We must remember that a crime is a crime and it has to be tackled head on as per the law. We stand firm where we have to stand firm and be considerate where we ought to be considerate. We should not be bought. Let reason, the rule of law and the Constitution prevail.

regulation meant to preserve and protect against land alienation and wanton destruction of natural resources for self-aggrandisement are being diluted. Perhaps, the Benami Act and Trading Regulations have become means to get rich quick. Therefore, U Soso Thom's analogy of the Gibeonite in his introduction to Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniewtrep (Olden Days of U Hynniewtrep) holds true and that the downfall of "Jaidynriew" or Community is due to

marked with white lines (of course manned by Traffic personnel), then the problem of the public would be solved. And revenue could be collected time wise, same as in parking lots.

(6) The above-mentioned suggestions would be futile if this one is not employed and it is - our judicious traffic police who can do so. We request our traffic police to execute their duty without fear of the privileged. All citizens are equal. Special treatment demanded by the high and mighty has demoralised the police. If the morale of Traffic Police is up then we should see fewer traffic snarls in the days to come.

(5) Complaints of free parking space for bill payment (MUDA or MeECL etc) and those going to hospitals or diagnostic centres, made worse with clamping of tyres. If the STP could survey a few areas to be

Tigers, traitors in a Maharashtra twist

By Jagdish Rattanani

The BJP and the Shiv Sena have been running a mini, local area version of competitive Hindutva politics for sometime now. As the Sena leader Sanjay Raut told the treasury benches in Parliament once: "We do not need certificates on being strong Hindus from anyone. We are the headmasters of the Hindutva school you study in." That comment, and many others that have been exchanged in the last two-and-a-half-years, were part of a vicious political war that brought the two "natural allies" virtually at each other's throats. For those who paid careful attention to the State, it offered a fascinating account of how power was the prize and everything else a tool. This is of course understood to be the case in the charged political climate of today but in Maharashtra it was a game played out in the open. If Hindutva politics is characterised as hatred of the other, here was Hindutva that showed hatred in the family as it were, hatred of one version of itself.

It is against this backdrop that the BJP had vowed to pull down the government of Uddhav Thackeray, whose sin, after all, only was to ask



to keep the position of the Chief Minister for the Shiv Sena, so that the two parties work as equal partners in their long-standing alliance. He claimed this was agreed; the BJP said there was no such deal and the bigger partner in terms of MLAs (which is the BJP) would keep the prize. It was the BJP's refusal to play on that equal footing that forced Uddhav Thackeray to form an alliance with the Congress and Sharad Pawar's National Congress Party (NCP). In return, the BJP launched relentless attacks on Thackeray and his team, with the heavyweight support of the Centre.

The BJP's Maharashtra project has now succeeded at last. Uddhav, son of the founder of the Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray, is out and a rebel Sena member Eknath Shinde has become the 20th Chief Minister of Maharashtra, with the BJP's support. The BJP, half-a-term gone, still could not grab the Chief Minister's position. But with a government it controls, there is a lot that can be done to change the narrative and build the base. The problem: as the elderly and astute Sharad Pawar has pointed out, the one issue before the new government will be to gain credibility with the people of Maharashtra.

The manner in which the split in the Sena was engineered, the offer of the Chief Minister's position to the breakaway faction and the sudden inclusion of BJP's former Chief Minister Devendra Phadnis as the Deputy Chief Minister to balance power equations clearly laid bare the fears of the Shiv Sena since the last elections - that the one aim of the BJP has been to weaken the Shiv Sena, to turn it into a junior, even insignificant, partner, and to grow the BJP's own base in the State.

Right now, the Shiv Sena is a party that was bested - the tiger that was beaten by what it calls traitors. It was the underdog that put up a fight but then went down under the weight of the BJP giant. It strengthens the im-

age of totalitarian control by BJP today - and the uneasy and growing realisation that the party can get away with anything. While the ED summons and investigates Shiv Sena members, no questions are asked on who paid for the five-star bills and chartered flights that secured the breakaway MLAs in BJP-ruled States.

Politically, the Shiv Sena will have to come to terms with how so many of its MLAs rebelled, sitting within a party that itself was known for complete control, now not catching even a hint of the drama that was underway right under its nose, and ongoing for some time at least. This is clearly weak political control.

The Shiv Sena was built as a one-man party under the complete control of the Sena pramukh. It would be unimaginable for MLAs to revolt against Bal Thackeray. This writer has travelled with the senior Thackeray and sat with him while he interviewed candidates for party tickets - he could mock, dismiss, chuckle, question - and still would be revered. Nobody dared question Balasaheb.

That kind of control has clearly not come to the son who has been more in the nature of a gentlemanly politician, often seen speaking in a measured tone and noted for decisions that have made him and his son Aadiya Thackeray a darling of progressives and important environmental groups. This happened particularly after Mumbai's lungs, as the Aarey forest region in the Western suburbs is known, was spared the concretisation that was coming with a metro rail project pushed by the BJP but stopped by the Shiv Sena. Surprisingly, this is the very first decision that the new government has revoked, even before it had settled down. Soon, bulldozers will be uprooting trees in Aarey and the first fight of civil society with the BJP government will likely begin here.

For Uddhav Thackeray and the Shiv Sena, this is a challenging time. Yet, the BJP has given him material. It is for him to turn it into political dynamite. As the new government works on its credibility, the Sena will only have to hammer away the point that a Maharashtra government was broken on orders from New Delhi, by MLAs who went into hiding in Gujarat. Shinde will find it challenging to convince the people of the State that this is what Thackeray would have wished - the story that he has peddled soon after he rebelled. In his words, what has happened is a "victory for the Hindutva ideology of Balasaheb Thackeray." He should know that Balasaheb would never have stood for this, but equally he would know that Hindutva is a label to be used, power is the ideology and Uddhav Thackeray is now the enemy. Uddhav Thackeray will have to take his case to the people very fast, and take on the role of Maharashtra's wounded warrior who would fight to the last.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Separate IAS cadre for Meghalaya

Editor,
As far as I know, the IAS officers posted to Meghalaya are under the Assam-Meghalaya joint cadre, under the administrative control of their respective state segments. It may be noted that small states like Nagaland and Goa have separate IAS cadres, despite being similar or smaller in size than Meghalaya. Due to the joint cadre system, many HOD level officers of the Meghalaya Civil Service (MCS) miss out on the opportunity of being promoted to the IAS, and even fewer get to reach the senior post of Commissioner and Secretary in charge of various departments of the state government. We speak at length in the media about the shortage of local IAS officers in the state, but we fail to explore this alternate route whereby more MCS officers

can be promoted to the IAS, if we had our own separate Meghalaya cadre.

The direct recruit IAS officers would have lesser options of switching over to Assam, and would be compelled to serve our state, with the exception of central deputation. Besides these points, the state government should pursue the matter of increasing the SCS quota of the IAS for the state, thus thereby securing more MCS officers into the IAS.

I sincerely hope the state government would take up the matter on a serious note.

Yours etc.,
Ardor Hynniewta
Shillong 1

Walk of hope and promises

Editor,
It was heartening to watch the news of our DGP Dr LR Bishnoi walking from Police Bazaar to Jaiaw Lumdingri, to have a first-hand

experience of the woes of our commuters. All sections of the public from drivers to pedestrians to shops nearby had a conversation with the DGP, who it seems has promised them a fairer deal.

Road expansion is no longer possible owing to the sad outcome of our propensity to violate the PWD acts. During the Assam time till the late 60s, house owners by the roadside were always informed that they should maintain a six feet distance from the foundation of their buildings to the nearest road (not the bitumen surfaced one but also the footpaths). We failed to comply and so here we are with Shillong expanding by leaps and bounds.

The only way to cope with these narrow roads is by (1) Strict implementation of traffic rules. Now with digitalisation and smartphones, the errant drivers could be punished (a fine plus the penalties left before license seized) in 24 hours as all registration plates are linked

to DTO office's software. Lest we forget, registration plates should be clearly visible (as per law) and any concealed one executed purposely should be questioned and taken to task. Concealing or smearing with mud has its dubious objective and should be thoroughly investigated. Trucks with folded rear plates should be severely punished. This is serious as it is practised in hit and run cases. And even if the traffic police is immediately informed by his friend on that route or passers-by, it is not wise for that police to eye on the front, risking him/herself as stories tell us.

(2) All vehicles barring ambulances are to line up irrespective of designation. If a person in the ambulance could get the phone number of the traffic police at a congested junction, the patient could reach the nearest hospital on time.

(3) Refuelling etiquette - Refuelling during school hours with vehicles allowed to cross the road from left to right is one of the causes of

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"When you reach the end of your rope,
tie a knot in it and hang on."

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

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Igniting emotions

THE Supreme Court has rightly admonished former BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma for her communally loaded comments against Islam. Speaking in a perspicacious manner the apex court said she has a "loose tongue", she has "ignited emotions across the country" and that she was solely responsible for what happened in the aftermath of her utterances in a TV debate. The observation that she should have apologised to the nation also must be well-taken; and the poser from the court as to why she was not arrested be viewed in the right spirit. While the BJP has suspended her to pacify the Islamists, the government too should have taken a stronger view. In a nation where religious beliefs of one and all are respected, loose talk from any quarter should best be avoided. However, the kind of politics that the BJP pursued has left sufficient scope for the likes of Nupur Sharma to hold forth.

All this is not to justify the aggressive responses from sections of Muslims to the controversial comments. The Islamic world as a whole rose in protest and some countries summoned the Indian envoys and registered their protests. That's all fine as long as they have not taken matters to a more complex level. The BJP having announced Sharma's immediate suspension was in itself a positive response. India is a nation that guarantees freedom of speech. Its TV debates are a free-for-all and often lack rhyme or reason. Passions rise. Even discourses outside the TV frames too are often of a loose nature. Unlike the enforced calm of Islamic nations, India is a noisy democracy. As a society, we cannot keep our mouths shut.

The murder of a tailor in Udaipur (Rajasthan) and the killing of a chemist in Amravati (Maharashtra) that followed the instant protests against the former BJP spokesperson were equally shocking and are condemnable. They were done to death for their positive responses to Sharma's comments -- as per media reports. By doing so, at least small sections of Muslims have demonstrated a tendency to go overboard. It is important that they understand the harm they cause to their own community in a nation where they enjoy equal rights as citizens. The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution have ensured as much. Appreciably, India has matured to a level when communal riots are rare; unlike the scenarios till the time of the Gujarat riots in 2002. It should be in the interests of all to maintain and promote communal peace. A spark can ignite a flame, which could ultimately play havoc with the lives of one and all.

Letters to the Editor

On community policing

Editor,
Social media posts and news items on local papers together with the ST Polls column in the Shillong Times have shown tremendous public support to the initiative taken by the Jaiaw Pyllun Dorbars to begin night patrolling by members of the Dorbar Shnong complemented by pooling of human resources from the Seng Samla and Seng Longmie of the respective Shnongs involved. This initiative simply shows the concern that elders of Shnongs and the common citizen have over any threat to the peace and tranquility of their respective areas of jurisdiction. It also amply demonstrates that common people are fed up to their necks over the hooliganism, the delinquency and the misbehavior of local hoodlums who terrorise ordinary citizens by their nefarious criminal activities. Apparently these goons come from family backgrounds that lack parental control and this has necessitated action from the Dorbar and its office bearers to take on this neglected parental responsibility. One must commend the elders of Jaiaw Pyllun for their public minded action.

Now after all's said and done one must also consider the sustainability of such Dorbar initiatives. Dorbar members are voluntary workers with family and other domestic issues to attend to 24x7. Can such an initiative be sustained? For, please remember that the anti social elements are simply waiting for elder fatigue to set in before they restart their disreputable activities again. Then we come back full circle from where we started! We have to make this initiative of law-abiding citizens work. I have always advocated for Community Policing for I have seen its operational success in other similar situations in other parts of the world. How it can work in Shillong will depend entirely on the understanding, conceptualization and implementation of the concept between the Police Department and the Dorbars concerned. For, let us be very clear on one thing. Close cooperation between Dorbars and Police is the greatest threat to the nefarious activities of antisocial elements and the last thing they want to see happen. They will try their level best to thwart and discredit such cooperation because such public collaboration against crime is not in their interest. There will also be emotional say-nay-to-everything ele-

ments within the Dorbar who will take the side of the criminals on this call. They will have to be dealt with. Whatever, I simply wish to convey my good wishes to the courageous Dorbars of Jaiaw Pyllun. May your efforts bear the fruit you seek to achieve.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Crying Need for a State University

Editor,
This write-up is intended to serve as an awakening call to all the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos of Meghalaya to perceive the imminent threat due to the worsening condition of the education sector in the State. It is extremely unfortunate that all the colleges in the State are bound to be affiliated to North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) whereas the University has literally lost moral and ethical right to affiliate colleges. The University has not been able to deliver anything that it is obligated to do with regards to affiliation of colleges. Of course, there was a pretext - Covid-19 pandemic to cover up its maladministration. But even

after the lockdown ceased, the University has conducted semester exams with perfunctory participation and derisory administration in a very unorganized, irresponsible and messy manner. Questions were supplied by the University but the answer scripts were evaluated by the respective college teachers. The marks are submitted by the colleges to NEHU after which the University declares the results.

What a disgusting lack of concordance and unethical way of conducting the exams. This has resulted in the complete loss of credibility of the exams, and hence the results of the exams manifested aberrance. Many students who with true spirit wished to take part in free and fair competition have been utterly disappointed. The University can neither fix exam dates nor make routines by taking into consideration all possible factors such as sufficient time semesters' teaching and learning as per binding rule and adaptability to the academic calendar. A person who is unable to communicate in English is now the Vice Chancellor of the University. He is busy organizing non-academic programmes without paying heed to the crying needs of the University. In some of the major departments,

only two/three teachers run the show haphazardly and students are at the receiving end. Guest lecturers are appointed semester wise and they are made to teach one month or so with strong instructions from their respective HODs to complete the course within the given time.

The teaching and learning process is not taking place ethically. Moreover, poor guest lecturers remain unpaid for months together even though they come for one and a half months at their own expense. The Examination Department does not check PhD theses, submitted by PhD scholars to check whether they meet the criteria as per UGC guidelines. The University has become a leading one in producing copy and paste PhD degree holders. Another grim reality prevailing in our environment is that there is none among the people in the corridors of power or the ruling dispensation who have the guts to establish a State University. The present day politicians in the State are by and large persons without any firm conviction and vision to do something that is a game changer. Only able and visionary leadership with strong political will can do something that scripts history. But, at present, we

cannot see anybody among the ministers, MLA's and so-called leaders with that robust personality to undertake such a challenge.

States like Manipur have a State-run University as well as a Central University besides many private universities. Assam has several State Universities, two Central Universities and many private universities. It will be extremely dangerous for the State's education sector to be left to the mercy of a University like NEHU which has become a den of all kinds of nasty politics of people who are stooges of their masters in Delhi. These stooges do not have time to think about developing the University and affiliated colleges. They manage the affairs of the University at their whims and fancies. Although the University was set up specifically to cater to the educational development of the region, I feel that at NEHU is rather harming our educational sector. A society with a degenerating education system has no future.

Yours etc.,
Wanjop U. Laloo,
Via email

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Shiv Sena's 'Maha' battle for Survival

By Rajdeep Sardesai

"Whoever becomes chief minister, the remote control will always be with me."

Sitting on a silver throne-like armchair, sipping a glass of white wine, that was Bal Thackeray's typically blunt response when asked whether he would consider his son Uddhav Thackeray as a potential chief minister nominee if the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance won the 2004 Maharashtra assembly elections. Less than 20 years later, not only has Uddhav Thackeray's government been pushed to the brink by an unprecedented internal rebellion but even the 'remote control' is moving out of Matoshree, home of the Thackerays, suggesting a serious existential crisis for the party founded more than half a century ago as a flagbearer of a 'sons of the soil' movement for Maharashtra's asmita (self respect).

The Shiv Sena's predicament is partly that of any family-centric regional party whose identity revolves around a larger than life individual: once the founder withdraws from the political stage, how do the successors ensure their continued supremacy? Be it an Akhilesh Yadav in UP, a Tejaswi Yadav in Bihar, a Sukhbir Badal in Punjab, a HD Kumaraswamy in Karnataka or indeed, the Gandhis of the Congress, dynastical privilege is subject to diminishing returns. Even Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal, which is often held up as an example of successful dynastical handover, faces a future challenge: after Naveen babu, the founder, who? Only the DMK has been able to ensure relative dominance in Tamil Nadu ever since the demise of M Karunanidhi because its cadres have remained mostly intact.

The Shiv Sena too claims to be driven by their solid cadre-based shakha (branch) network but central to this unusual arrangement was the towering persona of Bal Thackeray. The political cartoonist turned politician was sui generis: a rabble-rousing neta who never fought an election, the unquestioned 'supremo' who presided over a loose mafia-like structure that evoked fear and loyalty in equal measure, a demagogue who openly endorsed

the politics of 'thokshahi' (violent intimidation) while representing regional and nationalist aspirations.

Trying to emulate Thackeray senior's charisma was always going to be a hard act to follow and to Uddhav Thackeray's credit, he didn't pretend to be his father's duplicate. But in bravely attempting to carve out his own identity as a more moderate, accommodating face of a Sena-led government, he forgot that a tiger doesn't change its stripes.

Over the years, Sainiks have built a reputation as Mumbai's lumpenised street

warriors, digging up cricket pitches, refusing to allow Pakistani artistes to perform, roughing up opponents: from south Indians to Muslims, the 'enemy' figure has changed over time but not the party's distinctive militant character. Not surprisingly, rebel Sena leader Eknath Shinde's CV includes leading a mob that set on fire a Thane hospital where his mentor Anand Dighe died after a road accident operation.

While the soft-spoken Uddhav and his Jesuit college educated son Aadiya represent a more urbane face of Sena politics, the original image of being a firebrand party of hard-nosed street-fighters has led to a certain dissonance in style and functioning. When a Maharashtra MP was charged with sedition by a Sena government over her insistence on reciting the Hanuman Chalisa, the cadres were perplexed by the 'secular' shift, a confusion exploited by family rebel, the mercurial Raj Thackeray. While an Aadiya's Thackeray's commitment to environmental causes is truly admirable, it hardly resonates with the Sena rank and file who are clearly clueless about climate change and would rather take up more emotive issues linked to identity politics.

But this implosion is not just an ideological or generational battle within the Sena. The split in the party would not have taken place without the conscious attempt by the BJP to capture the Sena's political space. When the Shiv Sena and BJP first came together in 1988, the rules of engagement were clear: the Sena would get primacy in Maharashtra, the BJP would be the national player. The

betrayal of 2019 when the Sena broke away from the BJP to form a post poll Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance with the NCP and Congress was 'revenge' for losing out in 2014. The 2022 coup is now retaliation for the perfidy of 2019: such is the animosity between the state leaderships of the two parties that the Enforcement Directorate has been brazenly misused to settle scores.

Those aligned to Uddhav Thackeray are facing the full heat of the agency's powers while the break-away group is virtually guaranteed immunity judging by the BJP's recent 'washing machine' track record.

The choices before the Thackerays in the face of the BJP's undiluted political aggression are limited. A return to a BJP-led alliance would be a loss of face, an acceptance of junior partner status, forever at risk of being swallowed by the national juggernaut. Sticking by the MVA would mean a further erosion in its Hindutva ethos. Going it alone means risking isolation. Ahead of a crucial 'do or die' BMC elections - the country's richest civic corporation remains the Sena's last fortress - the Thackerays can ill afford another misstep. At stake is not just a greatly diminished family legacy but the party's very survival as a major player in the state's politics.

Post-script: In the 1990s, the seat negotiations between the BJP and Shiv Sena involved direct dealings between Bal Thackeray and Pramod Mahajan at the former's Matoshree residence. Once when Thackeray was miffed, Mahajan had to spend hours assuaging him. How did the Sena chieftain eventually relent? "I gave him a box of his favorite imported Cuban cigars!" laughed the BJP leader. Times sure have changed.

(The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

Find a new way to ensure probity Scrap defection law

By Manish Tewari

"The fact remains that over the past 37 years the anti-defection law has failed to fulfil the foremost objective for which it was enacted"

The coup d'état in the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra leading to the ouster of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government once again underscores the complete redundancy of the anti-defection legislative mechanism. The first private member's bill that I had moved when I entered Parliament was to relax the rigours of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution of India colloquially called the anti-defection law.

Seeing the whip-driven tyranny that drove legislative process had convinced me very early in the day that though well-intentioned this particular legislative fiat had backfired. It had sucked democracy out of the legislative institutions. No longer could Parliamentarians or legislators exercise their judgement according to the dictates of their conscience, constituency or even common sense. They were prisoners of a rather quixotic system where the electors who had put them into public office had no influence upon the legislative choices they were compelled to make.

A brief background may just be in order. The Constitution (Fifty-Second Amendment) Act, 1985, added the Tenth Schedule to the Indian Constitution to proscribe the increasing propensity of party-hopping and defections by elected representatives post elections. The introductory delineations of the statement of objects and reasons of this anti-defection legislative instrument bemoaned this rather sordid situation vividly. It stated, "the evil of political defections has been a matter of political concern. If it is not combated it is likely to undermine the very foundations of our democracy and the principles that sustain it."

The original anti-defection legislation of 1985 chastised acts of individual defection. It conversely acknowledged the norm of differences in political parties. It mandated that if one-third of the members of a parliamentary or legislative entity created a separate faction or even merged themselves into an analogous political outfit, their membership of whichever legislative organ they were elected to would continue without 'interruptus'.

Why the bar for defections to be legitimate was set at one-third was elucidated in paragraph three of the Tenth Schedule. It can be described as the doctrine of "honest dissent", i.e., not less than one-third of the strength of a parliamentary or legislative party could collectively have reservations about the ideological or political direction adopted by their original political party and, therefore, may decide to go their own separate way. However what this law accomplished in reality was transmuting a retail malady into a wholesale malaise. The reasons for splits continued to remain opportunistic not ideological.

The NDA government tried to plug this loophole via the Constitution (Ninety-First Amendment) Act, 2003. It deleted paragraph three from the anti-defection law that permitted one-third of the elected representatives to separate from the original political outfit. The Amendment Act, however, allowed paragraph four to hold the field. It authorised two-thirds of the elected representatives of a political party, should they choose so, to merge with an existing political party or form a new political party as a consequence of such a merger. This would not impact their legislative status under the 10th Schedule. Effectively what this constitutional amendment achieved was raising the bar of wholesale defections from one-third to two-thirds.

All this Constitutional jiggery-pokery, however, does not answer a fundamental question. Did the founding fathers who wrote the Indian Constitution countenance a paradigm whereby the right to choose a representative would vest in an individual elector but what he does with his elected status on a legislative platform would be hostage to the ditkats of a political party?

Given that in Re. Kesava-ananda Bharti, the Supreme Court by a 7-6 majority held parliamentary democracy to be basic structure the 10th schedule of the Constitution, it negates very tenet of the basic structure doctrine, i.e., parliamentary democracy both in letter and spirit. The little person who stands in the scorching sun to press that EVM button to elect a representative has really no role for the next five years.

Coming to the private member's bill that I had introduced in 2010 and have reintroduced again in 2020, labelled The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (Amendment to the 10th Schedule), it envisages that whips can be issued only for that legislative business that threatens the stability of government. It would perhaps be instructive to reproduce the salient aspects of the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the 2010 Bill which are pari passu with the 2020 bill. "The disqualification of a member of a House should be only on the grounds that he votes or abstains from voting in the House with regard to a confidence motion, no-confidence motion, adjournment motion, money bill or financial matters contrary to the direction issued in this behalf by the party to which he belongs and in no other case." The core of the bill states: "A person shall cease to be a member if he votes or abstains from voting in such House with regard to a motion expressing confidence or want of confidence in the Council of Ministers, motion for an adjournment of the business of the House, motion in respect of financial matters as enumerated in Articles 113 to 116 (both inclusive) and Articles 203 to 206 (both inclusive), a money bill, contrary to any direction issued by the political party to which he belongs or by any person or authority authorised by it in this behalf." This would free up the legislative space for better and more diligent law-making.

However, even with these proposed amendments to the 10th Schedule, the fact remains that over the past 37 years the anti-defection law has failed to fulfil the foremost objective for which it was enacted, i.e., proscribing the menace of defections.

It has, in fact, created another problem by vesting arbitrary discretionary powers in the hands of the presiding officers of the legislative institutions in terms of deciding petitions under the anti-defection law. These presiding officers are not at all autonomous much as the Constitution would want them to function independently. At the end of five years or six years they have to seek re-election on the ticket of the political party that has put them there in the first place. Anti-defection petitions keep languishing without a decision for years on end if it suits the convenience of the ruling party or the personal predilections of a particular presiding officer as legislators keep merrily party-hopping at times changing multiple parties during a five-year term.

The time, therefore, has come to rip the veneer of this legislation-driven morality. The 10th Schedule must be repealed. Parliament must apply itself to a new modus vivendi for enforcing political probity.

(The writer is an MP and former I&B Minister. Article courtesy Deccan Chronicle)

"Talent hits a target no one else can hit; Genius hits a target no one else can see."

—Arthur Schopenhauer

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Sixth Schedule and the Constitution

THE agenda items listed out by the Opposition Congress for deliberations in the forthcoming session of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) are interesting. The issues it threatens to rake up range from the MoA signed between Meghalaya and Assam on settling the border disputes between the two states without consulting the Council; issues of illegal coke units that are environmentally destructive; the ban on sand and stone mining and illegal check gates etc. What's curious is that the Congress MDCs threaten to even rake up the history of "Ri Khasi" (Khasi states) before the arrival of the Sixth Schedule. Attempts to return to a romantic past are not new in Meghalaya. Instead of taking up issues that affect the daily existence of citizens, the MDCs prefer to hold forth on something that they know is set in stone. The Parliament of India is unlikely to revisit the Instrument of Accession (IoA) - an agreement signed and sealed 74 years ago. In these 74 years the people of the Khasi states have learnt to live within the ambit of the Indian Constitution that guarantees them certain fundamental rights and privileges as citizens.

The Congress MDCs know that these political gimmicks will not take them too far. The issue of illegal coke units has been dealt with by the State Government after the High Court came down heavily on it and because the mining of coal as a raw material for coke units was already banned in Meghalaya. Rampant mining of boulders and sand banking has destroyed the life of our rivers. It is timely that these two activities are being strictly regulated. Regarding the signing of the MoA between the two governments of Assam and Meghalaya, there was ample time for the Congress to be involved in the process if it chose to. It could also have raised the banner of protest at Dispur where the agreement to give and take land as agreed by the two sides was executed. Now it is a bit late in the day and is being raked up only in preparation for the 2023 polls.

Politicians have used nostalgia time and again to win elections but it usually backfires. The people of Meghalaya are reminded of a hoary past as if everything was hunky dory in that past. This is because politicians have no vision of the future. Their concern is only the next election and how to win it. But that is a strategy that is unlikely to work now. What people want is a promise of solutions to problems and a better economic future. The Councils should be engaging themselves with environmental challenges and the state of the rivers which they claim to be under their jurisdiction. People are no longer fooled by obfuscation. The Sixth Schedule is not above the Constitution.

Roberts' Hospital Centenary: Robert Arthur Hughes

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

This is a sequel to my article on Hugh Gordon Roberts, the founder of the hospital at Jaiaw that bears his name and the primary fund-raiser and builder of the Dr. Norman Tunnel Hospital at Jowai. The subject here is Dr. Robert Arthur Hughes, who was born at Oswestry in 1910, exactly one hundred years after the pioneer, Thomas Jones (1810-1849). Those were the heydays of the British Empire and missionary activities were, frankly, an important part of the colonial project in India. Dr. Hughes however was someone who transcended the limited missionary circle of activities and distinguished himself as a surgeon and hospital administrator, as well as an influential public health adviser to the Assam government.

Oswestry town in England, 8 kilometres from the Wales border, had a large number of Calvinistic Methodists, part of the Welsh diaspora in the West England border counties. The Rev. Howell Harris Hughes ministered at chapels in Oswestry, then at Bangor, Liverpool and Llandudno; so little Robert Arthur and his twin brother,

University of London, at the Radium Institute and at the Mount Vernon Hospital. It was a hurried departure as Arthur married Nancy Wright, a qualified nurse, on 7 January 1939, and they sailed for India on 28 January. Their only son was born in Shillong and he later also became a physician - Dr. John Hughes.

Upon arrival at Shillong, Dr. Hughes took charge of medicine and surgery, as Dr. Roberts concentrated on administration and the hospital's expansion. World War II broke out in September 1939, and the Japanese Army invaded Burma in 1942. Dr. Hughes was posted briefly to Dimapur, treating wounded soldiers and civilians, before being recalled to the Welsh Mission Hospital. He also served as consultant at the Civil Hospital and Military Hospital in Shillong. According to Welsh historian, Ben Rees, Dr. Hughes treated 2,851 officers and soldiers from all over the world from 1942 to 1945, plus the hospital's regular patients. Dr. Gor-

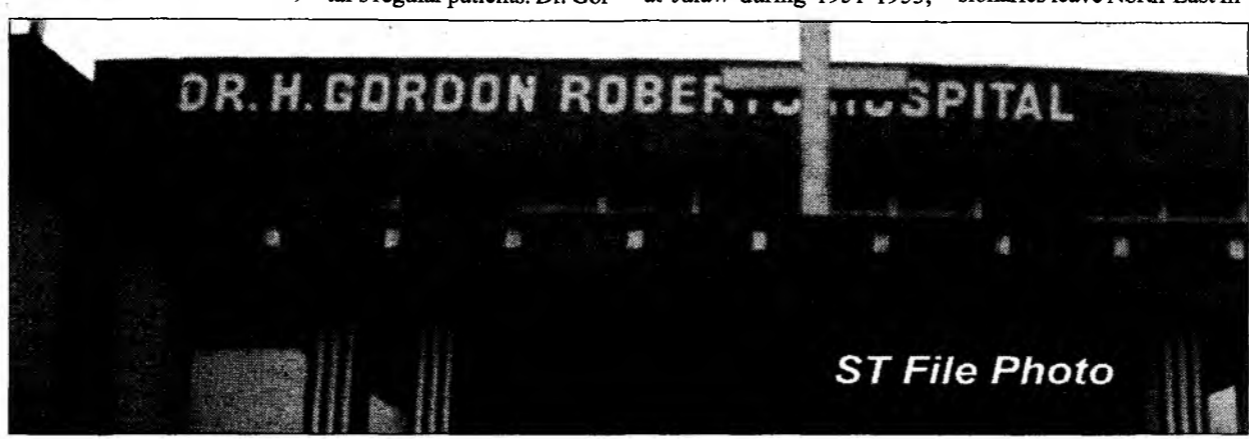
rooms and administrative work. The OPD on Tuesdays and Thursdays continued till late evening, sometimes extending till 10 pm, as patients insisted on meeting Dr. Hughes. Surgeries on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays sometimes extended till 8 pm. Despite this workload, Dr. Hughes maintained a cheerful demeanour: "Just his smile was enough to alleviate half your illness!" (Old Khasi saying). Despite this schedule, Dr. Hughes found time for the ministry of his local church, the Jaiaw Presbyterian Church, of which he was elected as elder in 1944. To my knowledge, this is the only instance of a missionary serving as a 'Tymmenbasan' of a Khasi church.

While he had many Khasi doctors as colleagues in medicine, Dr. Hughes did not have long-term support in surgery. Dr. Stanley Russell served during 1942-1947, which allowed Arthur and Nancy Hughes to go on furlough after World War II. Dr. Norman Tunnel served at Jaiaw during 1951-1953,

ets, kwashiorkor, anaemia, goitre and other diseases and deficiencies.

He advised preventive measures to the government: change of diet, personal and home hygiene, clean drinking water and pro-active distribution of medicines against malaria and dysentery and vitamins to prevent rickets, anaemia and other deficiency diseases. Unfortunately, Dr. Hughes' immense contribution to public health in erstwhile Assam has not yet been fully documented and recognized, being overshadowed by his formidable reputation as a surgeon. In 1947, the hospital received a large donation from the women of the South Wales Auxiliaries in memory of Margaret Buckley, the first matron of the hospital. Dr. Hughes bought and equipped a vehicle to serve as a 'travelling dispensary'; for two decades it toured the interior regions of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, bringing medical treatment, preventive measures and public health awareness to villages.

The late 1960s brought changes in government policy that required all foreign missionaries leave North-East In-



John Harries, had to change schools everytime their father was transferred to another pastorate. Arthur entered the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Liverpool in 1928, graduating in 1933 with a Gold Medal in surgery. Dr. R. Arthur Hughes had a brief but brilliant pre-missionary career, as house surgeon at the Royal Southern Hospital, Liverpool, as the John Rankin Fellow in Human Anatomy at the University, and as Surgical Tutor, Pathologist and Registrar at the David Lewis Northern Hospital.

Therefore, it was with great delight that the mission directors received an application for missionary service from the accomplished 28 year old. The Welsh Mission Hospital at Jaiaw had been established sixteen years ago in 1922, and now Rev. Dr. H. Gordon Roberts, the 53 year old founder, was looking for another surgeon to support him, and eventually succeed him as Administrator. As part of his preparation, Dr. Hughes received training in Tropical Medicine at the

don Roberts retired in 1942 after 29 years of service, and Dr. Arthur Hughes took over as Senior Medical Officer and Administrator.

Dr. Hughes' expertise enhanced the hospital's reputation; patients included ministers and civil servants of the Assam government, tea planters from Upper Assam and Cachar, as well as members of Indian royal houses. These patients provided valuable income for the hospital and allowed cross subsidy for the treatment of the very poor, some of whom travelled over one hundred kilometres from interior villages. This is the financial model of successful mission hospitals like CMC, Vellore, which attracts the very rich with its world-class professional treatment while helping the very poor with its subsidized fees.

Dr. Hughes maintained Dr. Roberts' standards of discipline, self-sacrifice and meticulous organization, standards that the hospital needs till today. Every morning began with devotion at 7.40 am, followed by visits to the wards, private

before moving to Jowai as the medical superintendent of the new hospital there. Dr. Peter Shave and other doctors came on short-term tenures.

Apart from regular procedures, Dr. Hughes also pioneered new areas of surgery. Ben Rees credits him with introducing Caesarean section before the days of antibiotics, improvements in general anaesthesia, innovative surgeries in the treatment of ulcers, and identifying 'kwashiorkor,' the protein calorie deficiency disease, as a major cause of childhood mortality and lifelong susceptibility to illness. Dr. Hughes' approach included prevention as much as the cure - addressing public health challenges and identifying systemic causes of illness. He sometimes toured interior villages to conduct medical and statistical surveys on endemic diseases and experimented with preventive measures. Dr. Hughes discovered that among children over six months in Ri Bhoi, half had enlarged spleens due to endemic malaria; the high infant mortality rates were also due to dysentery, malnutrition, rick-

et. After 30 years of service, Arthur and Nancy Hughes left Shillong on 16 May, 1969. At the many farewell meetings, eyewitnesses recall the tears and eulogies for Dr. Hughes and the other missionaries. Back at Liverpool, the vastly-experienced 59 year old joined the University's Faculty of Medicine. In 1984, Dr. Hughes returned for a brief period to the Roberts' Hospital. In 1991, he and some former missionaries attended the KJP Synod's 150th Anniversary Celebration, where we were privileged to meet him.

In 1992, Dr. Hughes was honoured by the Presbyterian Church of Wales with the position of Moderator. In his later years, Dr. Hughes suffered from heart illness and gave up medical practice although he continued church ministry. He died at Liverpool on 1 June, 1996. At the funeral, Roberts' Hospital was represented by the then medical superintendent, (L) Dr. Pherlok Lamare, whose own dedicated service as a surgeon endeared him as the Dr. Hughes of my generation.

Party miserably failed to connect with common people in bypolls

TMC has to depend on locals in next assembly polls in Tripura

By Arun Srivastava

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress nursed high hopes from Tripura, but it could not be accomplished. Her aspiration to have one more state under her party's wings and the recognition of being a national party received a severe shock from the people of the state with all 4 TMC candidates losing deposits in assembly bypolls, which were held on June 23 despite big-ticket campaign.

Notwithstanding her being admired as a leader of national stature, the TMC is still viewed as a regional party representing the aspiration of the Bengalis of Bengal. Unless the party acquires the pan Indian image, it would be a tough proposition for Mamata to project herself as the all India leader in the true sense. This has been a major stumbling block in her effort to outwit Rahul Gandhi and stake her claim of being a national leader.

The fortitude of achieving has made her deploy a battery of 27 star campaigners under the leadership of the second person in command, Abhishek Banerjee. But they failed to reach to the voters and convince them of the importance of their party in the state. The TMC leadership, including Mamata, were sure of making a major impact on the political establishment of Tripura. But it did not happen. What came as a major shock to the leadership was the aversion of even the Bengali voters to rally behind the TMC.

In the by-elections held on 23 June, all four TMC candidates - Mrinal Kanti Debnath (Jubarajnar), Arjun Namasudra (Surma), Sanhita Banerjee (Town Bordowali), Panna Deb (Agartala) - lost their deposits. The BJP won three of the four seats while one, Agartala, went to the Congress. In the initial stages of the campaign an impression had gained ground that the TMC would win at least two seats. But it did not fructify. Notwithstanding this severe drubbing, the TMC leadership is confident of making a comeback in the 2023 assembly elections, but the fact remains that the party has not realistically underlined the reasons for its wash out. Though the state president of TMC, Subal Bhowmick, expressed ebullience at the future prospects of the party he could not underline the features that would help it to come to power and provide a pan-Indian character to the party.

The TMC leadership which is eyeing the 2023 election battle with the aim of overthrowing the BJP government is reluctant to agree to the postulation that the defeat has been a major setback and continues to assert, "We are only 11 months old here in Tripura; there is some weakness in our committees and a lack of consistency. But we will overcome these in the coming days". To achieve their goals they are contemplating to design an electoral strategy to build up the organisation and open a headquarter in the state. The voting percentage reveals that even the Bengali population of these four seats did not come out in support of the TMC. The TMC got 2.1%, 2.98%, 3.3% and 2.96% vote share. It was expected that in TMC the Bengalis of Tripura would enjoy an advantage. TMC had at least managed to come second in the Agartala Municipal elections. Irrespective of the nature of clarification the fact cannot be denied that the TMC could not identify itself with the people of Tripura. Raising the issue of protecting the self-respect and identity of Bengalis had helped the party in Bengal, but it had no agenda which talked about the self-respect and identity of the people of Tripura. There is no denying the fact TMC committed the same mistake in Tripura what the BJP had done in Bengal in 2021 assembly election.

Allegedly lack of trust was a major factor. The local tribal leaders did not get a major say in the running of the party. TMC failed to reach out to the tribal population. Tribals constitute 31 per cent of the population and have their own rich culture, one that is very different from the dominant Bengali culture. The tribal population can influence around 35-36 assembly seats in the state, and 20 are reserved for them. TMC is almost non-existent in the tribal belt and did not get votes from there.

It is beyond comprehension how Mamata Banerjee, an astute politician could depend on her own colleagues from Bengal to lead the party and campaign in Tripura? Strategically she should have projected some local faces instead of entrusting the task to a someone from Bengal. The rivalry between the tribals and Bengalis of Tripura is legendary. It was only until much later that Subal Bhowmick was made the state unit president and was the only local face among the top brass.

In the early years when the party was striving to have its foothold in Tripura, Sushmita Dev was tasked with strengthening the party along with Assam. Later, Rajib Banerjee was entrusted to look after the party affairs in Tripura. Both were outsiders and non-residents. Dev is from Assam and Banerjee from Bengal. Ironically both failed to build a proper organization in the state, especially in the Bengali-speaking areas. In fact, the failure of the TMC leadership to retain Sudip Roy Barman and Ashish Saha who had joined the party in 2016, and later moved to the BJP within a year in 2017 has simply eroded the confidence of the local activists in the TMC.

To fight BJP, the TMC needed a local leader with a strong personal base. Though Abhishek Banerjee nephew of Mamata was the campaigner for the TMC, his being a non-resident was a major factor. Another mistake that the TMC made in Tripura was the lack of sustained campaigning, especially after the civic polls. The TMC leadership should have learnt the lesson from its poor performance in Goa and focussed on Tripura. Instead of investing their energy in Goa they should have focussed on Tripura. Their neglect of Tripura made them lose whatever little ground they had gained in the state.

Letters to the Editor

A cry in the nick of time

Editor,
Kudos to Wanjop U Lalloo, for the letter, 'Crying Need For A State University (ST July 6, 2022) which highlights the worsening condition of education in our State. Notable among these is that our Education Minister, L Rymbui does not care to stick to his well applauded principle on CUET and making a 180 degree turn at the request of the VC of NEHU. Second and more saddening is the fact that the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma was not aware that Meghalaya has only two state-sponsored colleges. This information vacuum necessitated his flying to Delhi to beg for CUET exemption for one year. The under-graduate aspirants of 2022 are therefore the last lucky batch.

Those in charge of examinations don't seem to learn from past mistakes. How could the examination rules so beautifully framed be side-lined? Paper setters of not less than 10 years of experience with the approval of college principals (based on students' feedback) are a must. Then a board of moderators of more experience would moderate, with one rule expected of them and that is to be tight lipped after sitting for moderation. Then there are our poor, ill paid evaluators who spend sleepless nights to do justice to examinees with a constant fear that should the paper be re-evaluated they are not embarrassed and blacklisted if there are any discrepancies between marks given and actual marks scored. Not to forget too that all question papers are kept under lock and key in the nearest police station. So, the word 'conscientious' is no longer applicable when vaulting ambition that overlaps itself is the daily diet of a few.

That is what examinations are all about. Sad to say with all those four essential features missing, college teachers have replaced the NEHU examination board personnel and with that the unavoidable fallibility to advertise the college for more admission. Examinations have become a farce. Worse, with delayed declaration of results by NEHU our deserving students who want to enter the best universities outside miss one academic year.

Hence the cry for a State University is well justified not only for what was said but for other reasons too. As far as CUET is concerned it is unfortunate that except for the Principals of Union Christian College and Synod College, all principals did not discern what the top educationists in India have viewed with grave concern.

Of course, some principals and their team had a thought of setting up a CUET coaching centre in their districts without realising that ultimately our students will lose out under the present circumstances. It would be educative for all Meghalayans to review the impact of NEET on our students both tribals and non-tribals.

On scrutinising the 2020 and 2021 NEET Physics paper, there was only one question on each year from CBSE (forget ICSE and State boards). All are from the guide books used by these urban coaching centres, the most notable among which are Akash in Delhi and KOTA in Rajasthan. And coaching fees range from Rs 5 lakhs to Rs 7 lakhs so only the affluent can afford to send their children for coaching. The twice attempted aspirants managed to scrape through the DHS screening with 432/720 (The topper percentile of Meghalaya 2021) i.e. a mere 60% vis-a-vis those all India scores of 720/720 or 100%. It would be in the interest of all future patients and NEET aspirants, if the above 100% really fare well in MBBS course until they complete their internship.

CUET with multiple choice questions (MCQs) taken from the Class 12 syllabus only, and with 13 mother tongues allowed, places the UG aspirants of Meghalaya in an unfair competition. Their being displaced from their own states cannot be ruled out. And the question then would be - why did the college principals remain silent? The one-year respite from CUET is no big deal.

Thus, the demand for a State University is timely and imperative. In the meantime, there are some temporary solutions as private universities like MLCU, UTSM, William Carey are not under UGC and so are freed of CUET. One only wishes that the above universities expand their departments. MLCU with its Nutrition and Dietetics has job opportunities. UTSM is well equipped with electronics and computer (hard ware and software). William Carey too may help our children who may be displaced by CUET. Environmental Science as a subject may be included amongst others.

Decreasing nutritional value of food

Editor,
This refers to the recent Medical Study Report "The Global Burden of Disease" wherein it mentions that one in five persons die due to nutritional deficiency! The report carries immense significance vis-a-vis the increase in consumption of denatured, hybridised and inorganic food globally. With the emergence of the era of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, the nutrient density of the soils have further depleted resulting in lack of nutrition in the earth's produce. Although due to the Green Revolution and Genetic Modification, crop production has increased but production of quality food has decreased. Malnutrition apart from causing various health hazards also results in decreased human productivity which directly or indirectly affects the economy of the nation. It is important that the Government makes it a priority to provide high quality food to the general public by emphasizing on organic cultivation. People should be made more aware about quality nutrition through education and awareness. It is high time that along with education quality nutrition also becomes a part of our fundamental rights.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Via email
Sadiq H. Laskar,
Guwahati

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

"Segregation has no place in the education system."

— Richard Dawkins

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Jewels in Rajya Sabha

PARLIAMENT'S upper house, the Rajya Sabha, has a dignity of its own. While the stalwarts in Indian politics are mostly seen in the lower house, the Lok Sabha, where they reach up through direct elections by the people, Rajya Sabha is where most members are elected by legislators of state assemblies. It earns its aura majorly through the presence of a set of 12 nominated members drawn from fields of eminence like entertainers, writers, scientists, entrepreneurs, legal luminaries, sports persons etc. There were occasions when the establishment brought in politicians too to the nominated posts in Rajya Sabha, much against the basic concept of nominations. This time, when four nominated posts fell vacant, the government went in for selection of four eminent persons, all from the southern states.

This all-South decision might have been arrived at partly due to the lack of a substantial number of MPs for the ruling BJP-NDA from those states, where regional parties mostly rule the roost. One way for a ruling establishment to handle such a scenario is to altogether leave things at that and adopt a couldn't-care-less attitude. But, the BJP being the principal national party cannot afford to ignore any region, be it the south or the east or the north-east, each of which has special styles and characteristics. Even in nominations, a fair share of representation should go to each region. That's how the system of democracy makes itself relevant and a government reinforces its moral authority on the people across the social spectrum.

As for nominated members in Rajya Sabha, they are seen mostly as the jewels of the upper house. This, even as these worthies do not show an inclination for regular presence or attendance. They are busy in their respective fields, politics interests them too little perhaps, and some of them attend the sessions only to the extent that would require of them for retention of their membership. This however is not what the framers of the Constitution visualized. The nominated members' wisdom should show up in the upper house, at least when legislations of a related nature are made. There, of course, were some nominated members who went on to become Union Ministers and held even the PM post. They have acquitted themselves well. It will be in the fitness of things if more individuals of eminence are brought into the Rajya Sabha. This will give an added weight to India's democratic process also as the standard of discussions in the lower house of Parliament is steadily going down as is widely pointed out.

Influx Control: A Second Option - Part 1

By Toki Blah

The demand to take action on the unabated influx of outsiders into the state of Meghalaya stands unresolved. The ILP demand is ongoing but from all indications Central nod to the ILP is bleak. This can however lead to future agitations in the state where the ordinary people will suffer and the state continues to slide backwards in all spheres. Everyone is concerned about a viable, workable influx control mechanism and here we are stuck over a quibble about the ILP! The ILP is not the issue. We need to be truthful with ourselves. The issue before us is the absence of a viable workable Influx Control Mechanism. Under the present circumstances we all face the distinct possibility of another round of a rapid breakdown of law and order; of being locked in further stalemate; of going into a tailspin on an issue which seems has no solution in sight. So how do we get out of this mess?

Based on the above, an alternate influx control option, appropriate with the needs of our times, is called for. On offer for serious consideration is the Comprehensive 3 Tier ID Card system. It is being offered as a solution to a local problem. It is being offered as the best alternative because the solution will be (a) participatory in nature - meaning thereby that the concerned common man, his grassroots traditional institutions (the Durbars), Civil Society and concerned NGOs of the state together with the Government will work in tandem in the best interests of the state and its people. Checking and controlling influx will no longer be left in the hands of Government employees who can be bought (b) monitoring of implementation will be through a 24 x 7 automatic social audit mechanism inbuilt within the scheme. It will be done by people themselves on a 24x7 basis with no opportunity for a blunder. (c) because onus of ID status shall lie with the applicant and not with the state (This is where the Assamese missed out on the excellent terms they got through the Assam Accord) (d) It is being proposed as a solution from the local perspective because New Delhi is totally devoid and clueless of any viable and workable ideas on how to deal with the problem. (e) It is being offered based on the Constitution of India's special provisions for these areas; Art 19 (1) (d) of the Constitution and because of a precedence made in the Assam Accord of the 80's.

The Comprehensive Three Tier ID Card system as a viable influx control mecha-

nism shall depend primarily on public participation. It is therefore crucial for the citizens of Meghalaya to understand their respective roles in such participation. These roles shall revolve round the nature and composition of the ID card, irrespective of its colour and the status it denotes its holder. Each card in the system shall resemble an ordinary debit or credit card which most of our citizens are by now familiar with. State-of-the-art micro chip biometric technology will be employed to ensure that details of the card holder can easily be displayed at the touch of a button, making the system as transparent as it can be. It shall also be ensured that every category of card is tamper proof. There shall be three categories of ID cards (i) the Permanent ID card (ii) the Semi Permanent ID card and (iii) the Temporary ID Card, each category dis-

shall be retained with the dorbar shall be forwarded by the dorbar with its recommendation to the concerned DC, who shall then proceed to store the same in his District server, which in turn is electronically linked to all the blocks, other District HQs and the main Hub at the Secretariat in Shillong. Details of all permanent residents of Meghalaya will therefore be available at different levels of the administration. The DC shall then process, compile and issue such cards based on the recommendations of the dorbar; sent the same back to the concerned dorbar who shall then proceed to disburse the same to the entitled holders.

b. Semi Permanent Resident Status (Yellow)
Next is the Semi Permanent Comprehensive ID Card or Work Permit for technical and skilled non Permanent residents of Meghalaya. It has to be recognized that the state has enormous potential for coming up with a dynamic and viable economic resurgence. Quality Education, World Class Health Care, IT related activities together with Tourism are four potential areas that immediately come to mind. Students availing of our higher educational institutions, their teachers, doctors etc are potential Semi Permanent ID Card seekers. There are other areas of Development too where there will be need for a sustained inflow of technology and expertise, which might not be readily or locally available. We most probably shall need non local technical expertise to kick start any Economic Vision that we may have. We need to invite experts from outside, people who will contribute to the development of the state and we need to ensure that they do stay for a relative period of time and in relative comfort and security for them and their families. Such people will need places to stay; Institutions to work in; schools and colleges for educating their children; ration cards to sustain themselves etc. As a state we welcome up gradation of knowledge and technology. We welcome those who are prepared to come and endow Meghalaya with these assets. The proposed Semi - Permanent ID Card is for such a category of people. Their entry as Semi Permanent residents can be endorsed by the Institution they intend to work for, stating the anticipated period of stay and the Govt shall then issue the necessary Semi Permanent ID Card.

The DC of any district shall be the issuing authority for this category of cards
(to be continued in Part II)

"The Comprehensive Permanent ID Card seeks in a single stroke to restore the legitimate rights and residential status of genuine Non Tribal residents of Meghalaya who for no fault of their own, have for quite some time become apprehensive of their future in the state."

inctive in its own respective colour. Each type of card shall have a stand alone profile i.e one category of ID card cannot be converted into another category. This means that under no circumstances can a temporary or a semi permanent card holder eventually become a permanent ID card holder.

1. Permanent Resident Status (Green)
At the top of the Comprehensive 3 Tier ID Card system is the ID Card for all permanent residents of the state. These will consist of all indigenous Tribals of Meghalaya together with other Tribals and Non Tribals. **The latter two will be identified on the basis of a cut-off year, to be decided (1972, year of Meghalaya statehood would be best) and all who were residents of Meghalaya and their descendants before such a year are to be conferred Permanent Resident status of the state. Permanent Resident status not withstanding, local Laws (Land transfer act, trading licence, reservation policy etc) applicable for all Non Tribals and Non Indigenous Tribals residing in Meghalaya shall apply and be enforced.** With reference

sons falling under this category will be done by the local Durbar in Council. The word "Durbar in Council" is specially mentioned as it will prevent misuse of power by any single individual at the Durbar level. It is however recognized that in certain places, such as the coal mining areas or areas in Shillong such as Jhalupara, Jail road, Pynthorbah etc, even Durbars in Council may not be free from the influence of vested interests. In such areas, the direct involvement of District Administration in the identification process, operating under strict guidelines, may be necessary. The Comprehensive Permanent ID Card seeks in a single stroke to restore the legitimate rights and residential status of genuine Non Tribal residents of Meghalaya who for no fault of their own, have for quite some time become apprehensive of their future in the state. At the same time it seeks to placate the indigenous Tribals on the identity of others who have an equally genuine interest in the development of Meghalaya and its people. After identification of all persons falling under this category is completed, such records (a copy which

Political vocabulary marks leaders from rabble rousers

By Patricia Mukhim

Language has power. It can wound or heal depending on the choice of vocabulary. We might feel that power gives us the right to spout out anything we wish to. But there is such a thing as context, place, culture, nuance that politicians need to bear in mind when they speak and especially when they address their followers and party workers. Considering that we in India are hugely influenced by the US it is not surprising that many have adopted the coarse political lexicon of Donald Trump and believe that such language is kosher but it is not. Not especially in Meghalaya where societies are small and there's hardly any distance between political leaders and their constituents. They run into each other at funeral homes, weddings, naming ceremonies and what have you and they don't like to burn their bridges behind them. Many would like to keep that little leeway which allows at least a minimum social interface.

It is therefore not unforeseen that the members of the National Peoples' Party (NPP) would take any affront to their leader and the State Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma with the seriousness it deserves. Mr Abhishek Banerjee the second in command in the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), came to Shillong; he saw what it is all about but I doubt that he conquered hearts. His puerile reference to Conrad Sangma, who is still the chief minister of the State, as some kind of a knave has not gone down well, not just with the NPP but also with the common man/woman. In Meghalaya, swearing and using cuss words against politicians happens in private conversations, not from a public platform. Call it hypocrisy or whatever but name-calling is not yet part of the political culture in Meghalaya. So much for Abhishek Banerjee and his posturing!

However, this is not to acquit the MDA Government. Not at all. This Government needs more than just a rap on the knuckles. True that Conrad Sangma and the MDA have inherited problems from the past. Take the case of the striking teachers. Past governments have never dared to rationalise the pay scales of teachers and to club them under just two categories - the Deficit and non-Deficit teachers. Previous governments have skirted this issue for fear of offending their constituents and teachers form a formidable vote bank. There has never been a serious look and a cabinet brainstorm on the Education system itself and whether it is delivering results, and if not, why not? Why are our students even today so scared of competition? Why are even graduates not employable? Is the education being provided good enough for the challenges of the 21st century?

Our students suffer from deep-seated insecurities just because they are inarticulate and cannot express themselves and their points of view in a public platform. And we are talking of students from the rural outback. I have, however had the good fortune to meet with several students studying in the Rama Krishna Mission schools in Sohra, Sheila and bSohbar and they have invariably come up the ranks and done well for themselves. Clearly there are lessons to be learnt from these schools which have consistently served the population with dedication. This dedication from the teachers is very rare these days. Some of our leading politicians and bureaucrats were students of the RK Mission schools. These schools believe in the democratization of dignity. Its not just the affluent that can go to the best schools and speak English fluently that deserve dignity. On the contrary those coming from struggling families yet working hard to perform well must develop self-worth.

It is time for the Government to conduct a qualitative and quantitative study on the education sector in Meghalaya. Unless this happens we will have to be listening to Education Minister, Mr Rymbui stating that parents want to send their children to private schools and there are lesser and lesser takers for government aided schools. There has to be something wrong with the government aided schools for parents to shift their kids to schools where they have to pay more. So, what is wrong with government aided schools? Do we know? We won't know because the Government has not engaged an independent agency to do a study. And that study will be truly independent if school students and their parents are interviewed too. The survey requires a well thought out action plans. There was a time when Inspectors of Schools conducted surprise checks. Now those are things of the past. Teacher absenteeism and teachers outsourcing their jobs to someone else while they take up more lucrative professions, are also part of the problem.

The Government is the biggest not-for-profit sector. Or so says the management guru Peter Drucker. Some key points for those heading this sector is (a) Assess what must be strengthened or abandoned. This means not everything that was started at one time must carry on. Disruptions are what bring improvements (b) Leadership is accountable - There are times to face the fact that the organization as a whole is not performing - that there are weak results everywhere and little prospect of improving. It may be time to merge or liquidate and invest energies somewhere else. In some performance areas, where it is unclear whether to strengthen or abandon, government will need a systematic analysis as part of its plan.

Both for-profit and not-for-profit sectors need to measure their outcomes. Does the Government ever measure outcomes? Not in most sectors. Certainly not in the education sector. Those who have attended any kind of leadership training will remember the lesson on SMART goals - Specific - Measurable - Achievable - Realistic and Tangible. It would have been a good idea for the MDA Government headed by a management graduate to set these goals out at the very start of the government. These goals however can be operational only if the government has set clear priorities for itself. Five years is not a long time to implement long term goals and objectives but a government committed to delivering on its promise will prioritise its goals and action plans. In Meghalaya, education, health, agriculture & horticulture, roads and bridges, water supply, power generation & distribution and waste management are immediate priorities. Unfortunately, none of these critical areas has a policy framework. This also means that Government cannot look for outcomes since the objectives have not been clearly set out. On the contrary some ministers have set their own priorities - to promote their own businesses. Sadly, the technicians in the government, including doctors and bureaucrats are part of this sinister plan to turn a not-for-profit social sector (government) into a private, for-profit company. As the team leader, Conrad Sangma knows this but has no stamina to stop the gold rush.

The NPP as a national party needs money and lots of it for the 2023 elections in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura besides other states. Where will this money come from if not from Meghalaya? Who are the top funders? We know who they are. Naturally they have been given a free rein in illegal mining and transportation of coal besides control on other businesses. Other Parties which are part of the coalition namely - UDP, PDF, HSPDP, BJP, NCP also need money. The UDP has built a substantial corpus but the other parties (other than the BJP) have no revenue model. So guess who's gonna take the trophy!

Letters to the Editor

Stop turning parking spaces into shops

Editor,
Many letters have been appearing in The Shillong Times and other newspapers and there have been endless discussions on the increasing traffic problems and dearth of parking facilities in the capital city of Shillong. While discussions and deliberations are continuing, some unpleasant 'change of use' is taking place in the few parking spaces which were created in earlier years. All these parking lots were earlier constructed by the Urban Affairs Department to address the on-street parking which was rampant in the city.

Things are changing for the worse today. Take the instance of the parking space which was created in Dhankheti. Today a larger portion of the parking lot has been occupied by shops and very little space is left for parking. In the parking lot opposite the main branch of the State Bank of India, new shops are being added almost every month. Ultimately, if the powers that be have their way, there

won't be any space left for parking. Even two years ago there were only three or four shops in this parking lot. Today, shops have come up along the entire boundary. Even now construction of new shops seems to be in progress. No consideration for the structural safety of the building or how it is affecting the circulation of public and vehicles or where the liquid discharge is going. One will dread entering the basement. It looks more like a criminal's den.

Take the case of the parking space near Mahavir Park, one has to see to believe it. For namesake a public toilet has been constructed but use is more of commercial nature. In fact, it looks like a shop selling provisions inside the toilet. A few dilapidated looking shops have also been constructed right in the middle and God knows for what purpose. The same is true of the parking lots at Khlieh Iewduh, opposite Anjalee Cinema, at Mawlong Hat and other parking spaces, all being gradually converted to commercial use. How such 'change of use' is taking place and the concerned authorities turning a blind eye is anybody's guess.

There had always been

demand for converting parking spaces into shops on the bogey of creating employment but wiser sense had prevailed earlier. Now, however, it seems to be a different story. There seems to be no objection whatsoever from any quarters to such actions which go against public interest. It looks more like a complete surrender to the powers that be by the concerned departments resulting in a free for all. If the Government of the day has not learnt from the experience in the commercial complex located in the parking lot at Police Bazar and still wants to continue with the failed policy of creating employment opportunities by constructing shops all over, they may very well do the same in New Shillong area instead of destroying the limited infrastructure available in the city today.

In case the Government of the day has any sense of responsibility towards its citizens and concern for the future of the city, it will do well to remove all the encroachments from public places in Shillong and instead create other opportunities in New Shillong which seems to be developing into another government township without any provision for the public.

Pathetic road condition in Upper Shillong

Editor,
Through your newspaper, I would like to raise a serious complaint about the pathetic and extremely bad condition of some portions of the the Shillong-Mylliem-Nongstoin Road. One portion is at Sawmer, Upper Shillong, and the other is near the Trijunction Area at Hynniewmer (just before reaching the bifurcation point from Shillong towards Mylliem or Nongstoin), which has caused huge inconvenience to daily commuters and which also is dangerous for vehicles to ply on. These particular portions of the road are full of potholes and are uneven terrain. During the rainy season, these portions gets flooded and cause huge trouble to pass through. The fact that these are on a National Highway is another fact that is greatly disappointing.

Through this letter we the citizens demand that the PWD Roads (National

Yours etc.,
B. Dutta,
Shillong-1

Highway Division) or any other concerned road department of the centre/state initiate repair of the roads immediately, failing which concerned citizens will be compelled to approach the High Court. We also urge the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Shillong to monitor this issue closely.

Yours etc.,
Ardor Hynniewta
Shillong - 1

Desperation of flood affected people

Editor,
Flood-hit Barak Valley passengers in Assam have no rail and proper road connectivity for weeks together. Both the union and the state governments know that for an essential flight requiring 25 to 28 minutes between Guwahati and Silchar the private airlines have been charging Rs 6200 to Rs 24,000 per passenger for one way journey. For a very limited short period of time the Assam Chief Minister arranged special low cost flights but that facility is no longer available today.

The Civil Aviation Ministry, the PMO, the

CM (Assam), and the administration are just onlookers now. This is an indirect support to exploitation by different airlines at a time when the situation warrants low-cost frequent flights between Guwahati-Silchar and Kolkata-Silchar sectors.

We request the Government to strictly intervene into the matter to bring down the cost to Rs 4000 for the short air travel between Silchar-Guwahati till the regular trains are restored. Similar action is requested for flight passenger tickets between Silchar and Kolkata on the same grounds. Additional flights in both the sectors are essential to mitigate public sufferings under the Act East Policy of the Government of India and also the Ministry for Development of North East Region (MDoNER).

Your kind urgent intervention is solicited.
Yours etc.,
Prof Dilip Kumar Dey
General Secretary,
Pro-active Senior Citizens' Forum, (A non-political organization of elders) Silchar

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"Anytime you suffer a setback or disappointment, put your head down and plow ahead."

— Les Brown

The Shillong Times

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Legislative misdemeanour

WHAT happened during the visit of the Presidential candidate Ms Droupadi Murmu where a BJP minister of the MDA Government stood up to interrupt the Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly while he was highlighting the concerns of tribal and religious minority states, reflects poorly on the legislative conduct of the Member. Such disruptions when the Speaker of the House is making a point before a visitor from outside the State is unprecedented. What was the need for the MLA to defend the BJP and call it a secular party? The entire country and indeed the world is best placed to judge the secular nature of the BJP or its absence. The BJP and its ideological partner the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been actively promoting Hindutva – a right wing ideology that leans towards Hinduism. Not only that but there is an all pervasive call for an India with one language, one culture and one religion. So much so that religious minorities feel threatened in the present India led by the NDA Government. Meghalaya Speaker, Metbah Lyngdoh was only expressing the anxieties of the indigenous people of the State and region and he is well within his rights to do so. It was the South Shillong MLA, Sanbor Shullai who had over-stepped his brief and so the apology issued after the incident went public is only to be expected.

Some MLAs have the habit of making their points by banging their fists on the table and creating a scene. That is infantile behaviour not expected from lawmakers. What is curious about this case is that Shullai has taken offence that a discussion that is ostensibly held in a private location away from the prying eyes of the media should have been reported. Well, misbehaviour by an elected member who disrupted the speech of the Speaker of the Assembly in the august presence of the President elect cannot be dismissed as normal legislative behaviour which is why there are marshals in the Assembly to lead boisterous members outside the House. Unruly behaviour is not acceptable and cannot be condoned under any circumstances.

In July 2021, the Supreme Court while taking up a case related to the Kerala Assembly in 2015 said, it has to take a "strict" view of unruly behaviour of lawmakers in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies as such incidents are "increasing now-a-days" and this sort of conduct cannot be condoned. Indeed, unruly behaviour and disrupting someone's speech is considered bad manners even in ordinary discourse. The MLA represents his people and his behaviour reflects badly on his constituents too, the Supreme Court had noted.

Letters to the Editor

Plying of heavily loaded vehicles across Umiam Bridge

Editor,
It is noteworthy that the government has taken cognizance of the weak condition of the Umiam Bridge by limiting the tonnage capacity of the heavy vehicles passing over the Bridge. Generally dams are prohibited areas as in the case of PHE Mawphlang Dam and other dams across the country. However, it is sad to mention that public vehicles are plying over the bridges of Umiam Dam, Umiam-Umtru Stage-III Dam near Kyrdekulai in Ri - Bhoi District and Myntdu Leshka Dam in Jaintia Hills District defying the security norms and creating instability of the structures.

Since the case of the Umiam Bridge is in the public eye and proposal for diversion of the road is in the pipeline, a serious note on plying of vehicles across Umiam - Umtru Stage-III

Dam near Kyrdekulai in Ri Bhoi District and Myntdu Leshka Dam in Jaintia Hills District should also be given a serious thought to. At present, the Government can easily manage diversion of heavy vehicles plying over these dams. It is also suggested that all important and sensitive structures like dams, power stations etc., be declared as protected areas.

Yours etc,
B. Lyngdoh
Shillong-8

Revenue land parceled off

Editor,
As you are aware that NPP office was constructed without the permission of MUDA i.e. Meghalaya Urban Development Authority as senior cabinet minister, S. Dhar is Urban Affairs Minister and the Town Planning Officer is dear to him. Moreover, S. Dhar is more of a businessman having landed property in East Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi and Jaintia Hills District. His Company, one of the biggest construction companies had

c. Temporary Resident Status (Red)

Last but not least, in fact, the most crucial component of Influx, is the floating non-tribal population. Local labour is expensive whereas outside labour is cheap. The flow of outside labour into Meghalaya, especially in the mining and construction sectors is nothing but enactment of the laws of supply and demand. It is when this imported cheap labour begins to take permanent roots, in both urban and rural Meghalaya, that our concerns begin and the trouble starts. The least we can do under such circumstances is to ensure that the labour that comes into Meghalaya is not allowed to take permanent roots. Here lies the answer to the influx problem.

In view of Meghalaya's sad experience with our Infiltration Check Gates and Work Permit System, it is logical to assume that control of influx can no longer be entrusted to the Government alone nor to any of its designated agencies, simply because they cannot be trusted. Influx control will have to be by the people themselves working together as stakeholders towards a common objective. **THIS IS THE CUTTING EDGE FACTOR THE 3 TIER CARD SYSTEM HAS OVER THE ILP.**

This Temporary Card shall also apply to tourists who come to visit and enjoy the tourism assets of Meghalaya. These people come to enjoy and with ready money to spend. They add to the economy of the state. They must be welcomed and provided with security assurances that we welcome them and the money they bring. The Temporary card will be their warranty. We must recognise and understand that **Permanent settlement of outsiders and not Entry of outsiders is the problem.** The three tier card system seeks to eliminate this problem through the participation of the local communities. Till date there is no viable counter measure against such developments except for the demand for ILP which apparently is not forthcoming. The problem of influx remains unresolved. The temporary ID card proposes to contain the problem.

Applications for issue of temporary ID cards can be made from the office of any BDO, SDO or DC. (This provision is for the benefit of contractors who wish to apply on behalf of labourers they wish to bring from outside. Details of each applicant as per requirement of the scheme will have to be provided). All Meghalaya Houses and Check Gates at all entry points into Meghalaya will be authorised to

issue on the spot Temporary ID Cards to people who wish to visit Meghalaya for a short period of time. All such issuing booths will in turn be digitally linked by computer to all Block, District and the main Hub at Shillong, where all Temporary IDs so issued will be recorded and stored. **Each temporary card will clearly indicate the expiry date of such card.**

Temporary visitors to the state shall be issued Temporary ID Cards for a period of not more than three months only. No temporary ID Card can be renewed. Extension of stay within Meghalaya shall have to be justified and if approved a new Temporary ID card will be issued on surrender of the old card. It is also presumed that since the Card is for a temporary period of three months only, the holder shall not require prolonged rented accommodation; nor office premises; nor need to set up businesses; nor shall they need to avail of educational facilities for themselves or their families; nor shall they need to register

a central office in Shillong. This main server will then be linked to secondary portals located at all district HQ, at Block HQ, at all entry points on Meghalaya's border and to all Meghalaya houses. The Meg web site will list details of all temporary IDs inclusive of date, place and validity of issue and these details can be accessed by all interested parties especially authorized travel agents. The Meghalaya Web will advertise how Online application for ID Cards can be made. Application through such portals will be mainly for Semi Permanent and Temporary Cards only, as these do not require local durbar scrutiny for issue.

2. Local participation, and not dependence on a corruption susceptible police constabulary, shall be the working ethos of the Comprehensive 3 tier ID card system and this will ensure its effective implementation and compliance throughout all Meghalaya. It is necessary to explain how this concept of participation will work. As the possession of an ID card

"The three tier card system seeks to eliminate this problem through the participation of the local communities. Till date there is no viable counter measure against such developments except for the demand for ILP which apparently is not forthcoming. The problem of influx remains unresolved. The temporary ID card proposes to contain the problem."

or apply for ration cards etc. As tourists they shall only need hotel or paying guest accommodation. As labourers it shall be the responsibility of the contractor who brings them in to take care of their daily needs. Durbars, NGOs and other concerned local groups will ensure that the above are enforced. In the process no imported labourer can simply disappear into the countryside as they do now. Once his period of stay is over the holder of a Temporary ID Card will voluntarily leave on his own. No force is used. People leave on their own free will as no one without an ID card can exist in Meghalaya.

Implementing Procedure
1. The above, in essence is the concept behind the comprehensive 3 ID Card system as a control Measure against influx. This concept is based mainly on the easy availability of Online connectivity through the electronic digital systems and software. A Main server or Hub shall be installed and operate from

is compulsory for everyone, it shall be illegal for any person in the state to employ or engage a person or persons who are not in possession of a valid ID card. Any person who violates this rule will be judged as an abettor to a crime and liable to be punished under law. This will immediately bring all mine owners and contractors, who till now act with total disregard to the menace of influx, directly under the influx control mechanism. Employers of illegal migrants or people with invalid ID Cards can no longer plead ignorance. This is an important deterrent that will help check influx. Secondly, Government and the district administration will actively facilitate and encourage the durbars to maintain records of all categories of ID Card holders within their jurisdiction. Special attention of the Durbars will be given to all new residents and to the expiry date of all temporary cards within their jurisdiction. **It will be impossible for anyone without a**

valid ID to reside anywhere within Meghalaya as the people themselves will be constantly monitoring the status of all IDs all the time. It is a fool proof mechanism towards the control of illegal immigration; prevention of clandestine residency within the state and discourage employment of labour who do not possess an ID card. There is optimism of its effective applicability throughout the NE. Those interested in maintaining the demographic harmony in Meghalaya and the NE will definitely welcome the scheme. One however cannot speak on behalf of those who wish otherwise.

3. The secret of success and viability of the 3 ID Card system lies in its inbuilt mechanism. Identity of an individual will be the key. No person without an ID can exist within Meghalaya and that is why it is called Comprehensive. All aspects of activity as a resident of Meghalaya shall depend on the Identity status of the individual. Therefore the onus of proving identity will be with the individual and not on the state. Instead of having to ferret out, chase and throw out any suspicious illegal immigrant, the person himself will voluntarily have to leave, because he just cannot survive in Meghalaya without an ID Card

Bonus Points of the proposal

Aside from checking influx into Meghalaya the ID Cards, especially the Permanent ID Card to be issued to all genuine residents of Meghalaya, will act as Human Resource indicators of the villages and homesteads under the jurisdiction of Meghalaya. The boundaries of Meghalaya will be fenced with Humans and villages who can claim residency of the state by virtue of the ID cards they possess. The ID Cards will automatically solve the vexed boundary problem Meghalaya currently has with its neighbour Assam

The strength of the scheme is based on the following salient features:

All residents of the state shall need to possess an ID Card. Daily life activities will be linked with possession of a Card. All forms of employment, housing (tenancy, renting or boarding), education of children, ration cards, residential status, application for licenses or certificates etc will be directly linked to the possession of a card. **The objective is that those without an ID card cannot survive in Meghalaya. Illegal immigrants, existing and future, will be forced to leave voluntarily. Herein lies the strength and beauty of the system. There is no need to push anyone across any border or to maintain anybody in any refugee camp.** (Concluded)

(Continued from Part I)

Influx Control : An Alternative Option - Part II

By Toki Blah

Diluting Democracy Hampers Hindutva

By Dusmnata Kumar

BJP's core theme of mobilisation has been Hindutva. Scholars and leaders seek to make a distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism; the former is treated as a political construct. Be that as it may, Hindutva and Hinduism are increasingly becoming synonymous for want of viable champions of Hinduism in opposition ranks. BJP has therefore managed to consolidate the Hindus. The concern in this piece is to examine how undermining democracy will hamper Hindutva mobilisation.

Let me make two formulations. One, Hinduism/Hindutva and democracy are co-terminus. I know that could be a provocative proposition. Yet, let us proceed with it as a working hypothesis. To use a caveat, in 1990s, I was participating in a democracy seminar in the University of Lancashire in the Lake District of United Kingdom. One of the presenters, a British professor called Indian democracy "an ethnic democracy" "an ethnic democracy". Elaborating on it, he said, Indian democracy survives on account of diversity as well as pluralism in the Hindu religion itself which is a majority religion in India. This formulation has merits.

Hinduism is a polytheist religion, meaning there are various streams of spiritualism and practice. Believing in oneness of God and humanity, Hindus worship thousands of Gods and Goddesses which they consider the manifestations of the supreme God. In addition to differentiated Hindu spiritualism, the existence of caste which is considered a social sin, adds variety of identities in Hinduism which complement democracy. In conceptual terms, democracy means recognising and reconciling multiple identities.

Secondly, democracy involves sharing of positions, power and political space among various communities. That is how the tickets for candidates for Assembly and Parliamentary elections are decided on the basis of community support; the ministerial berths are allocated on same terms. In a representative democracy, not only the leaders represent people, they also represent various segments of population defined in terms of communities, which in turn are based on language, ethnicity, caste, religion, gender, profession and so on.

As the essence of Hinduism consists of pluralist beliefs and practices, it conduces democratic politics which promotes diversities and reconciles differences emerging out of them. The logical extension of this formulation is that Hinduism and democracy are symbiotic. If democracy is diluted, Hinduism is undermined, and vice versa. In other words, it is to be underlined that the champions of Hindutva should respect and redeem democracy. This is not happening in hanker for power, and out of ignorance of the interface between Hinduism and democracy.

The second formulation is that legal and democratic are not one and the same. Political parties, mainly the present ruling regimes in the States and at the Centre seem to conflate the concepts of legal and democratic which leads to upending democracy. For the sake of conceptual clarity, take it that what is legal is not necessarily democratic. Legal relates to an outcome, a decision taken, but democratic refers to the process of arriving at such decisions. Debates, discussion, dialogues, inclusive participation of stakeholders, building consensus wherever possible, encouraging and respecting dissent are elements of a democratic process. Sadly, all these attributes are missing in our legislatures and even in public discourses across the country. A law can be passed in the Parliament on the basis of majority. That is legal. But is it democratic? Was there adequate discussion in Parliament? Members of Parliament belonging to the Opposition parties complain that they are not given time to speak on bills that are

made into laws. They are not even provided with the draft of the Bill in good time before it is tabled in the Parliament.

There are Parliamentary committees to scrutinise the Bills before they are put into motion. These committees are bypassed in making laws. Thus the roles of Parliamentary Committees ensuring accountability, value addition and an inclusive process, are undermined. The committees seek opinions from the public, professional bodies to examine various dimensions of a Bill. Thus, the stakeholders of various Bills are taken into a consultation process. This practice also helps in acceptance of laws by citizens.

Remember the three farm laws, which were passed without adequate consultation with the Opposition or the primary stakeholders, causing widespread and prolonged protest by the farmers until the laws were withdrawn. The infamous note ban is another example, which caused undue and avoidable distress to people without achieving the intended results – curbing black money etc.

Another example could be passing of CAA – Citizenship Amendment Act. The government may have its logic in excluding a particular community and including the minorities who are persecuted in their host countries. This was not adequately debated in the Parliament and explained to the public. Consequently, the country was plunged into unrest and strikes by students in the universities. This could have been avoided with due dialogue across the board.

Convening all party meetings is a practice that helps democracy. The government has the benefit of contrarian suggestions from different parties which help in better formulation of policies. These meetings have become rare across the federal layers of our country. The other medium for communication by government is the press, which can carry government's intent and actions to the public. But strangely, the ministers do not address the press.

The ruling party has spokespersons, who, not being part of the government, could disseminate wrong messages. We noticed recently, one of their spokespersons, making indiscreet remarks about a religion which led to strong and hostile reactions in the country and abroad. The ruling party promptly disowned the spokesperson, disagreed with her remarks and dismissed her from the position. The point is, spokespersons could represent the party not the government. Sadly, the Prime Minister never addresses any press meet.

In recent times, an unhealthy trend of discussing religions in public is being noticed across States of the country. This is stemming from party-politicisation and radicalisation of religions. Both these practices do not augur well for our democracy. As said before, community mobilisation in electoral politics without causing inter-community antagonism is acceptable. In that sense, consolidation of Hindus may be in order. Many progressives will challenge this though. So be it. It is an existential reality for political parties in a competitive electoral politics.

If Muslim parties can be registered by the Election Commission and allowed to function, why not Hindu parties? But radicalisation of Hinduism, even in response to the same practice in other religions, negates the essence of Hinduism which consists of being tolerant, accommodative, reconciling and so on. To reiterate the point, radicalisation and religious monism of Hinduism goes against the practice of democracy as well as the spirit of the religion. Pluralism present in Hinduism fosters religious pluralism in India, which leads to political pluralism that constitutes the main pillar democracy.

---/NFA

this grand scheme.

In conclusion, I request that a proper enquiry be conducted by the CBI to unearth the biggest scandal of the MDA Government led by NPP and its Ministers, Revenue Department and A.D.C. (Revenue) as all are involved in these fraudulent deals. Without the permission and seal of the aforesaid department these deals could not have materialised.

Yours etc.,
Teiborlang Thangkiew,
Via email

Need for CBI Enquiry

Editor,
The spate of irregularities and scams being dug out every now and then under the current dispensation of the NPP led-government that includes the regional parties as well, marks a new low in the history of scams in the state. What is ironic is the stubborn attitude of some MLAs in the ruling government irrespective of their party banners, to have accepted that corruption is normal and

that it is their moral right to extract every pound available and the very same ones will lambast the coalition they're in together. The collapse of the newly built state legislative assembly dome to cracked bridges, potholes; road to an unfinished model institution in Ri Bhoi funded by the Center, leaking ISBT, haphazard construction of centrally funded institutions and assets all of these call for a CBI enquiry and all those found guilty should be put in jail and their assets sold off to repay what has been spent. We don't really see the kind of quality governance we see in other states. This is why the MDA Government has lost credibility in the eyes of the Union Government and most importantly in the eyes of the public. Perhaps it's an opportunity to boot out the MDA in 2023.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,
Via email

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Why we mimic the accents of others in conversation

By Lacey Wade

Have you ever caught yourself talking a little bit differently after listening to someone with a distinctive way of speaking?

Perhaps you'll pepper in a couple of y'all's after spending the weekend with your Texan mother-in-law. Or you might drop a few R's after binge-watching a British period drama on Netflix.

Linguists call this phenomenon "linguistic convergence," and it's something you've likely done at some point, even if the shifts were so subtle you didn't notice.

People tend to converge toward the language they observe around them, whether it's copying word choices, mirroring sentence structures or mimicking pronunciations.

But as a doctoral student in linguistics, I wanted to know more about how readily this behavior occurs: Would people converge based on evidence as flimsy as their own expectations of how someone might sound?

Three years of experimentation and an entire dissertation later, I had my answer, which was just published in the academic journal *Language*.

People do, in fact, converge toward speech sounds they expect to hear — even if they never actually hear them.

What is convergence?

But before getting into the specifics, let's talk about what convergence is and how it's related to other speech adjustments like code-switching, which refers to alternating between language varieties, or style-shifting, which happens when a person uses different linguistic features in different situations.

Convergence refers to the shifts people make to their speech to approximate that of those around them. This is an intentionally broad definition meant to encompass all sorts of adjustments, whether intentional or inadvertent, prominent or

subtle, or toward entire dialects or particular linguistic features.

You could imitate aspects of speech you actually observe. Or maybe you throw in some words you think kids these days use, only to have your use of "bac" and "lit" be met with teenage eye rolls.

Code-switching or style-shifting can also be examples of convergence, as long as the shift is toward an interlocutor — the person you're talking to. But people can also shift away from an interlocutor, and this is called "divergence."

Code-switching and style-shifting can occur for other reasons, too, like how you feel, what you're talking about and how you want

more like "Tom." This is called "monophthongization," and it is a hallmark of Southern speech.

I wanted to know whether people would produce a more Southern-like "I" vowel when they heard someone speak with a Southern accent — and here's the crucial part — even if they never heard how that person actually pronounced "I."

So I designed an experiment, disguised as a guessing game, in which I got more than 100 participants to say a bunch of "I" words.

In the first part of the game, they read a series of clues on their computer screen — things like, "this US coin is small, silver, and worth 10 cents."



to be perceived. You might drop your G's more and say things like "thinkin'" when reminiscing about a prank you played in high school — but switch to more formal speech when the conversation shifts to a new job you're applying to.

Are expectations enough to alter speech?

To determine whether people converge toward particular pronunciations they expect but never actually encounter, I needed to start my investigation with a feature that people would have clear expectations about. I landed on the "I" vowel, as in "time," which in much of the southern US is pronounced

Then they named the word being described — "dime!" — and I recorded their speech.

In the second part of the game, I had participants listen to clues read by a noticeably Southern-accented talker and instructed them to respond in the same way. By comparing their speech before and after hearing a Southern accent, I could determine whether they converged.

Using acoustic analysis, which gives us precise measurements of how participants' "I" vowels sound, I observed that Southerners and non-Southerners alike did, in fact, shift their "I" vowels toward a slightly more Southern-like pronunciation when listening to the



Southern-accented talker.

They never actually heard how the Southerner produced this vowel, since none of the clues contained the "I" vowel. This means they were anticipating how this Southerner might say "I," and then converging toward those expectations.

This was pretty clear evidence that people converge not just toward speech they observe but also toward speech they expect to hear.

Social asset or faux pas?

What does this say about human behavior?

For one, it means that people perceive accents as coherent collections of different linguistic features. Hearing accent features X and Y tells people to expect accent feature Z, because they know X, Y and Z go together.

But it's not just that people passively know things about others' accents. This knowledge can even shape your own speech.

So why does this happen? And how do those on the receiving end perceive it?

First, it's important to point out that convergence is usually very subtle — and there's a reason. Overly

exaggerated convergence — sometimes called overaccommodation — can be perceived as mocking or patronizing.

You've probably witnessed people switch to a slower, louder, simpler speech style when talking to an elderly person or a nonnative speaker. This type of over-the-top convergence is often based on assumptions about limited comprehension — and it can socially backfire.

"Why are they talking to me like I'm a child?" the listener might think. "I understand them just fine."

For expectation-driven convergence — which, by definition, is not rooted in reality — such a faux pas might be even more likely. If you don't have an actual speech target to converge toward, you might resort to inaccurate, simplistic or stereotyped ideas about how someone will speak.

However, subtler shifts — in what might be called the "sweet spot" of convergence — can have a number of benefits, from social approval to more efficient and successful communication.

Consider a toddler who calls their pacifier a "binky." You'd probably

be better off asking "where's the binky?" and not "where's the pacifier?"

Reusing the terms our interlocutors use is not just cognitively easier for us — since it takes less effort to come up with a word we just heard — but it often has the added benefit of making communication easier for our partner. The same could be said for using a more familiar pronunciation.

If people can anticipate how someone will speak even sooner — before they utter a word — and converge toward that expectation, communication could, in theory, be even more efficient. If expectations are accurate, expectation-driven convergence could be a social asset.

That's not to say that people necessarily go around consciously making these sorts of calculations. In fact, some explanations for convergence suggest that it is an unintentional, automatic consequence of speech comprehension.

Regardless of why convergence happens, it's clear that even beliefs about others play a major role in shaping the way people use language — for better or for worse. (*The Conversation*)

The Dalai Lama - an authentic role model for all leaders

His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives in exile for over 60 years; having forfeited his active role as the spiritual and temporal leader of the over 7 million Tibetan Buddhists due to Chinese aggression. But he reflects the inimitable characteristic of a divine presence on earth, not losing his composure, his sense of humour, altruistic tendencies, the simple child-like nature and relentless hard work towards his global and national commitments. He is now celebrating his 87th birthday and what he has achieved on a global level over the period of his exile would need many pages history to record.

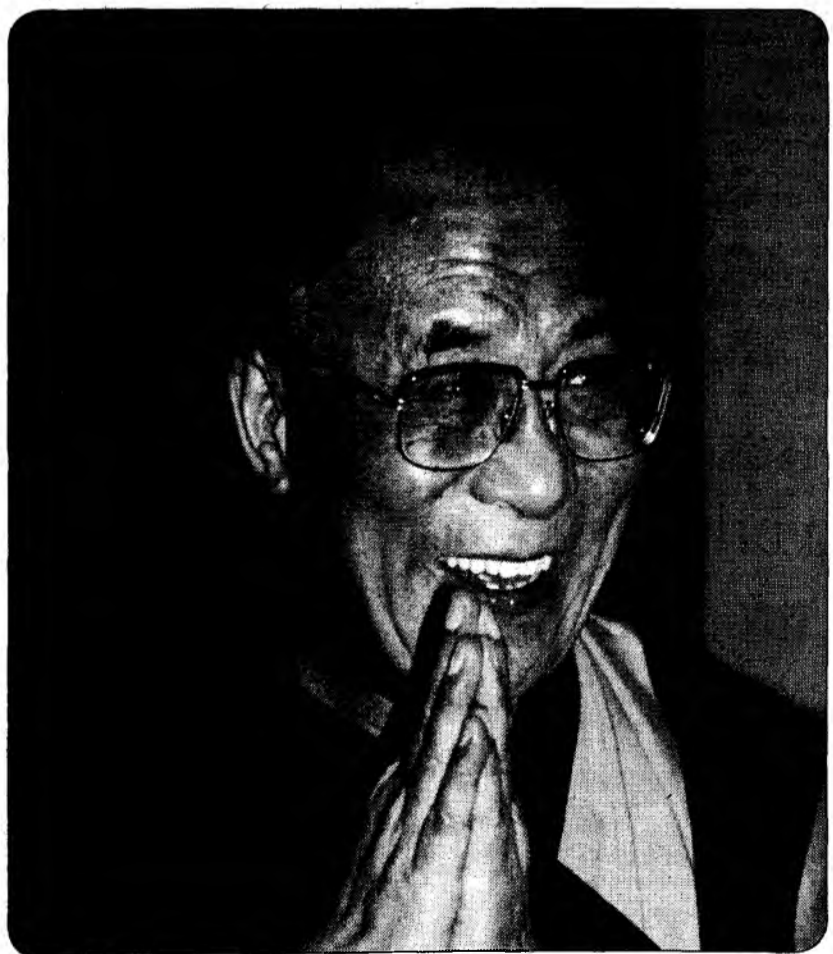
His commitments on global peace, the relevance and importance of Buddhist teachings to the contemporary world, individual peace and happiness, health of planet earth, the liberation of his motherland and its people, the importance of education and a reconciliation between Buddhism and science.

In his lectures, deliberations, discourses and meetings held in world capitals over the years, he has conveyed his messages very clearly on these issues, aside from establishing institutions in India for the propagation of these concepts.

His simple child-like nature, and the capacity to laugh aloud without any trace of concern or worry while engaged in grave global issues and threats, his unreserved pure, willful, sacrificial love that intentionally desires another's highest good and his equilibrium and blissfulness at all occasions have all been clearly witnessed by people in the events that he attended over the years.

His remarks at a symposium at the Cambridge Union are worthwhile mentioning to 'geeta' glimpse of his simplistic nature: "I never think of myself as a leader, I think of myself as a simple Buddhist monk. It's part of my practice to serve sentient beings as best I can. My body, speech and mind are dedicated to

their welfare. If someone asks, I share my experience with them, but I don't impose my views without a request or invitation."



Hundreds of quotations, such as the one below, from his lectures and discourses in world capitals and at institutions of international repute can be cited to portray his outlook on fellow human beings and his approaches to the contemporary world:

"Brothers and sisters, I dislike formality. When I meet you I like to think that we are all human beings. Any idea that I am somehow different from you because I am Asian, Tibetan or Buddhist, or that I am somehow special because I am the Dalai Lama is nonsense. You are human beings, I'm a human being; you want a happy life, and I want a

happy life. But I think that aim will not be fulfilled only on the basis of material values; what we all want is affection and what we all need is to be

more warm-hearted. This is how we create the healthy mind that ensures our physical health."

He has consistently advocated policies of non-violence, even in the face of extreme aggression. His Holiness has travelled to more than sixty-two countries spanning six continents. Since 1959, His Holiness has received over 84 awards, honorary doctorates, prizes, among others, in recognition of his message of peace, non-violence, inter-religious understanding, universal responsibility and compassion. His Holiness has also authored more than 72 books. His Holiness describes himself as a

simple Buddhist monk.

His Holiness has three main commitments in life.

Firstly, as a human being, His Holiness promotes human values such as compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment and self-discipline.

Secondly, as a religious practitioner, His Holiness is committed to promoting religious harmony and understanding among the world's major religious traditions. Despite philosophical differences between them, all major world religions have the same potential to create good human beings. Therefore, all religious traditions need to respect one another and recognize the value of their respective traditions.

Thirdly, His Holiness is a Tibetan and as the 'Dalai Lama' is the focus of the Tibetan people's hope and trust. Therefore, his third commitment is to preserve Tibet's Buddhist culture, a culture of peace and non-violence and protect the natural environment of Tibet. The institutions that he established range from educational institutions for the Tibetan refugee children to institutions dealing with controversial global issues. At last, His Holiness has lately spoken of his commitment to reviving awareness of the value of ancient Indian knowledge among young Indians today. His Holiness is convinced that the rich ancient Indian understanding of the workings of the mind and emotions, as well as mental training such as meditation are of great relevance today. He is confident that ancient Indian knowledge can be combined with modern education.

As one of the most revered spiritual leaders, the 14th Dalai Lama is an icon who advocates democracy and freedom not only for his country but also for the world. He is a role model to everyone who wish to see positive differences in the world. (LANS)

London in possession of 1st Tamil Bible translation

The Tamil Nadu Police's Idol Wing has traced the 300-year-old, world's first printed Bible translation in Tamil, stolen from the state's Thanjavur, to the King George III museum in London, officials said on Friday.

Sources in the Idol Wing told LANS that the department has commenced the process to bring the Bible back to India. An officer said that the Bible was stolen from Saraswathi Mahal Library in Thanjavur in 2005 and the theft is suspected to be the handiwork of a group of foreigners who had visited the library.

The deputy administrator of Serfoji Palace in Thanjavur filed a complaint about the theft with the Thanjavur west police station on October 10, 2005 and a case was registered a case but there was no progress.

Subsequently, on October 2017, Saraswathi Mahal Library administrator E. Rajendran lodged a complaint with the idol wing, and a case was registered and investigations launched.

After the progress was studied by Director General, Idol Wing, Jayanth K. Murali, a separate team was set up in 2020 and a detailed study of the registry was painstakingly undertaken by the team during the period the Bible went missing and it was found that on October 7, 2005, the library had hosted a group of foreigners.

"We found that the visitors had come to India to attend a function to commemorate Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg, the Danish missionary who had printed the Bible," Murali said.

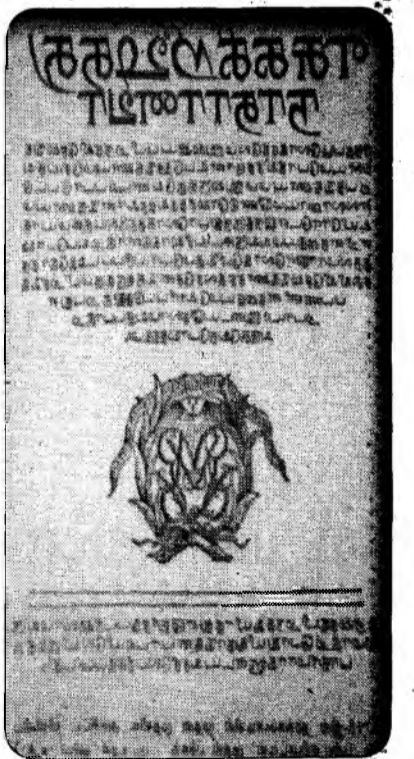
An officer with the Idol Wing then scanned all the websites of libraries and private collectors associated with Ziegenbalg manuscripts, and stumbled upon at King George III museum.

They were able to find the stolen first Tamil translation that was printed at a printing press in Tharangambadi in the 17th century, and could match the stolen Bible with the one

at the museum.

"We hope to retrieve the Bible and restore it to the Saraswathi Mahal Library under the UNESCO treaty soon. The wing has initiated steps to restore the Bible to the library," the Idol Wing said.

The King of Denmark had sent Ziegenbalg to Tamil Nadu and he ar-



rived in Tranquebar (The anglicized name of Tharangambadi), which was then a Danish colony close to Nagapattinam, in 1706.

The Protestant missionary translated the New Testament into Tamil in 1715. After his demise, another missionary Schwartz handed over the first copy of the Bible to Tulaji Rajah Serfoji, the then ruler of Thanjavur.

The Tamil Nadu government had kept this antique as an exhibit at Saraswathi Mahal Library.

The Idol Wing, in its statement, also said: "The value of the Bible is further enhanced as the cover of this antique piece bears the signature of the then King of Thanjavur, Serfoji." (LANS)

Smoke and mirrors: Was there anything real about Elvis?

By Michael T Bertrand

In Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis*, there's a scene based on actual conversations that took place between Elvis Presley and Steve Binder, the director of a 1968 NBC television special that signaled the singer's return to live performing. Binder, an iconoclast unimpressed by Presley's recent work, had pushed Elvis to reach back into his past to revitalize a career stalled by years of mediocre movies and soundtrack albums. According to the director, their exchanges left the performer engrossed in deep soul-searching.

In the trailer to Luhrmann's biopic, a version of this back-and-forth plays out: Elvis, portrayed by Austin Butler, says to the camera, "I've got to get back to who I really am." Two frames later, Dacre Montgomery, playing Binder, asks, "And who are you, Elvis?"

Presley never wrote a memoir. Nor did he keep a diary. Once, when informed of a potential biography in the works, he expressed doubt that there was even a story to tell. Over the years, he had submitted to numerous interviews and press conferences, but the quality of these exchanges was erratic, frequently characterized by superficial answers to even shallower questions.

His music could have been a window into his inner life, but since he wasn't a songwriter, his material depended on the words of others. Even the rare revelatory gems — songs like *If I Can Dream*, *Separate Ways* or *My Way* — didn't fully penetrate the veil shrouding the man.

Binder's philosophical inquiry, then, was not merely philosophical. Countless fans and scholars have long wanted to know: Who was Elvis, really?

A barometer for the nation

Pinpointing Presley can depend on when and whom you ask. At the dawn of his career, admirers and critics alike branded him the

"Hillbilly Cat." Then he became the "King of Rock 'n' Roll," a musical monarch that promoters placed on a mythical throne.

But for many, he was always the "King of White Trash Culture" — a working-class white southern rags-to-riches story that never quite convinced the national establishment of his legitimacy.

Man with blue eyes and sideburns speaks into microphone.

These overlapping identities capture the provocative fusion of class, race, gender, region and commerce



that Elvis embodied.

Perhaps the most contentious aspect of his identity was the singer's relationship to race. As a white artist who profited greatly from the popularisation of a style associated with African Americans, Presley, throughout his career, worked under the shadow and suspicion of racial appropriation.

The connection was complicated and fluid, to be sure.

Quincy Jones met and worked with Presley in early 1956 as the musical director of CBS-TV's *Stage Show*. In his 2002 autobiography, Jones noted that Elvis should be listed with Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, Stevie Wonder, and Michael Jackson as pop music's greatest innovators. However, by 2021, in the midst of a changing racial climate, Jones was dismissing Presley as an unabashed racist.

Elvis seems to serve as a barom-

eter measuring America's various tensions, with the gauge less about Presley and more about the nation's pulse at any given moment.

You are what you consume

But I think there's another way to think about Elvis — one that might put into context many of the questions surrounding him.

Historian William Leuchtenburg once characterized Presley as a "consumer culture hero," a manufactured commodity more image

than substance. The assessment was negative; it also was incomplete. It didn't consider how a consumerist disposition may have shaped Elvis prior to his becoming an entertainer.

Presley reached adolescence as a post-World War II consumer economy was hitting its stride. A product of unprecedented affluence and pent-up demand caused by depression and wartime sacrifice, it provided almost unlimited opportunities for those seeking to entertain and define themselves.

The teenager from Memphis, Tennessee, took advantage of these opportunities. Riffing off the idiom "you are what you eat," Elvis became what he consumed.

During his formative years, he shopped at Lansky Brothers, a clothier on Beale Street that outfitted African American performers and provided him with secondhand

pink-and-black ensembles.

He tuned into the radio station WDIA, where he soaked up gospel and rhythm and blues tunes, along with the vernacular of black disk jockeys. He turned the dial to WHBQ's *Red, Hot, and Blue*, a program that had Dewey Phillips spinning an eclectic mix of R&B, pop and country. He visited Popular Tunes and Home of the Blues record stores, where he purchased the music dancing in his head. And at the Loew's State and Suzore #2 movie theaters, he took in the latest Marlon Brando or Tony Curtis movies, imagining in the dark how to emulate their demeanor, sideburns, and ducktails.

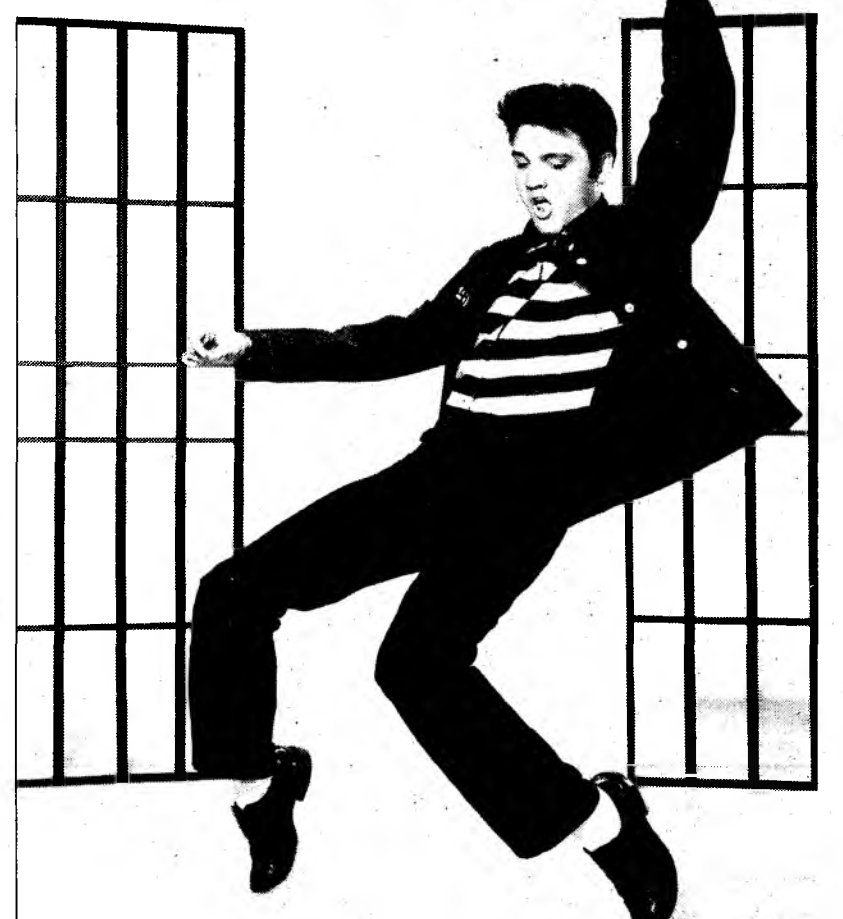
In short, he gleaned from the nation's burgeoning consumer culture the persona that the world would come to know. Elvis alluded to this in 1971 when he provided a rare glimpse into his psyche upon receiving a Jaycees Award as one of the nation's Ten Outstanding Young Men:

"When I was a child, ladies and gentlemen, I was a dreamer. I read comic books, and I was the hero of the comic book. I saw movies, and I was the hero in the movie. So every dream I ever dreamed has come true a hundred times ... I'd like to say that I learned very early in life that 'without a song, the day would never end. Without a song, a man ain't got a friend. Without a song, the road would never bend. Without a song.' So, I'll keep singing a song."

In that acceptance speech, he quoted *Without a Song*, a standard tune performed by artists including Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and Roy Hamilton — seamlessly presenting the lyrics as if they were words directly applicable to his own life experiences.

A loaded question

Does this make the Jaycees recipient some sort of "odd, lonely child reaching for eternity," as Tom Parker, played by Tom Hanks, tells



an adult Presley in the new "Elvis" film?

I don't think so. Instead, I see him as someone who simply devoted his life to consumption, a not uncommon late 20th-century behavior. Scholars have noted that whereas Americans once defined themselves through their genealogy, jobs, or faith, they increasingly started to identify themselves through their tastes — and, by proxy, what they consumed. As Elvis crafted his identity and pursued his craft, he did the same.

It also was evident in how he spent most of his downtime. A tireless worker on stage and in the recording studio, those settings nevertheless demanded relatively little of his time. For most of the 1960s, he made three movies annually, each taking no more than a month to complete. That was the extent of his professional obligations.

From 1969 to his death in 1977, only 797 out of 2,936 days were devoted to performing concerts or recording in the studio. Most of his time was dedicated to vacationing, playing sports, riding motorcycles, zipping around on go-karts, horseback riding, watching TV and eating.

By the time he died, Elvis was a shell of his former self. Overweight, bored, and chemically dependent, he appeared spent. A few weeks before his demise, a Soviet publication described him as "wrecked" — a "pitilessly" dumped product victimized by the American consumerist system.

Elvis Presley proved that consumerism, when channeled productively, could be creative and liberating. He likewise demonstrated that left unrestrained, it could be empty and destructive. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Aja Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 10, 2022

Moon square Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. The year will turn out very favourable one for you. You will be interacting a lot more with people. You will shed your inhibitions and become more extrovert. This will help you in developing lot of contacts and making new friends. Your professional circle will increase and will also prove to be of immense help to you. Some person will provide timely help and support. New job opportunities will keep coming. Your confidence will be high and a new personality will emerge. Romantic ties can lead to marriage. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. You will make plans for going on a holiday with family. Mate will continue to support. Health will remain perfect. Financial position will get strengthened. Children will shine in studies.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
The time will be one of gains. You will be able to complete your work with satisfaction. You will make a good impression on your bosses who will help you a lot. You will be full of self confidence and your efforts will get noticed. There will be better coordination among your colleagues. You will have no tensions with regard to money. Your income will rise. And you will prosper in your business. There will be compatibility between personal and marital relations. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner. You might plan to change your house/location. You will behave politely with your children. You will be happy and prosper. You will develop yourself. You will work seriously to make your image in the public. There will be celebrations. Introduction to new people, meeting old friends and there will be revival of old memories.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
It will be a mentally satisfying week. You will have lot of days to cheer and feel happy about a lot of things in life. Your friends, relatives, elders, spouse/partner, colleagues will be a part of your life. You will care about them and will get support from them too. You will get chance to progress in your job/business. You will also earn well. You will be of a good character and this quality will take you far ahead. Your wishes will get fulfilled. You will welcome success in your life. Love birds will have an amazing time. Your working speed will be slow and steady. Time is knowledge enhancing students will focus on their studies. You will learn something new. You will be working with new people.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
You will witness peace and prosperity in your life. You will manage your money properly. You will also make new investments wisely. You will take care of your health. You can also get involved in new love relations. It will prove to be a joyous experience for you. You will also remain devoted to your parents. They will bless you. A dispute may get blown out of proportion about which you will regret later on. Hence remain careful about your actions. Love makes will have a wonderful time. Husband and wife will have good understanding. You will be working with full dedication and will not rest till your work get finished. Guests will also arrive and you will be very busy in their welcome. You will have the results of your hard work. And your prestige will increase. You will have money in your hand.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
The time is favorable. Your colleagues will be with you and you will also get support of your boss. You will also have blessings and affection of your elders. Or some great personality. Relations with your siblings will improve. They will give you lot of respect and love. You will also enjoy wonderful bonding with your partner/spouse. Those who are in a long distance relations will plan to get married. You will have financial worries. You will also get a good news from somewhere. You will also make changes the way you work. You will be able to attract people with your charm. Meeting with friends and colleagues will make you happy. Decisions in court will come in your favor. There will be good understanding between couples. You will also clinch a favorable business deal. You will see your dreams to be fulfilled.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
It will be money gaining days. You will have good progress in your job/business. You will have self confidence in your own abilities. You will get full support of your peers and bosses. You will also display exceptional leadership qualities. Life will be full of joy and happiness. You will have special respect for parents and elders. Long pending official works will speed up with someone's help. There will be no tensions in love affairs. Opponents and enemies will be unable to harm you. Boss and senior officers will be fully satisfied with your work. Even though there will be lots of hurdles in your progress. You will be able to attract people with your charm. Meeting with friends and colleagues will make you happy. Decisions in court will come in your favor. There will be good understanding between couples. You will also clinch a favorable business deal. You will see your dreams to be fulfilled.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
It will prove to be best days for you. You will earn lot of money. You will also move ahead with a positive attitude. Housewives can earn something new. You can also fall in love relations with a person known to you. You will make excellent progress in your job/business. You will be comfortable with people. There will be a very busy schedule in household works and office works. You will also complete your pending projects with

a greater speed. You will also spend quality time with your family. You will spend your time in entertainment. You will also understand the value of time and utilize it effectively. Time will be spent nicely with loved ones. You will discuss with your family about the problems to be solved with their trust and cooperation.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)
The whole week will be good for you. You will have a realization of your power. You will also have some magnetic attraction and power. Your communication skills will be second to none and people will take notice of you. You will also be able to get your work done with ease. You will also make good use of your contacts. You will be trying for your business expansion by advertising. You will also reap huge profits. You also need to avoid arguments with your family members, particularly elders of your family. Your faith in God will increase. You will be full of courage and self confidence. You will also resolve outstanding issues with your partner/spouse. Your knowledge about lot of things will grow. You will be acknowledged for your knowledge and work. Your sincere efforts will give you inner peace.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
The beginning and end of the week will be very pleasant for you. In the middle of the week, you will be caught in your own work. You will get lot of respect. Personal matters will be solved soon and intimate relations will be improved. You will share wonderful bonding with your mate. You can get promoted in your job or get a new job offer. You will get good news from somewhere which will lift your spirits. You will get lot of money after your hard work and sincere efforts. There will be lot of running around to get your work done which you will finish eventually. You can fall in love relations with a unknown person all of a sudden. You will come up to the expectations of your partner.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
You will be getting fabulous results. You will have your family's support. You will also follow a plan at a workplace to get your workplace. It will please one and all. You will get encouragement and support of your bosses. Your name and fame will grow by leaps and bounds. You will also make plans to expand your business. At home front, there will be cordial relations between husband and wife. This is the time for completion of all your important work. The time is favoring you. You will also take care of your child's interest and also plan about his/her future. There will be some pleasant event take place. You will also undertake business related trips which will prove beneficial for you. You will achieve your goals by hard working.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
You will be busy in your work. You will also get success due to your hard work. You will be successful in fulfilling your responsibilities at home as well as office. You may have to undertake a work related trip all of a sudden. Take care of your health as weather is changing. You may suffer from some seasonal disease like cold, cough or fever. So you should remain careful. You will be interesting in higher studies and will plan accordingly. You will be relieved as your works will get moving. You will have property gains. You will be over ambitious. This time will be activities oriented. You will be preparing for some special festival. You will be working with peaceful mind. Peace and harmony will prevail in family ties.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
You will take full advantage of good times. Your relations with your bosses will be cordial. You will be given additional responsibilities. You will be full of energy and excitement. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. You will also get marital bliss. Your bonding with your spouse will be perfect. Your efforts will be successful in your business/work. You will be winning over your opponents. You will get the chance to move ahead in your life. Your meeting with an old friend will bring new aspects to light. These days you will get good responses for the work done earlier. You will complete your official work in time. You will look after the needs of your children as well. You will be conscious to improve your image in front of others. You will increase your interactions with new people. New opportunities will be there for your progress.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
These are best days for property gains. You will complete your work with keenness. You will enjoy happy and peaceful days. These are indications of marital happiness. Expected success signs are visible. Those who are single will get marriage proposals. You will have monetary gains. You will make new investments. You will also get promotion which was overdue for a long time. You will be working by your destiny's strength. Your work will be successful due to your liberal and moderate attitude. Love ties will be successful. Works that had been stalled will be completed. Your vehicle will need regular repairs and service. There might be an auspicious moment regarding your children and a good investment on their studies. Money flow will be good. You will travel a lot in order to look for new opportunities in work and job.

The influential stage visionary who made Mahabharata a global epic

The soul of Peter Brook's work as a director, actor and writer was in his productions noted for what he called "colour-rich", as opposed to "colour-blind", casting. In his view, when the audience sits bored, listening to a recital of words with no emotion, the actor has failed.

Brook once said: "People have entrusted themselves to you for two hours or more and you have to give them a respect that derives from confidence in what you are doing. At the end of an evening, you may have encouraged what is crude, violent or destructive in them. Or you can help them. By that I mean that an audience can be touched, entranced or - best of all - moved to a silence that vibrates round the theatre."

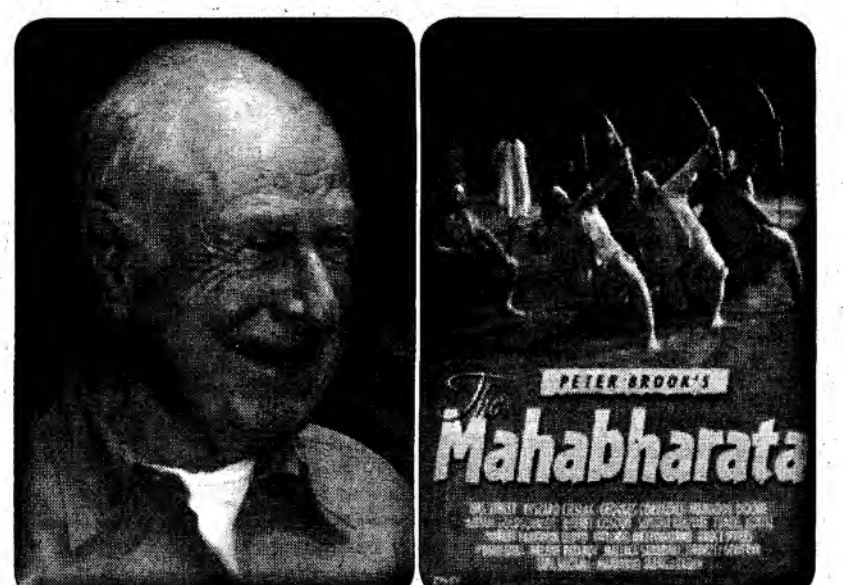
And this, literally, brought the roof down on the opening night of William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* at the once-dilapidated Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris that he helped restore. The applause shook the building.

In a 2017 interview with British art critic Michael Billington, Brook spoke about how important it is to "swim against the tide and achieve whatever we can in our chosen field. Fate dictated that mine was that of theatre and, within that, I have a responsibility to be as positive and creative as I can. To give way to despair is the ultimate cop-out."

Not surprisingly, after his productions at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the Bouffes du Nord, his base for more than 30 years was in African villages where his actors improvised performances, and on stages both grand and in modes that his globetrotting ensemble visited refined the way theatre is looked at.

Brook's landmark achievements include a nine-hour version of the 'Mahabharata', putting Shakespeare on trapezes, and directing the likes of Sir Laurence Olivier, Sir John Gielgud and Paul Scofield at the RSC.

'The Mahabharata', in fact, was



staged in a French quarry in 1985

and *The New York Times*, noting its "overwhelming critical acclaim", said it "did nothing less than attempt to transform the Hindu myth into universalised art, accessible to any culture".

Many post-colonial scholars, however, have challenged this claim to universalism, accusing the play of Orientalism. Author Gautam Dasgupta wrote: "Brook's Mahabharata falls short of essential Indianness of the epic by staging predominantly its major incidents and failing to adequately emphasise its coterminous philosophical precepts."

Brook returned to the epic in 2016 with 'Battlefield', staged with his long-time collaborator Marie-Helene Estienne.

Brook also directed musicals, the anti-Vietnam war protest play *US*, and co-created with British author Ted Hughes *Orghast*, an experimental play based on the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus, a Titan and god of fire.

"I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space, whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged," Brook wrote in *The Empty Space* (1968), which many directors and actors consider

their Bible.

Often referred to as "our greatest living theatre director", Brook won multiple Tony and Emmy Awards, a Laurence Olivier Award, the Japanese Praemium Imperiale and the Prix Italia. The Government of India honoured him with the Padma Shri in 2021 "for his valuable contributions towards art".

Born in London on March 21, 1925, at age seven he acted out a four-hour version of *Hamlet* in his own for his parents.

Several of his shows received Broadway transfers, including the avant garde *Marat/Sade*, which won the Tony award for best play in 1964.

In 1970, Brook moved to Paris, where he set up his International Centre for Theatre Research. The company visited Africa, where his actors gave performances that "didn't use anything that corresponded to the theatre of the time -- we wanted to play to audiences who were not conditioned by anything. We wouldn't, even experimentally, do a play with a text or a theme or a name."

Brook married actor Natasha Parry in 1951 and they had two children, Irina (now a director) and Simon (now a producer). Parry died in 2015. (*IANS*)

"Betrayal is the only truth that sticks."

— Arthur Miller

The Shillong Times

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Turmoil in Sri Lanka

THE four-month-old mass protests over the deepening economic crisis in Sri Lanka have resulted in the effective ouster of the Gotabaya Rajapaksa-led dispensation, seizure of his presidential palace by the people in a non-violent mode and the resignation of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe whose house has been set on fire. The collapse of the government is complete; and the Rajapaksa family that got back to power in 2019 is seen today as the villain of the piece. With the country's external debts rising, the government has no funds to import fuel. Fuel stations ran dry and homes stopped getting their cooking gas. Every step by the government to ease the situation produced only negative results. The political leadership has let down Sri Lanka badly.

Quite a fall for a family that was the toast of the season after the Rajapaksas managed to brutally put down a decades-long separatist struggle by the Tamils of the north-eastern province and liquidated LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in 2009. While Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother Gotabaya were handed back power by the people after the 2019 Easter blasts by Islamists, they failed in almost every step forward. The economic crisis was worsening due also to the Covid19 surge that brought the money-spinning tourism sector to a standstill. Sri Lanka's famous beaches where foreigners came in droves in the past wore a deserted look. The Ukraine war worsened the nation's plight as fuel prices went up in the international market. Above all, the after-effects of the huge Chinese funding for Lanka's infra projects added to the economic mess. The government's withdrawal of money from the country's foreign exchange reserves to foot fuel bills accentuated inflationary trends. Curbs on import of fertilizer, with a view to boosting natural farming, resulted in a huge fall in agricultural production. The situation was tailor-made for disaster.

The present offensive against the government was mostly peaceful as the entire people have turned against the dispensation. The police and the military in Sri Lanka were poorly trained; and it was with Pakistani military help that the Rajapaksas had neutralized the LTTE. This apart, the judiciary did not entertain a plea to ban protests in areas close to the seats of power. India that has extended a huge financial aid to Sri Lanka has made it clear it is on the "people's side." At the same time, backroom channels might be active. Pakistan is also faced with a serious economic crisis and peoples' protests. It's time to keep our fingers crossed for now.

When virtual is real: Living in two worlds

By H H Mohrmen

The internet which was initially called information super highway was later called cyber space or virtual world as the system evolved. This, as if the internet is another ether world that existed where humans choose to enter and exit at their whims and fancy. When the internet was first used, it was for sending mails via emails from one place to another but today one can do almost everything through the internet. The internet has, in fact, become part of everyday life of a person so much so, even babies have started using YouTube at the young age of three or four years old.

Social media a new reality

Perhaps this small story will help the reader understand how social media which operates via internet changes our perception. In a chance meeting with a gentleman from Jowai, I introduced him to my two daughters as a photographer who is very popular in the different social media platforms. He tried to interrupt me but then realized otherwise and allowed me to continue introducing him as a photographer. I immediately understood what he was trying to re-introducing himself as a retired engineer who passed his matriculation in the first position. He went on to study engineering and passed with flying colours winning a gold medal from the university he graduated from. Social media sometimes changes our perceptions about the person and things that we see or interact with. For instance, for those who only know ma Leeno Shilla from his later avatar as a photographer par excellence, from the beautiful photographs that he shares on different social media platforms, tend to miss the real person.

Social media users tend to think that what they see on the internet is gospel truth and do not question even the source of the story or the information that is shared. The other dangerous trend in the medium is that people reshare the video or the article without verifying the source of the information. This is a very dangerous trend and sometimes users fall into traps laid by anti-social elements who are on the prowl

in the internet too.

Internet a useful tool

Social media has influenced not only what people think but how they behave too. In a way social media has also influenced how people react to issues they see unfolding in their everyday lives right in front of their eyes. In a seminar on waste organized by a college in Jowai, almost all papers presenters used information shared on the internet to justify their points. News items or information which appear on news portals and even videos related to the subject available on the internet become part of their presentations. It is true a lot of us do our preliminary research on the internet and there is no denying the fact that it is very helpful. The internet not only benefits the educated section of the population but it has also helped people in the rural areas too.

There is a JCB driver from a village near Jowai who later on upgraded himself and now drives a chain excavator. On being asked how and where he learned to drive and use a chain excavator, he replied very promptly 'YouTubed Ma.' In fact he can't even pronounce YouTube properly. The point is how a person uses the internet.

Data from the internet

One would think what data can the social media companies collect about the user when one has not shared anything on the platform except one's identity. But is that really true? On second thoughts one realizes that unintentionally users provide a whole lot of information about themselves to the different companies operating on the internet. Once a friend pointed out that if one buys a pair of shoes online, the customer has to share one's shoe size with them and the company not only sells the shoes but it also collects the information and stores it in its system. Similarly, when

pages of the different online shopping portals, they inadvertently disclose to the machine's artificial intelligence one's favourite colour, one's clothes size and one's fashion tastes too.

When readers read or watch on the internet the information is also stored and the companies use algorithms to analyse the users' interest and ensure that he or she only receives articles or videos that they are interested in. The trick is to read randomly not to give too much information to the machines to be able to know what the user's interest is.

Social media a new data source

Internet and social media in particular can be a major source of information. Hearts and other emojis or smileys are not just something that people click randomly. People are beginning to interpret and analyse them. Views, emojis and the likes or dislikes are opinions or feelings that people have on an issue or on incidents shared on social media platforms. It is also very natural for a person to be happy when he/she has lots of positive comments on his/her post or the links that the person shares. The emojis, smileys status uploads and likes becomes a new indicator for a person to study the general public's attitude towards issues or incidents. People are also counting the number of views of their videos and posts and every one's wish is for the most popular term that the video goes 'viral'.

The internet especially social media platforms have become a major source for data collection during the elections. This is obvious from the fact that even candidates who have never been active on the internet have all of a sudden started a Facebook/Instagram page or Twitter account of their own. Of course, there are candidates who do not have the time or maybe they are not familiar with the technology, but they

have their own social media handlers.

Negative impact of social media posts

The murder of two precious lives (the former rather in the most bizarre way) just because they liked or showed support to certain issues or posts is an example of the worst impact that social media can have on people. This is one of the emerging ugly side of social media where differences of opinions shared on social media platforms can even lead to the murder of an innocent person. Of course, like any other platforms or mediums of communication there are always two sides to the same coin but one would not expect that what one shares on the virtual world would be taken with a pinch of salt.

Face time on smart phones

Using internet has become a habit which has adverse impacts on the life of the users. How much time does a person spend on social media is a big question now. It is also true that an ordinary smart phone user would spend at least one hour a day on the internet. In a recent interview Martin Cooper the founder of a mobile phone which has evolved to a smart phone that we use now, has a very strong message for smart phone users who over-use the device. Persons who use smart phones more than five hours a day need to have a life Martin Cooper said. The simple advice from this message is everything in moderation is fine.

The medium of the future

The internet and the different sites and platforms in the system are going to be part and parcel of our lives. In a cafe in Jowai recently, a mother who went to dine with her daughter when the young lady paid the bill using Google pay, said to me, 'See now they don't have to pay cash anymore.' The point is it obvious that the line that divides the virtual and the real world is no longer distinct now. Majority of the population now cannot live without the internet. It has become a necessity for a person to have a smart phone with internet connection. Internet can no longer be called virtual world but a real world as the line that divides the two is blurred.

Uddhav Thackeray right in calling for fresh polls in Maharashtra Let the people including Shiv Sainiks decide once again

By Sushil Kutty

Uddhav Thackeray's challenge to the man who replaced him, Eknath Shinde, to hold fresh elections in Maharashtra hasn't elicited response, and most likely would not because the Shinde-Fadnis dispensation cannot for all the money in the BJP's war-chest hazard a guess on which alliance will win the civic body elections, which is where the next test of strength will be on display.

The floor test Shinde won with relative ease — 165 to 99. But there still remains another Supreme Court test before the Shinde-Fadnis regime can breathe easier though it is unlikely that the top court will disturb the new status quo. That leaves only the civic body elections and even a child in Maharashtra knows who has been calling the shots there — without doubt the Shiv Sena.

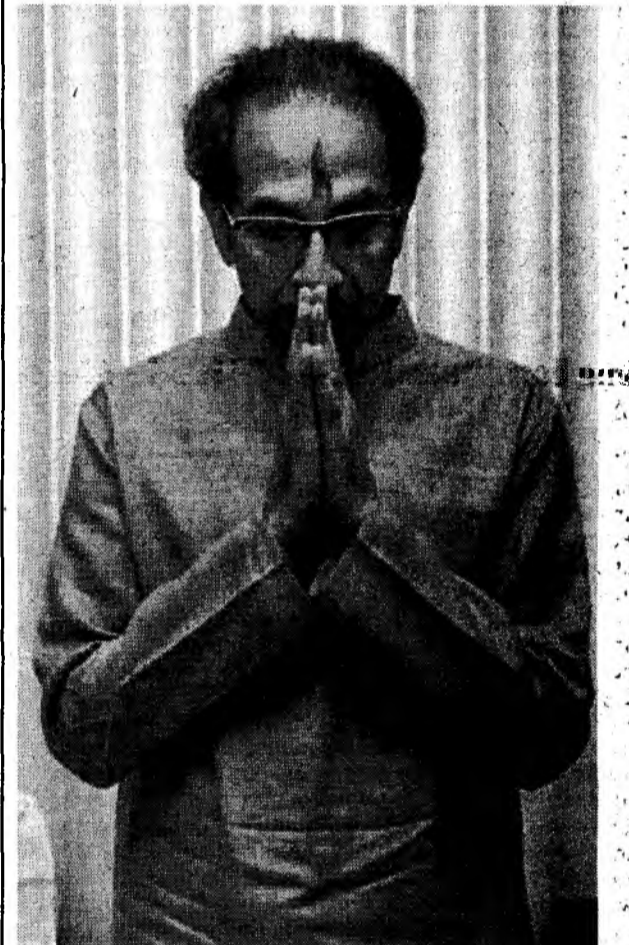
But it's the state elections that Uddhav Thackeray wants. Thackeray believes the ordinary Shiv Sainiks continue to be with the Shiv Sena of Balasaheb Thackeray, and no wannabe usurper will be able to take it away from the Thackeray family; definitely not an "auto-rickshaw driver" who stabbed the Thackerays in the back,

and half years", which is not what "respectful people" do.

Uddhav Thackeray should know, at least now, that Shinde is no gentleman in white flannels. Thackeray can't appeal to the honest and fair in an "auto-rickshaw driver". Shinde will make a hard try for the party symbol. And Uddhav Thackeray knows this, too. Therefore, the foreboding, and the repeated assertions that "no one can take the bow and arrow symbol from the Shiv Sena."

But it is not so easy for even Shinde, the Thane strongman, now also Chief Minister. Uddhav Thackeray is no run of the mill party president. He is a Thackeray, and is "life President" of the Shiv Sena, just like Balasaheb Thackeray was. No ordinary Shiv sainik can brush Uddhav aside and pluck his way to the top.

There is another difference that works in favour of Uddhav Thackeray and that has to do with 'Hindutva'. A lot has been written and spoken about how Uddhav Thackeray, for the love of power, dumped Hindutva and embraced the secular. And that Shinde & Co., rebelled because of this



Letters to the Editor

ID Card Scheme is Defective

Editor, I read with interest the two-part series: Influx Control: A Second Option by Toki Blah (ST July 8-9, 2022). No legal explanation or legislative justification is provided in the articles. This scheme is fraught with complexities that may make it a non-starter. We will start with the Constitutional infirmities that will not stand up in a court of law.

The fundamental rights enshrined in Articles 14-19 provides rights to all citizens equally and cannot be applied differently to any particular section. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on any grounds for these rights, including right to access to places. Article 16 guarantees equality in matters of employment on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, place of residence or income. According to Article 19(1)(e), every citizen of India has the right "to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India." A mere card cannot remove this right. Even if it is underwritten by a new Central Act, it may not be sustainable, as courts will strike down any legislation which threatens the fundamental rights chiseled into the Constitution.

It is true that these freedoms are subject to reasonable restrictions that may be imposed on them by the State, listed in Article 19 itself. The grounds for imposing these restrictions include national security, public

order, decency and morality. None of these grounds will be maintainable as the local issues do not rise in importance to the required level. For example, how is national security, morality or public health endangered by Indians from other states coming to Meghalaya. Any threat to public order is generally instigated by locals, not outsiders.

An ID card of any colour, imposed only on one section of citizens is not only tantamount to discrimination, but may be unimplementable. In a state which has the lowest acceptance of Aadhar cards, created under a Central Act, many will not accept another such card, which will also have biometrics and mark of the beast numbers? What if every state issues such cards? A local trader who has to source goods from Kolkata may travel there frequently. Will he need a West Bengal card also? What about a tribal-non-tribal couple and their children? Will they require cards from two states? If Assam starts a card system, every time I go to Guwahati railway station, I will have to show my card at a check post. Such a card system has inherent infringement of civil liberties, unlike a card for rations or health insurance.

Another defect is the idea that local citizens and organisations will monitor the scheme. Even if it is surmised that the government is corrupt, untrustworthy and inefficient, the law cannot be taken into the hands of individuals. To say that we (civil society), must "ensure that the labour that comes into Meghalaya is not allowed to take permanent

roots" is untenable. Every Indian has a right to live and travel wherever they want. If they cannot buy land, they can rent. Individuals or even the state apparatus cannot declare them as illegals.

Even the ILP is based on an Act: the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873. Perhaps a card scheme can emerge from this Act. But this would be a perverse use of another oppressive colonial Act. Here is an example of a hideous clause from that Act: Any rubber, wax, ivory or other jungle-product, or any book, diary, manuscript, map, picture, photograph, film, curio or article of religious or scientific interest, may be confiscated." Constitutional scholars opine that the ILP is discriminatory but this has not been tested in a court of law. Such outdated laws are still used at government convenience like the sedition law.

Yours etc.,
D Nongrum,
Via email

Enjoying the best of both worlds

Editor, I wish to narrate a rather suspicious fact that is currently the reality in a particular Community and Rural Development Block in the West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. In this C&RD Block, a particular senior grade MCS officer has still been made to hold charge of the post of Block Development Officer (BDO) by the "powers that be", despite the fact that this bureaucrat

had been promoted to the higher rank of Addl. Deputy Commissioner vide state government order dated the 1st April 2022. It is rather funny to note that despite having been promoted to a higher rank, this said bureaucrat is still allowed to hold the post of BDO which is a junior grade post. Is it not an open case of enjoying the best of both worlds? Since when has the post of BDO been made equivalent to that of an ADC? It is also relevant to mention that another junior grade MCS officer was made the BDO of this particular Block vide Government order dated 14th January 2022, but the same has not been adhered to till date as the person has not been allowed to take charge. The spirited citizens of West Jaintia Hills District should raise this issue before the High Court and get to the bottom of this issue.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Cushioning the NEIGHRIMS exodus effect

Editor, NEIGHRIMS has served the ailing population of Meghalaya and the entire region and even patients from Bangladesh with dedication. The affordable diagnosis with correct treatment have been the poor and down-trodden. But the exodus of specialists in large numbers has impacted the service of the Institute. The Hippocratic oath taken by doctors to

serve suffering humanity is now diluted with doctor, especially specialists seeking greener pastures at the first opportunity. In future, medical institutes should frame laws stating the minimum number of years of service to be completed (before quitting) for those who apply for specialist posts and also the six month notice needed in advance in case of quitting so that patients could be cushioned from the lack of doctors until fresh appointment of specialists would set things right.

It appears that those leaving NEIGHRIMS are mostly from Assam. Fortunately, our local specialists and a few others from outside Meghalaya are staying on. The only problem is that patients have to be in the queue for surgery in NEIGHRIMS. The Emergency services it appears is now well taken care of. NEIGHRIMS should take the example of CMC Vellore which has built lodging centres with kitchens for members of family to cook and stay in while their relative is undergoing treatment. Thus the expenditure while waiting for the line-up is greatly curtailed. But I request this government not to outsource this facility if it comes up at NEIGHRIMS, to some corporate as they would exploit the situation arising out of doctors' exodus, and would be hell for the family.

I also take this opportunity to educate our people to take maximum benefit of the medical insurance. One concerned doctor assisting Ram Krishna Mission Laitumkrah, stated that the illiterate don't understand the scheme and therefore

they are losing out. It is really unfortunate that the Government has not created adequate awareness on crucial health issues so that the poor do not lose out.

Yours etc
W. Passah
Via email

Why the continued load shedding?

Editor, It's really odd that Meghalaya is resorting to load shedding when the state has had a decent pre-monsoon rainy season and then in June the state received extremely heavy rain. Now that the generation of power is not enough, the MeECL has started load shedding. The entire Garo Hills has a 4-hour load shedding daily, 2 hours in the morning, between 5:00 AM and 7:00 AM and between 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM.

I request the MeECL to kindly alter the 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM to at least 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM. This would make the day more productive and since it's summer, sunset is much later. Not having electricity in the middle of the day in the Garo Hills is not a pleasant experience and the MeECL must kindly reschedule the load shedding period.

Yours etc.,
Tyrone D'Barra
Tura

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the first chance he got. The feeling in the Thackeray camp is that Eknath Shinde and Devendra Fadnis must have been planning the "betrayal" for weeks if not months. The mistake was that Uddhav Thackeray could never have imagined that somebody who had been elevated to prominence in the Shiv Sena over a lot many others would renege against the family.

The Thackeray camp believes punishment is due to Eknath Shinde and his band of rebels. And the best just desserts for chameleons, who had like rats deserted what they thought was a sinking ship, is to be booted out in fresh elections. And ordinary Shiv Sainiks, those who control the streets will deliver the parting shot to these breakaway leaders.

Uddhav Thackeray is not only smarting from the betrayal, he is also fuming at the very thought that the rebels want to get a hold of the party and the party's bow-and-arrow election symbol. That would be adding insult to humiliation, and there couldn't be a bigger betrayal in the land of Shivaji!

Uddhav Thackeray was caught on the wrong foot when Shinde made the midnight escape to Surat along with a suite of MLAs. It was too late; the rebels were in enemy territory. Now, after all the dramatics there is so much water in the Brahmaputra, Uddhav is asking Eknath why he waited "two

betrayal, which Uddhav has denied with all the vehemence at his command.

And Thackeray has his backers who argue that there are solid reasons why the Shiv Sena's 'Hindutva' is different from the BJP's 'Hindutva'. Balasaheb's 'Hindutva' was always "pro" — pro-Marathi manors; pro-Shivaji, and pro-India, whereas the BJP's 'Hindutva' is rooted in the 'anti' — anti-Muslim, anti-Secular... Therefore, for Eknath Shinde to say that Uddhav Thackeray sacrificed Hindutva for power was a lie perpetrated for power!

Eknath Shinde is also running the risk of ending up on the wrong side of history. Shiv Sainiks are comparing Shinde to Afzal Khan, the Adil Shahi commander who came to secure the surrender of Shivaji but ended up dying at the hands of the Marathas. Playing the sympathy card, Uddhav Thackeray has accused Shinde of remaining silent when the BJP "abused" the Thackeray family.

"You betrayed your own party" is the Uddhav Thackeray, Shiv Sena's epitaph for Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. It says the Shiv Sena cannot be finished off just because a bunch of MLAs rebelled and left. And that there's a difference between the legislated party and the registered party. The bottom-line is that the Shiv Sena-saga is far from over, not by a long shot. (IPA Service)

"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference."

— Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

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BJP's internal dissension

THAT there is no love lost between the two BJP MLAs in Meghalaya is evident from the trading of charges between the two, courtesy the Party mouthpiece. For reasons not easily comprehensible, the BJP has not been able to take roots in Meghalaya. Contenders for the Legislative Assembly have on the contrary opted to join the English version of the Bharatiya Janata Party which translates to National Peoples' Party (NPP). There is still that aversion for joining the BJP and to consider it anti-minority even when the NPP leadership and the BJP are supping from the same plate both in Meghalaya and Delhi. Never has such a clever stratagem been developed by any Party so far. It serves both the BJP and NPP well, this game of running with the hare and hunting with the hound. At least for as long as it lasts. The NPP has put a spanner in the works by pitting family members against each other. But that is politics. And the NPP knows the game better than anyone else!

It will be interesting to see how this internal wrangling plays out in the BJP camp. AL Hek is an old BJP hand and the Party is unlikely to take the words of one relatively new member too seriously and to take action based on his complaints. In any case why is the concerned MLA cum minister so touchy about his actions being reported in the public domain. He is a public representative and all his actions are publicly judged. There is no such thing as "privacy" for a politician, least of all an elected member of the Legislature. Whether the Speaker of the Meghalaya Assembly was well within his rights to air his views regarding the concerns of the minorities vis-à-vis the BJP's overtly anti-minority stance is a matter of legislative debate. Also, whether the Speaker should have voiced those concerns before a Presidential candidate coming to seek the support of allies is subject to interpretation. Political observers aver that a resort was hardly the place to take up contentious issues. They feel that if the meeting had happened in the August House then it would have been more appropriate to raise those issues vis-à-vis the BJP. They are of the opinion that what was raised by the Meghalaya Speaker would have been more appropriate had it been taken up formally after Droupadi Murmu is formally elected the President of India.

Whatever be the contentions and varying viewpoints, that single episode at the Orchid Lake Resort has set the cat among the pigeons at least in the BJP camp. It remains to be seen how the BJP veteran, AL Hek emerges from this imbroglio.

Roots Through Dance - Glimpses into the origin of Behdeinkhlam 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 the festival can be understood from the viewpoint of various disciplines such as comparative religion, anthropology, social psychology, folklore, and sociology which are collectively defined as 'a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participates directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds and sharing a worldview.'

Scholars have defined various types of festivals, generally based on sacred or secular dichotomy. Festivals are generally considered to be types of cultural performances associated with religious traditions. However, we do also have festivals that are associated with localized ritual entertainment. Such festivals are termed as 'festival tourism'. It is an instrumentalist discourse in which festivals are viewed as tools for promoting tourism, economic development, and marketing. In Meghalaya, we have many such 'festival-linked tourism' like the Monolith Festival, Autumn Festival, etc., which are lavishly sponsored and promoted by various government departments. These festivals have different objectives and functions. They are designed to support tourism and attract national and international visitors where crores of rupees are spent for managing such festivals. There is no doubt that these festivals provide incentives for local businesses. However, political commentators have expressed displeasure over the huge spending on these festivals at the cost of development. At this point in time, I shall not go into details about this genre of the festival. However, I shall 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 are strongly linked to myths. In Niam Behdeinkhlam the rituals are connected to the myth of U Lakriah and the descent of U Niaw Wasa (the Seven huts) through Ka Tangnoob Tangri (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 about the divine origin of the river Myntdu and 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 communities.

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

In the beginning God, U Tre Kiro created the universe in three layers. The topmost layer called Soorkek rests God with the immortal, ki Puri blai (angel). Here, the judgment of the mortal takes place. In the second layer called Bneiñ(Heaven) lives ki Khadyru Wasa (sixteen huts) and the third is called Sla Khyndaw Pyrthai (Earth). One of God's (U Tre Kiro) desires is to send his loving Niaw Wasa (seven huts) to earth through the golden ladder, Ka Tangnoob Tangri 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. The Rainbow is a symbolic bridge to the divine, a sign of God's covenant. It is a symbol of peace and hope. However, this literalism is not universal. In many cultures, rainbow is an evil presence-dangerous to even point at.

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. Second, He directed the goddess, Ka Bei Waboo (goddess of fertility) to fill the earth with birds, animals and fishes, so that the Niaw Wasa would be able to survive and sustain themselves. 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 for 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 them 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 get good health and prosper in life. It was like a covenant or divine sanction to help the Niaw Wasa. The Niaw Wasa agreed to fulfil it. Then God ordered Syiem Pyrthai (Thunder God), one of the Khatso Waheh (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 Rynkaw 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 Sooyang 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 Harmamooiid, 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 prevent the people from famine and diseases. Prayers are also offered to Ka Bei Rymaw for a bountiful harvest. During the festival, 'ritual food' offered to the ancestors (Ki Sangia Ki Saret) signifies a means to communicate with gods and ancestors who are invisibly present with their families during the four days of this religious festival. 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. Since Behdeinkhlam is usually celebrated during the high monsoon and after sowing, rites and rituals are also performed to drive away the evil spirits of plague and pestilence. This is a natural practice of the agrarian society.

It goes without saying that festivals like this which strengthen the identity of the indigenous community would be interesting for many cultures around the world. It deserves to be given due recognition and promotion by the government and its agencies. This Behdeinkhlam we pray that we are blessed with health and happiness; peace and prosperity; love and compassion; friendship and fraternity, and above all, a readiness to work selflessly for the betterment of the world.

Congress a total failure as the main opposition to take on BJP High command's lack of leadership skill has hit combined opposition

By Amulya Ganguli

The absence of Congress MLAs from the Maharashtra assembly during a crucial floor test because they were said to be stuck in traffic would have been hilarious if it didn't carry a sad tale about the party.

For a start, it is odd that as many as 11 legislators were caught in a traffic bottleneck. Were they travelling together or were they making their way singly or in twos and threes from different parts of the town? Whatever their routes or travelling plans, their failure to turn up at the

Sena of Eknath Shinde playing second fiddle to Big Brother? It was to forestall such a possibility that Thackeray had broken away from the BJP and formed an alliance with the NCP and Congress despite their ideological differences.

It is now up to the NCP and the Congress to stay with Thackeray and ensure the MVA's continuance as a viable alliance. But by throwing a spanner in the works, the Congress must have given considerable pleasure to the BJP. Yet, it



right time for a vote looks fishy. Not surprisingly, it has been seen as a prelude to leaving the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) or a split in the party with a section gravitating towards the BJP.

The strange absenteeism is yet another sign why the 137-year-old party is floundering in the dark. It isn't only age that is making it senile, the party also appears to have lost interest in political events, another sign of dementia.

The lack of focus is evident from the casual manner in which it conducts its business. One example of this cursory approach was the way in which the Congress relinquished its hold on Punjab even after winning a handsome victory five years ago under Amarinder Singh.

Yet, as this year's elections approached, the Con-

gress has gained nothing for itself except confirming the suspicion that the party cannot be taken seriously.

The reason why the Congress appears lost is obvious - inept leadership. The BJP, too, passed through a similar phase when it was called "kati patang" (floating kite) by a former member, Arun Shourie. But, luckily for the party, it found someone who could not only provide leadership, but also an inspiring one. As vice-president Venkaiah Naidu said, Narendra Modi is God's gift to India.

There is little doubt that the BJP has benefited greatly from the divine bequest. It has also gained from the Congress's failure to find anyone who can take the party forward. Some of the other opposition parties are slightly better placed in the sense that they have credible leaders - Sharad Pawar,

"There is little doubt that the BJP has benefited greatly from the divine bequest. It has also gained from the Congress's failure to find anyone who can take the party forward. Some of the other opposition parties are slightly better placed in the sense that they have credible leaders - Sharad Pawar, Mamata Banerjee, M.K. Stalin, Arvind Kejriwal - but they are all local chieftains."

gress did all it could to get rid of Singh at the behest of a maverick who is now cooling his heels in jail. It was a reckless move for which the Congress has paid the price of handing over the state to the Aam Admi Party. This mistake could have been avoided if the "inexperienced", as Singh ruefully said, brother-and-sister duo of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra had shown greater political sense.

The latest misstep in Maharashtra shows a similar tendency to act in a careless manner. Instead of emphasizing a disinterest in the MVA's survival by playing hooky, the Congress should have given the impression that it is as interested as the NCP's Sharad Pawar in ensuring the Uddhav Thackeray's political longevity.

Such tactics are all the more necessary at a time when the Shiv Sena rebels are on tenterhooks about their future as they cannot be sure about the BJP's game. Is the BJP giving them a long rope? How will the Marathi manooos react when they see

Mamata Banerjee, M.K. Stalin, Arvind Kejriwal - but they are all local chieftains. As such, their chances of challenging the BJP at the national level are minimal.

Even if there are occasional attempts by some of them to come together and unitedly take on the BJP, there are far too many differences between them, including ego hassles, for them to work together. The Congress could have been the glue, but it has been going downhill ever since Rajiv Gandhi's death.

As of now, therefore, the future looks bleak for the opposition parties. Despite the BJP's failures on the economic front, it has managed to keep its flag flying with effective tactical manoeuvres based on stoking Hindu nationalism, demonising the Muslims and depending on welfare programmes aimed at the lower middle class. If, in addition, the Congress commits blunders like the one in Maharashtra, the BJP will seriously believe in God's benediction. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Shillong - Dawki 4-lane: A distant dream

Editor,

The news regarding the Shillong-Dawki four-lane project had brought great joy and relief to the residents of the State, especially those of Shillong city. The stretch of highway between Shillong and 7th Mile, is a real traffic nightmare for daily commuters. There is not a single jam on this road. Sometimes it takes two to three hours to cover a distance of merely 7 km. On this account the four-lane project is indeed a long overdue need of the state. Unfortunately, the work progress as of today is quite discouraging. Every time that I pass that way, I get the impression that the work is at a standstill. Considering the urgent need for this road expansion, the current progress is very much wanting. From some reliable sources, I have come to know that the project has been outsourced to a number of small companies, probably who are not so equipped to undertake such a massive project. This could be the reason why the work is going on at snail's pace. Reliable sources tell me that when the tender was floated, the renowned international Larson & Tou-

bro Company had bid for the project. For reasons, not known (but which we can, however, presume) their tender was rejected and the work was instead given to smaller companies. Had the project been given to L & T we would have witnessed a faster progress of the work.

Larsen & Toubro have many mega projects to their credit including the 600 ft tall statue of Sardar Patel in Gujarat and the International Terminal at Delhi Airport. Recently, the Assam Government has assigned to them the mega project of constructing the longest bridge across Brahmaputra connecting Dhubri (Assam) to Phulbari (Meghalaya). I am sure that this project would get completed much before our Shillong-Dawki project. The advantages of giving such mega projects to renowned international companies are (a) the work would definitely see the light of day not like many projects in Meghalaya which are left half done and have become the laughing stock (b) the work would also be completed on time and (c) the work would be of high quality because such companies would never compromise with the quality of materials. Perhaps, if L & T Company had taken the Assembly House Project, it would have been completed long before and we would not have had the tragedy of "dome collapse."

As citizens of the State we

are mystified by the manner in which work projects are being assigned by the state government. What criteria does the government follow? Is it to save money and sacrifice quality? That would be a dangerous criterion because it would put at risk the lives of so many innocent people. It is time for those at the helms of affairs in our state to wake up and start working as honest, transparent and responsible citizens. It is time to put public welfare before personal gains.

Yours etc., Barnes Mawrie sdb, Via email

Umiam Dam imminent collapse

Editor,

Collapse of the Umiam Dam would no doubt be a great disaster, but having read the article written by Dr. Eladbor Laloo on the Umiam Hydel Project, and noting the geological investigations and foundation treatment done as well as the design parameters adopted for earthquakes, I think the Umiam Dam will serve its purpose. God willing, for many more years. However, disaster prevention/mitigation measures must be taken regularly, and reduction of vehicle loads is one of them, but more importantly impact loads of vehicles must be

reduced. Structural disaster mitigation measures must also be taken to prolong the life of the dam. 60 years is too short a lifespan for this kind of structure.

But, again, in a Disaster Management Plan we must have alternatives. As suggested by Dr Eladbor Laloo, the alternative bridge must be located much downstream of the existing Umiam Dam. This alternate bridge will then connect Shillong with the GS Road, circumventing the existing Umiam Dam. This new road should also serve to provide an alternate route to the present Umroi Airport, as well as serve the purpose of connecting Shillong with the proposed Greenfield Shillong Airport.

Yours etc, S.Ahmed Shillong-1

ID card and influx control

Editor,

An intellectual like Toki Blah giving three sets of ID cards as a solution to the alleged influx problem is ridiculous (Influx control ST 8-9, July, 2022). Don't we have enough cards in our little walled that we need one more? Cherry picking cards for self interest of only one section of the society is shameful discrimination. How does one explain

equality and liberty under such narrow defined prism is beyond comprehension. The third category of ID card proposal seem like issuing ILP permits. Is Mr Blah advocating ILP under the garb of ID cards that too after shuffling the whole pack of cards who already are bonafide citizens of the state or belong to other regions of this country?

Ever since the digital revolution began we are tempted to assume that every issue can be solved with the click of a button or via the internet. But in reality it is not so. Give them as many cards and I can assure nothing will get resolved. We cannot restrict people from travelling or residing at our whims and fancies overriding constitutional safeguards which each Indian upholds. Recall why the High Court ordered removal of check gates following a PIL.

One may ask why there is apprehension in the first place given that there is no data to suggest massive influx into the state that is robbing the tribes of their rights to livelihood. The state has sufficient teeth to curb illegal migration in the first place. Whether that is being implemented or not is another question. Has there been any large scale study to assess the threat of large scale influx/migration by so called outsiders? And who are these outsiders and illegal settlers? Has the state

defined them in the first place? How many people have entered and settled illegally in the state in recent times? On the contrary there is data to suggest large scale exodus of non-tribals from the state since the eighties.

Influx and fear of the outsider is a state of mind more than anything else. Burdening the Government with more policing isn't the right approach for a modern and vibrant society. Don't we have enough problems already? The less cards we have at our disposal the more we can walk with freedom, equality and dignity. Intellectual energies and human wisdom should be redirected towards upliftment, bringing people closer rather than alienating them from one another. We need to bring communities together and drive away fear and suspicion that we currently nurture. Rights of each individual must be respected. No tags attached. Dare I say it's time we focus our thoughts on initiatives that can bring different communities together rather than wasting precious resource and time on divisive non implementable policies?

Yours etc., Bhaskar D., Via email

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"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

—Albert Einstein

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Wounded Tiger

PENDING a final word from the Supreme Court on the disqualification issue linked to the Shiv Sena MLAs who sided with rebel leader Eknath Shinde, the last word on the sustenance of the present power-sharing arrangement between the Sena rebels and the BJP is still uncertain. Yet, fact is the 'tiger' party has taken a major hit and recovery for it is difficult. Uddhav Thackeray has proven his lack of leadership qualities, glaringly so, and the future of a political dynasty is left uncertain. For now, with the apex court granting time for a detailed consideration of the case, the Shinde side bought time. Efforts at ministry-making are under way, and the rebel Sena is guaranteed a fair share apart from the CM post. Be that as it may, the success of this alliance will depend on ensuring the cohesion between the Shinde side and the BJP in the days ahead.

The BJP, for now, has won back a share of power in the state – what was due to it after the 2019 assembly polls that threw it up as the single largest winner of seats. Uddhav Thackeray was partly – not fully – at fault over the somersault he did to grab the CM's post following machinations by Sharad Pawar to share power through his midwifing of a new alliance. The BJP's poaching of the Sena space during the Devendra Fadnavis term had caused strains in the relations between the Sena and the BJP. But, having allied with NCP and the Congress to run an alternative government in the past nearly three years, the Sena men found that Pawar and the NCP were gaining the upper hand over them and sharing more of the spoils of power. The aloofness of Uddhav -- not possessing natural leadership skills as he had been foisted onto the leadership bandwagon by his father – has alienated major sections of the Sainiks from him. Uddhav bringing in his son Aditya too into the ministry caused its own problems for the Sena.

While Pawar and Uddhav want fresh elections, they can be depended upon to do all they can to unsettle the Shinde-led government, granted that the SC would now clear the way for Shinde. Curiously, Mumbai remained entirely peaceful even as the Thackerays were hit badly by Shinde and rebel Sena legislators. This could signal the alienation of Uddhav from the rank and file of the party to the full. The Mumbai-Thane belt was where the Sena 'tiger' roared all along. It is precisely there that Shinde took the wind out of Uddhav's sails.

Letters to the Editor

A rejoinder

Editor,
From all indications so far, it would seem my proposal for a 3 Tier ID Card system as an Influx Control Mechanism has raised mixed reactions in the public. Criticisms ranging from calling me mad, divisive and Johnny-Head-in-the-Air and the proposal as ridiculous have publicly surfaced. I'm glad and these reactions are welcomed because the whole issue of Influx Control is controversial and if we are to arrive at any sensible conclusion on the subject, in a democracy like ours, extensive debates on the matter are necessary. We have never had them so far but this time I seem to have stirred a hornet's nest. Good! Let's have more views; more write-ups more reactions. It's a healthy democratic exercise and I should be encouraged. I believe that we are still a functioning democracy, and as such its essential that citizens vent out their feelings openly.

One 'D. Nongrum' had vide his letter to the Editor ST 11/07/22 titled "ID scheme is defective" and presumably from the tone and tenor of his letter, a reputed Khasi expert on Constitutional Law, has ridiculed the proposed 3 Tier Comprehensive ID Scheme as Constitutionally void and infirm; legally defective and legislatively unsound. "Nongrum" has extensively quoted from Art 14-19 of the Indian Constitution on what constitutes Fundamental Rights and special emphasis was given to Right to Free-

dom, Art 19.1 (sub clause (a) to (g)). "Nongrum" has quoted from Art 19.1(d&e) that gives every citizen of India the right "to move freely and to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India". This expert has also pointed out that the above Rights can only be "reasonably restricted" on grounds of national security, public order, decency and morality and as the situation in Meghalaya exhibits none of these, the proposal for reasonable restrictions is void. Since "Nongrum" has based his arguments on Constitutional provisions, I would like to respond in a like manner.

At first glance the pronouncements of "Nongrum" the Constitutional expert appear valid and sound but on closer inspection I find that the expert has conveniently forgotten to mention clause 5 of Art 19 which clearly states that "nothing in sub clause (d) and (e) of Art 19 can prevent the State from making any law imposing 'reasonable restrictions' ----- if it is in the interest of the general public or for the protection of the interests of any Schedule Tribe". Aha, there the Cat is out of the Bag! The 3 tier ID card proposals do actually have Legislative justification as well as legal back up. Interests of Schedule Tribes is involved and the last time I checked the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos are still listed as Schedule Tribes and that the reasonable restrictions of the 6th Schedule are as valid for 1952 as they are today. Mr Nongrum it does

BJP's core theme of mobilisation has been Hindutva. Scholars and leaders seek to make a distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism; the former is treated as a political construct. Be that as it may. Hindutva and Hinduism are increasingly becoming synonymous for want of viable champions of Hinduism in opposition ranks. BJP has therefore managed to consolidate the Hindus. The concern in this piece is to examine how undermining democracy will hamper Hindutva mobilisation.

Let me make two formulations. One, Hinduism/Hindutva and democracy are co-terminus. I know that could be a provocative proposition. Yet, let us proceed with it as a working hypothesis. To use a caveat, in 1990s, I was participating in a democracy seminar in the University of Lancashire in the Lake District of United Kingdom. One of the presenters, a British professor called Indian democracy 'an ethnic democracy'. Elaborating on it, he said, Indian democracy survives on account of diversity as well as pluralism in the Hindu religion itself which is a majority religion in India. This formulation has merits.

Hinduism is a polytheist religion, meaning there are various streams of spiritualism and practice. Believing in oneness of God and humanity, Hindus worship thousands of Gods and Goddesses which they consider the manifestations of the supreme God. In addition to differentiated Hindu spiritualism, the existence of caste which is considered a social sin, adds variety of identities in Hinduism which complement democracy. In conceptual terms, democracy means recognising and reconciling multiple identities.

Secondly, democracy involves sharing of positions, power and political space among various communities. That is how the tickets for candidates for Assembly and Parliamentary elections are decided on the basis of community support; the ministerial berths are allocated on same terms. In a representative democracy, not only the leaders represent people, they also represent various segments of population defined in terms of communities, which in turn are based on language, ethnicity, caste, religion, gender, profession

not behave a person of your intellectual stature to deliberately overlook such glaring Constitutional provisions and to attempt with calculated mischief to mislead innocent gullible tribals like me. Nor is it very subtle of you to state, quote "Any threat to public order is generally instigated by locals (meaning local tribals) not outsiders."

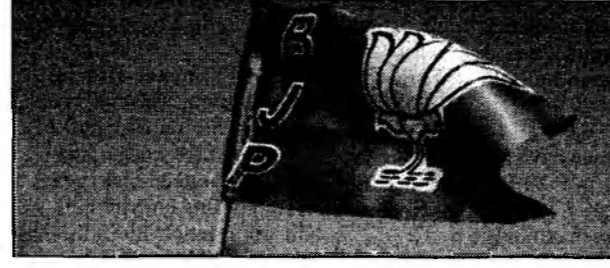
Now for whatever reasons, you might have in opposing the 3 Tier ID Card proposals, do you really need resort to such communal undertones simply to score brownie points? The 3 Tier ID Card system is designed to bring tribals and non-tribals closer; working together to protect their respective interests; working in tandem for the interest and development of their Hill State. I am really shocked, Mr Nongrum at the perfidious mindset you project that seeks to divide instead of repair whatever societal gaps Meghalaya may have.

There was also that snide remark aimed at ridiculing the sentiments and emotions of the locals. Was it really necessary to bring up that spiteful comment on some peoples gullibility over the "Mark of the beast"? It might be trite and nonsense to a great intellectual mind as yours but that does not give you any right to ridicule and mock the belief of simple ordinary people with less intelligence than you have. Again why do you question the ability of our grassroots governing institutions working together with the Government to protect ourselves with laws, again I

Diluting Democracy Hampers Hindutva

By Dusmnata Kumar

and so on. As the essence of Hinduism consists of pluralist beliefs and practices, it conduces democratic politics which promotes diversities and reconciles differences emerging out of them. The logical extension of this formulation is that Hinduism and democracy are symbiotic. If democracy is diluted, Hinduism is undermined, and vice versa. In other words, it is to be underlined that the champions of Hindutva should respect and redeem democracy. This is not hap-



pening in hanker for power, and out of ignorance of the interface between Hinduism and democracy.

The second formulation is that legal and democratic are not one and the same. Political parties, mainly the present ruling regimes in the States and at the Centre seem to conflate the concepts of legal and democratic which leads to upending democracy. For the sake of conceptual clarity, take it that what is legal is not necessarily democratic. Legal relates to an outcome, a decision taken, but democratic refers to the process of arriving at such decisions. Debates, discussion, dialogues, inclusive participation of stakeholders, building consensus wherever possible, encouraging and respecting dissent are elements of a democratic process. Sadly, all these attributes are missing in our legislatures and even in public discourses across the country.

A law can be passed in the Parliament on the basis of majority. That is legal. But is it democratic? Was there adequate discussion in Parliament? Members of the Opposition belonging to the Opposition parties complain that they are not given time to speak on bills that are made into laws. They are not even provided with the draft of the Bill in good time before it is tabled in the Parliament.

There are Parliamentary committees to scrutinise the

Bills before they are put into motion. These committees are bypassed in making laws. Thus the roles of Parliamentary Committees ensuring accountability, value addition and an inclusive process, are undermined. The committees seek opinions from the public, professional bodies to examine various dimensions of a Bill. Thus, the stakeholders of various Bills are taken into a consultation process. This practice also helps in acceptance of laws by citizens.

Remember the three farm

laws, which were passed without adequate consultation with the Opposition or the primary stakeholders, causing widespread and prolonged protest by the farmers until the laws were withdrawn. The infamous note ban is another example, which caused undue and avoidable distress to people without achieving the intended results—curbing black money etc.

Another example could be passing of CAA—Citizenship Amendment Act. The government may have its logic in excluding a particular community and including the minorities who are persecuted in their host countries. This was not adequately debated in the Parliament and explained to the public. Consequently, the country was plunged into unrest and strikes by students in the universities. This could have been avoided with due dialogue across the board.

Convening all party meetings is a practice that helps democracy. The government has the benefit of contrarian suggestions from different parties which help in better formulation of policies. These meetings have become rare across the federal layers of our country. The other medium for communication by government is the press, which can carry government's intent and actions to the public. But strangely, the ministers do not address the press.

The ruling party has spokespersons; who, not being part of the government, could disseminate wrong messages. We noticed recently, one of their spokespersons, making indiscreet remarks about a religion which led to strong and hostile reactions in the country and abroad. The ruling party promptly disowned the spokesperson, disagreed with her remarks and dismissed her from the position. The point is, spokespersons could represent the party not the government. Sadly, the Prime Minister never addresses any press meet.

In recent times, an unhealthy trend of discussing religions in public is being noticed across States of the country. This is stemming from party-politicisation and radicalisation of religions. Both these practices do not augur well for our democracy. As said before, community mobilisation in electoral politics without causing inter-community antagonism is acceptable. In that sense, consolidation of Hindus may be in order. Many progressives will challenge this though. So be it. It is an existential reality for political parties in a competitive electoral politics.

If Muslim parties can be registered by the Election Commission and allowed to function, why not Hindu parties! But radicalisation of Hinduism, even in response to the same practice in other religions, negates the essence of Hinduism which consists of being tolerant, accommodative, reconciling and so on. To reiterate the point, radicalisation and religious monism of Hinduism goes against the practice of democracy as well as the spirit of the religion. Pluralism present in Hinduism fosters religious pluralism in India, which leads to political pluralism that constitutes the main pillar of democracy.

To sum up, let us dig into the tenets of Hinduism. Only two will prove our premise here. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the world is just one family. The other, "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayaah, Sarve Bhadraani Pashyantu, Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet (May all be happy, may all be free from illness, may all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer). If that is so, where is the scope for polarisation between communities, hounding, hate, vengeance and violence? ---INFA

Shinzo Abe assassination: What I learnt fifty-five years ago

By Vappala Balachandran

The assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8 in Nara City reminds me of my first lessons in VIP security, lessons on the difference between protocol and security. While protocol demands that the officers receiving VIPs should face them, security insists that they should look at the surroundings and not focus on the visiting dignitary.

I learnt that basic lesson in 1967 from the chief security official of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), then designated as the Deputy Director (Security) or DD(S). In those days DD(S) was the No.2 position in the Intelligence Bureau. At that time, if my memory is correct, the DD(S) was the late G.C. Dutt. He was a fastidious officer who used to go around with a small notebook noting down all points after minutely checking the places of the Prime Minister's engagements and our proposed arrangements. To our horror, he used to write to the Inspector General of Police, then the head of our state police, on any shortcomings after the visit was over.

As the police chief of Sangli district in Maharashtra, I was preparing for the hurricane visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for election-

Brady, his Press Secretary. Later it was known that Hinckley had a "delusional obsession" and wanted to "impress" the child actress Jodie Foster by killing the president although he had no personal enmity. During the post-incident enquiry (March 31 to May 1, 1981) the SS said that Hinckley's prior crime record was not known to them, and they did not know why the DC police could not see Hinckley crouching and firing through the crowd. The enquiry report which runs into 398 pages should have been read by all security agencies.

That did not happen. On 4 November 1995 a young Israeli ultra-nationalist Yigal Amir shot and killed Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel under similar circumstances. Rabin, hero of the 1967 Arab Israeli war, had signed the famous "Oslo Peace Accord II" with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on September 28, 1995. This was at the White House, witnessed by President Bill Clinton and representatives of Russia, Egypt, Jordan, Norway, and the European Union in Washington DC. This was not appreciated by the Israeli ultra-right as it was considered a sell out by a war hero.



earing, which included a public meeting at the district headquarters, followed by a long road show of 50 kilometres passing several villages to the neighbouring Satara district.

DD(S) asked me to post policemen throughout the Prime Minister's road journeys, facing the public. This was totally new to us as it was thought impolite for uniformed policemen to turn away from the VIP and not salute her or him while passing. Another important lesson he taught me was that the VIP was most vulnerable at the alighting and departure points as all attention would be in receiving her or him and garlanding the VIP, while forgetting the crowd, the people who were around. Also, after the public meeting, a tendency to relax would set in, while escorting the VIP to the car.

The fabled US Secret Service forgot these lessons on March 30, 1981. President Ronald Reagan had gone to the Hilton Hotel, Washington DC for a luncheon address to the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations which is the largest federation of unions in the United States representing more than 12 million workers. The Secret Service (SS) had considered the Washington Hilton very safe, as a secure passageway known as the "President's Walk" was built after the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The SS was confident as they had screened the invitees. Also, the president's public exposure would be only for 30 feet while entering and exiting the hotel to reach the secure limousine.

However, neither the SS nor the Washington DC police paid much attention while exiting, to the crowd collected outside the hotel along with press and TV cameras. John Hinckley, a mentally deranged young man who was monitoring the president's programme, took advantage of this and fired six shots at the president, injuring him and James Scott

Rabin had addressed, in the evening, a vast gathering of about 100,000 people at the Central Plaza in Tel Aviv, now renamed "Rabin Square". As described by the Guardian (UK), the emotional climax came when veteran folk singer Miri Aloni performed her signature anthem, Shir LaShalom (A Song For Peace) in which Rabin also joined. His parting message to the crowd was "Let's not just sing about peace – let's make peace". After that, as he stepped down and walked towards his car, he was shot by Yigal Amir who was lurking in the shadows.

On March 29, 1996, a three-member commission blamed Shin Bet's chief Karmi Gillon for the agency's failure in ignoring intelligence warnings on the possibility of Rabin's assassination. It said that the agency failed in "adjusting its protection methods to the new risk to cope with the worsening threat and did not ensure that its VIP bodyguards properly understood the severity of the threat."

Also, they made an incorrect assumption that no Jew would kill an Israeli PM. An amateur video later emerged showing Yigal Amir waiting in the parking lot unchecked by the security. He was filmed walking behind the PM, who was flanked by bodyguards, and shooting him in the back. On July 8, BBC showed a clear photograph of assassin Tetsuya Yamagami standing behind Shinzo Abe. This was taken moments before the incident. Abe was seen bending forward, holding a hand mike and no one was looking at Yamagami. As in the case of Reagan and Rabin, Abe's security detail paid no attention to the surroundings.

That is why the teachings of my DD(S) from the Indian Intelligence Bureau fifty-five years ago still hold and are still important.

(The writer is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat) (Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

repeat, made as per the provisions of Art 19 clause 5 of the Constitution? If traditional grassroot bodies can synchronise with constitutional institutions like the government in maintaining peace and tranquility in society; in promoting growth and development; in implementing social welfare programmes, I fail to see why they shouldn't come in as partners with Government to safeguard our Tribal interests for ours is a Tribal State. Let me in conclusion be as blunt and candid as I should. We wish to safeguard our identity and interest as citizens of a Tribal Hill State not as residents of a Union Territory which I feel your convoluted arguments seem to hint at.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Meghalaya's Hindus as minority citizens!

Editor,
Of late there has been a feverish clamour amongst some quarters to declare the Hindu citizens of Meghalaya and a few other North Eastern states, erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab---as minority citizens whereby they can enjoy all the concomitant benefit-packages as entitled to the minorities of India. I've been made to know that this has been the prolonged avowed dreams of the Indian majoritarian to target these States in question. With the Saffron party at the helm, they thought that this was

the most opportunistic movement. However in my ground interactions with many indigenous tribals and non-tribals, who have been part and parcel of Meghalaya, especially Shillong since aeons, they have expressed their apprehension that such a legislation will have far-reaching adverse consequences in terms of tribal-non-tribal equity. They reiterate that Meghalaya being a constituent part of India anybody, post such legislation, from without the State can perchance easily settle here and in the fullness of time claim the privilege of being a minority member. Such a societal makeover may unleash unprecedented influx thereby ironically reducing the indigenous tribals into minorities themselves!

Based on the foregoing contentions, I'm afraid that the same prognosis was once expressed by a renowned Khasi poet, Soso Tham, in the 19th century, when he visualized that, we the Hynewtrep tribes would one day be reduced to the status of slaves catering to the whims of the ethnic majoritarian! And for that matter, even our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had described us as "Microscopic minority!"

Yours etc.
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Via email

Need for societal cooperation

Editor,
A string of drug and nar-

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

"Success is the sum of small efforts
- repeated day in and day out."

-- Robert Collier

The Shillong Times

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Collapse of the moral-ethical order

THE news that a baby of just 20 months old was raped in a village in South West Khasi Hills sends shudders up the spine. Rape has become so commonplace in Meghalaya that society seems to have lost its capacity for outrage. It is good that the case in South West Khasi Hills was horrifying enough to evoke a public protest. But will even a protest deter the next rapist? What has gone wrong with matrilineal Meghalaya is a query that those from mainland India raise time and again when they hear of the crimes against women and children in this society where women are ostensibly held in high esteem. That narrative had collapsed a long time ago. The societal framework that used to be guided by robust ethical mores and which were practised as a collective have frayed. The clan as a support system is weakening as families move towards the nuclear model. With abandonment/divorce so rampant in Khasi society and the woman having to bear the brunt of bringing up her children single-handedly, the repercussions can only be imagined. How could a young man get hold of a 20 month old baby. Where was the mother? Can a small baby be left alone with a stranger? Or is this a normal practice since the mother - a single parent has to earn a livelihood and possibly left her baby with the elder siblings which is again a common practice in the villages. Sometimes the elder children are still at the playing age and hardly able to look after themselves, much less their little siblings. Hence it is easy for a neighbour or relative with bad intent to prey on a little girl-child.

In 2021, Meghalaya recorded 75 rape cases, in 2020, 84 and in 2019, 102. These are only reported cases put up on the Meghalaya Police website. There may be several unreported cases in distant villages, where the nearest police station is distantly located. In 2020 a murder case that happened at Sytung village in Mawkyntse Block, East Khasi Hills District which is 82 Kms from Shillong had to be attended to by police from the Madanting Beat House. What if a rape case happened in that distant village? Would the parents of the victim have the wherewithal to come all the way to Shillong to file an FIR immediately after the rape has been committed? The problem with Meghalaya is that reaching the law enforcement agencies is a rough ride. True, the Police Department has come up with an App recently to address crimes against women but villagers must also be given enough awareness to use the App effectively.

Meanwhile there's need for a societal re-awakening to counter rape which is a slur on society.

From River Rejuvenation to River Rights: Need for a Broader Perspective

By Philippe Cullet

The need for rejuvenating lakes and rivers is increasingly widely discussed. This is a welcome step in a context where human activities are causing increasing damage to freshwater ecosystems on which nature and human-kind are dependent for their survival. This rejuvenation speaks to a process of ecological restoration, which reflects an understanding that ecosystems can cope with human presence as long as this is in a symbiotic relationship. Where human activities disrupt the balance, restoration is the process that seeks to give a chance to ecosystems to recover from negative human impacts.

River rejuvenation, restoration and beyond

In the case of 'Cleanliness of Umiam Lake', the Meghalaya High Court has aptly emphasised the need for rejuvenating water bodies (ST, 28.6.22, p.1). Similarly, the River Rejuvenation Committee has focused on the restoration of Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyri, whose status is 'not satisfactory' (https://megspcb.gov.in/mth_waterquality.html). Yet, it is not clear that the proposed measures go far enough to ensure the goals that they set for themselves.

Starting with the action plans for rejuvenating Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyri, there is an underlying sense of despair that runs through the proposed measures. Thus, the premise is that these rivers cannot be restored to the standards of 'outdoor bathing' because they pass through congested and densely populated localities.

This should act as a wake-up call. On the one hand, everyone has a fundamental right to water, and as long as surface or groundwater from the catchment area of these rivers is used to supply water unfit for consumption, this would amount to a breach of this right. On the other hand, everyone has a duty to contribute to rejuvenating and restoring rivers and lakes. This includes individual behaviour, such as not throwing garbage in the open. This also includes duties of the government, such as the need to comply with all relevant stipulations, for instance, concerning the need to set up treatment plants, and to enforce environmental protection measures-against all polluters.

None of this is new. At the same time, the situation is worsening. This indicates that the path followed until now is not commensurate

with the challenges faced. Too often, the focus is on the immediately visible pollution, such as plastic floating in rivers or lakes. This emphasis is a good way to make everyone aware of the problem and it is a genuine issue that needs to be addressed. At the same time, this should not lead to sidelining the more intractable issues that are at the root of the catastrophic situation unfolding.

For a start, it is crucial to address pollution effectively. In a city that has limited



sewerage network, the first need may be operationalising faecal sludge treatment plants (which can treat the sludge from septic tanks). Further, effective and universal waste segregation could go some way in addressing some of the existing problems. Such steps are important but remain framed within a narrow understanding of the challenges that need to be addressed.

emphasised for decades economic growth as the only way to foster environmental protection and social equity. The concept of sustainable development, which has embodied the way in which the world wants to move forward since the late 1980s has clearly failed in its endeavour. The root problem is that sustainable development is premised on economic growth as the driver of a better society.

Turning back to rivers and lakes, the emphasis on economic growth as the basis for

protecting the environment has meant that an increasing amount of pollution has been caused. In certain cases, like Wah Umkhrah and Wah Umshyri, little has been done to address the consequences of this pollution, hence there is now talk of 'restoring' these rivers. This indicates a complete failure of the existing way of thinking about the environment, where ever more pollution is seen as a

"On the one hand, everyone has a fundamental right to water, and as long as surface or groundwater from the catchment area of these rivers is used to supply water unfit for consumption, this would amount to a breach of this right. On the other hand, everyone has a duty to contribute to rejuvenating and restoring rivers and lakes. This includes individual behaviour, such as not throwing garbage in the open."

What is much more important is to avoid and reduce pollution. This implies rethinking the kind of economy that has led to the current crisis. It is relatively easy to accept that climate change is the big evil that needs to be fought. Yet, this seems to imply that this problem is so vast that it cannot be grasped and tackled at the local or state level. In fact, anthropogenic climate change is but the sum of environmental harms caused to the planet by human societies that have

necessary condition for a better society, and addressing the pollution always comes as an after-thought. This is in large part because everyone seems to base their own decisions (from individuals to corporations and the state) on the idea that we have a right to use nature, even if there is an ultimate limit to that right.

Rights for rivers
One of the new ways of thinking around rivers and lakes is to recognize them as holders of rights. This frames the conversation in a

completely different format. Instead of only talking about the rights that humans have in relation to nature, this acknowledges that we must recognise the rights that nature itself holds. In this perspective, the discussion starts from the need to ensure that all needs of the concerned freshwater ecosystem are taken into account when considering new human activities that may affect it. This implies, for instance, that the understanding of the needs of rivers is not limited to the river itself but takes into account the whole catchment area.

This river rights discourse is now well understood in policy circles. Indeed, the Supreme Court is currently considering an appeal from the Uttarakhand High Court decision declaring Ganga and Yamuna as living persons, in other words legal entities with rights. The underlying ideas in this judgment need to be urgently implemented throughout Meghalaya.

The idea of river rights has been implemented in various countries and often involves recognising that the people who have protected and managed the river are best placed to take a lead on operationalising river rights. This is exactly what multiple communities have done in Meghalaya for centuries in successfully protecting and managing their rivers, forests and more generally natural resources. The idea of river rights is about recognising these existing frameworks and strengthening them. It is also about an idea of river management that starts at the local level and trusts local wisdom. This is in opposition to the top-down system that has been the hallmark of protection and/or restoration frameworks until now.

That this conversation is needed in a state that is also known for the cleanest river in Asia (Wah Umngot) is sobering. Unlike in many other parts of the country, Meghalaya can still avoid the need to 'restore' rivers by ensuring that human activities do not adversely affect them. This is also a duty of a mostly upstream state towards communities relying on the same water sources downstream. Rivers do not recognise administrative or international boundaries. This confirms the need to treat them as entities that have rights, rather than as resources to be used and abused by humans.

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A hospital or a landfill?

By Emidao Shylla

Shillong Civil Hospital as we all know is a government-run hospital, and people who go there for treatment are 'privileged' not because they are affluent but they have a large store of patience and no dignity, no matter how badly they are treated. I apologise if the words used here are not appropriate, but do let me know if there is a correct term. What is the fault of patients that they are treated with such disdain by the nurses and staff? I fail to understand this. Patients have come to the hospital with the hope of receiving treatment and being cured of their illnesses, but instead they are met with a barrage of loud noises, arrogant attitudes, and unpleasant behaviour from the staff, which includes doctors, nurses and assistants etc.

Passion and compassion are essential ingredients for a person who chooses to work in a hospital. Even before taking the job and choosing this career a person knows what it takes to be a nurse or doctor. A ten-to-five job is the most monotonous if a person's only aim is to do a 'job' just to put food on the

Another episode is that of a patient admitted to the 'Civil Hospital who is being asked to have their blood test done at another 'Private Hospital.' This is because the Civil Hospital doesn't have laboratory kits, diagnostic kits, or whatever it is called in the hospital. What happens if a patient has no immediate attendees? Is he/she expected to crawl all the way to the nearest hospital i.e.; Woodland Hospital (as recommended by the nurses) to get his/her blood test done and to wait for hours until the report is procured, to avoid the to and fro futile trip? A government hospital with no basic diagnostic facilities is as good as being shut down.

Isn't a hospital expected to always be spick and span? Then why does one feel that entering a government hospital is akin to a journey through a landfill? The smell is overpoweringly nauseous, the stains speak of apathy and a couldn't care less attitude and, most importantly, a healthy patient (yet to be discharged) will have to extend his stay the moment after he uses the shared toilet



table. But for doctors and nurses, work is really worship because they are dealing with vulnerable humans. If they have no interest in this service they should not have opted for this vocation in the first place.

The scenes that play out in Civil Hospitals, or any government-run hospital, are more likely to be similar. Most importantly the experiences of thousands of patients and attendants leave a bad taste in the mouth. A question that begs an answer is - what use is a government hospital? What is its value? Why was it created? Who should benefit from it? Why is there a need for a government hospital when we already have many other private hospitals? The answer to each question is known to us. Government run hospitals are meant to meet the needs of the underprivileged of our society who cannot afford health care in private hospitals.

Additionally, a government hospital is expected to be fully equipped, functioning machinery and other basic infrastructure, which the Shillong Civil Hospital lacks in particular. Is it because the allocated funds are barely used? If the funds were not utilised then where did the money go? Who should we hold accountable for this? How can a government hospital lack a simple machine like a photocopying machine? They may have one or two in every Block although we don't expect that they should be available everywhere. These photocopyers ought to be available not just in administrative areas, but in every office space where paperwork is involved. In the case of a person who has permission to get discharged if he/she had no attendant then the patient himself/herself is being told to run down to the 'Xerox Centre', which is located outside the hospital within the campus, to get a "Discharged Summary" or "Discharged Slip" (piece of paper) photocopied so the duplicate can be withheld by the authorities. This experience is very fresh, and I recall my sister being asked by a nurse to get a photocopy done. If this isn't ridiculous, then what is?

In the general ward. A toilet by name, but a dustbin by appearance. Why can't they keep the hospital clean? Isn't that a basic requirement? Why can't they hire people to clean and mop the rooms/wards in intervals as is being done in other hospitals? Why must a government-run hospital be left in such a decrepit state?

One wonders if there is a system of accountability in the entire hierarchy? Isn't the Superintendent doctor supposed to take a call on all of these deficiencies? Are all the staff well-trained from the higher ranks down to the lowest? Why do they have to be so rude to everyone? What hurts most patients and their relatives is to be treated rudely just because they are from the rural areas and illiterate or semi-literate. Why is there a lack of compassion towards the sick? People with no empathy should not even be employed in the healthcare sector.

The problem with a "Government job" is that once appointed the employees feel that no one can touch them irrespective of whether they deliver or not. True that nurses and doctors can be fatigued by dealing with patients but aren't they mentally prepared for this vocation they have chosen? When will all government employees, from security guards to drivers, MTAs and LDAs, to officers and senior officers, learn the human values of consideration for others basic decency and politeness? Why do we common citizens, visiting any government office, have to stoop before these public servants?

When will this cult of a 'government servant' acting as a ruler ever be corrected? When will this chain of privilege break and allow the formation of a healthy culture of service? If not now, then when? It is doubtful if we will ever see such a day! Maybe sometime in the distant future a revolution will change this arrogance and entitlement.

On a brighter note though, there are still a few, very few who are doing what it takes to make this world a better place and still care to give their best to the patients. May their tribe increase!

Letters to the Editor

10 crore scam in MeECL more to follow

Editor,
Controversies seem to follow MeECL everywhere. Of late, sources have brought to light that the work for billing of 6 lakh consumers at the exorbitant rate of Rs 6 per consumer per month had been recently awarded to an Agra Based company M/s. Inventive Software Solutions Pvt Ltd also called as UGO billing. What is interesting is that the above said work has been awarded without following any tendering process and without taking any cost estimation from reputed firms which is highly irregular and illegal.

It is alleged that this was done on the instructions of none other than the Principal Secretary, Power, Govt. of Meghalaya and the work order was hurriedly issued by the Director (Distribution) and not by the Chief Engineer as is the general practice. It is also alleged that the same firm had supposedly earlier agreed to work on a free of cost basis in order to establish its credentials in the Smart Meter billing field in MeECL. It is estimated that this firm has already been paid against the submitted bills of around 1.5 Cr which MePDCCL will have to bear from it's own pocket.

Save our rivers

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to draw the attention of the general public towards the pathetic condition of the rivers in our State of Meghalaya. In India, the rivers are considered holy and are

worshipped. However, bathing in the rivers, dumping industrial waste, sewage from our houses, etc. has made our rivers really sick especially the Umshyri and Wah Umkhrah Rivers. The rivers, which act as the life-line of our state as well as nation, have become poisonous beyond imagination especially in some localities like Polo, Ribong, Laban, and 4th Furlong etc. This water reaches us in one form or the other. We use the same water in our day to day lives. It may or may not always be purified 100%. The chances of toxins and disease-causing germs entering our body are huge. In addition to poisoning our health, contaminated river water is a threat to plants and animals as well. Therefore, there is a desperate need to save our rivers.

The demand of the hour is efficient sewage disposal system. If there are proper places to dump garbage/sewage, it won't be thrown in the river. Secondly, more cleaning projects should be launched and more and more people, including youth, NGOs and Government should participate in cleaning the rivers.

Finally, spreading awareness is extremely important, especially in villages, towns and cities established near the rivers. Until and unless the inhabitants are made to understand the causes and effect of polluting the rivers, they will not take proper pre-

cautions. Every individual has to change his or her habit of disposing waste. One has to take the responsibility and the initiative to save the rivers from getting sick and eventually dying.

I hope, I was able to put my point across and that the readers will take appropriate action to save our rivers.

Yours etc.,
Prasenjit Dey,
Via email

Environmental catastrophe

Editor,
It was an interesting column written by Fr. Barnes Mawrie SDB on the Shillong-Dawki national highway that was once and till date the lifeline for villages lying towards Riwar Mihngi area of Pynursla. The writer has also put his points across related to the construction of the most crucial highway that also connects people of neighbouring villages with Bangladesh. The people-to-people relationships through trade and commerce have been there since time immemorial. However, what is very important is to note the wanton destruction caused by the firms who were contracted with this project in four to five phases at an astounding amount of about Rs 1,251 crores taken as a loan with central assistance. The road today is not worth talking about notwithstanding

the fact that the MLA of the area also holds the post of Deputy CM. The opposition AITC of Pynursla had raised this matter in some vernacular papers and have been critical in the way the entire land acquisition was done and the construction being undertaken. It is ironic that the CM says he wants communities to engage with the government but in this case the entire project was undertaken without consultation with the various traditional heads which is why it is a failed project. Hope the Central government listens and demands answers from the authorities of the state.

Yours etc.,
Khrav Syngkrem
Pynursla

common sight in Shillong. Every nook and corner, a sidewalk like the one at the entry gate of Civil Hospital has barred pedestrians from using the sidewalk as vendors have set up their food stalls there; at times just on the road, rubbing shoulders with vehicles as is being witnessed in Motphran. These pose a lot of inconvenience to drivers and even passers-by.

It has become a trend, as nowadays one does not need to rent a shop/stall because a gunny bag spread on the pavement, a thermocol box placed on a chosen spot or even a van loaded with delicacies can station themselves wherever they choose to. I have nothing against any of the hawkers and vendors but I certainly am against those who ignore and trample upon the convenience of others to suit their purpose. I have my rights on the pavement for which now I am being denied because my fellow brethren are busy running their businesses. Shillong is witnessing encroachments on the roads, pavements and parking places as well. Shouldn't the government pay heed?

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Pedestrians have a right to footpaths

Editor,
I can't agree more with B.Dutta's letter, titled "Stop turning parking spaces into shops" (ST 8, July 2022). Despite there being a dearth of parking space as pointed out by the writer, a number of shops have appeared at designated parking lots, thereby eating into the parking spaces for vehicles. Encroachments by hawkers who spread their wares on pavements and just about any free space they get is a

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

"A lasting architecture has to have roots."

— I. M. Pei

The Shillong Times

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Silencing a society

LIFE has its own rhythm. Straight-jacketing life is what dictatorships and religious fundamentalists do – by effecting even unwarranted curbs on free speech, action and responses. India is a functional democracy, the world's largest, and there existed a sense of balance with regard to people's conduct in public life. Violation of law and order is not the norm. Laws give both protection for one's right to speak and act; and laws also impose curbs on unacceptable conduct in public life. Such freedom and curbs naturally extended to our representative houses like parliament and state legislatures. All was, perhaps, fine until the Lok Sabha Secretariat came up with a new booklet this week, on the eve of the Parliament Session, that brought several new, patently harmless words into the list of 'unparliamentary' words. The warning is that these, when used, will be expunged from records. It also means such content must be excluded from the reports in the media about parliamentary proceedings.

It must be stated with a certain degree of pride that the Indian political class as a whole demonstrated a maturity in the way they spoke in representative houses. This, even as discussions turned acrimonious, as is also witnessed in the US or UK -- two other stellar examples of functional democracies. Things get out of control when passions are high; and order is restored almost effortlessly by the presiding officers. On the negative side, there often was very little by way of discussions and more of disruptions of houses as no law prevents unruly scenes. Even the semi-literate members however avoided abusive words, for the most part. If they did, such words were expunged from the records of the house. Now, in what looks like an excess, even patently harmless words like 'dicatorial', 'snoogate' and 'vinash purush' have been barred from use in Parliament.

Too much control harms a society; such attempts kill the inner spirit of a nation. This is more so when such curbs are effected on freedom of speech of the people's representatives. Parliament is where the people's mood must get adequately reflected in order for those in the seats of power to be mindful of the ground realities. The Modi government, like the previous ones, keeps "producing" laws, rules and regulations as if from a production factory. There is no escape from this as parliament and legislatures are meant for this. Yet, the surfeit of new laws and rules is hugely confusing the judiciary itself and the law-enforcement agencies. Life has to have checks and controls but an overdose of them will only harm the society.

Meghalaya: A critical look at growing societal challenges

By Patricia Mukhim

Meghalaya actually comprises two tribes – the Khasi-Jaintia tribe and the Garo tribe. The Khasi-Jaintia cannot be two communities because they have the same origin myths of Hynniewtrep-Hynniewskum and above all the Jaintia clans are connected to the same natal roots as the Khasis. There are those of the Laloo clan in Sohra as much as there are Laloo in Jaintia Hills. We find Blah clan that are Jaintia and some that are Khasi. Each clan is co-related to at least two or three other clans and must have originated from a common umbilical cord or natal root. It is therefore disconcerting to see a group called the Sein Jaintia felicitate so-called Jaintia women achievers. Are we to presume that these women administrators or writers or poets are no longer Khasi and that the Khasi people will not consider them as part of the community?

Of late some writers/intellectuals have conflated the history of Kiang Nangbah and his resistance against the British might as something that sets the Jaintia people out because the Khasi chiefs had ostensibly meekly submitted to British rule suzerainty. The fact that Tirot Syiem the Syiem of Nongkhlaw put up a spirited fight against the British is sought to be buried. So too the fact that U Kiang Nangbah was betrayed by one of his own! In fact one writer is trying to conjure an origin myth that is different from that of U Lum Sohpet Bneng but is suggesting that the Jaintias came to where they are settled today from a route different from that of the Khasis. In short the Austro-Asiatic migration route is now under contestation.

It's not very clear what the writers/intellectuals want to achieve by these controversial claims. The other day at a discussion organised by Sankardev College on the theme "Meghalaya at 50 – Vision, Achievements and Challenges, former Minister and the present Executive Member of the Khasi Hills District Council spoke at length on the indivisible nature of the Khasi-Jaintia community because both communities have settled in areas originally claimed by the particular community through intermarriage. To separate the two communities for political opportunism or for any other reason is short-sighted to say the least. In fact, Paul Lyngdoh stated upfront that the very creation of the Jaintia Hills District Council was a short-sighted one since both communities are matrilineal and follow the same societal values and cus-

tomary practices. Some may disagree with Paul Lyngdoh but I believe he has hit the nail where it ought to, instead of floundering and missing the mark.

Now the, above is one contentious issue that has emerged but for which we have not as yet had an academic discussion. Perhaps the subject will mature into a research paper for a PhD aspirant. But meanwhile there are several other issues that

Mental health and the baggage of childhood trauma and the unspoken adolescent distresses such as undisclosed sexual violence that had visited us but that we try and hide in the deepest crevices of our emotional caskets can surface in adulthood and push us to do the unpardonable. As a society we are hardly ready to discuss mental health as an issue that besets a large section in our society. A person with a sane mind cannot kill

"The fact that Tirot Syiem the Syiem of Nongkhlaw put up a spirited fight against the British is sought to be buried. So too the fact that U Kiang Nangbah was betrayed by one of his own! In fact one writer is trying to conjure an origin myth that is different from that of U Lum Sohpet Bneng but is suggesting that the Jaintias came to where they are settled today from a route different from that of the Khasis. In short the Austro-Asiatic migration route is now under contestation."

the Khasi-Jaintia community has to contend with as these are whittling away at our cherished values and our sense of "uniqueness." Even while we speak with pride about our unique culture let's not forget that some of the events that have happened such as a father killing his own two kids and a man of 41 raping a 20-month old baby should shock us out of our complacency and false sense of utopia for those are

his own flesh and blood. Nor can a man well past his middle age violate a baby. The very thought is abominable. But both actions have happened and will perhaps continue to happen if we don't bite the bullet and discuss these issues at the level of the shnong, dogg and faith-based institutions. Platforms have to be created where people can express their angst. The very act of being listened to, is it itself, a healing process.

"Even while we speak with pride about our unique culture let's not forget that some of the events that have happened such as a father killing his own two kids and a man of 41 raping a 20-month old baby should shock us out of our complacency and false sense of utopia for those are visages that mislead our society. The ills are creeping out like worms from under the woodwork."

visages that mislead our society. The ills are creeping out like worms from under the woodwork. Sometimes the need to portray Khasi society as undefiled and pristine can be a prison whose bars are orthodoxy and disrespect for dissent. While we seem to have moved ahead in terms of material progress (at least a section of Khasi society has) we have not engaged with the psycho-social issues that confront us. Times are changing rapidly and our youth need to be trained to live in a mercurial society and face an unpredictable future.

Too many young people live lonely lives with only the smartphone for company. The person becomes an anti-social in that he/she prefers the virtual world because the real world is difficult to deal with. Most adolescents do not have the store of emotional quotient needed to process complex feelings that arise from a break-up resulting in a heart-break that takes a long time to heal. To "move-on" is good advice from someone who has not walked the path, but tough on the person facing an emotional ordeal. In the Khasi-Jaintia soci-

ety an open discussion on sex is still taboo. The male and female genitals are cuss words (which I think is common in this country) and yet pornography is available to every smartphone user at the touch of the screen. Even attempts to speak on family planning, spacing and use of condoms are considered "unpalatable social discourse" and yet it is what's needed the most in this day and age. The more we push these human proclivities under the carpet the more is the likelihood of the cumulative mental garbage blowing up on our faces.

What we need to be questioning are the guardians/parents/mother of the 20-month old baby. How is it possible for any man, unless he is a relative, to be able to inflict that savagery on a child? Who was the child left with? Does the child have both parents? Were the child's elder siblings looking after her and did they leave her alone while they were playing? These questions are important to get at the root of the matter because if we don't do so now, such instances will repeat themselves.

There are those who blame the matrilineal tradition for all the ills that have befallen the Khasi-Jaintia society such as the large number of unwed, teenaged, single mothers and the phenomenal numbers of abandoned or divorced women in this society. I am not sure of any research that has been done on this so-called causal factor (matriliney) for the degeneration of Khasi society or if its an easy scapegoat for the issues we have not dealt with over the centuries.

We are a society that's in the middle of a great churning and we cannot hope to cope with these complex threats and challenges if we put ourselves inside carefully constructed and vigorously defended walls where we want to be showcased as "kiba donburom" (respectable, dignified people). And those "donburom" types have been carefully constructed by society to mean the conventional, conformist types that do not step out of the lines drawn by the patriarchs of Khasi society.

It is not enough to produce brilliant scholars, scientists, lawyers and doctors if these are not going to press the envelope of their respective disciplines or professions to engage in the larger issues of our day in the ferment of our times and our society.

Let's hope someone presses the panic button and we start talking about our collective problems instead of dividing society along sub-ethnic nationalism.

PSUs race against time

By Kamal Baruah

As India attained independence, it led to a phase of vigorous initiatives in agriculture, industry and infrastructure to make independent India self-reliant. Central and State Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) play a leading role in India's industrialization and economic development. They are categorized into Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), Public Sector Banks (PSBs) and State Level Public Enterprises (SLPEs). In a PSU, majority (51% or more) of the paid share capital is held by the Central Government, State Government or partly by both.

Dr. V Krishnamurthy was an outstanding leader

core National Monetization Plan. If the trend continues all (non-strategic sector) PSUs will be privatized, merged or subsidiaries with other CPSEs or closed other than four strategic sectors come under (a) atomic energy, space and defence (b) transport, and telecom (c) power, petroleum, coal & other minerals (d) banking, insurance and financial services. Government means business to attract FDI, FII to finance projects. It has divested 5 per cent of the shares of the LIC recently.

Will such large-scale privatization be positive for the Indian equity markets? Prominent senior industry leaders have supported the asset monetization efforts,



and a visionary in Indian industry, whose contribution to the growth of India was immeasurable. He was Chairman of BHEL, SAIL, GAIL and Maruti Udyog under whose leadership, India achieved in building heavy industry. It helped setting up Government's mission by boosting investment, providing employment and supporting MSMEs. Ironically India's 300+ PSUs are under the outcome of the policies of liberalization and privatization.

We wonder why the era of a household name HMT failed. The timekeeper of the nation that evokes nostalgia in most Indians was shut down. The mechanical timepiece is not alone in withstanding under pressure from the quartz era but India's one of the largest engineering and manufacturing

while critics, civil societies have expressed their strong opposition, claiming that this is against the public good and collective stakes in national development. Time will tell whether NITI Aayog was right.

Amidst rampant privatization, now PSU banks are growing despite a long standing challenge from NPA and set to become profitable this year after suffering aggregate net losses due to higher provisioning in the past. Profitability has increased due to the bad loan cleanup, economies of scale gained through mergers and easy liquidity. Meanwhile, the removal of IDBI Bank from the list of PSU banks has contributed to the gain of the state lenders.

On the other side, Indian private banks have had a decade of strong growth but

"Amidst rampant privatization, now PSU banks are growing despite a long standing challenge from NPA and set to become profitable this year after suffering aggregate net losses due to higher provisioning in the past. Profitability has increased due to the bad loan cleanup, economies of scale gained through mergers and easy liquidity."

Letters to the Editor

Plight of NEHU students

Editor,
In spite of demonstrations and protests to make our voices heard, it seems the NEHU authorities have gone into a deep slumber. Perhaps they expect the students to remain silent due to end semester exams. The entire written assurances given by the authorities seem to have no validity. Leaking pipes, zero Wi-Fi facilities, stomach bugs and lacklustre Covid care are everyday affairs with no light at the end of the tunnel. With immense frustration and anguish, a few students decided to talk to the administration this past week only to find out that the Vice-Chancellor is away from office for an entire week. The reason for his absence was not given and is best known to him, but given his frequent trips out of the state, perhaps another Covid scare is not far off.

In office? Discussions with the VC are a necessity, given the CUET examinations, new NEP challenges and a whole lot of other demands but a listener is someone who is being missed dearly. The current Vice Chancellor seems to be in no mood to cater to our demands with false assurances every now and then which even the students of the Tura Campus have been reeling under.

Hence it's for the stakeholders like the KSU, GSU and other student bodies to decide whether the NEHU authorities actually understand English or if NEHU is turning a blind eye to the needs of the students given their leaders' vested interests with affiliated organisations elsewhere. Hope the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary are listening and do their bit to save this dying university.

Yours etc.,
Wilbert Thangkiew,
Shillong-2

Money laundering and release of coins

Editor,
The release of coins in commemoration of the 125th birth anniversary of Yu-

gacharya Shrimat Swami Pranavananda Ji Maharaj, who founded the not-for-profit and spiritual organization, Bharat Sevashram Sangha (BSS), is the talk of the town. The Rs. 100, Rs. 50 and Rs. 10 denomination coins, minted by Government of India, will be released on the July 23 month at Guwahati by Assam CM, Himanta Biswa Sarma. The release of the coins, though beyond time, come against the backdrop of the lingering and unresolved money laundering case of nearly a crore of rupees, by former BSS, Shillong, Secretary, Swami Damodarananda. In fact, the incumbent Secretary, Swami Purnabratnanda has blood in his hands unless cleared by the law since he committed the crime of blindly believing the former secretary in terms of monetary transactions concerning the BSS, Shillong for years.

In this digital age, when we witness unthinkable cases of money related fraudulences with the police cautioning the public not to fall prey to the tactics of the fraudsters, can anything else be more weird than a monk blindly believing his fellow monk – who ran riot with all the donations of the bhakts? The Secretary of BSS Headquarters in Kolkata, as reported earlier,

Swami Vishwatmananda had told the local media here that suitable legal action will be initiated against the accused monk, who was expelled from the organization, but non-compliance by those in the management also compels, us common bhakts, to point our fingers at them. One can only wonder if the laundered money will ever be recovered and the accused monk is punished with the incumbent BSS, Shillong, Secretary being cleared of all the allegations that are an easily lingering on him. Just look at the irony! Instead of the BSS Headquarters ideally, the local branch of BSS, Shillong has initiated the coin release, which despite being noble is riddled with sarcasm, which is, money laundering then and release of coins, now.

Yours etc.
BC Paul
Shillong – 4

end of their five-year tenure. The money is spent in such a way that it is made to look as if the money is coming from the MLA's personal pocket. Some MLAs even want to name roads created out of public money after themselves. This is the height of megalomania. But in Meghalaya, anything and everything is possible. Anyone who has the commitment to dig into any aspect of governance will find a scam. And I wish someone does a rigorous RTI on at least one or two constituencies within Shillong city.

The only 3 MLAs I can recall who gave an account of how they spent their MLA funds down to the last rupee were (Late) TH Rangad MLA of the then Laban constituency, (Late) Ardhendu Chaudhuri, MLA of Mawprem Constituency and his brother Manas Chaudhuri of the same constituency. No MLA thereafter has had the moral left to give a detailed account of how the MLA funds have been spent annually. Some MLAs are publicity hounds who will never spare an opportunity for a photo-ops even when the money spent on a particular project is public money. Sometimes I am made to wonder why the media patronise such publicity hounds who never miss

an opportunity to advertise themselves. While the MLA Special Development Fund may be useful to create infrastructure in rural Meghalaya, it has the possibility of being misused by MLAs in urban Meghalaya where the roads, bridges, water supply, power supply et al are already being taken care of by the respective government departments. So the MLA funds are being largely used to dish out to supporters and camp followers by giving them small contract works that are badly executed.

But then unless the public points out these anomalies and the civil society seeks accountability the ruling government (politicians) will do nothing to endanger the electoral prospects of its members. On the contrary the Government might even hike the amount for all we know. After all, this Government is good at milking loans from every lender. Quo Vadis Meghalaya?

Yours etc.,
Kyrhailin Suaim,
Shillong-8

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company BHEL continued to disappoint investors with a poor earnings performance. India's largest domestic steel maker SAIL also reported loss. The downfall of BSNL started due to intense competition and lack of network capacity. It never managed to live up to customers' expectations. The disinvestment process gained pace ending 2004 and asset sales continued year after year in the last decade. Maruti was sold to Japanese automaker Suzuki. Debt-laden national carrier Air India goes back to Tata Group after reeling under a massive debt. Many sick PSUs put burden on our economy. Should it be run just because of legacy? State PSUs are largely reported loss for lack of roadmap and work culture. The million-dollar question now is how to convert these to profit-making entities. So far little has been done to revive the ailing PSUs. But at the same time there are profit making PSUs (Maharatnas) such as IOCL, ONGC, NTPC, GAIL and Coal India etc.

Government's disinvestment decision is crucial and now facing stiff opposition from all quarters for its inept handling of the Indian economy. To meet the aggressive budget target, Finance Ministry has released the 6 lakh

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"When a true genius appears, you can know him by this sign: that all the dunces are in a confederacy against him."

—Jonathan Swift

The Shillong Times

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Sports not a priority in Meghalaya

FIRST we hear that the much touted PA Sangma stadium with state of the art facilities in Tura has turned into an open bar with liquor bottles strewn around. While this says a lot about the people in that area and their love for sports or the lack of it, this also means that there are too few stakeholders in the stadium who are expected to be using it and therefore also taking responsibility for it. At least that is what the District Sports Office is expected to do when a sports infrastructure of such superior quality is bestowed on the people. Contrast this to what happened in Shillong. People of Meghalaya have a passion for football. Those who don't play are the cheerleaders when their teams play. In 50 years the state capital does not even have a fully functioning stadium in the Third Ground where football is played all the time since the JN Stadium is out of bounds for local matches. How much would it have cost the State to construct spectators' galleries so that people can watch a match with dignity? Not much if successive governments had the vision and commitment to promote Football which has attained the status of a State game. But if the State Governments could not care less the Sports Associations too are not far behind in their lackadaisical attitude.

Another point that has been made repeatedly is also the take-over of the iconic NSCA indoor stadium where many a shuttler was born and perhaps many could have been born in the future if the State had chosen to improve the infrastructure in that stadium that has stood the test of time. But the MDA Government is taking over that stadium and converting it into some bhavan as if it cannot find any other place. Sadly, in this state there are only murmurs and no protests for genuine public concerns. Hence Governments past and present feel they have the political heft to ride roughshod over public emotions. There are so many sportspersons and associations but we are yet to hear if they have petitioned the Government to spare that stadium – in fact to leave it alone and let those with a passion for Badminton and Table Tennis have their space. As it is there are so few places for leisure and recreation in this city and in the State as a whole. No wonder most youth spend their evenings in cars where they set up a bar of their own. Is this what the Government wants to promote?

Towards a Single Party Electoral Democracy

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Are the 2024 general elections done and dusted already? A loaded question that hints at the ascent of a single party electoral democracy is now being increasingly answered in the affirmative. Recent political developments suggest that a 'Modified' BJP is on a roll even as the opposition remains in a state of utter disarray.

The toppling of the opposition coalition government in Maharashtra is the most dramatic example of the BJP's build up to 2024. By seizing the state with the second largest number of Lok Sabha MPs, the BJP has demolished a key citadel around which the opposition might have hoped to mount

A similar grassroots leader versus privileged dynasty storyline has been used to justify the coup in Maharashtra: now, the BJP is looking for an Eknath Shinde like disgruntled figure in other states who can challenge family run regional parties in Telangana and beyond.

That the south is a future target for the BJP is also clear in the fact that all four of the presidential nominees to the Rajya Sabha are from southern states, a move awash with political symbolism. In the 2019 general elections, the BJP won just 29 of its 303 seat tally from the five

party is battle ready. With no clarity on its tangled leadership issue, it seems that the party is drifting in choppy seas without a captain at the helm. The lack of fighting spirit was visible in Maharashtra – once a Congress bastion – where the state party leaders appeared resigned to the fate of their coalition government from the very outset.

So is there an inevitability to a Narendra Modi hat-trick in 2024? Twenty months is a long time in Indian politics but it is hard to see what can change political fortunes. Yes, there isn't a level playing field in the contest: the BJP has access to enormous resources, media and insti-

party is battle ready. With no clarity on its tangled leadership issue, it seems that the party is drifting in choppy seas without a captain at the helm. The lack of fighting spirit was visible in Maharashtra – once a Congress bastion – where the state party leaders appeared resigned to the fate of their coalition government from the very outset.

So is there an inevitability to a Narendra Modi hat-trick in 2024? Twenty months is a long time in Indian politics but it is hard to see what can change political fortunes. Yes, there isn't a level playing field in the contest: the BJP has access to enormous resources, media and insti-



its 2024 challenge. The near-total implosion in the Shiv Sena is not just a power struggle within the party but a coup orchestrated in Delhi by the top BJP leadership and only executed at the state level. The ruthless manner in which the operation was carried out with the full might of state power – from partisan central agencies, especially the Enforcement Directorate, to local police machinery in Gujarat and Assam to a pliant Raj Bhavan in Mumbai – it would seem that every opposition ruled state is on notice: even where the BJP is not in power, it will not lose an opportunity to turn the tables through a mix of inducements and coercion. Jharkhand reportedly could be the next target.

Coincidentally, in the week where the Uddhav Thackeray-led government was on its way out, the BJP was holding a national executive meeting in Hyderabad. Telangana, where assembly elections are due next year, is clearly on the BJP's radar, and the no holds barred attack on K Chandrashekar Rao and his family is designed to build a familiar 'party' versus 'parivar' narrative.

southern states, 25 of them from Karnataka alone. The southern push reflects an ambition to expand the party's footprint into uncharted territory – seats that the party has never won – even if the rewards may not come overnight. Having almost reached saturation point in the Hindi heartland, the south is seen as the next major growth area.

Not just a geographical expansion, the BJP is deepening its social base too: the presidential nomination of Draupadi Murmu, an Adivasi woman from Odisha, is part of this conscious strategy. In the 2019 elections, the BJP dominated the scheduled tribe reserved constituencies with a 40 per cent vote share, a gain of more than six per cent. In fact, the BJP did much better in rural India than in urban pockets by engineering an OBC-SC-ST alliance that has gone well beyond the traditional upper caste Brahmin-Bania stereotype of the party's support base.

Interestingly, the BJP has also won the recent by-elections to the Rampur and Azamgarh Lok Sabha seats in UP, both with large Muslim populations and traditionally

ed an opportunity to present a unified stance but instead has floundered because of internal contradictions. A few key parties including the Aam Aadmi party chose to stay away from the initial meeting called by West Bengal chief minister, Mamta Banerjee to evolve a consensus on a name who might offer a real challenge to the BJP nominee. Octogenarian Yashwant Sinha was eventually only a fourth choice. Now, Draupadi Murmu's nomination has widened the faultlines: not only has the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha decided to support a tribal woman but even the Shiv Sena (Uddhav faction) is backing her.

The predicament of the main opposition party, the Congress is even more glaring. The post 2019 hemorrhaging that has seen several high profile exits shows no signs of ending. Every week, the political bazaar of Delhi is rife with rumours on who will be the next leader to leave a beleaguered party. A Chintan Shivir in May was designed to lift the morale after the assembly election rout but barring a re-energising of its communication team, there is still little sign that the

tutional power that makes a mockery of the concept of 'free and fair' elections. But for a fractured opposition to merely lament the 'capture' of the democratic process without even offering a viable counter-narrative or leadership model is to only make the BJP's route to absolute power that much easier. A One Party Dominance (OPD) system may seem like an inescapable reality for now, its implications for democracy are deeply regressive: a 'one nation, one leader, one photo' trend could become dangerously entrenched.

Post-script: The BJP's latest 'Operation Lotus' is playing out in Goa. Even in a small state where the BJP won an election just months ago, the party seems determined to create an 'opposition-mukt' Goa. The Congress alleges that its MLAs have been offered Rs 40 crore each to switch. Pre-election, these MLAs had been taken to a temple, mosque and church where they vowed not to defect. Even God appears powerless before the BJP's blooming lotus.

(The writer is a senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

Sri Lanka needs at least \$10 billion to restore economy

Foreign powers at play as Sri Lanka moves to choose new President

By Arun Kumar Shrivastav

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has sent his resignation – first by email and a hard copy flown in from Singapore. The authenticity of the resignation has been verified and it has been accepted as authentic. The Parliament Speaker, Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, officially announced the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Friday. And, he has promised a new President in a week. Meanwhile, the opposition parties have called a meeting on July 20 to work out a consensus to choose a new president.

Aside from some stray speculations, the involvement of any foreign power in the people's struggle leading to the fall of the Rajapaksa clan from power has not been prominently discussed. Among the speculations, reports suggested that India had sent its troops to Sri Lanka to maintain peace and order. But the claim was never accepted by the Sri Lankan authorities. And, the Indian High Commission in Colombo also refuted the suggestions as rumours.

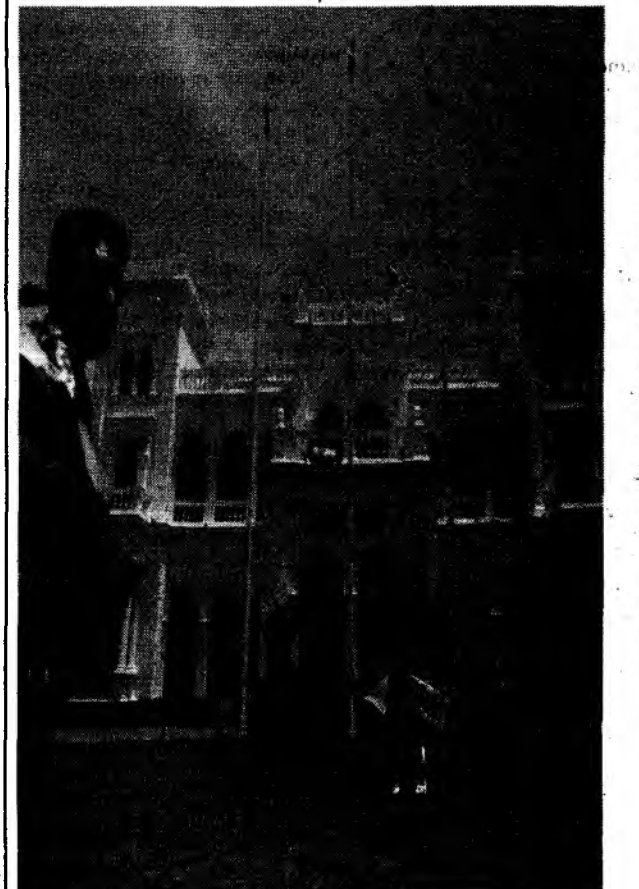
Another interesting claim that emerged was about President Rajapaksa's exit from Colombo past midnight on Wednesday in a military airplane. Reports suggested that India which has so far extended \$3.5 billion of support to the crisis-hit Sri Lanka in the last six months, facilitated a safe exit for the embattled President. If the Indian assistance is purely humanitarian and there is no clandestine

post are Ranil Wickremesinghe and Sajith Premadasa. Seventy-three-year-old Wickremesinghe became the prime minister of Sri Lanka for the sixth time in June this year while 55-year-old Sajith Premadasa is the leader of the main opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB). Ranil Wickremesinghe is the lone parliament member of his party – the United National Party while Sajith Premadasa's SJB has 54 members.

Besides being an old war horse and one of the Presidential candidates that India won't mind working with, Ranil Wickremesinghe has the support of SLPP, particularly that of Basil Rajapaksa. But, the support of SLPP, which is crucial for any government to survive, is the reason why Wickremesinghe has come to become extremely unpopular.

After Gotabaya made him Acting President before leaving Sri Lanka, the unrest in Colombo's streets intensified and the irate mob entered and ransacked the Parliament on Thursday. A major highlight of this protest was the now viral picture of a couple in a lip-lock, with the agitating crowd in the backdrop.

Earlier, Wickremesinghe's private home was burnt down by the angry mob. In Contrast, Sajith Premadasa who has a degree from the London School of Economics is considered to be a practical person who can handle the pressure that



return gift for India is anybody's guess!

If India had any role in Gotabaya's safe exit, China had a role in receiving him in a safe country. Social media reports suggested that Speaker of Maldives Parliament (People's Majlis) Mohamed Nasheed tweeted about the resignation of the Sri Lankan President before Gotabaya Rajapaksa did. Interestingly, Nasheed received Gotabaya at the Male airport in the wee hours. Nasheed has a similar reputation of approving useless Chinese projects at exorbitant costs and unfair terms during his Presidency as the Rajapaksas.

The US embassy has been among the most active diplomatic missions in Colombo throughout the unrest, with its ambassador Julie Chung regularly releasing official statements on the developments.

Now, a new president is going to be chosen through consensus as the ruling party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) is extremely unpopular. The Sri Lankan Parliament with its 225 members will most likely choose the new president next week when it convenes a special session. Among the front-runners for the top executive

will face at this moment. But his candidature needs to be endorsed by SLPP, a proposition that no one is sure how it will pat out.

Another name that's doing the rounds as a Presidential candidate is from SLPP – Dallas Alahapperuma. A 63-year-old former journalist, Alahapperuma is both a senior lawmaker and a popular leader among SLPP lawmakers. If there is a consensus on his name, the ruling party would not need support from other parties as it has 117 seats in parliament.

Will the world power stay neutral as Sri Lanka chooses a new President? To bring Sri Lanka back to economic normalcy, it needs roughly \$10 billion in the current fiscal and it's beyond the means of the island nation's limited economic resources. India, China, and the US will have a key role to play if Sri Lanka ever becomes a peaceful and prosperous nation. If the world powers want to see the country back on its feet, they would want a President who can navigate the complex path and often conflicting interests of the world powers. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Cry in the wilderness

Editor,
The 'Plight of NEHU students' by Wilbert Thangkiew (ST July 15, 2022) has come at the most critical hour. If what the writer lamented on NEHU infrastructure, WIFI connectivity, Covid care and his final concern of CUET as well as NEP is correctly understood by the readers then it is a serious issue that Thangkiew is voicing and those running NEHU should take heed. Alas! Even when so many letters have appeared on the subject of neglect of students' welfare it seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

The aforementioned letter is critical because July 15 is the day before the first ever CUET exam of about 60 lakhs of UG aspirants to central universities in India will be held. There are accounts of a girl from Kerala who received her admit card a few days before the exams with the Centre not specified. A girl from Ambala complained of multiple exams on the same day and different dates for the same subject. A

director of schools in Delhi saw no hope for his students and is ready to reconcile his lot to their admission into local colleges run by the state. Another student who scored 80% in her Class 12 and would have been sure of getting admission into the top colleges of Delhi in the past is now uncertain of her future. In the past at least 10 to 20 UG aspirants from Meghalaya would get admission to top colleges in Delhi, Calcutta, Bengaluru, Mumbai etc. Now they are unsure if they can get in through the CUET. Those who can write the CUET in their mother tongues have an unfair advantage against those that have to write the exam in English. There is no level playing field now!

Imagine 60 lakh students being examined by a single National Testing Agency when in the past the colleges and universities could examine the aptitude of students meticulously. And with the testing reduced to answering multiple choice questions (MCQs) the aptitude of students and the institutions they pass out from are belittled.

It's a case of confusion,

worse confounded with students getting different centres for different exams.

NDTV interviewed M. Jagdish Kumar, Chairman, UGC, the man behind CUET on the issue of admit cards with two distant centres for paper 1 paper 2 due to scheduling error. The Chairman said if the complaints are true they would be immediately rectified. He also promised to grant sufficient days to UG aspirants who are victims of any error. On online tests the anchor posed a very important question about connectivity for students from rural India. To this the chairman pointed out that NEET and JEE with 50 lakhs examinees comprising rural students have not faced any problems. Perhaps the UGC Chairman does not know the remoteness and poor connectivity in the North East.

The computer generated MCQs would prove a disaster to our children who are taught the traditional way to master subjects from prescribed books. To reduce all that they learnt to a 3-hour MCQ, that too only from class 12 syllabus is pathetic. Yet the UGC Chairman defended CUET saying he emulates the UK

and USA! The Chairman also defends CUET as a level playing field as the online examination at the higher secondary level was marred by the fact that evaluators of respective colleges/ higher secondary schools got to mark their own students' papers. Before Covid we got the best UG aspirants in top universities all over India. The reason is because there were paper setters with experience and who had to follow strict regulations.

The bottom-line is that with CUET many deserving students would miss the college of their dreams. The batch of 2019-20-21 who are now studying in Delhi, Bengaluru Calcutta and Madras etc are the last lucky batch.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Via email

One shame upon another

Editor,
The crashing of the spectators' gallery at the Polo Third Field Football ground was a disaster waiting to happen. It is well known that controlling enthusiastic fans

is near impossible and for years that gallery has been the way it is with no attempt to turn it into a more durable structure. The collapse of the dome in the State Assembly building seems like a bad omen for Meghalaya even as one after another we see public spaces collapsing or buildings developing cracks and so many other scams. You name it the MDA Government is in it. Yet the political parties currently running the show are very sure of returning to power in 2023. Unless the common people of Meghalaya – the hoi polloi – decide that enough is enough we will have the same set of people taking us for a ride for the next five years before Meghalaya finally reaches a point of no return. This State is surviving on loans (we don't even know the cumulative amounts) and as someone earlier had rightly pointed out the repayments capacity of the State is suspect. Oh yes the Central Government is overwriting all these loans. But for how long?

The political forces that need to give the present set of MLAs in the MDA a run for their money have to

align and fight a combined battle keeping the State as a priority and setting aside their personal ego. What has happened with the Congress at the Centre should not happen here in Meghalaya where the Opposition is reduced to a toothless tiger. We are in dire straits and it is important for people to awake and arise now before it is too late. Do I sound like someone sounding a death knell? Well, the signs are writ large before us if we care to see. Now the casinos will come in where at least two ministers have a direct interest. And all the humbug about Meghalayans not being able to join the merry company at the gambling table is humbug. The casino coming up near a college in Umiam-Khwan should alert us about the lengths to which people in this government will go to earn filthy lucre.

Yours etc.,
Draistar Kharbuki,
Via email

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

James Webb Space Telescope – hope for humanity in the search for alien life

The ingredients for life are spread throughout the universe. While Earth is the only known place in the universe with life, detecting life beyond Earth is a major goal of modern astronomy and planetary science.

Thanks in large part to next-generation telescopes like James Webb, researchers who study exoplanets and astrobiology will soon be able to measure the chemical makeup of atmospheres of planets around other stars. The hope is that one or more of these planets will have a chemical signature of life.

Habitable exoplanets

Life might exist in the solar system where there is liquid water – like the subsurface aquifers on Mars or in the oceans of Jupiter’s moon Europa. However, searching for life in these places is incredibly difficult, as they are hard to reach and detecting life would require sending a probe to return physical samples.

Many astronomers believe there’s a good chance that life exists on planets orbiting other stars, and it’s possible that’s where life will first be found.

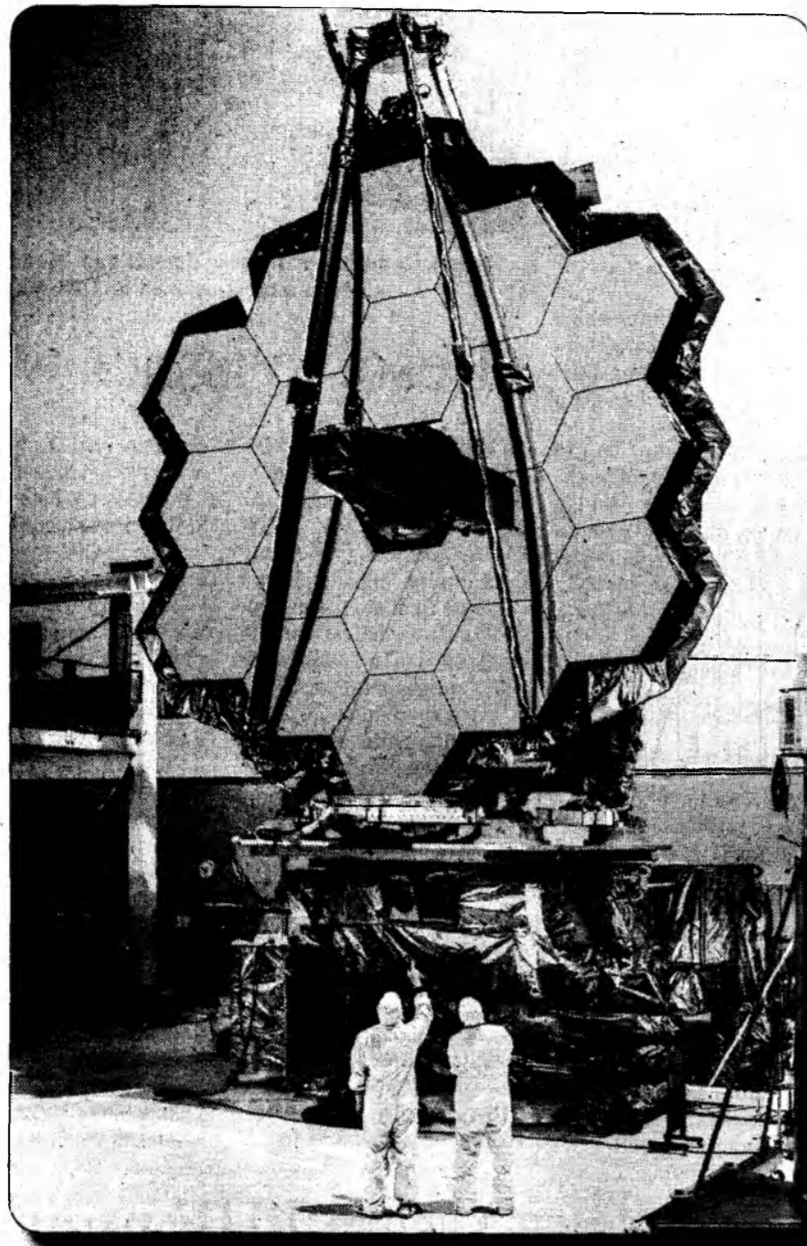
Theoretical calculations suggest that there are around 300 million potentially habitable planets in the Milky Way galaxy alone and several habitable Earth-sized planets within only 30 light-years of Earth – essentially humanity’s galactic neighbors. So far, astronomers have discovered over 5,000 exoplanets, including hundreds of potentially habitable ones, using indirect methods that measure how a planet affects its nearby star. These measurements can give astronomers information on the mass and size of an exoplanet, but not much else.

Looking for biosignatures

To detect life on a distant planet, astrobiologists will study starlight that has interacted with a planet’s surface or atmosphere. If the atmosphere or surface was transformed by life, the light may carry a clue, called a “biosignature.”

For the first half of its existence, Earth sported an atmosphere without oxygen, even though it hosted simple, single-celled life.

Earth’s biosignature was very faint during this early era. That changed abruptly 2.4 billion years



James Webb Space Telescope is the first telescope able to detect chemical signatures from exoplanets, but it is limited in its capabilities.

ago when a new family of algae evolved. The algae used a process of photosynthesis that produces free oxygen – oxygen that isn’t chemically bonded to any other element. From that time on, Earth’s oxygen-filled atmosphere has left a strong and easily detectable biosignature on light that passes through it.

When light bounces off the surface of a material or passes through a gas, certain wavelengths of the light are more likely to remain trapped in the gas or material’s surface than others. This selective trapping of wavelengths of light is why objects are different colours.

Leaves are green because chloro-

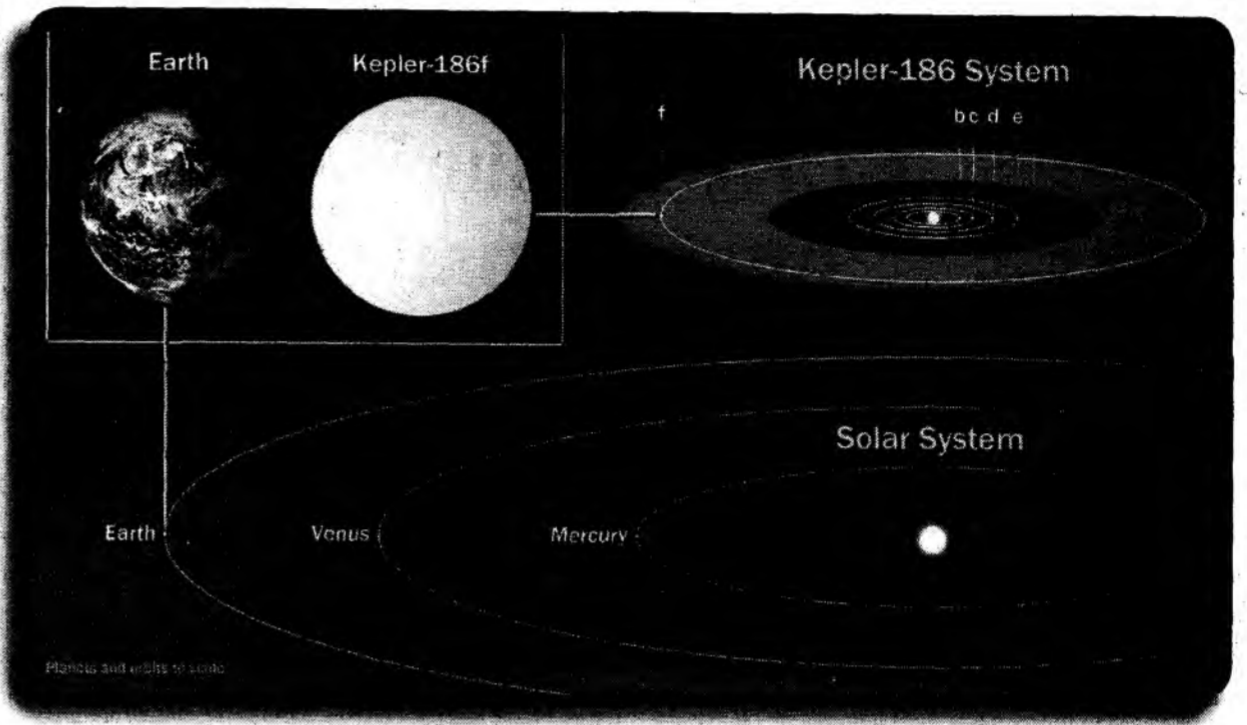
phyll is particularly good at absorbing light in the red and blue wavelengths. As light hits a leaf, the red and blue wavelengths are absorbed, leaving mostly green light to bounce back into your eyes.

The pattern of missing light is determined by the specific composition of the material the light interacts with. Because of this, astronomers can learn something about the composition of an exoplanet’s atmosphere or surface by, in essence, measuring the specific colour of light that comes from a planet.

This method can be used to recognize the presence of certain atmospheric gases that are associ-

ated with life – such as oxygen or methane – because these gasses leave very specific signatures in light. It could also be used to detect peculiar colours on the surface of a planet.

On Earth, for example, the chlorophyll and other pigments plants and algae use for photosynthesis capture specific wavelengths of light. These pigments produce characteristic colours that can be detected by using a sensitive infrared camera. If you were to see this colour reflecting off the surface of a distant planet, it would potentially signify the pres-



There are many known exoplanets in habitable zones – orbits not too close to a star that the water boils off but not so far that the planet is frozen solid – as marked in green for both the solar system and Kepler-186 star system with its planets labelled b, c, d, e and f.

ence of chlorophyll.

Telescopes in space and on Earth

It takes an incredibly powerful telescope to detect these subtle changes to the light coming from a potentially habitable exoplanet. For now, the only telescope capable of such a feat is the new James Webb Space Telescope. As it began science operations in July 2022, James Webb took a reading of the spectrum of the gas giant exoplanet WASP-96b. The spectrum showed the presence of water and clouds, but a planet as large and hot as WASP-96b is unlikely to host life.

However, this early data shows

that James Webb is capable of detecting faint chemical signatures in light coming from exoplanets. In the coming months, Webb is set to turn its mirrors toward TRAPPIST-1e, a potentially habitable Earth-sized planet a mere 39 light-years from Earth.

Webb can look for biosignatures by studying planets as they pass in front of their host stars and capturing starlight that filters through the planet’s atmosphere.

But Webb was not designed to search for life, so the telescope is only able to scrutinize a few of the nearest potentially habitable worlds. It also can only detect changes to atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, methane and water vapour. While certain combinations of these gasses may suggest life, Webb is not able to detect the presence of unbonded oxygen, which is the strongest signal for life.

ant Magellen Telescope, the Thirty Meter Telescope and the European Extremely Large Telescope. Each is far more powerful than existing telescopes on Earth, and despite the handicap of Earth’s atmosphere distorting starlight, these telescopes might be able to probe the atmospheres of the closest worlds for oxygen.

Is it biology or geology?

Even using the most powerful telescopes of the coming decades, astrobiologists will only be able to detect strong biosignatures produced by worlds that have been completely transformed by life.

Unfortunately, most gases released by terrestrial life can also be produced by non-biological processes – cows and volcanoes both release methane. Photosynthesis produces oxygen, but sunlight does, too, when it splits water molecules

Leading concepts for future, even more powerful, space telescopes include plans to block the bright light of a planet’s host star to reveal starlight reflected back from the planet. This idea is similar to using your hand to block sunlight to better see something in the distance. Future space telescopes could use small, internal masks or large, external, umbrella-like spacecraft to do this. Once the starlight is blocked, it becomes much easier to study light bouncing off a planet.

There are also three enormous, ground-based telescopes currently under construction that will be able to search for biosignatures: the Gi-

into oxygen and hydrogen. There is a good chance astronomers will detect some false positives when looking for distant life.

To help rule out false positives, astronomers will need to understand a planet of interest well enough to understand whether its geologic or atmospheric processes could mimic a biosignature.

The next generation of exoplanet studies has the potential to pass the bar of the extraordinary evidence needed to prove the existence of life. The first data release from the James Webb Space Telescope gives us a sense of the exciting progress that’s coming soon. (*The Conversation*)

Longings at Majnu Ka Tilla

It was a chance meeting with the Dalai Lama and his suggestion that as a photographer she does something to bring awareness to the Tibetan cause. However, when she started working on the Tibetan exile story, photographer Serena Chopra, whose new photo book *Majnu Ka Tilla Diaries* will be released on August 5, felt stuck and couldn’t find a new photographic language that spelt what it felt like to be a displaced community in exile.

Her initial work with the Tibetan community in India did not express her feelings about the subject of displacement. She felt stymied and dropped the project for a brief period. But then one day Chopra was inspired to visit Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi, an old refugee colony haunt from her days as a Delhi University student more than two decades ago.

“I spent a day and a late night at the colony and I just knew that I had found the space to express myself. It was an intuitive sense of resonating with the environment. This had to happen for my ideas to flow and express themselves creatively,” she tells *IANS*.

Majnu Ka Tilla harbours a Tibetan community torn away from its roots, now reinventing its life amidst the chaos and uncertainty of being in exile.

“The narrow alleyways, bustling with untold stories drew me closer. Every narrow lane morphed into the humdrum of a market with street vendors, crafts, restaurants, hotels and cafes sprouting in every nook and cranny. The temple square was the glue that bound every life here. It was not only a place to pray but a marketplace, a meeting place and a playground for the children in the evening. The old and infirm settled



An image from Serena Chopra’s work on Majnu Ka Tilla. (*serenachopra.in*)

into the rhythm of time passing to the resonance of thumbs rolling over prayer beads. I was inexorably drawn to their courage and resilience,” she adds.

Intentionally using the diary format in order to retain the intimacy and potency of a personal diary, she says the diary pages are the core and heart of the book. “The diary becomes a live object as it zooms in on the voice of the real person, unwittingly dragged into the whole situation of war and suffering.”

Believing that black and white as an art form does not project reality the way we see it with the human eye, the photographer says, “I believe it allows me to transform

reality in my own fashion.”

Interestingly, Chopra does not work with digital cameras at all and prefers the meditative, slow process of a manual camera that uses film. Her process starts when she feels passionate about a subject and wants to talk about it and express herself through photographs.

“When I work on a project, I like to read literary works. I also journal and jot down my thoughts and ideas on the project. Finally, a body of work encompasses all these factors – gut, concern, depth of feeling, and yet it transcends them,” she says.

Stressing that it would be a positive step to take photography forward along with other art forms

and have more of it as an integral part of the school curriculum, she feels that with the advent of social media platforms like Instagram, photography has grown in a multi-dimensional realm.

“That’s good. It provokes creativity and ease and is in sync with the modern need for speed and instant gratification. Whether these trends will find relevance or not is a moot point. Criteria limit artistic expression and excellence. It is more a question of expressing yourself with great individuality and originality,” concludes Chopra who is currently shooting a story on ancient forests using a large format studio camera. (*IANS*)

A unique experience across Europe on train

If you’ve been keeping up to speed with news reports, you’d know that airports in Europe and the UK are the worst to travel through. Long delays, ques, cancellations and lost luggage are just some of the many problems passengers are facing.

Airbnb is partnering with Interrail, an all-in-one European train Pass, on its 50th anniversary to offer six friends the opportunity to embark on an epic slow travel journey connecting remarkable historic homes across the continent.

Over 19 days, up to six friends or family members will be whisked away on the ultimate bucket list adventure, a bespoke Interrail journey with overnight stays in magnificent historic homes along the way: an English mansion, a French chateau, a Catalan manor, an Italian villa, and a German castle.

From a retired naval officer to a hotelier-turned-Host, the owners of the historic homes on the Airbnb Heritage Tour have made it their mission to breathe life back into these heritage buildings - all bookable under Airbnb’s new historical homes category which now offers travellers an easier way to search for almost 20,000 heritage buildings in the UK, Spain, France, Germany, and Italy.

This new category combined with a brand new Itinerary curated by Interrail makes it easy to create your own heritage tour of Europe by train.

The bespoke itinerary connects different areas of Europe that offer the best choice of historical homes available on Airbnb.

Emmanuel Marill, Airbnb Regional Director, EMEA said, “We



are excited to be offering this epic adventure which celebrates the golden age of 19th-century travel when there was more time to appreciate adventures with friends and family for longer. By combining the very best of train travel with the best of heritage in Europe, we hope travellers will reconnect with history and culture and enjoy travel as it once was.”

“Timed to coincide with Interrail’s 50th anniversary, the Airbnb Heritage Tour shines a spotlight, not only on the freedom and flexibility offered by travelling with Interrail but also on the rich heritage that these rail lines provide access to and the chance to go one step further in connecting with Europe. We clearly see a rising demand for this kind of travel - this year alone, we’ve seen the number of travellers exceed that of 2019 pre-pandemic levels. We’re thrilled to partner with Airbnb and to advocate for the positive impact rail travel can have in the world,” adds Nadine Koszler, Eurail BV Head of Marketing. (*IANSLife*)

An elegant, intricate mosaic

- Persian literature over the centuries

By Vikas Datta

One of the world's oldest, most vibrant, and yet still thriving literary traditions, its impact spans centuries and continents. Were it only known for its medieval - but still popular - Sufi mystic poets, its national epic that spans mythology to recorded history, or its tales of star-crossed lovers, it could rest on its laurels. But Persian literature has far much more up its elegant sleeve.

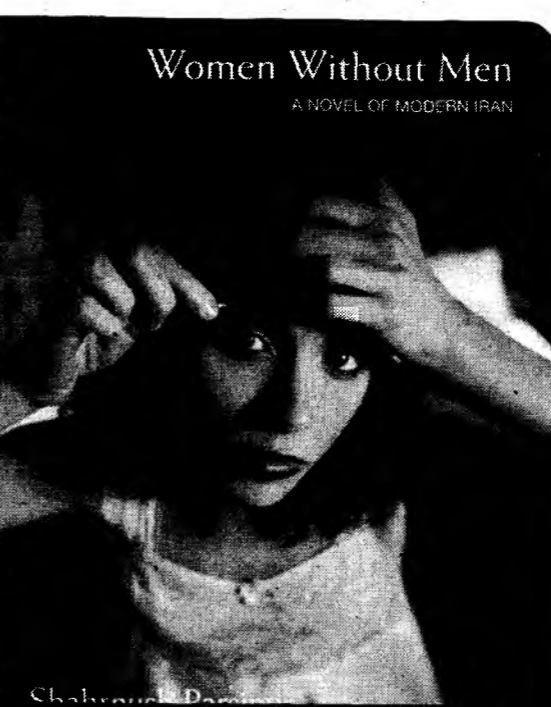
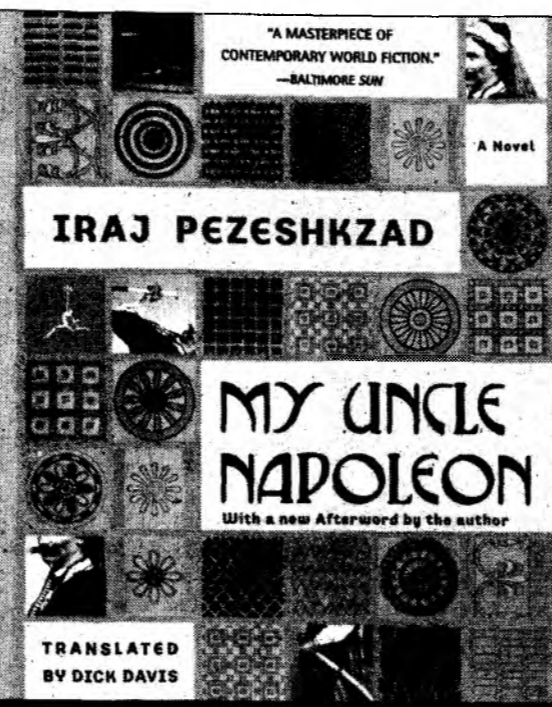
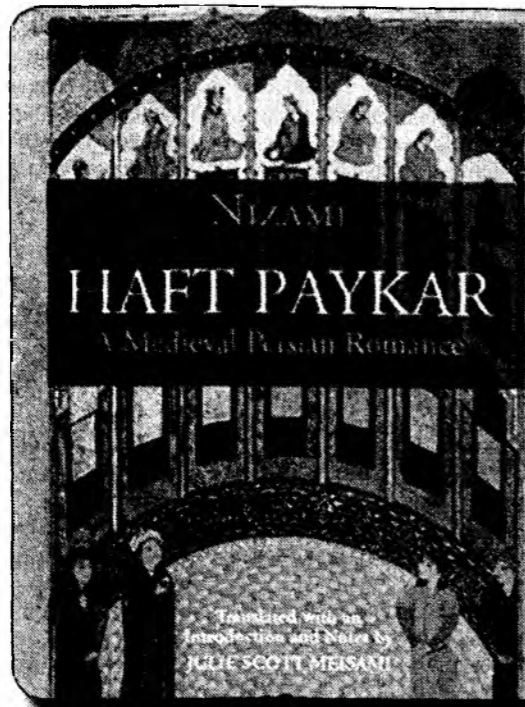
Take, for example, a 14th-century satire that could be the possible predecessor of the cartoon *Tom and Jerry*, an early 20th century work so darkly pessimistic that it was banned on the grounds that it could make its readers suicidal, and an outspoken coming-of-age story, amid revolution, war, and heartbreak - in a graphic novel format.

What's more, there is a distinct Indian connect to modern Persian literature too - both as far as content and production go, in line with the centuries-old links between the two civilisations.

Whenever we think of Persian literature, however, what generally comes to mind is its glittering firmament of classical poets, who flourished from the ninth to the 13th centuries. Let us begin with them only.

There is Hafez (or Hafiz), who was even once quoted by Sherlock Holmes (though there are some literary scholars who dispute the reference), or Sheikh Sa'di, of the *Bustan*, a verse work enlisting standard virtues for people, and *Gulistan*, a prose work, sprinkled liberally with short poems of aphorisms, advice, and reflections on the fickleness of fate, and one of the earliest expressions of the absurdity of human existence.

Omar Khayyam, the 'Sage of Naishapur', has, to his credit, the *Rubaiyat*, one of best-known works



of world poetry, especially after its English rendition by Edward Fitzgerald. This rather free-wheeling translation would not only go on to inspire titles of works by such diverse authors as Agatha Christie, Eugene O'Neill and Rex Stout - but achieve the singular task of making Khayyam popular all over again in his homeland.

And above all, there is Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, whose focus on personal paths to understand and unite with divinity, and the overwhelming nature of selfless and sacred love, make him one of the world's foremost and popular poets - especially in the US, where even recordings of his work top the music charts.

And then there is Rudaki, the first poet to write in New Persian. He was said to be so skilled that he was once commissioned by homesick courtiers of a king to persuade their ruler to abandon his favourite camping ground - where he had been ensconced for over two years - and

return to their hometown Bukhara.

Rudaki crafted a poem so evocative that, according to one account, it moved the king so much that midway he jumped on to a horse and rode away so fast that his courtiers had to pursue him for miles before they could persuade him to wear shoes as well as leggings, and he never drew rein till he reached home.

There is also Nizami Ganjavi, whose fame rests not only on two works of passionate but doomed love *Khosrow and Shirin* (of which the Shirin-Farhad episode is more known than the whole work) and *Layla and Majnun*, which is Arabic in source but substantially reworked.

He also deserves to be known for his *Iskander-Nameh*, telling of the historic and fantastic episodes of the life of Alexander, and the highly exotic and esoteric *Haft Paykar*.

Mention must also be made of Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*, another arcane look

at the path and purpose of life, told through a discussion at a gathering of feathered beings, as they search for a ruler.

In the realm of prose, Ferdowsi/Fardushi's *Shahnameh* is not only an engrossing read of the country's mythology and history, but it also

and fancies. Let us take a look at some modern works too.

Among the first stand-bearers of Iranian modernist literature, Sadeq Hedayat is known for his overly morbid *The Blind Owl* (1936 in Persian, 1957 in English) - originally published in a limited edition in

World War II.

At its heart, it is the story of the struggles of the unnamed narrator - a high school student - to stall his cousin's pre-arranged marriage to another cousin in order to get her for himself.

She happens to be the sole daughter of his maternal uncle - the 'Napoleon' of the title, a name sarcastically given to him by his nieces and nephews due to his obsession with the French Emperor, and otherwise, a paranoid and delusional character who believes the British and their "lackeys" have invaded the country to get even with him for "opposing" them during the Constitutional Revolution over three decades back.

A phalanx of constantly intriguing family members, police investigators, government officials, an incompetent doctor, a preacher, sly servants, and others complete the cast. Standing out among them is an Indian Sikh businessman named 'Sardar Maharaj Khan' and believed by Uncle to be a British spy.

And finally, no literary tradition can be complete without mentioning the voice of women, who, repressed otherwise, can use the pen to share their plight and even hit back.

Shahnoush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* (written in the 1970s, but first published in 1989 in Persian and 1998 in English) uses interwoven narratives and Magical Realism to depict the social condition of Iranian women and their desire to break free.

It depicts five women - a former schoolteacher grappling with a disquieting experience, another who seeks independence and a husband, an old woman shaken by revelations about virginity, a disenchanted middle-class housewife, and a cheerful prostitute, who meet in a mystical garden, where they can freely reflect on their lives, dreams, and desires.

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* series is well-known as a semi-autobiographical account of loss of faith and trust in religion, society, and even relationships, but it is her *Embroideries* (2003 in French; 2005 in English) that is more-hard hitting in its candid discussion on sex among three generations of women of a household and some of their friends and neighbours.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 17, 2022

Moon parallel Mars on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. You will come in contact with lot of influential persons. Differences and conflicts will be resolved in time. Your property disputes will also get solved. You will work diligently and with full seriousness fulfill your tasks. Your peers and superiors will be ready to help you in all possible ways. New job/business offers will come. You can also enter into new business in collaboration/association/partnership. Your financial condition will remain good. You will also meet a special and influential person, and will get benefits later on. There will be peace and harmony in family ties. Love birds will have a wonderful time. They will plan to get married. Those who are involved in a romantic relationship for a long time will decide to enter into wedlock. Business/work related trips will keep you busy.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Time will be in your favor. You will have a very good time with your family and friends. You will also enjoy it fully. You will also do a lot of shopping for your family and children. You will also buy expensive items for yourself. You will also receive valuable gift from someone close. You will also remain devoted to your work. Your seniors will support you fully. Your seniors will be impressed by you. You will also feel a lot confident about yourself and will focus on your goals. Time is good. Work will dominate on your mind. You will also plan to go out with your family. You will make great efforts to revive old relations. Works done in partnership will be successful. At this stage all hurdles and obstacles will get removed.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You will be able to peacefully complete all your tasks. Time is very favorable for you. Your partner will care about your feelings and expectations. Students will concentrate on their studies. You will adjust yourself to the changing weather. You will also focus on your work. You will be able to complete tasks. You will also discuss vital matters with your bosses. The balance between work and family life will be great. There will be an improvement in your health. Guests will visit you. You will be focus of attention to an event organized by someone close to you. Yourself respect will be high. You will get success in court cases. Political matters will also get resolved. You will be blessed with good health. You will also receive benefits from new cont

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This week will prove to be very fruitful. The time will be very good. You will perform every task with a lot of thinking and will meet an influential person who will help you to grow in your career. You will try every way to get your work done. You will also help those who are needy and poor. Income will be good. You will plan to buy new clothes, jewellery etc. You may also have fun in an event, party etc. You will take care of yourself and also fulfill the wishes of your family. Situation will be well under your control. Time is very favorable. You will not interfere in other's matters. A person may be angry with you. But that is not your problem. Just let it go.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It will be an enlightening week. You will need to centralize your energy. A meeting with your bosses will prove to be beneficial. You will have monetary gains. You will also plan to go out with your family. You will enjoy delicious food. There will be happiness in your family and you will get full support from others. You will be mentally engaged in your own work. Old disputes will get resolved. You will receive opportunities to change your destiny. You will also be ready to help others. You will be prepared to face any problems. Be careful with your talks otherwise you may hurt your words and get misunderstood. Relations are very important for you.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The beginning of the week will be splendid, the middle will be favorable and the end will be satisfying. You will be able to complete your work and you will also go to a favorable place and work from there. Your colleagues will support you fully. You will become favorite of your bosses. Even your family members will like you. Your courage and strength will increase as will your confidence. You will feel like working as you plan to. You will get money and riches. You will also enjoy perfect health. You will also have wonderful bonding with your family members. Your own people will inspire you a lot. You will be reciprocated in love. You will have a positive outlook towards life. You will feel relieved as you start doing your work. There will be chances of gains. You will amass a lot of wealth. Your prestige will increase.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It will prove to be best days for you. You will earn lot of money. You will also move ahead with a positive attitude. Housewives can earn some-also new. You can also fall in love relations with a person known to you. You will make excellent progress in your job/business. You will be comfortable with people. There will be a very busy schedule in household works and office works. You will also complete your pending projects with works and office works. You will also spend quality time with your family. You will spend your time in entertainment. You will also understand the value of time and utilize it effectively. Time will be spent nicely with loved ones.

It will be a normal week. The unemployed will get work proposals. Those working in the private sector and business will fulfill their work responsibilities. The work will take some time to complete but there is no doubt that it will be done. You will face a stiff competition in your business. You will also get invited to business conferences. In interviews and exams, you will get success. Don't be scared and take care of your interests. The obstacles you were facing in property related matters will come to an end. You will be courageous. You will feel capable of carrying out your work. Your reputation in family will come up. You will be busy in social activities. You will feel happy and prosperous. The responsibility of work and family will increase.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It will be a good time for government employees. Work conditions will improve. You can get a promotion also. You will live a practical life and see things in reality. It will be a favorable time. Freedom in love will be realized. You can buy new clothes/items. You will have financial gains. There will be prosperity in the family. The whole family will be with you and you too will be devoted to your family members. Your time will be spent in good deeds. You will run your business well. You will create profits conditions. You will search for new sources to increase your income. The strength of the economic situation will delight you. This week, overall, will prove to be peaceful and wealthy.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

The beginning and end of the week will be very pleasant for you. In the middle of the week, you will be caught in your own work. You will get lot of respect. Personal matters will be solved soon and intimate relations will be improved. You will share wonderful bonding with your mate. You can get promoted in your job or get a new job offer. You will get good news from someone which will lift your spirits. You will get lot of money after your hard work and sincere efforts. There will be lot of running around to get your work done which you will finish eventually. You can fall in love relations with a unknown person all of a sudden. You will come up to the expectations of your partner.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It will be a well spent week. You will introspect and analyze yourself. You will also bring about a change in your communication and behavior. You will get recognition, name and fame. You will get attached to some special skills. You will also get new job/business opportunities. You will also meet lot of new people. Your eligibility will be revealed to everyone. You can also go out on a business tour. Your financial position will be satisfactory. You will also gain your partnership. You will be able to establish yourself in your office or at workplace. Your efforts will bring in money. You can receive a valuable gift from someone. You might have to take important decisions in household matters. You need to make new investments with caution.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It will be a favorable week for financial matters. You will earn lot of money. You will have gains in property matters. You will also do the best of works. You will get the desired success. You will be satisfied to know that all your works are going according to your wish. Your bank balance will add on. You will also go on tours due to your job/business. A complex matter at work will be resolved with the help of a friend. Your seniors will be happy with your performance. Your influence and prestige will grow. You will also spend time with your friends and will recollect some good memories. You will get out of problems and your disputes will get resolved. The tensions you were having with regard to studies of your children will come to an end.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It will be a wonderful week. Your physical health will be very good. You will remain devoted to your work. You will also try to keep yourself away from tensions. You will be confident about your abilities and will have a positive approach towards life. You will also complete your work by using your contacts and running here and there. Business deals will be successful. Change in plans will be helpful. You will also look for new alterations in your career. You will desist from interfering in other's people's matters. You will also buy gift for your dear ones. You can also attend a party or family function. Your good and noble work will also get appreciated. Luck will be in your favor. Your hands will remain tied in financial matters.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Some work which was left incomplete for a long time will get completed. Time will be of happiness and will be spent amongst your dear ones. There will be lot of hard work but you will get your reward. The days will bring in some joyous occasion. There will be some enthusiastic activities in family life. You will get success in exams/interviews. You will be full of vigor and energy. Pending matters will gather momentum. Relations with brothers will be pleasant. You will feel a lot of love towards your dear ones. Your relations with neighbors will also improve. A dispute that was going for a long time in the family will get resolved. Possibility of some journey is there.

National Emblem on new Parl building a symbol 'for the people, by the people'

The 6.5-metre tall fully hand-crafted National Emblem of India on the roof of the new Parliament building, weighing 16,000 kg, is made of high purity bronze.

There is no other similar depiction of the emblem, from the perspective of material and craftsmanship, anywhere else in India. Over 100 artisans, from various parts of the country tirelessly worked on the design, crafting and casting of the emblem for over six months to bring out the quality that could be seen in the final installation.

The installation itself was a challenge as it was 32 metres above the upper ground level. Giving wings to the ambition of creating such an expression of the emblem needed dedication, meticulous supervision, and skilful installation - all depicting various elements of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. When seated on the top of the temple of our democracy - the Parliament building - it truly represents the paradigm of 'for the people, by the people'.

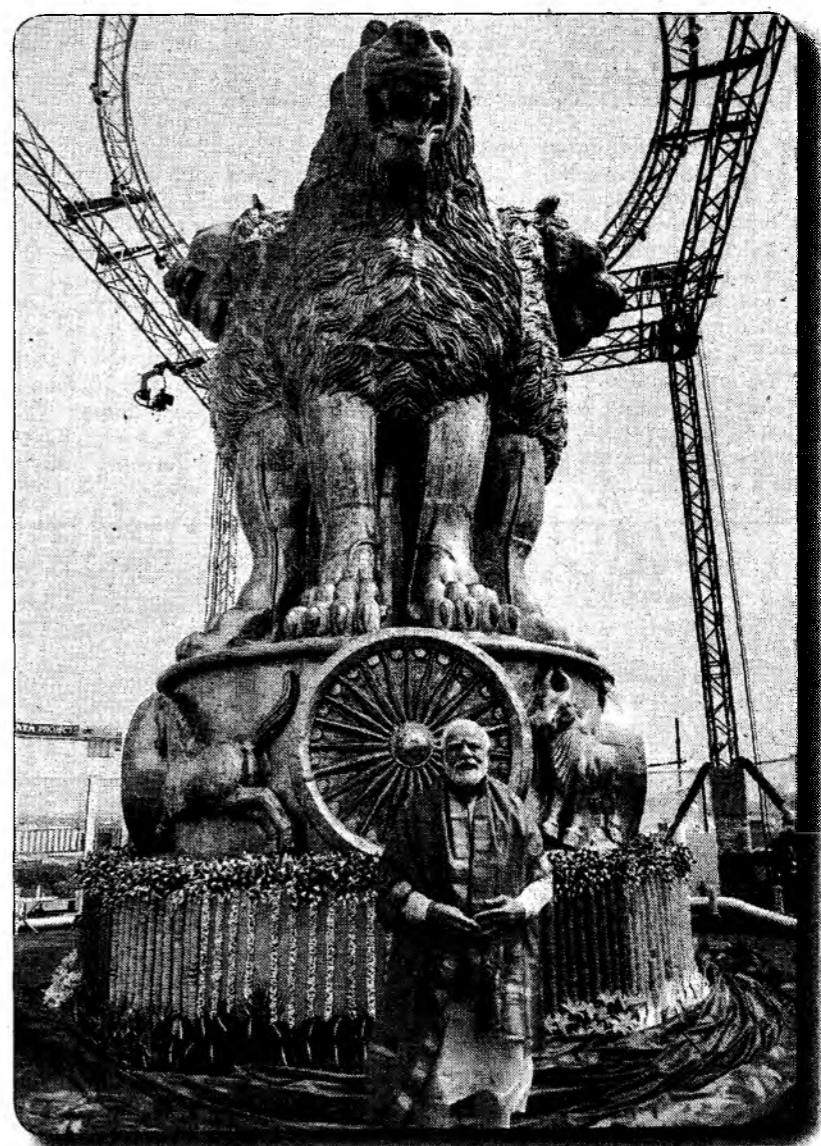
The design

The National Emblem is an adaptation from the Lion Capital of Asoka which is preserved in the Sarnath Museum. The Lion Capital has four lions mounted back-to-back on a circular abacus. The frieze of the abacus is adorned with sculptures in high relief of an elephant, a galloping horse, a bull, and a lion separated by intervening Dharma Chakras.

The profile of the Lion Capital has been adopted as the National Emblem of India. This finds pride of place and the design is adopted for the emblem above the Parliament building.

The process of casting of national emblem

A computer graphic sketch was made and based on that a clay model was created. Once approved by the competent authorities, the FPR Model was made. Then with the lost wax process, the wax mould and



bronze cast was done.

The process of lost wax casting

To cast the clay into the bronze, a mould is made from the model, and the inside of this negative mould is brushed with melted wax to the desired thickness of the final bronze. After removal of the mould, the resultant wax shell is filled with a heat-resistant mixture.

Wax tubes, which provide ducts for pouring bronze during casting and vents for the gases produced in the process, are fitted to the outside of the wax shell. Metal pins are hammered through the shell into the core to secure it. Next, the prepared wax

shell is completely covered in layers of heat-resistant fibre reinforced plastic, and the whole is inverted and placed in an oven.

During heating, the plaster dries and the wax runs out through the ducts created by the wax tubes. The plaster mould is then packed in sand, and molten bronze is poured through the ducts, filling the space left by the wax. When cool, the outer plaster and core are removed, and the bronze may receive finishing touches.

Finally, the statue is polished and breezed and ready with clear coat of protective polish and no paint to showcase the rich metal. (IANS)

Dhankar versus Alva

IN another line-up for election to a high post, the 17-party opposition alliance has picked veteran Congress woman and former Union minister Margaret Alva to face outgoing West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankar, the BJP-NDA nominee. Both names emerged out of the blue while media and political pundits groped in the dark and got no advance hint. On the positive side, both these leaders have a wealth of experience. Rather, Alva's experience in politics might outweigh that of Dhankar, she having functioned for several years as a Union minister and topped it with gubernatorial posts in quite a few states. She had worked closely with three prime ministers, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao. Now, the 80-year-old Alva also seeks to carry forward a legacy of her own as well as of her mother-in-law Violet Alva -- both having functioned as vice-chairperson of the Rajya Sabha. The vice president functions as chairperson of the upper house. Jagdeep Dhankar, 71, a former MP and MLA, has been in the news during his term as governor of West Bengal, where he had often sought to put chief minister Mamata Banerjee on the line of fire. Yet, at another level, the personal warmth between them was also no secret.

Political calculations are high in these selections too. Dhankar represents the powerful and numerically strong Jat segment of the population spread over five geographically contiguous states including his own state of Rajasthan. Jats form the bulwark of the farming community in these regions, also including Punjab, Haryana, UP and MP. Well-built, they are a strong presence in the military services too. The BJP might be having its eye fixed on the assembly elections in Rajasthan and MP in the near future. All eyes, however, are on who would now keep a watch on Banerjee in Bengal.

Alva, a Roman Catholic, has an added personal appeal among minority Christians mainly in her home state of Karnataka. Elections are due in the southern state less than a year hence, but this by itself might not be the main prompting for the Congress or the Opposition in the present context. Christians form only less than two per cent of the population there. Yet, the Opposition alliance appears to have weighed in factors like her being from a minority community and a woman at that. Now, the BJP-NDA alone cannot appropriate the credit of having fielded a woman in the form of Droupadi Murmu -- in the present round of President and VP polls. Notably, the BJP is not fielding any minority member for the Vice President's posts, despite speculations to the contrary.

The Jaintia Rebellion: Abstract from Dr JH Thornton's memoir

By H.H. Mohrmen

There are three important sources available about the great Jaintia rebellion of 1862-63 led by U Kiang Nangbah. The major sources are the correspondence of the British officers stationed in Calcutta and Cherrapunjee and their subordinates in the hills and the account of Dr JH Thornton, who was part of the military expedition to suppress the rebellion. The third and the most important source are the oral narratives which are being handed down by words of mouth from one generation to another.

In his memoir Dr JH Thornton who was attached to the 28th Regiment of Native Infantry has recorded almost all the incidents he was involved in and encountered during the rebellion. Thornton was appointed as the medical in-charge of the left wing 28th Regiment of Native Infantry few days after January of 1862. The regiment was ordered to move to Sylhet by steamer to assist in suppressing the rebellion in Jaintia hills in Eastern Bengal.

Thornton said that the rising of the hill tribes was mainly because of the ill-advised of the Bengal government to impose income tax upon the native inhabitants of the hills. The simple highlanders had no incomes in the proper sense of the term and could not understand the meaning of such tax in the first place. The Sylhet Light Infantry Battalion which was stationed in Cherrapunjee in the Khasi hills was being reduced in strength because it was in the process of being converted from an irregular local corps into a regular regiment of the Bengal Native Army. Thornton was informed by the Bengali tax-collector that the subordinate officials began in their customary way to oppress and extort the hill people. The outcome of this is that in the beginning of 1862 a revolt began which continued for fifteen months. The revolt has caused heavy losses and it was finally suppressed with much difficulty and at great expense by the government employing 5000 or 6000 soldiers and police.

The journey from Calcutta to Sylhet

The day after he joined the wing of the 28th Native Infantry in January 1862, they embarked on a journey from Calcutta in a river steamer down the Hooghly River to reach the Sundarbans. Sundarbans are islands and

channels lying between the Hooghly on the west and the Meghna on the east, a distance of more than 150 miles. It was through these innumerable channels the waters of the great rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra find their way to the ocean.

They reached Burrisal on February 10 and remained there the rest of the day and left Burrisal the next day on February 11. With so much difficulty they succeeded in reaching Dacca the main city of Eastern Bengal, on the following day. They stayed a day in Dacca and continued with the trip and landed at Luckaie on February 15. They then continue with their journey and reached Sylhet on February 22 after crossing Soorma. When they reached the station they found that they were ordered to march to Cherrapunjee. The sta-

The Sylhet Light Infantry Battalion which was stationed in Cherrapunjee in the Khasi hills was being reduced in strength because it was in the process of being converted from an irregular local corps into a regular regiment of the Bengal Native Army.

tion itself was almost empty of troops as they were moved to the field to fight against the rebels.

They had to stay in Sylhet for some time due to logistic problems and started marching on February 25 till they reached a place called Companyunge. From the place they can see the Khasi Jaintia hills rising like a gigantic green wall stretching from east to west. They could also see many waterfalls cascading down between these hills. They reached Pandua on February 27 and while at Pandua they received an order from Colonel Richardson requesting the commanding officer to send a company up to Cherrapunjee in Khasi hills and to join him at Nongtalang in Jaintia hills. Captain Robinson who commanded the regiment decided to move eastwards on a regular road instead of returning to Sylhet. After they had spent a week and marched for about forty miles through many difficulties they arrived at Jyntiapur town.

Reaching Jaintiapur

Thornton's impression of Jyntiapur was an old town which is situated at the foot of the hills and located only

a few miles from the place where troops are supposed to move. It is the capital of a country which was once a very flourishing kingdom. It is also a place where the palace of the Rajah of Jaintiapur is located. The palace was however in ruins and nothing worthy could be found in the palace except some huge monoliths around the palace which he believed could have some religious significance.

The troop then left for Jaintiapur on March 7 and proceeded on a very steep ascent of about 1500 feet to reach Nongtalang. They found that the people of Nongtalang were very friendly and they had not joined the rebels to fight against the government. If the soldiers had not arrived on time to protect them perhaps they would have joined the rebellion said Thornton. At Nongtalang they met

Major Rowlett, the chief civil officer of the Khasia and Jyntia Hills, and Colonel Richardson of the 44th Regiment Native Infantry along with his party.

Attacking the rebels' Stockade

Dr Thornton accompanied Captain Robinson with about thirty men and left Nongtalang to launch an attack on the enemy's stockade at Oksai/Amkoi. They walked through many ascents and descents and through narrow valleys and dense forests. After trekking for sometimes they were aware of the presence of the enemy who then fired arrows at them from the cover of the jungle. Fortunately no one was hit in the attack and the troops fired volleys of musketry towards the rebels which compelled them to run away. Captain Robinson decided that it was not prudent to advance further. They then started their retreat but were followed by the rebels who were driven back after few shots from the doctor's rifle and muskets of the soldiers.

As the troops descended the steep hills the rebels who were hiding in the forest continued to throw rocks at

them. When they reached the bottom the rebels continued to fire arrows and throw stones at the soldiers from both sides. They shouted and yelled triumphantly thinking that they had caught the soldiers in a trap. The soldiers luckily escaped the trap after so much difficulties and escaped from the rocks and arrows that the rebels threw at them. The soldiers escaped without any loss and reached their camp safely.

The next morning with almost all the troops and the police that they had at their disposal they jointly went to attack the rebel's stockade at Oksai/Amkoi.

They crossed the ravine without opposition and soon arrived in front of the stockade, which was built of stout palisades about nine feet high, bristling everywhere with sharp bamboo spikes. It was carried across a neck of level ground with a precipice on each side which effectually prevented any attempt on the part of the soldiers to turn the defences. The ground in front of it was everywhere stuck with 'panjees' lancet-shaped bamboo spikes several inches long, which would penetrate the upper leathers of stout walking hoots. As they reached the top, they heard the sound of musketry on the other side of the stockade, which meant that Colonel Richardson had already commenced his attack. The rebels seemed confused by an assault from two opposite directions, which made the work of the soldiers easy.

The soldiers soon entered the stockade by scrambling over the palisades, and met their friends, who had been equally successful although their loss had been greater than the other team's. A few of the rebels were killed, but most of them escaped by going down the precipices where troops could not follow them. The soldiers then left a small detachment to hold the captured stockade, and the remainder of the troops, after a halt for rest and food, took the roads to their respective camps. During their return to Nongtalang, while crossing the deep ravine, they were again attacked by the rebels with arrows and large masses of rocks, and several soldiers were wounded.

This is only a part of the narrative of the rebellion which was recorded by Dr JH Thornton. In his memoir he had also mentioned other expeditions too.

If authentic, common Muslims should come out strongly against them 'Alleged' PFI document makes dangerous observations about India

By Sushil Kutty

Those who wrote the PFI document, currently in circulation, to convert India into an Islamic state by 2047 know their English. The grammar is clean and it took the author just eight pages to conquer India lock, stock and barrel. The long and short of it is, Indian Muslims want to rule all over again. The British uprooted them, and the "cowardly Hindus" usurped in 1947. Now, 75 years on, there is this PFI document to restore Muslim rule in India.

Frankly speaking, it is ambitious, and it's foolhardy. A bunch of wayward Muslims planning the overthrow of the Indian state. The question is, is it authentic PFI? So far, the document has not been denied by the PFI. And, the Government of India hasn't reacted to the "chilling",

Shaolin School. Maybe, training in the 'Kalaripayattu' of Kerala, which is where most of the PFI exploits are centred, and are reported from. Let's not forget the Mopla rebellion that was influenced by the Caliphate. 'India Vision 2047' talks of the "friendly" country of "Turkey".

For the PFI, the goal is "Towards Rule of Islam in India". It makes an attempt to get Indian Muslims to rally behind it by keeping alive sore points that keep Indian Hindus and Indian Muslims apart. Clearly, the "two nations" theory which birthed Pakistan remains pregnant with the idea of the takeover of India.

The "coward Hindus" and the "present state of Muslims" are juxtaposed for maximum effect. Per-



"sensational" and "shocking" plan... The PFI has to come out publicly about the origin of the document, otherwise, it will be used as a major weapon by the Hindu fundamentalists to castigate the Muslim minorities in general.

"India Vision 2047" lays bare a plan to re-subjugate Hindus if only 10 percent of the Muslims rallied behind the PFI, which means not even 10 percent of Indian Muslims support PFI. But this didn't stop the radical Islamists from dreaming "big", preparing for an armed overthrow of democratic "secular" India.

The focus is to build a committed armed cadre, trained in using the knife and machete; the small arm and the heavier artillery. Along the way, get Islamic countries to help; force the Hindu-majority Indian state to its knees. Get Indian Muslims sold on the idea of an "Islamic Republic of India". The enormity of the task didn't faze the planners. The 8-page document talks of getting the SC and OBCs to the Muslims' side and winning a few dozen seats by fighting elections. But it is armed conflict that is the mainstay of the Popular Front of India's plans for India.

The document and its contents does give the impression that some pretty sharp but relatively younger minds were at work. The training of the cadre-soldiers is rather rudimentary with small-arms weapons training and unarmed combat, like that imparted at China's

ceived victimhood runs in a thick vein throughout the narrative. That said, there is nothing to betray anything 'Mahatma-like' in the telling. Ahimsa and Satyagraha are not in the PFI-playbook. The sword remains the tip of the Islamic conquests.

From "once Muslims ruled over majority Hindus" to "Muslims have been reduced to the status of 2nd class citizens" to "but for the British we would still be ruling", and "there are 9 districts where Muslims are above 75%", all these are trotted out to justify Indian Muslims coming together to overthrow "Hindu rule".

The PFI document makes the claim that the government of India does not even "bother to consult Muslims on matters concerning Shariat" and how divisions among Muslims are making things difficult. "The world looks at Indian Muslims as a model and the Indian Muslim community hopelessly waits for a miracle... leadership has to emerge from within the community..."

Many of us alive today will no longer be present in 2047, but no matter how impossible and ludicrous it may sound, the PFI document is upbeat—"We dream a 2047 where the political power has returned to the Muslim community from whom it was unjustly taken away by the British Raj. If we look into (the) history of Islam, Muslims were always in minority and for victory we do not need to have a majority..." (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

CUET a veritable nightmare

Editor,
This evening, a national TV channel has described the situation faced by some students on the first day of the CUET as that marked by chaos and confusion. The main reasons for this are because admit cards containing information about the date of examination and the examination centres were issued only at the last moment. In fact, for those who have to sit for the examination on the July 15, 2022, the admit cards were issued only on the July 12, 2022. For some, it seems examination centres were also changed at the last minute. But what is of serious concern are the reports that some students missed the examination because basic information was not given in time.

"Nightmare" is another word I would like to add because of what my child had to go through. As clearly indicated in her application form, she and along with her friends chose Shillong as the place of first choice to write the examinations with Guwahati, Kolkata and Aizawl as the subsequent choices. But it came as a surprise that while some of her friends were assigned centres in Shillong and Guwahati, she was assigned an examination centre in Kolkata while one of her friends was assigned

an examination centre in Chennai though these were not their first choices. In the case of my daughter and her friend who got Chennai as the examination centre, the admit cards were sent on July 12, 2022 and the date of examination was July 15 2022.

Despite all the good intentions, I am still wondering where CUET will take us if it is organized in this manner. How many of us can afford to travel to distant places and to make travel arrangements within a short time? As per the present arrangement, CUET is a financial burden which will cost more than the fees of some courses. In fact, for the common people and especially for the poor and those in rural areas, it is going to deprive them of higher and quality education as they will not be able to afford the travel and stay and as they will not even know how to go about the rigmarole. As such, CUET as per the present arrangement is a burden and a nightmare for parents and students.

I hope that our Education Minister, the Education Department and the MDA Government will take note of this and take up the matter with the appropriate authorities for the benefit of one and all

I can make public the application form and admit card of my daughter to substantiate my arguments.

Yours etc.,
BJ Syiemlieh
Nongkseh

Traders who became rulers

Editor,
On the occasion of U Syiem Tirot Sing memorial on July 17, 2022 let us remind ourselves that after U Tirot Sing was arrested by the British East India Company the Hima Nongkhlaw (Native State) was imposed with huge taxes in the form of a war tribute that the Hima had to pay to the East India Company at Saitsohpen, Sohra. This had pushed the Hima Nongkhlaw to total bankruptcy and taken a huge toll on poor subjects. Subsequently, several of U Tirot Sing's successors too found it very hard to raise the huge amount of tribute to meet the demands of the British Company's Government. During the conversation with a few Khasi authors it is learnt that Thomas Jones, the first Welsh Presbyterian missionary stood in solidarity with the subjects of Hima Nongkhlaw in challenging the imposition of this war tribute.

In the neo-liberal era the business or corporate houses no longer finance elections, rather they themselves are running for public offices, like MDC/MLA and MP to claim full political control in order to expand their business interest at the cost of the people and the State.

Moreover, in the case of Meghalaya, since the past several years or a decade or so, the State government had

taken humongous loans from ADB et al. Now who will repay this loan? Is it not the citizens of the State and what will be the implications on the economy, employment, education, health and development of the State in the near future? So the end result is structural adjustment!

During the era of U Tirot Sing, native States like the Hima Nongkhlaw had to pay war tribute to the British East India Company. Today and henceforth, we the citizens of the State will have to repay the loans with high interests to ADB and others?

Yours etc.,
Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh
Via email

Rising cases of unemployment

Editor,
It is a pity that the problem of unemployment has not been solved so far. There are three types of unemployment: educated unemployment, unemployment, and under-employment of the agricultural sector and under-employment of the unskilled labour in the industrial sector. Seasonal unemployment is caused by the fact that farmers and agriculturists remain unemployed for a great part of the year after the harvest season.

In fact, unemployment is a curse on society, a blot on humanity, and a potential danger to the stability of the country. Many employed persons join the army of the

unemployed and indulge in anti-social and destructive activities.

In view of the above, it is the duty of the government to provide work and at least living wages to its citizens. In fact, the right to work is the fundamental right of all citizens.

There are several reasons for the growing unemployment in the country. In the first instance, our educational system is outdated and does not fulfil the socio-economic needs of the country. It is completely divorced from the realities of life also. What is needed is that job-oriented courses to be introduced. Moreover, educational planning should be streamlined so that the number of graduates and undergraduates should be in proportion to the jobs available in a year. This has not been looked into during the last Five-Year-Plans.

Really speaking, unemployment is a complicated problem and no single remedy can solve it. It must be dealt with on all fronts. The development of cottage and small-scale industries should be given priority over the large-scale industries. This will provide employment to a large number of skilled and unskilled labourers. Large scale industries should be organized in a manner that they may absorb the maximum manpower.

Then there should be schemes for self-employment. Some of the states have made elaborate schemes in this respect to provide im-

mediate employment to the vocationally and technically trained hands. The Government provides the know-how of the industry started by a skilled hand and also helps him in purchasing up-to-date machinery on the hire purchase system.

Another cause of unemployment is the growing population which must be checked. Every year 15 million souls are born in our country. This is called "population explosion" and it has made the unemployment problem all the more acute. So the masses should be made aware of the advantages of a limited family.

Lastly, society should be based on a socialistic pattern. The state should take over all the means of production and distribution. In the socialistic states, there is no unemployment. It is only in the capitalist countries where we find unemployment. Socialism does not breed unemployment. Thus we need today's socialistic pattern of society, scientific knowledge, and vocational and technical training to put an end to unemployment. Unless unemployment is uprooted completely, we cannot build a welfare state in India.

Yours etc.,
Prasenjit Dey,
Via email

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

"Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution. If you don't have any problems, you don't get any seeds."

— Norman Vincent Peale

The Shillong Times

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CUET will create inequalities

THE manner in which the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) is being conducted leaves a lot to be desired. Going by the experiences of the aspirants then if parents are not well off to fly their children at short notice to distant centres like Chennai then their wards have missed the bus. Anurag Mehra, Professor of Chemical Engineering and Associate Faculty at the Center for Policy Studies, at IIT Bombay says in an article, "Our policy-makers have an uncanny knack for finding solutions to existing problems that create even more problems. The recent announcement that admissions to 45 UGC-funded Central Universities will now be exclusively through the Central University Entrance Test (CUET) is a case in point." The reason advanced by the UGC is that CUET will, "create a level field".

That level field it is argued can be created by ending the "moderation" of the actual marks that students get in their board examinations because this is what leads to marks inflation, ultra-high scores in CBSE 12th boards; the entire process is non-transparent and devoid of any scientifically-validated basis. Hence the problem is with the board examinations, and not with the admissions process which was merely using their scores. The solution lies in addressing the problems associated with board examinations and not in changing the admissions system. A common core curriculum should be implemented across state boards so that the CBSE and ICSE do not have an unfair advantage over those passing from state boards. This will bring about a universalization of education.

Unfortunately, the medicine – in this case CUET- is worse than the cure and is likely to exclude deserving students who for reasons of resource are unable to afford coaching. The CUET has made board exams completely irrelevant. Now teaching will be oriented towards scoring well in the entrance examination but students will still have the stress of clearing board examinations. What CUET will do is to promote rote-learning without much use for reason and will not test the individual's thinking capacity. CUET will also deal a death blow to "long-form" learning and will only push students to focus on objective-type questions in the CUET. The reading and writing skills that were considered an integral part of all-round school education will all be abandoned in favour of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ). Educationists across the country have voiced their reservations on CUET. Their case is that MCQs are the worst way to evaluate people for most subjects, especially the arts, literature, social sciences and the natural sciences. Perhaps what is needed is a countrywide movement against CUET which is aimed at benefiting the coaching industry at huge cost to students and parents.

Let me from the very beginning give credit to my friend Fabian Lyngdoh for his FB post which read as follows, "I know that many would disagree with me, but in my understanding, the Khasi society today faces many cultural and societal problems because the society has undergone a change from the Avuncular Matrilineal System to the present Nuclear Patriarchal System." This remark set off a thought process within me which ended with the question – if Khasi society is really going through a process of change, then in which aspects of our lives, as indigenous Khasis, are we experiencing this change? The more important aspect however and which we should be dwelling on more deeply is, how are we as a society, managing or reacting to this change? Lyngdoh has confined his observations to cultural and societal problems primarily because of a change from an avuncular matrilineal system to that of a nuclear patriarchal system. This write-up will however attempt, within the limited space of a newspaper column, to include the changes that we as a society face not only within the cultural and societal arenas but more importantly in our political and economic worldview, on which we as a society have become more and more dependent on. I hasten to add that the views and opinions expressed in this column are not based on any detailed academic research or investigation. They are however the outcome of the author's observations of the changes that have manifested themselves in Khasi society in the last 70 years or so.

Let us start with the changes that have taken place within the clan (kur) system of our tribal society. Matriliney was and still remains the mainstay of our identity as Khasis. The clan comprises of descendants from various wombs (kpoh) but ultimately all are descendants from one common ancestress. The ranking and strength of a typical Khasi clan depended on two issues. First, its land resources, meaning the extent of arable land under clan possession and second, its human resources, meaning the number of members within the clan. Based on the above, the clan, supervised and managed by senior male members known as "ki kni" (the maternal uncles), served as a strong social safety net for any clan member who perchance fell on bad times. That is why till 60-50 years ago one seldom stumbled upon a despondent Khasi beggar, as a homeless abandoned Khasi was considered a huge shame and social embarrassment on the clan (kur) the unfortunate belonged to. Hence the role of the kni (maternal uncle) as the protector-manager of clan interests came in and the role of the Khatduh as the custodian of clan well-being was established. Based on an economy that was pastoral and agrarian, where needs were basic and elementary, this form of societal non-profit enterprise worked in

the interest of all concerned. Prestige and respect for wise elders, culled from adherence to well-established social values and principles, prevailed effortlessly in a casteless society that practiced egalitarianism. Perhaps this was the Aiom Ksiar (golden age) of my forefathers that this generation of Khasis speak of with such nostalgia. About 150 years ago the change that was to make such a huge impact on Khasi psychology and our world view started to appear on the horizon. An agrarian economy

slowly began to give way to a monetary economy. Money and the ability to save it began to define social well-being and wealth. It changed forever a Khasi's perception of the value of land and his concept of leadership. Far-sighted individuals began to acquire land not for the community services it can give but for the status it provides to one's personal social image. It didn't take long for such individuals and their wealthy families to be bestowed with the mantle of leadership. At ground level, community land began to

disappear which unfortunately was not flagged by our leaders or by the traditional institutions that governed us. Landlessness, an alien unknown factor in bygone era, was thus allowed to grow and by now has already become largely endemic in our social make-up. Hand in hand with this new nomenclature of wealth came the introduction to a new form of knowledge acquisition. A formal Western system of education based on a Romanised script that the Khasis never had before, made rapid inroads in Khasi society. The written / printed word soon replaced the oral tradition of passing on knowledge and learning.

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the governance and development of India. 50 years ago, a further milestone in our tryst with destiny took place when the State of Meghalaya was created and the destiny and fate of our future generations was placed in the hands of our own elected leaders. The point this essay wishes to drive home is that if the latest anthropological findings are to be believed, then it would seem that the Khasis form one of the earliest ethnic group of settlers in the Indian sub-continent with a history of perhaps not less than 25,000 years to its credit. A community that must have learnt the art and skill of sur-

Caught up in Change

By Toki Blah

Not surprising therefore that monetary wealth and formalised education soon became the two distinguishing features for social recognition in modern Khasi society. It turned the indigenous world we once knew and the principles it used to uphold, upside down!

The clan or Kur formed the embryo or nucleus of traditional Khasi political thought and practice and it revolved round the experience and wisdom of wise elders personified by the kni. Within a short period of a 100

vival throughout the last 250 centuries of its existence. Today however we find the same community struggling to find meaning and substance in the changes brought about in the last 100 years, facing perhaps the greatest challenge it has ever confronted; worried and anxious about the survival of its identity in a rapidly globalised world. Change therefore within this context can be termed as socially traumatic, a social trauma or cultural shock that the Khasis have yet to find an answer to.

Yes, we continue to struggle, in all aspects, to find answers to the changes that have befallen us in the last 100 years but the biggest challenge we face today is in identifying elected leaders who can lead us into the unknown future. Leaders and visionary statesmen are needed and it is with utmost despondency we admit that there appear to be none! In the rest of the democratic world, politics is the chosen vehicle to promote economic prosperity, social harmony and prospective future for the state and its people. Drivers for the vehicle are thus chosen and elected with utmost care and fore-thought for they should have the interest of the community foremost on their minds. Our political system on the other hand, comprising of individuals and political parties is inward looking and exists only to serve its own selfish interests. It exists to simply give the party, a 5-year lease to power. It exists only to provide a 5-year livelihood option to school dropouts; demagogues who excel in rousing passions and emotions; in providing business space to unscrupulous traders who see Government as their personal "dukan" and ATM. Period! The interest of the public and the electorate comes third in priority and not unusual for only crumbs from the high table to be offered to the common man.

Under such circumstances to claim that the political system we have adopted for ourselves has failed us, is the understatement of the century. An example of the depth to which our political insight has dropped is exemplified by a recent FB post of a youth, who proudly stated that "he has dropped studies so as to better serve the Jaitbyrniew". A most ridiculous and dim-witted statement ever, but one should not be surprised if one day the same lout is elected as a representative to our legislature! That's how far we have sunk in political consciousness yet the priority of the political system and its pundits still remains fixed only on winning elections. That's the limit for Meghalayan Political vision. So beyond that, what should we expect? Only the deluge I guess!

Urgent measures to redeem, improve and make the system more relevant to the welfare of the community and the state, seem as distant as ever. Unfortunately it is with this burden on our political psychology that we will enter the 2023 Assembly elections. May God have mercy on us!

and particularly the Chief Rector- the Hon'ble Governor to initiate an academic audit to draw a comparison of how many days the VC has been in station and the reasons for his travels out of state. This culture of having institutional leaders being a law unto themselves should be done away with once and for all. And still, if the VC does not understand, which seems very likely, we do have a popular English coaching institute- 'Avenues' in Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Benny Shira,
Tura

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

Undertrials and democracy behind bars

By Jagdish Rattanani

The Chief Justice of India (CJI) N V Ramana and the Supreme Court have offered a wake-up call to the nation on the issue of undertrials languishing in jails, bringing attention to an issue that has diminished our democracy, robbed ordinary citizens of liberty and embedded a system where jail rather than bail has become the routine of most investigations.

India has 610,000 citizens as prisoners, nearly 80 per cent of them undertrials, Chief Justice Ramana said July 16 at the inaugural session of the 18th All India Legal Services Authority in Jaipur. The CJI (as quoted by PTT) noted: "In the criminal justice system, the process is a punishment. From indiscriminate arrest to difficulty in obtaining bail, the process leading to prolonged incarceration of undertrial prisoners needs urgent attention." And then went on to add: "Prisoners are black boxes. Prisoners are often unseen, unheard citizens."

In choosing to highlight a burning issue that has rarely if ever incited passions or been the subject of debate,

evidence is to be whetted and guilt is to be established beyond any shadow of doubt – long before the process of conviction even begins. In delivering this effect, the State at the level of its most basic and ordinary day-to-day functioning has made the justice system irrelevant if not redundant. To make matters worse, this is achieved with the help of the judiciary, where remand and more remand is routinely granted, and bail is difficult to obtain because not always are the merits of the case fully discussed or even asked. If getting custody or an extension of remand is a matter of routine, police take the remand giving judicial authority for granted, and this has the immediate and direct effect on the quality of investigation. In fact, Justices Kaul and Sundresh quote a 2014 judgement of the Supreme Court to note: "Our endeavour in this judgment is to ensure that police officers do not arrest the accused unnecessarily and magistrates do not authorise detention casually and mechanically." They



the CJI was giving voice to what is known to all, lamented by a few and then left to be, untouched and unfixed. What is worse is that the state of affairs is not a temporary fall in the near term but has become a permanent feature of the Indian system. The predisposition to arrest in the short term rather than investigate for the long haul of conviction is also one of the reasons why many bail cases come to court in the first place and add to the numbers that choke the system. Further, because arrest and jail are routine, this leads to a rise in anticipatory bail applications from those who are better off and can act to avoid arrest – adding to the load at the higher courts.

This makes the entire dynamic a systemic problem that won't go away just by increasing the number of judges because its root lies in a deeper malaise. We know that our conviction rate is abysmal, so that robust investigation is discarded and pre-trial jail and extended custody becomes the punishment, breaking at its root the entire edifice of the criminal justice system that says an accused is presumed innocent unless proved guilty.

In their 85-page order, Justices SK Kaul and M Sundresh on July 11 point to the systemic nature of the problem: "Courts tend to think that the possibility of a conviction being nearer to rarity, bail applications will have to be decided strictly, contrary to legal principles. We cannot mix up consideration of a bail application, which is not punitive in nature with that of a possible adjudication by way of trial. On the contrary, an ultimate acquittal with continued custody would be a case of grave injustice."

The state of affairs has nothing to do with the politics of the day, the attitude of a particular set of political leaders temporarily in power or indeed any agenda or grand plan at work. The tyranny of the system lies in its commonplaceness, everydayness and pervasiveness – it's become one with the air we breathe, the water the fish swim in and it puts behind bars and tends to forget some of the most vulnerable citizens of the nation.

How this breaks the back of the system is not always easily understood or fully grasped. One is that it offers the result of a conviction – without a trial in which

quote further: "The power to authorise detention is a very solemn function. It affects the liberty and freedom of citizens and needs to be exercised with great care and caution. Our experience tells us that it is not exercised with the seriousness it deserves. In many of the cases, detention is authorised in a routine, casual and cavalier manner."

In fact, so common is it to grant detention that police officers do not always put in the effort to fill in proper or full details. Sometimes, this feeds into an arrogance among the investigating agency that anything goes, derailing at an early stage the most critical part of the investigation – which must be thorough, fair and executed in a timely manner. It also emboldens police to get away with custodial violence, another menace growing unchecked despite the many protections to the accused written down in the legal system.

It is therefore not a day too soon that the Supreme Court has now formally asked the Centre to consider bringing a Bail Act. Justices Kaul and Sundresh noted: "We ... call on the Government of India to consider the introduction of an Act specifically meant for granting of bail as done in various other countries like the United Kingdom."

This will clearly be a step forward. While the legal framework can be more specific and lay down firm guidelines on bail, the larger problem is the colonial mindset that continues to rule the Indian bureaucracy, coupled with lack of investments to support those doing good work and a lack of exemplary punishment to those manipulating the system. This is one place where the courts can and must get active. A proper monitoring of cases right from the remand stage, with a detailed look at whether the demand of the investigating agencies is justified, will set the ground for a more responsive and responsible investigative machinery. It will keep the police on their toes and it will keep our jails less crowded while improving the overall outcomes of the system.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

War on narcotics

Editor,
Pockets of Shillong are witnessing a rise in drug-related crimes. In the past weeks the law enforcers conducted counter-narcotics programs using community-based intelligence which has worked wonders on a temporary scale but this is a long war which will test the mettle of governments now and later. In this game of interests the lines are blurred from traffickers to a porous border along the North Eastern corridor. What we have not witnessed is the rise of rival cartels backed by corrupt states similar to situations in Mexico or Honduras. Unemployment is a matter of grave concern as each

year students are getting out of institutions with degrees but no jobs. Technically, the distribution channels of narcotics are gaining ground in cyberspace too.

Legalisation and decriminalization have always been on the cards but whether they will be implemented in letter and spirit is a debatable matter. We cannot be swayed by the capital punishment in Singapore or the failed Plan Colombia to draw a roadmap for ourselves, but the answer lies deeper than the series Narcos. Antony Loevenstein's Pills, Powder and Smoke (Inside the Bloody War on Drugs) weaves it beautifully on this powerful multi-billion dollar industry which will not yield submissively.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gatphoh,
Via email

NEHU in shambles

Editor,
Apropos the letter "Plight of NEHU students by Wilbert Thangkiew (ST, July 15, 2022) I wholeheartedly endorse the views of the author. Being a victim of the issues highlighted in Wilbert's letter, it's even more frustrating to realise that you're not the only person struggling but a part of a larger disgruntled group. NEHU has become a den of politics for personal vendetta and vested interests. Many Vice-Chancellors have come and gone and we, the indigenous people, who have had multiple generations graduating from this university, feel sorry to witness the gradual downfall of this once

esteemed institution. From having professors under CBI scanner for taking bribes from research scholars in broad daylight, disruptive forces meddling with everyday affairs to officials guilty of dereliction of duty from time immemorial, it seems NEHU has come a full circle with the appointment of the current Vice Chancellor.

The VC is always out of station and a simple task of issuing a bonafide certificate takes more than two weeks to process. Whenever someone tries to raise an important issue there is an acting VC in office with no responsibility. Perhaps, employees in NEHU have gone into retirement mode with the VC eternally being away from the helm of affairs. So, the question is, are all VC's expected to be in Delhi for the majority of their tenures?

I believe hefty salary and facilities makes the man affluent enough to neglect his primary duty of serving the state and the nation through quality education. The grapevine is abuzz that the VC has constructed a new chamber for himself from taxpayer's money while vehemently giving false assurances of improving hostel facilities amidst crunch for funds.

The Tura Campus has received step-motherly treatment with false assurances time and again. The question to be asked is how did NEHU find itself in such a situation of giving a 15-day time frame to casual workers, 7-day time frame to Tura Campus and again 15-day time frame to the students to meet their demands which has lapsed a long time ago?

I hence urge the Chief Minister, all stakeholders

"Life ought to be a struggle of desire toward adventures whose nobility will fertilize the soul."

— Rebecca West

The Shillong Times

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Weak India, strong Indians

WHILE India may not have grown to a level it aspired to on the world stage, Indians are growing and building muscles abroad. The latest Indian making waves on the global screen is Rishi Sunak, who is "widening his lead" in the Conservatives' race for the post of UK Prime Minister. Having functioned as British Chancellor of the Exchequer, he already has earned a name that helped him in the present build-up for the top governmental post. Britain has a string of top Indian personalities in other fields too, including for instance the Mittals who run steel mills and hold an unassailable position in the business world there. Late VS Naipaul and Salman Rushdie were among the very many in the literary field, not to mention the long list of actors, models, musicians, academicians and doctors of Indian origin in the UK. They are a class by themselves.

A profusion of Indians through generations of settlers in the US made India proud. Vice President Kamala Harris, with a mix of Indian and African blood, stands a chance to be President. Several Nobel laureates from the US had Indian origins, while those from within India are not winning such top honours in recent times. True, Indians with a good basic educational background are excelling in the academic and research fields in the US due to the opportunities on offer there. Set against this, academic excellence is somewhat alien to modern India. Top IT companies in the US have Indians in the lead; and a top post like the CEO in Pepsi was held by an Indian woman executive.

Notably, Canada is having Indians excelling in various fields including in business, politics and government. The Justin Trudeau cabinet carried four Indian representations while the Sikh community there has been an impressive presence. To top the chart, Anita Anand became the defence minister. New Zealand has an Indian, Priyanca, as cabinet minister. Malaysia's highly acclaimed Mahathir Mohamad, for another. They have all acquitted themselves well and have not got into any major scams or scandals, unlike India's own inbuilt breed of politicians and business sharks.

It is widely recognized that the governance systems in India, despite the legacy of the British Raj, moves slowly and produces less results compared to the dynamism with which the modern world shapes itself up even in the Asian continent. China happens to be the top performer but nations like Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan etc have grown by leaps and bounds, taking lessons from the growth of Japan as a great industrial power. When will Indians in India excel in their chosen field through merit alone?

Teachers sleeping on the streets: Does anyone care?

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

This is not the first time that the elementary school teachers under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) scheme are on the streets demanding for the release of their monthly salaries which are pending for several months together. One is left fuming with anger and frustration at the government's apathy towards their plight. Of course, there are issues in the implementation of SSA

01. The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002) inserted Article 21A in the Indian Constitution which states: "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State, may by law determine." Also, changes were made in the SSA flagship program after the passing of the Right to

utilization certificates to the Centre is one reason which results in non-sanction of funds towards various schemes which include SSA. Another important aspect that has to be seriously looked into is the participation of grass roots or rather traditional governance. One of the characteristics of the SSA scheme is the involvement of Tribal Autonomous Councils vis a vis the Dorbar Shnongs

and other democratically elected civic bodies. This is another major hurdle in the State of Meghalaya as we are yet to have in place a robust village administration law that will enable our traditional, and grass roots governments to participate in the process. Allow me to be blunt that no scheme which is meant for the people will effectively work without a decentralized, well-funded and accountable civic/grassroots governance. Sadly, the Village Administration Bill is still in limbo and our children have to endure the effects of our arrogance.

Lastly, I also want to put forward this question. Henceforth will the teachers have to come out and sleep on the streets every 3 or 5 months to get their dues? We must end this soon. The State has to generate Rs 29 crore per month to meet the State's share for the salary of SSA teachers and it can be easily met by revoking all appointments of consultants in various departments, all contractual appointments accorded to retired employees, de-notify useless Commissions, political appointments like Chiefs/ political advisors to Government etc. and to restrict travels of both Ministers and Government officials within and outside the Country so as to cut down unnecessary and wasteful expenses.

In solidarity with the SSA teachers.



scheme in the State under the past governments and now things have only aggravated. Is this an accumulated problem or an isolated one (s)? Be that as it may and as a matter of principle of continuity in governance, the Government of the day must shoulder the responsibility. Moreover, in order to sustain the system of democratic governance the coalition partner, in this case the United Democratic Party (UDP), which holds the Education portfolio must answer to the public as to why teachers of every pattern have to resort to agitations to get their basic rights and to solve the simplest issue like releasing or enhancing of incomes?

The state of education in Meghalaya is peculiar in nature, especially in relation to the composition of teaching staffs. In one given school there are teachers of different patterns, namely, government sanctioned, deficit, Ad-hoc, those employed under SSA/RMSA schemes and exclusively private school teachers. This existing multi-layered pattern in education between the State, Central and the local government for imparting education.

It provides an opportunity for the States to develop their own vision of elementary education. Ever since the launching of SSA scheme in the State, the already established schools under private individuals and mission run schools were also covered under the scheme and this is the genesis

Education Act.

The SSA scheme is implemented in partnership with the State Governments to cover the entire country and address the needs of education in the country. The scheme is no doubt noble and is being designed to work in tandem with grassroots governance. As per Government's document the following are the salient features of the Scheme:

This scheme was launched for the implementation of universal elementary education in a defined time frame.

It facilitates promoting social justice by providing basic education to children.

It effectively involves the School Management Committees, Panchayati Raj institutions, Village Education Committees, Parents' Teachers' Associations, Mother-Teacher Associations and Tribal Autonomous Councils in the management of the elementary schools.

It creates a partnership between the State, Central and the local government for imparting education.

It provides an opportunity for the States to develop their own vision of elementary education.

Ever since the launching of SSA scheme in the State, the already established schools under private individuals and mission run schools were also covered under the scheme and this is the genesis

other schools such as private or mission schools. But what happened here in Meghalaya is that SSA scheme is given to the private schools, mission schools and then there are schools set up under the SSA schemes as well". The leader was matured enough in his articulation that the SSA teachers did not come out on the streets to blame anybody but to find the solution.

This time, the SSA teachers are back on the streets with a strong resolve and determination to go for a long haul until their demands are met. To recap, the SSA teachers under the banner of the Meghalaya SSA Teachers Association are demanding for the release of their salaries; implementation of salary structure and enhancement of salaries of all primary and upper primary SSA teachers among others.

While the plight of the SSA teachers must take precedence, it is also important to highlight a few issues which had also caused the systemic failure in the implementation of vital schemes like the SSA in the State. The recurring agitations of workers like the teachers is the tell-tale of inefficiency and deficit in governance in the State. Every time the Government would absolve itself on grounds of financial constraints. But we should no longer buy this argument. However, Government's own report, like the CAG, clearly indicates that the non-submission of the

Please Save Our Teachers

By Barnes Mawrie, SDB

I am always struck by this famous saying of Henry B. Adams which says, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." This proves the noble profession of a teacher. Developed nations value the role of teachers and they are looked upon with great respect, as builders of a nation. It may surprise us to know that these countries have the highest salaries for the teachers. The three countries who top the list are Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany. A teacher in Luxembourg for example gets \$138,000 a year, that is a whopping amount of about 2 crores. The reason that these countries give for this policy towards the teachers, is the fact that they consider teaching as the noblest profession of all. It is sad to note that among 33 countries who pay good salaries to their teachers, India features nowhere in the list. This speaks volume of the attitude of our country towards these nation builders who slog day in and day out in order to shape the

Government of India withhold the salaries of so many SSA teachers after the service they have rendered to the country? It is a well known fact that India does not invest heavily on education like in other countries. The budget for education for 2022 is just a little more than 1 lakh crore rupees while the defense budget is more than 5 lakh crore rupees. This proves how shabbily our governments (both central and state) treat the builders of our society.

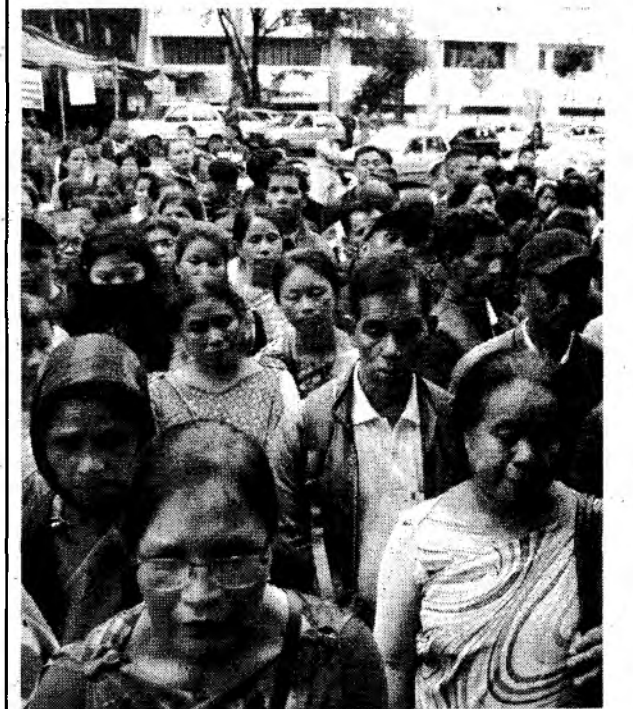
The fact that teachers are not being paid their salaries for months, has many ramifications: first of all it affects the nobility of this profession for the poor teachers have to resort to begging for what is just and rightful for them. It is greatly humiliating for teachers to go and sit in protest on roadsides for days and nights. Perhaps the CM and the Education Minister should also go and sit in protest in front of the office of the Union Education Minister in order to get the money released as soon

How shameful for the government that these teachers have to resort to this extreme measure in order to get their rightful pay. With no salaries how will they survive and how will they feed their children and meet the essential requirements of their families? This is highly immoral and can by no means be condoned. We have not heard of other government employees' salaries being withheld for months and months.

lives of our future citizens. How pathetic it is to witness these days hundreds of our teachers protesting before the government for the clearance of their salaries. One category of teachers after the other has to pressurize the government for their rights. Recently, the ad hoc school teachers of Meghalaya had staged an indefinite sit-in protest in front of the secretariat for an increment of salaries. Finally, after days of protest and negotiations they managed to get a positive assurance from the government. I am told by some SSA teachers who started their indefinite sit-in protest yesterday that they have not received their salaries for the

as possible. Secondly, many teachers are forced to absent themselves from schools in order to participate in their rightful protest. This means that very little teaching is done in schools and consequently the students are the losers. How long can this go on without affecting adversely the life and future of our poor children? Thirdly, many of the teachers are parents with their children at home. How can we accept the fact that these parents have to leave their children at home and come to spend their days and nights away from their families for an unavoidable cause of securing what is rightful to them?

Fourthly, this government's attitude of "I don't



past 6 to 7 months besides the arrears. How shameful for the government that these teachers have to resort to this extreme measure in order to get their rightful pay. With no salaries how will they survive and how will they feed their children and meet the essential requirements of their families? This is highly immoral and can by no means be condoned. We have not heard of other government employees' salaries being withheld for months and months. But why are our teachers treated like third class citizens who can be easily exploited at will?

The fact that the salaries are being withheld for months, raises many questions such as whether our country values the services of our teachers? Why does

"are" is extremely unethical and it demoralizes our teachers who are the victims of such an unjust and inhuman policy. How can our nation be blessed if we continue to victimize thousands of our teachers depriving them even of their means of survival? In this regard, I implore upon the state government to make all out efforts and not leave no stone unturned, in order to relieve the anxiety and suffering of our teachers. It is my conviction that "a nation that knows how to respect and treat with dignity its own teachers, is a great nation and it is surely on the path to development and progress. Instead a nation that despises its teachers is a doomed nation." God bless our teachers!

Letters to the Editor

Unsuccessful candidates have right to know results

Editor,
We all know that the number of aspiring candidates for a given post/vacancy is humungous in comparison to the number of posts/vacancies available for appointment. Thus, there are a large number of unsuccessful candidates. These unsuccessful candidates learn about the results of the selection much later and some candidates would not know the result at all. So, these candidates keep on hoping eagerly for a long time, only to be disappointed and in despair. This leads to adverse psychological effect, particularly for the young aspirants for the job.

In Meghalaya informing unsuccessful candidates about the fate of their endeavour is not in vogue. Such secrecy of selection is usually maintained by the schools' management committees for reasons best known to them. This unnecessary maintenance of secrecy raises doubts in the minds of the

candidates about fair play in the appointment process maintained by the Managing Committee of the school. I am citing the example of schools because, unlike government recruitments which are normally done by an independent selection board/agency, teachers' appointments in the school are done by the Managing Committees themselves. I do not consider it necessary to elaborate on the effects of such unwanted secrecy, in the matter of appointment in the minds of the young aspirants, irrespective of any organizations/institution, private or public. I leave it to readers' imagination.

In the interest of fairness and transparency therefore it would be desirable in fact, imperative for the results of any appointment/selection to be published in the local newspapers when a vacancy is advertised in the newspaper, calling for applications from eligible candidates. Alternatively, while calling for applications for the post a self-addressed envelope duly affixed with a postal stamp should be asked from the candidates beside other documents/ testimonials. That ensures that all candidates

are individually informed of the results of the selection to any post job applied for by them. This will also be in consonance with the spirit of justice, equity and is also an ethical principle that schools should adopt because partiality cannot be ruled out otherwise. Concerned departments of the Government, may, in public interest, make it mandatory, for all recruiting agencies to publish the results of the selection in the newspapers, for the information of all stakeholders.

Yours etc,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong -2

On disgusting similarities

Editor,
I sincerely believe that a person or community that can laugh at itself usually comes out on top. This is because it has an inbuilt mechanism of looking at itself from the outside or as others see it. From this perspective we can say that Indians take themselves too seriously. Our greatest dread is of being laughed at and who but our beloved,

honourable and swollen headed elected representatives simply love to portray this most ridiculous Indian trait. Indian politicians are most sensitive to such rib-tickling exposures. If you are still in doubt, just take a look at the domestic news reports that fill our daily papers. Persons, mostly poor underpaid comedians, arrested all over the countryside for their audacity in making fun of our netas! In the process we fail or are simply too scared to admit that we have turned Art 19 of our Constitution into a farce. Then as we keep on covering up mistake after mistake that we made, we end up as the laughing stock of the entire World and Boy, it seems do we just love to be ridiculed.

The reluctance to admit mistakes prohibits us from taking course correction on time, and nowhere is this more pronounced than in India's foray into party politics. Indians simply love to brag that they practice and sustain the largest Democracy on God's planet Earth. The fact that our political system and political parties have failed us time and again; that as a nation we have been repeatedly betrayed by those on

whom we place our faith on; that institutions and offices meant to protect and preserve democracy have repeatedly turned the election process on its head; that electoral representation has become a big joke- yet we press on regardless, with a grim smile of desperation on our faces, hoping against hope that the other lesser democracies are mute as well as blind.

Closer home, Meghalaya - the Abode of the Clouds, is once again gearing itself for its next foray into State Assembly elections. A pertinent question arises - who are these people we are going to elect? Well they belong to a certain remarkable class of individuals and if they are frank and candid with themselves they would be the first to admit that they have more or less surpassed themselves in entertaining the state and it people for the last 5 years and we all know what the English dictionary call people who entertain with mirthful actions. So, will they this time be able to maintain the same degree of professional proficiency? If truth be told there are strong indications that in 2023 they might even excel

themselves. So prepare to be entertained further!

Now since we have adopted the British form of Parliamentary representation it would be most enlightening to know what the British equate their elected representatives to. In digressing a bit, I am one who is really full of admiration for British wit and humour. These guys are really good at those subtle barbs of criticism that really can pierce the skin of a Rhino but best of all the British have also developed the healthy knack of being able to laugh at themselves. The English have described a gathering of baboons (Yes baboons, the most dangerous, most obnoxious, most viciously aggressive, thieving and least intelligent of all primates.) as a "Parliament" of Baboons. The point I wish to emphasise is "why the hell are the British always so disgustingly correct with their observations?"

Yours etc.,
Tokki Blah,
Via email

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

"Time does not change us. It just unfolds us."
—Max Frisch

The Shillong Times

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Education Commission imperative

EDUCATION in Meghalaya is fraught with problems arising from lack of proper planning. Educational planning requires extensive engagement by educationists and not by political appointees or 'know it all' retirees that occupy government space without producing results. If the government can shell out several hundred crores for international consultants why can't it get the best brains to tell it where exactly the problem with education lies and how to get that fixed. These planners of course will have to do serious primary research on how the schools across the state are performing, not performing or under-performing in order to get to the root of the problem. Perhaps they will be appalled by what they see in their surprise visits (if that is allowed to happen) to government primary schools in some of the regions of Meghalaya. The singular reason for poor educational outcomes in Meghalaya are due primarily to politics. Where to set up a school is not determined by need but by political expediency. Who to appoint as teachers is also decided by political expediency. People have not forgotten the 'white ink' scam as yet and it is not understood why the case is hanging fire. Where is justice for those teachers that should have got in on merit ten years ago? And what about those guilty of the crime? Why is there no punishment ever in Meghalaya for crimes committed by politicians? This makes it profitable for politicians to continue with wrongdoing, knowing how flexible the legal system is when it comes to punishing the powerful. Only the poor languish in jail.

It is learnt that in many parts of Meghalaya, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) schools have been started by retired government officials with political and bureaucratic links. In such a scenario where education is treated like a cheap commodity to placate political colleagues in return for their support, isn't education itself being mortgaged? How do we expect any outcomes when the intention of setting up a primary school is not based on any altruism or a demand from the community? Most schools are first set up and then other things are thought about later. Every government plays politics with education and every incoming government being too weak to reverse this corrosive process continues with the same arbitrary action. Education in rural Meghalaya is on a backward slide and the results are regularly published by external agencies. When it comes to colleges and universities there is an oversight body - National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) hence teachers/faculty/staff are kept on perpetual notice. Teachers are also subject to assessment by their students. A poor NAAC score could lead to the college/university being downgraded and they may lose financial benefits if they are funded by the University Grants Commission. Where is such an oversight body for the most important educational pillar - primary education? No wonder Meghalaya is where it is today. It's time the MDA Government sets up this oversight body for school education from the primary to the higher secondary level. An Education Commission should be put in place urgently in order to restore the dignity of students, teachers and of education in Meghalaya.

Letters to the Editor

Higher education accreditation

Editor,
Although a lot of emphasis is given to primary education in our country, higher education has not received serious attention over the years. There are several factors that are involved in higher education progression and development. One such factor is the accreditation of institutions of higher learning by autonomous agencies/bodies. One such body is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) which was raised in 1994 to assess and accredit colleges and universities. NAAC evaluates institutions based on whether they conform to the performance standards vis a vis the educational processes and outcomes, curriculum coverage, teaching-learning processes, faculty, research, infrastructure, learning resources, organisation, governance, financial well-being and student services.

But the core for establishing NAAC is that the institutions themselves find out their own strengths and weaknesses and take innovative and corrective measures to improve the quality of education and research by establishing internal quality assurance cell (IQAC). This has to be an ongoing process. But it has not. NAAC had no

intention to trigger academic competition amongst the institutions. However, over the years sadly, the main purpose of almost all institutions is to compete and receive the highest grade from NAAC, even if they don't deserve it. This has defeated the purpose of NAAC.

Institutions now are more inclined towards short-cut measures to accumulate awards, recognitions etc. to present it to NAAC and shy away from introspection and routine self-assessment. They become active just prior to NAAC peer team visit to respective institutions. So, the fault lies with the learning institutions as almost all of them suffer from lack of innovation, poor teacher selection and a host of other malaises that afflict them. There could be many reasons for their shortcomings. However, there are some exceptions like the IISc, IITs and the IIMs who it appears are more responsible and are performing well, irrespective of their funding status. Even some non-public universities and colleges are doing well. but the majority suffer from what we call as the state of laziness and living in a comfort zone.

Yours etc.,
Dr. H. S. Ranhotra,
Shillong-1

Sad plight of teachers!

Editor,
Apropos of the front page

An encirclement India must avoid at all costs

By Manish Tewari

While India has been distracting itself with cynical battles over identity, religion, accentuated hate speech, proscribing freedom of speech and expression and playing cynical state government toppling games, there is a new world order underpinned by new alliances that is evolving. The contours of this order are portentous for the strategic interests of India. For, the centre point of this unfolding paradigm is China.

Before President Vladimir Putin launched the invasion of Ukraine he signed an agreement with China in Beijing on the 5th of February, 2022, entitled Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development. Grandiose in both its breadth and sweep, it makes no bones about the fact that both Russia and China seek to challenge the existing status quo aggressively.

The following text in the document says it all: "Some actors representing but the minority on the international scale continue to advocate unilateral approaches to addressing international issues and resort to force; they interfere in the internal affairs of other States, infringing their legitimate rights and interests, and incite contradictions, differences and confrontation, thus hampering the development and progress of mankind, against the opposition from the international community."

The transgressions into Ukraine de-horse what may be the final outcome were or are really designed to undercut if not upend the European security construct underpinned by the US. If the Russians succeed nobody would be happier than the Chinese because then a vulnerable Europe may have to look towards China as the outside balancer. However, the reverse seems to have happened so far in the past four-and-a-half months with Europe looking more consolidated than ever before against Russia. However, Putin has ominously warned he has just started out. China may still end up having the last laugh.

And yet the China-Russia axis is not the only one that should worry New Delhi. From North Korea to Iran

encompassing China and Pakistan, a contiguous physical mass of nuclear weapon States — three de-facto and one de-jure (if one was to give credence to non-Western sources) — has emerged whose interests and those of India are just not aligned.

Notwithstanding whatever outreach India may have made towards Iran, the fact remains that Iran's adversarial relationship with the US and India's congruence with both the United States and Israel produces a fundamental dissonance in

the Asian heartland?

That China is at the heart of this new axis of cooperation is evidenced not only by the encouragement it is providing to the North Korea-Iran relationship but also the assistance it is ostensibly providing to upgrade North Korea's conventional and unconventional capacities as exhibited by North Korea during its 75th anniversary military parade in October of 2020.

A report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution of Baden-

If Russia and Turkey at some later stage do also become a part of this loose arrangement provided that Turkey and Russia are able to find a modus vivendi in their quest for influence in the caucuses and given that they were on the opposite side of the conflict in Syria, this new paradigm from Murmansk to the Straits of Bosphorus can emerge as a formidable bloc. Except for Russia, the others, DPR Korea, China, Pakistan, Iran and even Turkey have either an antagonistic or at best a "very formal" relationship with India.

the Indo-Iranian relationship how much ever India may want to paper it over by underlining civilisational ties.

The 25-year strategic partnership between China and Iran signed in the March of 2021 only further adds to this discomfiture. It is no coincidence that while this agreement between China and Iran was in the final stages of negotiation India was outed from the Chabahar-Zaidan railway link project in the November of 2020.

If Iran leans decisively in the Chinese direction given that India has no relationship with DPR Korea worth the name and China is in illegal occupation of Indian territory since April 2020 while with Pakistan the unfinished business of Partition stretches back 70 years, how does India deal with this bloc of nuclear weapon States stretching from the far east to the west across

Württemberg, a province in Germany, in June 2020, detailed the cooperation between North Korea, Pakistan and China on nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programmes. It underscored: "They aim to complete existing arsenals, perfect the range, deployability and effectiveness of their weapons systems. They are trying to obtain the necessary products and relevant knowhow through illegal procurement efforts in Germany. In order to circumvent existing export restrictions and embargoes, risk states must constantly develop and optimise their procurement methods. To conceal the actual end user, they can procure goods in Germany and Europe with the help of specially established cover companies and, in particular, transport dual-use goods to risk states.

Typical bypass countries include Turkey and China."

Why this should worry India is primarily because Iran has not only been able to create a huge influence in the Shia Crescent in the Greater Middle East where India has significant energy interests, but moreover the synergy between these four powers has a direct bearing on India's security given that with Afghanistan now under de-facto Pakistani control through the Taliban a friendly Iran provides a comfort level of strategic depth that Pakistan has always aspired for.

If Russia and Turkey at some later stage do also become a part of this loose arrangement provided that Turkey and Russia are able to find a modus vivendi in their quest for influence in the caucuses and given that they were on the opposite side of the conflict in Syria, this new paradigm from Murmansk to the Straits of Bosphorus can emerge as a formidable bloc. Except for Russia, the others, DPR Korea, China, Pakistan, Iran and even Turkey have either an antagonistic or at best a "very formal" relationship with India.

If one is tuned into the buzz in the international strategic community, the United States and China have also been concurrently holding "quiet consultations" about the emerging scheme of things.

The US wants to keep China engaged so that it does not get completely consumed by the orbit that Russia and China are striving to create. Some form of "spheres of interest" conversations are an obvious corollary if not intrinsic to such confabulations.

Were the US-China conversations to fructify into some tentative understanding, how would this play out qua the QUAD, AUKUS and other arrangements that the US has now created or has been trying to create in the Indo-Pacific theatre stretching back two decades now if not to the end of the Second World War? Does India even have its eye on the ball given that the world around it is swivelling at a dizzying pace?

(The author is Lawyer, Member of Parliament, Former Information & Broadcasting Minister. Views are personal)

Rupee touching Rs 80 per USD in line with global developments

RBI cannot protect exchange rates for long and defy markets

By Anjan Roy

For people life begins at forty. For the Indian rupee, life is beginning to be exciting at 80.

The Indian rupee crossed the psychological barrier of 80 to a US dollar on Tuesday in trading on foreign exchange markets. On Wednesday, it recovered a wee bit. Now, it is becoming exciting to track how the rupee is fending for itself in the markets and whether it should recover some lost grounds.

Following the economic reforms and liberalisation, the overseas investment norms were revised and foreign institutional investors were allowed to put their money in the Indian stocks. While that is good as it brings in a lot of investment dollars, there are some downside risks as well.

If you are allowing overseas investment in secondary markets, it brings in the risks of withdrawals of overseas secondary investment in Indian stocks when the financial markets are in trouble. We have seen this happening in the wake of the global financial melt-down and subsequently.

This is exactly what is happening now. Because of the knee-jerk reactions to oil prices due to uncertainties from the Ukraine war, rising inflation across the world and disruptions of normal trade channels, the central banks

16. In the beginning of this period, in 2010-11 the rupee was 45.56 to the dollar. This went down to 65.46 to a dollar in 2015-16. That is, a side of Rs 20 in just about five years. It may be recalled these were the period of what has come to be known as "Taper Tantrums". The US Fed had embarked upon a huge bond buying spree, now as "Quantitative Easing" after the global financial melt-down in 2008-09.

The Fed chairman, Ben Bernanke, had announced his plan to reverse this and start winding down the bond purchase programme. This would mean that less money would be available. The talks set off a massive shuffling of investments in the financial markets. The major investors started withdrawing from the emerging market economies and concentrating on the US.

In the wake of this resetting of monetary policy by the Fed, there was total rout in the financial markets. These exposed the weaker countries to the vagaries of the adjustment process in the richer economies. The emerging market currencies had suffered reverses.

Something similar seems to be happening now, although the macro-economic context is markedly different. Responding to the surging inflation in the US, with



are recasting their monetary policies.

Of these, the most important central bank, the US Federal Reserve, is set to raise interest rates from the ultra-low floors rates to much higher levels. The indications are that the US Fed can rate hike by a huge 100 bps at one go. This is changing all risk calculations and returns on financial assets globally. When future interest rates are expected to rise, the existing assets turn negative in value. In case of bonds the yields tend to rise. So existing bonds sell cheap and their yields rise. The secondary market stocks start depreciating.

In expectation of future hikes in US interest rates, the overseas investors in Indian stocks are withdrawing. Reports indicate that foreign investors have withdrawn some \$30 billion this year. On top, they are further feared to withdraw money to keep their investable funds for future investment in dollar assets. As a result, these investors are withdrawing from all other markets and are pouring funds in US markets. Consequence? The US dollar is appreciating and all other currencies depreciating, the Indian rupee being only one of them.

It may be mentioned that the European Union's common currency, the Euro, has also depreciated against the dollar and is now plunging to unprecedented depths.

The question that now crops up is what value the Indian rupee will reach in the immediate future against the US dollar. Past experience could be useful to project the future.

The sharpest depreciation of the Indian rupee took place between 2010-11 and 2015-

retail inflation reported at 8.5%, the US Fed is talking of historic hike in interest rate. The consequence will be a large-scale reshuffling of portfolios across geographies. The withdrawal funds could set in a motion another round of adjustments among economies.

In these circumstances, it will be wrong to draw the conclusion that the Indian economy is in bad shape and hence the rupee is falling. If anything, the Indian economy is showing a good growth prospect and smartly recovering the growth momentum.

What is worrisome is, however, that the Reserve Bank is intervening in the market to shore up the rupee. This might only blow up India's foreign exchange reserves and in the end achieve nothing. Rupee can still depreciate even after RBI spends a lot of dollars to defend the rupee.

The indubitable fact is that all the emerging market currencies have also gone down in the last several months.

Some traders feel that further erosion in rupee value is inevitable, given the way the global economy is turning. The wild swings and mainly upward ones in the prices of oil, the continuing uncertainties in the financial markets, prolonged war in Ukraine and its debilitating effects have all contributed to the leaking of the emerging market currencies.

True the rupee depreciation will impose heavy costs on the economy. But it is better to see through these tribulations than try to artificially shore up the rupee in a dog fight with the financial markets. (IPA Service)

Urgent request to DGP regarding JCBs

Editor

Reminiscing the tragic incident at Khliehrhat, East Khasi Hills around 12 years ago in which the speeding JCB mauled a car killing all the occupants including the grandmother, and a similar incident in the autumn of 2019, these JCBs returning to Shillong from Laitlum Tourist spot where they do renovation work are seen to be speeding on the road. With cars commuting between Jowai and Shillong, I can't wait further but to write to the Transport Minister Dasakhat Lamare to the DTO East Khasi Hills Shillong.

I had earlier pointed out the Ministry of Transport (GoI's) order on JCBs which does not consider them vehicles to be driven on roads because (1) they are exempted from paying road tax (b) They don't need pollution tests. Legally speaking therefore JCBs need to be transported on carriers with special loading and unloading platforms as it is a single block machinery weighing several hundreds tonnes and whose steel chains damage the costly bituminous surface.

To further prove my point, the bumper is defined as two horizontal bars at the front and rear of automobiles. By that definition the JCB is not an automobile but an earth-

mover to cushion the impact in case of collision and to minimize death and injury. And in event of collision with small cars, it means death to all. Further, the 'operator' of the earth mover, even if he/she possesses a driving license for heavy vehicles can in no way use that license to operate the JCB and to drive it into the safe garage of the owner. JCBs need to be transported on carriers and stay put in the work place.

JCBs have lighting not for road usage but for emergency work at night. Following a JCB at night proves risky as the rear headlights glare at the driver. And they have no safety signals either.

In response to my letter, I received a letter written by Deputy Commissioner Transport, GOM, PM Sangma addressed to the Under Secretary, GOM (Transport) letter no. Com/Trans/Estt/89/193/Pt III/330 dated Shillong, the 5th November, 2019. The letter begins with usual honorifics but the second paragraph is interesting. It says, "In this respect, I am to request you to kindly allow timing for JCB plying on public roads only after sunset and before sunrise to enable to avoid traffic congestion, public safety and danger to public road user."

The whole sentence reads as if 'avoiding public safety is necessary.' What an irony! That's what happens with English language. But this letter is not what I want.

Considering these JCBs are owned by ministers and influential people, I do understand the predicament the officers are always in as they have family to feed.

So I wrote to the Secretary, Transport GOM on March 2021. As always no reply was forthcoming. The next step is to do a PIL, but that is not affordable as we have to engage a lawyer. Also across the country, there is dearth of lawyers with engineering or technological back grounds. If a lay person with technological background takes up the case then public safety is guaranteed.

With election only 8 months away, JCBs in large numbers would swarm the roads to execute unfulfilled promises before the Model Court of Conduct sets in. Yes, following my letter the JCBs in large numbers return home by 7 - 8 PM when the roads are extremely busy. Do we need to wait for another major accident to happen before taking action? Do we see anywhere else in the country, JCBs plying on roads? No-where. That's because the rule of law prevails unlike in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Via email

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

"The aim of the wise is not to secure pleasure, but to avoid pain."

— Aristotle

The Shillong Times

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Exit of citizens

IT should not come as a shock that over a lakh of NRIs are renouncing their Indian citizenship every year with their numbers progressively growing. Considering the number, this is not a huge exit as the overseas Indian diaspora has a size of over three crore; and that 25 lakh Indians are going abroad for work, study or stay every year. Yet, this massive giving up of citizenship should be a matter of concern to us. While the maximum of permanent exits is to the United States, even Indians who have settled down in China have also opted to bid good bye to their motherland. India no longer instills a patriotic spirit in them.

Those who lived abroad should know that life here is claustrophobic. India in many respects is in the Stone Age. Change for India is evident too -- in the massive arrival of cars and other vehicles, the shopping malls and branded products, and the high-class national highways. Some major airports have a classy look today. Lifestyles of the rich here match with those of the affluent in the developed world. Their mansions are a treat to the eye. The five-star circuit here offers one all that's humanly possible. Yet, the Ambanis and the Adanis are fewer in number. The corrupt politicians and babus wallowing in ill-gotten wealth form only a small segment of the 1.35 billion population. Luxury here has a high price to pay. Not so even in the developed West or the glitzy cities like Dubai or Singapore. Almost everyone there gets a chance to feel free and enjoy life, while almost everyone here lives on a shoe-string budget. Laws take people round and round. This may also have to do with the set of ageing politicians with antiquated mindsets sitting pretty over our heads. They resist change.

Singapore was built to glory by a British-educated Lee Kuan Yew; Malaysia by doctor-turned administrator Mahathir Mohamad; Dubai by visionary leader Shaikh Mohammad. China lifted its fortunes sky-high with the forward-looking leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Leadership matters. Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundations of Independent India with great vision. In one go, dams sprang up to feed the soil and steel factories emerged to boost the cause of industrialization. India had its head up. Those were inspiring moments. The growth today is for a handful of the population; say, two per cent of the one billion plus. The rest are not starving, per se, due also to the subsidized rice scheme. Earnings, for most, are too low. Life is a daily struggle for existence.

Letters to the Editor

SSA teachers at wits end

Editor,
I wish to draw the attention of Justice Sanjib Bannerjee, Hon'ble Chief Justice of the High Court of Meghalaya to the ongoing agitation of the SSA teachers of Meghalaya who are facing hardships due to the injustice meted out to them by the MDA government led by Conrad Sangma as Chief Minister and Lakmen Rymbui as Education Minister. This present Government has failed miserably to address the persistent financial problems of the SSA teachers and has treated their just cause as if it were nothing but garbage, even coming to the point of threatening to withhold the SSA teachers' pay if they do not resume duties immediately.

When the SSA teachers have not received their hard-earned pay for more than 5 months, in addition to some leftover months from a previous financial year, is it justified now for the government to threaten to withhold their pay any further? Where is the justice in this? This is nothing but a ploy of the MDA government to crush the peaceful fighting spirit of the SSA teachers who are

demanding and struggling for attainment of their rights, amidst this world of high prices where it is becoming increasingly difficult to make both ends meet. We have heard that in the past the Chief Justice has taken sensitive cases which have compelled the government to respond and take action. We are aware that under the present Chief Justice's leadership, the judiciary does not shy away from calling a spade, a spade. Hence this letter of appeal to the Judiciary which is the last seat of justice. I humbly request you to kindly intervene in this matter suo-moto, as the SSA teachers are dying of hunger and poverty as the days go by. Every minute where the government is silent on the issue is a reflection of their indifference to the plight of the SSA teachers. This is an issue that has been dragging on for far too long; in fact for years now. It is said that teaching is a noble profession, but after these past few episodes it is becoming increasingly clear that the state treats the SSA teachers as nothing but mere toys to play with. Only the judiciary can help the SSA teachers out of their miseries.

Yours etc.,
Ardor Hynniewta,
Shillong - 1

Education in Meghalaya: Unresolved conundrum

By Patricia Mukhim

Images of teachers spending sleepless nights on the streets, next to the seat of power - the state secretariat - should make us all bow our heads in shame. The image will remain a perennial blot on Meghalaya on its 50th year. It is a grim reminder that since the state attained statehood, not much thought was given to developing long term educational goals. The political masters at the time were content in the knowledge that churches and other faith-based institutions were running educational institutions and were doing it quite well, so they should be assisted with ad-hoc grants or the schools could later be absorbed into the deficit system of grants-in-aid where teachers were paid by the Government but the schools were run by their own management or by a Managing Committee.

In 1981, the state enacted the Meghalaya School Education Act. The body of the Act is generic in nature, which as can be expected was a copy and paste job from the Assam Act. Meghalaya has never been known to be original in anything so far. Excerpts from the Act says: "There shall be an Advisory Board for School Education to be called the 'Meghalaya School Education Advisory Board' for the purpose of advising the Government on matters of policy relating to education in Meghalaya. (2) The Advisory Board shall be constituted by the Government and shall consist of a Chairman, Secretary and fifteen other members to be nominated by the Government, (3) The Advisory Board constituted under sub-section (2) shall include - (a) the Secretary to the Government in the Education Department as Chairman (b) the Director of Public Instruction as member-Secretary, and (c) fifteen other members to be nominated from amongst the following - heads of recognised Schools (ii) representatives of recognised organisations of teachers of recognised schools (iii) representatives of the Managing Committee of recognised schools (iv) representatives of parents or guardians of students of recognised schools and (v) eminent Educationists. (4) The Advisory Board shall regulate its own procedure. (5) The terms of office of every member of the Board and travelling and other allowances payable to a member of the Board shall be as may be prescribed.

Further down the Act says, "The State Government, may, subject to the condition of

previous publication, make Rules to carry out the provisions of this Act. But guess what? I tried to see what the Rules say because without the rules this Act cannot be implemented by the executive. The Rules were never made hence the Act was never executed. If the Rules were in place the Meghalaya School Education Advisory Board would have been in place to advise the Government since it could have acted as a think tank.

The only politician who ever did any serious thinking for this state was PA Sangma. He realised that the



State needed to raise internal resources for spending on Education and in 1988 when he came in as Chief Minister, PA Sangma saw to it that the State enacted the Meghalaya Minerals and Cess Act 1988, (Meghalaya Act No 7 of 1988). Primary Education at the time was going through turmoil with Primary School teachers not being paid salaries on time by the District Councils under whose jurisdiction they were. The intent of the above Act was to provide for the levy and collection of cess on some minerals of the State for the development of Primary education and for development and improvement of mining areas and for matters connected therewith.

One of the reasons for the state's inability to pay salaries of SSA & primary school teachers is because there has been no revenue generation from coal which used to yield around Rs 600 crore annually. The fault is that of the politicians and the mining lobby in Meghalaya. Ever since the NGT banned coal mining in 2014 and insisted that Meghalaya come up with a mining Policy because it can restart mining, the State Government has been treading on eggshells. A Policy was brought out by the Congress-

led MUA government led by Dr Mukul Sangma. But the mining lobby resisted it. The coal barons don't want any regulations. They have come up with all kinds of alibis, one of which is that Meghalaya is a Sixth Schedule area where land is owned by Scheduled Tribes and they have the right to what they choose on that land including how they exploit the minerals under the land. This without a clear understanding that the Sixth Schedule cannot override the Constitution of India. In the interim coal was illegally mined and transported with the coal mafia and law en-

forcers making a quick buck especially under the MDA Government where the bribe money had gone up to Rs 90,000 per truck. So while revenue that should have accrued to the exchequer as coal cess and gone to fund education, the teachers have been left without salaries, ostensibly because the Government has no money. True the Government has no money but the wealth of those running the Government has gone up exponentially. And all of us citizens have allowed this to happen and made no noise about it. We only occasionally gripe on social media and then move on.

Till date there has been no brainstorming on how to generate internal revenue which is much needed to beef up the education and health sectors in Meghalaya. While the Union Government funds the SSA schools the funding pattern is on a 90:10 basis for the 8 north eastern states and 65:35 for the rest of the states. Moreover, this funding is not perennial. Beyond a point the State Government has to take complete ownership and financial responsibility for the SSA schools. Since 2015 the Union Government has further reduced the SSA funding to some states from 65:35 to 50:50. Only the 8

north-eastern states and two Himalayan states continue to avail the 90:10 pattern of funding but for how long, no one is sure, going by the manner in which the NDA Government operates.

A study by the Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research found that the Union Government had released only 38 per cent of the SSA funds to states till October 2021. According to the analysis, only five out of the 20 largest states received more than half of the funds in the first seven months. Not only was the pace of fund release slow, the amounts released were also "considerably lower". This was despite the Covid pandemic that had severely impacted the school systems and learning.

The SSA rechristened as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan which incorporates two new elements to the old SSA is the largest school education scheme in the country. Yet in the 2021 Union Budget over Rs 8,000 crore was cut from SSA funds. The budget allocation for school education also saw a cut of close to Rs 5,000 crore. The union government, in August 2021, had announced a total budget of Rs 3 lakh crore for the scheme till 2026. But according to the analysis, the Union Government only released Rs 11,945 crore of the total Rs 31,050 crores allocated for the scheme. The survey says, "Pace of release of Government of India (GoI) share has been slow for most states in FY 2021-22. At the end of the first seven months of FY 2021-22, only 5 out of the 20 large states received more than half of their central allocations. Proportion of GoI share released to the rest of the 15 states ranged between 14 to 25 per cent," the analysis said.

This is the reason perhaps why Meghalaya has hit a wall as far as payment of salaries to SSA teachers is concerned. It is here that the State needs to engage and brainstorm on how to generate internal revenue for financing primary education which is the building block of human capital.

Meghalaya has to end its profligacy in other areas such as purchase of SUVs and other needless expenditures on ministerial and bureaucratic trips to Delhi when so much can get done online. It is vulgar for government officials and political VIPs to drive around in swanky vehicles in front of the striking teachers. The State's annual budget has to be reimagined by economists that understand the importance of education.

**Inflationary pressure is at its peak in India in 'Amritvarsh' year
Modi govt must take lessons from Sri Lanka developments**

By Binoy Viswam

The BJP government was enthusiastic to adorn the 75th year of independence with a high sounding name. Because of that, people every day read and hear the term 'Amritvarsh'. The word suggests a year in which life would be victorious over death. As it happens with every ceremonious name coined by the BJP, Amritvarsh also is heading in the opposite direction, where death stares at life fiercely. Amritvarsh of India is characterised by unprecedented price hikes on all the necessities of life. The people of India find it increasingly difficult to cope up with the shooting prices and their diminishing income. This Amritkaal is meant only for exploiters and looters. The dream of common people to have a decent life has turned into ashes. The wildfire of price rise has eaten away their hopes of life.

In the year of 'Amritvarsh', the price of daily commodities is higher than that of previous year. While, one litre of packaged milk would have cost Rs 56, this April it cost Rs 60. The rise

The Union finance minister is the architect of the disastrous GST exercise. She has come out with her own justifications. But such futile exercise will not find an escape route for the Indian economy, which is already on a downward slide. It is true that the finance minister devotionally strives to become the committed exponent of 'Modinomics'. But with all their overtime rhetoric and hard work, the Amritvarsh is painting a picture of doom.

The data coming from all sides portray this doom. As per the latest NFHS Survey conducted by the ministry of health and family welfare, 36 per cent of Indian children are stunted (too short for their age), 67 per cent of children suffer from some extent of anaemia, and even 57 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men suffer from anaemia. The survey also states, 35 out of every 1,000 children born in India do not live to celebrate their first birthday. A recent study published by PLOS Global Public Health reports that 70 per cent of the districts in



in prices of vegetables last year was around Rs 80-100 for kg, this year it would cost Rs 100-120 for the same. The price on edible oil has doubled, a litre would have cost Rs 80-100 last year, now costs Rs 200-220 this April. While the LPG used to cost Rs 450 two years ago for a common family with government subsidy, with Modi's government 'masterstroke' to remove subsidies, the LPG now costs a staggering Rs 1050. The prices of petrol face a strange fate in the country, wherein prices decline before elections and increase afterwards while being controlled by 'market forces.' Only thing that has

India fail to meet Maternal Mortality Rate (mothers dying due to pregnancy related complications) target set by the United Nations. The Global Health Index 2021 ranks 101 out of 116 countries, with 25 lakh Indians dying out of hunger, with a classification of 'serious'.

As per the government's State of Inequality Report, the top 10 per cent of the country earn merely Rs 25,000 a month. One could imagine the state of those on the other side of the table. Adding to all of these is the declining Indian Rupee, which reached 80 rupees against one US Dollar. The State Bank of India chair-

"GST exercise of the government has been felt as a heavy blow to the common people. The latest GST rate hike was not against luxury goods but against the day-to-day essentials of a common family. Items such as curd and paneer which were previously exempted from GST, will now have a five percent charge of GST. Even daily staples such as wheat, rice and flour are not free from GST."

remained stagnant is the income, suffering of the masses and apathy of the government.

GST exercise of the government has been felt as a heavy blow to the common people. The latest GST rate hike was not against luxury goods but against the day-to-day essentials of a common family. Items such as curd and paneer which were previously exempted from GST, will now have a five percent charge of GST. Even daily staples such as wheat, rice and flour are not free from GST. Hospital rooms which remain as a constant reminder of the failure of the Modi government during the deadly second wave of the pandemic bears GST. One would wonder, what the government intends by raising funds from commodities that affect the poorest the most, all amidst a global-supply chain crisis!

person, while admitting this would cause 'short-term pains', said: "It (further fall in the rupee) is required, otherwise exports will become absolutely unviable. It is important to maintain parity. It can be achieved only if the rupee is allowed to depreciate further." His words are the warning signal for the salaried people and the downtrodden. Their lives are going to be further miserable. The government is heard telling India to learn from lessons neighbouring Sri Lanka. True, there are lessons for India from Sri Lanka, not for the people but the government. It is important for the government to learn that divisive politics might give temporary electoral relief, but only real development with people-friendly policies can save any nation from disaster. (IPA Service)

NEET examinees stripped of their dignity

Editor,
Complaints that several female candidates who took the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) were forced to remove their inner wear before entering an exam centre have caused great uproar in Kerala. Charges have been brought against those involved in the offence. Similar incidents have occurred in the state in the past too. A few teachers involved in the offence were suspended following complaints at that time.

True, the NEET stipulates certain dress code. Light clothes with long sleeves are not allowed. Likewise, slippers and sandals with low heels can be used but shoes are not allowed. Texts, several stationery materials and devices are not allowed in the exam hall. Similarly, several accessories that candidates usually use are not allowed. Further, ornaments or metallic items are also not allowed. However, the NEET advisory does not specify whether garments with metallic hooks are allowed or not.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Via email

Restore dignity of teachers

Editor,
The news report that 12,541 SSA teachers have

threatened to quit en-mass over the Education Minister's ultimatum of 'no work no pay' has shocked the public. The politicians of today don't care a damn about their performance, much of which is destructive to the cause of the state. As a former teacher, I can feel the pain of the teachers who by the MDA Government's continuing torture had to take the extreme step of leaving their students orphaned.

The OPEC countries levy taxes on petrol for education. But in our country the hike in petrol cost ceases three months before the elections and resumes immediately after the results. This cess does not go to education but gets lost in something else. The SSA was founded to comply with the Right to Education Act. But as expected, any benefit to the poor is not liked by corporations. The NEP 2020 report says 3.22 crore children dropped out of school. Now the NEP promises 100% enrollment by 2030, a wild dream in the light of the pandemic not yet ready to leave us.

How cruel the MDA Government can be to our teachers beggars all description. The reason is not far to seek. Money power blinded these

5-year gods and goddesses to the plight of the poor.

Ten years ago, elections meant there were debates on every market day and the Headman would give a vote of thanks with candidates shaking hands and most importantly our listeners would choose whom to vote for. Now those things are in the past. It's all about using money to buy votes and misusing the MLA schemes right, left and centre. So much so that anyone with a sincere yearning to serve the public cause has to back off from the uneven playing field.

Sadly, those who will suffer from this SSA imbroglio are lakhs of children who are going to miss their second parents forever. Teachers now could return home and be reconciled to one fact and that is that we were not lucky to get statehood in 1972 which is now in the last critical stage of existence.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Via email

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

"Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master."

— Leonardo da Vinci

The Shillong Times

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State Security Commission defunct

IT is rightly pointed out by Leader of the Opposition, Mukul Sangma that the State Security Commission (SSC) in Meghalaya is now virtually defunct. The SSC is a mechanism recommended by the Supreme Court of India as part of a package of seven directives aimed at systemic police reforms. The Commission was to act as a buffer between the political executives and the police. In short it is meant to insulate police from political interference in day to day functioning, especially in appointments and transfers of senior police officials. The SSC was to be an independent body and not populated with people handpicked by the Government. The Meghalaya SSC is therefore not what it is meant to be. One important mandate of the SSC is to develop policy and performance parameters for a more efficient and accountable police organization.

Police reforms have been attempted with the purpose of ensuring that India breaks away from the colonial mindset where police continue to be the "rulers" police instead of the citizens' police, providing security to the common citizen. It's a different matter that governments have failed to comply with the SC directives and even if they have, the SSCs are largely defunct. The balanced composition suggested by the court is ignored and the need for accountability to the legislature and binding powers are blatantly disregarded. The mandate of the Commissions is the only component of the court's design that has generally been adhered to. But even here, some states have substantially weakened their Commissions' mandates.

In Meghalaya, under the MDA the SSC has rarely met. Recently, Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong defended the Government saying the SSC meets only when necessary. Perhaps he has not read the fine print of the SSC mandate. Going by that statement it would appear that everything is hunky-dory with policing in Meghalaya when the contrary has been true in the past four years. Every rule in the book has been broken to facilitate illegal mining and transportation of coal at a scale not known before. Interestingly, in the past the Meghalaya SSC was pointed out as a model for convening the SSC regularly, making it the most proactive SSC in India, until about 2017. Now the political executive exercises a firm grip on policing. According to the mandate laid out by the Supreme Court the Commissions should bring in external experts to conduct the specialised function of devising performance indicators and conducting a performance evaluation of the police organization. The Commissions must meet at least every three months and prepare annual reports to be submitted to legislatures in time for the budget session and also comply with Section 4 of the Right to Information Act, 2005. All these have been given short shrift in Meghalaya and the Police are not complaining.

Letters to the Editor

Mini-Meghalaya at Loreto

Editor,

It was an overwhelming sight to see the rich culture and tradition of our beloved State being displayed at the exhibition celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Meghalaya at Loreto Convent, Shillong. The moment we stepped into the school premises we were greeted with the mesmerizing voices of the young school choir singing the melodious song "Meghalaya-sweetest homeland of the clouds" - every little girl dressed in colourful traditional attire - every class right from Nursery had something to showcase from the cascading waterfalls to the living root bridges, from the sacred forests to the ancient art of pottery, the rich flora, fauna, music, dance and to top it all the delicious indigenous food items so well laid out... Wow! Indeed we felt as if we stepped into a mini Meghalaya. This is what we call joyful learning - extending

beyond classroom learning. We appreciate this initiative taken up by the school and the credit goes to the whole team of the Principal, the teachers and the little children.

As Meghalaya celebrates this golden jubilee year I am sure this exhibition has helped to inculcate in the children a love and admiration for their own State-Kudos Loreto Convent! Indeed, you have chosen the right theme for the exhibition - "Meghalaya wears a Golden Crown - with gifts and treasures that are well renowned". Let us hope this legacy passes on to the younger generation and instills in them a love for their motherland.

Yours etc.,
Prof RM Shangliang,
Via email

Meghalaya's poor educational ranking

Editor,
The recently announced

results of the PIE survey (2020-2021) has definitely not come as a shock to us. We Meghalayans have witnessed for far too long the lackadaisical approach to improve the situation. Meghalaya's Education Minister has blamed only the poor infrastructure for the dismal results of the PIE, that 'keen observation' is not the whole truth. That is just the tip of the iceberg. Education has been in an abysmal state and languishing for decades in Meghalaya. And nowhere in its fifty years has education been given its due. We did not emulate the success stories of Kerala and Mizoram. Instead, Meghalaya indulged in blame games.

Categories of teachers of Meghalaya have been crying hoarse for their salaries for months on end. Their threats finally paid dividends perhaps because of the forthcoming elections in early 2023. Many schools have not had teachers. In yesterday's The Shillong Times, there was a front page story on a school in South Garo Hill that has been without a single teacher for

the past two years. And we haven't forgotten what was discussed at the previous Assembly session regarding some schools in WGH not having teachers nor classes having been conducted for two years.

The best BEd college in the state, the Don Bosco College of Teachers' Education, Tura was able to get its license restored only after two wasted years. The management of the DBCTE, ran from pillar to post to reopen their college. Meghalaya has too few BEd colleges. This shortage must be addressed immediately, so that the state can appoint trained teachers and improve the quality of education.

All stakeholders in the state of Meghalaya must display a sense of urgency and dedication and awaken the state from its dormant lethargic condition, if we wish to give our children a fair chance at life. We need to stop this backward slide of our students, if Meghalaya wants to have a better PIE result and a much improved overall quality of life. Enough is enough. Let's

not squander and pilfer our common resources which are meant for the entire population of the state. Let's get cracking and eradicate the ills plaguing the state. It begins with electing people who have a 'vision' and who are empathetic to the needs of all citizens of the state.

Yours etc.,
Tyrone D'Brass,
Tura.

Well done Loreto Convent!

Editor,

The two-day exhibition celebrating Meghalaya's 50th year at Loreto Convent showcased the best of the State. Kudos to the students, teachers and management of Loreto Convent. This letter is inadequate to describe the many aspects of the exhibition which must have been the result of months of preparation to showcase the unique beauty of our lovely state Meghalaya. This exhibition shows every detail of Meghalaya's culture, resources and lifestyles of

the people which is not seen in any museum. At least I have not seen this kind of exhibition anywhere. No aspect of the tradition of the three tribes - Khasi, Jaintia, Garo has been left out. The exhibition left me and other visitors overawed. It's like an unexplored Meghalaya! Everything has been well curated and professionally done.

Thank you Team Loreto for this memorable journey via your exhibition. I request all who can to visit the exhibition which is open on July Saturday 23 to do so. It would also be good for those from the Tourism Department to see this work of art. Perhaps the Department can learn a few tips on how to showcase the original Meghalaya to tourists from all over the world. Meghalaya deserves a Museum like this.

Yours etc.,
Biplob Paul,
Via email

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

GST on food will add to malnutrition among Indian poor

Essential items for Consumption must be affordable

By Dr Arun Mitra

In the 2021 Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, India ranks 101st out of the 116 countries. With a score of 27.5, India falls into the category of serious level of hunger. According to the GHI a rank of ≤ 9.9 is considered to be low, 10.0-19.9 moderate, 20.0-34.9 serious, 35.0-49.9 alarming, ≥ 50.0 extremely alarming. That we are at a serious level of hunger is a cause of concern for us. It requires pro active planning to ensure nutrition to all the citizens.

The report has pointed out that number of malnourished has increased globally in the past by 15 crores i.e 24.3%. In 2019 the number of malnourished was 61.8 crore while it increased 76.8 crore

saturated and unsaturated oils 30 grams of sugar. At the present market price the cost of these food items per person comes to be around Rs.225/- per day. This means that a family of five members should spend Rs.1125/- per day or Rs.33750/- per month on food only.

Barring a minuscule population our people are far from this target. The government's scheme to give 5 kg of grains and one kg daal and a bit of oil does not fulfil the nutritional requirements. It is just not enough even for proper sustenance. It does not at all meet the requirements of micro nutrients like vitamins and minerals essential for

ate Abhijeet Banerjee have suggested several means to alleviate poverty.

Recent economic surveys have pointed out that 90% of our population earns less than Rs.10000/- per month. A balanced diet for them is only a dream which does not seem to come true in the present circumstances. By imposing taxes on the essential food items cost of filling the belly is bound to increase. The wages on the other hand are showing a downward trend as the employment is shifting to contractual labour with no job security nor any employment benefits like the provident fund or the ESI. Small scale sector which provides

Rs.5340/- per month. This is despite an internal labour ministry committee recommendation of Rs.375/- per day. This is even against the Supreme Court ruling on works demand for Rs.650/- per day wage, where the Hon'ble court added further 25% for health and education. The government's intention to introduce time based work wage will be detrimental economically as well as against the medical advice and health needs of a person.

Large number of our population in our country is in the unorganised sector where the legal formulations are hardly implemented. The farmers and agriculture labour who are the producers are among the worst sufferers. Agriculture



in 2021.

The Hunger Index is based on three criteria, Inadequate food supply, Child mortality and Child under-nutrition. The report also points out that 1/4th of the total malnourished in the world live in India. This is at a time when our country is aspiring to be global leader in economic development with a 5 trillion economy.

Supply of balanced food to all the citizens of the country is the basic requirement to reduce malnutrition. A balanced diet means sufficient number of proteins, fats, carbohydrates and micro nutrients in the form of vitamins and minerals. Prestigious medical journal Lancet had formed a committee to go into nutritional requirements of a person. It has suggested intake of 232 grams of whole grain, 50 grams of tubers or starchy vegetables like potato, 300 grams of vegetables, 200 grams of fruits, 250 grams dairy food, 250 grams of protein sources in the form of meat, egg, poultry, fish, legumes, nuts, 50 grams

physical and mental growth. With 15 crore people out of a population of 23 crore in Uttar Pradesh queuing up to get this much ration free of cost, is a projection of extremely dismal state of affairs of nutritional security.

livelihood to large number of people is at a receiving end under the neoliberal economic policy. To meet the requirements of 2300 calories and a healthy food and clothing for a young adult, various workers or

"As per the UNICEF, India has 5,772,472 children below five years affected by severe wasting — the most in the world. The global body called the situation an 'overlooked child survival emergency' in its May 2022 child alert. Severe wasting, also known as severe acute malnutrition, is defined as low weight-for-height."

It is pertinent that the purchasing capacity of the people is raised through poverty alleviation, sufficient wages and ensure means of livelihood to meet the requirement of quality food for the citizens. Several economic experts including the Nobel Laure-

labourers have to face double oppression, economic as well as social. Farmers protested against the new Farm Laws fearing they will not only adversely affect their economic conditions but even the food security of the citizens too will be compromised.

As per the UNICEF, India has 5,772,472 children below five years affected by severe wasting — the most in the world. The global body called the situation an 'overlooked child survival emergency' in its May 2022 child alert. Severe wasting, also known as severe acute malnutrition, is defined as low weight-for-height.

It is therefore imperative that essential food items are cost effective and within the reach of low socio-economic groups. Wages for all sections be revised as per the caloric needs, balanced diet, clothing, health, education and housing at the present prices. In this context the GST levied on food and other day to day needs items be withdrawn to prevent further malnutrition. (IPA Service)

organizations have demanded minimum wage based on the principle of these caloric needs. They have demanded a minimum wage of Rs.21000/- per month. To utter dismay, the government announced a floor level wage as Rs.178/- per day or

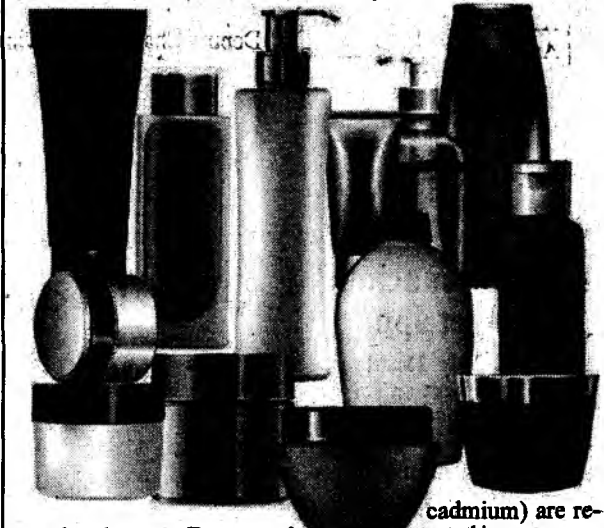
Cosmeto - vigilance in India: Need of the day

By Dr Reuben P Syiem

Cosmeto-vigilance is a new concept of safety monitoring of cosmetic products. The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic (FD&C) Act defined cosmetics as "articles intended to be rubbed, poured, sprinkled, or sprayed on, introduced into, or otherwise applied to the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness, or altering the appearance." The products covered under this definition are skin moisturizers, perfumes, lipsticks, fingernail polishes, eye and facial makeup preparations, cleansing shampoos, permanent waves, hair colours, and deodorants, or any other substance intended for use as a component of a cosmetic product.

The purpose of Cosmeto-vigilance is to collect, analyse and assess the adverse reactions/side effects occurring in consumers to identify any potential health risk. This allows to control or rule out potentially hazardous ingredients that may be present in cosmetic products. Initiated by the French health products safety agency as a part of pharmacovigilance system for cosmetics. Today, it is recognized globally as a concept of public health to address the safety of cosmetic products. Prior to July 2013, the safety of cosmetic products was not reviewed or approved. Since then new legislation has compelled the industry to provide data on products and ingredients before they can be marketed, however the efficacy and safety of cosmetic products are not reviewed or approved by national authorities before they are sold to the public.

In India, cosmetics are



regulated as per Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 and Rules 1945. Part-XIII (regulates import and registration of cosmetics), part-XIV (manufacture of cosmetic for sale or for distribution) and part-XV (regulates labelling, packing and standards of cosmetics). Rule 145 and 135 prohibits the use and import of arsenic and lead containing compounds. Cosmetics containing mercury are prohibited as per provisions of rules 135A and 145 D. Rule 134-A prohibits import of hexachlorophene containing cosmetics. Rule 134 specifies that cosmetic products should contain colour, dye or pigment as per specified by schedule Q and Bureau of Indian Standards. However, the distinction between drugs and cosmetics is sometimes not clear. In India, the population is huge and similar is the market of cosmetics. Like drugs, adverse effects/side effects of cosmetics are commonly encountered. In a study with 1609 participants, in a period of 5 years, 12.2% suffered from adverse effects of cosmetics and toiletries, out of which 63.3% were women and 36.7% were men. Most common complaint was itching (70.9%), dryness of skin (63.3%), and burning sensation in skin (50%). The duration of suffering ranged from 5.5 months to 3 years. Adverse reactions to traditional agents are also commonly reported, for example, kajal and kumkum dermatitis.

Although lots of adverse effects occur at the population level, reporting to the regulatory authority is very low. A recent study published from Brazil noted that several common allergens and irritants are found in children's skin care

products and additionally were labelled as "dermatologist tested" or "hypoallergenic." According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), hypoallergenic means "whatever a particular company wants it to mean" and "manufacturers of cosmetics labelled as hypoallergenic are not required to submit substantiation of their hypo-allergenicity claims to FDA." This allows for unhindered marketing use of the terms "hypoallergenic," "sensitive skin," or "fragrance free" without any consequences. There are some organizations, such as the National Eczema Foundation, that perform testing on common skin care products and provide product recommendations, which have passed their testing. Unfortunately, until more consumer-friendly databases are easily available and easy to interpret, adverse skin reactions will continue to be common.

Another major problem in India is the increased sale of misbranded and spurious cosmetics. Cosmetics are called misbranded if they contain an unprescribed colour, inappropriate labelling, or contains false/misleading product information. Cosmetics are labelled as spurious when their name resembles another cosmetic; the product resembles another cosmetic or if manufacturer information is misleading/fictitious or does not exist, which can deceive customers.

Spurious cosmetics are commonly reported in the Indian market. High level of lead is reported in many cosmetic products. Impurities such as high level of heavy metals (lead, zinc, and

cadmium) are reported in many cosmetic product (lipsticks, lip glosses, eyeshadows, and henna hair dye). Hair technicians in saloon and parlours are at risk of chemicals in cosmetics and hand dermatitis is quite common among them. Female hair technicians are at particular risk for fertility disorders and adverse pregnancy outcomes, which is of special concern. One study shows that 43% of the India samples of sindoor exceeded the limit of lead content in sindoor compared to US Samples. Even commonly used "kajal" is found to contain high levels of lead.

Cosmeto-vigilance then becomes the responsibility of the consumer and their physician. As consumers, we must be aware that drugs are not the only culprits for side effects but cosmetics like hair dyes, moisturizers, make up products and perfumes etc can also produce side effects. Family medicine physicians and primary care practitioners thus have an essential role to recognize adverse reactions induced by cosmetic products, and thus encourage patients for reporting. Increasing awareness on this new concept will be a valuable remark on global public health. Hence besides proper regulation of these agents, a proper vigilance system is also required to protect the health of the Indian population. Going with words of Vigan and Castellan, proper use of cosmeto-vigilance can help to control or rule out hazardous ingredients in cosmetics and thus improve our confidence on use of these agents.

(Dr Reuben Syiem, MBBS MD is Senior Resident Doctor, Department of Pharmacology NEIGRIHMS)

Take your parents on a trip down memory lane

Travel during childhood or early years was almost incomplete without a train journey with our parents.

The scenic routes, meals, munchies during the journey, and conversations with fellow passengers made the journey even better. It gave us the opportunity to spend time with one another as a family and embrace the value of slow travel.

Ahead of Parents Day which is annually celebrated on July 24, Booking.com presents six global railway stays to resurrect the magic and help inspire travelers looking for a nostalgic trip with their parents.

Parents are sure to love railway-themed stays, considering staying in a converted train carriage or a former train station is a dream come true for train buffs like parents.

Research by the travel platform reveals that 66 per cent of Indian travellers are planning to pick a destination to travel to based on whether or not they have unique accommodation options.

From authentically-converted Pullman railway carriages that capture the nostalgic glamour of rail travel to a train that stays permanently stationed on a historic bridge high above a national park, there is something for train buffs.

Chanakya BNR Hotel, Odisha, India

Chanakya BNR Hotel is an idyllic getaway, located just 200 meters from Puri's pristine coastline. Staying at Odisha's only heritage hotel is like going back in time and witnessing India's magnificent railway legacy. This hotel is a small piece of heaven, with all 37 sea-facing rooms featuring customised artwork from the wonderful Indian Railways.

The timeless grace of old-world charm with all the modern luxuries offered by Chanakya BNR is something to be cherished and appreciated. Without a doubt, this hotel offers a stay that is warm yet

memorable.

The Old Railway Station, Petworth, United Kingdom

Featuring authentically-converted Pullman railway carriages, this unique bed and breakfast is a former Petworth Railway Station, built in 1892, in the South Downs National Park. Guests arrive at the restored wooden station building, which was built in the Victorian times, and will spend the night in a historic train carriage, which is now modernly designed from the inside.

If the weather is good, guests can start their day with a delicious breakfast on the station platform, before visiting the beautiful market town of Petworth or enjoy a 20-minute drive through the British countryside to discover the nearby Amberley Castle, a 900-year-old West Sussex castle within medieval walls.

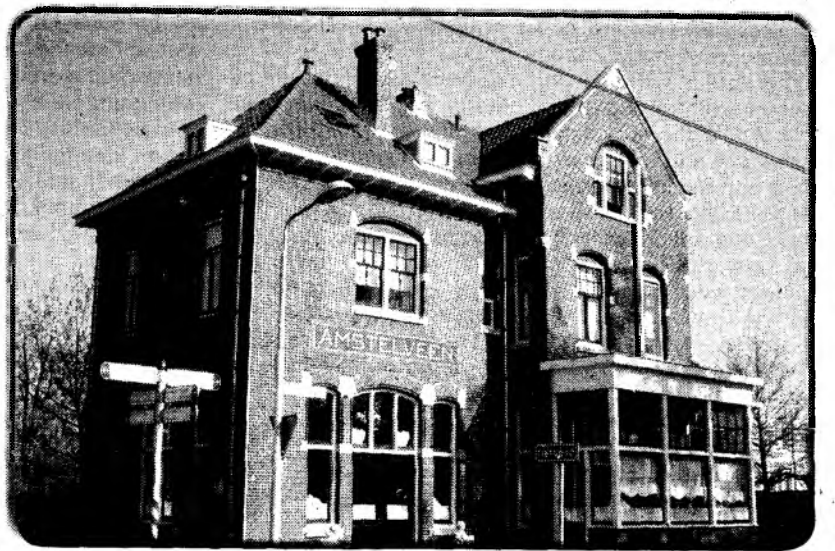
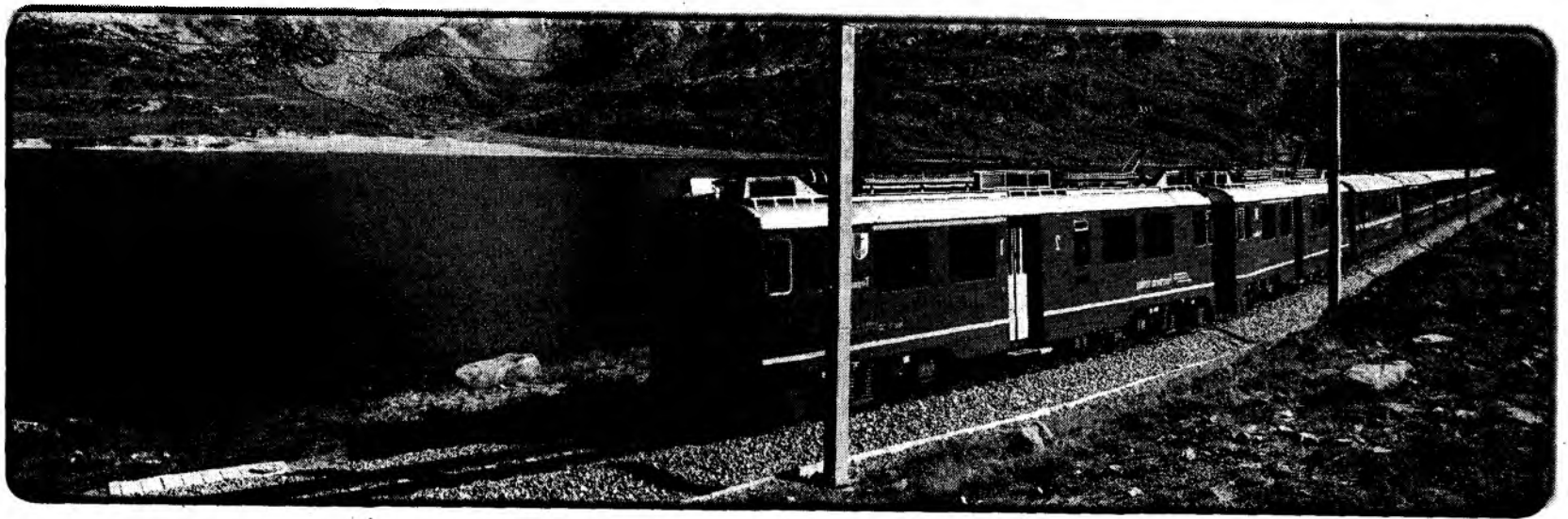
Kruger Shalati - The Train on The Bridge, Skukuza, South Africa

Permanently stationed on the historic Selati Bridge, high above the Sabie River in South Africa's iconic Kruger National Park, this stunning train has been transformed to a unique lodge with glass-walled train rooms and marvelous Instagrammable pool overlooking the park's crocodiles, hippos, buffaloes and elephants. Offering the same experience travellers had about 100 years ago when their train would park overnight in the exact spot, this unforgettable stay is a must-do experience for everyone.

The Crawford Hotel at Union Station, Colorado, United States

Located in downtown Denver, a short walk from Ball Arena, The Crawford Hotel at Union Station is right above the iconic Denver Union Station. The landmark station opened in 1881 and has been restored to be the heart and soul of downtown Denver. Guests can enter the hotel through the once again bustling railway station and spend the night at the vibrant transit hub.

Each of the hotel rooms tells a different story, with some rooms



recreating the romance of train travel, while others hosting beautiful "Colorado-curated" collections of art and artifacts.

Hapuku Carriages Kaikoura, Kaikoura, New Zealand

Just a short walk from the beach, Hapuku Carriages Kaikoura offers a unique overnight experience in a restored railway carriage.

Built-in 1921, the carriage was situated on a farm in Waiau for many years and carefully restored into this cozy place to stay, which also has a Booking.com Travel Sustainable badge for the measures taken to offer its guests a more sustainable stay.

Guests can relax at the outdoor

bathub overlooking the mountains and the kiwi blue sky while listening to the sounds of nearby trains passing by and the ocean lapping at the nearby shore.

Station Amstelveen, Amstelveen, the Netherlands

Situated in the town of Amstelveen, just a short drive from the city center of Amsterdam, this charming bed and breakfast is a former historic train station from 1915. Featuring rustic, cozy, and comfortable rooms, this Travel Sustainable property managed to keep the original train station feeling.

The property is facing the old rail tracks, and its beautiful gift shop used to be the station's ticket

office. The iconic red brick, three-story station is close to little shops, cafes, and restaurants, as well as to the Amsterdams Bos (Amsterdam Forest), Amsterdam's largest park and recreational area.

If the weather is nice travelers can bike to the vibrant city of Amsterdam to visit its world-famous museums and enjoy a variety of activities like a canal cruise or cheese tasting.

Alojamiento Vagon Rural, Murcia, Spain

Set in Murcia, near the Roman Bridge and the Murcia Bullring, Alojamiento Vagon Rural offers a unique stay in a historic train carriage from the 1950s, which

has now been transformed into a vintage-style apartment. This wagon apartment is located next to other wagons, forming a large terrace like a train station, in a very quiet residential green area.

Guests can swim in the outdoor swimming pool, or relax in the garden and use the barbecue facilities. The property is situated in an area where guests can engage in fun outdoor activities such as windsurfing, cycling, and fishing. Visitors to Murcia should also consider a private walking tour to see Murcia's famous landmarks and hear remarkable facts and stories about the city from a local guide. (LANSLife)

Who says comic books are only for children?

Two of the world's best known comics and their lessons



Usually reviled by irate parents and teachers as a "waste of time and money", comic books have held their own for nearly a century. And as Shakespeare said, there are "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything", so why not this format? Particularly, when it can have its uses -- even instructional and moral ones.

Say, for instance, showing how humanity has been the same across ages by depicting key contemporary issues in the far past, using stereotypes to evoke laughter, not

xenophobia, or become a herald of (that now reviled word) globalisation with a balanced portrayal of various ethnicities.

And then for good measure, to demonstrate how humour can continue to work its magic across translations.

Comics originated in the US, and it, along with Japan and its manga, still holds the top position as far as their proliferation -- and its adaptation by other media -- goes. For the purposes above, however, we must turn to another tradition -- the Franco-Belgian, and its two most famous characters -- the diminutive

but doughty Gaulish warrior, and the intrepid and globe-trotting boy reporter.

With their well-researched settings, meticulously drawn plots and characters, and of course abundant wordplay, the Frenchmen Rene Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, and Belgian Georges Remi alias Herge, not only elevated the form to literature, but made Asterix and Tintin the world's most well-known Frenchman and Belgian, respectively.

Let us begin with Tintin, whose fans included Satyajit Ray, Steven Spielberg and Charles de Gaulle, who considered him to be his only serious rival. And then, our hero, in his lunar visit, also made a "discovery" (lunar ice) that was scorned then, but would be validated by India's Chandrayaan half a century later.

The two dozen installments of the series have sold hundreds of millions of copies in the more than 70 languages they have been translated into, and the reason is not difficult to ascertain.

Herge's trademark "ligne claire" (clear line) drawing style, creating a most realistic feel, is complemented by engrossing, well-researched stories, which quite unobtrusively deal with serious social and political themes: Crime, wars, drugs and slave trade, racism, political subversion and regime change, fuel crises and so on. And he kept pace with the times in the stories that span from the 1930s to the mid-1970s and respected diversity -- Tintin is even shown doing yoga.

And in the series, Herge also drew from his own life -- and found some peace too.

Emerging out of a weekly cartoon strip in the children's supplement of a Belgian Catholic newspaper, the initial two adventures -- set in Soviet Russia and the then Belgian Congo -- were not very refined, being an unabashed anti-Communist attack and an unashamed justification of colonialism and the "White Man's Burden", respectively.

It was from the third installment that there was a change in ideological orientation to a more multiracial-tolerant setting.

Featuring Chicago gangster boss Al Capone -- the only prominent real-life character appearing in the series, apart from a brief appearance by the creator himself much later -- *Tintin in America* combines all current perceptions of the US in a blistering denunciation of capitalism, consumerism, and criminality, not to mention racism and exploitation of indigenous people.

Tintin's adventures next take him to Egypt and India (*The Cigars of the Pharaoh*), where the blundering detectives Thompson and Thomson come onstage -- and so do cow vigilantes! in a struggle against drug smuggling, which is continued in *The Blue Lotus*, set in China. The latter was unprecedented in a depiction of Chinese people far removed from the racist stereotypes prevalent in then Europe, though the Japanese, who were more westernised, don't come off so well.

The Japanese aggression against China, particularly the self-engineered Mukden incident, which served as a pretext for the occupation of Manchuria, is rendered with starkness and led to an official complaint from the Japanese embassy in Brussels.

Space constraints won't permit a recap of all of Tintin's colourful adventures and characters, but we can try a few prominent ones.

The Broken Ear, set in two fictional South American countries, combines crime and high politics, while satirising the frequent (violent) regime changes in the region, backed by foreign interests, seeking to spark war between countries -- and supplying both with weapons.

King Ottokar's Sceptre, with its political subtext chronicling contemporary happenings, was unexpectedly not banned by Nazi censors in occupied Belgium, but Herge played it safe and the next half-dozen odd installments -- from *The Crab With the Golden Claws*

(where Captain Haddock makes his appearance) to *Prisoners of the Sun* -- abandon political themes for pure adventure.

In the 1950s, Herge returned to contemporary happenings -- the Cold War, the arms race, political subversion, human trafficking can all be found.

Tintin also had a therapeutic effect on Herge. Having been "forced" to marry co-worker Germaine Kieckens by his conservative editor, despite both being unhappy about it, he had numerous affairs. This caused him to feel guilty and have recurrent nightmares of what he described as "the beauty and cruelty of white" -- visions of white and snow.

He even consulted a psychologist and was counselled to leave his art, but rejected the advice and found expiation of sorts in drawing the desolate landscapes of *Tintin in Tibet*.

Tintin and the Picaros, the last completed adventure, is full of political intrigue -- and messaging -- down to its final panel: a new regime, but slums still filled with wretched people, with the only change seen being in the uniforms of the apathetic police and names on the victory signs.

Asterix and his extremely well-built (never call him fat!) friend Obelix, created by writer Goscinny (1926-77) and illustrator Albert Uderzo (1927-), have regaled the world since his first appearance in French comic magazine *Pilote* in October 1959, before branching out to his own series of albums, as well as films -- both animated and live action.

The series survived Goscinny's death, and the 2008 retirement of Uderzo, who had taken both roles, with his assistants nominated to carry on with it.

It was set in 50 BCE in an unnamed village in Armorica (what is now Brittany in France), termed the sole area in Gaul that Roman ruler Julius Caesar had failed to subdue due to a magic potion

of the local druid, which gave its users short-term superhuman strength.

Apart from local adventures, Asterix and Obelix (and sometimes other villagers) go out on missions in other parts of Gaul and what are now Belgium, Britain, Germany, Switzerland as well as to North America, Middle East, and India.

There is a lot of bashing up of Romans, pirates, assorted barbarians or whoever else comes in their way, the series is not mere slapstick. Its humour works on some more subtle devices -- the witty dialogue, the puns, the running gags, the caricatures, the accurate, tongue-in-cheek but affectionate stereotyping of various peoples, who are depicted like their contemporary counterparts -- the proper, reserved British, the clean and hospitable Swiss, and the rule-obeying Goths (Germans).

The humour, typically French-specific, raised concerns if the work could be feasibly translated, but the gifted duo of Anthea Bell (1936-) and Derek Hockridge (1934-2013) succeeded, with the English versions maintaining the original's spirit and jokes, and devising equally irresistibly funny puns where needed.

And what doesn't need translation are the references from art and poetry as well as films, music as well as historical characters -- prototypes of Mussolini, Napoleon, Sigmund Freud, Laurel and Hardy, Thomson and Thompson, Winston Churchill as well as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Elvis Presley, besides Charlton Heston as Ben Hur, Kirk Douglas as Spartacus and Sean Connery as James Bond, can be seen.

Then, keeping the series relevant are the well-aimed pokes at social, economic and political issues, as relevant now as when written -- luxury accommodation including its land acquisition, environmental costs, labour relations, or marketing gimmicks, and business jargon. (LANS)

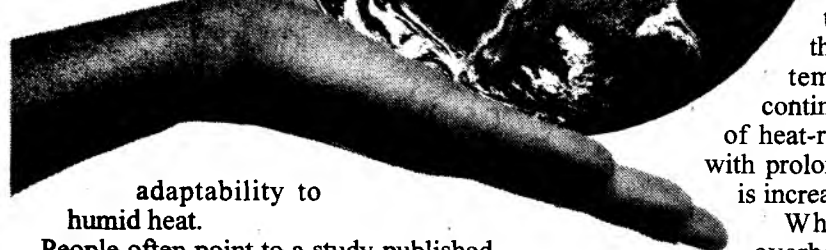
How hot is too hot for the human body?

By W Larry Kenney, Daniel Vecellio, Rachel Cottle & S Tony Wolf

Heat waves are becoming supercharged as the climate changes – lasting longer, becoming more frequent and getting just plain hotter. One question a lot of people are asking is: “When will it get too hot for normal daily activity as we know it, even for young, healthy adults?”

The answer goes beyond the temperature you see on the thermometer. It’s also about humidity. Our research shows the combination of the two can get dangerous faster than scientists previously believed.

Scientists and other observers have become alarmed about the increasing frequency of extreme heat paired with high humidity, measured as “wet-bulb temperature.” During the heat waves that overtook South Asia in May and June 2022, Jacobabad, Pakistan, recorded a maximum wet-bulb temperature of 33.6 C (92.5 F) and Delhi topped that – close to the theorized upper limit human



adaptability to humid heat.

People often point to a study published in 2010 that estimated that a wet-bulb temperature of 35 C – equal to 95 F at 100% humidity, or 115 F at 50% humidity – would be the upper limit of safety, beyond which the human body can no longer cool itself by evaporating sweat from the surface of the body to maintain a stable body core temperature.

It was not until recently that this limit was tested on humans in laboratory settings. The results of these tests show an even greater cause for concern.

The PSU H.E.A.T. Project

To answer the question of “how hot is too

hot?” we brought young, healthy men and women into the Noll Laboratory at Penn State University to experience heat stress in a controlled environment.

These experiments provide insight into which combinations of temperature and humidity begin to become harmful for even the healthiest humans.

Each participant swallowed a small telemetry pill, which monitored their deep body or core temperature. They then sat in an environmental chamber, moving just enough to simulate the minimal activities of daily living, such as cooking and eating. Researchers slowly increased either the temperature in the chamber or the humidity and monitored when the subject’s core temperature started to rise.

That combination of temperature and humidity whereby the person’s core temperature starts to rise is called the “critical environmental limit.” Below those limits, the body is able to maintain a relatively stable core temperature over time. Above those limits, core temperature rises continuously and risk of heat-related illnesses with prolonged exposures is increased.

When the body overheats, the heart work harder to pump blood flow to the skin to dissipate the heat, and when you’re also sweating, that decreases body fluids. In the direst case, prolonged exposure can result in heat stroke, a life-threatening problem that requires immediate and rapid cooling and medical treatment.

Our studies on young healthy men and women show that this upper environmental limit is even lower than the theorized 35 C. It’s more like a wet-bulb temperature of 31 C (88 F). That would equal 31 C at 100% humidity or 38 C (100 F) at 60% humidity.

Dry vs. humid environments

Current heat waves around the globe are approaching, if not exceeding, these limits.

In hot, dry environments the critical environmental limits aren’t defined by wet-bulb temperatures, because almost all the sweat the body produces evaporates, which cools the body. However, the amount humans can sweat is limited, and we also gain more heat from the higher air temperatures.

Keep in mind that these cutoffs are based solely on keeping your body temperature from rising excessively. Even lower temperatures and humidity can place stress on the heart and other body systems. And while eclipsing these limits does not necessarily present a worst-case scenario, prolonged exposure may become dire for vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with chronic diseases.

Our experimental focus has now turned to testing older men and women, since even healthy aging makes people less heat tolerant.

Adding on the increased prevalence of heart disease, respiratory problems and other health problems, as well as certain medications, can put them at even higher risk of harm. People over the age of 65 comprise some 80%-90% of heat wave casualties.

How to stay safe

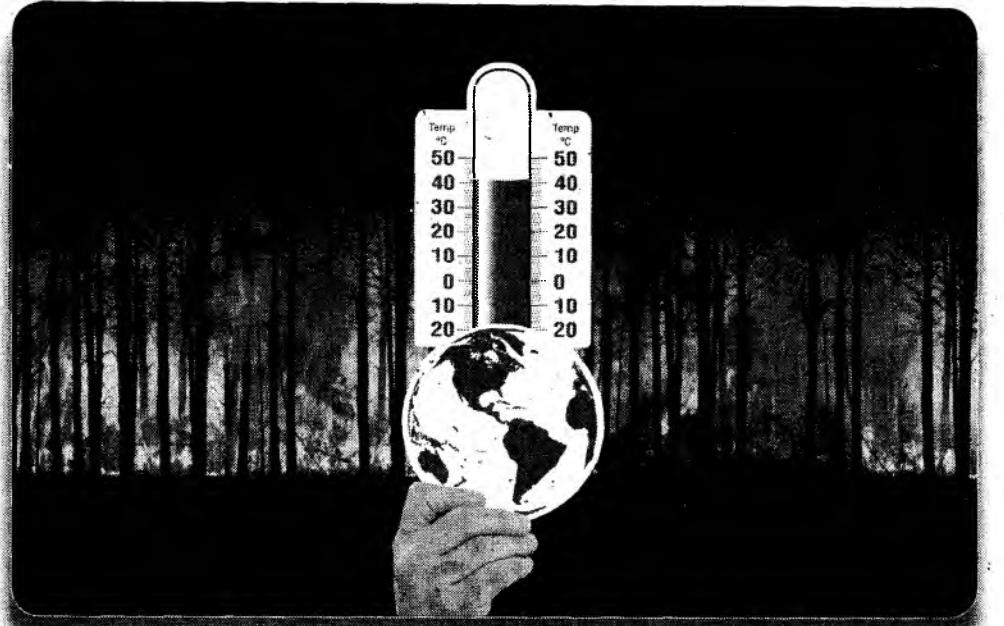
Staying well hydrated and seeking areas in which to cool down – even for short periods – are important in high heat.

While more cities in the United States are expanding cooling centres to help people escape the heat, there will still be many people who will experience these dangerous conditions with no way to cool themselves.

Even those with access to air conditioning might not turn it on because of the high cost of energy – a common occurrence in Phoenix, Arizona – or because of large-scale power outages during heat waves or wildfires, as is becoming more common in the western US.

A recent study focusing on heat stress in Africa found that future climates will not be conducive to the use of even low-cost cooling systems such as “swamp coolers” as the tropical and coastal parts of Africa become more humid.

Findings suggest heat + humidity gets dangerous faster than many people realise



These devices, which require far less energy than air conditioners, use a fan to recirculate the air across a cool, wet pad to lower the air temperature, but they become ineffective at high wet-bulb temperatures above 21 C (70 F).

All told, the evidence continues to mount that climate change is not just a problem for the future.

It is one that humanity is currently facing and must tackle head-on. (The Conversation)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 24, 2022

Moon sextile Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give nice results. It is just the right time for expansion of your business that you have been thinking for a long time now. You can also plan a job change. Your plans will materialize. You will also have good gains in business. Your relations with bosses will be excellent. You will get a chance to travel abroad for work or further studies. You will take steps for financial betterment and the results will be visible too. You will give time to your family. You will remain emotional and close to your family members. Husband and wife will have good relations. Work related trips will keep you busy. You will extend a help to a needy friend. You will also get proper advice and emotional support from friends from time to time. You will consider yourself fortunate.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is going to be a peaceful week. You will be a lot more relaxed and look towards life with a positive attitude. You will look after your elders well and take care of their health. You will also complete your pending tasks. You will also earn profits in your profession. Your respect will also increase. New job opportunities will be available. Positive events will also take place. You will be spending some quality time with your family. Marriage proposals for singles will come. You will also be keen in making new friends. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. Financial position is going to be strong and stable. You will develop interest in Yoga, meditation and prayer.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is going to be a week of mixed fortunes for you. You will have a misunderstanding with some person. Your enemies and opponents will be a cause of worry. You will also have a fight with your spouse. But matter will get resolved. You will also have monetary benefits. With your strong will power you will start moving towards success. You will also face every problem with the help of your intelligence and cleverness. You will complete your work peacefully. The time is extremely favorable for you. You will also make many plans to gain profits. Your health will be good. Take care of your diet and eat healthy food. You will also impress your boss with your attitude.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Time is very beneficial for you. You will have favorable gains in your business/work. You will be kept busy due to your busy schedule. You also need to take care of your health. You will get success in every work. People associated with technical jobs will reap more benefits. You will benefit from your inheritance. You will also make contact with new people. Politics may attract you. You will spend your time having fun with your friends and close people. You will achieve success in your business. The whole week is full of happiness. You will have some positive changes in yourself. It will make you feel better and confident. And you will be more assertive and achieve your goals.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It is going to be a wonderful week. There is Yog of promotion in your job. Your bosses will be very supportive. You may also begin a new work. Days will bring joy and health. You will get success in every work. People associated with technical jobs will reap more benefits. You will benefit from your inheritance. You will also make contact with new people. Politics may attract you. You will spend your time having fun with your friends and close people. You will achieve success in your business. The whole week is full of happiness. You will have some positive changes in yourself. It will make you feel better and confident. And you will be more assertive and achieve your goals.

Lao: (July 23 - August 23)

Your difficulties will get resolved. You will make new experiences in business and increase your profits. There are chances of promotion in your job. You will also accept difficult challenges at work. You will also be proud of completing your work nicely. Your romantic life is going to be good. You will share excellent bonding with your mate. Do not give loans to anybody otherwise you will have a tough time in recovering them. You should not expect a lot from your relatives. They will just disappoint you. Your health is going to be perfect. You will have no worries at all. Love birds will have a wonderful time and will come closer to each other.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will be happy at the completion of your work. If you are making plans of going out somewhere the time is suitable. The problem of property disputes will be settled with the mediation of someone. You will get your work done by talking softly. The time will be auspicious and fortunate. Money will keep coming.

You will excel in your business. You will also make profits in ample quantity. Your worries regarding children will come to an end. It will be a knowledge enhancing day. Some guests will arrive during later part of the week. You will be in delighted mood and have peace of mind. You will be successful in solving different problems with your intelligence and wisdom.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

You will earn lot of respect for your efforts. There is possibility of some gain in business/ profession. You will be miles ahead of people in terms of achievements and thoughts. New doors of opportunities will open for you. You will also spend wonderful time with your family. The time will be joyful for you. You will get success in whatever you do. Money that was blocked will come to you. Your life partner will walk shoulder to shoulder with you. Your fame will increase manifold. You will learn better manner of behavior. Your daily life will proceed smoothly. If you take decision at the right time you will get lot of name and fame. Your intelligence will be acknowledged by one and all.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will do the best of work now. It is going to be a favorable time for property matters. You will work with dedication and get the desired success. You will also be satisfied to know that all your works are going according to your wish. Your bank balance will also add on. You will have to do tours due to your job/business purpose. Some problems will be resolved with the help of a friend. Officials will be happy with your work. This will increase your influence and prestige. You will recall some good memories. Your financial position will be strong and stable. You will get better opportunities in job/business. You will make progress in life. Income too will be good.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will take an important decision at work. Your luck will be on your side. Despite obstacles and burdens you will complete all important tasks. A dispute in your family will get resolved. A third person might try to create a wedge in the family. Your power and self confidence will help a lot. Your relationship with friends will become stronger. You will get mixed results in your studies. There are chances that you will start a new work. Initially it will not bring any success. But you need to wait and not get disappointed. You might also have to listen to your boss or seniors at the work place. Your health will be good. There is nothing much to worry about. Take things easy.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The favorable placement of Venus is indicating success in love matters. A very special person will come in your life all of a sudden. You will be successful in romantic ties and endeavors but you need to show a wise head. You will gift an expensive item to your beloved. The situation is very favorable at your work front. You will get promoted too. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will have good financial gains. Work related hurdles will get over. They will near its completion. Most of the time will be spent on fun, frolic and entertainment. You will also be inclined towards spiritual matters. You will also maintain a balance between job and family.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The week will start on a pleasant note. You will get a good news from somewhere. You will be happy and cheerful. These are good days in terms of money and finances. You will also plan to buy a valuable item. Due to your strong will power you will start moving towards the path of success. Your enemies and opponents will be unable to harm you. You will be empathetic. You will do all your work seriously. You will be able to establish harmony among people around you. Prepare well for interviews. You will be mentally peaceful. You will be spending quality time with your family. Your spouse will prove a source of strength.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

These are enlightening days. You will have the desire to do something new for yourself for which you need to learn a lot of things. The star of your destiny will become strong and help you in moving forward. Partnerships will be extremely favorable during this phase. The time will be very peaceful. You will work with full of energy on receiving a desired task. You will also start doing good deeds. New romantic opportunities will come. Love mates will have a good time. There are possibilities of you spending money on luxuries. You will also get new opportunities for work. You will also take a vital decision. Your bosses will support you and also keep encouraging you.

Follow in Mandela’s footsteps by participating in his tours

All across the magnificent nation of South Africa, are written tales of freedom and lessons of liberty. Nelson Mandela, an influential political leader who went on to become the first non-white president in South African history, was at the forefront of this freedom struggle. From serving 27 years in prison to working as a philanthropist, his life was legendary, to say the least. The ‘Gandhi of the African continent’ has received, and rightfully so, more than 250 honours including The Nobel Peace Prize and the Bharat Ratna.

The Rainbow Nation continues to celebrate his life 104 years later, and encourages residents and visitors to do the same through art, culture, sports, heritage, and more importantly, social inclusion. As the world honours this great revolutionary every 18th of July, by commemorating International Mandela Day, history and travel buffs can follow in Mandela’s footsteps by participating in the below tours.

Each of these tours offers deeper insights into the life and times of Nelson Mandela, who is a testament to the power of the human spirit. Madiba, as he is fondly known, showcases the ability of a single individual to change the course of history with grit, determination, and standing up for what is right.

Robben Island

Nelson Mandela spent 18 immensely challenging years in prison on this little island situated off the coast of Cape Town and yet emerged from it filled with forgiveness instead of hatred. Robben Island is now a World Heritage site and museum. Although from the 17th to the 20th century the island was a place of imprisonment - today it is a beacon of hope and a place where visitors can gain some insight into the life and times of Nelson Mandela and fellow freedom fighters.

Apartheid Museum

Apartheid - a system of institutionalised racial segregation and discrimi-

nation, had infiltrated every nerve of the country. These dogmas (or the resistance towards them) helped shape Mandela’s entire life and nowhere can you get a better grip on what transpired during the preceding struggle than at the Apartheid Museum, situated south of Johannesburg. The Apartheid Museum opened in 2001 and is acknowledged throughout the world for its illustrious display of the rise and fall of Apartheid. Allow yourself at least a couple of hours to soak it all in, and get over an emotional yet interactive and informative visit.

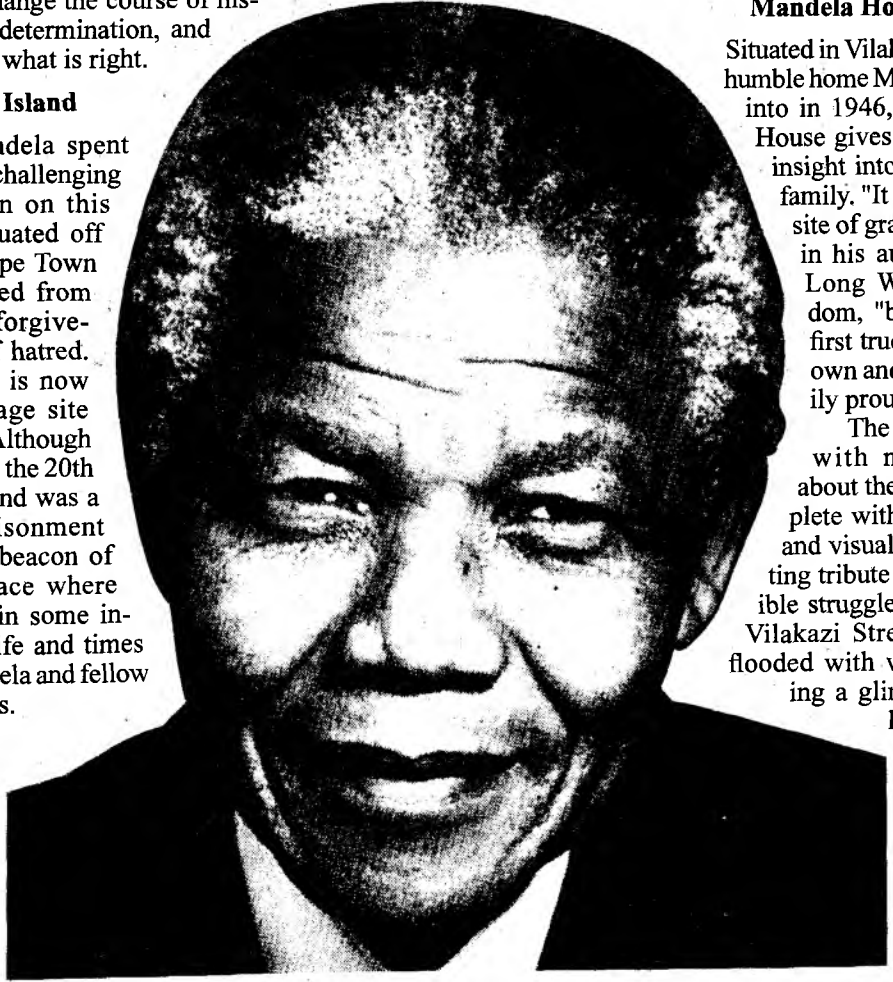
Capture Site

This site has enormous significance in the history of the freedom struggle because it was here that, after 17 months of evading the apartheid authorities, Nelson Mandela was arrested. On 5th August 1962, the police flagged down a car driven by Nelson Mandela in a chauffeur’s uniform while he was returning from a secret meeting with the African National Congress president - this incident would go on to shape the future of an entire country. To mark the historic spot is a sculpture comprising 50 steel rods, that align to create a magnificent portrait of Mandela.

Mandela House

Situated in Vilakazi Street, the humble home Mandela moved into in 1946, the Mandela House gives visitors great insight into the Mandela family. “It was the opposite of grand,” he wrote in his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom, “but it was my first true home of my own and I was mightily proud.”

The house is filled with memorabilia about the family, complete with photographs and visuals, and is a fitting tribute to the incredible struggle for freedom. Vilakazi Street is usually flooded with visitors wanting a glimpse into the home of the great Madiba - hence getting an early start to this place might be a good idea. (IANS)



"Time changes everything except something within us which is always surprised by change."

—Thomas Hardy

The Shillong Times

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Embarrassed TMC

WHILE admitting the grim fact that a stock of over Rs 20 crore is normal for a political bigwig in corrupt India, the seizure of such a huge stock from a close associate of West Bengal Industries and Commerce Minister Partha Chatterjee has come as a major embarrassment to the ruling Trinamool Congress and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. For a change, Banerjee was at a loss for words, signifying an admission of guilt. The TMC is hemming and hawing simply for the "sake of it." The cash stock has wider ramifications. That Partha Chatterjee previously handled the education ministry and the central Enforcement Directorate reached up to the apartment as part of a probe into complaints of a huge teacher appointment scam in government schools denoted a direct link. Chatterjee is also the general secretary of the Trinamool Congress.

To allege that the Enforcement Directorate is out to kill the Trinamool Congress -- the reigning political establishment -- through multiple means is only to state the obvious. Also, political parties cannot do without huge funds. The BJP itself circulates tonnes of money during elections across states. Yet, being the ruling party at the Centre, it can manage such transactions without being caught by the law-enforcing agencies. The Congress party did so when it was in power at the Centre. It has less funds now. Elections are, by now, an exercise in money-based manipulations. In the North-East, it had been so all along.

However, the issue here is of a more serious, rather inflammatory, nature. This is why the TMC is finding itself speechless. The source of this stock is directly linked to the teacher appointment scam as per records with the investigating agencies. In other words, this was the money that the educated youths in Bengal were forced to pay as bribes to get a school teacher's job or other jobs. Or, this was a collective of other ill-gotten funds. It is clear as sunlight that both small-time actor Arpita and Chatterjee have no personal income to keep so much money through normal means. The long and short of this surmise is that the minister or TMC is engaged in corruption. Note also the fact that chief minister Banerjee's nephew Abhishek and his wife are under ED lens in the multi-crore coal scam case; another bombshell. BJP says this now is the tip of the iceberg and a trailer for the unfolding of bigger shocks. However, targeting political rivals will alone not help achieve the wider goal of checking corruption in this country.

What does Meghalaya 2023 expect from us

By Toki Blah

The agitation by SSA teachers deprived of their salaries has just ended. Teachers' agitations are only one of the myriad other cases of already conveyed grievances or yet to be exposed cases of injustice in Meghalaya, waiting to be assuaged through agitations. We have had public grievances and resentment relating to purchase of sub-standard power meters, not -up- to- scratch power supply scenarios, collapsing domes and buildings, leaking bus sheds, today repaired, tomorrow -worse- than -before roads and bridges, most of the above undertaken by companies owned by a powerful business enterprise within the Government itself. If this is not fraudulent misconduct, misuse of power and open-handed larceny, then I have yet to understand the meaning of corruption. We now have taxi fares decided by cab drivers in open defiance of a weak-kneed transport Minister. Add to that a failing education system that brought us within 50 years from one of the best to one of the worst performing states, growing unemployment, fading hopes and growing frustration of every section of our society and all these are waiting to be addressed through agitations.

Now what does one call the above type of governance and public service that gives cause for such anger from the public? If one is to believe the partners of this MDA Govt, then it's just a passing phase that will be rectified once they are re-elected in 2023. On the other hand, totally independent and impartial observers call them symptoms of a failed state! So if we are already a Bimaru state then who is to blame and why? Is it the politicians and parties who promised us the moon and then delivered lumps of stinking dung instead? Or is it the illiterate ignorant electorate itself, who see elections as Government-sanctioned fun filled holidays instead of accepting them as exercises involving the serious business of governance where our own fate and destiny are decided? Let's try and analyse where and how Meghalaya has gone wrong.

Let's start from the beginning, a very good place to start. Let's start with people and political parties who promised us, 50 years ago, Paradise in the Clouds, if only they were elected to power. All of us complied, we got our Abode in the Clouds but together with our elected leaders, we forgot the vision and direction that Meghalaya was supposed to take. Then for half a century we carried on with unsubstantiated, unfounded and fairy tale promises of a golden tomorrow,

which simply never came. 50 years down the line we suddenly discovered ourselves neck deep in a septic tank; paradise is no longer being promised for 2023, for the focus of Meghalaya politics has dramatically changed. From the usual "Elect us so that we can serve you better," when the appeal or lie, it's the same whatever you call it, was still in vogue, it has now spectacularly degenerated in tone and tenor to "Please help us win this election because all the others are frauds". There, have you seen the change in approach? Before it was "elect us to serve you better" today it is "Help us form the next Government." The change is so blatant, so noticeable, so shameless. Elections nowadays are no longer the exercise to improve governance for the betterment of the people. Elections for our netas has now simply become a contest to prove the strength of one political party over the other. A game, where the

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stakes are open access for five years to the coffers of the Government. One can ask, what about the people? The answer- People? What bloody people? You mean the idiots that voted us to power? Their mouths have been silenced with money! They no longer enjoy any rights. We have purchased them all. Now leave us in peace to plunder and rape for the next five years. The History of Meghalaya politics written as it really is! There is no vision, no roadmap, no foresight, simply "grab Power to make Money".

Let us accept with all humility and honesty that we have never bothered what elections are all about. Let us admit that we thought they were all about electing good men/women who would forever be at our personal beck and call, paying for our picnics, paying hospital bills and children's school fees. Good men are those who freely distribute money while campaigning. We never linked elections with a person's administrative capability; his educational qualifications; his competence to frame laws and policies for the good and welfare of the state; the

Party's capacity to visualise the future of the state and its people. No Sir, all these things had been neglected in our obsession to get all the good persons to power. We convinced ourselves that Laws and Policies were for the birds. For us picnics, handouts, emotional and sentimental orations over our 'golden past and dangerous future for acceding to India' were what we wanted to listen to and hear. Well we received them in full measure for the last 50 years and look where they got us? Like the Americans would say "Up shit creek"! No voter or electorate has ever bothered to question or ask his candidates and their parties about manifestos or what they intend to do after they win.

Manifestos in Meghalaya politics are 11th hour afterthoughts, prepared to satisfy the Election Commission than listing the priorities of the state and the strategies of the party towards meeting them. Our politicians have never bothered as to the direction or goal they are to pursue once they have been elected. ("To sa ia peit pat. Pynjop shuwa, kita baroh kin sa wan") We'll see about that later. First make us win and all those things will happen once we are in power" and like sheep being led to the slaughter we said "Yes Sir, Three bags Full Sir".

Our politicians and their parties are not likely to change. They are out to con and befool us once again. Let's accept that. If we want a future for ourselves we will have to draw it up ourselves and make our politicians agree to our demands. That's how it should be done. Let's do it for 2023.

Let me now put my money where my mouth is and try to come up with a bullet point list of what we the people expect from our honourable politicians. We won't tax the poor Dears nor their brains. We'll prepare it for them. They only have to spell out how they intend to make it happen for us, not for them. That's quite fair I think, so here goes - The People's Minimum Programme of expectations from netas who will form the next Govern-

ment:

1. Creation of sustainable infrastructure should be the main focus of the next government. Infrastructure should include (a) a holistic, quality based education Policy and system geared towards the future (b) efficacious Health Care amenities for all (c) meaningful and livelihood centred agriculture policy for rural areas (d) durable and sturdy communication/transport facilities throughout the state (e) meaningful and implementable employment policy for our youth (f) sustainable environment for our future.

2. Identifying and developing the economic potential of Meghalaya is crucial. Coal, limestone mining are not the only options. They might line the pockets of politicians but have contributed zero to the welfare of the common man. Stop wasting precious time and resources on such issues. Instead we need a Roadmap on how to achieve overall sustainable economic development through proper management of other resources that we have. Such resources are (a) our salubrious climate, topography and inbuilt social hospitality for sustainable tourism (b) Educational tourism and Health tourism hold immense potential (c) our English speaking assets / human resources within an internet connected globalised world needs to be explored.

3. We need political consensus on the issue. Drop political animosity and work together instead for the interest of the people. Political parties must elaborate how they intend to make this consensus on economic development happen.

4. The state needs Lawmakers and not Lawbreakers. How the political parties plan to elevate electoral politics to this critical level of political, ethics and propriety is their business, but it's needed. The people are not interested in the beloved "winnability" factor of politics. We are more interested in people who can deliver, not suck and steal from us.

These are the few minimum crucial points the electorate must take up and ask from politicians and their parties when they come to seek our votes. Point is they must come prepared to serve for the next 5 years. They must come prepared and answer the issues of the people. They must come not as candidates seeking employment for the next five years but as leaders with the vision and wisdom to lead the state for the next five years. They are our representatives to make us proud, not clowns to make us the laughing stock of the whole world. That's the essence of democracy. We need it so let's demand it!

India's energy security Russian demand challenging

By Shivaji Sarkar

The unstable world energy market, volatile prices, uneven supplies may have repercussions on India's energy security. The first hit is India's natural gas company, GAIL's liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal, followed by the Russian demand for payment in UAE dirhams converted in dollar terms. The GAIL's troubles are traced to the German energy regulator taking over Gazprom Germania, which operates gas to storage and supplies to industries. The move followed Gazprom moving out of the subsidiary so that it could continue business without attracting sanctions. It has led to the default in delivery of five cargos as per a 20-year-deal agreed in 2012 for 2.5 million tonne LNG a year.

This has become a problem for GAIL, which meets 50 per cent of the nation's LNG needs. It is scouting for alternative fuel. But it faces the problem of Russia stopping supplies to Gazprom Marketing & Trading that owned the future gas contracts for supplying to Gazprom Germania and other subsidiaries: It used to supply from Yamal LNG facility. After Russia's stoppage of supplies, Gazprom GM&T initially managed supplies from its floating international portfolio. As prices rose to \$40 a unit and supplies to Europe became lucrative, it diverted supplies leaving GAIL in the lurch.

In fact, the prices are so high that Gazprom Germa-

nia is said to have margins after paying damages under the take-or-pay clause. The GAIL has option to take legal recourse but it is cumbersome, may take years and would not address the problems of the Indian consumers. The GAIL has long-term LNG supply contracts from the US to Australia, supplementing domestic gas supplies, though it may cost a bit more in the prevailing circumstances. Prior to the Russian war against Ukraine, the US LNG used to cost one-third of the price of gas available on the spot or current market.

GAIL has a 5.8 million tonne per annum LNG contract with the US suppliers. These are all linked to the US gas market, where the current rate is \$10 per million British thermal unit. In comparison, the spot price of LNG in Asia is between \$37 and \$40 per million British thermal unit.

The GAIL and the Petroleum Ministry are scouting the markets for ensuring the supply. The Asian LNG prices are rising with intense demand from Japan, Korea and India. Trading activity in the Asia LNG market rose as traders and end-users dipped back into the spot market to secure cargoes amid increasing global supply uncertainty as the Gazprom reduction of gas-flow into Europe spooked an already fractured market.

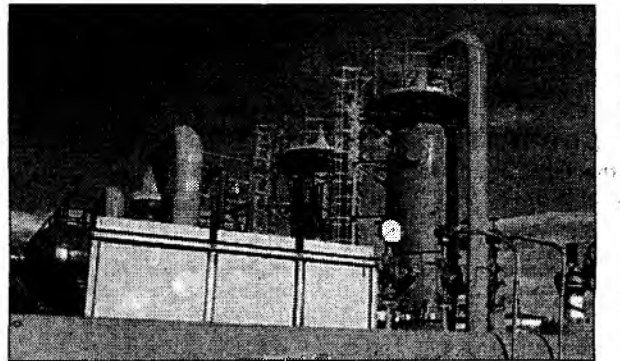
The world energy markets are seeing too many oddities. India's domestic exports though have seen curtailment, but of late with Russian crude being supplied to the private refiners it is being exported again. The cap through an export tax clamped on July 1 for ensuring at least 50 per cent of the private refiners' production has been removed. The duty, imposed following fuel shortage in a number of States, has been waived on petrol, and cut by a third on diesel and brought down the windfall tax by 27 per cent.

The tax has been reduced from Rs 6 to Rs 4 on diesel and done away on petrol. The duty has been waived refined products and shipped from SEZs. This will give a big boost to mainly two private refiners Nyara and Reliance. A major benefit will be to the latter as its refining is based in an SEZ in Jamnagar. The duty reduction is also said to benefit ONGC and Oil India and Vedanata.

Of late, according to tenders by Indian Oil and Bharat Petroleum, diesel imports are expected to rise to its highest since February 202 at over 48,000 barrels per day. India's increased imports are telling on Asian fuel supply as planned petroleum supplies from China have been decreasing.

India is the world's third-largest oil consumer at about 5 million barrels a day. It is growing at 3-4 per cent a year and the demand is likely to go up to 7 million barrels a day in a decade. The Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), India's oil import dependence was 85 per cent in 2019-20, marginally declined to 84.4 per cent in 2020-21 and again has risen to 85.6 per cent in 2021-22 and in April 2022 it rose to 86.6 per cent. This year's imports are to surge beyond the 212.2 million tonnes of crude last year.

The new exploration licences announcements are a good move but it may take a decade to start new production. The aim is to reduce imports to 50 per cent, too ambi-



tion, by 2030. Apart from long gestation the capital requirement is extremely high. India despite odds remains dependent on Russian oil. India's crude oil imports from Russia have jumped over 50 times since April and now make up for 10 per cent of all crude bought from overseas. Russian oil made up for just 0.2 per cent of all oil imported by India prior to the Ukraine war.

The country is facing some petrol and diesel shortage as fuel pumps have reportedly gone dry in several States including Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, some parts of eastern and north-eastern region.

There have been long queues around fuel pumps in several parts of the country in the past few days as people rush to fill the fuel tanks of their vehicles. Several petrol pumps in and around Srinagar and Rajasthan have also faced shortages. The US-led sanctions on the energy tie-up with Russia have been contested by a number of gas-starved NATO members, including Germany, Europe's largest economy. Even Japan, the world's third largest economy after the US and China, says it will maintain oil and gas projects in Russia citing the country's energy security concerns as the reason. Germany and Japan are the most important US strategic partners in Europe and Asia, respectively. Only a week ago, Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Koichi Hagiuda made an emphatic statement that his country "does not intend to withdraw" from oil and LNG development projects in Russia as they make a choice between energy security and tightening sanctions on Russia for the war in Ukraine. A neutral India has to trudge through a difficult phase to maintain supplies from Russia and the West as well as keep the domestic prices low. --INFA

Letters to the Editor

On the decay of narratives

Editor,
Is there such a thing as 'Journalism' in Meghalaya? Does 'Journalism' in Meghalaya display professionalism? How do we define 'news' in Meghalaya? We have seen a pattern or tendency towards sensationalisation, opinionisation, re-gurgitation, fear-mongering reporting, biases etc. To cite one example;
Covid 19 reporting has exposed the disappearance of professionalism as depicted by the behaviour of articulation, interpretation and pattern of reporting. Most reports have only generated fear, biases and downright lack of foresight, sensitivity, verification of data (definitions) and analysis. Other Public Health issues (including Mental Health), data analysis and verification flew out the door; it seems they are not taken into consideration. Media houses require objective analysis and presentation of facts. The fourth pillar has become the government spokesperson but not a judicious, conscientious public-

centred presentation of facts and views. Facts are crucial and precious. Without facts there is no news, it ceases to exist.
News articulation and interpretation is loaded with emotive language; only a few strands of logical reasoning and rationality can be gathered. News reporting focuses on appeal and sentiments. News reports are the fulcrum of collective societal views formation, that creates mass psychosis or bliss. The future is built on the perspectives formed or adhered to. Media house digital and analog section have a greater responsibility towards building a sane conscientious society. We are living in a developing State where the majority population is yet to have the capacity to comprehend the nuances of a complicated world and rampant rapacious politics. Therefore, the media plays a crucial role in taming the flames and the faculty of thought and reasoning.
Journalism in Meghalaya still leans towards commercialisation since it is the backbone of media existence. Is there a professional editorial board that can sieve through the friction between commerce and journalistic

ethics?
Have journalists of all hues and shades asked tough question that are hard to swallow? If there are such instances, are these tough indigestible questions targeted only towards a section of community, individual or authority? Where is investigative journalism that focuses on unraveling certain important issues. I think Investigative Journalism requires the mind, energy, grit and integrity of a researcher; do we have one within the umbrella of Meghalaya's journalism? Recently we have seen common people on their own effort through the RTI exposing various discrepancies and irregularities.
We have recently seen various survey reports on the state of education, economy etc. by certain institutes, NITI AAYOG, organizations. Our government has provided a different point of view and counter-argument towards these reports. In this context, the public need to know the existing state of affairs, and here lies the role of the media to verify and look into the facts and analysis.
There is no festivity in journalism and election is not

a festival. Media houses need to tame their tendencies, as much as they can. They need to provide objective reports on things and events. Elections are won and lost on how the media performs its duties and obligations.
Lastly, Is there a selective journalistic credo? Is there a hidden agenda of self-image construction in Meghalaya journalism? If there is such a thing, I think Journalism has abandoned one of its core Principle. In an ideal world, true journalism has no ideology or party politics and true bred hard-boiled journalists are the poorest.

Yours etc.,
Ubahunlang D Tmar,
Via email

Great moves by the new DGP against drugs

Editor,
Soon after the publication of my previous letter on the drug menace entitled "War on drugs a must" (ST 31st May '22) I got to know more shady secrets. It was because some anxious parents came forward to share with me other nuances of unspeakable facts concerning how drugs

percolate in the various strata of society. At first I wondered in disbelief! However, when I came across the news item the other day -- "State police chief seeks public help in fight against drugs" (ST 21st July, 2022) I heaved a sigh of relief. Here the DGP himself earnestly sought the support of the public. It is, in fact, the need of the hour. Without taking the support of the common people the war on drugs is not easy to wage. The present DGP has clearly sent out a very positive signal. To build public confidence the police chief has personally gone around to meet the Rangbah Shnong, Dorbar Shnong and ordinary people. Hope this unprecedented move by the DGP "percolates" into the entire police department across the state.

Well, if the enforcement machinery gives the "friendly" knock on the doors of the public; more importantly, those who are bearing the brunt, a lot can be achieved. Whether one agrees or not, normally people "fear" crossing the threshold of police stations. So, this must stop now! People-friendly policing is imperative. What the caress of love can do, the fear

of the scepter cannot!

Of course, the rampant drug abuse among the youth is a serious scourge of modern times. Meghalaya is adversely affected. The government must consider adopting every possible measure just as the Assam government has done in the last one year. It should not shy away from tweaking the acts and laws to give more teeth to the enforcement agencies. Developing a friendly "rapport" with the common people gives the police more leverage in probing and catching hold of culprits. Please note the culprits are in various avatars! It would also be advisable for the government to provide a toll-free number through which people can also share their inputs in anonymity. Let's all join hands in support of the police force in our collective fight against drug abuse/dealers. The state has achieved much in this direction soon after the new DGP has taken charge.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

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

"That man is prudent who neither hopes nor fears anything from the uncertain events of the future."

— Anatole France

The Shillong Times

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Crime and politics

CRIME and politics are synonymous. Data revealed by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) a watchdog on politics, political parties and elections, the number of candidates with criminal charges getting elected to Parliament has been on the rise since 2004. Same is the case with State legislatures. The number of Parliamentarians with pending criminal cases has risen from 24% in 2004 to 43% in 2019. To expect accountable and transparent governance from such political representatives is a utopian dream. Political parties don't care about the criminal antecedents of their candidates as long as the winnability factor is there. In fact, political parties rise in defence of the candidate and rubbish the criminal charges against them as political vendetta. In the recent raid into the farmhouse of BJP, Vice President and Tura MDC, Bernard Marak at Edenbari, Tura which he claims is being run as a homestay, Marak a former militant asserts that the entire exercise is political vendetta at the behest of Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma his political rival from the same constituency.

While a person is innocent until proven guilty what is curious is Bernard Marak's present fugitive status. He has refused to surrender before the law to allow it to take its course and decide on the criminality or otherwise of his actions. Marak is accused of turning his so-called guest house into a brothel which he vigorously denies. Meanwhile he has also alleged that some senior police officials are out to get him. That the BJP, a Party that claims a moral high ground as far as inducting people into the Party is concerned should even consider anointing a surrendered militant as the State Vice President is fraught. But there being no takers for the Party in Meghalaya, after the likes of TH Rangad a man of substance - passed away - the BJP has had to settle in for people who lack credibility.

Giving tickets to candidates with serious criminal charges has actually eroded the trust of large sections of citizens. But there are always those who can be lured to vote for such tainted people. This betrays the electoral mandate of the mindful voters and corrodes the fundamental tenets of the party system apart from destabilising elected governments and reducing the value of politics from a transformative tool for social change to serving individual interests, a political business cycle. The harsh reality in this country today is that Parliament has refused to legislate a law curbing the entry of criminals in politics. The Supreme Court too has refused to enter into this domain calling it a matter for the legislature to deal with. At the end of the day the role of voters in rejecting candidates with criminal antecedents becomes paramount.

Teachers' Agitation in Meghalaya

By Batskhem Myrboh

If Sohra and Mawsynram are known for rainfall, Meghalaya deserves to have the tagline, "Land of teachers' agitation". Teachers' agitation in Meghalaya is nearly as old as the state itself. Looking at the history of the agitations, except for the agitation of the teachers serving under the Autonomous District Council-managed schools before their taking over by the state government; it is the teachers serving under the grant-in-aid educational institutions that are always on the agitational path. Broadly, teachers' associations, irrespective of the nature of the grants, fight for timely release of salary, salary enhancement, payment of pay revision arrears, and pension. However, the government always tries to shift the responsibility to the employers which are private management.

Technically, the argument of the government is absolutely correct but it is philosophically flawed. Articles 38 and 39 of the Constitution of India direct the state to make India a welfare state. Specifically, Article 39 (1) (f) instructs the state to strive to establish a society in which children are extended with opportunities and facilities to have proper development. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution provides that the state by 1960 should provide free and compulsory education to all children below the age of 14 years. This directive became a Fundamental Right under Article 21 A in 2002 and eventually a legal right under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child besides stressing the need for the states to provide free and compulsory education at the primary level also lays an emphasis on the availability and accessibility of secondary education and even higher education as well. Similarly, quality education is part of the 2015 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal.

Despite the criticality of education for development and the central position and role of the state towards the sector, it is a historical fact that the state of Meghalaya has done too little to establish government educational institutions. Except in the primary sector where the state government transferred the ownership from the Autonomous District Council in 1985, about 90 percent of secondary and collegiate educational institutions are established and managed by private school management.

Till the early 1980s, liberal grants in aid were extended to institutions at different levels and there was only one grant in aid system, i.e., the deficit grant in aid which was inherited from the Government of Assam. In the late 1980s, the government came up with the Adhoc grant in aid system. Later, the government introduced the deficit pattern, the lump sum grant, and lately at the college level, the people's college grant in aid system. The teachers serving in these different grants in aid systems have different service conditions of which the deficit system is relatively better. All these aid systems are based on executive orders with no clear-cut guidelines on eligibility. This leaves room for the absence of rule of law but arbitrariness of extreme form exercised by those who are in the government. For example, in the recent inclusion of colleges under the people's college grant-in-aid system neither performance nor location was the basis for consideration. If performance was the criteria, Women's College, Shillong would have been the best candidate for selection, and if the location was the basis, Sngap Syiem College, Mawkyrwat should not by any logic be excluded. Nonetheless, both these colleges were left out. In fact, this arbitrariness in making and executing public decisions merits judicial scrutiny if the matter is brought before the honourable High Court in the form of public interest litigation.

It is not wrong on the government to depend on the private sector for education, and there is nothing wrong likewise to provide aid only to the extent that the state is capable. But it is wrong to leave the private sector unregulated. In spite of the fact that the Meghalaya School Education Act, 1981 empowered the state government to regulate the private educational institutions, the government follows a laissez-faire state policy. For a long time, there was no rule to regulate the opening of schools and even today the service conditions of teachers and other employees in private schools remain unregulated and the same applies to colleges as well. This leads to the spiraling downgrading of the teaching profession to the point that it is considered to be the last resort as it is a lowly paid profession.

As mentioned earlier, the government's defense is always that teachers in aided

institutions are not government employees and therefore, it is the management's duty to look after them. Instead of making such meaningless and inconsequential statement, it is advisable and desirable on the part of the policymakers and administrators to come up with a law. However, I am afraid that the Government knows too well that if such a law is in place, most of the educational institutions at different levels would face the ultimate closure due to their fragile financial positions. The market model of education beyond a limit simply does not work. What is the percentage of the state population that has the capacity to pay a high amount of fees to bear the teachers' salaries and pensions? In the event of the closure of such educational institutions especially in the rural areas, 'is it not the duty of the state government to take them over or take some other measures not to deprive the right of children to education?' At present, the state government provides education, albeit of low quality, by defrauding the teaching community. It is logical to mention that teachers are intentionally deprived of any legal right while executing their duties.

It is not out of context to point out that the state government has come up with measures incentivizing certain public services. The Members of the State Legislative Assembly even after serving for a brief duration are extended pension besides enjoying all the perks and privileges. Similarly, in recognition of the services they provide to the people of the state, land is made available to the members of the bureaucracy at a throwaway price and recently, the state government took a decision to even reimburse the income tax paid by them. If the state government has financial resources for these, why is it expressing the financial limitation when it comes to providing adequate and respectable service conditions for the teachers in aided educational institutions? Again, why is the state government lacking in thinking and sensibility to entitle the teachers in unaided private educational institutions with a legal right for acceptable service conditions? It should be noted that the Kothari Commission (1964), National Education Policies 1968 and 1986 spoke about the importance of good service conditions for teachers. The 1968 Policy stated,

"Of all the factors which determine the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the teacher is undoubtedly the most important. It is on his[her] personal qualities and character, his[her] educational qualifications and professional competence that the success of all educational endeavours must entirely depend. Teachers must, therefore, be accorded an honored place in society. Their emoluments and other service conditions should be adequate and satisfactory having regard to their qualifications and responsibilities."

During the agitations, the political executive is always the target of condemnation and should be rightly so but the role of the faceless bureaucracy is often ignored and forgotten. The fact remains that the bureaucracy, especially, when weak political executive occupy the office, plays a significant role not only in policy implementation but also in policy making. The fact that the state education department runs almost entirely on executive orders exhibits the significant role of the bureaucracy. In this chaotic educational scenario where governance deficit is evident, the bureaucracy has its own responsibility to share. The frequent agitation by teachers, the mind-boggling categorizations of teachers, and the unplanned extension of grants in aid to educational institutions reveal the inadequacy of rationalization and unimaginable advice given to the ministers. In this context, I would like to extend my unsolicited advice to the members of the bureaucracy to kindly guide the ministers to avoid the employment of the "private employee" and "management's responsibility" narrative as it is unappealing and jaded. Rather, it is imperative on their part to help the ministers come up with innovative means to bring solutions.

In conclusion, the formation of the commission/committee to study the serious long pending issues of teachers may simply lead to wastage of time and valuable state's resources, unless the government has a strong political will with clarity of thought and purpose, responsibility, and accountability backed up by efficient bureaucracy.

(The author is former General Secretary of the Meghalaya College Teachers' Association. Email- bmyrboh07@gmail.com)

Importance of electing educated legislators in 2023

By Louis Pyngrope,

The title of this write up is self-explanatory. The stress is on electing educated MLAs which is the need of the hour. Our voters need to be reminded again about this. Every voter of the State needs to focus on electing educated and committed MLAs for the next government. It is very difficult to assess who amongst the existing MLAs are to be re-elected. In my assessment, based on their performance, none of the 60 MLAs deserve to be re-elected. To be fair, let us elect educated new faces so that we can get the fittest people running the government according to the expectations of the masses. If we fail to elect the right people in 2023 it would be suicidal for us because we would then be the worst-governed State in the history of Indian democracy.

It is very important for us to remember that for the past 50+ years none of the governments in our states have ever set education and health as top priority in the list of governance priorities. As a result, today we are lagging behind in both sectors in comparison with other states of India. In fact, Meghalaya is ranked at the bottom of the list of well performing states in both these sectors. I am very sorry to say that this is the same ideology of the underdeveloped countries all over the world. Now it is time for us to awaken and to free ourselves from such dangers. Once we can come out of this mindset other spheres of activities will be on the right track and a brighter future awaits us. Hence the candidates and the political parties to be elected are to be weighed on these criteria. The elected political party should have education and health as priorities in their election manifestos and the candidates should possess good educational qualification with good statesmanship quality at the same time.

This General Assembly election is an opportunity for us to elect good representatives to the Legislative Assembly. Failure to do so will lead to all of us the electors being responsible in ruining our state without learning how to transform the mistakes committed in the past 50+ years which had brought our state to this existing unacceptable condition. We do not have an education policy, no health policy, no mining policy, sports, environment, energy generation and distribution policies, etc., till date. So how can we expect our state to perform better in all the fields mentioned above?

With the present Government, we see many flaws, the most prominent ones are the rise in unemployment to the extreme limit so much so we don't see any hope of coming back to a situation we experienced in 2018 just before the formation of this Government. We cannot remain silent spectators at the actions of the present coalition Government. I believe we have learned enough that we will never commit the same mistake to create a situation compelling the elected members to elect a similar type of government in 2023.

Again, with the calibre of the MLAs elected we understand how we were cheated by our government in arriving at the so-called solution to our boundary problems with Assam which was so much against the wishes of the affected people living in the border areas. Our Government, instead of arriving at a correct decision by taking on board the opinion of the people living in the disputed border areas, instead took their own decision on the long pending border dispute between Meghalaya and Assam which led to the present state of dissatisfaction of the affected people in

the affected border areas. Once again, as a reminder to all of us, any wrongful decision made by us in electing MLAs to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in 2023 will make us regret it forever as this government has failed to bring any transformation that could have benefited our society. One more very simple law that could have been enacted by our government is the blanket ban on plastic items as they have caused so much pollution to our earth and water bodies. The government is afraid to take action as the meat sellers were complaining about the absence of substitutes to plastic bags for carrying the meat bought from the sellers. The government needs to be blunt and take direct action to ban plastics without any hesitation as we are not supposed to have such a short memory to forget about the methods used in the recent past just before the acceptance of plastic bags, to carry the meat bought from the market.

This Government has failed totally to bring justice to the bereaved family of Late Cherisherfield Thangkiew by delaying in making the official report available to the bereaved family. It is only in this government that teachers' organisations have agitated by spending days and nights at the parking lot near Additional Secretariat with the expectation of getting a solution to their long pending demands in connection with their salaries. In the eyes of the law, it is more justified for these SSA teachers to fight for the payment of their salaries as they have been appointed to teach the young children at the elementary level which is the fundamental right of every Indian child. This failure to pay salaries happens because there is no education policy which could put a limit to the number of categories of teachers right from the elementary level to the higher and technical level. There are innumerable mistakes committed by this MDA Government with the above-mentioned failures being just a few.

If we are anxious about bringing change in our state, it is high time for us to set up think tanks and involve ourselves en-mass in canvassing for this coming election. It is the only method to get rid of the existing useless politicians and make them learn their lessons taught to them by voters. They should understand that such mistakes are not to be repeated whenever they return to politics in the near future.

This is the right time to get young and fit politicians to save the image of our state. Our new politicians will hopefully also be the rulers and statesmen we can rely on to bring back the fame and prestige we have experienced in the past.

We understand the criminalisation of politics today. Money plays a crucial role in politics where votes can be purchased from the voters. We need to do away with corruption by convincing our people not to accept money for election of legislators or to succumb to the feeling that once money is accepted, it is mandatory that these be translated to votes. Let us unanimously commit to elect real legislators so that we can have the governance we deserve. We have to make sure that there is no room for mistakes in electing good legislators with one single political party, having a clear mandate on education and health reforms and policies leading to their developments in our state. That political party must have the above in its manifesto to obtain absolute majority and form the next government.

(The writer is Retired Associate Professor, Lady Keane College)

Letters to the Editor

Whither All Saints Church Property!

Editor,

The plot on which "The All Saints Cathedral and the Bishop's Kutl" stand now are declared as 'commercial'. How could this happen? Has the congregation been taken into confidence before declaring property hitherto being used for church and educational purposes into a "commercial" area? To what extent are the clergy pious? It is said with good reason that belief and faith have no civic rights in the domain of science. It is only when a belief or a conviction voluntarily condescends to the modesty of scientific tests, arguments and experiments that its access to the realm of knowledge can be accorded. Even then it must be regularly supervised to see under what conditions the assumptions hold true. In other words, there is always the element of distrust in the things that we accord to faith and belief. Most people believe that a belief has crossed over to the threshold of an absolute truth when you can bet your bottom dollar that its tenets will hold firm

- even against the power of money. Yes, one's faith and belief must weigh heavier than one's love of money if one is to live up to the doctrines of any religion. Even Bishops and other clergymen would agree that in the face of money their faith and belief trembles. Is the piety that we believe, is the fortitude of the clergy, all bunkum?

Let us take an example to determine the truth. In the instant case let us look at the land holding on which the All Saints Cathedral in IGP stands! The Cathedral falls under land holding 55 and the adjacent Bishops "Kuti" and Parsonage fall under land holding 56 of the Revenue Department in the Government revenue records. For the past many years it was officially recognized as an "Institutional and Religious holding". And so the congregation decided on a school and a church on the plot. Belief and faith in the maintenance of this plot for religious and educational purposes was never tested against the power of commercial purposes. And rightly so, because religious purposes and commercial purposes are so incompatible. The winner in such a test was a foregone conclusion. The piety of the Bish-

ops and the clergy that held the administration of the plot and the structures thereon was undoubted till 2022. Their belief and faith was so imperative and absolute that no other option was entertained. There was a value in the belief they held... more valuable than silver or gold. What belief was this that they held onto which the current Bishop Michael Herenz and Presbyter Himangshu Christian have now discarded? They believed that when commerce enters into the spiritual realm everyone must be involved in decision making.

There is much that can be learned from the manner in which the previous Bishops and clergy functioned. They instituted a Charitable Trust, namely the NEIDTA (North East India Diocesan Trust Association), to help in managing the properties of the church (the congregation). Only modest revenue for maintenance costs would be collected from any revenue generating activity since a Trust is essentially non-commercial in nature. Moral checks would always be applied before any project was implemented. Legal pundits of morality will all concur that the test of any moral action by a Trust

consists in the abnegation of self-interest by its office bearers, especially when it is religion based. The essential ingredient is the consensus among the congregation. However, in the instant case this was lacking. Everything was done surreptitiously by the Bishop as the Chairman of NEIDTA, the clergy and some others as members, intentionally keeping the Secretary of the Church Committee in the dark. The imperative was dispensed with and doubtful interests surfaced. The failure to seek the approval of the congregation has resulted in a backlash with the congregation demanding the immediate removal and replacement of the Bishop.

NEIDTA had a duty to necessarily be honest and truthful and include everyone beforehand, and to clarify and affirm that everything was being done for the good of the congregation. Instead, it acted like some uncivilized savage, devoid of truth - and no one likes to be deceived. The congregation's acceptance and approval of any intended action must necessarily precede any re-nomenclature of the land because the land belongs to the congregation. NEIDTA has deceived the

congregation and deceived itself in the process. The action of NEIDTA is prima facie beyond its legal power or authority.

Let it be noted that no one wants to be deceived because deception is injurious and dangerous - even fatal. Sadly, the congregation was kept in the dark and therefore there is reason enough to suspect a nefarious dealing in the entire affair. In such a monumental alteration of the land holding the congregation should have been told the truth at every stage of the alteration. Instead, everything was done in one foul sweep behind the closed "Parsonage Doors" of "Christian Morality." Alas! the congregation has realized only too late that at the altar of "the fortune hunters" they have sacrificed and slaughtered one truth after another. Consequently, the collective morality is at stake.

The intention to convert the land holding to 'commercial' (in addition to religious and Institutional) might perhaps, to express it mildly; be a piece of enthusiastic craziness. It might be something worse: namely a destructive principle - a desire on the clergy to get wealthy and rich using unholy means. The personality

of the clergymen, from top to bottom, has been sullied. There is a horrendous defect everywhere in this subtle and secretive alteration of the holding of plot 55 and 56. Morality is the problem that the congregation is faced with. It makes the most material difference to the congregation when a "man of the flock" stands personally related to his desire for wealth and riches over his desire to serve morality. Nothing good comes when deceivers hold wealth and riches for the simple reason that wealth and riches will diminish fast when held by toads and weaklings. It is hard to come across a pious and a-humble clergyman these days.

In the coming years a multi-storeyed Shopping Plaza and a Five Star Hotel may adorn the IGP landscape. The Cathedral will be hidden in the background if nothing is done here and now.

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

"Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity."

-- Hippocrates

The Shillong Times

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Murmu and symbolism

AS India showcased before the world its first tribal in the august office of President, there has to be life beyond symbolism and showmanship. Droupadi Murmu's growth from the precincts of a poor family in Odisha's tribal region in stages starting from a ward councillor to a teacher to minister, governor and President was well-shaped. She has shown the grace and capacity to hold high offices with relative ease, which is also a tribute to the strengths of Indian women. There's little doubt that just as Ramnath Kovind presided over the destiny of the nation for five years, Murmu will acquit herself well. That also denotes the strengths of India's vaunted Constitution shaped by the British-educated barrister-turned first law minister of Independent India, BR Ambedkar, who eventually became the icon of the Dalits – the most backward in the Indian social system.

Fact of the matter is that an Ambedkar initiating India's legal process from the high office he held in the initial years of Independence 75 years ago and Kovind's ascension to the throne in recent years in themselves helped very little in furthering the collective causes of the most-backward segments of the society, including the hills-people that Murmu initially represented. Odisha's Santhal tribals, of which Murmu is a part, have a rich legacy of art, literature and culture of their own yet remain hugely marginalized as is the case with tribals across India. Sections of the marginalized hills people got educated in the North-East thanks largely to the efforts of Christian missionaries. While the RSS stepped in to check "conversions" in this region for fear that it posed a threat to Hinduism, Christianity's empowerment of the ordinary folks must be written in letters of gold. A similar attempt made in Odisha, in Murmu's own backyard, ended up in a huge controversy over "conversions" by Christian priests and was stonewalled a couple of decades ago. In fact, there are those who see the elevations given to Kovind and Murmu as another way how India's elite fools the poor; giving the poor something and yet nothing.

The good side of installing a Murmu in the high office is well-appreciated. But, real issues need to be addressed. Even in most tribal areas in the mainland, the government establishments are manned invariably by non-tribals or, more clearly, the elite. It does not require high voltage intelligence to run a village office. Common sense will do. Empowerment of the poor should start from the bottom as well. What is required first and foremost is political will, which is woefully lacking here.

Are we holy only inside churches?

By Albert Thyrniang

On July 19 last, this writer travelled from Jagiroad in Assam to Orlong Hada in Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya. The two states in this stretch are divided by the river Umsiang. The distance between Tipatoli junction to the river is 4 kms. After crossing the bridge over the river, we arrive in the Meghalaya side of the border. The marked difference is that the 4 km road on the Assam side is a smooth drive. But once you cross over to Meghalaya you are in for a "rock 'n' roll" ride. The 7 km distance to Orlong Hada takes nearly an hour instead of 15 minutes. With managing the jerks I somehow rolled my camera and posted the videos on YouTube and Facebook.

The border MOU between Meghalaya and Assam has been dogged in controversy. Assam has the upper hand because in disputed areas, it is providing better roads, schools, health care and other facilities. In Umlaper, near Mawlasnai, Assam has built a complex consisting of outdoor and indoor stadia and a conference hall worth Rs 10 crore. Will Meghalaya invest this amount in a disputed zone? Meghalaya banks only on ethnic loyalties. The Garos, Khasis and Pnars in the border prefer Meghalaya. But how long will ethnicity hold out? The Khasis and Pnars who have government jobs in the border don't want to shift to Meghalaya. Forget about government jobs. If Assam provides better road connections, marketing agricultural facilities, health care and education and assures their rights and a peaceful existence why should the Khasis, Pnars and Garos pledge allegiance to Meghalaya where everything is lacking. Why should ethnicity supersede livelihoods?

Back to the road! The 80 km road passes lead to Mawhati, Umsohait and Umsing. It is a nightmare to travel on. Instead of a normal one hour it takes almost 6 hours. The road helped Dasakhiatbha Lamare to win the 2018 election. The super-rich NPP candidate took advantage of poor roads and under-development in the constituency and pledged to transform the border constituency with good roads and convert the Umsing-Jagiroad into a two-laned one. Now the road has further deteriorated. Unable to keep this and other promises the business tycoon's son has now deserted the neglected Mawhati in favour of a less

challenging Nongkrem. In the next election the contest in Mawhati will see a PHD holder, a doctor and some veterans. In my interaction with people at Umsiang Maiong I gathered that candidates were already visiting the villages. They are making the same promises. The residents are also sure that the next MLA will be no different.

My one week sojourn in Orlong Hada was at the Franciscan Eco-Spirituality centre. The impressive centre is lush with greenery. A lot of restoration work has been done there. The trees and vegetation that were cleared for 'Jhum' cultivation have been replaced by fruit and cash vegetation.

Many, including religious leaders, use this facility. Attendees murmur at the horrible road on the Meghalaya side of the border. But it ends right there. My Facebook account and YouTube channel invited just 350 odd views. But hopefully it has caught the attention of someone who matters. This piece could probably double the reach. Church men and women too spend a lot of time on social media but few use them to influence and create awareness, positively.

The indifferent attitude stems from the chasm between religion and reality. Religion is distanced from the condition of ordinary people. Religious leaders do not seem to be touched by the plight of the poor. For almost two months this scribe has been invisible in these columns. I thought it was better to do something more pressing than take a pen and paper. So it was decided to direct all attention to rendering relief to people ravaged by two successive floods in a month.

In my experience this time and earlier in 2014, in general, Church institutions, including leaders are apathetic to the sufferings of victims of natural disasters. There was hardly any inquiry about the calamities. There was no expression of concern. Except for a handful there was no solidarity. Spirituality is not moved by the reality. Prayers are not linked to life. Church going does not lead to sympathy and empathy for the distressed; devotion does not evoke sacrifice and generosity. They remain within the four walls of the Church.

Till the year 2000 the emphasis of the (Catholic) Church was evangelization – the proclamation of the

Gospel or the Good News or the preaching of Christ. At the turn of the millennium the focus is on holiness for all Christians, including the laity in their respective work places. Holiness does not merely mean reciting prayers. It is not just going to church. It is not even only giving charity. It is living the Christian or/and human values wherever one is. It is a life of witness in the work place – in church, in schools, in hospitals, in offices, in factories, in business, in politics, etc. When Christians are urged to lead a life of holiness it means they do not compromise on certain values.

Now, do Christians live in accordance with Christian or human values in their everyday settings? Here in Meghalaya corruption is the talk of the town. Tainted money is derived from illegal coal mining and transportation. MeECL is riddled with scams. But who is manning the state? Who are the ministers? Are they not Christians? Who are the bureaucrats? Who are the officers in MeECL? Who are the police personnel who supposedly extort money from coal trucks? Who is running the coal business? Who owns the weigh bridges? Who offers and takes bribes? The vast majority do! Are they not Christians? In churches, is honesty not taught? Is not earning a living by rightful means not schooled? Then, why the rampant corruption? That is why religion is divorced from real life. Has the Church failed the society? Or have individual Christians failed the Church and the society? Taking and offering bribes seems okay because they don't happen inside the church.

Something is drastically wrong with education. When the state is dubiously ranked last in the sector you know it is a serious problem. When pay is released only after a continued protest you know something is not right. When increment of salary is effected only after a similar 'dharna' you know there is no salary policy. The arrangement with FASTOM is temporary. After a year or two the teachers will return to the streets in front of the Additional Secretariat. When there are so many categories of teachers with unequal pay you know you have challenges.

Why are we at the bottom? A vast majority of our schools are Christian schools. Even in government, deficit, AD-

HOC, SSA schools the heads and assistant teachers are largely Christians. Are they fully committed to their profession? Are they regular and punctual? Are there not absentees from duty? Are there not teachers who sub-contract their jobs? Are they primarily concerned with pay? Do not many teachers pay more attention to tuition than teaching in the classroom? Why the poor results in schools even though teachers get fat salaries? Neglect of duties is unchristian. Besides poor performance, Christian education has failed to produce honest leaders and citizens.

A person named John in New Zealand quit his full time ministry because he realised that worship, the music, the singing, the dancing, the clapping and the frenzy is only a Sunday affair. They make no impact on the preachers and the followers alike. The 'goodness' learned and experienced in Church did not carry forward to their lives the rest of the week. So he left preaching and joined a company to see whether he can be a good Christian daily in his office. This example is for all human beings. A good life is lived outside the Church, mosque and temple. If we frequent the sacred places and do the contrary of what they represent, we live a life of duplicity and hypocrisy. Worship is of no use.

We long for a corruption-free government. We desire to see true lawmakers rather than businessmen and contractors in the Legislative Assembly. While MLAs own Lamborghinis, ordinary folks move tediously in dilapidated roads. We want to change the trend. It would be wonderful to see individuals like social activist, Angela Rangad and former pastor Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh in the Assembly. It would be refreshing if the new faces of Voice of the People (VPP) and other parties who seemingly mean business, win. But the task is cut out. The 2023 elections too will be a spectacle. The tamasha has already started. Crowds sing and dance along catchy election songs of parties and candidates. On the voting day, party workers will pass on the cash to the voters. We see nothing wrong in it. The church is far away. It is not a Sunday.

Someone opined that if Jesus were to read today's newspapers, he would certainly be moved by the contents and would be furious at the indifference of those who claim to be his followers.

Food for thought!

Meghalaya tourism must live up to the 'promise'

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The Travel and Tourism Fair (TTF) is a trade exhibition providing a platform to state government tourism departments/agencies to showcase and promote their respective destinations. Although prospective tourists can find a lot of information about destinations in India (and foreign countries in the middle-east, etc), it is primarily a business-to-business (B2B) medium for tourism service providers such as travel agencies, tour and transport operators, hoteliers and accommodation managers, airlines, destination management organizations, etc to come together and do extensive networking. It also provides a means to evaluate where Meghalaya stands as compared to other destinations. The Hyderabad TTF, 2022 is significant for Meghalaya as it was awarded 'Most Promising New Destination' which is indeed a matter of great pride. But, this accolade does come with a few concerns. These are important as it would determine whether Meghalaya tourism would be able to live up to the 'promise'.

The devil is in the details. A promise is a futuristic commitment to deliver something or to do something. It is a contract entered in good faith between Meghalaya tourism and the prospective tourists. As joyous the occasion and a reason to celebrate, the award also revives concerns which act as bottlenecks to tourism progress. To cut a long story short, the award highlights two things. First, it concerns the tourist whereby they would expect an enriching tourism experience beyond the sights and sounds and learning from the destination. Now, it is not only about the attraction such as the seven sisters' falls at Sohra or the adventure activities at Shnongpdeng. It is about the whole experience encompassing transportation, accommodation, food and beverages, professionalism, service quality, etc. It is a 24x7 thing. The heightened expectation of experiences would be evaluated not only on the basis of the beauty of the place; rather, the whole range of services that defines the travel in totality. Second, it concerns the development strategies whereby the tourism stakeholders' (from the government to the service providers, etc) will have to synergise for ensuring an enriching experience to the tourist. The issue that needs addressing now is what blueprints and strategies are needed to deliver on the promise and remain competitive? At the top of the pecking order are micro problem areas like training of human resources and a focus on cleanliness and hygiene.

Learn and guard against Today, the good thing about Meghalaya tourism is that all stakeholders agree that there is a need to move away from mass tourism towards other alternative forms. The nature-based tourism resources are unfit for mass tourism. A focus on alternatives like ecotourism (where tourists travel in small groups) is suitable. It will ensure sustainability of the destination and livelihoods of the stakeholders. However, this is easier said than done. Observations have shown that when the lure of money sets in then thoughts of sustainability and responsible tourism goes out the window. For example, when Mawlynnong entered the tourism map in 2004-05 there was a focus on best practices, responsible tourism with a plan to moderate the number of tourists visiting per day. This noble thought lasted only for a while. With the passage of time, the uneasy commercialization of tourism impacted upon privacy, peace, aesthetics, host behaviour, waste disposal, etc. Although Mawlynnong is fit for ecotourism, it has become an unpleasant case of mass tourism. There is need to learn from this. In relation to guarding against, take the case of Nongmahir in Ri Bhoi. It is a stunning

attraction and not that popular till date. This presents an opportunity to practice ecotourism from its early days. In a recent talk with the boatman at Nongmahir, it was encouraging to learn of their focus on ecotourism and sustainability. Hopefully, the resolve will remain as against the temptations of quick monetary gains.

A tourism development framework

A crucial element that is missing from Meghalaya is a tourism framework. The advantage of having a framework is that it defines the specifics which need focus without grappling with everything. One of the reasons for the absence of a framework is because tourism in Meghalaya is considered only a business tool. Anyone can start a tourism business. It is not considered as a development tool. There are no efforts to answer the question, "what tourism can do for development in the long-term". What are the tangibles we would like to see develop in our communities? Tangibles like construction of schools and toilets, better health facilities, better village roads and pathways, better lighting, preservation and reclamation of forest, etc. There is a failure with regards to looking into the tourism development indices. So, what is the frame with which the progress of tourism would be mapped? This depends on the strengths of the tourism resources and the opportunities available. The strength of Meghalaya lies in the community and natural beauty. As a result, the development framework would entail capacity building of the communities and emphasis on ecotourism. Today, many communities are engaged in rural/village tourism without much knowledge and hand-holding. The services are not up to the mark and tilting towards mass tourism. This is a concern as studies have shown that once mass tourism enters a destination, it is difficult to reverse the trend.

A case for regulation

Tourism regulation is a sticking point. There are stakeholders that advocate for tourism to be unregulated. The thought process is to let tourism develop as it is. They point that tourism and its activities have been growing without regulation. But, the ground reality is that tourism is unorganized with no stakeholder database, growth has not benefited the communities and the impact on the environment is massive. There is no system of licensing to vouch for the credentials and skills of the service providers. Tourism in Meghalaya is a merry-go-round wherein anyone can enter and exit as per their wish. It has been unregulated for the last 33 years and its sorry outcomes are visible. It would be fair to say that it is time to try out at least some regulation for the next 5 years. A starting point can be a regulation on waste management, environment friendly establishment of tourism properties and quota-based entry of tourist into sensitive natural resources like caves. The outcomes of this can then be compared with the data of the previous years. It will not be surprising to find that regulation helps. It is time for the government of Meghalaya to learn from European Union countries and realize the benefits of regulation. In addition, regulation will help in streamlining tourism with other developmental sectors like agriculture, horticulture, rural development, forest conservation, culture, trade and crafts, etc. In the end, Meghalaya has missed the opportunity for proper tourism policy and planning since the 1990s. Today, the opportunity still exists. It is time to get the act right. After all, a promise is easy to make, but living up to it is a different ball game altogether!

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

Letters to the Editor

Man lives not by bread alone; public interests matter

Editor,
One went through the contents of the ST, Letter to the Editor (ST July 26, 2022), titled "Whither all Saints Church Property," with a sad sense of foreboding and concern. Let me clarify from the start that I am not a member of the above church. I belong to a different Christian denomination have no business poking my nose in the internal affairs of the All Saints Church, Shillong. What they do or decide among themselves is their own in-house matter and it should remain so.

On the other hand the prime property under discussions happens to be in the heart of this city, Shillong an urban entity that we live and breathe in. We therefore have a right to be concerned what happens to this "unplanned piece of paradise under heaven" and also the right to express our concerns if and when they so arise. Now that piece of prime property under the custody of the Anglicans and under

discussion here is Revenue land but no doubt the Church management must have obtained permission from the Revenue authorities to alter the category under which it is being occupied. The point I wish to drive home is different. Is permission from the revenue authorities the only permission required? Is that enough? Is it the only requirement needed to alter, change, transform and redo the face and beauty of the place? The urban space we are talking about also happens to be where one of the most beautiful, iconic, impressive, historic church building in India is located. On it also stands one of the oldest most iconic coniferous tree to be found in the whole of Meghalaya. The tree has become synonymous with Shillong Christmas celebrations. Who in their right minds would want to cut it down? So much so that time and again the whole setup has been referred to as a Heritage building and the place where it stands, as a heritage site. I have no qualms in claiming that the All Saints Church building and its frontage is one of the most beautiful facets that give meaning to the claim of Shillong being the Queen of Hill stations.

So what do the above entail? It simply means that

the location of All Saints Cathedral of Shillong, building together with the frontage where the church is located, may legally belong to the church and is church property, but its emotional, sentimental and aesthetic beauty belongs to the hearts of all Shillongites. There has been too many instances where an unfeeling and insensitive Church management has heartlessly trampled upon the interests and welfare of the people. I turn to my own Presbyterian church. I see the damage it has done to Student's Field and Madan Mission in Mission Compound. Ugly concrete buildings have been setup on playfields where generations had played and recreated. At what cost to society? The social cost-benefits analysis of such acts, if ever conducted, would prove tremendously disastrous. It has deprived youth of a place to spend their energy in. We now see youth of those areas standing and loitering in street corners, easy prey to all sorts of temptations. Addiction to drinks and drugs are only some of the social evils such unthinking actions have produced. And then we have the gall to preach and demand that they repent! Do we know what we are saying? Do we realize the hypocrisy it exhibits? I'll

be soundly criticized for this write-up. I don't care because it happens to be the truth. Also I have seen in too many places in India where church property has been exploited, divided and turned into monstrous commercial structures for the benefit of a few. We should not allow such practices to happen here in Shillong. Let's keep our sanity while discarding our greed.

Luckily there are institutions and authorities set in place to protect these heritage sites and public sensitivities. These are offices whose permission and acquiescence is required before any physical intervention is allowed that has the potential to alter the site in question. First is MUDA and its by laws. Very sensitive to issues that affect environment and public interests! Then there is the Heritage Committee set up under the Chief Secretary to identify and protect such heritage sites. Its views is called upon here. There is the Department of Tourism that is very possessive of places and sites that add beauty and attraction to the tourist potential of the state. Then there is INTACH (Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage) a Central watchdog over such sites. Last but not least are the citizens of Shillong

who are most zealous over the beauty of their city, its historical charm and its environment.

My organization ICARE had successfully challenged in the court the intention of the then Govt to set up the Assembly building in another heritage place called Tara Ghar. We will again challenge any future intention of the Govt to change the status of the IGP skyline with a monstrosity of a proposed shopping mall. We will definitely react to any proposal to change the beautiful and historic frontage and scenic beauty of IGP by whosoever. Last but not least I hope that better sense, better counsel and better aesthetic tastes prevail in the interest of all concerned.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Caught between heaven and high hopes!

Editor,
The article on the plots on which the All Saints Cathedral stands becoming a commercial plot is a seismic upheaval. Being a member of this congregation, I hope

the other members of the congregation stands united no matter what the outcome. A consensus must be arrived at. The writer claims that the recommendation to convert it into a commercial plot was done behind closed doors. Really? Well, now that the closed doors are opened let the congregation take a stand. Let each and every member of the congregation use their inherent free will and stand by it - the free will to choose whether to have a shopping mall or to maintain a Cathedral. It is impossible to think that both can be accommodated in the same place. The incongruity is stark. These are two empirical opposites. The dissolution of a tradition is a difficult reality to bear with when it is taking place before our eyes. NEIDTA has embraced a more physical kind of thinking which does not rely on a transcendent soul or an afterlife but on living in the here and now. The congregation is caught between heaven and high hopes!

Yours etc.,
Gregory F Shullai,
Via email

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"I am a slow walker, but I never walk back."

— Abraham Lincoln

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UDP-NPP an uneasy relationship

THE National Peoples' Party (NPP) and United Democratic Party (UDP) have been coalition partners in the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government for over four years now but as the time for the 2023 election approaches the two parties are each making public claims that they would fare much better and the hint is that each will not need the other to form the next government. This souring of relationship is evident from the manner in which the striking SSA teachers withdrew their agitational programme after the Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong called the leaders of the SSA teachers for a talk after the Education Minister had given them an ultimatum to call off the strike or face consequences. This face-off between the Education Minister, a UDP MLA and the striking teachers could have taken a very serious turn. It took the statesmanship of Tynsong to placate them and send them back to their classes. If this was a game of cards, then the first round has gone to Tynsong of the NPP. But this has surely not gone well with the UDP.

The recent induction of former Congress MLA of Mawphlang constituency, Kennedy Khyriem into the NPP would mean that Khyriem would be pitted against Eugeneson Lyngdoh of the UDP who won the recent bye-election after the demise of his father Syntar Klas Sunn. Similar direct contests would play out between the UDP and NPP in several constituencies including some in Garo Hills. What is interesting is that the MDA Government is about to complete its 5-year tenure without a Common Minimum Programme (CMP). This means that neither the UDP nor the NPP had any substantive issues that they had laid out before the public in their respective manifesto. The UDP and NPP never had a pre-poll alliance hence it is obvious that the two parties had set out for the 2018 polls with their respective manifestos. So what did the manifestos say? Did both the coalition partners make similar promises? If not, how does the UDP - which makes tall claims about standing for regional aspirations set out to achieve those aspirations while working with a Party that has a national ideology? These are important aspects of politics but because political parties are not held to scrutiny they continue to take voters for a ride.

It is in this context that democracy requires an informed electorate. In the 2023 polls what will be the stand of the UDP vis-à-vis the NPP? Will people continue to be misled by these two coalition partners that have been overseeing one scam after another during their tenure? Or do they believe that the voters will forget all these acts of omission and commission once the election fervour starts? Much will depend on the other political parties that are emerging on the horizon.

Politics & Governance in Meghalaya: What the State Needs

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Meghalaya is fifty years old now and it is one of the tribal dominated States in the Eastern Region. As a tribal State special provisions are accorded via the Constitution. It is to be pointed that 55 out of the 60 seats in the State Legislative Assembly are reserved for the Scheduled Tribes and this implies that Meghalaya is fully governed by the indigenous people of the State. Secondly, the entire State, save a meagre area within Shillong, falls under the Sixth Schedule. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution deals with grass roots and traditional governance and it empowers democratically elected grass roots institutions like the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) to legislate and govern on matters of customs, cultures, land, mineral resources, forests produce, traditional knowledge etc., under the Autonomous area.

However, in the case of Meghalaya it has baffled students (both indigenous and non-indigenous) of constitutional history that a full-fledged tribal State having special provisions within the Constitution is also enjoying other constitutional protection under the same Constitution. Though, tribal minorities are in need of Constitutional protection, but is Meghalaya over protected that we have now become pampered and spoiled? When 90% and 99% of seats in the State Legislature and ADCs respectively are occupied by indigenous law makers, should we blame others for all the ills that have befallen the State?

The regional All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) which took the mantle in the initial years of statehood couldn't withstand the mighty grand old party, the Congress, and was immediately subsumed. This led to the establishment of the Congress regime in the State for nearly four decades. Today, the United Democratic Party (UDP) which claims that its roots can be traced to the year 1960 when APHLC was born, is subservient to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the nascent Nationalist Peoples' Party. In fact, the UDP which was founded in 1997 has failed to assert as a regional force. No wonder Meghalaya's politics is marked by party hopping and match fixing. Some of the people who are in the Cabinet today were also in the previous governments and may perhaps jump ship and be together again with their old

buddies who are now in the Meghalaya Trinamool Congress etc., after the 2023 general elections. If gossips and rumours are to be believed within no time these existent regional parties will be completely devoured by the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP. These political instabilities have cost the State dearly and resulted in worsening criminality and corruption in governance and politics.

In the past fifty years, though we have together achieved, but save for the Transfer of Land Regulation Act 1971, no sound legislation was enacted in the State. On the contrary, the Land Regulation which is primarily meant to protect tribal ways of life is being diluted since the year '79, '81 and its teeth were extracted in 1997 with the passage of the Single Window Policy. The dilutions are done in the name of development and also to serve the economic and business interests of tribal elites and capitalists from within and outside the State. As a result, there is rampant destruction of environment. The tribal land system is eroding and land is alienated in the process. Against this backdrop, since the past four decades there is a huge cry for the extension of the Bengal Frontier Regulation Act 1873 vis a vis the Inner Line Permit in the State and the cry is getting louder. Moreover, in the neo-liberal era in which everything is privatized or corporatized from land, forest, air, water, electricity to education, health, transportation jobs etc., tribal life is under major threat. Hasn't the single window policy, which is the by-product of the economic liberalization completely made any regulation for protection of tribals in the State obsolete? Shouldn't we the indigenous people of the State seek for a more ingenious way of protection from the onslaught of the neo-liberals from within and outside the Bri Hyniewtrep and Achik? I reiterate my stand that as a tribal minority I need protection from the Constitution but it should not be pitted against others who also deserve protection under the same Constitution. I have no doubts that I can find a workable and just solution.

Tribal identity is rooted in land and natural resources. A tribal means nothing without community land and forests where he/she toils to sustain life. Landlessness is threatening the tribal identity and

this threat is becoming a reality now because according to the Socio-Economic Caste Census Survey 2011 it is found that 76% of rural households in Meghalaya is tribal in which no transfer of land is permitted, so why have the 76% tribal households become landless? One of the reasons may perhaps be that many commons or community lands have been converted into private lands or tribals have sold off to meet other exigencies.

The politics and governance in the State is deteriorating on all fronts, from unemployment to costs of living. Teachers are not getting their salaries for months; many private, contractual and casual workers are underpaid. Besides, they slog for 15 to 18 hours a day sans overtime, day off, essential benefits like casual, maternity, earned and medical leaves. Excepting the regular government employees, workers in Meghalaya have no health insurance coverage. The universal health insurance provided to the citizens is insufficient and will not meet the costs of cancer, kidney and liver treatment to name a few. Many private employers and government sectors do not adhere to the Minimum Wage Act when it comes to remunerating its employees, while the house rent, costs of transportation, medicines, school/college fees and essential commodities are shooting through the roof and becoming unbearable, especially for the poor to live. Further, urban and rural poverty is alarming and the gulf between the rich and the poor is getting wider in the state.

The rate of unemployment and job loss is staggering. According to a survey, between the month of April and July 2021 the unemployment rate was at 5% and continues to fluctuate. Government can generate merely 25% employment and the remaining 75% of jobs creation is dependent on private sectors and self-generation. While private players can generate employment, but entrepreneurship is extremely difficult, especially for people with small capital. The non-implementation of a just and fair rent regulation is the biggest challenge for self-employed people. There is a huge disparity in rents across the capital which makes en-

trepreneurs with small capital difficult to conduct business and trade and to compete with big capitalists.

Since 1972, Meghalaya has had ten general elections and soon the term of the 10th Legislative Assembly is getting over and fresh elections will be held. But in Meghalaya none of the political parties are rooted in values, principles and ideology. Politics and governance have become so corrupt and immoral. Policies and decisions are unjust and anti-poor. Democracy and elections are farcical. Elections have become a business enterprise. Besides, politics of lies, deceit and turncoats are making the lives of ordinary citizens harder than ever. People have also internalized that only those with wealth and position can rule over us.

The State desperately needs representatives who have ethics and believe in the rule of law. It needs people with tenacious character and resolve to enact and regulate on: (i) Land so as to protect and revert lands to landless tribals, to also provide decent housing to marginalized citizens. (ii) to legislate Land Ceiling Act (iii) to provide a just and fair rent control in urban centres (iv) to accord all benefits to workers both in organized and un-organized sectors which includes living wage, leaves and better working conditions (v) to upgrade Civil Hospitals into state of the art medical centres, to build more public hospitals and upgrade all CHCs and PHCs in every District. To increase the amount of coverage in the Universal Health Insurance scheme. (vi) to improve, upgrade and build more government and public schools, colleges and to better the conditions of teachers (vii) to provide support to farmers and farm workers in the State (viii) to support the youths in terms of employment and give impetus to the entrepreneurial spirit of our young people. (ix) to facilitate full participation of women in politics and governance beginning from the Dorbar Shnong.

Together we reclaim the tribal ethos of mutual respect, egalitarianism and communitarian way of life. We also reclaim those basic tenets of earning through righteous means and eating from the sweat of one's own brow. The time is now to collectively challenge corruption and criminality in politics and governance.

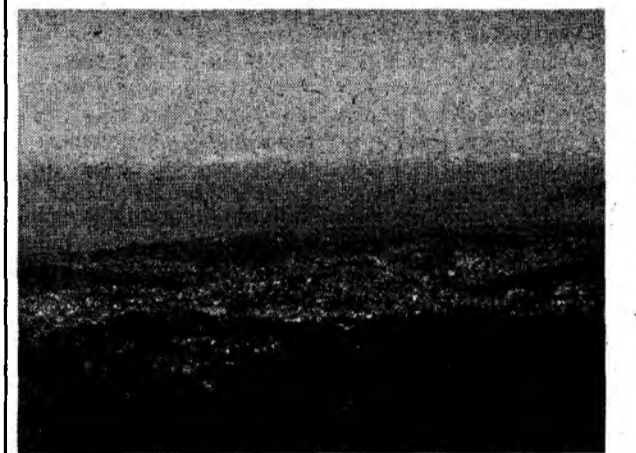
Fading glory of Shillong

By Barnes Mawrie, SDB

Shillong city used to be called the Scotland of the East because of its natural beauty and similarity with the landscapes of Scotland. Years ago the city was definitely worthy of that name. Even as a small boy I still remember how the Golf Links used to be immaculately clean and the area was bigger than it is now. Today it has lost much of its span due to illegal encroachment. Golf Links during the British times, was known to be the biggest natural golf course in the world. Today it can no longer claim that title. When it comes to cleanliness and appearance, this iconic place has seen a great degeneration.

Today with the net enclosure put all around it, there is a little improvement in cleanliness. Another iconic place in the city which has disappeared altogether, was the renowned horse race course in the so-called Polo Grounds. My parents told me that the British used to hold horse races and polo games frequently which attracted a lot of spectators. In fact, the name Polo Grounds is derived from there. Another remnant of that are the long sheds occupied by the MES today in the locality of

Victor Banerjee of the Passage to India fame, Jai Barua a well known musician and singer, civil servants like J. M. Lyngdoh the tough Chief Election Commissioner of India, H. T. Sangliana the famous police commissioner of Bangalore who was also elected to the Lok Sabha for one term and a well-known Kargil Martyr of 1999, Captain Clifford Nongrum who was posthumously awarded the Maha Vir Chakra. It is a known fact that thousands of youth from all over North-east India would dream of pursuing their studies in Shillong. It is true that this is still a fact but what we witness is a gradual decline. Today, Guwahati is emerging as an educational hub of the region. The number of private high standard schools, professional colleges and universities that have cropped up in Guwahati is something phenomenal and more students from North-eastern states are flocking to that city. Guwahati can boast of diverse types of educational institutions from engineering, medical to arts and culture etc. With the fast improvement of public infrastructure, the city of Guwahati is almost comparable to any metropolitan



Ghoraline. These sheds used to be stables for the horses and so Ghoraline derived its name from this. Imagine if these games, Polo and horse race, were still preserved today, Polo Grounds would have retained its pristine glory and purpose. Unfortunately, in Meghalaya we are fond of wiping out history and anything historical. With the horse race and polo game, Shillong would have attracted more tourists from different parts of the world. Therefore I would consider the degeneration of the Golf Links and the disappearance of the above mentioned games in Polo Grounds as a great loss to the state and to the people of Shillong in particular.

Shillong used to be known also as the "Educational Mecca of Northeast India." This title was true when we consider that

of the country. Our city of Shillong on the other hand has not seen much improvement in the area of educational infrastructure and other allied areas. Till date, we do not have even one state university, no state medical college, no state engineering college and let us not talk of other professional institutions which are altogether absent.

If the state is experiencing a dearth of doctors, it is precisely because we have no state medical colleges which can give preference to local youth. Of late the Assam Government has sanctioned 6 new medical colleges in the state besides the many existing ones. Can Shillong still boast of being the educational hub of the region? In my opinion, that is a thing of the past. Shillong has lost its privilege of retaining its name as the educational

"Shillong has lost its privilege of retaining its name as the educational Mecca of Northeast India, thanks to the lack of vision and sense of mission of our leaders and governments of the past and present."

Shillong has many of the most renowned educational institutions in the region. We have distinguished colleges like St. Anthony's College, St. Edmund's College, St. Mary's College, Shillong College, Lady Keane's College to name a few. We have well known schools like St. Edmund's School, St. Anthony's School, St. Mary's School, Loreto School, St. Margaret's School, Pine Mount and many others. These institutions have produced eminent citizens who are renowned nationally and internationally. We have St. Anthony's and St. Edmund's Colleges which have produced eminent politicians like P. A. Sangma, E. K. Mawlong, Donkupar Roy, Safar Satyavan, P. R. Kyndiah, Pradyot Bikram Manikya, academicians like Dr. David Syiemlieh, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Itanagar and former Chairman of UPSC, Dr. Hamlet Bareh, artists like

Mecca of Northeast India, thanks to the lack of vision and sense of mission of our leaders and governments of the past and present. What a shame that in the recent paper published by the Observer Research Foundation (2020-22), the Performance, Infrastructure, Equity (PIE) Index with regard to Primary and Secondary Education, Meghalaya ranked the lowest in the country. This is something to be lamented by every Meghalayan and we as Shillongites feel greatly betrayed by our governments which have damaged the reputation of our city by their lack of political will and decisiveness. Kudos to all private educational institutions especially those of the churches that still remain committed to the cause of education in our city. Had it not been for them, the condition of education in our city and state would have become deplorable.

Letters to the Editor

Whither Trust properties!

Editor, Following the Letter to the Editor (ST July 26, 2022) on the scare of withering heritage properties in Shillong an additional scare is the picturesque Golf Course. A part of it on the opposite site of Teeput an area of approximately 30,000 sq ft owned by the Shillong Recreation Ground Trust (SRGT) had about 30-40 matured pine trees and was sold to one Rocky Dhar. The trees were cleared in a matter of weeks and the land is now bare. A big hotel is on the anvil. This will start a scary clearance exodus of the area.

The interesting questions are - who or what is the SRGT? Who are the members and how can they sell Trust land? What legal entity does the Trust have to part away with land of its holding to a private person? The area being contiguous to the golf course will be destroyed aesthetically and this is a threatening development for the entire golf course. Monetary gains for Dorbar Shnong, clans etc. will certainly be a possibility, so how safe is this iconic heritage property?

Successful notable efforts for Tara Ghar, Barik compound have shown that such destruction can be arrested so why not the aforesaid mentioned property? The custodians of the Golf

Course can kindly make the public aware of how secured this precious state asset is. Yours etc., TS Lyngdoh, Via email

A correction

Editor, Apropos of my article, "Teachers' Association in Meghalaya" (ST July 27, 2022), the transfer of ownership of primary schools from the Autonomous District Councils to the State Government was effected in 1994 by The Meghalaya Taking Over of District Council Lower Primary Schools Act, 1993. The year 1985 mentioned in the article stands corrected.

Yours etc., Batskhem Myrboh, Assistant Professor Synod College Shillong

Bribe demand at Dawki LCS

Editor, We travel to India very frequently through the Dawki border and previously we had been promoting this border as the best land port among all other land ports between India and Bangladesh. However, after COVID 19 the situation has changed. The Indian immigration and customs department asks money from every passenger which is very frustrating.

Every country promotes tourism and trade and extends all facilities to international tourists but unfortunately it seems the Indian authorities apply a fine on the tourists as if to say, "Why did you come to India? now pay a penalty fee?"

On an average about 300 tourists enter India through the Dawki border per day and this is very frustrating to everyone that Indian officials welcome tourists by asking for bribes and hampering the country's reputation. I would request the concerned authorities to take the initiative to solve this issue and create a decent environment.

Yours etc., Tanvir Ruhel (entrepreneur) Shreehatto Advancement Service (SAS) 08 Noyasarak, Sylhet 3100, Bangladesh

Tragic news indeed!

Editor, While expressing my deepest condolences to the bereaved family of Baghmara on the demise of their son as a result of an explosion of the Bluetooth sound system, I believe it is my responsibility to share the possible reasons for the explosion. Let me humbly correct the terminology 'Speaker Explosion.' Speakers can't explode at all. Since the advent of Android phones and a little later the e-vehicle, scientists and technocrats invented

the new powerful rechargeable battery, the Lippo as it is commonly called. The battery Lithium Hydride, unlike our lead sulphuric acid still used in fossil fuel vehicles, has high Ampere Hour Capacity (AHC). Our smartphones use 5.24 volt Lippo cells and it possesses 2500 maHr capacity meaning the battery when fully charged could be used for 25 hours with ampere drainage of 100 milli-ampere. In practical terms, the fully charged smartphone will serve for 2 days with conscientious use, avoiding videography as far as practicable.

One technological marvel of the charger is the new SMPS (switch mode power supply). This charger will automatically turn off when the battery is fully charged (usually for smart phones at 5.6 volts a little above 5.24 volts is the cut off). With all these safety precautions, we sadly are not free from the fault of the Bluetooth Sound amplifier. The Garo Hills case might be the result of a short circuit in the amplifier. This had happened recently with car battery chargers. A car after charging the customer's battery (12 volts), instead of testing each one with the usual method, did the most dangerous act of short-circuiting it, thereby resulting in blue sparks. The battery exploded with severe damage to the eyes. Luckily, the person did not suffer permanent damage. The unlucky teenager is

sadly a victim of the fully charged Lippo cell which was short-circuited. Three months ago a man died in South India due to the explosion of the e-vehicle battery charging in his room. That same month another person was killed in a similar manner while his wife and daughter in the same room suffered injuries. That same week 1447 two wheelers of OLA were recalled due to battery explosion on roads.

Union Transport Minister, Nitin Gadkari had built around 12,000 Govt charging stations for e-vehicles all over the country to cater to around 15 lakhs users. It is not advisable to use domestic or commercial power supply to charge e-vehicles. It is not only illegal but dangerous too. The higher the power capacity of a battery the more the chances of explosion in the event of a short circuit. We also saw on YouTube of an e-bus gone up in flames in the US. Science and technology have the onus to invent techniques that automatically shut off in the event of current overloading. Another suggestion is to prevent the driving mechanism from being vulnerable to over-current consumption.

I take this opportunity as a former teacher to request all schools not to use rechargeable cells like Lippo in their practicals as a mere short-circuit causes sparks that can burn the skin and may at times explode. Dry cells are the safest for children.

Yours etc., W. Passah, Via email.

Slow speed of India Post's Speed Post Service

Editor, The Speed Post service is not performing as per promise. I booked one letter from the Shillong GPO on July 6, 2022 vide consignment note No EE426969362IN addressed to the Executive Engineer, South Garo Hills (D) Division, Williamnagar with the hope that the letter should reach within three days time, due to an emergency situation but it is deeply regretted that their services are far too slow and very poor. The officer concerned received the letter only on July 25, 2022.

My simple suggestion and request to the officers and staff of the Speed Post service is that they should improve their speed as per its name and not let it degenerate to slow post service as had happened to me.

Yours etc., M.Kharkongor, Shillong.

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

"The great business of life is to be, to do, to do without and to depart."

— John Morley

The Shillong Times

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RG Lyngdoh: Principled yet unwanted
IT is normal to speak well of the dead. But Robert G Lyngdoh, Meghalaya's former no-nonsense Home Minister serves as a role model of an uncompromising politician who never shirked from boldly calling a spade by its name. He held the Home Portfolio at a time when Meghalaya was battling insurgency and the State was then passing through a hard time with life coming to a halt at sundown. There was not a soul when the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) would call a bandh on the two national days – Independence Day and Republic Day. But RG would, with a band of faithful followers trudge down to Polo Ground for the parade and walk back home, unafraid of the consequences. In so doing he demonstrated courage in the face of danger because the HNLC then comprised trigger happy rebels.

He was the only Home Minister who appointed a State level Police Reforms Committee headed by former DGP, IT Longkumer. The Committee gave a detailed set of recommendations and these would have served the Police Department in good stead had they been implemented. But as things stand nothing good is ever adopted in Meghalaya especially when it means investing money for the right reasons. RG was one politician who was vocal about the misuse of the MLA Scheme and felt that it had become a ploy for politicians to spend the money on the fifth year of their tenure to win acolytes and buy votes. In fact, RG was very critical about how politicians running the Government would put a spanner in the works when it came to sanctioning schemes for those in the Opposition camp unless they agreed to join or support the ruling party. In his own words, "There is an ethical question whether development schemes can be used for political gains." RG was also critical of those who blamed the Conrad Sangma Government for all the ills such as illegal trading of coal and the power projects that were non-starters which he says were legacies from the past.

RG Lyngdoh meant well but in a world of murky politics, he became isolated as he did not play along. He had the courage of conviction not to yield to demands for freebies especially before elections, saying that these demands were the basis for corruption not just of politicians but the bureaucracy too for no politician would give out freebies from his own pocket. Every penny doled out to the constituents for their irrational demands would have to come from the public exchequer but by using the wrong means. These harsh decisions had made him unpopular among those that expected politicians to bend the rules to placate their constituents. Perhaps RG was too straightforward for the crooked politics of Meghalaya but he lived life on his own terms and never regretted a single moment.

The Best Chief Minister We Never Had

A Tribute to RG Lyngdoh

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

RG Lyngdoh was one of a kind. He had a rare combination of talents: author, musician, poet, politician, polymath, attributes that are not often seen together in the same person. Straight thinker, straight talker, clear action. There was not much room for grey areas in his textbook. Having only spent brief portions of my childhood in Shillong, I hardly knew anyone when I returned to Shillong in 2006, after a hiatus of 35 years. A few weeks after my return, I was invited to a seminar in Don Bosco Youth Centre. Not sure of distances and location, I landed up at the venue about half an hour early. No one was there, the hall was locked.

A few minutes later, a gentleman showed up and we got to talking. He was also early for the same meeting. He asked me who I was and responded with the same question. The name did not ring a bell, and when I asked, "What do you do?", he answered, "I'm the Education Minister". I was probably the only person in Shillong who didn't know who he was. Of course, I did a double take, since I hadn't heard a siren, or seen flashing red lights on a VIP vehicle screeching into the compound. Nor was there a retinue of security, personal assistants and chamchas. My immediate mental reaction was, "Wow, politicians seem to be different in Meghalaya". It wasn't long before I was dispossessed of that fond idea. RG was also one of a kind politician.

As Education Minister, he was the chief guest at the inauguration of the MLCU campus in Rymbai. During the function my young daughter clambered onto the stage and I was a bit miffed at the disruption of this official event, in front of a minister, no less. But Bob was cool. He picked up and carried the toddler, and I, not being used to such informality, relaxed immediately.

Cool! If one had to describe Bob in one word, that would be it. When he became Vice Chancellor at MLCU, he was generally dressed in jeans, casual shirt, ear stud and boots. He was often referred to as our rock star VC. In this role, he carried himself lightly, and was constantly chatting with staff and students. Students

loved his friendly manner and his light-mannered way of giving advice. Bob, as you know, had a postgraduate degree in management from the prestigious XLRI in Jamshedpur, and started his career in the corporate sector. I once remarked that given his professional work, he could be appointed as a professor according to UGC rules. His response was, "Hmm, I don't think it will suit my image", and we laughingly left it at that.

In MLCU, he proved to

and tribulations of Khrawbor, a young man lured into the life of a militant. RG seemed to be the quintessential outgoing personality. In MLCU, we administer personality tests to all the new students each year and also to the new faculty. Those who are familiar with the Meyer-Briggs Personality Indicator, know that the test covers a range of attributes that is encapsulated into four letters. We both had identical results, and I remember feeling an immediate bond with this guy. But one letter in his personality analysis puzzled me. It was the letter 'I' for introvert. How could that be? Was the test result wrong? He explained that he was by nature an introvert and that his current outgoing nature was a learned behaviour that he picked up from observing and imitating his father.

He leaves a multifaceted legacy. Perhaps he will be most remembered as a straight politician, one of a rapidly vanishing breed. But his colourful personality was much more than that. During his time at MLCU he often adorned the stage, not only with his speeches, but also with his harmonica. He was a connoisseur of art, poetry and literature, and his book, "A Point of View" contained poems of deep insight, some have been included in our curriculum.

I know that many in this town know RG much better than me, and there will undoubtedly be paean of praise from many others. There was no hidden side or mystique to this man. What you saw was what you got. I found out this and much more when we worked together closely for four years, and travelled together in the Northeast and other parts of India. It was a special privilege to have gotten to know this larger-than-life man who has touched the lives of so many and has left a firm imprint on the landscape of our society. We will miss this illustrious son of the soil.

Here is a snippet of verse from Soso Tham's poem, "The Green Grass".
*Tell me twilight, beloved of the gods,
Tell me where is that star
Quietly in the grave
Let him rest,
Beneath the green,
green grass.*

be a dynamic leader, bringing in his organizational and management skills. In a year's time he had streamlined important operational areas like human resources and finance. The growth of the university necessitated a move to a larger campus and he led the move to the present Nongrah campus. The university was going through a difficult time when he joined,

"He observed that MLCU had a vision and mission, but no statement of values. He wrote out a list, and we passed it around. In a few days we had a values statement that everyone subscribed to, and it was presented at the next convocation. A syllabus was drawn up and every year the students take a class on human values, based on this list."

his diplomatic skills helped calm the turbulent waters around us. There were moments of disagreement, but it was for the larger good of the university, and it was never petty or personal.

He observed that MLCU had a vision and mission, but no statement of values. He wrote out a list, and we passed

He had a natural confidence and fearlessness, in spite of threats to him and his family. I have spent evenings in his company, while he recounted those stories. The tense atmosphere of that era and the caricatures of some of the main actors are portrayed in his book, "Who the Cap Fits", a story that follows the trials

What is Wrong and Right with Public Sector Banks

By Ajit Ranade

The third week of July marks two anniversaries of events in 1969, one national and the other international. The latter was the first human landing on the moon which happened around 8 am on a Sunday morning in India. Just twelve hours before that, the Prime Minister announced to the nation, that the government was taking over 14 private banks, and nationalising 85 percent of the nation's deposits. One event was a technological breakthrough while the other demonstrated political audacity. Each event had a long-term influence, one on the evolution of the space exploration program, and the other on the evolution of banking and finance. We will leave the story of Apollo 11, whose crew came back safely to earth, and the subsequent developments, to a later day. For now, let's focus on the long shadow of bank nationalisation. The economy has grown 50 times larger since 1969. The bank deposits with those 14 public sector banks were not even 100 crores then, while today Public Sector Banks (PSBs) hold over a 100 lakh crores in deposits. The deepening of the financial sector, its formalisation and its spread into every corner of the country has been phenomenal.

After fifty-three years, the share of deposits with PSB's are still at 70 percent, which is a fall of merely 15 percent since that day of nationalisation. Incidentally the Prime Minister had rushed through nationalisation, even getting Presidential assent on a Saturday. But this hasty legislation was defeated by the Supreme Court just six months later, and hence a modified ordinance had to be passed to overcome the court hurdle. The Prime Minister gained immense popularity and political mileage from this decision since there had been hundreds of private bank failures in the previous twenty years. The public perceived, rightly or wrongly, that their money was safe in public sector banks. That feeling persists to this day. Even this government has shown disproportionate dependence on PSB's rather than private banks. For instance, more than 90 percent of the Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojana of 45 crore accounts were opened by PSB's. This is the world's foremost financial inclusion campaign and has helped channel government subsidies through direct benefit transfers to the IDJ accounts. Even during COVID these accounts have proved invaluable. They also have an insurance cover as well as an overdraft facility attached to the accounts. The Mudra loans to small enterprises are also mostly an exclusive domain of PSB's. On the credit side too, the bulk of the loans for government's projects, whether in ports, roads or railways or other infrastructure endeavours are through PSB's. A recent example is the Bundelkhand Expressway in Uttar Pradesh, whose estimated cost is 15,000 crores. Loans for the Expressway have been raised from a consortium of PSB's.

As for bank failures, there too the PSBs come to the rescue. Yes Bank recently was de facto taken over by State Bank of India (although not technically). The ill-famed Global Trust Bank was bailed out by the Oriental Bank of Commerce back in 2004. If one looks at only the commercial performance of PSBs the picture is mixed to put it mildly. The quantum of bad loans or what are called non-performing assets (NPAs) is much worse for PSBs in comparison with private banks. A recent report by the credit informa-

tion company TransUnion Cibil shows that willful defaulters, i.e., against whom the banks have initiated legal action, have increased by 10-fold in the past ten years. As of March 2021, these defaulters owed 2.4 lakh crores, of which 95 percent of the amount was owed to PSB's. This amounts to a loot of public funds. Of these there are 36 people who have defaulted on more than 1000 crores each. The chances of recovery are remote, and in any case, the legal process is longwinded. The question is whether this implies negligence of the lenders, lack of vigilance on the loans, or lending under some political pressure? The negligence argument is not convincing, since for example, 30 percent of those loans were given by State Bank of India or its associates, who are all known for high standards of diligence and lending practices. Why is it that private sector banks have low non-performing asset ratios? Are they better at loan monitoring? Are they better custodians of public deposits? Do they inherently take less risks? Is it because they don't lend to socially desirable but commercially non-lucrative borrowers? Or is it because they don't face political pressure to lend?

The view that privatising banks is the panacea for all ills of banking in India is obviously wrong. All bank failures have been of high-profile private banks. The mother-of-all bank failures occurred in 2008 in America and among the western nations, starting with the fall of the gold-plated Lehman Bank and the domino effect resulted in a global financial crisis. Surely public sector ownership of banks was not to be blamed for this crisis.

Around the same time in late 2008, a cash-rich company like Infosys had to publicly announce that it was moving its cash deposits from private and foreign banks to State Bank of India, and that its shareholders or customers should not panic! The instinctive flight of public deposits to PSB's indicates the trust and confidence of depositors. There is however a flip side to this confidence. It is because of an implicit guarantee by the owner of the PSBs i.e., the government of India that no bank will fail. This un-priced guarantee can result in poor profitability. Is it fair that the public depositor should have an unlimited guarantee that her or his money in the PSB is safe? Should there not be an upper limit (say 5 lakh rupees) above which funds are at risk of bank failure? The answers to these and many such questions lie in banking reforms, which include more autonomy in their running, more commercial orientation, a lower burden of pursuing social objectives, more focus on manpower productivity and a better pricing of depositors' risk.

The wrong answer is outright and wholesale privatisation of all PSB's as was proposed recently in a paper authored by a former NITI Aayog Chairman and a present member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. Surely a middle path can be found, wherein government ownership is reduced, functioning autonomy of the PSB is increased, the public's trust is maintained, deposit insurance is properly priced and the commercial performance of banks is enhanced. This is not rocket science, unlike that moon-landing in 1969.

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

Letters to the Editor

Rejoinder to NEIDTA clarification

Editor,
I, on behalf of ICARE take this opportunity to express our appreciation to NEIDTA and its Secretary for clarifying that from NEIDTA side, "There is no such move to demolish/alter or to construct any commercial building in the said land where the cathedral stands." Thank you Sir for this welcome news as it provides a vast relief to those of us who are concerned over the preservation of identified heritage structures and sites in and around our beloved Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Will the legislators of 2023 handle education better?

Editor,
We, in Meghalaya, are used to seeing teachers' agitations in the streets or in public thoroughfares because they have been frequently seen there since the 1980s. We would then ask ourselves, "Who then will

teach our children at school if teachers are instead found on the streets? Seeing teachers on the streets makes the common people empathise with them and support their cause. It is their right to agitate to realise their rightful dues. But they have become the thorn in the flesh of the government. The All Primary School Teachers' Association were the first to agitate. Then came the All Meghalaya Primary School Teachers' Association. Third, the Meghalaya College Teachers Association followed by the Khasi-Jaintia Deficit School Teachers' Association. Recently we witnessed the agitations of FASTOM and MSSASA. All these teachers' agitations – some literally spending their nights on the streets have put Meghalaya to shame in front of the whole country. The reasons for all this stem from either non-payment of salaries or grievances relating to salaries and allowances.

It was on June 26, 1982 that the first teachers' agitation took place under the umbrella of All Primary School Teachers' Association (APSTA) led by its firebrand dynamic leader and teacher, Mr. F.C. Shullai who was then its General Secretary. The Association (APSTA) initially consisted of 1022 District Council Lower Primary School teachers and 825 Grant-in-Aid Lower Primary Schools run and managed by private managing committees of Khasi

Hills only. All of them were paid by the Khasi Hills District Council. The reason for the agitation was against non-payment of five months' salaries for DCLP teachers and 9 months salaries for Grant-in-Aid teachers. The Khasi Hills District Council, in spite of the protests and agitations by teachers, did not bother to clear the pending dues because it had mismanaged, misused, diverted and messed up the funds meant for teachers' salaries. Besides the KHDC at that time, had scant regard for teachers for they were appointed by them and were considered a tamed lot.

Seeing the plight of teachers who went without salaries for months together, the Government of the time, on 29 February, 1983, through the Administrator took over the DCLPs and Grant-in-Aid Schools first for 3 months then renewed that for another 3 months every year. Later the period was extended for six months and finally on June 2, 1994 the Government took over all DCLPs in the state and they became Government DCLPs, while the Ad-hoc grant in Aid schools were converted to Deficit System of Grants-in-aid Schools, while Contributory Provident Fund and Death Cum Retirement Gratuity to the latter category of Grant-in-Aid were extended only in 2015.

It must be made clear here that teachers' agitations are not over yet. The time

is not long before we will see them back in the streets seeking solutions to their grievances. The Government tries to evade lasting solutions to their problems but for how long? Release of few months salaries is not the solution; in fact it is peanuts. The permanent solution is to ensure that an uninterrupted source of recurring funds is found in order to fund the teachers' salaries, increments and allowances admissible from time to time. Payment of salaries is just one item only. What about the service rules for different types of teachers belonging to different types of schools? What about streamlining these types of schools so that service rules are also streamlined? Or is the Government saying that it is enough to assist the schools financially to meet the salaries of teachers, and to hell with service rules and regulations?

This is precisely why Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary education in Meghalaya is in shambles. What happened to the Primary Schools set up, run and managed by the District Council for so long (for almost 30 years)? Or is the State Government contented just to replicate them? Why is the foundation of our educational edifice in the State so weak and fragile today? The answer is that we have miserably failed to give top most priority to Education, especially to

Primary and Upper Primary Education and all the entire baggage that goes with them in terms of budgetary allocation for infrastructure, human resource (teachers), enrolment (students), salary emoluments etc., right from day one of Meghalaya's statehood. We have simply continued foolishly without a policy for the last 50 years. Will law makers of 2023 come up with a robust education policy that will take a long term view of education along with the outcomes expected from the primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary sector, listed out clearly for all to understand and raise the necessary questions?

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

Why the threat from NEIDTA

Editor,
I think Mr Borkatoky's threat of taking legal recourse against those that have written letters to the Shillong Times expressing their anguish or against the entire congregation on the alleged conversion of the revenue plots 55 and 56 on which the All Saints Parsonage etc., stand is preposterous.

It is also totally in conflict with the Christian Ethics of not taking your brother

to court but settling it in a Christian manner which I presume aims at face to face talk.

1 Cor 6:1-20 reads:- "When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, "...

And in another instance, Prov 25:8-10 says, "Do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame? Argue your case with your neighbor himself, and do not reveal another's secret, lest he who hears you bring shame upon you, and your ill repute have no end." ...

Yours etc.,
Gregory F Shullai,
Via email

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Translation Travails

By Vikas Datta

As humanity evolved sufficiently to communicate articulately with each other, the foundations of language -- and all its benefits -- were laid.

At this time, it is generally believed that there was one common tongue, but as increasing population led to migrations, languages began diverging and proliferating. So did the scope for mutual unintelligibility and misunderstanding.

Of current languages, take Macedonian and Marathi, Spanish and Sinhala, or say, Punjabi and Portuguese. They appear all different and are even spoken on different continents, but they all happen to be members of the Indo-European family that accounts for most languages -- primary, recognised, or used -- across all world.

All stem from various historical languages, developing from different proto-languages, said to originate from one common language -- Proto-Indo-European, in this case.

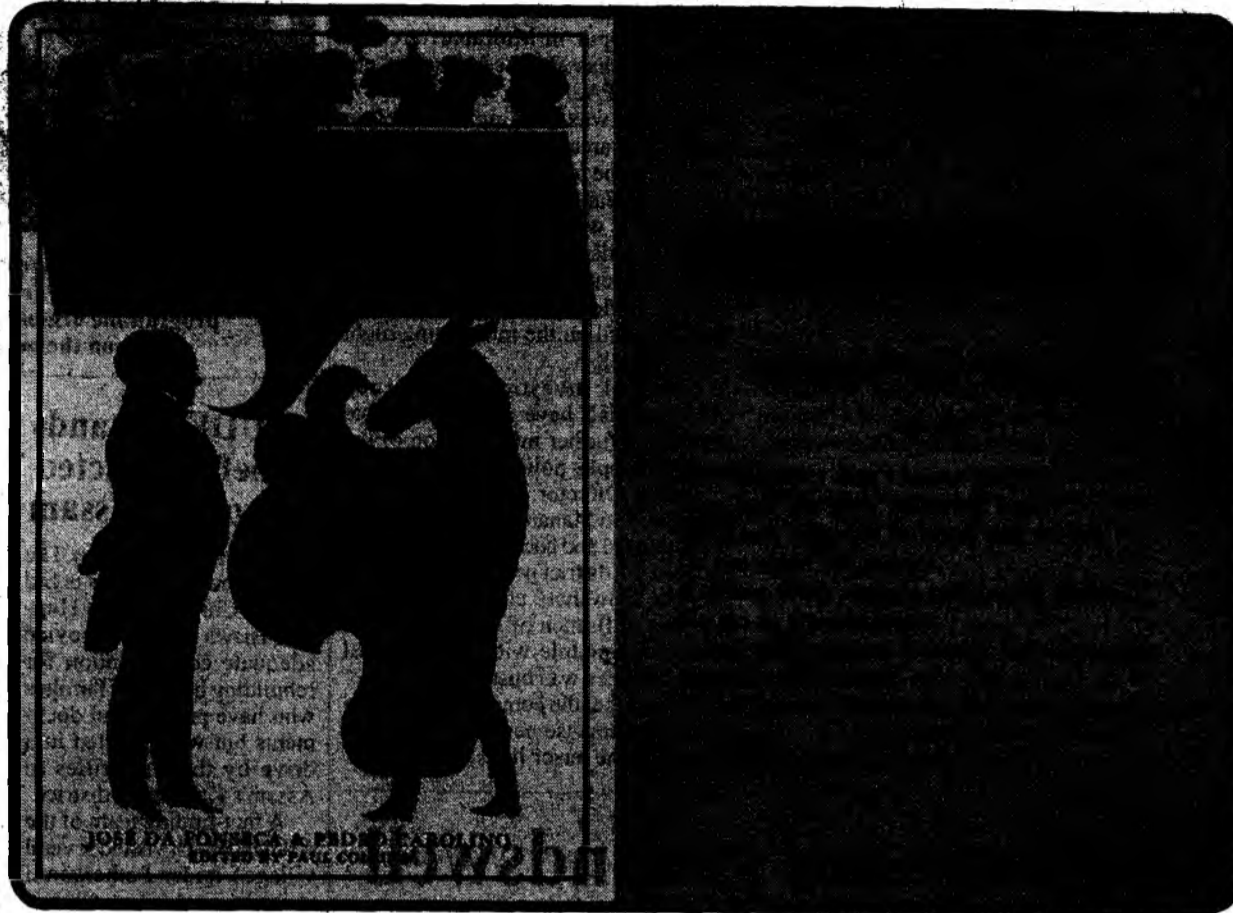
But due to their succeeding levels of divergence, and other influences and impacts, only linguists and philologists can point out the similarities, and for the common speaker, other Indo-European family languages may seem as mysterious, as those from other families, such as Sino-Tibetan (Chinese, Japanese, and so on) or Afro-Asiatic (Arabic), or even fairly contiguous ones like Uralic (Finnish).

So, despite being an essential attribute of humanity and serving the purpose of communication, their multiplicity and variations make languages more liable to creating barriers to understanding, than demolishing them. Though human ingenuity evolved translation to bridge the gap, this didn't entirely solve the problem, given the differences in syntax, idioms, and connotation -- or even mindsets for that matter.

In the world of technological distractions and limited attention spans that we are in, the interest in learning foreign languages is seeing a decline too. While there are online translation tools and even websites with key phrases for tourists -- and these are far advanced from the time when the phrase "out of sight, out of mind" was translated into another language, and on translation back into English, came out as "invisible lunatic", these can only help to an extent.

There are good and reliable phrasebooks, say by the likes of Berlitz or Lonely Planet, with pronunciation guides or even transliterations, what happens when the translators are inept, or have not kept pace with times? Let us see some examples, when they make for uproarious humour -- and incredulous disbelief.

British reporter and author Trevor Fishlock, in his travelogue *India File* (1987), tells us about coming across a Raj-era Hindustani phrasebook for newly arrived British visitors. In this, he tells us, he found that the Indian equivalent of "Hark, our postillion has just been struck by lightning" (which he encountered in a book for travellers



to Norway) was "Look, our ostler has been eaten by a tiger".

Among other gems he found in this were "Your cuirass is dirty" and "He will be hanged tomorrow morning".

There is a manual for learning Pushto -- compiled by a British Army surgeon-cum-Political Officer somewhere in the mid-19th century, but even well into the 21st century, apparently the only English primer available.

In Henry Walter Bellew's *A Grammar of the Pukhto Or Pukhto Language* (1867) has examples of phrases, and dialogues, like "What has become of my sword? I don't see it. I put it under the bed before I went to sleep" or even "Don't shoot at the people, fire your matchlocks above their heads".

Conversational dialogues range from instructions to servants about what to take for a hunt, and convincing local maliks to hand over fugitives, and so on.

Then there is GG Rogers' *Colloquial Nepali*, whose 2006 reprint's cover page says that it "is not a run-of-the-mill tourist handbook. It teaches you how to communicate with anyone, anywhere in Nepal."

Especially, if you are still fighting in the Second World War.

Sample phrases, mostly in the imperative tone, in it include "Our soldiers will beat the Japanese" (or alternatively, what the outcome of a clash with the enemy in the jungle was). Then, there are more helpful dialogues, such as "Fall in, in lines of 10 men each", "No. 7 Platoon is advancing", "Has the General Sahab arrived yet?", "If you do this, the Colonel sahab will get angry", and so on.

All this is understandable when we learn Lt Col Rogers, who wrote the book in 1950, was the Nepali Instructor with the Gurkha Brigade during World War II.

But the ace as it happens to be is Portuguese author Pedro Carolino's *O novo guia da conversacao em portuguez e inglez* (1855), intended as a Portuguese-English conversational guide. Its quality became apparent when it was translated as "English as She is Spoke" (1883).

As its introduction said, it was incredible for the author to "perpetrate -- at his own expense -- the monstrous joke of publishing a Guide to Conversation in a language of which it is only too evident that every word is utterly strange to him."

A little consideration of the shaping of our author's English phrases leads to the conclusion that the materials used have been a Portuguese-French phrase book and a French-English diction-

ary. With these slight impedimenta has the daring Lusitanian ventured upon the unknown deep of a strange language, and the result, to quote again from the Preface, 'May be worth the acceptance of the studious persons, and especially of the Youth, at which we dedicate him particularly'..."

We learn that in it, "among what are denominated 'Eatings' we find 'some wigs', 'a dainty disheg', 'a mutton shoulder', 'a little mine' ... the menu is scarcely appetising, especially when among 'Fishes and Shellfishes' our Portuguese Lucullus sets down the 'hedgehog', 'snail' and 'wolf'."

We can also find compliments: "This girl have a beauty edge", or maybe "He is valuable his weight's gold", as well as puzzlement: "I am confused all yours civilities", or despair: "I dead myself in envy to see her", and advice: "Take out the live coals with the hand of the cat".

Carolino's spirit lived in the Correctly English Society of Shanghai, which produced *How to Correctly English in Hundred Day* (1934), "prepared for the Chinese young man who wishes to served for the foreign firm".

Jerome K Jerome also deals with inept translators in his *Three Men on a Bummel* (1900), the lesser-known sequel to his *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), about the trio planning a bicycling trip through the (then) German Empire.

His friend George picks up a phrase book intended for German tourists to England, and proposes that they use it the other way round on their travels.

Jerome is sceptical, noting "its longest chapter being devoted to conversation in a railway carriage, among, apparently, a compartment load of quarrelsome and ill-mannered lunatics" and he feels "some educated idiot, misunderstanding seven languages, would appear to go about writing these books for the misinformation and false guidance of modern Europe".

Yet, they resolve to try it out and hilarity ensues, when a coachman outdoes them, a boot-seller gets angrily agitated, and in a hat shop, they are again outsmarted, but somehow, complete the purchase. Still, "comparing views in the train, we agreed that we had lost the game by two points to one; and George, who was evidently disappointed, threw the book out of the window."

In the same book, Jerome also offers some wise insights into why his countrymen did not make efforts to learn foreign languages and why even those who try do not succeed as much as they should -- with the example of a leading textbook of the time.

But this passage about a clever Frenchman, with a book of gentle satire, and a perceptive but positively amoral publisher, and their diabolical agreement, needs reading in its entirety to appreciate.

And finally, there is the *Dirty Hungarian Phrasebook* -- from which we have the invaluable phrase for all occasions: "My hovercraft is full of eels". Too bad, it was just a Monty Python sketch.

On 'Sunday scaries' and how to tackle them



Sunday is often a chance to catch up with friends, lost sleep, and recover from last night's hangover. But for many of us, by the time Sunday afternoon rolls around, a feeling of intense anxiety and dread sets in -- often referred to as the "Sunday scaries".

It's hardly surprising the "Sunday scaries" are so common. After all, research shows Sunday is our unhappiest day of the week -- with Saturday being the peak. There are a number of reasons why the Sunday scaries happen, and how you spend your weekend can play a big role.

For example, spending all your weekend stuck inside on your computer probably isn't a good idea, even if it's for leisure. This is because research

shows people who spend a lot of time on their computer tend to feel more anxious in general. Abundant alcohol and drug use can also cause your mood to plummet and cause anxiety levels to soar the following day. So if you spent your Saturday night partying, this might explain why you feel down or anxious by Sunday afternoon.

For many people, the Sunday scaries also happen due to the work they left behind on Friday evening. The anticipation of the next day, the work you might have to do, and all the emails you'll need to catch up on can cause anxiety. But working through the weekend isn't the answer either -- and could actually leave your mental health worse off.

The Sunday scaries may also happen because of a social overload that happens during the weekend. This may be especially true for people who work hard during the week or those who are single, who designate their weekend as being their primary time for socialising. But spending time with others, as enjoyable as it may be, can put additional pressure on us. For example, when we share our friends' worries, we may become stressed too.

If you're someone who tends to suffer from the Sunday scaries, here are a few things you can do to cope.

FINISH YOUR TASKS
One of the most effective ways of getting rid of the Sun-



day scaries is to prevent them from happening to begin with. This means trying to finish any tasks you need to do before the weekend, instead of leaving it until Monday morning.

When you know you have unfinished business to deal with on Monday, it can have a number of effects on you, including by ruining your night's sleep and making you more anxious on Sunday. It may even affect your next week by making you more likely to experience burnout. This is why starting the week with a clean slate is crucial.

Before you switch off your computer on Friday evening, you might also want to take time to reflect on the negative things that may have happened during the week, consider what changes you might want to make for the next week, and try to tie up any loose ends and easy tasks that you can instead of leaving them for Monday.

If you're in a middle of a long-term project, at least try to complete a milestone task that will help you feel like a chapter of your work is closed on Friday, with a new one ready to begin on Monday.

POSITIVE ANTICIPATION

Probably the biggest reason for feeling anxious on Sunday evening is due to dreading the work you have to do the following week -- especially those tasks you hate doing.

But having events planned for the week that you can look forward to can help balance out these negative emotions and make you feel more positive about the week ahead. Try creating a new routine on Sunday where you plan out fun things you can do the next week, such as meeting friends for lunch or going to the cinema after work.

WRITE IT DOWN

If you get your Sunday scaries but have no idea what's causing them, take 20 minutes of uninterrupted time to write down your deepest thoughts and feelings. This simple exercise can help you figure out what causes your anxious thoughts, which will ultimately help you address them.

But if you're someone who has never tried expressive writing before, here are a few things that might help you get started: Write about your challenges

using a different perspective (such as how your parent or best friend might see it).

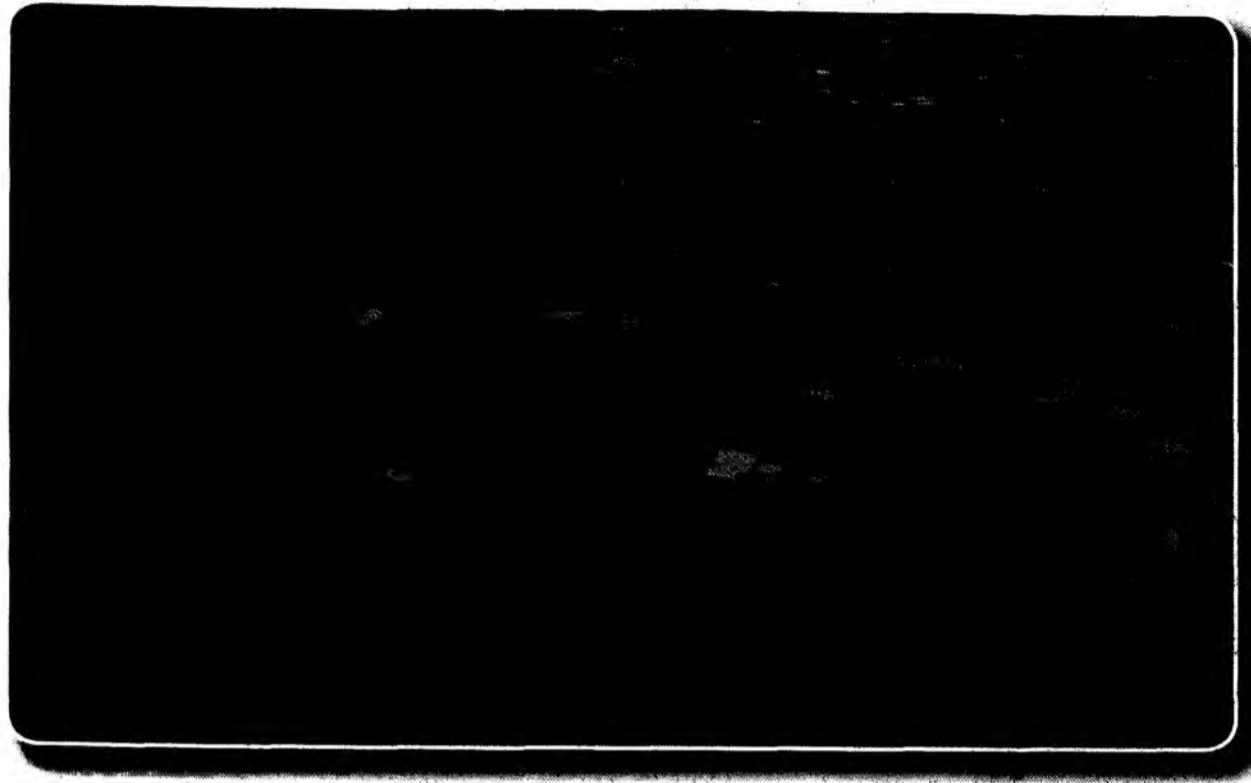
Try writing at different times of day. You may be more focused at different times of the day, which can be important for helping you tune into how you're feeling.

If you find it difficult to talk or write about yourself, imagine you're writing with a specific audience in mind, such as your friend. This may help you better express what you're feeling and understand why you're feeling that way.

If writing isn't for you, use a recorder or video to help you express yourself.

Of course, there are many reasons that people may experience the Sunday scaries. While some of these factors we can change, some of them are a bit more difficult to address, such as if your feelings of anxiety are due to working with people who treat you unfairly. But regardless of the reasons you may get the Sunday scaries, remember that we often tend to over-exaggerate our anxieties in our heads -- and often these fears turn out to be unfounded. (*The Conversation*)

Climate change is turning intense



Powerful storm systems triggered flash flooding across the US in late July, inundating St. Louis neighborhoods with record rainfall and setting off mudslides in eastern Kentucky, where at least 16 people died in flooding. Another deluge in Nevada flooded the Las Vegas strip.

The impact of climate change on extreme water-related events like this is becoming increasingly evident. The storms in the U.S. followed extreme flooding this summer in India and Australia and last year in Western Europe.

Studies by scientists around the world show that the water cycle has been intensifying and will continue to intensify as the planet warms. An international climate assessment I coauthored in 2021 for the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change lays out the details.

It documented an increase in both wet extremes, including more intense rainfall over most regions, and dry extremes, including drying in the Mediterranean, southwestern Australia, southwestern South America, South Africa and western North America. It also shows that both wet and dry extremes will continue to increase with future warming.

Why is the water cycle intensifying?

Water cycles through the environment, moving between the atmosphere, ocean, land and reservoirs of frozen water. It might fall as rain or snow, seep into the ground, run into a waterway, join the ocean, freeze or evaporate back into the atmosphere.

Plants also take up water from the ground and release it through transpiration from their leaves. In recent decades, there has been an overall increase in the rates of precipitation and evaporation.

A number of factors are intensifying the water cycle, but one of the most important is that warming temperatures raise the upper limit on the amount of moisture in the air. That increases the potential for more rain.

This aspect of climate change is confirmed across all of our lines of evidence discussed in the IPCC report. It is expected from basic physics, projected by computer models, and it already shows up in the observational data as a general increase of rainfall intensity with warming temperatures.

Understanding this and other

changes in the water cycle is important for more than preparing for disasters. Water is an essential resource for all ecosystems and human societies, and particularly agriculture.

What does this mean for the future?

An intensifying water cycle means that both wet and dry extremes and the general variability of the water cycle will increase, although not uniformly around the globe.

Rainfall intensity is expected to increase for most land areas, but the largest increases in dryness are expected in the Mediterranean, southwestern South America, and western North America.

Globally, daily extreme precipitation events will likely intensify by about 7% for every 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) that global temperatures rise.

Many other important aspects of the water cycle will also change in addition to extremes as global temperatures increase, the report shows, including reductions in mountain glaciers, decreasing duration of seasonal snow cover, earlier snowmelt and contrasting changes in monsoon rains across different regions, which will impact the water resources of billions of people.

What can be done?

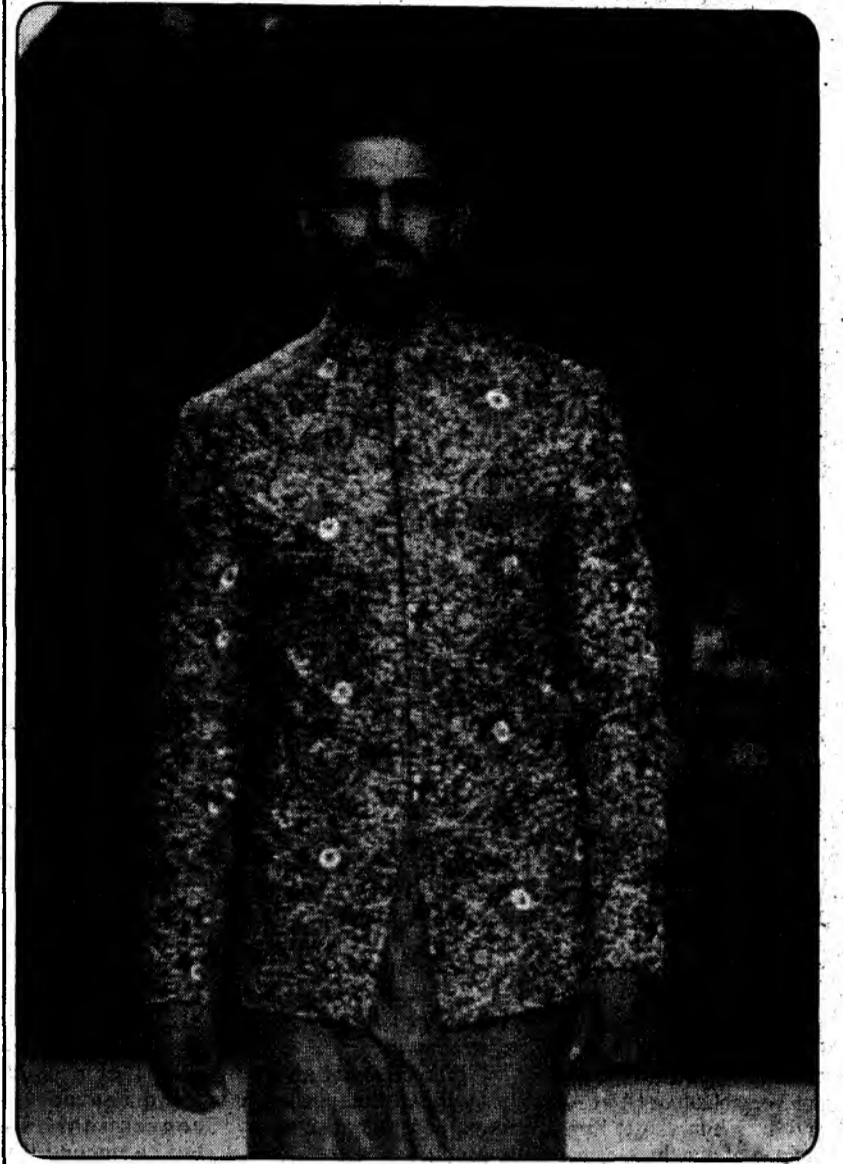
One common theme across these aspects of the water cycle is that higher greenhouse gas emissions lead to bigger impacts.

The IPCC does not make policy recommendations. Instead, it provides the scientific information needed to carefully evaluate policy choices. The results show that the implications of different choices are likely to be.

One thing the scientific evidence in the report clearly tells world leaders is that limiting global warming to the Paris Agreement target of 1.5 C (2.7 F) will require immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Regardless of any specific target, it is clear that the severity of climate change impacts are closely linked to greenhouse gas emissions: Reducing emissions will reduce impacts. Every fraction of a degree matters. (*The Conversation*)

A floral fiesta



Designers Varun Bahl's love for flora and fauna isn't something he's not conquered before. From vintage designs to contemporary motifs, his designs beautifully portray nature through various handcrafted techniques, plush hues, and fresh silhouettes.

The designer showcased his collection, 'New Leaf' at the FDCI India Couture Week 2022 being held in the Capital. For womenswear, Bahl focussed on voluminous lehengas, statement pantsuits, layered dresses packed with bold floral prints, patchwork embroideries, and interesting textures. On the men's front, there were plenty of cool jackets, suits, and sherwanis on display.

With the wedding season around the corner, this collection offers a wide variety of choices for brides who are looking to experiment. The bralette tops, 3-D textured patchworks, and luxe suits are some brave options.

The collection reinvents traditional Indian silhouettes and alternates between Indian wedding ensembles and red carpet looks, catering to the younger generation's couture needs. (*ANSLife*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 31, 2022

Mercury is opposite Saturn on your solar return chart and will give exceptional results. You will overcome stiff challenges and move ahead. You will also buy something precious. You will also solve all work related problems. Your status and prestige in society will rise. You will also get admission in institute/course of your choice. You will also be busy with your work. Your financial condition will be normal. But your mind will be peaceful. You will be praised from all sides but pride can dominate you. You will be a victim of some conspiracy. The year will end on a happy note. Auspicious functions will take place. You will be determined to carry out the tasks. There will be lot of ups and downs but you will be able to manage the work. Your mind will be peaceful. You will be praised from all sides but pride can dominate you.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is time to make the right moves. You will be making progress in your job. Your business will also prosper and flourish. There will be an increase in your work efficiency as a result your income will also rise. You will feel a lot more secure. You will become very popular. Some persons may become jealous of your success. You will get caught in a controversy and may find it hard to come out of it, but timely help of an influential person will help you. Your relations with your spouse/partner will be cordial. Family problems will get solved. You will be ambitious to establish your dominion over others. However, your family members will give a lot of respect. You need to keep your expenses under control. You will get a hold on your financial condition. You will remain busy in establishing contacts and travelling.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is time full of fun and frolic. You will be physically active. Halted works will gather momentum. You will get opportunity to race ahead in life. It will be a good idea to spend sometime in the lap of nature with your family and have peace and bliss. You will do each work very carefully. Your enemies won't be able to harm you. You will spend time with your parents and wife. You need to keep away from doing wrong things. These are victory granting days for you. Your desired work will be done. You will keep personal matters a secret. You will get some good news from somewhere and take an important decision regarding your career. Income is good. Additional source of income will be explored.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will prosper in life. And will not compromise with anything and will settle for only the best. You will spend some quality time with your family members. And can also plan to go to a retreat for a short duration. You will do things of your choice and eat food you like. The house wives will be able to show their capabilities. Your investments will bring good returns. All your half-finished works will be completed. The young people will prepare themselves to achieve high. Your disputes with neighbors will get resolved. Officials will be happy with your work. You might buy new clothes and ornaments. You will do right things and achieve your objectives. There will be lot of peace at home.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your work will get done with ease. So you need to make best use of this opportunity. You will get success in legal matters. There are strong chances of division of property. You will also get success in love and romance. Love mates will enjoy a good time. Your income will also rise. There will be various activities in different directions. Marriage function will take place. Commercial situation will improve. Your business partner might betray you. You need to remain alert. There is possibility of getting separated from your dear one, for a little while. You will also have differences of opinion with your life partner. You will face difficulties. You will have to remain cool and peaceful under all circumstances.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Some tension may arise in your married life but it will be timely resolved with the intervention of family members. Things will improve in the right direction. You could also fall in love with a person working in your office. You will also excel at your workplace. Futuristic plans and schemes will be put into practice. Your bosses will have lot of exceptions from you. You will get rewarded for your loyalty. By the grace of God you will be able to acquire accomplishments. You will also remain in the spot light. Hard work done now will pay rich dividends later on. You will also get cooperation of your friends and elders which will prove beneficial to you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It is a favorable week. You will feel a lot better now. Some works that had been struck for a while now and giving you sleepless nights will finish without any obstacles, much to your relief. Your confidence will also rise. You will take part in professional activities. Your popularity will also rise. Your communication skills will be second to none. Your perspective towards life will become more positive. You will also enjoy

good bonding with your mate and will have some unforgettable moment. You will also get credit for your hard work. You will take steps forwards in life along with time. You will also help needy people a lot. You will prove to be a true friend in hour of need. There will be an increase in love between siblings. You will be gentle towards your closed ones.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It is time to move ahead in life. You will enhance your skills and acquire new knowledge related to your job. Your work will also come in for lot of praise. If you are making plans to go abroad for job or higher studies, it is just the appropriate moment. You will also discover something new and exciting in your romantic life. Your work will get fulfilled. You will also have profits in your business. You will face fierce competition but will still achieve victory. You will be opted for new business ventures in partnerships. Your financial position will be strong. If you are not let down by your own people you will achieve success in life. You will get lot of name and fame. Your health will be perfect.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It is time to enjoy and have lots of fun with your loved ones. You will be busy at weddings and parties. Your income will increase. A job-change looks a possibility. You will also plan to take up your ambitious project and will receive the loan easily from banks. You will work overtime to realize your dreams. There will be an improvement in your attitude and you will be much loved. But some persons will be jealous of your success. You will also save yourself from a big problem. You will also share amazing bonding with your mate. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. You will also get a wonderful news from somewhere. You will plan to go on a picnic with family. And will have mental peace.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is going to be a week which you will enjoy a lot with your family. Your dreams will get realized and you will do things to your liking. You will get love and affection from your near and dear ones. Your financial position will get better. You will also have prospects for growth in your work. You will get a chance to work which will give you happiness and you will get good profit. It is right time to think about a change in business or work. You will also feel some positive changes in yourself. You will not impose your views on others. Your enemies will get defeated. Your children will make progress. You will get success in exams/interview. You will also work to improve your income.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will prepare for some big occasion. Your presentation is also going to be terrific and you will win praise from far and wide. Time is totally in your favor. Whatever things you touch will turn gold. You will also cooperate with your seniors. Your work efficiency will enhance. You will be able to complete all your tasks. Your financial position is going to be strong. You will also develop interest in meditation, yoga and prayers. Your mind will get clear of doubts. You may have some financial needs and will apply for immediate loan. You will also get a letter of appointment. Your efforts will bring all round success. You will have prosperity and happiness in your life. Your family will support you. You will have wonderful relations with your mate. You will listen to your family elders.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Your business will grow. You will get lot of success in your job. Whatever task you undertake, you will be successful. You will get lot of encouragement from your bosses. You will have the full support of your spouse. You will have gains. Your financial position will be strong. All your fatigue will get removed. Your disputes with neighbours will get resolved. It will give you lot of peace of mind. Company of your darling will give you lot of happiness. Property related disputes will get resolved. You will also plan for a major expansion of your business. You will also receive a good news. You could also get a promotion. You can also be transferred and there could be a change of place or residence. You will experience some positive change in your life.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will be very busy. If you want to change your job or business, this is just the right time. Your financial position will remain stable. This will also remain healthy and fit. You will have no worries in your personal life and your family will give you full support. It is time to focus on your goals. In due course, you will also lead a very peaceful life. There will be good bonding in family ties. Unity in the family will remain. You will also work hard to improve your relationship with family elders. Your seniors will be happy with your work. You will be able to motivate others. And provide timely help too. You need to pursue your dreams and aspirations with full zeal and zest.

The lost treasure

TN idol wing moves to bring back antique idol from US gallery

The idol wing of the Tamil Nadu police has initiated steps to bring back an exquisite idol of Chola queen Sembiyan Mahadevi that was allegedly stolen from a village temple in Nagapattinam around a century ago. The idol has been traced to the Freer Gallery in the US and an old complaint about the stolen idol is being used to bring it back.

Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi was worshipped as the avatar of Goddess Parvati in the Sembiyan Mahadevi village temple that is about 25 km from Nagapattinam. The issue had come to light after social activist and lawyer G Rajendran spotted the idol at the Freer Gallery in 2015 and lodged a complaint in 2018.

In his complaint, Rajendran said that he found a metal sculpture at the art gallery with a note below the pedestal saying Sembiyan Mahadevi, Chola dynasty, 10th century, Tamil Nadu, India. The metal sculpture, according to Rajendran, was 3.5 feet in height. A senior officer with the idol wing told IANS that Rajendran in his complaint stated that after he came back from the US, he went to the Sembiyan Mahadevi village in Nagapattinam and on enquiry found that the old idol at the Kailasanatha Swamy Sivan temple had been replaced by a replica. He learnt that this copy of the idol was commissioned in 1959 by the then Executive Officer of the temple.

Tamil Nadu idol wing DGP Jayant K Murali, while speaking to the media said "We came to understand from the Freer Gallery after contacting them that they had purchased the sculpture from Hagop Kervakian, an art collector who had passed away in 1962. We have now commenced a probe as to how this person got hold of the idol and the price he had paid for it. We have also sought the assistance of Homeland Security in the US to unearth his links with other art collectors as he had sold several antiquities and art collections from across several countries including India in the US."

The idol wing police have already got the stone inscriptions in the Kailasanatha Swamy temple deciphered using the epigraphy branch of the Archaeological Survey of India.

Murali told IANS that, "We found that the theft has occurred before 1929 and we have ruled out the involvement of the HR&CE department as it was formed after 1929." He added, "We have also found that the existing idol at the temple which is one and a half feet tall is fake."

Sources in the idol wing told IANS that the probe will cover who stole the idol, to whom it was handed over and how it reached Hagop and how he had shipped it. (IANS)

