

Fooling Is Fun



April is the cruellest month stirring... wrote Wasteland poet T.S. Eliot. But for many all over the world the month starts as a Fun day. Or April Fool's Day. Making fun of others, playing a hoax, even giving a bad news which is not true, are all taken in with good humour.

According to popular beliefs, the early practices originated in France. It was the first country in Europe to implement Pope Gregory XIII's order of replacing the old Julian calendar with the Gregorian calendar in 1582.

New Year's day was originally celebrated around April 1 as an advent of spring. With introduction of the Gregorian calendar, the New Year's date moved to January 1. Many people, who either refused to acknowledge the new date, or were unaware about the change, continued to celebrate New Year's day on the old date. This prompted others to make fun of these traditionalists, sending them on fool's errands. Eventually it became a ritual

and spread throughout Europe.

However, this theory has been questioned by many who dismiss it for lack of evidence. As proof, they point out that while England did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752, the tradition of April Fool's Day was already well established there by then.

Constantine and Kugel

Another theory states that the tradition of April Fool's Day dates back to the time of Constantine the Great and one of his court jesters, Kugel.

Joseph Boskin, a professor of history at Boston University who was invited by the public relations team at the University to pitch in as an expert and speak on the origin of April Fool's day.

Boskin told his audience that when a group of court jesters told Constantine that they could rule the kingdom better than him, he was amused and allowed a jester named Kugel to rule for a day. King Kugel, having ascended the throne, passed a proclamation calling

for a celebration of absurdity on April 1. Later, it became an official event.

Sounds plausible! Associated Press thought so and ran the story. It took them a couple of weeks to realise that Boskin played a hoax on them.

"In a way, it was a very serious day. In those times fools were really wise men. It was the role of jesters to put things in perspective with humor," he told AP. Boskin was accused of ruining the life of a young reporter working for AP, but he has since used the story as an example to teach his students the importance of cross-checking facts.

Up in the sky

Way back in the late eighties or could be early 90s too, a leading Indian-English daily, The Statesman, informed its readers about an alien invasion that was going to take place on the night of April 1. The newspaper in a well-crafted piece with convincing images in its Sunday supplement Miscellany ahead of the fool's day urged readers

to look up in the sky. As luck would have it, the unsuspecting readers fell for the bait.

"It's difficult to forget about that prank," says senior journalist Sujoy Dhar, who was in his sophomore year then. He too was a 'victim.' And why not?

It was unthinkable that a house would associate with copybook journalism would indulge in a plan to fool its readers. Maybe that's why so many believed in the fake news. Many were amused later when the paper later announced that it was a prank. But some were outraged too, hehe," recalls Dhar.

Since then, many Indian news outlets have tried to fool its readers/viewers, but "haven't been able to emulate The Statesman's skill in presentation of the news or its success," stresses Dhar.

Instant Colour TV

However many old timers in Europe recall how in the early 1960s,

Forgotten games of India

By Uttara Gangopadhyay

Sawantwadi in Maharashtra is a quaint little town known for its lacquer toys. Hence it's a bit of a surprise when one visits the palace to find a training course on the making of Ganjifa cards in progress. Ganjifa is usually associated with Odisha and West Bengal (where it is better known as the Dasha-vatara cards). But now it seems Sawantwadi shares a common legacy. A little more probing reveals that Ganjifa was also known in Mysore (Karnataka), Gujarat, Rajasthan and Kashmir.

Souvik Mukherjee, assistant professor in Presidency University, Kolkata, points to an antique board game that looks similar to the 'snakes and ladders' that children grow up with. Actually, Mukherjee informs, it was the game of 'gyan chaupar' once played in India, a precursor to the 'snakes and ladders' board game. The Indian version used to picture stars instead of ladders.

Irving Finkel, author of Ancient Board Games, surprised the audience at ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival by saying that the game of Pachisi was invented in India but reproduced during the colonial period as the Ludo. According to an article (in the DNA) by Roshni Nair, Irving said, "The English took the rule book and created an alternative requiring not the slightest respect of the soul. They took the good out of that game, repackaging and importing it to India as stupid, anodyne Ludo... Now I see Indians playing Ludo, totally oblivious about the damn good game their forefathers played."

Tourists to Fatehpur Sikri are shown a large drawing consisting of squares laid out in the design of the Pachisi board on a courtyard as proof that even Emperor Akbar was fond of this game and loved to play with his courtiers.

India had a rich tradition of board and card games, which are now mostly forgotten, some

likely to be lost forever, rue games researchers like Mukherjee.

That the epic Mahabharata was premised on the game of dice or the mention of Shiva and Parvati playing similar games according to Hindu mythology, are proof that these games were known in India since ancient times.

Deme Raja Reddy and Samiksha Deme, in their book titled *Ancient Indian Board Games*, have also shown how carvings in old temples and forts still preserve records of traditional Indian board games. But recollections of these games are fading fast from collective memory, with the result that it is getting increasingly difficult to find people who either know how to play these games or are aware of the rules.

For example, the rules of playing the Dashavatara cards (inset picture) of Bishnupur in West Bengal are perhaps lost forever.

The deck of 120 circular cards contain pictures of the 10 incarnations of Vishnu in the first and second set of 10 cards each (the difference being the incarnations are housed in a temple in the first set while the temple is missing in the second set) and the remaining are marked by dots for numbers.

Studies have revealed that the representation of the incarnations also varies. There is also a smaller pack, called Naqsh (Naksha Taash), which consists of 48 playing cards, divided into 12 sets of four cards each.

Interestingly, in both Odisha and West Bengal, the cards are usually made by 'Patanchari' artists. It is difficult to find if there was any relation with the Sawantwadi Ganjifa cards with that of Odisha or if it evolved independently. Was it revived as an art form or was still being used for playing the card game? The only information available is that Satavashila Devi Bhonsle, the erstwhile queen, was keen to ensure its survival.

Pointing to the 'Gyan Chaupar' board, Mukherjee explains that it was a game that imparted a lesson in morality too. The life's journey is a full of virtues (ladders) and vices (snakes) and it is for you to find out how best you can ace it. However, it was a popular game across India, and thus variously named — Gyan Bazi, Moksha Patam, Vaikunthapadi, Parampada Sopanam, etc. "Exported into England first in 1892, this complex and intricate game of moral teaching ended up as a simple racing-game, that removed the elements of learning and introduced competition instead."

In Bengal, it was known as 'Golok Dham', a game that was popular even with followers of Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa. From the accounts of Shudha Mazumdar (Memoirs of an Indian Woman), it is evident that the game was a favourite with women in the early 20th century. She writes, "And we played golok dham, a game in which you went to heaven on a paper board, if you played your cowries right, or else, straight to hell, or a tavern, if you failed. The game held great allure for me and I was forever jingling the little seashells, cowries, which were the dice, and dying to test my luck in my spare time."

Scholars like Andrew Toppfield, Jen Schlieter and Jakob Schmidt Madsen have written about the Jain, Buddhist and Vaishnav versions of Gyan Chaupar and about boards that have been found all the way from Gujarat to Tibet, says Mukherjee.

Another game that was popular across India was the 'tiger and goat' game. Known variously as 'Bagh-Bandi', 'Bagh-Bakri', 'Puli Judham', it was played with symbolic representations of two tigers and 21 goats, where the tigers try to kill the goats and the goats try to surround the tiger (because a tiger cannot kill more than one goat at a time). According to Deme Raja Reddy and Samiksha Deme, at the 12th century built Sri Govindarajswamy Temple in Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), three versions of the tiger and goat game can be found in three different areas of the temple, reflecting that even in one place several versions of a game might be possible.

"Chaturanga" was another popular game that was largely ruled by strategic moves and considered as the early Indian version of the chess. Research in traditional Indian card and board

games are still at a nascent stage. Lack of physical existence of a full set of old playing cards or old game boards, lack of reference material and absence of people having a knowledge of the rules of the games compound the problem for researchers.

However, some interest in reviving the traditional board games is evident these days. Aman Gopal Sureka, an IT entrepreneur from Kolkata, is not only a collector of old board games but also focuses on creating awareness about games like Gyan Chaupar through his company Khol Khel. Writes Sureka on the Khol Khel Facebook page, "In older times, when education did not mean a set of degrees alone, wisdom and insight were imparted to learners in a fun and engaging way, through playing board games. Slowly, with the passage of time, this ancient tradition of learning and enjoying at the same time has been lost. Chaturanga was a humble effort in reinventing those joyous times... in the process of recreating these games, the skills of a lot of talented artisans of rural Bengal have been utilised. We



A Ganjifa cardmaker

now need a larger movement to popularise these games and bring them back to life."

In the southern states too, there have been some concerted efforts. Tamil Nadu-based Kreedra is a private organisation devoted to reviving traditional board games.

They also re-create them for retail. Ramsons Kala Pratishthana, a not-for-profit art foundation based in Mysore holds an annual exhibition of traditional board games of India, in summer, called 'Kreedra Kaushalya'. A few others have created apps of some of these traditional board games for digital enthusiasts.

Hopefully, the initial interest will help in revival of the traditional board games of India in their original form, where lessons in morality and philosophy were imparted through the games people played. "Modern management teaches the gamification theory," says Mukherjee, "but the rules of traditional Indian board games can easily prove that Indians discovered it long back." (TWF)

(Images by the writer)

April Fool's Day is celebrated across the globe though it originated in Europe. Sudipto Maity reports

the Swedish national broadcaster had fooled people when they announced that new technology would help owners of black and white TV sets to convert them into colour sets by pulling a nylon stocking over the screen.

At the time, SVT (Sveriges Television) was the only television channel in Sweden. The broadcast was in black and white only.

Well, it took almost eight more years for people to watch colour TV in Europe when colour transmission began in 1970. The 1962 hoax transmission by the broadcaster of Sweden can still be watched on YouTube!!!

Of cockroaches & lizards

Among other things, Krishnanagar in West Bengal's Nadia district is famous for its clay craft. In medieval times, a common practice among the natives was pranking relatives using objects made of clay. These objects, mostly resembled food (fruits, sea food) and insects, and due to the of artistry, they looked life-like.

Reminiscing about a prank she pulled on her colleagues once in Mumbai, travel writer Uttara Gangopadhyay shares,

"It was April Fool's Day and I could not resist taking to office a pair of cockroaches and a lizard that I had at home. I went to office early and placed those on the desktop keyboards and within files at random. Slowly people started trickling in, when suddenly the morning quiet was torn by a shrill cry. The lizard was discovered. The colleague who discovered it on her key board nearly fainted while others tried to shoot it from far.

And as luck would have it, one of the cockroaches was discovered too - another ear piercing cry and rushing around by a few who wanted to dis-

tance themselves from the offending animal.

Finally, a brave heart, armed with a long plastic ruler tried to shoot away the lizard, which refused to move. Some wondered if it was dead when suddenly someone tried to slide it off the keyboard by tilting it. It was then they discovered that the lizard was made of clay.

Somebody similarly hit at the cockroach and its clay identity established."

She says,

Was she caught? Yes, and she still has the cockroaches!

A 'sweet' prank

The renowned Jolbhora Sandesh of Bengal may find takers aplenty, but do you know how it came into existence?

It was born due to one's desire to fool an unsuspecting dear relative. The year was 1818. According to descendants of the famous confectioner Modak, upon receiving instructions from the zamindar's wife, confectioner Surya Kumar Modak with his son Siddeshwar got down to work.

The instructions were clear, the mother-in-law wanted to play a prank on her new son-in-law but wanted it to be subtle. Modak came up with the idea of filling a modak (a traditional Bengali dry sweetmeat) with rosewater and sweet syrup and it was presented to the new groom. As he took a bite, the water-filled centre crumbled, drenching his panjabi (Bengali style Kurta). What followed was a loud cheer from the mother-in-law. The rest is history.

Though the incident took place much before April Fool's Day arrived in the country via the colonialists and gained a following, it remains a classic case of perfect execution of a prank. (TWF)



Fun time: This is an image of 2001 April Fool's Day in Denmark, regarding Copenhagen's new subway. It looks as if one of its cars had an accident, and had broken through and surfaced on the square in front of the town hall. In reality, it was a retired subway car from the subway of Stockholm cut obliquely.

Image courtesy: Lars Andersen, Wikimedia Commons

Changing sex a click away

In Norway, any child over the age of six can now legally change his or her sex. "Daddy, guess what, I'm a female now! Daddy, what does female mean?" Gender trends in the West are astonishing.

Last month in the United States, a student responded to a reference to gender by commenting that there are two biological genders, male and female. Furious teachers barred him from the class at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

In Asia, any student who answered a question on gender without saying that there are two biological genders, male and female, would risk getting thrown out of class.

East and West seem to be different planets on this topic.

In parts of Europe and the United States, if a bearded man working as a professional sperm donor claims to be female, using the word 'him' for him (his sopsel) is a hate crime, and to be rude, loud and untidy (that is, more like a boy). The teacher was unapologetic.

This was on my mind as I have two firmly members travelling to Europe this week. I warned them to avoid all gender questions. "But what if someone gives me a form and I have to tick a 'male or female' box?" I told her that this would definitely be a trick question, and she should throw the form back in their faces, saying: "Your discredited binary gender categories outrage me."

These days if you meet a Western baby, you can't tell what sex it is, since many consider it evil to dress girls in pink and boys in blue. You have to say something like: "What a cute little, er, offspring, it looks just like one or other of its, er, begetters."

In several Western countries you

can now change your sex by clicking an online form.

It was revealed in recent days that an Argentinian man named Sergio Lazarovich got his pension money paid five years early by changing his sex to female. Now if this column was being written in the West, this writer would have to refer to this guy as a woman, because journalists are required to follow their subjects' self-chosen sex, even when it is patently idiotic to do so. Lazarovich's relatives are quoted saying that he is the sort of man who makes homophobic comments and has a string of girlfriends, including after his, er, "sex change".

Schools in Sweden are instructed by the government to "counter-

act traditional gender roles and gender patterns", the New York Times reported approximately last week.

One Swedish couple was unhappy when their daughter came home having been taught to be rude, loud and untidy (that is, more like a boy). The teacher was unapologetic.

"This is what we have here, and we are not going to stop it," she told the reporter.

I think making girls behave like boys may qualify as The Dumbest Idea in History, beating even Chairman Mao's "Let's kill all the birds". British India's "Let's lubricate bullets with pig fat", and Hollywood's decision to finance a film called 'Santa Claus Conquers The Martians'.

Meanwhile, I am updating my all-purpose answer to my children's questions, from "Ask your mother" to "Ask your other begetter".

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, APRIL 1, 2018

Moon square Pluto on your solar return chart denotes that there will be mixed developments around you. It is a friendly time, when it is easy to enjoy life and other people as you instinctively start a new phase in your life. It's time to give your life a makeover, a time of new beginnings and fresh energy. Focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new plans, and exploration. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. Your physical activities tend to be more intense, passionate, and focused.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Positive new relationships are formed and you can look forward to good results. It's a friendly time, when it is easy to enjoy life and other people as you instinctively start a new phase in your life. It's time to give your life a makeover, a time of new beginnings and fresh energy. Focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new plans, and exploration. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. Your physical activities tend to be more intense, passionate, and focused.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. You are inspired and could even inspire others. You are thinking more creatively, and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You want your objectives to reflect what you are really about, and you are likely to rid yourself of unsatisfying goals. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus helps you achieve what you set out to do. It is the time to coordinate with your creations, love affair, children, and hobbies.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You are in a position to inspire others through what you create highlighting communication, creativity and authority. Your attitude towards life would be changing; you are no longer willing to make compromises in the important areas of your life, particularly with regards to career and your life path. You would be able to find a way to strike a balance between self-gratification and the obligations of daily life. You are more determined, and it is an excellent time for getting rid of bad habits. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal life.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You give a new approach to communications projects, learning, or self-expression. Your most natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. A new project or goal begun now has a good chance of being successful and long lasting. This is a good time for reflection, prayer, and meditation. A higher purpose to your life is what you seek, and you rely more heavily upon your intuition to arrive at achieve it. Your self-confidence and positive attitude will reward you. Positive connections with others can be made fairly easily. A comfortable level of personal popularity helps to keep conflict to a minimum.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings an exciting job offer, reward, recognition or a possible promotion. An opportunity to expand on a worldly level arrives now. A balanced approach to life, in terms of realistic expectations, is the best approach for maximizing success. People are bound to recognize your leadership skills and talents. You want your life path and your objectives to reflect what you're really about. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do in the coming weeks. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. It's also a good time for expressing your creativity.

This is a period of work and development. It's a time to deal with practical matters, and it's not a time to be lazy or especially generous. It can be a time that feels hard, monotonous and lonely. Try to get yourself organized. Your problems are not your sources, keep busy. You might find that you are very often encouraging and supportive of others. Certainly, you are more

accepting and understanding of your friends and loved ones. Being content in love will figure and will attract positive circumstances into your life. It's likely to be a rather light-hearted time, when opportunities are greater than usual.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

There will be a wave good-luck in love and romance. You spend great time in long conversations, phone calls, short trips and enjoy the feeling of togetherness. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental about work commitments. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Financial success is stronger than earlier. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity on your work in an unconventional way. Positive new relationships are formed.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. There are greater monetary gains too. You probably should be aware of a tendency to create your own financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. Your main focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends, and exploration. You are enthusiastic and ready for adventure. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating and visiting religious places.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You might play attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time from the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Financial benefits may come your way. You may find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well. If you are patient and open yourself up in a gentle manner, you will attract both things and people. Be patient, be receptive and enjoy the peace.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You enjoy decisions in your favour when it comes to legal affairs, education, and travel. Financial benefits may come your way. You may find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well. If you are patient and open yourself up in a gentle manner, you will attract both things and people. Be patient, be receptive and enjoy the peace.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Your efforts would be rewarded and praised by people in authority as you resolve issues related to finances and budgets. You are bound to experience increased social opportunities as well as a boost in your personal popularity and magnetism. Others look on you favorably. You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time from the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Financial benefits may come your way. You may find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well. If you are patient and open yourself up in a gentle manner, you will attract both things and people. Be patient, be receptive and enjoy the peace.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

The planetary configuration boosts your professional prospects as you communicate clearly and interact in a more positive way with people. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of the consequences and try to please your loved one. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your truth and intuition to take care of integrated with your loved one. Married people should look after a family member as the health of a family member may suffer. You tend to get mentally stressed and anxious causing health problems, deep sleep and problems arise as you are under a different perspective. Meditation and daily prayers would help to overcome the recently generated problems.

'I'm aware of sexual harassment in Bollywood'



I was not a newcomer... They knew if they (directors or producers) had approached me inappropriately and I had revealed it to the journalists, the news would have been on the front pages of newspapers. So nobody could take chances

Delhi. She is a very strong, independent girl who meets a man in an arranged marriage scenario. Being a level-headed girl, she rejects the man. But in the course of life, she realises that independence, education, ambition are great, while at the same time a person must be judged on the basis of the merits of a good person. She realises the presence of emotions, love in life. The film is a funny, emotional and romantic journey of Avantika and Babloo.

Do you have any plans to be a part of a Bengali film?
I am not planning anything but if something comes around, I might give it a thought.

A debate is going on worldwide

about the payment disparity between male and female actors. Where do you think the Bollywood actresses of this generation are standing?

I don't have to think anything as the box office collections are proving it. The female-oriented films done by Priyanka (Priyanka Chopra), Tabu, Kangana (Kangana Ranaut) (in recent times) are doing so well at the box office. People, directors, producers have started betting on female actors, so that is a kind of progression. Yes, there was a time when female actors only backed their heroes and their names, but now the scenario has changed. I am not going to take any name but the films A-listed actors also do not make profits at the box office now if they lack good content.

On the other hand, a film which is just (grossed) three or four crores but the content is good, picks up. Now the audience is very intelligent. They don't go to the theatre houses but they are required to be pushed to the cinema halls because of the availability of multiple platforms to watch movies. Until and unless the audience knows the content is good, they will not go to the theatre houses. So there is a huge pressure on the film industry to deliver good films. Earlier, people used to visit the theatre houses to watch their favourite heroes without thinking about the content. Now if someone wants to see Varun Dhawan (she means any hero), he or she can see him in just a click (on multiple platforms), so they won't spend money to see him at the theatre houses unless the film is good. This is good because the entire standard of the industry has been elevated.

Several Hollywood actors came out in public to share their experiences of sexual harassment through #MeToo campaign post Harvey Weinstein episode. Have you encountered such things in the Hindi film industry?

Of course it is prevalent and I am aware of it. Since I already had the title of Miss India to my credit I didn't face such circumstances. I was not a newcomer, so never had to go and knock on the doors of directors and producers as one falls vulnerable in those situations. They knew if they (directors or producers) had approached me inappropriately and I had revealed it to the journalists, the news would have been on the front pages of newspapers. So nobody could take chances.

Do beauty pageant crowns help aspiring actresses to get their initial break in the film industry?

Yes but to a small extent. The crown of Miss India is not a ticket to Bollywood. One still has to go through the auditions, screen tests because the directors or producers will see her as a model. They don't know her acting skills. The aspirants will get an opportunity only after passing the tests. (IBNS-TWF)

(Images by Avishek Mitra)



By Ranjan K Baruah

When we hear of press then we think of either a printing press or media. In this edition we would like to tell our readers more options and avenues related to printing press.

In today's digital world, there have been many changes and there might be more in near future. Many of us might remember the person writing on walls and making banners and working like postman to draw and write big hoardings and now all of them have been replaced by flex. Print technology was invented in the 14th century by Johannes Gutenberg of Europe, most popularly known as the father of printing.

There are different designation and responsibilities associated with printing press. The main avenue in this regard is of print technology. The most popular applications of printing are newspapers, periodicals and hoardings, which include colour magazines, books, brochures, posters, catalogue, pamphlet, banners, etc. There are offset press and some other machines as per requirement of the final product. Career avenues when it comes to printing press also vary. Required human resources are also different for different capacities. Some of the posts or options are Printer Engineer, Print Technologists, Printing Manager, Printing Supervisor, Graphic Designer, Production Manager, DTP Operator, Proof Reader and Quality Manager.

Print Technology: Printing technologies and careers are offered in India at

different levels like diploma, Bachelor degree, Masters degree which are offered at universities, institutes and at the polytechnic level. The eligibility for admission in Printing Technology Courses is also different for different levels.

together images, typography, or motion graphics to create a piece of design. A graphic designer creates the graphics primarily for published, printed or electronic media, such as brochures/pamphlets and advertising. They are also sometimes responsible for typesetting, illustration, user interfaces and web design.

Air India disinvestment

AIR India disinvestment has been mooted for long, particularly with Arun Shourie, Minister for Disinvestment in the Vajpayee cabinet vigorously pushing for it. Now the Narendra Modi government has invited expressions of interest to acquire 76% stake in the state-owned airline, once J.R.D. Tata’s pride and glory. Air India ran up losses of Rs 46,805 crore and outstanding debts of Rs 48,781 crore at the end of the last Financial Year. The rationale for privatization is sound. Consumer will gain from competition. The tax payers’ money will be better utilized. It is a welcome step as after the fall of the Vajpayee government, the idea has been shelved. Air India is evidently unable to withstand sectoral competition. Its current domestic market share is only a little over 17%. So the government has no reason to be interested in the national carrier. The same logic applies to BSNL and MTNL. There is perhaps some reason for keeping NTPC, CNGS, IOL, SBI, LIC and BHEL within the state-owned parameters. These organisations have met private competition fair and square. They continue to be profitable and pay dividends although the oil marketing companies are sustained by cross-subsidisation hurting the common man’s interest. Air India should be in the same league as Bhushan Steel, Binani Cement, Lanco Infratech or Alok Industries.

Air India has certain strong points apart from its Maharaja image. It has operating fleet of 138 aircrafts. It connects 54 domestic and 94 international destinations. It has prime landing / parking slots as well as brand equity. In efficient private entrepreneurial hands, it can recapture the slogan that there is An Air About India. But the old problem remains. Who will come forward to buy such a heavyweight in the air?

LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

Panchayat Bill will be defeated in RS

The opposition parties will defeat in the Rajya Sabha the Constitution Amendment Bill on panchayat institutions, Janata Dal leader in the upper house Mr M S Gurupadaswamy said today. Talking to newsmen here he said the Congress(I) did not have the required two-thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha his party was determined to defeat the bill, he added.

MDA and the Making of a Strong Democracy in Meghalaya

By H H Mohrmen

Thanks to a strong opposition, the first Budget Session under the MDA government saw a very lively debate in the House and perhaps for the first time in the history of the State, the deliberations in the House have evoked the interest of the common people too. People of different age and gender diligently followed the proceedings in the Assembly and started discussing the issues raised in the House at the appropriate location and time.

It is for the first time in the history of Meghalaya that one hears people discussing what is going in the August House at teashops or the homes of the bereaved families. We will have to wait and see before arriving at a conclusion as to whether it is the charm of the new CM or because of the unrelenting opposition (that keeps the Government on its toes) which has drawn the interest of the crowd about the Assembly proceedings. But any which way we look at it, it is good for democracy in Meghalaya.

This writer was taken aback while travelling recently on a public transport when a housewife started discussing the topics debated in the Assembly which were of interest to her. The public picked up the subjects debated in the House either from the newspapers or from what they saw reported on Doordarshan and other visual media which gives a regular update on the Assembly proceedings. Therefore the media too plays a vital role in making people aware of the discussions in the House which ultimately leads to the discussions at different places.

Though not as avid as the common people this writer also follows the deliberations in the House and had noticed something missing this time. If I am not mistaken the House had missed out on a very important event this time when it failed to make an obituary reference for Indro Pariat former MLA and also minister in charge Excise etc Government of Meghalaya who died at his residence in Wahiajer on the voting day of the last election.

Notwithstanding the positive developments in

the House, there are also critics who blamed the Congress for raising too many questions and some concluded that vociferous criticism by the Party against the newly instituted MDA government was a reflection of the failure of the previous Congress-led MUA Government. That is fine. People also have the right to ask the Congress (on its face), as to how can the Party be so brazen to even expect a Government which is not even a month old to be responsible for the wrongs in the State.

It was also a good question to ask as to how the Congress party has the audacity to even raise so many questions when it was

The decision that from next year on all schools will have to follow the CBSE course in Classes XI and XII is a step in the right direction, but it is just the beginning. Hopefully the new Education Policy will not only improve the education scenario in the state but will also come up with mechanisms to monitor and control private institutions which are mushrooming in the state.

the Congress which was at the helm of power in the last five years and therefore should be responsible for the all the mess in the State. Of course these are all important questions, but the fact is that the Congress is now the major opposition group in the House and if the members do not raise questions, then who will?

The Congress is caught in a Catch-22 situation. They are in a sticky wicket where they are damned if they don’t ask questions and damned also because they asked question. Rather the important question that should be asked is; what is the role of the opposition if it is not to raise questions of public interest in the House? And the second question is what kind of session will we have if we have an acquiescent opposition? Isn’t it true that the Assembly sessions would be dull and lacklustre if the Opposition do not raise question? Therefore we should congratulate the Congress party for living up to its constitutional responsibility of being a strong Opposition.

A strong Opposition will

of the Opposition and even from the very beginning of the current session, it is obvious now that the Treasury Bench cannot take the Opposition for granted. Not only Dr Sangma who is a politician of a stature who also knows the Government like the back of his hand but many of the Congress MLAs too are good orators and are also well versed with the parliamentary protocols which will be a test for the Government of the day.

If the bright morning promised a better day, then the first few days of the Budget Session of Meghalaya is a sign of good days to come for Meghalaya. If the morning promises the day then one can safely conclude that this Assembly is going to be an interesting one and hopefully it will bring progress and development to the state.

The first budget of the MDA government was praised by many for having its priority right by allocating the second highest budget allocation to Education, but on a closer examination one would also realise that a large part of the budget allocation will go towards paying for the teachers’ salary. Of

course providing a good salary for teachers is a good incentive for those responsible for educating the future citizens of the state because this can also be seen as an investment for the future.

The pertinent question is whether the government will be able to close the disparity gap in monthly remuneration paid to the teachers who fall under different categories such as full-fledged government schools teachers, those under deficit system, government aided, SSA and of course teachers in private schools. It is ironic that although they perform the same job but there is a vast pay disparity between the government teachers and teachers in private run schools. The other question is also what change this government can bring with the meagre resource that it has at its disposal. The decision that from next year on all schools will have to follow the CBSE course in Classes XI and XII is a step in the right direction, but it is just the beginning. Hopefully the new Education Policy will not only improve the education scenario in the state but will also come up with mechanisms to monitor and control private institutions which are mushrooming in the state.

Although the Congress might not like it, but the result of the 2018 election is good for the State as a whole. Of course like everybody else the twenty odd Congress MLAs too want to be in the treasury bench and not in the Opposition, but as fate would have it they have to accept the outcome and look at the brighter side. The Party will at least have to be content with the side it is now, but who knows what is in store for the party post the 2019 general election?

Come what may, the Congress sitting in the opposition is good for the state because for a change we now have a very strong Opposition in the House to monitor and also act as a check and balance mechanism to the activities of the MDA Government. (IANS)

"You are late today for the prayer." Gandhiji smiled and replied, "Yes, I am." But at that moment the man pulled out a revolver and fired three shots from point-blank range. The bullets pierced the frail body of the great leader. Gandhiji collapsed. The assassin was seized by the people who had come to attend the prayer.

Thus, another crucifixion was staged on another Friday. The Good Friday of January 30, 1948 halted the juggernaut of religious fanaticism as it made people realize the inherent danger of it. As a matter of fact, such Good Fridays made our evolution from brutality to humanity possible. We still have miles to go but past progress from primitive society to feudalism to police state capitalism to modern welfare states confirms that ours is an ascending evolution. However, Jesus is still to suffer on the cross to get us going.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De.

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 challenges of Autism

By Dr Shabina Ahmed

(Published on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day)

April 2nd has been designated as World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) by the UN Resolution 62/139 adopted in November 2007. It has been celebrated every year worldwide since April 2008 as a global effort to foster greater understanding, acceptance and inclusion of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in communities around the world. WAAD is an annual reminder that autism is a growing global health issue that impacts millions of children and adults.

The prevalence of ASD in Asia tends to be similar to that in Europe and the US. Studies conducted over 30 years, from the 60s, reported prevalence of ASD as 2-5 per 10,000 population, but a 90s study by the USD Department of Developmental Services reported a 550% increase , and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the US in 2016, states an incidence of 68 per 10,000 population , similar to a global figure of 62/10,000. Similar trends are being reported globally, with the highest rates in Japan and developed countries.

There are no nationwide prevalence studies in India. However it is estimated by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) an incidence of 1:500 or 0.2%, corresponding to more than 2.2 million people nationwide, more common than Downs’ Syndrome.

This explains the alarming rise of children, adolescents and adults with social-communication disorder. Research has shown that disorders of language and communication hamper scholastic performance in later life. Surveys show that 75% of these adults ultimately remain unemployed or underemployed. Another study shows only 55% of young adults with ASD had been employed at least once in their first 6 years after highschool. This is the lowest rate when compared with other developmental disability groups. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) services are in place to assist individuals with disabilities but researchers indicate that the VR services provided to individuals with ASD are less than optimal and inadequately prepared to support individuals in the spectrum to face their unique challenges in employment. Hence, it is the need of the hour is to understand the transition process of youth with ASD.

It is time to realise that there is a huge ongoing loss of productive human resource, a focus of debate in recent years. Significant to mention here that autism is now included in India in the revised Persons With Disability (PWD) Act 2016 under the grouping ‘Intellectual Disability’. But by definition, in the Act, ASD is a neuro-development condition of social communication disorder affecting a person’s functionality. Herein lies the great disparity in service delivery. In contrast, the developed world has developed their autism services years ahead of us, unlike in India where we are yet to establish the basic services. In fact, this is reflected in this year’s WAAD theme of the UN, “Empowering Women and Girls with Autism”. Let us first get our basics rights and stabilisation of services before we can get into specificities of the issue.

Is this a disability or a change in cognitive style due to neurodiversity ? Though the condition has been grouped under ‘Intellectual Disability’, intellectual capacity is not the main criteria of this disorder. Though most of the children with ASD have developmental and intellectual delay, and are unable to follow the normal school curriculum, but some show intense interest and detailed attention in music, newspapers, magazines, books, pens and mobiles and handles these interests skillfully. If this aspect of splinter intelligence is nurtured, they can be channelized meaningfully.

Autism is not a disorder of childhood alone but a truly developmental disorder that affects development manifesting differently across the lifespan, with many subcategories and varied presentations, best addressed in a dimensional approach. Initially, we have the paediatrician’s role in early identification and intervention. Later, if we do not cater to their needs appropriately, they have an increased incidence of neuropsychiatric problems. Hence a multidisciplinary support both at individual and family levels is essential.

The uniqueness of this problem is, if detected before 30 months, and those with milder symptoms, with higher cognitive scores at 2 years, supplemented with early intervention had greater chances of outgrowing the symptoms of autism. But longterm studies are required to assess their progress in normal school. However, the challenge of identification before 2 years is difficult as the symptoms of autism remain submerged within the child’s aberrations of the developmental functioning.

Over the years, many types of interventions have evolved with multiple definitions and concepts, but due to the wide variability of presentations and of trained staff, generalised interventions fail to harness a large group of children.

Hence, it is suggested that parents and other stakeholders must think in terms of individually designed plans to adapt social interactions and activities to match a child’s neuropsychological makeup rather than changing the child to fit the program. Such interventions are typically parent-delivered. Parent-mediated interventions involve teaching parents to use therapeutic strategies usually in the context of normal daily routine along with social skills training with emphasis on peer relationship.

Autism differs from other disabilities where compensation is of the deficient organ : blindness by Braille, deafness by hearing aid but in autism the problem area has not been specifically identified as the symptomology appears to be a chain reaction of biological to neuropsychological development. Therefore the best treatment modalities towards this group of children are from the bio-socio-medical approach. Presently, the prevailing deficit targeted approaches do not address the child as a whole and does not prepare the child for transition of youth.

Autism is a global health crisis that knows no borders. The world must further act globally and locally to improve the lives of the individual and affected families. WHO has suggested to enhance services for affected families. It is mandatory to find each nation’s prevalence and to understand the impact of ASD on the families, especially on parenting styles and upbringing. Finally, a support system for these families must be developed by instituting training modules to promote child development in a holistic manner.

(Dr Shabina Ahmed is MD Developmental Paediatrician, Assam Autism Foundation Guwahati)

“ We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open. ”

--- Jawaharlal Nehru

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2018

Students as victims

THE CBSE examination paper leak is the last straw. This year certainly does not bode well for India. On the one hand we have a banking system that has failed to prevent slick thieves from making away with thousands of crores of public money. Then we have Facebook admitting to leaking our data to market sharks and now the leakage of examination papers - the ultimate blow to students and their parents who have worked relentlessly for months together to ensure that their children get past the burdensome education system with flying colours.

A question may be asked as to why India fails to get things right. Aren't all the above maladies the affliction of banana republics run by tin-pot dictators? Isn't a democracy more evolved in that governance must necessarily be a participatory activity? Evidently it isn't! Some people at the top mess up and there are no checks and balances. In Meghalaya, a lot of noise is generated on account of the text books prescribed by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE). The text books seem to have gone from bad to worse. The language is unreadable and one wonders how such books pass muster and who finally recommended such badly written, factually incorrect text books for our young students, many of whom are able to write much better English than the authors. Our education system is in shambles and has been so for a while now. Those teaching Mathematics are appalled at the exercises which they say will confound the students instead of making Mathematics a joy to learn. The Social Science text books too need comprehensive revision or must be completely trashed for the simple reason that the authors appear to have been politically motivated.

The fact that children of senior government officials and politicians do not study in the MBOSE schools is enough indication that they don't give credence to what is taught in these schools. Is that why they dump the worst kind of books on students who are ill-fated to be under MBOSE?

LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

Party nominees to be release

The Congress(I) Parliamentary Board is expected to release the list of party nominees for Meghalaya on January 6, the day the Prime Minister is scheduled to return from his sojourn in Lakswadeep. The Pradesh Election Committee earlier in its meeting held here at the Chief Minister's Bungalow, finalised the draft

list after a lengthy discussion. The committee took into account the subcommittee report on the three "general" seats of Shillong. Meanwhile, the Union Minister of State for Surface Transport Mr.Rajesh Pilot and the AICC(IGeneral Secretary Mr.Oscar Fernandes arrived here on Sunday morning.

TO THE EDITOR

Exposure only for the privileged?

Editor

Being an ex student of a premier school in this city I witnessed a mixed bag of changes in my Alma Mater, one of them being the system of sending students for excursion to foreign countries - a move that looks very progressive at the outset. But in a Christian educational institution which bases itself on equality for all, it was quite surprising to see a system of self financed foreign trips, including costs which worked out to a couple of lakhs, thus automatically implying that only a small privileged section qualify to be a part of this, simply because of the economic standards of the parents. And the rest were left out.

This drawing of a wedge between students based on their economic backgrounds and no other criterion for merit, could have serious impact on the young minds who are left out only because of their inability to match up to the fancy costs involved. While excursions like these are important, I wonder if fancy international trips should be the

Easing traffic congestion in Shillong

Editor

The traffic congestions on the main roads of Shillong has become unbearable. For the traffic police personnel it is like fire-fighting everyday with no hope of dousing it any time soon but which instead spreads with each passing day. Lately the congestion has started to spread to the lateral roads from different localities since portions of these narrow roads are used for parking of vehicles either throughout the day or overnight. Residents of localities near schools, especially, have to struggle to get in or out of their localities because of the parking of vehicles along their approach roads during school pick up time .

The government is

Mental Health: it’s time for our involvement

By Ibasaralyne Thabah Synthiang

30 years and 24 females in the age group of 14-30 years. People take the last step of ending their lives because more often than not, there is no one to turn to for help. Now was the family able to give help. In fact most families with a member suffering from mental health problems live in denial and are reluctant to seek help. A recent study of young people aged 15 - 24 years in the state of Himachal Pradesh revealed that adolescents suffered from a wide range of mental health conditions one being suicidal ideation (5.5%).The reasons often cited for suicide ranges from family problems, failure in examinations, drug abuse/alcohol abuse, a love affair gone wrong and in some cases the causes were not known.

Since various mental health conditions can affect anyone at any time, no group can escape the vulnerability to mental disorders. The risk is higher among those of low socio economic backgrounds, the unemployed, victims of violence, indigenous populations, children and adolescents. Moreover, parental mental disorders or substance abuse, discord and marital violence and breakdown also contribute to children being vulnerable to mental health issues. Battered women were found to have more depressive symptoms than other women, being the target of violence puts women at increased risk of depression, suicide attempts, psychosomatic disorders and physical injury. Mental health conditions was also recognized as occurring commonly among older people as well, and as having an important impact on their quality of life, and on the lives of their family members.

Institutions providing mental health care and services are limited. Most of the mental health services available are concentrated in Shillong. In rural areas, mental health services are almost absent although there are psychiatrists posted in few district hospitals. Mental health camps conducted by organizations such as SANKER or Bethany Society do provide some mental health care in rural areas. The gap between the need of mental health care and services and their availability is very large. Research in the field

of mental health especially pertaining to the state is also limited. There are a few strides that institutions have taken. For instance, the Martin Luther Christian University has a project to develop a community mental health programme in rural Meghalaya using the community based participatory approach. The aim is to enhance the capacity of the local people to manage mental illnesses using local resources and to refer to appropriate mental health providers whenever necessary. What was learnt through the experiences with the project is that there is a stigma attached to mental illness. People shy away from availing mental health services because of the fear of being labelled 'mad'.

Mental Health awareness and education are important components. It is only when we are aware about the importance of mental health that we will be able to influence others positively. This can start with the inclusion of Mental Health education in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities. As mental health is an important component of the Social Work curriculum students taking this subject have become more sensitive to mental health issue. Since they have clarity about this condition they do not mind sharing their experiences such as situations that causes them stress and give real life examples to connect mental health conditions they have identified in their very own lives. Can educational institutions Mental Health in their curriculum to shed light on common mental illnesses and also hold workshops inviting experts to speak on the subject? The good news is that sensitized students are trying to intervene; with a few even utilising a simple CAGE questionnaire, the name of which is an acronym of its four questions to screen the prevalence of alcohol use among their fellow mates with the intention of helping those that might need help.

As professionals and as teachers especially we need to be observant, to listen without being judgmental and refer individuals with mental health conditions to seek professional help whenever required, making them understand that seeking professional help if they cannot cope is like visiting a doctor for physical ail-

ments where there is no shame or and no negative connotation. Promotion of mental health education is vital; the more we talk about something, the more we are aware, and the less we fear.

There is a need to prioritise the Mental Health scene in the state with emphasis on preventive initiatives rather than just the curative aspect. Our emphasis is usually more on the physical aspect of health, forgetting the other two components which are our mental and social wellbeing.We have to start focusing on Mental Health because the three components of health are closely interwoven and each are essential fibres of life and interdependent; one will not do without the other.

The need for a Mental Health Policy for the state is crucial and the policy should emphasize on young people, their families and the cultural context. Speaking out about focused interventions on Mental Health is the need of the hour. One sees this happening already with various institutions which are educating young minds on the subject. Today research relating to Mental Health is being conducted and experts are speaking about the importance of Mental Health.

Can we start then by simply getting involved? We can do our part by not discriminating against persons with mental health conditions, we can start by not using belittling statements about ourselves like "I am mad or crazy", "I'm OCD", "You are a Psycho" and the like. We can be advocates for mental health in our own ways. As stated earlier we should not be ashamed of seeking professional help if required. Also we can identify and refer others to seek such help and/or lend a listening ear to those who may be going through a tough phase in life or to caregivers of mentally ill persons. Dr R.Srinivasa Murthy, renowned Psychiatrist, NIMHANS opined, "Everyone could help and contribute to mental health by thinking out of the box and building from available resources."

(The writer teaches in the Department of Social Work, MLCU)

interest.

Yours etc.,
K.L.Tariang,
Via email

Age of leaks!

Editor,

This refers to the front - page report, "CBSE paper leak : Tale of friendship gone awry" (ST, April 2, 2018). From bank loan leak to Aadhaar information leak to poll date leak to now CBSE question paper leak ~ are we living in an age of leaks? Or is it a leak age? We fail our children in every possible way. Students are to cope with a growing apprehension that they may not get jobs in future which means living without employment and without any unemployment allowance as well. But private educational institutions are extracting exorbitant fees from them. Now, paper leak is there to add insult to injury.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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.

Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

Beating the Rhetoric

In the last two decades the character of crimes in India has change considerably. While traditional crimes continue to hold space in public narratives, gradual liberalization has also led to the proliferation of white collar crimes. White collar crimes are often financial in nature and swindle the government and country of crores of rupees. The Harshad Mehta stock exchange scam in mid 1990'S, was India's first tryst with the world of financial crimes. Mehta had gamed the stock system and Indian banks to make himself a princely sum in those days. For the first time, India came face to face with a new set of challenge. And since then financial crimes have got bigger and more serious.

In the late 2000's the owner of the Kingfisher group Vijay Mallya left behind a crumbling empire in debt while finding home in England. Repeated attempts of the Government to bring Mallya back have met with diplomatic and legal entanglements. In 2018 , however

application before a special court (designated under the 2002 PMLA Act) to declare a person as a fugitive economic offender. The application will contain the following sections. The first section would pertain to the reasons to believe that an individual is a fugitive economic offender; the second section would pertain to any information about his whereabouts. The third section would be a list of properties believed to be proceeds of a crime for which confiscation is sought, while the fourth section would contain a list of benami properties or foreign properties for which confiscation is sought. Finally the application would contain a list of persons having an interest in these properties.

Once the application is received by the special court, the court in turn will issue a notice to the individual: (i) requiring him to appear at a specified place within six weeks, and (ii) stating that a failure to appear will result in him being declared a fugitive economic offender. If the person ap-

“ The government has risen to the occasion by bringing in the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 in the Lok Sabha. Once this bill is passed it will ensure that the government has legal sanctity to recover from any person who has allegedly defrauded the country and scooted. The salient features of the Bill make this intent absolutely clear.”

the biggest news came when Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksy left the country after allegedly defrauding Punjab National Bank of hundreds of crores, by defaulting on loan payments and alleged issuance of fake Letters of Undertaking (LoU).

The government has risen to the occasion by bringing in the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 in the Lok Sabha. Once this bill is passed it will ensure that the government has legal sanctity to recover from any person who has allegedly defrauded the country and scooted. The salient features of the Bill make this intent absolutely clear. The bill would seek to confiscate properties of those who flee India after committing an economic offence. This is the first time; the government has been given such a power to recover dues from those who flee the country.

In the Bill, fugitive economic offender has been defined as a person against whom an arrest warrant has been issued for committing any offence as listed in the schedule of the Act. The Bill further defines an economic offender as someone who has committed anyone of these crimes (i) left the country to avoid facing prosecution, or (ii) refuses to return to face prosecution. Some of the offences listed in the schedule are: (i) counterfeiting government stamps or currency, (ii) cheque dishonour for insufficient funds, (iii) money laundering, and (iv) transactions defrauding creditors. The Bill allows the central government to amend the schedule through a notification.

The bill has notified the process through which the system can be kick-started. If any individual has committed an economic crime or is an economic offender then a director or deputy director (appointed under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002) may file an

appears at the specified place, the special court will terminate its proceedings under the provisions of this Bill, while those who fail to appear before the Court will by their absence kick- start proceedings under the Act against themselves.

After hearing the application, the special court may declare an individual as a fugitive economic offender. It may confiscate properties which: (i) are proceeds of crime, (ii) are benami properties in India or abroad, and (iii) any other property in India or abroad. Upon confiscation, all rights and titles of the property will vest in the central government, free from all encumbrances, such as any charges on the property. Once the property is confiscated the Bill confers the right to the central government to appoint an administrator to manage and dispose of these properties.

This Bill gives the director or deputy director the power to attach any property mentioned in the application with the permission of a special court. Further, these authorities may provisionally attach any property without the prior permission of the special court, provided that they file an application before the court within 30 days. The attachment will continue for 180 days, unless extended by the special court. If at the conclusion of proceedings, the person is not found to be a fugitive economic offender, his properties will be released.

The Bill allows any civil court or tribunal to disallow a person, who has been declared a fugitive economic offender, from filing or defending any civil claim. Appeals against such orders from the Special Court will lie with the jurisdiction of the High Court. This Bill is indeed a landmark step towards combating economic offences in India in the long run. (Views expressed are personal)

“I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.”

--- Thomas A. Edison

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.231 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 2018

Communal Disharmony

IT is not surprising that with religion dominating Indian politics, communalism is rearing its ugly head in different parts of the country. A holy occasion like Ram Navami triggered unholy feelings in secular West Bengal and the Dalit factor has hit the streets in Madhya Pradesh. But the worst manifestation has been in Nitish Kumar's Bihar since his severance of ties with the RJD and the Congress and joining the NDA. He professed to be prompted by the need for good governance. But official records present a murky picture. There have been 200 incidents with communal overtones since July 2017. There are deliberate attempts at political polarisation and social intimidation. When an RJD candidate won in the Lok Sabha bye- election in March, allegedly fake videos of Muslim youth shouting anti-India slogans were circulated in Araria. Armed religious processions were taken out through Muslim areas intimidating the minority community. Asansol in West Bengal took a cue from the Bihar example on Ram Navami day. Communalism has been rife in Bihar in Munger, Bhagalpur, Aurangabad, Samastipur, Shekhpura, Nawada & Nalanda. BJP, leader and Union Minister Ashwin Kumar's son, Ajit Shaswar had to be put in judicial custody. His role in communal violence in an incident in Bhagalpur must have been glaringly blatant.

Nitish Kumar's pre-volte face pro-poor stance has also been largely knocked out. The state government has foozled it in maintaining peace and order. In Bihar also, Ram Navami proved a cause for destabilisation. All this botches up Kumar's development agenda. The central leadership of the BJP, the dominant party in the Bihar government should teach local thugs to exercise restraint. Flimsy excuses on grounds of fault-finding with the Constitution and such absurd demands as inserting the name of Lord Rama in it will vitiate the Indian polity. Solidarity is the key to progress.

LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

Panchayat Bill will be defeated in RS

Govt to introduce Bill for Urban Development

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi today said his government proposed to introduce a bill on the pattern of panchayati raj for the overall development of urban and sub-urban areas of the country. Addressing a public meeting here Mr Gandhi said the proposed bill would be brought in the next session of the Parliament within the next two months. This would bring about economic uplift of the people living in the areas, he added.

The Prime Minister expressed grave concern over the growing communal and separatist tendencies and said the saner and conscious sections of the society should counter them. Mr Gandhi charged some of the leading opposition parties with fanning the flame of communalism and described it as most "unfortunate". He appealed to the people to unitedly expose and oppose such evil designs. Mr Gandhi suggested that attempt should be made at all levels to curb extravagance. Only a small fraction of the fruit of development reached the people because of the extravagance, he added.

The Prime Minister said the developmental programmes of the Government should reach the poorest and depressed sections in the remotest corner of the country. Mr Gandhi recounted the honest intentions of the government regarding Panchayati Raj Amendment Bill and the Jawahar Rojar Yojana and said all these measures were aimed at long term benefits. He said his government had

taken special care for women to give them a prominent place in society and also ensured that they were not denied their rights a provision for thirty per cent reservation for women has been made, he added.

The Prime Minister said alongwith strengthening of the Panchayati Raj system there was also a need for reorganizing the cooperative sector and making it more effective. The cooperative institutions have to live up to the expectations of the people for which they have been created.

Mahanta opposes varsity sitting

Assam Chief Minister Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta today opposed the centre's decision to set up a central university in Barak Valley of the state. Speaking to newsmen he described the decision as “unilateral and taken on narrow political consideration” and appealed to the centre to reconsider it.

He said the State Government from the very beginning had been pressing for setting up of a central university in the state and communicated to the central authorities besides the Prime Minister and Human Resources Development Minister from time to time in this connection. A site was also selected in Sonitpur district and land was acquired for the purpose in 1987.

Mr P V Narasimha Rao and Mr P Shivshankar both were informed that it the State Government's site selection was inanoged it would create widespread resentment in the state.

The Language row: Did God really crush the Tower of Babel?

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

According to the Bible there was a time that the whole world spoke one language. And the advantage and potential of that unilateral language helped mankind at that time to nearly achieve the mission of building what is known as the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel is nothing but a human celestial mission to reach God's place. Seeing the potentiality of that mission, it prompted God to immediately act and destroy the plan simply by striking confusion in the language that they were speaking. But the question remains as to who brought down the Tower of Babel.

The recent language imbroglio within the State's legislature has been criticized widely both inside and outside the State. The situation could have been prevented had the Honorable members of the August House displayed their stature of being people's representative with higher standards and values. But unfortunately, their intentions are revealed and their credibility tested from the reaction and counter reaction on the language spoken rather than its contents. Such reaction has revealed their weaknesses and short comings. They failed to understand that the Governor of a State is a constitutional head and not an elected representative. He (the Governor) is vested with the power to summon the legislature of the state and address its first session. The bottom line here is that he has to address the House. The House on the other hand cannot start its business without a presidential address from the head of state. Hence, an address has to be made and delivered in some way or the other irrespective of any language spoken (provided that its contents are translated and circulated). This is a rule and a precedence of decorum. Why should we feel offended by the Governor speaking in an official

language? This has made me to think about the pre-colonials days when the Khasis successfully made their conversation with the British. I strongly believe that the only medium of communication at that time was from English to Bengali (Sylheti) then to Khasi and vice versa. Probably those Khasis who were living at the borders were the main interpreters at that time. In fact we should not to be ashamed that most of our Khasi words and terminologies are also borrowed from other languages; most likely from the Bengali or Hindi, both of which are branches of Sanskrit. Personally, I do not see any controversy on the language of the speech because a speech is a speech but it is the contents therein that should matter a lot.

For the elected members, to react against the language of the speech rather than its contents show immaturity and foolishness. The Language Act has specifically stipulated that the associate language can be adopted at the district level only and not at the state level. So, who is breaking the law here? The Congress member (Ms. Ampareen) has reacted just because there is a saffron taste in the Governor's speech. While for the KHNAM member Adelbert, it is a golden opportunity and a break-even for him to speak in the language or dialect that he is more fluent in and one in which he is less confused. But for Saleng to speak in Garo is purely another reaction against the two who have spoken in their own mother tongue (Khasi). Of course he is right in his own way to prove a point that language is a means for communicating; not for parading ego. Whatever be the reason, the fact is that all of them were trying to make their presence felt with infamous issues. There is

nothing wrong in speaking in one's own native language but when there is a third person who does not understand a bit of it, it is unwise to further continue in that language. But this is somehow exempted from the Marwaris who have to handle their business and trades wisely especially before the non-Marwaris customers.

Another thing that I want to remind is the types and section of communities that these representatives are representing in the State legislature. So far, the present representation is geographically based and covers a wide section of the society. Therefore, as representatives of all sections of the society, they should do equal justice to all members of the society or the electorate who have elected them. The state's legislature is not like the floor of the United Nations where representation is multi-linguistic from all countries and nations of the world. If the representation in the legislature of our state has changed from geographical based to community based, then by that time I imagine that it will be quite an interesting atmosphere for then our state legislature will also have numerous local interpreters/ translators to carry out the business of the House. But by speaking in their own language both the legislators have committed an offence and insulted some section of their electorates who are either English or Hindi speaking. Here is another example of lawmakers who do not respect the law they have made and the pledge they have avowed while taking oath.

Coming back to the tower of Babel, literally, God did not destroy the Tower of Babel but the confusion and uproar occurred when everyone was speaking in a different tongue. This led to the collapse of the intended mission. The goal got

diverted by another mission and that is of finding one's own roots and similarity. From the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, it seems as if God is testing the attitude and intention of mankind on how to cope in the midst of diversity and ethnicity of languages and tribes. It is a clear lesson from this story that the enthusiasm and spirit of building anything remarkable will get distracted and shattered when those involved in it start to establish and project their own personal priorities first.

Looking at the general failure of the State on all fronts, this is purely due to the lack of accountability at every level of administration. All the employees and functionaries are doing their jobs without a sense of accountability to anybody. It is here that the legislature of the state has a vital role to play in extracting and demanding accountability from all its functionaries. Accountability for discharge of duties in appropriate and proper manner is still absent from the system. Employees are paid but productivity is not assessed and therefore progress and development are affected. For instance, time and again we have been talking about the state of affairs in the education system. There is a consensus that teachers especially at the primary level should be well trained. But as far as the future of small children is concerned, how can accountability be ensured in this teaching system in order to build a lifelong foundation.

When the concept of 'Checks and Balances' is absent from the entire political system, it is the Legislature that should straighten things up in the right direction. But that situation can happen only when our legislators are persons of high virtues and integrity.

Accountability and Transparency in the Catholic Church

By Benjamin Myllem

I would like to raise a few thoughts regarding the accountability and transparency in the Catholic Church. This in no way reflects the Church as a whole but rather the Church in Jaintia Hills and I will cite what is happening in Jowai Parish which is the cathedral parish of the Jowai Diocese in order to put forward my thoughts. To put things in perspective let me first explain everything in brief. In Jowai parish there are many villages and the church in these villages are known as "balang shnong" e.g. Mihmyntdu, Sohmynting, etc and Jowai town is just a 'Balang Shnong' within the Jowai Parish. In each Balang Shnong there is what is called a "Committee Balang" (church Committee) which looks after the spiritual and temporal welfare of the church in that particular village only. All these Committees work under the

is like this: the priests decides to buy things or to go for some construction work; then he asks for donations from the faithful. After that how the money is spent, only God knows! There are no more budget sessions, no more audits and no more accounting. Account is given only verbally during Mass and it's simply like this, "I have used the money in building this or that" or "in buying this or that". Is this what the Church teaches? If this is happening in the Cathedral Parish then what about other parishes in the diocese? Canon 537 says that in each parish there is to be a "Parish Finance Council." It is a universal law to have that but all we hear is about the Parish Pastoral Council. Why is the Church here silent on this? It seems that every priest is on his own when it comes to financial administration in the parish. I have heard

The Committee Balang Jowai was formed with the authority of the parish priest and after years of functioning it has then been able to work in ways as laid down by the Church in the Code of Canon Law. For example, it use to have a budget session every year (can. 1284 §3). After proper audit is done, it gives accounts to the faithful regarding the goods offered by the lay faithful (can. 1287 §2). In this way it has been able to save funds which sustain the needs of the Balang Jowai. But when the present parish priest came in 2015, he surprisingly dissolved this Committee Balang of Jowai without having a proper discussion with the office bearers of the Committee.

guidance of the Parish Pastoral Council. The works of these Committees mostly are to choose workers like Rangbah Balang, Bei Balang (male and female leaders of the church), make liturgical programs, take care of the temporal goods of the church, etc. Jowai town also has a Committee Balang and since this article is about accountability and transparency, I will point out its handling of the temporal goods of the church only.

The Committee Balang Jowai was formed with the authority of the parish priest and after years of functioning it has then been able to work in ways as laid down by the Church in the Code of Canon Law. For example, it use to have a budget session every year (can. 1284 §3). After proper audit is done, it gives accounts to the faithful regarding the goods offered by the lay faithful (can. 1287 §2). In this way it has been able to save funds which sustain the needs of the Balang Jowai. But when the present parish priest came in 2015, he surprisingly dissolved this Committee Balang of Jowai without having a proper discussion with the office bearers of the Committee. He convened a meeting with some of the faithful of Jowai town and in that meeting they decided to dissolve the Committee Balang Jowai and later on the April 2, 2016 he wrote a letter to the General Secretary of the Committee telling him that the Committee has been dissolved and that the amount 46 lakh which the Committee had is to be returned to the parish for church construction!

Now the financial administration in the parish

stories of priests building houses for their relatives and loved ones and right now a story is circulating that a priest is building a house for a girl who used to be a cook in the parish house! The people from the girl's village said that they saw the priest carrying cement, bricks, etc between 8:30 -9 pm to her village. Are these stories true? Without hard evidence it's difficult to say but if there are priests who really do these sort of things, then the question is, 'whose money are they spending'? Is it from their own pockets or from the Church's treasury? How do we know that a donation given by the lay faithful is used for its stated purpose? I believe this is exactly the reason why ACCOUNTABILITY and TRANSPARENCY is needed in the Church. Once the Church achieves this then the kind of stories floating around can be warded off. I'm not an expert on Canon Law but what does the Church mean by saying, "According to norms to be determined by particular law, administrators are to render an account to the faithful concerning the goods offered by the faithful to the Church" (can. 1287 §2)? Where are these norms? Should we the lay faithful simply trust the priest's words and donate directly to him whenever the priest asks for anything?

The higher authorities of the Church need to clarify on these matters and set up a systematic procedure in financial administration in the parish level according to norms laid down by the Church so as to avoid any kind of abuses both from the clerics and the faithful.

TO THE EDITOR

Why this inefficiency?

Editor,

This refers to the front-page news item "Water supply affected in the city" (ST, April 3, 2018). It is amazing that in this era of super computers and awesome smart phones, the people of this great city are made to endure frequent inconveniences as far as even basic needs like electricity or water are concerned! Why does the main water pipe-line break down so easily and so frequently? And even if this happens, then why does it take 4 days for the concerned Department to replace/repair the same? Do they order and start taking the pain of bringing new pipes from outside the state only after the pipes get damaged? The public are interested to know if there is a dearth of skilled technicians in the Department? Or, do they get the works done with the help of unskilled people only! I wonder if such 'main water pipe-line break-down' episode occur so frequently in other cities too! Why such frequent collapses? Which material are the pipes made of that they cannot bear the weight of flowing water for long and hence break down so often? Or, are sub-standard materials used every time the 'break-down' takes place? Now, my question is: why the innocent citizens always have to bear the brunt due to the likely inefficiencies or greed of few people? The writer of this piece, on behalf of the public would, therefore, like to request the new MDA Government under the dynamic

leadership of Conrad Sangma, to look into the matter seriously and do the needful at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
Partha Sarathy Gupta,
Via email

Frequent power cuts!

Editor,

I wish to air through your paper the difficulties faced by us the residents of Sharing Lum, near Mawblei Petrol Pump with regards to the extremely erratic power supply from the MeECL. Recently we had power outages of more than two to three hours more or less on a daily basis. In the last three days these power outages have continued throughout the night only to be restored the next day. On March 29, alone the power was out from 7 PM and was restored only at 9.45 AM the next day. Then it went off again at 3 PM and was restored at 6.55.PM. When the complaint number is called the standard response is, "Your line is connected from Nongkrem so it is going to take time".

While we do appreciate the fact that maintenance is not an easy task, and we are sure there are dutiful linesmen attending to these problems, but we consumers depend on the power supply for everything from using our water filters, pumping water for daily needs, working on our PCs and laptops , using our mobile phones and watching our TVs to name a few, and these require as far as possible uninterrupted power supply. We request the authorities concerned in the

MeECL to look into the problems causing these frequent power outages faced by us.

Our suggestion is that if the Nongkrem connection is too unwieldy by virtue of the great distance involved, then kindly arrange a power source from somewhere nearby as was done all along in the past, so that problems, if they arise, are promptly dealt with easily .We do hope the authorities concerned take a serious view of these issues faced by residents of the area and take steps to address them suitably.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

India an unhappy country!

Editor,

This is with reference to your editorial, "Students as victims" (ST, April 3, 2018). We feel sad when we cannot afford exorbitant costs of education for our children. And we feel very happy when our children do well in examinations. As a matter of fact, the difference between the people's access to quality education is one of reasons why Nordic countries are the happiest countries of the world and India is becoming more unhappy. According to World Happiness Report 2018, Finland gets the top position, Norway is at the second position, followed by Denmark at number 3, Iceland at number 4 and Sweden at number 9 whereas India slides down further from 122 in 2017 to 133 out of 156 countries.

Indeed, Nordic countries have given top priority to education and other human development indices.

Education including higher education is totally free in all the Nordic countries. Moreover, an unemployed person gets handsome allowance in those states. So, education has not become a matter of rat race for survival as Nordic people enjoy huge social support from the state.

It is a pity that instead of ensuring affordable quality education for all, we are now trying to limit it only for the rich by letting corporate houses extract more and more profit from nursery to higher education business and that too almost without any effective state control. Moreover, our jobless growth makes students face growing apprehension that they may not get jobs in future which means living without employment and without any unemployment allowance as well.

In the name of education, we are giving good business to market players whereas students are getting lathis when they protest against fee hike which is nothing but shutting the door of education in the poor students' face. In this way, we are actually wasting huge human capital that should have been utilised and developed. The CBSE question paper leak is just another example of how we fail our students. All the students of our country need to be provided with affordable, value - based and job - oriented quality education to make our country strong and happy.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

“ Stay positive and happy. Work hard and don't give up hope. Be open to criticism and keep learning. Surround yourself with happy, warm and genuine people. ”

--- Tena Desae

The Shillong Times

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New govt on the move

THE NPP-led Government appears to be working at a frenetic pace taking stock of things. Between air-dashing to meet central ministers in Delhi, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma is also prioritising the needs of the State. The latest objective of looking south towards Bangladesh for economic initiatives is a welcome move. The Act East Policy is meaningless for Meghalaya as a state, because our closest link to any international outlet for trade and commerce is towards the south through Bangladesh. It is also a stark reality that there are people of Bangladeshi origin who work and live in Meghalaya. The construction business here would not sustain without Bangladeshi labourers. Hence it is important to identify them and give them work permits rather than allowing them to remain an amorphous group that is not easily identifiable. This usually ends up in pre-election noises and politicians making hay out of the issue but which also dies down once elections are over. The lack of seriousness to resolve this contentious issue of illegal immigrants has been the bane of successive governments. It is a welcome respite therefore that the Chief Minister has met the External Affairs Minister and apprised her of the exigencies obtaining here vis-a-vis trade with Bangladesh and illegal migration from that country.

Currently, Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina is India's only friendly neighbour amongst the South Asian countries. Bangladesh has been co-operating with India in pushing back the insurgent outfits taking shelter there. This has greatly reduced the fire power of such outfits who have now taken shelter in Myanmar. Meghalaya sells huge quantities of coal and limestone to Bangladesh but there is a lot of informal trade/smuggling too. Cattle, for instance, is not a legal export from India but cattle smuggling is a thriving business and it is happening through the porous borders of our state. It is time for Meghalaya to think of formalising the cattle trade. This would be a huge revenue earner. Better still if the meat is processed before it is exported because that is what Bangladesh does. It exports processed meat to the Middle East. Time for Meghalaya to think of better business ventures which will create jobs for its youth and also earn foreign exchange!

TO THE EDITOR

Police Dept fails tourists!

Editor,
It is very unfortunate and also condemnable that a group of young women out to spend time together had to face a harrowing experience along the Guwahati-Shillong route. For a police personnel of whatever rank he might be to refuse to assist those facing risks to their lives is highly unprofessional and unbecoming of that person on duty. But the crux of the matter is that everyone has been asking about the absence of the highway patrol cars that were purchased amidst great fanfare by the State Police. I was surprised to see one of these highway patrol cars escorting a VIP vehicle when there was already a pilot car and an escort going along. It seems that having a highway patrol is pointless since these are never visible on the entire national highway that runs through our state. Moreover, these cars seem to be out only to patrol trucks rather than helping passengers who face difficulties along their journey. A sad state of affairs in the police department!

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong-3

Teaching as a sacred vocation

Editor,
Teaching is considered to

be a noble profession since teachers are entrusted with building the future citizens of the country. As teachers shape the future of the nation, everyone always looks up to them. I am one among those fortunate ones who is in the profession of nurturing young minds. But the recent news about the destruction to our education system by the so called teachers is very disappointing and discouraging. I was part of a seminar for teachers held in the city where one of the speakers spoke about the four pillars of education. They are (1) learning to know (2) learning to live together (3) learning to do and (4) learning to be. What education are those teachers involved in the recent case of leakage of question paper of CBSE imparting to the young minds? They have themselves not abided by those four pillars of education so what will they teach the young children to be in future. Some teachers take undue advantage of their position and harass the students. One such case was reported in your daily where three teachers from a private school in Goalpara raped a minor girl student. Such acts of a few teachers will defame the entire profession. After their parents, children look up to teachers. But such acts of hooliganism by the so called teachers, has left those who honestly pursue their vocation in despair

and disappointment. Such teachers who play with the lives of their students deserve the strictest punishment.

Yours etc.,
Anil Singh Roka

Essence of Good Friday

Editor,
In the article, "What is Good Friday all about?" (ST, March 30, 2018), B.J. Syiemlieh rightly said, "Jesus' death on the cross which is commemorated on Good Friday is a celebration of the act of emptying oneself to be a blessing to others without any expectation of a reward or a pay back." Suffering and death of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday was not in his own personal interests. It was a sacrifice in the best interests of our evolution so that we could become more conscious. It was, as it were, for the resurrection of divinity in us from its oblivion of sleep. The execution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a church leader, who had to give his life for opposing Hitler, was another such crucifixion for the same cause. Interestingly, January 30, 1948 was indeed a Friday. This day is observed as a Martyrs' Day in our country. Nevertheless, it is another Good Friday. On January 28, 1948, Mahatma Gandhi had said, "If I am to die by the bullet of a mad man, I must do so smiling. God must be in my heart and on

my lips. And if anything happens, you are not to shed a single tear." On the day of Mahatma's crucifixion, he walked up to a prayer mandap. At that time, a man came before Gandhiji. The man offered pranam by bending his body at a distance of less than two yards. Gandhiji returned the salute. The man remarked, "You are late today for the prayer." Gandhiji smiled and replied, "Yes, I am." But at that moment the man pulled out a revolver and fired three shots from point-blank range. The bullets pierced the frail body of the great leader. Gandhiji collapsed. The assassin was seized by the people who had come to attend the prayer.

Thus, another crucifixion was staged on another Friday. The Good Friday of January 30, 1948 halted the juggernaut of religious fanaticism as it made people realize the inherent danger of it. As a matter of fact, such Good Fridays made our evolution from brutality to humanity possible. We still have miles to go but past progress from primitive society to feudalism to police state capitalism to modern welfare states confirms that ours is an ascending evolution. However, Jesus is still to suffer on the cross to get us going.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

The Spectre of “Hindu Bangladeshi”

By Jyotirmoy Prodhani

Bengali Muslims) and the properties of these communities were also systematically annexed by the state and the Bengali Muslims largely on the strength of the notorious law called Enemy Property Act of 1948. The law was later renamed as Vested Property Act in 1971 in Bangladesh, through which the property of the non Muslims were being confiscated by the state in a massive scale. One prominent property that was confiscated under this law was that of Nobel laureate Amrtya Sen's ancestral household. (The present government in Bangladesh is mulling to return the property to the Nobel laureate)

The Chakmas have been the most mercilessly displaced lot from their native hearth in Chittagong Hill Tract through a series of strategies including the construction of the Kaptai dam by the East Pakistan regime in 1964 that had submerged 44% of their arable land and one lakh Chakmas were forcefully displaced from their hearth forcing them to migrate to India as Asia's biggest stateless nation. Later, between 1980 and 1993, at least eleven most dreaded massacres were carried out with the active support of the Bangladesh military to kill thousands of Chakmas. CHT is a classical example of how the Bangladesh state actively devised methods to dispossess the indigenous natives. Mujibur Rahman betrayed his extreme intolerance to the pluralistic reality of the land when he had rejected outright the request made by M.N. Larma to recognise other small languages and culture within the constitutional framework of the newly established country for which the Chakmas too made supreme sacrifices. For Mujibur Rahman the only pillar of identity was Bengali Nationalism which later became a combination of Bengali chauvinism and Islamic fundamentalism. A noted historian from Dhaka University, Mejbah Kamal, in one of his most elaborate papers presented in

Shillong on the Chakmas of Bangladesh described the combination of Bengali Nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism as the most 'poisonous' combination in the world. However, Mujibur Rahman during his tenure went to the extent of implanting, almost immediately after his meeting with M.N. Larma, about two lakh Bangalis in CHT from the plains under the full military protection. He made the most infamous comment when he had asked Larma to meet him next him only after they became fully Bangalis. The Chakma crisis, in fact, is reflective of the plight of the other non Muslim ethnic minorities in Bangladesh.

Implantation of Bengali Muslims in non-Muslim territories has remained one of the constant exercises with the full support of the state and the military establishments, as a result of which thousands of non-Muslims had to flee their native land and in case of the indigenous tribes and ethnic communities they had to come to their respective villages which happened to be just across the border. In west Assam there is innumerable people belonging to Hajong, Garo, Rabha, Bodo, Rajbanshi etc. who were forced to come to the Indian side of their habitation, and all of them are not Hindus, there are Christians as well as Buddhists. Despite these well known facts, the organizations that primarily represent the interest of the mainstream caste Assamese communities like the AJYCP, AASU etc. have willfully remained silent on this issue and used all the tricks of the cards not to allow this aspect of the debate gain any due importance. If one takes a glance at the recently circulated list by the Assam Police on the Untraced Foreigners of Goalpara, for example, one would come across many names belonging to various indigenous ethnic groups. From Bangladesh, as has been projected for popular consumption, the 'Hindu Bangalis' were not the only non-Muslim communities who were displaced and forced to migrate.

This whole political enterprise of Anti Foreigners Movement turned out to be one of the biggest failures in the history of Assam primarily because it has remained largely a heavily diluted and waywardly disseminated public mobilization without having any concrete and well focused agenda in place apart from strong and passionate rhetoric of a perceived prospect of de-stability grounded on xenophobic hysteria. The trajectory of the movement itself has remained a witness to this uncomfortable truth. From foreigner to bahiragata the movement turned out to be an event primarily aimed at inventing an endless dictionary of Assam's perceived enemies in the process, quite ironically, with utter ignorance and disrespect to the India's historical relations and bilateral protocols, the over enthusiastic agitators had subjected the Nepali speaking natives of Assam and the seasonal traders from Bhutan (mostly women) to severe physical violence. In the process, the whole enterprise of the Assam Movement got effectively derailed.

The present protagonists that perceive the whole Bangladeshi issue from a cultivated vantage of ahistoricity, misplaced understanding of ethno-social reality and grudging antagonism against the 'Bengalis' would do it well at least to make an honest attempt this time to address this issue from the perspective of deeper understanding and unimpassioned approach to contemporary history of this part of South Asia. Before joining the bandwagon one must lay on table the all the cards candidly with the subtle details of the demands else it would become, yet another, an epic scale failure very much like that of the Assam Movement.

(Jyotirmoy Prodhani is a professor of English at NEHU, Shillong. He can be contacted at rajaprodhanski@gmail.com)

Good deed or bad dream?

Editor,
Friends desert when misfortune knocks at the door of the BJP, but remember, "Jishka koi nahan, uska khuda hi yaaron". PM Modi and FM Jaitley deserve a pat on the back for doing away with the irritants of foreign funding of all political parties since 1976 through Finance Bill 2018 sans debate and discussion. Despite the good neighbourly act, they got brickbats instead of bouquets from disgruntled allies. The One who sees keeps track of all good and crooked deeds for repayment in future! The bad deeds point to mega data leak on Facebook, Cambridge Analytica, and Ovleno Business Intelligence or OBI and the main actors are Mark Zuckerberg, Alexander Nix, Praveen Chakravarty and Amrish Tyagi. It's almost an open secret now as well as bitter BJP-Congress twitter spat on the sticky turf of mega FB data leaks leaving the dirty linen wide open to public view. Whatever it is or whichever way one may view the sticky issue, the people of India would certainly want the concerned political parties to make a clean breast of things and fight the upcoming elections fairly and squarely and not the no-holds-barred elections through these forked missives!

The best deeds that were achieved by the NDA Gov-

ernment at the Centre this year include (i) enhancement of the monthly pension salary which is double the regular amount for all categories of pensioners, (ii) doubling payment of widows' pension, (iii) giving lump sum aid yearly to orphanages, crèches in addition to already existing grants-in-aid. (iv) sanctioning a hefty amount for construction of "Old age Home" subject to availability of land and fund. Basic necessities of life revolve mainly around, "Roti, Kapda aur Makaan" as well as good schools in rural areas of Meghalaya, some of which are hardly accessible even on foot. News reports say that the State is cash-strapped due to fiscal mismanagement in the recent past! Positive steps may bear good fruits in the near future! The poor cannot give PM/FM back anything but their blessings. A good deed done to the poor and needy is a blessing and often returns to the doer as a double harvest! Some may call me a sycophant and a parasite. I am neither. I am pointing to facts only which are often missed.

Yours etc.,
Sonaram M Sangma,
Tura

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 bullet or the ballot

Ananya S Guha

The issue of fake news has been trumped to muzzle the media. Or at least there was an attempt by the Information & Broadcasting Minister to do so. Till of course the Prime Minister intervened. His intervention indicates how powerful the media is in India, and even the Prime Minister does not want to antagonize it. By snubbing his Minister the Prime Minister averted a crisis, a crisis which could have rocked the country and engulfed it. But it all started with the spurious website The Post Card, which it was

pretext for victimization? This interpretative act of what is false, or what is not is subjective and could have given a handle to harass and arrest. This would have led to nation wide protests. However the PMO sought to rescind it and prevented the bomb from exploding. It is still ticking because the crafty deviousness hatched in the game plan has been understood.

Now let us look at the divisions in the country taking place today. There are Hindus, Muslims, Dalits and caste, poor and rich

“ On the one hand you defend a website which is fraudulent, on the other you become holy and pious. This seems to be the medley of contradictions in the ruling party today. A new tone of double- speak. A new way of inciting passions by justifying the wrong and then doing a double turn of pretence. ”

proven published false information about a Jain monk being attacked by Muslims. Yet some in the government actually supported it followed by a barrage of tweets by Ministers attacking the press. That prefaced the issue of a notification stating that any media person publishing false information would be impugned. One can see that the irony is telling. On the one hand you defend a website which is fraudulent, on the other you become holy and pious. This seems to be the medley of contradictions in the ruling party today. A new tone of double- speak. A new way of inciting passions by justifying the wrong and then doing a double turn of pretence. .

The Prime Minister knew that this would be a risk, in taking on the media in this bizarre manner. Now the matter of such fake media will be handed over to reconstituted committees

farmers, the South and the North. And now the journalists are taking on the government. It is a most corrosive situation endangering political, social and religious harmony. And the reasons for it? The double speak of the powers that be. Mouth-ing secular ideology but practicing ethnic and communal card. Focusing on the temple, the statue and glorifying a religion fashioned on mythic lines, and whipping up passion in this context. Not focusing on health and education. Doing anything and everything to come to political power in every part of the country and thus playing with regional and local sentiments. All the above is a dangerous play with the health of a nation. The only medicine is to extirpate the germs and diseases that have infested the body (politic) of the Nation, a great one; now comatose.

The Dalit explosion is an expression of pent up anger.

“The Indian media has two broad categories. One elitist and the other in the small towns or villages, that struggle financially but who more often than not incur the wrath of goons, local mafias with political nexus for their exposures on corruption and public dealing. They are often terrorized and even murdered. It recently happened in Bihar and the Gauri Lankesh murder is still haunting the conscience of a nation.”

such as the Press Council of India. And we know that they are government representatives who will not demur from a government standpoint. The issue will become more engrossing, more subject to debate and once again we will have to watch how the government behaves, because the raw nerves of the media have been more than tingled. The Indian media has two broad categories. One elitist and the other in the small towns or villages, that struggle financially but who more often than not incur the wrath of goons, local mafias with political nexus for their exposures on corruption and public dealing. They are often terrorized and even murdered. It recently happened in Bihar and the Gauri Lankesh murder is still haunting the conscience of a nation. When a journalist highlights the truth for many it is a lie. So what is false information? Was this not the attempt of the Ministry of I & B to cleverly create a

The Supreme Court verdict only exacerbated it. The farmers' agitation was a fight for economic justice. The Bihar and West Bengal riots were results of propelled polarization based on religion. The journalists' protest was because of attempts to stifle and oppress the media. Teachers and students are also disgruntled, especially on account of the CBSE question paper leak. Aspirant employees are angry about recruitment and question paper leaks. Is the country controlled by a mafia who seem to be colluding with each other in different parts of the country, playing to a precise game plan, sweetly timed?

You might get the votes in 2019 but it will be over ruinous heaps of murder and fratricide. Or will the anger be directed at the ballot and not the bullet? History has infinite possibilities. It will deal with all exegesis, all points and counterpoints tellingly.

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow.
Learn as if you were to live forever.”
--- Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Caught in a contradiction

INDIA is suffering from malnutrition. At the same time, it has to deal with the issue of obesity. Nine states in the country face the double trouble. 30% or higher proportions of children under 5 have stunted growth while 20% or a higher proportion of them are obese. It is said that the problem is due to nutrition transition in emerging countries. Convenience foods accompanying urbanisation are a principal cause of obesity. Food conglomerates swamping the market have brought on this serious problem. Because of the easy availability of foodstuff like cheap biscuits and other snacks, proper meals are often not provided to children. These children are victims of lifestyle disorder. It is not only the children in the upper classes who are victims of such instant food. Instant food is often preferred by families to a balanced diet in order to avoid hassles.

The root cause lies in weak educational outcomes and reduced employment opportunities both in urban and rural India. Women in India suffer in large numbers from anaemia coupled with obesity. The percentage was 15.6 in 2016. These women often give birth to stunted children and the children are vulnerable to non - communicable diseases such as diabetes, tuberculosis or cardiac illness. It is essential that regular checks are done to ensure that all kinds of processed food meet minimum nutritional requirements. Proper sanitation and provision of clean drinking water are also necessary. The health system in the country has to be greatly improved. The state has to spread awareness about the two undesirable effects of malnutrition.

LOOKING BACK
May 15, 1989

PM rules out further division of Assam

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today ruled out further division of states and said the nation's integrity must be kept above everything. He said the goal of national integration would be maintained if each state could solve its own problems properly. Addressing a mammoth public meeting here, Mr Gandhi said the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hills Council was a triumph of India's flexible political system.

The unity of different political parties such as the Congress(I), CPI (M), GNLF on common issues had been demonstrated in Darjeeling he added. The Prime Minister rounded off his two-day visit to Darjeeling by addressing the public meeting organized by the Hill Council in fulfillment of, what GNLF Chief Mr Subhas Ghising said, Gorkha people's demand.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mr Jyoti Basu and Union Home Minister Mr Buta Singh also addressed the meeting. Earlier, Mr Gandhi inaugurated the Hill Council's new office "Lalkhuthi" and addressed meeting at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

The Prime Minister said the people of Darjeeling had shown the nation what could be achieved through united efforts keeping in mind "we are all Indians." He said that the Bodo problem in Assam could be solved on the similar line keeping in view its special peculiarity, he, however, added that the formula adopted for Darjeeling need not be necessarily suitable for solving the problems of other states like Mizoram or Nagaland. Referring to the memorandum submitted to him by Mr Ghisingh on the problems faced by the Council, Mr Gandhi said both the Centre and State Government would sit together to see what could be done under a new package.

He however said in a

different vein even so0me full-fledged states did not make the kind of demands the memorandum contained. Mr Gandhi said the centre was ready to grant more funds for the rehabilitation of the victims of Gorkha agitation, but it was up to the Council to see that the aid reached every one without discrimination. The affected People including workers of Congress, CPI(M) and GNLF besides police and government employees all of whom belonged to the hill area. He made it clear that interest of the minority must be protected.

Regarding the Panchayat Bill, he said it was upto the Hill Council to come under the panchayat raj. "I shall, however, be thankful to the Council if it adopts it," he added. The Prime Minister urged the Council to give a fair treatment to the women in keeping with the national policy of their uplift. He said the Panchayati Bill was designed to ensure proper utilization of the central funds for the benefit of the people at the grass root. "Only 15 percent of the grants reach the people under the present system, with the bulk being eaten up by intermediary and governments machinery," he added.

He said handing over power to the panchayat would not reduce the power and status of the State Governments but would benefit them. In his address, Mr Basu said his government would extend all possible help to the Council and sought the Hill People's cooperation in this regard. He said the Centre had assisted the State Government to solve the Gorkha problem all along. "We must keep in mind we are all Indians", he added.

Do Khasis need an Awakening Day?

By Patricia Mukhim

I am a Khasi by birth and therefore I legitimately ask why the Khasi Students Union (KSU) needs to display its muscle on April 4 every year (barring this year) and to call that day - Khasi National Awakening Day. Firstly the KSU is a students' organisation and should be taking up the issue of the tawdry and appallingly worded text books endorsed by MBOSE for our high school students this time. The KSU never took up this issue. It was brought to the notice of the Government from reports and letters in the media. In fact the KSU has taken up more politically convenient issues than those relating to education. On March 20, last the KSU observed their 40th anniversary and took out a rally through the city's commercial areas. As expected the members of the students' body started hitting people walking on footpaths with the flag sticks. And again, as expected, those who were hit were non-tribals. One person was grievously injured and shops in the city centre of Police Bazar downed their shutters. The shops mostly owned by non-tribals know the outcome of not doing so. The law has never been able to protect them against such mob fury which visits them time and again like a bad dream.

Now what do those students (I am not sure that all those in the procession are students) who unleash violence at every given opportunity when they are part of a mob, actually want to articulate? What is their grouse? Who is their grouse against? What are they angry at? Why do they target non-tribals who sell stuff in Police Bazar or Bara Bazar with trading licenses issued by the District Councils? Why is it so easy to take on defenceless and vulnerable business people who pay their taxes but who are left to fend for themselves each time violence erupts in this city? We have not forgotten the first Khasi National Awakening Day on April 4, 2012. On that day there was large scale vandalism on shops and individuals beginning from Laitumkhrah and which carried on all the way through Police Bazar.

The routes too are always strategically chosen. Why the District Administration is unable to foresee the trouble is a no brainer. And why the KSU vandals are never apprehended is also a mystery. In fact, no one has been arrested in the past too for burning alive a tea seller and an electrical shop owner amongst others. That's the law for you in Meghalaya! And since no one has thus far sought accountability from the justice system for the poor conviction rates for all forms of crimes, the police continue to enjoy their pay and perks for non-performance. A 5% conviction rate is an apology for policing.

David Brooks in his article, "Understanding Student Mobbists in the New York Times (March 8, 2018) has correctly summarized that student mobbists manage to combine snowflake fragility and lynch mob irrationalism into one perfectly poisonous cocktail. The difference between student mobbists elsewhere and the KSU is that the latter also includes several lumpens who have left school a long time ago. These are youth who have fallen between the cracks created by our unimaginative educational system and who are labeled drop-outs and for whom the same system has not created any institutional mechanism for integrating them and providing them employable skills. These youth are angry because they see no employment opportunities and are staring at a bleak future ahead. So one cannot blame them for being easily instigated to commit outrage!

However, my question to the KSU is whether they have the mandate of the Khasi People to kick-start a cultural revivalism in the name of the Community. Can the KSU appropriate our consent? But they have done it and each time there is violence on the streets in the name of Khasi Nationalism then we as a society are guilty by association and are held guilty because of our

silence. Believe me such news of violence inflicted by a mob spreads fast and people quickly begin to judge the entire community as being in league with the KSU in their mobbism.

There is a video clip that has now gone viral. It is a short speech delivered by Rev Dr Kethoser Kevichusa on the occasion of Naga Day (Jan 10, 2018) which is a delight to listen to and full of wisdom. In fine, Dr Kevichusa speaks of three kinds of people in any given society. This threefold distinction was made by public intellectuals and was first stated by the founders of Democracy in ancient Greece. The first kind of people are idiots. An Idiot is not someone who is mentally deficient but is a private, self centred and selfish person who lives for personal gain and personal interests only. He/she has no public philosophy, no knowledge, no skills, no character, no virtues to contribute to a flourishing society and community. The idiot only lives for personal pleasure and treasure. The idiot is an upgraded barbarian.

The second type are tribes people, not in the sense of belonging to a certain tribe but having a tribalistic mentality. This group is unable to think beyond their small tribe or small group. Their primary and only allegiance is to the tribe. Their tribe is their god and their religion is tribalism. Tribes people are always afraid of things that are different and alien to them. They are always suspicious and fearful. They deal with different people and difficult situations with intimidation, with force and with violence. For the tribes people the ideal is the 'warrior' or the war-maker. The Greeks then speak of the third category of people who they call the 'citizens.' The citizen according to the Greeks is one who has the skill and the knowledge to live a public life and to live a life of civility. The citizen realizes that she or he is a member of a common wealth; knows her/his rights but also knows her/his responsibility. The citizen fights for rights but with an

awareness and respect for the rights and interests of others; of neighbours, of the smallest of minorities and the worst of enemies. Citizens make a civilized society which truly lives up to the name of society and understand that society means friendship and friendliness. Citizens settle their differences with civility.

What an awesome speech and what courage to be speaking before several Naga tribes on a significant occasion. I wish we had such courageous leaders in society who can put the mirror to us Khasi people and to those that appropriate our consent - the KSU- and show them at what stage of civilisation we all are.

Looking at ourselves and our reactions today, I would think that many of us still live the lives of idiots and have not transcended to becoming citizens, let alone good citizens. A good number of us are also tribalistic and believe in our tribe right or wrong. So we never see the sty in our eye but observe the speck in the eyes of our neighbours, especially those who don't speak our language or live our cultures because they don't belong to our tribe.

The KSU must take time off for introspection and look inside instead of focusing on the extraneous factors and blaming others for the fact that Meghalaya remains backward even after 46 years. If Khasi National Awakening Day is always accompanied by violence then does the KSU want us to believe that Khasi Nationalism is inherently violent? History does not show the Khasi people to be violent at any point in our history - oral or written. Violence is a learned attribute, if we can call it that.

So the next time the KSU wants to observe Khasi National Awakening Day I wish to give notice that I voluntarily withdraw that permission for the KSU to appropriate my consent. I have not signed a contract with authoritarianism.

Irani circular and a government running scared But I&B Minister persisting with ‘filmy style’

By Sushil Kutty

Arun Shourie was proof of 'journalism of courage', the 'fearless'. One of those who when asked to 'bend' did not 'crawl'. They did not make movies on him but he was the closest to a 'hero' to many a young journalist when 24/7 television journalism was yet to come and there were no gabbling celeb journalists. Then, sometime after 1995, he became a 'politician' - not 'dihheerna', like they say of 'suddenly' in Tamil, but taking his own sweet time.

On April 3, 2018, Arun Shourie was on a TV news channel, primetime, talking like a journalist but sounding like a politician. He was like that in 2017, too, after the 'Modi government went after a particular TV news channel's promoters, speaking his mind, which even at that time betrayed a certain anathema to the man who became Prime Minister on May 26, 2014.

They say once a journalist always a journalist. But they also say that once a politician, always a politician. And Shourie doesn't sound the journalist anymore. Lots of journalists wouldn't say that of him but that is how it is - Arun Shourie along with Yashwant Sinha and Shatrughun Sinha are three BJP leaders who have no love lost for PM Modi even if they remain BJP members though assigned to political wilderness.

Would the trio have been in 'another BJP camp' if Modi

journalist and consummate politician, piled on the Centre like a ton of bricks, a little unhappy with the paper he once edited but full of praise for Alt News, that fact-checker website wedded to truth, so delivers only the hard truth on fake news. Prime time Shourie plugged for Alt News like he was on a mission and all but came down on his knees to tell the TV news channel to spare "two-three minutes to Alt News" every night so that viewers could be up to speed with truth, so 'help me God'!

Asked what could have made Modi take a 'U-turn', ear-to-ground Shourie divulged the 'raaz' that nobody was in awe of Modi anymore and that the government was in all sorts of trouble, maybe hiding something. So, it was time for journalists to dig in and dig out what the government was hiding, afraid of. If the prime time TV host could not believe her ears, she did not show it. This was music to the ear - patented Shourie.

And so the evening dragged on. After Shourie left, another former editor took over: Shourie's friend N Ram, who while agreeing with 'friend Shourie, wondered why some journalists did not show the finger to Smriti Irani when she appointed them to the revamped PIB. Did somebody say that Ms Irani looked like possibly she had an agenda when she issued her circular and that just

At the end of the show, the two FAQs were: Why was Irani's circular issued in the first place? And why did PM Modi take it back? Shourie provided one answer: The government was scared, so the knee-jerks and the U-turn. Nobody dropped the jaw. It was a test balloon, and it sounded possible.

had made them ministers? That is sneaking feeling a journalist gets when they turn up to speak, which is always at the time when the Modi government is tottering on the brink of a soup.

On April 3, the Modi-led NDA government was in a hot-and-sour soup, spicy to the tongue of Modi detractors like Shourie, thanks to Information & Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani, who overnight sought to bring "some order" to journalism in the name of punishing fake news, telling journalists that they were not in any obligation to report the truth but if they peddled fake news they would be warned twice and then be third-time unlucky. Go figure.

By 11 am on April 3, the government figured it: Irani's directive to regulate news was a no-go, wouldn't work, self-goal blah blah. Journalists closed ranks and dug heels in concrete lawn of the Press Club of India and government pulled back. Earlier, in the morning, a national newspaper reported that the ghost who wrote PM Modi's book, the 'Exam Warriors', was not the ghost who wrote the book! It was not fake news.

So Prime Minister Modi, when told of the Smriti-circular, dust-binned it. Everybody clapped except Smriti Irani. Arun Shourie also did not. He would not believe the PM was in the dark when Irani shot off her now-infamous circular. 'How can God not know where each leaf falls,' Shourie asked the TV news channel's primetime host, who was properly obsequious - Uriah Heepish! And why not? After all, Shourie was speaking her language.

Arun Shourie, one-time

because PM Modi rescinded her order doesn't mean she will sit quiet? Yes, April 3 also saw her ministry giving some finishing touches to the PIB and the Press Council of India. It was like Irani had the last laugh!

So, a certain 'Swarajya Jaggi' advised that journalists should self-regulate and ensure that no fake news crept into newsrooms and lulled journalists to believe. There was also talk of not falling for the Donald Trump definition of fake news, which according to the journalists on the show, was to brand any anti-Trump news fake news. New York Times, the Washington Post and CNN stood vindicated - Journalists of the world unite!

At the end of the show, the two FAQs were: Why was Irani's circular issued in the first place? And why did PM Modi take it back? Shourie provided one answer: The government was scared, so the knee-jerks and the U-turn. Nobody dropped the jaw. It was a test balloon, and it sounded possible. The TV host asked if Irani's circular was a test balloon, and every talking head on the show agreed it could be except the one who had made it to the Irani-revamped PIB.

It did not dawn on anybody that maybe the government in its zeal to come out as shining knights in the war against fake news erred: Instead of targeting PIB accreditation and the mainstream media, it should have said that freedom of information was at stake and that journalists found peddling fake news would be punished. Period. The Irani-circular had an edge to it: It targeted mainstream media. Hence the U-Turn, and the boomerang. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Bangladesh a thriving economy!

Editor,
For all the scourge of illegal immigration and the bad name that illegal immigrants give to Bangladesh, many will be surprised to know that Bangladesh is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Since it gained independence in 1971, Bangladesh has built a strong reputation of being a manufacturing hub and the manufacturing sector has been able to create credible employment opportunities pulling millions of its people out of the clutches of poverty. So rather than the North Eastern states issuing work permits to Bangladeshi nationals, it should be the other way round. Distressed migration is one important issue that needs to be addressed immediately. If Bangladesh could issue work permits to people living in the border areas, it will reduce the scourge of distressed rural migration and open up avenues for credible job opportunities in the buzzing manufacturing sector in Bangladesh. People who will be given this opportunity can come back with sack loads of skill-sets and set up their own businesses here in our own state. Paul Krugman, the Nobel laureate while attending a conclave of a news channel recently stressed on the importance of strengthening the manufacturing sector. Without a strong manufacturing sector our country and our state in

particular would be more susceptible to the dangers of a global financial crisis. No country in the world has been able to develop without a strong and robust manufacturing sector.

The Act East Policy as far as the state of Meghalaya is concerned should include within its ambit investment in Research and Development (R&D) and attract firms from Bangladesh to invest in Meghalaya. Bangladeshi products today are highly valued even in the markets of Shillong and they are giving cheap Chinese products a run for their money. As far as R&D and innovative learning is concerned, Dhaka in the pre-independence period was an educational hub par excellence. Had not East Bengal become East Pakistan, my grandfather was mulling sending my father over to Dhaka for schooling. Dhaka is once again a thriving metropolis and within the boundaries of this city are located institutions of higher learning that can provide us with the technical knowledge to spurt the growth momentum here in North East India.

Yours etc,
Gary Marbanianj
Via email

Work permits a necessity!

Editor,
Today, Bangladeshi immigrant workers enter the State illegally and easily find work as labourers - both skilled and unskilled. You find them in the mining

sector, the construction sector and even in the agriculture, industrial and hospitality sectors. They manage to stay below the radar and there is no account of the amount of money they earn and send back to their homes and families. They are employed by our own indigenous local entrepreneurs, who take up construction works, run plantations, tea shops, factories, or mine limestone and coal. They find employment because they are cheap and efficient. Besides, they are not entitled to any statutory work benefits, so there is not much of a financial burden on their employers.

However, they are also responsible for many illegal activities in the places they reside. They have no social responsibilities or commitments to their employers or hosts. It is easy for them to commit crimes and vanish thereafter because there are no official records of their existence. After committing a crime it is easy for them to slip away in the same manner that they slipped into the State. This, I believe, is the reason for many unsolved crimes. Crimes of robbery, dacoity, rape and murder!

Yes, there are measures put in place to restrict their illegal entry into our country and State. However, as long as it is financially beneficial to recruit and use them, and they find employment, they will continue to find a way to enter and work here. They are desperate and we have seen that they will brave any danger of detection, deportation, jail or even a

physical beating, in order to be able to earn a living here. You detect and deport ten, and another twenty come in. Work permits for these illegal immigrants allows our entrepreneurs to access their cheap services. But, it puts the responsibility on those employing this cheap labour to obtain a permit to import and use them. It becomes the responsibility of the employers to check and verify the origins of the labour force they use. It makes it difficult for the employer to smuggle in cheap labour at the expense of the local work force. Further, because their existence is on record, their movements can be tracked and the bad elements can be detected and deported, thereby becoming a deterrent for them to commit any crimes. Their existence in our land is now transformed from an illegal status to a legal status.

If obtaining permits to employ these foreigners is made difficult and expensive, entrepreneurs will now be forced to use the local work force. It, therefore, protects the right of locals to find employment. Personally, therefore, I feel that taking the existence of these Bangladeshi labourers from the grey area into the scanner of the legal system, by making their employers take work permits for their service, will be more beneficial for our State and our people.

Your's etc,
RG Lyngdoh,
Via email

“ I was in uniform for four years, and I know that heroism doesn't occur from taking orders, but rather from people who through their own willpower and strength are willing to sacrifice their lives for an idea. ”

--- Thor Heyerdahl

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.234 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 2018

New face of Saudi Arabia

UNDER the young crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia is poised for the winds of change. Salman visited the UK recently and was received in Buckingham Palace. Not surprising since he is encouraging Saudi women to drive motor cars in the country, throwing the old conservatism which kept the country backward to the winds. Salman obviously believes in an agenda of reform to bring enlightenment to his country which has long been an area of darkness. What is more significant is that he seems to be of the opinion that Israel is entitled to its own land. Riyadh and Jerusalem can forge a fruitful relationship. His statement comes in the wake of renewed violence between Palestine and Israel over a blockade in Gaza, a permanent trouble spot. Saudi Arabia has long claimed to be the leader of an Islamic coalition in West Asia and has been in the past uncompromisingly hostile to Israel which it does not yet recognize. Economic and political considerations must have driven Saudi Arabia to adopt the new line of thinking. It wants closer cooperation with the developing economy of Israel and Riyadh considers it a lesser enemy than Iran.

It remains to be seen if Salman plays an effective role in prompting western powers to bring about a rapprochement between Israel and Palestine. Stake holders should follow the footsteps of Salman who says that he is not opposed to peaceful coexistence between the two warring nations. Radical elements in Palestine, Israel and Saudi Arabia must be opposed to such pacifism but Salman, perhaps is in a position to contain the hostile forces.

LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

S.D.A to be set up soon

The State Government has decided to go ahead with the formation of the Shillong Development Authority Chief Minister Mr Purno Sangma said in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on Friday. While replaying to a cut motion, Mr Sangma said that with the growth of population and the pace of development, a great pressure has been put on the land. The Govt has to be careful with limited land resources, and hence it has formulated a "better land use policy". Mr Sangma reiterated his government's commitment to the protection of tribal lands. Referring to the proposed Shillong Development Authority, he said that the SDA would have jurisdiction over the Cantonment area and

that conversion of cantonment land into commercial areas would be prevented. **Shun Khalistan supporters** Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today appealed to all the "National" opposition parties to "distance themselves publicly and clearly" from elements consorting with the Punjab terrorists and overtly supporting the cause of 'Khalistan.' Let the terrorists see the national opposition repudiating them," Mr Gandhi said intervening in the Lok Sabha in the debate on the Thakkar Commission report boycotted by almost the entire opposition as they did on the occasion in the Rajya Sabha earlier.

Rural Medical Care

With or without bridge courses

By Dr S Saraswathi

which requires some drastic prescriptions to overcome its deficiencies. But, there is no quick-fix solution. Different systems of medicine are popular in India. Faith in indigenous systems which was waning is presently growing in India perhaps as part of the realisation of the value of ancient knowledge and traditional practices and scientific approval of several traditional medicine and methods.

India is expected to grow its health sector and become one among top three healthcare markets in the world in terms of incremental growth by 2020 and 5th largest employer providing direct and indirect employment in the health sector

India is expected to grow its health sector and become one among top three healthcare markets in the world in terms of incremental growth by 2020 and 5th largest employer providing direct and indirect employment in the health sector with total workforce of nearly 5 lakh in 2015.

with total workforce of nearly 5 lakh in 2015. Health and wellness is not a commercial and purely economic activity to make us happy over its physical expansion and employment prospects. A glance through the crucial statistics pertaining to healthcare speaks volumes on its inadequacies.

One of these is doctor-patient ratio which was 1:1,674 in 2015 against WHO's recommendation of 1:1,000. This record was worse than that of Vietnam, Algeria, and Pakistan and ridiculous in the context of India becoming a destination for medical tourism. Brazil and China are far better with less than 1,000 patients per doctor.

Another is hopeless shortage of doctors in rural areas compared to urban. About 70 per cent of India's population lives in rural areas, but only 3 per cent of doctor population. However, disparities in healthcare are a universal phenomenon with high rate of uninsured patients in rural compared to urban areas. It became a research priority in Canada in 2002 when the National Commission on the Future of

Healthcare revealed important disparities between the two in dimensions like infant mortality.

In reply to a question in Rajya Sabha, the Government has stated that of the total 25,650 Primary Health Centres (PHC) in the country, 15,700 (61.2 per cent) function with just one doctor. There is not even a single doctor in 1,974 (7.69 per cent) PHCs. This is flagrant violation of the guidelines set by the Indian Public Health Standards to appoint at least two doctors and three nurses in every full time PHC. Lab technicians and pharmacists are luxuries for PHCs as 9,183 (35.8 per cent) and 4,744 (18.4 per cent) respectively were shown as running without

them.

Doctor shortage is pointed out as one of the serious health management failures in the report of the Parliamentary Committee on Health and Family Welfare presented in March 2016. The problem has become more serious as a bigger role for PHCs is envisaged under the National Health Policy 2017 to provide "assured health services to all" besides immunisation to cover several aspects like screening for non-communicable diseases.

Statistics show that on 31st March, there were 23,715 doctors in PHCs, which was less than one per Centre while the total number of doctors in the country was 1,041,395 indicating their overwhelming congregation in urban centres. Worse still is continuing rapid migration of doctors to cities - nearly 3,000 in the last one year. No amount of incentives for service in rural areas will work in the absence of extension of all urban amenities and urban standard of living in rural areas. The problem, therefore, is not confined to professional ambitions of doctors, but stretches to developmental

(The author is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

There has been a 66 per cent growth in crime against Dalits in the last ten years period from 2007 to 2017. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, rapes of Dalit women have doubled in that period. This is a threat to the ideals of equality and fraternity and to our national unity as well. Even a machine cannot work if there is a conflict among its parts, let alone a state or a society. In his famous poem, Apamanita (Insulted) Tagore said, "Whom you push down will pull you down."

There has indeed been a long list of atrocities against Dalits like beating them up for twirling or even just sporting moustaches, disallowing them to ride horses or to drink water from public taps or to get a haircut from a village saloon or to enter temples or to use village wells or to sit in a row in a village feast etc. The story is the same as that of "Sadgati" which is not just a Munshi Prem Chand's short story or a Satyajit Ray film. It is indeed the continuing saga of agonizing caste hatred in our country.

issue.

Article 47 of the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy enjoins the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improve public health among its primary duties. While medical statistics show a picture of absolute shortages in every aspect of healthcare, non-statistical reports of apathy, discriminations and even denial of treatment by medical personnel and institutions demand a thorough overhaul of medical education and profession. For, increase in the number of doctors is not enough to enhance medical ethics.

Worse than population-doctor ratio and doctor-patient ratio, or density of doctor population, discriminations shown between patients and cases of callous disregard for patients' condition and denial of proper treatment are unpardonable professional crimes common in all parts of the country.

TV news channels have shown the pictures of a patient lying in a hospital bed with his amputated leg used as a pillow; of a grieving man carrying the dead body of his wife on his shoulders as he was denied ambulance service. Patients are tied to their cots in another place to prevent them from falling when the doctors went on strike. Instances of sharing cots and beds in times of emergencies are not wanting. Denial of treatment for a sick person for want of Aadhaar Card made news in another place. Accident victims forced to go from place to place is a common problem. Private hospitals in most places do not start treatment until initial payments are made to the hospital. Cost of treatment is discussed first.

With endless problems, health sector is most difficult to handle. Doctors may have effectively barred entry of AAYUSH practitioners in allopathic medicine. But, they must come forward with constructive suggestions to cope with shortage of doctors particularly in villages. We have to bridge rural-urban areas with or without Bridge Courses. --INFA

(The author is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

This made Ambedkar embrace Buddhism. This also made Rohith Vemula write in his suicide note, "My birth is my fatal accident." This made Una happen. And this makes the dropout rate in Dalit children generally high in our country. The UN report says that there is a widespread discrimination against Dalits throughout the entire educational system in India.

We cannot turn a blind eye to unabated hatred, abuse, torture and exploitation that Dalits have still been facing every day in our country. Political will and stringent acts must be in place to prevent atrocities against Dalits apart from ensuring their proportional representation in government administration.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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.

Salman khan finally attains veergati, goes to jail

'Serial offender' who always gets his freedom

By Aditya Aamir

Year 2018 is bad for Salman Khan. He stands convicted and sentenced for five years in the fourth blackbuck case. Year 1998 was a bad year for the blackbucks killed in Jodhpur by a band of actors led by the superstar. Hunting is a centuries old pastime of people of eminence and deer of all sort are 'game' after big-game like Tiger and Lion and Leopard. Salman made a mistake, he shot dead a couple of blackbucks in a land where people worship blackbucks and animals in general. Besides, the blackbuck is also endangered unlike actors who are dime a dozen except that Salman Khan commands a price bigger than most prized actors.

Thursday morning the dressed in all black Salman Khan was convicted and sentenced for killing two blackbuck while other Bollywood hunters - Saif Ali

The other actors in the Maruti Gypsy have been let go because they were not holding guns, say some advocates. And that Salman cannot call himself innocent "all the time." The Bishnoi Sabha, meanwhile, says it will not let Saif and Sonali and Tabu walk free. Very little is spoken about what Salman and his hunting team did with the slain blackbucks. Did they skin the blackbucks and make a meal of the venison or did they leave the carcasses at the kill-spot out of concern for the vulture and hyena?

There are those who are, even after Salman's conviction, talking about how slippery a character he is. To date, "serial offender" Salman Khan has been convicted in several cases but in all of them he eased to freedom as easily as a worm from a sticky situation. The

If the two blackbucks had not been shot dead, they would have pranced around in the jungle for the rest of their 'god given' lives, taking each minute and hour of danger from other wildlife in their stride. The crime was that they were not allowed the many adventures they were entitled to in their normal lives. 'Endangered' means only man cannot kill the endangered animal, other wildlife which kill endangered animals do not commit a crime because that is what they do, kill when hungry at mealtime.

Khan, Sonali Bendre, Tabu and Neelam - who were with him in the Maruti Gypsy were acquitted.

The argument against the verdict is why have Saif & Co., been let go? They were into the conspiracy to kill and must have clapped when the blackbucks were felled. That is what hunters do, they cheer the leader of the hunter-pack, pat him on the back and later when the skinned carcass is slowly turning to golden-browned on the spit over the jungle fire, feed on meat, in this case 'venison'.

The verdict: Deer meat comes dear; costs a bundle and that includes 'conviction' and life behind bars for certain periods. If the two blackbucks had not been shot dead, they would have pranced around in the jungle for the rest of their 'god given' lives, taking each minute and hour of danger from other wildlife in their stride. The crime was that they were not allowed the many adventures they were entitled to in their normal lives. 'Endangered' means only man cannot kill the endangered animal, other wildlife which kill endangered animals do not commit a crime because that is what they do, kill when hungry at mealtime.

Most of the mainstream media was batting for Salman Khan but those on the blackbucks' side - the Bishnoi community, which worship blackbucks, in particular - say Salman deserves what he got because 'Being Human', he should have known that he cannot be an 'animal' in the Wild. Salman's defence team argued that he has been "framed" and that he's a "celeb" and a "reformed bad boy"; that he has been given the benefit of doubt in the three other blackbuck killing cases he was involved in and ergo should in this case also have got the benefit of doubt.

only time he went behind bars, he was out in seven days and much has been written of Woh Saat Din.

In this case, too, if he was not sentenced for more than three years he would have avoided jail time. But less than three years and he would have been entitled to bail from the same court, a privilege that was not accorded to RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav in the fodder cases. Salman has surely been the slippery eel who serially fished for trouble and was convicted but continued to have a whale of a time because he got off very easily.

It happened in the Mumbai hit-and-run case which left several people 'murdered on the pavement' and where the same day he was convicted by a lower court he was given bail by an upper court. Salman like the salmon (the ray-finned fish of the fish-family known as salmonidae) is a fish that swims upstream, against the current of the water.

Also, whenever cases against Salman come to a head and he was about to be convicted, Bollywood started screaming from the sidelines, shouting from the studios that hundreds of crores of rupees were invested in Salman movies which were right in the middle of shooting and his conviction and Salman behind bars would put so many "innocent families" in dire straits; poor folks, they cannot be left to starve, give them a chance, please, don't put Salman behind bars, try to 'Being Human'!

Hell, his bankrupt Veergati actor is fighting TB in a hospital and Salman is paying her hospital bills. What will happen to her, at least have a thought! The Veergati actor will now have to wait for an upper court to bail her out. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Prioritizing Mental Health Care

Editor,
The rising cases of suicide in today's world makes you wonder, what is going on. In our own state of Meghalaya we read or hear daily about people who, unfortunately, felt they had no way out. I feel that even though it may be a sensitive issue to talk about or discuss with our families, our colleagues, our friends, it has to be done. We cannot avoid this issue any longer. The percentage of people suffering from depression in our State is staggering but unknown to many. Every other person you meet on a day to day basis may be suffering from depression and the worst part is that you wouldn't even know it. As human beings, we have a duty towards each other; to ask the other person how they are coping with life's pressures. You never know whom you might be saving just by doing that. We have become a society so blinded by our own needs, our own

problems, that we have lost the ability to be humane. The need of the hour is to bring this topic to the fore, as a society, as a community, be it in schools, colleges, workplaces and above all at home. We start small and begin within our own families, our parents, our children, our siblings, our significant others. The problem with our society, is the immediate prejudicial judgment meted out at anyone we assume is "different" from us. By giving more attention towards Mental Health Care, the number of people who would benefit from this would be substantial. Mental health is something we should not be ashamed of discussing in public forums, as we have been doing for other health issues like heart disease, obesity, cancer etc. Funding towards Mental health care should become a priority in our State. This would ensure that every person is given the opportunity to approach the right person for guidance and help. Therapists, Mental Health care professionals, would provide the right

counseling which would lead to someone's wellbeing, self awareness and a path towards recovery. When more mental care facilities are made available, more people would have access towards such health services. I hope that one day, our society would evolve to the point where we no longer see mental health problems as "social taboos".

Yours etc.,
D. Pariat
Shillong

Fisheries Dept stagnating

Editor,
It is an irony of sorts that the much hyped aquaculture mission to promote, develop and increase the production of fish has failed miserably for many reasons and also various factors. We can recollect that your paper had reported the utter failure and wastage of money in such a project which could not achieve its objectives. For those in the know of things the entire mission has been just a money spinner for

those in the business rather than the actual beneficiaries. The previous MUA government should in turn acknowledge the failure of the IBDLP project in not able to uplift the economic and social standards of people in the rural areas rather than pushing for answers from the MDA led-coalition. Ironically even some Opposition members acknowledge that the IBDLP failed in its mission. Time for some introspection by the Opposition!

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong-3

Children of lesser Gods

Editor,
In the article, "The bullet or the ballot" (ST, April 5, 2018), Ananya S Guha rightly said, "The Dalit explosion is an expression of pent up anger." It is a matter of shame that a crime is committed against a Dalit every 15 minutes and 6 Dalit Nirbhayas are raped every day in our country.

Welcoming Spring



By Wa-i-sa Sumer & Juhhi Nanghuloo

Hello Spring! No matter how long the winter, spring is to follow! And with Spring, here comes the Spring Festival booming in across the world and Jowai, the headquarters of West Jaintia Hills District is busy welcoming the season with the two-day Annual Cultural Festival “Ka Chad Sukra” that started on Saturday in Jowai.

The first day of the cultural event begins with “Ka Lehke Drama”, a theatrical show where a drama will be staged and a host of directors, producers, actors will be fitted in for the night’s show.

This year the show will be hosted by the Loompyrdi longpiah, one of the Dorbar Chnong in Jowai in its Community Hall and will be presenting a drama named “Ka Juk”.

On Sunday, diverse cultural dances by the eight localities in Jowai — Panaliar, Dulong, Loompyrdi longpiah, Tpep-pale, Loomion-gkjam, Chhilliangraij, Loomkyrwiang, Um-changiar along with Sein Tylli Lang Ladhad-laboh, Seinraij Ummulong and Seinraij Shillong will be displayed at Madan Myngkoi Pyrdi — longpiah.

Men, Women, youths and children — dance with joy and enthusiasm. This is followed by a carnival procession called “Ka Mih law” towards lawmusiang, where everyone dance in unison in synchronisation with music, songs and dance.

A community festival, Chad Sukra literally means a dance with peace and vitality. This is an annual festival of the Pnar people of Jaintia Hills. Symbolising love and oneness, this festival is a projection of our love to our Mother Earth — “Ka Bei Rymaw” — before all agri-cultural activities are to be carried out in the lap of mother nature, our elders under the aegis of Seinraij Jowai a socio-cultural and religious organisation and the custodian of culture and tradition under the leadership of the President of Seinraij along with all the officials and the executive members together with U Dolloi the religious head and his councillors held a series of rites and rituals ceremony for paying rich



Season of celebrations: Participants dance to the tune of traditional music on Chad Sukra in Jowai

tributes to our mother earth and to top it all Ka Chad Sukra is held where songs and lyrics, tunes were all set as a manifestation and rejuvenation of one’s feelings. This is truly reflected through the dances perform on this occasion.

From the social perspective Chad Sukra pro-

vides a platform for showcasing the talents in the field of songs composers, singers, dancers. As Chad Sukra signals the arrival of spring, it also sends a strong message to the world that sowing season is approaching and our farmers are all set to get started to their diverse agricultural activities. Chad Sukra also has a

parallel with the onset of Ka Behdeinkhlam as it coincides with “Ka Dih Soo Pen” — one of the rituals performed to kickstart the beginning of this majestic festival along with “Ka Chat Thoh” — marking the sowing season for the community. Spring is nature’s way of saying “Let’s Party”.

Pride & prejudice

By Imitoshi Ao

People respect us for two reasons — either we have power or our behaviour. The first one is temporary but the second one is permanent. Is this true? Power gives us negative pride and it makes us prejudiced in our decisions and attitude towards others whereas, our good behaviour makes us proud in a positive way and because of that we do not judge people for who they are or what they are.

We all see in today’s world how people run after money, power, fame and success and I’m not saying it’s wrong, but it’s wrong if we hurt people in the process and if we judge people before we know them. Remember, “Life is not qualified by fluent English, branded clothes or a rich lifestyle. It is measured by the number of faces who smile when they hear your name.”

Pride is the one thing that makes us who we are, either it will make us very good or it will make us prejudiced. It’s up to you to choose which one you want. If you choose to take pride in what you have done and it makes people smile when they hear your name then you have had a positive effect or you can go on with your negativity and judge people because of their smile. The choice is yours.

“The greatest mistake we make in life — we listen half, understand quarter, think zero and react double”— Lord Buddha.

Tell me why do you think this is? I think it’s because we are too proud of ourselves that we do not want to listen or understand what others have to say. We think that we know everything and this negative pride becomes our downfall. An entire sea of water can’t sink a ship unless it gets inside the ship. Similarly, the negativity of the world can’t put you down unless you allow it to get inside you. Don’t let the negative pride and the prejudice get inside you because if you do it will sink you to the bottom from where you may never recover.

Think positive, be proud of what you have achieved but don’t let that make you judge other people as they too have their own experiences and they are proud of what they have achieved too. Be a proud person with a desire to achieve and make it happen but not by the desire to put down or beat others. Give respect to people whether they deserve it or not: Not as a reflection of their character: But as a reflection of your own personality.

If you really want to be proud of yourself, then build someone up, help them put their insecurities to sleep. Remind them that they are worthy and magical, be that light in a dim world. If you can make this happen then you will find that it brings a smile to people and you will be remembered forever. This is the pride we should all strive to achieve and I encourage you to do so and see the difference. Take that chance, I know the road to achieve this maybe long, winding and difficult but then again it always seems impossible to achieve something until it’s done.

Be proud with the measure of who you are and what you do with what you have. Never be prejudiced about others, for they too have achieved that measure, with what they have and what they did with it. So let’s not be too proud of ourselves and be prejudiced against others but let’s be that light in a very dim world.

LET’S MAKE IT HAPPEN.

(The author is a motivational speaker)



Pinterest

Queen of Africa: A saga of struggle

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, ‘the Queen of Africa’, is no more. After long illness, the ‘Mother of the Nation’, as they called her in South Africa, breathed her last peacefully aged 81 in Johannesburg hospital. A woman of explosive nature with red hair and blue eyes and very pale skin, she was ready to endure all trials. She was an icon no less significant than her legendary husband Nelson Mandela and remained equally active in the freedom struggle and had to undergo persecution and imprisonment. She remained by the side of Nelson Mandela even after his release in 1990 though her fame was tarnished in murder and fraud.

The meeting of Winnie and Nelson was one of the greatest and most tragic love stories of the world. Winnie was 23 and Nelson nearly 40, a patron of her school of social work. Their passionate love was consummated in marriage in 1958. In 1962, Mandela was captured. Winnie was arrested in 1969 and was kept in solitary confinement for political agitation and physical altercations with the security branch.

Scandals chased her. For a second time she was subjected to internal exile in 1977 where she suffered hardship and loneliness. But courage never deserted her. The firebrand activist fought the apartheid regime all her life and she was more militant than South Africa’s Freedom icon Nelson Mandela who believed in the Gandhian non-violence movement.

Here she was more like Netaji Subhas Bose in India who going to the opposite pole of Gandhi gave a call: “Give me blood, I will give you freedom.”

It was Winnie in who with a similar vibrancy gave a clarification call to the African people: “With our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country.” But still she never forgot that there was a limit to violence. She was



critical of anti-immigrant violence and offered shelter for an immigrant family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and made apology to the riot victims.

Release of Mandela could be a happy time for both them. But it did not give her respite as her fame was terribly affected by the Stompie Moeketsi Scandal.

The worse tragedy waited for her when Nelson obtained divorce from her in 1996 and married Graca Machel in 1998. But she did not separate herself from Nelson. It is really painful to accept that she was accused of extra-marital affair. Out of frustration she wrote: “I had so little time to love him. And that love has survived all these years of separation. Perhaps if I’d had time to know him better, I might have found a lot of faults, but I only had time to love him and long for him all the time.” She never discarded the name Mandela even after the divorce.

Besides being a political leader, she was a social activist and she got inspired since her girlhood days. She enrolled at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg in 1953 and proved herself as a “remarkably effective and dedicated social worker” as Emma Gilbey her biographer wrote it in The Lady: Life and Times of Winnie Mandela (1993). Winnie won the Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Award for human rights work in South Africa and Candace Award for distinguished service from the National Coalition of 100N Black Women in 1986. She was awarded honorary Doctor of Laws by Makerere University, Kampala Uganda much later in 2018 in recognition of her fight against apartheid in South Africa.

There was some fabrication over the interview taken of her by Nadira Naipaul where she was shown as attacking Mandela’s decision to accept Nobel Prize with FW De Klerk. Besides these moves by the enemies, she was also suffering from incurable diseases. After the death of Nelson in 2013 she was again involved in bitter family disputes and her health went into decline since 2016.

(The author is International Visiting Faculty at Fairleigh Dickinson University, New Jersey. He may be reached at profratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

Photo courtesy: Pinterest



A wave of self-reliance

This columnist once watched a 60-minute BBC TV documentary on the railways of Lahore simply because the remote control was on another chair.

Heartless people call this “laziness”, but I prefer “terminal indolence”, which sounds more medical.

In a bid to encourage this writer to be more active, colleagues pointed out that a noble, dramatic wave of self-reliance is sweeping the world at the moment.

It started with a video report from China a few days ago showing a woman out shopping for food. She paused for a moment and gave birth to a baby, which fell to the floor. She never even sat down. Onlookers in the city of Yunfu called an ambulance and paramedics but she waved them away and walked home, baby in one hand and shopping in the other.

Just imagine the conversation. Husband: “What did you get?” Wife: “Four carrots, a baby, and some bananas.” Husband: “Good, I like bananas.”

The wave of self-reliance spread to the US. On April 2, a car hit a woman, sending her flying. She picked herself up, refused an ambulance and drove herself to the hospital, the Tennessee press reported. On the same day, a man in Las Vegas was shot — but also drove himself to hospital, according to the local radio news.

This is a bit worrying, conjuring up a vision of US highways being filled with motorists zooming along while severely injured. “Oops, sorry for crashing into you, someone shot my head off so I can’t see anything.” “No problem, bud.”

Self-reliance was demonstrated in South East Asia at the same time too. An economy



passenger on a Kuala Lumpur to Hong Kong flight upgraded herself. The flight attendant sent her back, but she sneaked forwards three times. Eventually the passengers in the expensive seats shouted at her to go back. This seems unfair, since she was doing no harm to them besides damaging their elitism.

I told colleagues that these were trivial examples compared to the ultimate do-it-yourself tale. Jadav Payeng of Assam moved to a large sandbar in a river. He spent 30 years planting trees and eventually turned it into a new forest 1,360 acres in size. (An acre is about the size of a soccer pitch.) The forest was so successful that tigers and elephants now share it with him.

And possibly the worst do-it-yourself true story is that of Oscar Taylor of California. He performed a surgical operation on himself in 1909. He died and his family members didn’t even have a doctor to sue, so they missed an important US tradition.

When I got home, I discovered that my kids were watching a viral video about a dog named Drewbert who was playing “fetch” with himself. Owner Jialu Wong was busy so the dog threw his own ball and fetched it.

But going back to where this started, one of my kids told me that modern people no longer used TV remote controls. They changed channels by giving voice commands to their Alexa electronic assistants.

So basically, they’re agreeing with me: Reaching for the remote and pressing a button is just too much work, right?

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)



A scene from the film Death Certificate
Photo source: TWF

Rajaditya Banerjee, theatre director, lives in Finland but chose to make his directorial debut film *Death Certificate* shot on rural locations in eastern India. **Shoma A Chatterji** in conversation with the director

Excerpts from an interview

What is *Death Certificate* about?

It’s about a young tribal woman whose world crashes around her when she learns that her husband is missing. She sets out with her father-in-law to search for him. However, her life turns upside down when she discovers that the picturesque village surrounded by mountains and forests has suddenly become a space filled with cruelty and inhumanity and now tries to come to terms with this reality.

What is at the core of the film?

It’s an effort to evoke the impact of years of subordination of the voiceless and marginalised in India, particularly women. I have tried to bring across a microcosm of events these people have to encounter in their day-to-day life but which is entirely beyond their control.

You have chosen a dark story for your first film. Why?

The stories and novels my father wrote have never stopped fascinating me because they reflect a social reality which I have tried to portray on celluloid. How-

ever, having lived in Finland for many years and knowing that Nordic countries often produce dark films and plays, I chose my father’s short story because to my mind, it is more real than dark.

Why did you give the name *Death Certificate* to this film?

It is a tribute to my late brother, noted filmmaker Bappaditya Bandopadhyay and my father Debashish Bandopadhyay who passed away before I could complete the film. It’s based on a short story by him and this was the title he gave to the original story. I didn’t want to change the title.

The film is in an almost unheard of language

Yes, it’s the first art house film in Kurmali dialect (sub-titled in English) which is one of the many dialect variations of Bengali and spoken in some parts of Jharkhand. *Death Certificate* also highlights the terrible condition of the morgues in India. Protocol demands that dead bodies should be preserved for 72 hours for the families and loved ones to be able to collect them for the last rites. But very often, these are cremated without the knowledge of family members.

The film also refers to the unique case of Dana Majhi, a tribal peasant of Odisha who had to carry the lifeless body of his wife along with his daughter because he was denied a mortuary van.

What differences did you find between directing plays and directing films?

Well, cinema and theatre are not at war with each other. It’s quite possible to direct both at the same time. But while a play can run from beginning to end without much intervention on my part, I can’t say the same about cinema which demands my intervention all the time.

What took you so long to step into films as director Bappaditya Bandopadhyay was a famous director himself?

I have been doing theatre for a long time. I have a degree in filmmaking from the Baltic Film and Media School, University of Tallinn, Estonia. But it was only after the sad and untimely demise of my older brother that I decided to make socially relevant films. Bappaditya lived and died for cinema and found his own voice and his unique cinematic language. I can make films my way and pay a tribute to an icon like him.

What made you cast yourself as the hero instead of casting someone else in that role?

I have been acting in the European Union, in Finland and in the USA for the last 15 years. With hundreds of stage performances, I felt it only natural for me to appear as the lead in my own film. But I have very little screen time in the film. However, this is not my debut as

an actor. I have acted in three short films before this one. In *Casual Friday* (2013) in Finnish directed by Ritta Rytta, *Life* (2014) in English directed by A. Roy and *The Lovers* (2015), a silent film directed by Hiroki Kaminaga.

What statement are you making through this film?

I am raising a very pertinent question — we have globalised technology. When will we globalise humanity? As the search continues for life in other planets and we try to find an answer to the question whether we are alone in the universe, the misery and violation of human rights continue for the other half in this planet. I feel (it) is a strong statement against corruption, bureaucracy and human rights abuses inflicted on those who exist on the fringes of India. I have tried to vividly describe the ordeal and the pain these people experience.

***Death Certificate* has been screened at several film festivals.**

This year, the film has been screened at the Bengaluru International Film Festival, 5th Asian Film Festival in Pune, San Mauro Film Festival in Italy and the 5thGarifuna International Film Festival, USA. In 2017, the film was screened at the Los Angeles Cine Film Festival, London Monthly Film Festival and Third Eye Asian Film Festival in Mumbai. (TWF-IBNS)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 8, 2018

You would be able to move ahead and make good progress as Moon Apogee on your solar return chart. You will need to use your business wisdom to overcome delays and hindrances. You will be quick-witted at work and will utilize your creativity to great advantage in the projects and work at hand. Financial restrictions can be felt at times but overall the situation will be better. An affair will have a very comforting impact on your mind. Now is a good time to heal relationships and build strong bridges, this will prove to be constructive. You will get support from unexpected corners.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your efforts, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains and your energy increases for projects at work and your job environment teeming with activity. You take small yet sure steps towards your financial goals. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. If you have children, they may need more discipline than they previously did. You may find your children at an age that requires more attention and or structure. There are some contentious issues that are laid to rest as you tackle them and take a bold stand. Health needs some attention.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You may have to make some critical decisions due to situations in your life that force you to make choices; they could even be between career and family goals. Some of you may be promoted or your career takes a new direction. The challenge is to find a healthy balance--to improve home life, while at the same time tending to your career needs. Romantic and personal relations would be more practical than fun. For some, a romantic relationship stabilizes and becomes more serious. For some you will meet a new romantic interest who is perhaps more younger and energetic as compared to you. Some changes in your social circle have been occurring of late, and you meet new and unusual people.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

New friendships are likely to emerge this time, supportive and easygoing ones. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you are indicated. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around. Don't allow personal feelings to influence professional decisions. An opportunity or investment to make quick gains is on the cards but analyze data at hand before you invest. Energy is high and things happen swiftly. You exude confidence and are in a positive frame of mind.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You would be blessed with good health, love in relations and harmony at the work place. You give and receive affection and love from friends and relatives. You connect with old friends and business associates. Being open and receptive, you attract opportunities which hitherto seemed out of reach. You desire to learn and improve on your practical skills. Realistic levels of optimism and confidence are with you that enable you to quicken the pace at your workplace. Tension could run high and reach an emotional peak. Do not get carried away without first getting the facts. Yoga and walking would prove to be beneficial.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your social life will likely increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful people who could prove to be helpful as they extend a helping hand. Matters related to universities, higher education, organized religion, publishing, legal affairs, and foreign interests proceed smoothly. This is an excellent time to seek advanced training or further your education. Happiness and fulfillment through close friendships and relationships is indicated. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to aim for a sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The planetary combination tends to change your outlook on life, perhaps stimulated by travel. Some changes in your social circle have been occurring and this brings about a new awareness.

You are more determined to achieve your personal goals, and more strategic in the manner you go about doing so. New responsibilities are likely to present themselves and you would take them more seriously. New projects excite you but remember that bringing them to a completion is just as important. A little attention on fitness and health related programs would be helpful.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

During this period money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a realistic approach to business and finance because. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional activities, during the week. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is more intense. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. You look to networking to leverage on your contacts. You may be quick to anger and could antagonize some whom you want to win over.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This is a time which is good for money, status and for enhancing your standing. Your entire focus shifts in this direction. You take on new responsibilities, but enjoy the challenges it presents. Your belief systems and personal philosophies are especially important to you, but do not often coincide with your methods. This dichotomy will inculcate new attitudes towards finances, and social relationships before you strike a balance. It's an excellent time for travel, higher education and communications.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You may feel the need to be appreciated by family members, and the need for togetherness with others this week. Events are such that you move towards a more objective approach to your life and you cultivate true friendships. It is a time when we need to let go of things that no longer serve their purpose, and hold on to things that have a future. You would express your sympathetic and compassionate side. Others might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You would stand alone, take action and start afresh during this period.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would be able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility in personal and professional relations. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. You are also likely to form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You have to maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and profit.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

At this time you feel on top in domestic issues and spend quality time with people you care about and in activities that are rejuvenating. You tend to be traditional and restrictive in family matters and may have to face opposition of younger ones. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Your unselfishness and willingness to listen will help boost your magnetic appeal. Your professional skills wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Overseas visitors and news are positive and inspiring. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. You need to tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. You are generous with friends, and loving in family situations. You come across as especially smooth and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. A business venture could be gainful if you are willing to lend it some energy. You are involved in multiple tools of creativity you possess. A gentle and softer approach can resolve an old conflict.

Explore printing press

By Ranjan K Baruah

In the last edition we have published about a few career options related to printing press. In this edition we are publishing more information about career related to printing press. When it comes to press it might be pre-press, press and post press. Before actual printing takes place there are other things like getting the job from client, DTP of the contents, designing, etc.

Two important designations in any printing press is DTP operator and graphic designer or other designer.

DTP Operator: This is another common word when we talk about printing press. Desktop publishing (abbreviated DTP) is the creation of documents using page layout skills on a personal computer primarily for print.

Desktop publishing software can generate layouts and produce typographic quality text and images comparable to traditional typography and printing. This technology allows individuals, businesses and other organisations to self-publish a wide range of printed matter.

Desktop publishing is also the main reference for digital typography. When used skillfully, desktop publishing allows the user to produce a wide variety of materials, from menus to magazines and books, without the expense of commercial printing.

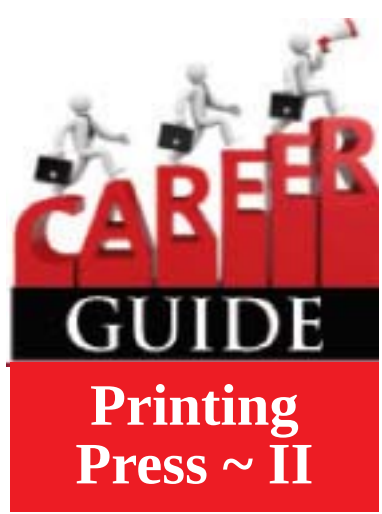
Individual with less academic qualification may become DTO operator but they must have typing speed.

Proof Reader: A proof is a typeset version of copy or a manuscript page. They often contain typos introduced through human error. Traditionally, a proof reader looks at an increment of text on the copy and then compares it to the corresponding typeset increment, and then marks any errors (sometimes called line edits) using standard proofreaders' marks.

Unlike copy editing, proofreading's defining procedure is to work directly with two sets of information at the same time. Proofs are then returned to the typesetter or graphic artist for correction. It is that easy and one needs to have good command on languages to become effective proof



readers. There are many other designations or avenues associated with printing press. We shall be writing on other



avenues like quality control, manager, supervisors, book binding, packaging, marketing and branding, etc.

Printing industry provides excellent career opportunities and advancement to deserving and hard working people. A career in printing gives opportunities in technical, marketing and managerial positions.

There are thousands of printing houses/presses or processing houses in different parts of country. One

may work with others or may start their own ventures.

Updates:

NCHM JEE: Students may apply for National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology’s Joint Entrance Examination to be held on April 28. Admission shall be based on marks obtained by the candidate in All India (written test) JEE-examination. Allotment of Institute shall strictly be in order of merit and rank. No group discussions or personal interviews are involved in this admission process. Students may apply before April 16 for the entrance examination.

AIIMS Entrance: Aspirants may apply online for Nursing and Para Medical courses at AIIMS. Last date of filling in online application is April 12. This most prestigious and reputed institute offers courses like BSc Nursing (Hons); BSc Nursing (Post Basic); MSc (Nursing); M Biotech in Biotechnology and paramedical courses includes BSc (Hons) in Medical Technology in Radiography, Bachelor of Optometry, etc.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

--- Eleanor Roosevelt

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.235SHILLONG, MONDAY, APRIL 9, 2018

Oli in Delhi

NEPAL Prime Minister K P Oli is in Delhi. What is remarkable about the visit is that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed his readiness to revise and update the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal. The revision is one of the major items on Oli’s agenda and he talked about it in his election speeches. Modi and Oli discussed issues pertaining to Nepal’s domestic situation and needs. India is anxious to look at the practical opportunities and challenges. It is because both countries share an open border. The advantages of having an open border should not be lost sight of by either country. Talks at the summit also related to the Railways network connecting Indian cities with Kathmandu. A pact in this regard is expected to be signed. Other issues discussed during Oli’s visit relate to agriculture, research, education and training.

New Delhi has been through a difficult relationship with Oli in the past few years. What rankled most was the blockade episode in 2016 triggered by the Madhesis who were alleged to have been backed by India. Oli has now won the election with a decisive mandate forming a Maoist government in Kathmandu. The Indian side is now anxious to stabilise relations with the mountainous neighbour. It has to consider the insecurity of a small country, its politics and the aspirations of its people. Oli is considered pro-China. His 10 point infrastructure agreement with China had aroused resentment in New Delhi. But India must be aware that it cannot pour as much money into Nepal as China. It has to get a grip on its paranoia about China getting Nepal on its side. It has to offer Nepal what China cannot-power generated by projects. That may lead to a constructive friendship between the two countries.

LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

Bodo bandh peaceful on fourth day

The 300-hours Assam bandh called jointly by the All Bodo Students Union (Upendra Faction) and the All Bodo People’s Action Committee (ABPAC) was peaceful for the fourth day today. Official sources here said no untoward incidents were reported from any part of the state. The Bandh however, remained confined to the Bodo inhabited areas of Kokrajhar district and

Udalguri sub division and had no impact in other parts of the state. Train services were normal and vehicles were playing on the national highway. Life in Kokrajhar district and Udalguri subdivision of Darrang district, however, remained paralysed. Shops and business establishments were closed and vehicles off the road. Functioning in the government offices and banks was also disrupted.

TO THE EDITOR

Missionary school turns mercenary

Editor,
As a concerned parent I am disconcerted by the exorbitant school fees charged by Loreto Convent. The school has been hiking the school fees @ 10% every year without once consulting parents or justifying the hike. I need to seek clarification from the school administration as to whether the following fee structure is justified.

1. Tuition fees Rs 2660 per month
2. Maintenance fees Rs 1500 per annum
3. Annual fees (stationery, examination, arts & craft etc.).... Rs 2000 per annum
4. E-Care fees (SMS disbursement, attendance etc.).... Rs 1200 per annum
5. Computer fees (Classes IV to VIII)... Rs 1500 per annum
6. Computer fees/Home Science fees (Classes IX & X).... Rs 1500 per annum
7. Science fees (Classes VII to X).... Rs 1500 per annum
8. Admission Fee: (For new admissions only).... Rs 15,000
9. Late fee if paid after due date.... Rs 100 per month
10. Magazine feeRs 150 per annum

Since when has stationery cost become separate from

school fees? And what constitutes stationery since parents provide all the stationery required for their children? And why should there be a separate examination fee? Is that not included in the tuition fees as well?

I am sure that the first response of the school on seeing this letter is to say, “If you cannot afford the fees, take your child out and admit her in another school.” This is the reason why most parents remain silent and only crib among themselves since the parent-teachers meeting too does not address these grievances. And this is the reason why Loreto Convent continues to blackmail parents, knowing full well that they will beg, borrow and steal in order to pay the school fees. Now why should a missionary school charge such exorbitant fees? Is the idea to provide education only to the affluent elite? Is this the Christian mission? Are those from the middle and low income groups not entitled to study in Loreto Convent? The problem with private schools in Meghalaya is that there are no regulations and no checks and balances on their fee structures. It’s time for parents to speak up and for the Government to intervene. There is a limit to the extortion that

parents are being subjected to.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Attempt to kill the medical profession!

Editor,
I was appalled at the callous attitude of the writer of the article, ‘Rural Medical Care-With or without bridge courses’ (ST April 7, 2018). From the article it is evident that the author, like many others, uses doctors as punching bags, as everyone feels they are soft targets.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) opposed the National Medical Commission Bill (NMC) as it was not good for the society at large. The writer has tried to portray the rejection of the bill as because doctors do not want more people to easily enter the field.

As a doctor, I will be happy to see more people joining the workforce as my job will be reduced and it will be easy for me to get more assistants, thereby enabling me to cater to more patients. But that doesn’t mean compromising on the training. Can an English professor be asked to teach Khasi after making her undergo a six month bridge

course? And if the Khasi professors disapprove of this, would you attribute it to their not wanting more people entering their field?

I have seen several patients who, after being advised treatment, have chosen alternative treatments and come back to me with a worsened condition, several times in conditions which cannot be treated. But there is no accountability for this. I am not condemning the AYUSH practitioners, but they have been trained in their own fields and they need to be encouraged to practice what they have learnt. Besides, this will increase the quackery already widely prevalent in our country. There is also the mention of ‘unpardonable professional crimes’ and so on. While I don’t condone such behaviour, there is bound to be such incidents in every field. It doesn’t help painting a negative picture of the entire profession. Why are no questions raised about the dismal conviction rate for criminals in the country, the poor handling of traffic, huge delays in government projects and so on? If there is so much depravity in the health sector (as the author says) it probably only reflects the society at large.

The article talks about all the inadequacies in the

health sector and the dismal doctor-population ratio. While the whole country faces this problem, the situation is much better in the southern states like Kerala and Tamilnadu. One of the reasons is the investment on Government Medical Colleges and also reservations given to government doctors for postgraduate courses and other affirmative action. Tamilnadu has medical colleges in almost all of the districts. Now, this is not due to the efforts of doctors in these southern states, rather it is due to the policies of the governments. But this article says doctors have to come up with suggestions to improve the scenario. Is the author in utopia, where the suggestions of the doctors are implemented? So what are the suggestions?

1. Increase the medical seats in government medical colleges
- 2.Ensure timely procurement of equipment and drugs
3. Ensure adequate staffing in government institutions
4. Create a congenial working environment for doctors
5. Reduce the ‘Non-Medical’ work which doctors are expected to do.

While these suggestion are nothing out of the box, have the policy makers implemented any of these?

Has the author questioned why there isn’t a medical college in the state of Meghalaya ? Even the one which is proposed would be a part private college. Does the Civil hospital provide adequate services? Why have buildings been constructed in the Civil Hospital, but services not started yet(citing 5% pending work)? Why is it that qualified Government doctors are posted elsewhere, in departments where their services are not fully utilized?

These questions ought to be directed at the powers that be, not at the humble doctors, who, if the NMC bill would be passed in its current form, would even lose their professional autonomy. The NMC will contain several non-medical persons deciding what the doctors should do. Did the judiciary accept the NJAC, with non-judicial persons ?

It would be nice if the author responds, or desists from writing such articles, which would not be of any benefit to the society.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
(A humble doctor, who is not a policy maker)

Banana republic scenes outside and inside Jodhpur Jail

Servile Jail Staff at Superhero’s beck and call

By Aditya Aamir

With politicians calling each other names and behaving like alley cats, power shifted to Jodhpur Central Jail where “Mr. Compassionate” Salman Khan, restless and privileged, was counting bars. Overnight in a midnight drama over 200 judicial officers were transferred and the new magistrate in Jodhpur Rural District Court moved quickly to hear Salman’s bail plea.

In any case, “bail is every jail-bird’s right, jail is not”, and the “law of parity”, which Salman’s lawyers quoted ad infinitum, had to apply. So what if that same parity has not been shown to lakhs of under-trials, forget convicts? Salman channels covered her beautifully. India is full of people who have no regard for the law – witness Salman Khan, a “habitual offender” – and people who will stand for the law-breaker blind to the majesty of the law.

The drama witnessed outside Jodhpur Central Jail and Jodhpur Rural District Court, two venues where law had no place under the 40 degrees Celsius sun, was a pathetic display of a ‘Banana Republic’ in full play. And as the hours melted into each other on Saturday, it was as if the animal-loving Bishnoi community was the real villain of the piece. It was as if Salman had been punished enough after having spent two of the

The drama witnessed outside Jodhpur Central Jail and Jodhpur Rural District Court, two venues where law had no place under the 40 degrees Celsius sun, was a pathetic display of a ‘Banana Republic’ in full play. And as the hours melted into each other on Saturday, it was as if the animal-loving Bishnoi community was the real villain of the piece. It was as if Salman had been punished enough after having spent two of the 1,800 nights he has been sentenced to spend in jail. Salman Khan was never the hero in real life. He was ham-handed in his dealings with fellow actors, threatening male and female actors alike – Aishwarya Rai, Vivek Oberoi, even Shah Rukh Khan. The brash actor who believed he was only next to God Almighty has been an atrocious role model.

had “family and friends” worried sick he was fighting hordes of mean mosquitoes.

Besides, Salman, like the caged lion, was stalking his “A/C cage”, walking his waking hours unable to shuteye, because he was not used to such an environment. The food was not up to his taste and he was used to “workout” to keep his muscles tone-perfect. Hell, if Salman Khan doesn’t flex his muscles who will, Baba Adam?

So many people were crying for relief. Salman’s sister Alvira; Salman’s bodyguard Shera; Salman’s mom and dad; Salman’s brothers Arbaaz and Sohail. That was not counting the family dog, the family cook and the family car driver. How could the law be so callous to such good people, all under the same roof? Something had to shift, and shift fast.

If it was a Bollywood flick, the sleazy Vidhayak and the ruthless don, with insanity written into his role, would have conspired to see to it that no court was held on Saturday and the ‘hero’ would have remained behind bars through the weekend. But in real-life Qaidi No.106 had everybody on his side.

Lawyers in boxes in TV screens sounded like they were hired counsel for Salman Khan. They refused to acknowledge logic. Who killed Jessica Lal reverberated. So did who killed Aurushi Talwar and who killed the blackbuck. But, suddenly, there was talk that Salman the large-hearted did not aim to kill, he was “covering up” for somebody else in the hunters-pack.

Salman-fans were out in strength. One “cute little girl” in her father’s arms “fainted” outside Jodhpur Central Jail and television

1,800 nights he has been sentenced to spend in jail. Salman Khan was never the hero in real life. He was ham-handed in his dealings with fellow actors, threatening male and female actors alike – Aishwarya Rai, Vivek Oberoi, even Shah Rukh Khan. The brash actor who believed he was only next to God Almighty has been an atrocious role model. But this muscleman on steroids has always gotten away with wrongdoings of all sorts.

It was a shame jail staff in Jodhpur went out of their way to be servile to Salman Khan. But what else could you have expected from jail staff? Most of the two nights Salman has been in jail, he allegedly spent in an air-conditioned video-conferencing room with multiple television sets. There was no dearth of cigarettes for the convict and allegedly jail staff were ‘selfie-taking’ with Salman and palming off the superstar’s autographs like the jail would run out of ink.

Salman Khan has always treated the media with contempt and there were many a time when his bodyguards led by the redoubtable Shera have laid about media-persons like they were so many inviting to be rolled out of the way like ninetpins. But the “shameless media” has always gone for more of the same, talking of him as if without him there would be no Bollywood. The media gave him superlatives and put him on a pedestal, always forgetting that ‘Being Human’ could be a sham Salman Khan practiced/perfected. If Salman Khan got bail on Saturday, it would have only been because the media played double-standards, fourth-fiddle! (IPA Service)

“ People have always tut-tutted about actors stepping out of line politically. And I can sort of see it because what you've got your fame for is not being someone who can influence things, so it's cheating. ”

--- Joanna Lumley

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.237 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 2018

Health priorities for Meghalaya

THE fourth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) shows a dismal picture as far as Meghalaya is concerned. The life expectancy for men is 57 years and for women 58 years as against the all India figure of 62 and 64 years respectively. The survey shows 51% of women and 31% of men as anaemic. Maternal mortality continues to remain high. Ironically the health priorities of the Government continue to remain focussed on the curative rather than the preventative and palliative aspects. In the preventive aspects the Health Department needs to partner with some robust agencies that can engage in awareness creation using the most strategic tools of communication in line with the cultural and societal needs. To expect the Health Department and doctors to also know the skills of communicating ideas of preventive medicine is a tall order. Communication skills are learnt and not just picked up and are certainly not the forte of every doctor. Hence the huge failure to bring down the fertility rate in Meghalaya! Family welfare which includes spacing and bringing down the birth rate through condom use and other such actions is still a hush-hush affair in our societies even today.

The Government has not taken a holistic view of health. There is too much stress on diagnostic equipments and medicines and too little on understanding the patient’s needs and certainly there is very little attention paid to the psychosomatic origins of most diseases. Doctors have confided that nearly about 90% of patients who come to them actually don’t require medicines but need someone to talk to and be counselled by. In short, most people today suffer from mental and emotional health problems which then manifest in physical ailments. Mental health is a huge challenge in Meghalaya but the resources allocated for this ailment is simply inadequate. Another problem with the health sector is over-specialisation. This is like splitting up a patient into so many specific needs when he/she might respond better if attended to by a general medical practitioner. Of course, all this can be attributed to the absence of a Health Policy in Meghalaya. And to think that the Chief Minister for seven years was himself a medical doctor! What an irony!

TO THE EDITOR

Losing our humanity!

Editor,

The brothers of our own land are losing their humanity day by day. Instead of protecting women who could be their sisters/mothers/daughters, the men indulge in acts of violence and sex. They hunt for teenage girls to fulfil their lust. I am taken aback by the acts of our men who are themselves acting like guardians and beating up girls in public places, chasing them and taking videos of the same. The moral policing is unacceptable and is not done in any given society. What could be our take on "Beti bachao Beti parhao" should be “Beta bachao, beta parhao.” Our boys are becoming perverts and need to be groomed and tamed. We need equal ratio of male and female teachers in schools to control aggressive boys.

I request the lawmakers to make special and stringent laws in the state to punish the perpetrators of crimes against women and girl-children. We need to protect women especially teenage

girls from becoming victims of such harassment which is cruel and shameful. All legislators should be able to protect women in their own constituencies.

Yours etc.
L A Sangma
Danakgre,
Tura

Sneak-peek at some naked truths

Editor,

The article by Aristotle Lyngdoh regarding the "Tower Of Babel" metaphor for what went on in the Meghalaya Assembly is correct in almost all spheres except for the fact that “every bird loves to hear itself sing in its own voice.” So too with all those revered legislators who spoke in their own language in the Assembly. Saffron or otherwise, the Governor who is a Constitutional Head of State deserves more respect from all.

And on another note, I would humbly advise my

Millions of Christians around the world celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on April 1st. The Resurrection is the commemoration of the rising of Jesus from the dead following his crucifixion on a Friday. In the modern era this feast is called “Easter.” It probably originated from the German term, ‘ostern’ meaning ‘east’ the feast was associated with the name of a goddess of spring. So Easter is celebrated between 21 March and 25 April, on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the northern spring equinox. At times the feast coincides with the Jewish festival of the ‘Pasch’ or ‘Passover’.

Easter is preceded by Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. On Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly. Only Holy Thursday he washed the feet of his twelve apostles, instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood. On Good Friday, after being crucified on the cross he died. On Holy Saturday he was buried and on Easter Sunday he rose from the dead. In this era of social media and television, the pictures and scenes of the above observances could be seen across the seven continents. The pomp and show, colourful and unique celebrations of each country marked the oldest Christian celebrations.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to the Christian belief. It is absolutely vital and crucial to the Christian faith. It is the corner stone on which Christianity itself stands. It is synonymous with Christianity. Without the resurrection there is no Christianity. St. Paul, the champion of the Resurrection, emphatically said, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile ..." (1 Cor 15:17–19). Therefore, Easter is unique to the Christians. They believe that since Jesus died and then came back from the dead, He is the living God. At least to the Christians, He showed beyond doubt that there is life and hope after death and those who believe in Him will live with Him after this earthly sojourn. So naturally Easter is the biggest Christian feast.

This is not a theological piece. Theological essays are to be scripted by theologians in the state capital, though, ironically we rarely hear from them. This is a random practical reflection based on the life of the man who, the Bible says walked the face of the earth more than 2000 years ago, worked

learned friend Sujit De (writer of essence of Good Friday) not to belittle our Christian Faith by comparing Jesus’ Death of Sacrifice for sinners of the whole world to Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination by a killer. Jesus gave up HIS life willingly as atonement for the sins of all human beings and he was not assassinated! Mahatma Gandhi is born of woman but Christians believe that Jesus was born of a virgin woman! He died and rose again on the third day whereas no mortal can claim that feat as promised!! No doubt the Mahatma is one of the greatest among greats in the world but to compare him to the Lord of Heaven and Earth and Conqueror of the netherworld is nothing short of an insult to our Christian faith! However, let’s leave it at that. I happen to know Jesus a mite more closely than Sujit De, so please don’t insult our GOD!

It is strange that people hardly notice that Prime Minister Narendra Modi follows the Scriptural teachings of Jesus and repays good for evil. He hikes the salaries of all the Hon’ble

Do we want a living Christ ?

By Albert Thyrniang

miracles, came into conflict with the religious structures of the time, was crucified and came back to life after three days. Following this stunning miracle (the miracle of miracles) His followers, braving persecutions grew rapidly. Through the centuries Christianity spread all over the globe. Today the 2.3 billion Christians (31% of world’s population) are the biggest group.

Through the celebration of Easter we say Jesus is alive. Really? Do we want a Jesus that is alive? What if Jesus comes back alive and prophesies today? What will be His prophecy? What will be His message? Will He be pleased with us individually and as institutions? What will He tell us? Will we accept Him? Will we welcome Him? Will we ignore Him? Will we tolerate Him? Will we be indifferent towards Him? Will We plot to eliminate Him? Crucifixion is out of the question but what will be the methods to get rid of Him? Or do we even want Him to come back to live on this earth? Would we rather not want Him to remain dead? Don’t we want a dead Jesus? I will personally say ‘Yes’. It is much better. I can live peacefully and comfortably. If Jesus were to be alive today, I am sure He would bother me endlessly. Jesus please don’t come back to life. Remain in your tomb.

On March 2, 2018 the editor of this newspaper wrote an article captioned, “Of Church, Politics, Satan and God.” It stirred many a conscience and won accolades from some quarters that considered her article ‘brave’. Why brave? Does it imply that the Church is untouchable? Does it mean that the Church is beyond criticism? Can we take it that ordinary humans cannot censor the Church? Should we require only the courageous to point out the flaws in the church? What do ‘critics’ fear about criticising the Church? Are they afraid of being reprimanded? Of the repercussions or excommunication as the writer mentioned in her column?

My reading is that she is disillusioned with structured and organised churches or religions. Well, Jesus himself did not comply with the Jewish socio-religious structures of his time. He went against it. He was sort of a rebel. He considered himself as God. According to the Jews He blasphemed. He broke the Mo-

saic Law by performing miracles on a Sabbath. That was precisely the reason He was crucified. He did not conform to the then stereotyped rule of not talking to women of questionable character, not dining with tax collector and sinners. He did not care much about rituals. He lambasted the Pharisees and priests who liked the best places in synagogues and social functions, who prayed in public places, who blew trumpets while giving alms; who wore long white robes which Jesus equated with white-washed tombs. He was severe on them and branded them ‘hypocrites’ straight on their faces. If Jesus were to be back will he still find hypocrites in Churches? Will He find hypocrite Christians? Will He find Christianity today a hypocrisy? Will He be still harsh on hypocrisy? Or will He have learned his lessons and given up preaching on hypocrisy?

A hypocrite is a person who pretends to be better than he/she is really is. A hypocrite pretends to be pious, virtuous, good, etc. without really being so. A Christian hypocrite is a one who claims to believe in Christ without actually living into the Christian values. Hypocrisy is ‘claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one’s own behaviour does not conform’. In fact, the ancient Greek word ‘hypokrites’, comes from the word, “for a stage actor or one who wears a mask.” They are some kind of imposters. Hypocrisy is an unauthentic and contradictory life.

The moot point here is about corruption, bribes, wealth disproportionate to one’s known earnings and liberal use of money during elections. Christian ministers, politicians, bureaucrats, officers, employees and the ordinary citizens are involved in these unethical practices. Are these compatible with Christ’s teaching? In the last election some former bureaucrats contested the polls. They possess immeasurable wealth. One even made a public road costing more than Rs 30 lakh to get elected. Was the money from his pocket? It is also alleged he had made sure all his relatives were employed in the Department of which he was the boss before retiring. Was that not nepotism? The other has palatial houses which only the likes of Ambanis could build. Was the source only from their salaries? And where did they get the

ful and may it remain so..

Yours etc.
Sonaram M Sangma
Tura

Justice evades the weak!

Editor,

Apropos the article, "'Serial offender' who always gets his freedom" by Aditya Aamir (ST, April 7, 2018), there is no doubt that the verdict on blackbuck poaching case has tried to translate Article 14 of our Constitution which says, “The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law..” into action. It goes without saying that this article is against such practices as that of treating some persons as more equal than others on the basis of the amount of bucks in their pockets or their status in the social hierarchy or the amount of money involved in their pending occupational engagements or the glamour of their public persona.

Now, we need to seriously reflect on three important aspects to improve our

money to fund their election? The ugly use of black money in the last election has crossed all decency. Cash won the election. Not the personality of the candidates, not issues, not performance, not merit, none of them! Should we wait for Christ to come back to life or expect his representatives to unequivocally disapprove and condemn these repulsive and unfair means?

Corruption and misuse of funds are present also in the church. On April 4, there was an article concerning this sensitive issue. While the write up might not have merited a place in a reputed newspaper’s column but the subject certainly did. Perhaps it is a case that ordinary souls too can be critical of the Church.

If Christ were to be present to day would He limit his teaching to church premises and to church goers only? Or will the periphery, markets and places of hustle and bustle of life be the centre of his Ministry? Will He not reach out to single mothers, orphans boys and girls who sell ‘kwai’ in Jewduh and Khyndailad, to the ‘khyannah ap masi’ (cattle tending kids), to the hospitalised, the terminally ill, etc?

One of lessons of the Resurrection is that Christ has transcended all barriers – space, time and nationality (human differences). Let us leave out time and space because they are not easily conquered. But the followers of Christ are expected to transcend human differences – racial, regional, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, economic, religious and other human differences. A particular Church is even called Catholic which means universal. Some church leaders deny their very own identity. They know very well that besides being One, Holy, and Apostolic, the Church is Catholic. However, they are stuck with their petty racial, ethnic, linguistic narrow mindedness and parochialism, so much so that they can’t accept a bishop from outside. It is more than certain that if Jesus, a Jew, is alive today, we would all summarily reject Him. We want a dead Jesus. A living Christ would be too tormenting for our consciences!

justice delivery system. The first is to look into the correlation between 'justice delayed' and 'justice denied'. We have to admit that delay in justice always boosts the morale of the criminals having done the people in general and the victims in particular a disservice in that proportion. This is the reason why it is said ~ 'justice delayed is justice denied'. Indeed, 'better late than never' can hardly be applicable so far as justice delivery process is concerned. The second thing that we must ponder is ~ if we really value the lives of poor footpath dwellers and consider them as precious as that of the endangered species. And finally the third one ~ if it is really easier for some people to jump from jaildom to baildom.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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.

Skill Development in the North East

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

Beating the Rhetoric

The economic order of the 21st century has unveiled a new economic understanding and a new way of defining economic capital and strength of a nation. One important component of this economic strength is ‘demographic dividend’ of a nation. The ‘demographic dividend’ of a nation is defined as the growth potential of the nation that can occur due to rapid increase in percentage of working population (15-64 years), in comparison to the total population of the nation. Since the last two decades, while other countries have witnessed a decline in percentage of working population, in India it continues to rise. Economists across the world have termed this as India’s demographic dividend and a key factor in propelling India into a five trillion dollar economy within the next decade.

With this goal in sight, it has become imperative that India prepares its working population so that it can leverage the demographic dividend. It is here that the crucial concept of Skill Development comes in. The Government of India, as per the Common Norms for Skill Development Schemes notified on July 15 2015, defines Skill Development, for the purpose of any Government scheme, as any domain specific demand led skill training activity leading to employment or any outcome oriented activity that enables a participant to acquire a Skill, duly assessed and certified by an independent third party agency, and which enables him/her to get wage/self employment leading to increased earnings, and/or improved working conditions, such as getting formal certification for hitherto informal skills, and/or moving from informal to formal sector jobs or pursue higher education/training. Skill development is imparting training to any individual in a particular sector so that he/she can enter the job market with employment of a status that justifies their knowledge and skill level.

In the past few years, North East has found much prominence in governance paradigm of the country. The rebranding of North East as ‘New Engine in New India’ is a testimony to the prominence that North East India holds today. The trajectory of Skill Development in the region does not betray this new found focus in the region.

It is clear that skill development in NorthEast has indeed picked up rapid pace, yet it is not without challenges. There is therefore an urgent need to invent new steps to further sustain and maintain the momentum in achieving the goals of skill development mission. One of the first steps that can be taken, would be a comprehensive skill mapping of each state. Skill mapping would encompass the harnessing of traditional knowledge of a particular area and developing it into a skill which can be redesigned as a source of employment. Such skill mapping that focuses on the needs of the catchment area would ensure meaningful employment for the local youth, instead of rapid migration to urban areas.

Each of the North Eastern states could carry out their own skill mapping exercise in order to identify those niche areas where they can develop a strong foothold backed by a traditional knowledge ecosystem or advantages of history or geography. Tripura can harness its immense potential of becoming a rubber giant. The rubber manufactured in Tripura can also be exported to neighbouring countries. With the recent plans to connect NorthEast by railways to the East Asian neighbours, such business models gain more trajectory. Hence there is an urgent need

to develop a strong skill development mechanism to train workers for the rubber industry. Nagaland can focus on tourism centred on the Hornbill Festival which has become a nationwide phenomenon today. The idea of tourism has to move from an overview to a more niche targeted model.

A second measure that can give further impetus to making skill development more meaningful is its ability to integrate with the international market by identifying new areas where traditional domain knowledge of these areas can be harnessed to create market for certain products in neighbouring countries. This model has been replicated by Pran Foods in Bangladesh. The food processing company from Bangladesh has created a niche market for itself in NorthEast by introducing products like Litchi Juice. In the last few years, the company has gained a firm foothold in a large number of areas in the NorthEast. The NorthEast states must take advantage of this cross border trade as well and eye industries which can deliver products which neighbours need.

The third measure that can be taken is shifting to outcomes-based approach by adopting the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) standards. Once this model is adopted it will be able to regularly view progress of each state and loopholes if any can be plugged as part of a continuous exercise.

There is also a need to catch aspirational youth at a young age to prevent a high dropout rate. Vocationalisation of school education is a welcome step in this regard. In order to inculcate entrepreneurial abilities among the NE youth, success stories of inspiring entrepreneurs should be taught at the school level.

It must be remembered that while the task of skill development is huge, the infrastructure available is finite. The NE States must embark on utilising un-utilised government infrastructure for skill development to effectively tackle the infrastructure constraints faced by these States. The revised National Policy on Skill Development gives guidance to the question of leveraging the existing infrastructure to its maximum use. The presence of private training providers in the region must also increase, perhaps new ways could be found of linking CSR for companies present in the region and acting as a training provider for that particular sector. Barring Assam, none of the other states have Institutes for Training the Trainers and that is one aspect that the states must focus on in an urgent basis.

In the last few years, skill development has seen tremendous growth in these states. It has led to placements and employment generation as well. However, in the wake of newfound premium of the economic importance of NE, there is further need for still strengthening skill development in the region. As Asian societies like Japan and Korea age faster, there will be a need for skilled workers in these countries. While India can fill this void, its NE region is best placed to fill the gap in these countries. In the light of the above, the status of skill development and subsequent placement of skilled youth in the North East only looks brighter in the future, if the momentum is maintained and newer policies are put in place to tackle new challenges.

- Ibu Sanjeeb Garg (The author is working as an Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax. The views expressed by the author are completely personal.)

“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”
--- Thomas A. Edison

The Shillong Times
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Whither Meghalaya State Security Commission

THE State Security Commission (SSC) was set up to insulate the police from interference by the government of the day. In 2006 the Supreme Court directed all states to set up SSCs which should be chaired by the Chief/Home Minister and include the DGP as its Secretary and the Leader of the Opposition as one of the members, to ensure bipartisanship. The Court directed that the other members on the Commission were to be chosen such that the body is “able to function independent of government control”. The function of SSCs would “include laying down the broad policies and giving directions for the performance of the preventive tasks and service-oriented functions of the police, evaluation of the performance of the state police and preparing a report thereon for placing before the state legislature. To fulfil its policy-making and performance evaluation mandate, the composition of the SSC needed to offset the powerful interests of the government. The Soli Sorabjee Committee recommended that SSCs have five non-political persons of proven reputation for integrity and competence from the fields of academia, law, public administration, media or NGOs, appointed on the recommendation of a Selection Panel. The Selection Panel would comprise a retired High Court Judge, Chairperson of the State Public Service Commission and Chairperson of State Human Rights Commission.

A study commissioned by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), New Delhi titled”, “State Security Commissions: Bringing Little to the Table –A study of Police Oversight in India, researched and written by Anirudha Nagar has interesting findings on Meghalaya. The study conducted in 2014 found that the Meghalaya SSC held five meetings since it was set up and basically had only one meeting a year - on 11 August 2011, 5 December 2011, 18 October 2012, 2 March 2013 and 18 July 2013 Also Meghalaya does not have a State Police Complaints Authority (PCA) which is tasked with handling complaints of misconduct made against the police. The PCAs are the second accountability mechanism recommended by the Supreme Court in the Prakash Singh case, and were to be chaired by retired High Court Judges. Unfortunately, looking at the numbers, profiles and selection processes of the “independent” members on the SSCs, it becomes clear that there is no arms-length process of selection. The research states, “Meghalaya’s selection panel is the least independent, with three members of the Commission itself on the panel – the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary and DGP. Interestingly the two non-political persons of proven reputation for integrity and competence from the fields mentioned zeroed in on former Chief Secretary PJ Bazeley, IAS (Retired) and V G K Kynta, Senior Advocate, Meghalaya High Court. The question is where and how is the civil society voice represented here? And why this propensity to pick up retired bureaucrats? This is a great disservice to the State Security Commission and to policing in Meghalaya.

TO THE EDITOR

Christ and the 2018 elections

Editor,
I read with great interest the article by Albert Thyrniang, “Do we want a living Christ” (ST April 10, 2018). It is a challenging article as it reflects on the very basis of Christianity today and the dilution of Christian values by those who claim to be church-going Christians. I was especially taken up by his courage to call a spade a spade where he mentions two retired government officials who contested and won the elections this time. The reputations of the two were well known but what is disgusting is that people still voted for them. In doing so, people are giving them another chance of now running not just their Departments but even the Government, had the Congress come to power in Meghalaya. Christ must hate this Christian hypocrisy and it is clear that he never intended his church to become a Sunday ritual while the rest of the week the same Christians would pillage the government coffers and steal what belongs to the people. It is also true that people of Meghalaya whether Christian

or non-Christian have become worshippers of money and freebies. As Thyrniang mentions, this election of 2018 has seen the worst display of money power. Where did all the crores of rupees come from if not from the public treasury?
Albert Thyrniang also mentions that his write-up is not theology. I am afraid that today theologians can no longer speak the truth about their church members otherwise these church-goers would stop coming to church if challenged with the truth. In that case how will the church run without their money/donation? It takes a lot of money to maintain a church building and to run the pastorate/diocese. Without the donations of the rich it is impossible to maintain the lifestyles of pastors and priests. At least that is what the church has become today. The biggest patrons of the church are also its most corrupt members. The church has in fact destroyed the Khasi value system of, “Kamai ia ka hok” by pushing the salvation of souls to Christ and making Him the sole authority for human salvation as if humans don’t have to do anything

at all for themselves to save their souls. Is this the theology that makes Christian politicians, officials and business persons so corrupt? They perhaps believe that money donated to the church will cleanse them of all sins.
No wonder Jesus Christ never built a church. He preached in all sorts of places where those who cannot afford their “Sunday best” were found looking for salvation. Today many more people needing Christ’s message are out of the church as Thyrniang says. Who will tend to them? The priests and pastors of this age certainly have no time for such social drop-outs.
Yours etc.,
AR Nongrum,
Via email

World Homeopathy Day

Editor,
Every year April 10, is celebrated universally as ‘World Homeopathy Day’- a tribute to Hahnemann, a German doctor who is the founder and father of Homeopathy. Medical doctors and patients of over 42 countries join the observance of the birth of

Religion-Based Crimes Social transformation critical

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

allege that the administration and authorities are quite naturally supportive of the party in power and tend not to interfere and act against Hindutva forces, which are increasingly becoming intolerant of Muslims and other minority communities, including dalits.

It is indeed tragic that the legitimising basis for such acts are portrayed as ‘nation saving’, by the forces. ‘Hindu nationalism’ that is being fanned across the country has obviously resulted in communal violence and torture of minorities according to a report by the Mumbai-based ‘Centre for Study of Society and Secularism’.

This apart, the US-based think tank, Pew Research Centre, in its 2017 analysis ranked India as among the worst in the world with

support the government’s policies in defying the minorities and their contribution to the country’s life and society is not known but there is a nagging growing resentment at various levels. And, though it cannot be denied that the Congress had pampered Muslims as their ‘vote bank’, the present trend cannot be supported. The ruling party is now pampering the Hindus and trying to instigate them so as to give an impression that the country is a ‘Hindu State’ and the party stands for its ideals.

Besides, Muslims as a community have unfortunately been accused of indulging in terrorism, a stereotype which is unacceptable. As is well-documented, terrorism has no religion and a community cannot and must not be isolated. At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that

The need of the hour is to uphold secular tenets of the country and promote mutual love and respect of all sects and beliefs. It is necessary that religious leaders create such awareness amongst the people so that an orderly society exists. However, in recent times, religious leaders have become ‘narrow minded’ and this needs to change as all religions propagate unity and people’s welfare. The contrast between Vivekananda’s spirituality and the escapist theatre of today’s religious leaders must alter.

regards to religious tolerance. The nation of around 1.25 billion people trailed only behind Syria, Nigeria and Iraq. Indeed, a great dishonour to our secular spirit that has prevailed over time immemorial.
The spate of religion-based violence is obviously a cause for concern. The interpretation of Hinduism, to invoke a nationalist spirit, is being distorted by the leaders of the ruling party as Swami Vivekananda and other liberal leaders of his school of thinking had never spoken of religious violence and force, rather had invoked religious, acclaimed by the western world.

The present situation in the country is indeed deplorable and mustn’t be allowed to continue. Whether educated Hindus

there has been no initiative at the Government level to improve the condition of Muslims in the country, particularly in education, and bring them into the mainstream. Even now, after over 70 years of Independence, they have the lowest literacy rate and the rate of unemployment and underemployment among them is relatively high.

If the present trends continue, it is but obvious they would feel further alienated and there could be an upsurge. Not just them, but even Christians and Sikhs are disillusioned and upset with the present government’s attitude towards them and ponder whether the country remains truly secular. The so-called Hindu nationalists’ behaviour and approach is not at all a harbinger of Hindu philosophy and beliefs but a perverted reflection of this

secular religious ideal.

A civilised society should know the basic principles of existence, i.e. live in peace and harmony, which involves appreciating and understanding others habits, manners and way of living. Whether it is religion, belief, food or any other habit, there should be no interference. Each community must be allowed to live according to its norms and values and only then can India uphold its reputation of reflecting ideal ‘unity in diversity’.

The need of the hour is to uphold secular tenets of the country and promote mutual love and respect of all sects and beliefs. It is necessary that religious leaders create such awareness amongst the people so that an orderly society exists. However, in recent times, religious leaders have become ‘narrow minded’ and this needs to change as all religions propagate unity and people’s welfare. The contrast between Vivekananda’s spirituality and the escapist theatre of today’s religious leaders must alter.

In a changing world, even religious organisations have a significant role to play in ensuring education and health facilities to the poor and economically weaker sections. The objective of achieving inclusive growth can only be attained if all these organisations come out of narrow obscurantist ideas and join hands with the government to achieve the welfare objectives aimed at uplifting the conditions of those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Religions should not instigate crimes but ensure the unification, love and respect of all people irrespective of religion, caste or creed. But to ensure the much-needed social transformation, an attitudinal change of the ruling party leaders as also those of various religious leaders is critical. Recall, father of nation Mahatma Gandhi propagated the ideal of ahimsa towards regeneration of society through communitarian bondage and fellow feeling,---INFA

(1) patient (2) the correct remedy the patient needs to cure him rapidly, gently and permanently through simple and minimum doses of as far as possible single medicine.

The World Health Organization estimates that Homeopathy is used by 500 million people worldwide, making it the second most widely used medicine in the world. In England, France, Germany and the Netherlands, Homeopathy is included in the National Health Service. India has over 70,000 board certified homeopathic physicians, hundreds of homeopathic hospitals and clinics and many homeopathic medical schools.

It is important for the public to understand the little known facts about Homeopathy. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Homeopathy cures a larger percentage of cases than any other method and is beyond all doubt safer, more economical and the most complete medical science”.

Indeed homeopathy has made immense contribution in the health sector all over the world.

Yours etc.,
Dr Rilang iki Bamon NEIAH, Shillong

Rahul usurps SP-BSP’s bragging rights Skirts third front and leadership issues

By Sushil Kutty

Congress President Rahul Gandhi has taken ownership of the die cast by the Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party combine and challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to contest and win the Varanasi constituency against a united opposition candidate in the next elections. “He will lose,” Rahul declared in Karnataka, which goes to polls on May 12, and which the party has to retain to get through to the quarterfinals and the semi-finals.

The Congress heads the UPA. But the party has so far lacked innovative leadership. It was the SP and BSP which thought out of the box and won the Gorakhpur and Phulpur by-elections. Now, Rahul wants to get into the box. He is banking on a united opposition to defeat Modi. Alone, the Congress stands little chance. So, the coattails to hang on. Rahul says the Congress-SP-BSP alliance will see the back of Modi. And where best to beat Modi than in Varanasi which is the PM’s Lok Sabha constituency.

At the same time, Rahul Gandhi is not too enthused by the possibility of a ‘Third Front’. Maybe that is because one of the loudest votaries of a Third Front is Mamata Banerjee, who is dead set against Rahul

wheels have slowed down and it’s just a matter of a few months more before they come to a grinding halt.

“Frankly, I don’t see the BJP winning the next election... because there are two basic things, once opposition unity goes above a certain level; it becomes impossible to win elections. Now the opposition unity has gone to a point. It’s simple,” Rahul told media, which is another bunch of people aware of Rahul’s immunity to what people think of him, his working style, which is subject to ups and downs.

Obviously, he has been taking notes from what the media has been talking, discussing, writing about. “Where are they (the BJP) going to win seats?” he posed to the media, oblivious to the fact that the question could be asked of the Congress, too. “Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab. We will take it over. You are going to see a collapse of the style you haven’t seen in many years,” he prophesied.

In his new avatar, Rahul Gandhi expresses confidence in overcoming opposition disunity; that he knows the Congress has in it to carry people along because his party is not afflicted with “egos” and has a track record of

The Congress President says he doesn’t “see the BJP winning the next elections” and he senses that “in 2009 we’ll go back to the normal.” The clairvoyance envelopes Modi’s sure-shot defeat in Varanasi. Rahul Gandhi says with emphasis that the Modi Government is set for a “collapse not seen in many years.” He says Modi’s wheels have slowed down and it’s just a matter of a few months more before they come to a grinding halt.

Gandhi taking the leadership role in a Third Front though she is quite OK with Rahul’s mom and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi who she deigned to meet on her recent trip to New Delhi while giving Rahul the miss.

Not too bothered with the snub, Rahul has been talking of ‘opposition unity’ to unseat the BJP-led Modi Government. He says the Congress knows how to engage and manage alliance partners despite their personal and regional differences. The remarkable thing about Rahul Gandhi is that he has always been immune to what other parties and leaders of those parties think of him, of his working style or his lack of a working style. Nothing could touch a raw nerve in him.

What’s more, the immunity extended to the public at large. Rahul Gandhi was not concerned of whether they called him “Pappu” or ‘Tappu’, he soldiered on, stumbling and bumbling, as if he was never in a hurry, assured that his time will come. The best thing for Rahul Gandhi has been that his party got a long time to prepare itself for the coming of Rahul Gandhi, an inevitability that was as sure to happen as the sun’s rising and setting.

The Congress President says he doesn’t “see the BJP winning the next elections” and he senses that “in 2009 we’ll go back to the normal.” The clairvoyance envelopes Modi’s sure-shot defeat in Varanasi. Rahul Gandhi says with emphasis that the Modi Government is set for a “collapse not seen in many years.” He says Modi’s

spreading “love”, not fomenting “hate”. In keeping with the sentiment, party leaders sat on a ‘fast’ for communal harmony in New Delhi on Monday, April 9.

Claiming that he understands “UP politics”, Rahul Gandhi says when the SP, BSP and the Congress get together, it will be curtains for the BJP, which will “only win two seats, and that too with luck”. And Modi will be shown the door by the voters of Varanasi. Conceding that after the 2014 victory, Modi had a chance to do ‘good’ for the country, Rahul is incredulous that Modi frittered away the opportunity.

That being said the big question is who takes on Modi on a one on one in Varanasi in 2019? In 2014, Arvind Kejriwal mounted a challenge and failed. Will Rahul Gandhi follow up his challenge to Modi and face him in Varanasi in 2019? The corollary: Will Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati concede to Rahul contesting the Varanasi seat, back him? The point is whoever trounces Modi in Varanasi will carry the aura of the next Prime Minister of India in case a united opposition comes to power. Rahul Gandhi has said he “will be PM” but will he be allowed to be PM? The other “boy” in the ‘trimurti’, ‘Bhatija Akhilesh Yadav’ may fall in line. But it is hardly likely that ‘Bua Mayawati’ will. And, then, you’ve ‘Didi Mamata’ to reckon with. That is one too many even for the ‘Family’ to take on. Opposition unity is not a done deal yet. (IPA Service)ard

“*No matter how carefully you plan your goals they will never be more than pipe dreams unless you pursue them with gusto.*”

--- Marian Wright Edelman

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.240 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, APRIL 13, 2018

Niti Aayog for North East

SO the Modi Government wants the North East to have a separate NITI Aayog called the NITI Forum for North East, for better delivery. Tripura was chosen as the destination for the first meeting of this newly constituted body perhaps because the state has given the biggest thumbs up to the BJP than the other two states of Meghalaya and Nagaland that went to the polls at the same time. NITI Aayog Vice Chairperson, Dr Rajiv Kumar has correctly pointed out that the North Eastern states suffer from reverse outflow of resources such as in tourism and human and private investment. The credit-deposit ratio in the region hovers around 30% and much of the credit availed by companies set up in the North East are invested outside the region. That is not surprising since the North East has low manufacturing capacity. Value addition for natural resources such as tea and petroleum and minerals like coal and limestone and niche products such as turmeric and ginger all happen outside the region. This is one of the reasons for the high unemployment rate with Tripura leading the pack. Communication as pointed out by nearly all the chief ministers present at the meeting is a huge bottleneck and prevents the outflow of products from the region such as flowers, fruits and vegetables. Hence inter-state connectivity and also connecting the seven states with the metros of the country would help enhance trade and movement of goods and people and facilitate better tourism.

The human resources of the North East are today adding value to the hospitality industry across India. While this is a good portend the region too needs skilled human resource to scale up its economy. It is good to learn that the NITI Forum for North East will focus on three key areas – education, health and skill development. These are important pivots for the growth of the region and they have long been neglected sectors of human development. Union Minister for development of North East (MDoNER), Dr Jitendra Singh’s assurance that all projects in the region will henceforth receive 100 % funding as against 90:10 funding model of the past should boost the development trajectory of the region. Earlier the states could not cough up the 10% matching grant and projects could not take off. Now that handicap has been removed. Hopefully the NITI Forum will turn the North East economy around.

TO THE EDITOR

Flyovers a must in Shillong

Editor,

Traffic in Shillong has reached a saturation point and there can be no respite until and unless we think out of the box. I pity the traffic police who are hard pressed by the insurmountable traffic. They seem to be reaching a point of depression. It seems that the Traffic Police Department is deriving some psychological satisfaction by merely changing traffic routes from time to time. They have also exhausted all sorts of combinations and we are back to square one. There is no use of experimenting with different routes because the crux of the problem remains the same. Traffic jams are worsening. The Urban Affairs Department in collaboration with the PWD must come up with a permanent solution. It is obvious that Shillong needs a few flyovers to resolve the issue to a great extent. The roads can never be widened and usually most jams take place at junctions. In my opinion, some flyovers are possible at places like Polo Bazaar, Dhankheti, Police Bazaar, Barik and Umshyrpi (Rhino) and a few other places.

It is a lame excuse to say that Meghalaya is an earthquake-prone region. Perhaps the government will come up with such an alibi. If other countries in the world who are more prone to

seismic dangers, can build mighty flyovers and skyscrapers with modern technology, why can't our State do it? Our city has reached a point when even pedestrians find no more space to walk without a threat to their lives. We are nearing the day when we would take three to four hours to travel from Mawlai to Nongthymmai. Governments come and go but none seems to take this existential crisis seriously. In these past few years, Guwahati has seen the construction of so many flyovers which have eased the city's traffic considerably, but for us in Meghalaya, the only flyover we have is at Barapani constructed by some company. Will the Shillongites see any tangible improvement in the coming days or are we to content ourselves with the traffic jam?

Yours etc.,
B. Mawrie sdb
Via email

Improving the quality of Education

Editor,

As a teacher I welcome and appreciate the step taken by the government to raise the standard of education in the state by incorporating the NCERT

curriculum and following the CBSE syllabus for the Higher Secondary Science and Commerce stream. This will definitely benefit the students to a great extent helping them to score better marks and equip them with the ability to compete in the all India entrance examination such as NEET, JEE etc. and also preparing them for various competitive examinations like Staff Selection Commission, Civil Services examination, Banking examination etc. In fact there should be uniformity in the standard of education particularly at the Matriculation and Higher Secondary level so that students get equal opportunity in terms of education irrespective of the place or region from where they come from. However, what concerns us and what we fail to understand is the neglect of the Arts stream which is left to follow the low standard MBOSE syllabus. This discrimination shown to the Arts students clearly imply that they are the inferior lot incapable of comprehending the NCERT curriculum and CBSE syllabus. This will surely evoke a feeling of inferiority making them incapable of competing at the national level. The question that arises is; What is the fear of MBOSE and the government if the Arts stream is brought under the NCERT curriculum? Is it bad to have a uniform standard

of education? What about the thousands of students in the state who study in the schools affiliated to CBSE? Are they not from Meghalaya? Then we have subjects that are common in Commerce and Arts like Economics, Computer Applications, English etc. What syllabus will they follow? Now if for these common subjects MBOSE decides to continue with its own syllabus, the question that further arises is, 'where is the uniformity?' Where is the standard of education? These are very pertinent questions that need to be answered by the Government of the day. We cannot have two sets of standards. We cannot have two sets of curriculum. Hope the government wakes up from its slumber and saves our education system for the future of our students.

Yours etc.,
Prof. B. Syiem,
Via email

Raising entry age limit for MCS

Editor,

The Government's intention to review the upper age limit for MCS officers at the recruitment stage is worth applauding; at least some legislators discharged their duties as true representatives of the people. The issue was raised at the form filling

stage as well but the entire episode got submerged under the festivity of assembly elections. It's an opportunity for the new government to correct the flaws and earn a niche of its own in the political arena. The current age bracket already eliminates many aspiring candidates for no fault of theirs. Last year's notification came after a gap of almost a decade hence many candidates have already moved to the higher age bracket. It's unfair to disqualify candidates based on the current age limit. Moreover this bracket is far below UPSC and other state PSC's age criteria.

A more pragmatic consideration is to raise it to at least 37 years, if not 40 would have created a level playing field. Raising the age limit to 45 as per the demand might not be practical, considering the physical demands of the job, and as correctly stated by the CM, a mere 13 years service is too short to be productive and is poor returns for the government after spending adequate resources behind each officer.

Another point to be noted here is with regards to the superannuation age of 58 years as per the state rule, which is too low. Madhya Pradesh recently raised the retirement age to 62 years. Life expectancy has improved considerably in India so why not extract more valuable time and inputs from these officials

who have accumulated peak experiences - a potential to contribute to the whole governance process. The age bracket 45-60 is the most productive phase for any work force since attitude and aptitude and productivity is at maximum threshold provided officials perform their duties with integrity and passion. The first 10-15 odd years i.e., from 28-40 ages are more of a learning phase to garner experience and expertise. Hence sending off an official at his peak level is definitely a huge loss for the Government and the official apart from denying him the opportunity of promotions.

The best possible scenario for the current impasse is to raise the upper age limit up to 37 (max 40) years for entry stage and extensions of the retirement age up to 60 if not 62 years. This would be an ice breaker deal for both the parties (Government and candidates) and giving a generous 25 years service to each officer.

Yours etc.,
Sonie Kharduit
Shillong -3

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.

Human greed threatens the environment

Why harp on mining as the only source of revenue

By Patricia Mukhim

through conveyor belts to Chhatak in Bangladesh where the cement companies are located. Then there are individual exporters and the Komorrah Limestone Mining Company (KLMC) set up in the 1970s. This company is a joint venture between Government of Meghalaya and



Development Consultants do deals with the affluent and the pliable from the community and with the heads of traditional institutions (Dorbar Shnong) (Sirdarship) who sign away the rights of the people.

When an exporter, B Lyngdoh was asked how long he would continue with this limestone mining considering he and others are bringing down whole mountains in a short time, the answer was, "We can mine limestone for at least a hundred years." This man is evidently not thinking about a future beyond one hundred years. For all he cares, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren could inherit a barren landscape that will no longer be productive. By then the water systems would have dried up. This same exporter is pleading that the BSF should clear up the trucks faster so that instead of 300 trucks a day, the exporters could send across at least 500 truckloads of limestone daily. When asked if all the limestone goes to feed the cement companies in Bangladesh, Lyngdoh said the low grade limestone is used by the people of Bangladesh as boulders and for constructing houses. I never heard of anyone being able to afford to use

resources such as water, forests, land and natural resources has coined the phrase, Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). This means that the community must have adequate understanding of the consequences of mining in their lands and only then would they give their free, prior, informed consent. But

limestone for building construction.

The irony of the situation is that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies commissioned by the Government are carried out by consultants employed by the companies and paid by them. Why would those consultants give an adverse comment?

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, on Thursday spoke of the impact of climate change on Agriculture. His sister Agatha Sangma is an environmentalist and would know the consequences of incessant and unregulated mining. Will they care to commission an independent study to assess the impact of limestone mining in Shella, Bholaganj, Nongtraí etc and now in the Nongtalang areas and inform us what cost we will collectively have to pay in the long run? Of course as Dr Manmohan Singh famously said, "In the long run we will all be dead," but how shall we die is the question. Will it be because of a natural calamity caused by a holocaust of unimaginable proportions because of the greed of a few?

What is the role of the larger members of the community who don't benefit from this extractive mining? Should they not have a voice? Are they not stakeholders of nature? Who took away their lands from them? Who decided to allow mining of natural resources without a care for the future? How much is ploughed back into reclaiming the bald hills?

Most of us are appalled by the eagerness of the MDA Government to lift the ban on coal mining. Is this the only reason why the present set of legislators were elected? If so, Meghalaya is in serious trouble for then we are being ruled by mercenaries with no concern for the future and certainly no love for the environment which is sustaining our lives here on this earth.

Salary of Peoples' Representatives

By Bhaskar Phukan

The Assam Cabinet ministers and MLAs have raised their salaries. The argument for the raise is the usual one --rise in cost of living and ancillary costs that are rising. The 'paribartan sarkar', fortunately desisted from putting forward the logic behind the raise as the student leader turned minister and legislators did post 1985 elections. It was to keep them away from getting corrupt, they reportedly said. A decent salary however did not keep them from earning huge wealth and property and incorruptibility was not the word that would suit their behaviour.

Members of Parliament proposed raise in salary for themselves by 100 percent - from 56000 per month to a whopping 1lakh. It has raised the eyebrows of many. There has been a persistent argument against the already high and oversized perquisites and allowances enjoyed with a reasonably high salary by the law makers and this sudden issue of raising the salary by such great degree has raised the eyebrows higher. The MPs interestingly enough like their own code of conduct, decide their own salary and the salary and other allowances according to a report has escalated to an unbelievable high as much as 1250% in last 20 years.

It would be interesting to know that Great Britain--the birthplace of Parliamentary democracy did not pay a salary or allowances to the members of any of the two Houses till the beginning of the twentieth century. The members were expected to have their own means of looking after their expenses. It was the motive of serving the people and the country that drew the great leaders of that country to politics.

Even in India till the 1970's service above personal gain 'appeared to have been the laid down principle of most members of Parliament and simple living and high thinking for the country inspired many to live a life of austerity and do great things for their country. Even today at the onset of canvassing and garnering votes, the prospective members of Parliament or state Assemblies ask for opportunity from the voters to serve the people through their votes. What becomes of these people (who were too eager to serve the public before elections) after getting elected is a different story altogether. Many MPs fail to visit most parts of their constituency and many even fail to meet the minimum requirement of attendance in the House. But salary, perks, allowance and all the benefits that come with the designation, 'Member of Parliament' however remain intact.

On an average a lawmaker in India receives Rs 56000 as salary, 50000 as constituency allowance, 45000 as other allowances. In terms of absolute amount the value of an Indian MP's pay and perks is higher than their counterparts in Japan, Singapore and Italy.

The list of benefits of the MPs too makes interesting reading. They are allowed three telephones without payment of installation or rental charges and are allowed 50,000 free calls in each of the three telephones per year. An MP is entitled to 34 single air flights during a year with his /her spouse / companion or relatives. The spouse or companion or any number of companion or relative can travel eight times in a year to meet the member. The MP's can travel anywhere in the country by

rail first class from their residence and spouses of MPs can travel from their residence to New Delhi when Parliament is in session for an unlimited number of times. Next, every member is entitled to a supply of 4000 kilo litres of water and up to 50,000 units of electricity per year in a house allotted in the Capital without charge or rent. Besides these the MPs are given the exclusive opportunity of using separate lounges in the airports and complimentary tea and coffee with snacks. An MP gets the same medical facilities as are available to the class 1 officers of the central civil services. Added to it is the allowance to alter or buy furniture and furnishings and also interest free loan of 4 lakhs to purchase a vehicle. The money earned by an MP is in most part non-taxable. Taxes are imposed only on one head --income from other sources. No tax is deducted at source. This is the state of monetary and preferential position of an MP as of now. Enhancement will mean a great hike and additional fiscal responsibility to the government.

Pension rules for the MPs are rather interesting. A one term MP is entitled to a pension. A government official has to work a minimum period of 25 years to be eligible for pension whereas an MP makes himself eligible for the same by attending a single session of Parliament.

As against the comfortable financial cushion and exclusive lifestyle offered to them what does an average MP deliver to the voters at large? Most MPs bunk major parts of the sessions and there are many who have no record of participating in a debate or participating in question hour discussions. Lobbying for political gains and at times walkouts on issues of importance to the public as a whole tend to hijack the basic purpose for which the members are elected.

It may not sound too palatable to the ears of the present day lawmakers but it is an undeniable fact that eloquence and quality of oratory has declined to a great low compared to the days when parliamentarians like Hem Barua, Hiren Mukherjee, Jayaprakash Narayan and Atal Behari Vajpayee kept the floor of the House spell bound with their substance of matter and eloquence. The most despicable fact is the presence of a large number of MPs with criminal records.

Politics today has come to be synonymous with money and power and money power alone can make an MP or a legislator in a state Assembly. Money again begets power and power begets money. That perhaps is at the root of a new phenomenon where once in the seat of power a leader of today multiplies his assets. To be called a leader one must learn to put oneself in the shoes of the ones who voted to put him/her in that position. Leadership is not all about princely living and regal lifestyle. It is also about identifying with the masses who vote with a hope of amelioration of the lot they are in. An elected member of Parliament tend to get swayed by the lifestyles of the metropolitan elite who they have the occasion to hobnob with officially or through social connections and tend to forget that they are not neo Rajas but representatives of people of a country that comprise of more have- nots than haves.

"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."
--- Helen Schucman

Misuse of Sixth Schedule

THE attempt by the MDA Government to use the Sixth Schedule to secure exemptions from central laws governing mining in the state of Meghalaya is appalling to say the least. The Sixth Schedule was created to conserve the customs and traditions of the hill tribes who were then governed by a non-tribal majority, Government of Assam. It is important to understand whether tribal customs and tradition excluded their living environment. After all, the environment is what sustains human life, tribal or non-tribal. The Sixth Schedule is meant to protect tribals from exploitation by non-tribals insofar as their land and resources are concerned. What the Schedule did not envision is that powerful and affluent tribals could exploit their fellow tribals. As a result of this serious loophole in the Sixth Schedule, nearly 76% of tribals in rural Meghalaya are landless (2011 Socio-Economic, Caste Survey). Former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma says this is a problem of the Khasis and Jaintias only because their land holding system is weak. He says landlessness is not a feature of Garo Hills. Be that as it may, it is the Government's duty to resolve a threat that affects a part of the State. But that has not happened.

Coal and limestone mining has wreaked havoc on the environment and led to land acquisition running into thousands of hectares. Forests have been mined on, rivers poisoned, land alienated in favour of mining companies through dubious deals and the Sixth Schedule was never invoked to prevent all these evils from happening. Now, suddenly the Sixth Schedule will be waved in front of the Prime Minister as a political instrument so that the coal mafia that supported the election of whom a few are in the present government, are allowed a free run of the land. Does the MDA Government represent only the coal mining lobby? Should the Government not spare a thought for the ecological disaster waiting to happen? The large majority of Meghalayans that don't benefit from coal or limestone mining have to suffer the consequences of such inhuman and reckless mining practices. Who will speak on their behalf? In normal circumstances the Government is supposed to defend the people from exploitation. In this case the Government itself has become the mouthpiece of those who exploit the people. Where do we go from here? And where is the Mining Policy?

Saving the girl child, saving a Nation...

By Ananya S Guha

Once again we find children at the receiving end of heinous crimes. The perpetrators are the politicians and officials of state governments. I am speaking of what happened in (Unnao) Uttar Pradesh and Khatua (Jammu). In both cases people who are supposed to preserve the law have tainted it with bloody hands. In the former, the father of the 16 year old, because his family protested was assaulted, taken to hospital, removed to jail and was brutally killed there. What is the India of saving and educating the girl child? What is the India of the 21st century, the clean India, the India of technology and showy malls? And these people are defended by the Government in the first case and lawyers in the second. Those who talk about history and the primeval instincts of rulers in the past, are shaming their acts, by actually keeping silent and defending these criminals. A sixteen year old and an eight year old have been raped and tortured. Where are all the organizations, especially women's organisations? The slurs on a nation continue unabated.

The worst is the attack on children. School buses have been assailed over the issue of a film. Children or young adults are raped; mothers in front of husbands. What is the country coming to? The innocence of children has been traumatized. The trauma engulfs the entire nation. The correspondent reality will be anger. Every situation, every event is politicized. Those holding the bastions of power are only blaming their political rivals. In the Uttar Pradesh case no FIR has been filed against the supposed culprit and the Chief Minister is maintaining a stodgy (and dodgy) silence, only uttering homilies of how the culprits will be punished. But the culprit and his brother have been identified. What does he do, he flaunts his power unabashedly, with a crooked and sick smile. The entire country has seen it. And one participant

in a TV channel discussion has the temerity to say that in the past he belonged to another political party!

The politics of expediency has gripped the nation in a monstrous way. And these incidents also include raping scheduled caste women. The larger reality is that of atrocities committed against ' lower castes' and the poor. The political strata is now being identified as oppressor with upper caste predilections, and the oppressed being the ' lowly ' and the poor. In between we have fracas between majoritarian and minority religious groups.

What could be more fractious, caste prone and communal? The country is being divided on every conceivable line: women, caste, religion, ethnic. The majoritarian view is fiendishly upper class and caste. Politicians are pitting one community against another. West Bengal is the latest case in point. In the context of all of the above is actually the need to save the country. The north south divide exacerbated ostensibly by the Cauvery waters dispute has added fuel to the fire. Mind you, it may not reflect the entire Tamil community as it is orchestrated by political parties. However, Andhra Pradesh is also connected with it as the TDM is whipping up sentiments over the issue of granting special status to the state. This is reminiscent of the situation in Tamil Nadu in the aftermath of independence when the DMK was established. The present situation is peculiarly complex as in the past there has been fall out of ethnic unrest between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka dating back to the 1980s. Again the politicians are raising sensitive issues even if the matter is intermittently sub-judice.

Education, health and child issues are the last words here. The back burner is power, read political power, and even as the salaries of the country's

legislators are raised, they are not performing their task at all. While some of them are uttering rabid misogynist statements, the others are disrupting Parliament, in both its chambers. Since 2000 Parliament has not been disrupted so viciously as in 2018 thanks to the storming of the well (like the storming of the Bastille!), all this leading to a severance and infraction of rules. So can the country be ruled, coupled with inept handling by the speakers in both the houses? The way the political leaders are switching allegiances smacks of an ideology bereft of ideology.

So here we have it - division of the country on class, caste, religious and ethnic lines. The symbolic protests by political parties against atrocities on Dalits will remain untenanted symbols. Only those who are the real symbols of such wanton acts will fearfully and then angrily watch and then preside over it across ten states as they did on 2nd April, with crocodile tears flowing from our politicos. And, the tears fall ' idly ' but perceptibly from a forsaken nation.

Where will the child go to? Whose help will she seek, as her father lies brutally murdered? What education will she get from a reprehensible world around where ruinous destruction in the garb of political acuity and ' wisdom ' lords over all considerations of law and national diversity? The eight year old who was raped and murdered in Jammu is a symbol of the utter callousness with which the issue was dealt with. It is criminality of the highest order, with lawyers, the guardian angels of law defending the perpetrators. Anger can be the only weapon and a national chorus of protest.

Now coming back to the two specific issues of child rape, in one case also murder, the first in Kathua in Jammu and the second in Unnao in Uttar Pradesh. The first happened last year and the

girl's parents were repeatedly protesting to the authorities. The girl even threatened to commit suicide in front of the legislative building. Her father was hauled up, taken to hospital and then to police custody, where he was beaten mercilessly to death in the most grisly manner. Supposedly the brother of the MLA accused in the rape was complicit in the murder. Even now the matter has not been investigated by the police and handed over to the CBI. Why isn't the police competent enough to take up the matter? Or are they afraid to incur the wrath of the big wigs? This is a shame and a pathetic commentary of the state of policing in the country. Moral policing however seems to be very forthcoming. And even this moral policing has taken a sorry beating in the case of the 8 year old raped in Jammu. She was taken to a prayer hall, sedated, raped not once but twice or thrice by different persons and then murdered. Two government officials were involved in this murder and insane lust. And what do we find, lawyers protesting and wanting no action to be taken against the criminals, because they say that the issue is deliberately divided on Hindu Muslim lines.

Come on, guardians of the law, at least spout lies intelligently. You all are in cahoots with nefarious people and designs, you all are part of a collective of a third rate system, which is causing irreparable harm to the country, disintegrating it and you are ensnared by the trap laid by the politicos. An eight year old raped and killed, then her body thrown into the forest. One wonders whether in the history of the world such an incident has happened. We as a society have failed this girl, Asifa and should hang our heads in utter shame and sorrow.

Kathua & Unnao Cases Rape of secular nation!

By Insaaf

Shame! That is what Kathua and Unnao rape cases should make people of this country feel. Not just J&K and UP governments but the nation must hang its head in shame. Power and communal politics has raised its ugly head and governance is at its lowest. In Jammu the 'Hindu Ekta Manch' leading protests in the city for the accused in the brutal rape and murder of an 8-year-old girl is plain simple unacceptable and must be condemned in the harshest of terms. Plus, the demand for a CBI probe and not by the police officers investigating puts the law and order system under a cloud. Why should religion come into play? And rightly asks the Bakherwal nomad father did his daughter 'think in terms of Hindu or Muslim?' The PDP-BJP government must put its coalition in order and not let the divide grow wider. It must give an answer. Likewise, Yogi Adityanath's government in UP must ensure that justice is done in the gangrape of the 17-year old girl and the murder of her father in the lock-up. It must also give confidence to the girl's family that they have nothing to fear and return to their village. No more dithering. For those in power must be reminded they are there to serve and not rule. India is no banana republic.

Bengal Poll Farce
West Bengal sets unprecedented muscle power in elections. The ruling party Trinamool Congress' cadres on Monday last ensured that the party's candidates for the panchayat polls would have a cakewalk in several seats. Belligerent, armed and violent, the cadres stopped rival Left and Congress candidates from filing their nominations. As a result several of TMC candidates were 'elected unopposed'-- such as 41 of 42 in Birbhumb Zilla Parishad, 21 of 37 in Bharatpur II and Barwan and 29 of 30 in Murshidabad's Kandi! The Opposition obviously cried foul and knocked on the State Election Commission's door with a plethora of complaints. Shockingly, the latter dithered by first extending the deadline for filing nominations by a day and then rescinded its own order! The Supreme Court too refused to entertain BJP's petition saying the Calcutta High Court was seized of the matter. The silver lining is that the High Court has stayed the elections process until April 16 and asked the State EC to furnish details on the nomination process. Will it ensure that free and fair polls will not be turned into free-for-all?

North-South Divide?
Transfer of revenue triggers a North-South divide. Three southern States and one Union Territory have questioned the Terms of References of the 15th Finance Commission saying it was contrary to the principles of 'federalism' and would entail performing-States taking on burden of worst-performing counterparts. Thus, on Tuesday last, at a conclave of Finance Ministers of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Puducherry in Thiruvanthapuram, the aggrieved States demanded the ToR for devolution of funds to States be 'reframed' as well as opposed using of 2011 census to calculate population for allocation of Union tax revenue instead of 1971 census. This because they feared that higher population States would bag a larger share of tax resources and a loss for States that have pursued population control. The Centre has rubbished charges as 'needless controversy,' but will keep a watch if the revolt grows. So far, it has a breather with Tamil Nadu and Telangana

not joining the bandwagon. But one can never tell.

TN Submerged In Protests
Politics and sportsmanship is a mix-match. The high-pitched Cauvery River waters protests in Tamil Nadu have submerged the cricket crease in Chennai's stadium too. After the first IPL match, the rest have been shifted to Pune. Worse, it even impacted Prime Minister Modi's visit to inaugurate the DefExpo on Thursday last. Instead of a road show, he had to take a chopper to avoid the black flags, balloons and shirts en route to greet him! Indeed, with both ruling AIADMK and other Opposition parties including DMK, actors, farmers and citizens hitting the streets since this month against the Centre's delay in setting up the Cauvery Management Board, the writing on the wall is getting sharper. The Centre can no longer dilly-dally. More so, after the Supreme Court's wrap and direction to submit a draft scheme for water-sharing between TN and Karnataka by May 3. Obviously, New Delhi's excuse that setting up of the Board during Karnataka polls would lead to "massive public outrage, vitiate election process and cause serious law and order problems," did not hold water with the apex court. Now, it's time to perform.

Odisha Water Woes
Water woes have hit Odisha too. The ruling BJD is peeved with the Centre's invitation to four other States for a meeting on the Mahanadi water-sharing issue. Act and don't keep talking, it demands. The State has been in a tug-of-war with BJP-ruled Chhattisgarh, due to go the polls later this year and has been insisting the Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT), notified by the Ministry of Water Resources as per Supreme Court orders this January be set up without any further delay. Its pleas obviously continue to fall on deaf ears. The Ministry instead prefers a meeting on April 16 in Kolkata, with the other invitees being Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. Anger is simmering and rightly, as a major reduction in Mahanadi's water flow means a severe crisis this May-June. Thus, the BJD has decided to act and will protest 'through a mass convention' with 15 districts MPs and MLAs in tow a day before the meeting. Will it stop the Centre from fishing in troubled waters?

Punjab Cops Folly
Punjab is worried about its men in uniform. Its top cops are fighting amongst themselves and worse in full public view, making Chief Minister Amarinder Singh frown. On Wednesday last, he chose to give the officers in the rank of DGP and additional DGPs a lesson or two in discipline. In a 'closed-door' meeting he warned them to halt "fighting their personal and professional battles in courts and in the media." From now on any officer found to be indulging in these acts of "indiscipline" will be dismissed from service, was a terse message.

Apparently, accusations are flying thick and high: DGP (HRD) has made allegations against the State police chief DGP Arora in the Punjab & Haryana Court and DGP (Intelligence) in a drug trafficking case, involving an SSP with an Inspector already under arrest! Resolve your personal issues with the DGP and if that doesn't work approach the Home Secretary, then Chief Secretary and if nothing works out then knock on my door, Amarinder has told the officers team. Reined in? --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Old traffic route better

Editor,
As a citizen who has observed the traffic routes, particularly every morning during the peak hours, vehicular traffic comes to a standstill at the Barik point in Shillong and every vehicle tries to overtake the nearest one which is very risky. The only probable solution is to re-open the road for both way traffic from the junction near the State Central Library towards Civil Hospital so that the vehicles intending to go towards Laban, Garikhana, Upper Shillong or Guwahati can always avoid Barik point and all the vehicles heading for Police Bazar from Barik may be allowed the right turn from Barik, as was the system earlier Further, to direct and control the flow of traffic, few traffic guards can be deployed at the junction in front of the Army Holiday Home to direct the traffic heading towards Malki point to take the original route to Barik without taking the roundabout way circling the PWD complex. It has been found that the Barik point remains overburdened due to the traffic flow from 4 (four) directions, viz. Malki point, IGP point, from Horse Shoe building and the Lady Hydari Park as there is no other alternate route. Hence the old traffic route may kindly be restored to ease the Barik bottleneck as the new system of pushing all the vehicles through Barik point has proved to be a failure.

Yours etc.,
Bibhash Dhar,
Via email

Needed an intelligent traffic system!

Editor
Apropos the report on traffic snarls around Shillong city (ST April 12, 2018) I recall giving a short note to the City traffic office in 2011-12 and I give below a few more pointers that should be useful in future deliberations on this matter. The flow of traffic in a city is divided under the following heads: offices, markets, hospitals, schools / colleges, tourist attraction points, business/ warehouse zones; bus/taxi stands to name the important ones. The traffic flow in all the constituencies such as Mawlai, West Shillong, North Shillong, South Shillong, PynthorUmkhrah, East Shillong and Nongthymmai can be reshuffled within the points mentioned below. This is of utmost importance to ease the flow of traffic.

(1) Old and outdated vehicle's need to be identified and phased out.

(2) An earnest discussion is needed with civil society to reduce private vehicles and encourage more walking lanes, cycling and motor bike lanes considering the lesser road length.

(3) Launching LPG based auto service and electronic rickshaws within the city will definitely create space and reduce congestion.

(4) The prevailing taxis can be deployed for outer-city / suburban rides for

commuting and tourism. In fact pool rides based on app and navigation would also improve congestion. (Like Uber/OLA & others).

(5) Bus services can be scheduled in a time-based manner to reduce congestion.

(6) Ticket based movement of vehicles can be thought of in business zones like Bara Bazar and Police Bazar.

(7) Some intelligent transport system in use at Singapore - Intelligent Transport Systems | Managing Traffic & Congestion | Roads & Motoring | Land Transport Authority needs to be emulated.

(8) Pollution related data like the one near Passport office can be installed in more areas within the city to create awareness among public and drivers about the unhealthy effects of pollution.

(9) State Government can initiate home delivery of groceries, medicines, meat-fish etc to reduce the market visits of public. This can also create employment opportunities.

(10) To reduce hospital visits of elderly and children the possibility of portea based home care organizations can be initiated by Government assistance that will as well lead to lesser road snarls.

(11) Other measures like restructuring of the city map with the possibility of relocating business zones like Bara Bazar to the city outskirts can also be mooted.

(12) Additionally certain

g o v e r n m e n t establishments and schools can also look at moving to the outskirts and thereby assist in developing newer areas.

Yours etc.,
Sandeep Barua
Shillong - 14

Death of humanity
Editor,
This refers to your editorial, "India's hour of shame" (ST, April 12, 2018). Rape is a gender violence. It is a criminal offence against humanity. So, there is no room for us to be selective in our protests against rape and murder after judging the caste, class and religion of the victims. It is a shame that six Dalit Nirbhayas are raped every day in our country. Now, what we see is that some people are even raising their voice in favour of the rapists when the victim is an 8 - year old Nirbhaya child namely Afisa who was abducted, raped and then killed! In one of his famous poems, Rabindranath Tagore said, ~ "He who commits wrong or condones the same/ May your contempt singe like a reed in flame." I do not know what he would have said had he seen such a scenario of rallying behind brutal rapists and murderers as is happening today

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Rude bank staff!

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily i would like to bring to the attention of the higher authorities of Meghalaya Rural Bank of a shockingly rude, ill-mannered and insulting behavior of one of the staff members of Nongpoh branch. Last March 2018 my mother(a pensioner) went to withdraw money from this bank and on reaching the payments counter she handed a cheque to the cashier (wearing black leather jacket and a black cap). In a rude and arrogant tone he shouted and ordered my old mother to get the token in spite of the fact that the person who was giving tokens had already instructed us that no token is required since there is no rush of customers. After receiving the token, again in a rude manner he asked my mother why she could not wait (Balei? Phim lah ban ap?). We obeyed his orders and had to wait for another 5 minutes since he was busy on his cell phone.. Then he called my mother and threw the cheque at her just because she did not write the date on it. Moreover when my mother received the payment she kindly requested him to pay in small denominations but he did not pay any heed or utter a single word. Instead he paid the amount in 2000 re notes. Also this is not the first time that this particular staff has misbehaved with customers. .

Yours etc
Baiahunlang Syngkli
Nongpoh

A welcome splash in Arunachal

By Prasanta Talukdar

India is a country of great multiplicity– Unity in Diversity. It described as a land of diverse religions and innumerable languages. At the same time it also described as a land of festivals as well. Indians love celebrating. Every little occasion from the harvesting of crops, welcoming the spring, expressing devotion to the deities of different religions, lends itself to joyous celebrations splashed with colours, music, folk dances and songs.

One such delightful festival in North-east India is Sangken festival. It is celebrated among all the natives of Arunachal Pradesh. Not only Buddhists, but people from other religious background take part to give a secular feel to the festival. The festival is a Buddhist festival celebrated with respect where Buddha is worshipped for the welfare of the mankind. The celebration takes place for three consecutive days when the images of Lord Buddha are given bath ceremoniously.

This festival is mostly celebrated by Khamti, Singpho, Khamyang, Tangsa and Tai Phake community of Arunachal Pradesh and in Assam. According to the Tai calendar, Sangken festival is celebrated in the month of Naun Ha, the fifth month of the Khamti Lunar calendar which falls generally from 13th to 15th April to welcome the traditional New Year. It is a three day celebration, where the images of Lord Buddha are given a ceremonial bath.

The main attraction of the festival is splashing clean water, which is the symbol of peace and purity. This act represents cleansing of souls in a way. The devotees seek blessing and love from Lord Buddha to ward off evil spirits. The involvement and participation of the people shows the depth and importance of the occasion among the people. Due to this culture of showering water to each other, this festival is popularly known as water festival.

Before the beginning of the festival, homes are cleaned and sweet aromas fill the air from the preparation of sweets like khau-tek, khामun sen (fried biscuit), khामun tong tep (biscuit wrapped in leaf) etc. All preparations like plucking of flowers and procuring of candles and incense



sticks for prayer are done well in advance and everyone eagerly awaits the sound of the drum beats and gongs from the temple which herald the beginning of the festival.

A temporary shrine called Kyongfra is constructed for keeping the idols of Buddha during Sangken festival. In this Kyongfra during Sangken festival, clean water is sprinkled through a specially designed water fountain called the Lungkong. Clean and scented water poured through the fountain is sprinkled over the idols of Buddha kept inside the Kyongfra. This water, which has washed the Gods, is collected as holy water by the devotees. The tribes put on traditional colorful attire on these days. They also light candles at shrines and burn the incense sticks. They distrib-

ute homemade and regional delicacies to friends and families in these days.

On the first day and at an auspicious time, a huge procession is carried out throughout the area with the images or the statue of Lord Buddha. The procession is accompanied with the beats of drum. On the vary day, they splash water on each other and have been believed in washing away their sins. Only after this is done are the sweets distributed to different houses and consumed. The unmarried youth are usually involves in this practice of showering of water. Water is also poured over all the holy objects, including the Boddhi tree, Water is also poured on Bhikkhus (monk) to invoke their blessings for good luck, good health, peace and harmony throughout the year.

Every village has a temple which is

the centre of the community’s activities and during the Sangken festival, this is where the people of the village go to first, to offer their prayers and for Son- Fra (to pour water over the idols, tree, etc) to cleanse their soul and pour clean water/holy water over others to enjoy and bond and also as an expression of happiness over the good year gone by. People go to the temple in the morning and evening during the two-three days of Sangken festival to offer prayers and for Son-Fra. Since this festival marks as the beginning of the New Year people tend to wear new clothes and ornaments along with making of delicious ethnic food. All the people of the community irrespective of their age come out from their houses in new and colorful costumes to observe

Sangken festival, the festival of water for peace and harmony.

On the final day of Sangken festival, the Buddha images are taken back to the Vihar premises, keeping it in their original places. Restoration of idols inside the Vihara marks the end of the old year and beginning of the New Year. They also offer prayers by lighting candles in the monastery premises and giving food to the monks.

With time comes change and changes can be seen even in the celebration of the festivals while adhering to the true spirit of the festival. Change can also be seen in the perception of the reasons for the celebration of the festivals. Earlier it was a religious festival during which the people would go to the village temple to offer their prayers together. Now each and every

preparation for and during the celebration has a different significance for different people.

The best part about Sangken festival was the anticipation of the exact time for the festival to begin and the preparation and distribution of sweets to families/ houses in the village. The distribution of sweets for people meant the sharing of joy and happiness to all and also means a visit to friends and relatives and enjoying the treats they had prepared. Everyone is in a happy mood, smiles are everywhere and crowds are seen on the roads. In the morning and evening mothers with enthusiastic children, young girls in groups in traditional attire, old and young men, all holding small buckets and baskets filled with flowers, candles and incense sticks can be seen proceeding towards the temple. The sense of calm and quiet that prevails during Sangken Festival with the slowing of the pace of life.

Buddhism, for these people, is not just a religion but a way of life. Although it is difficult to follow all the teachings of Lord Buddha to the letter in day to day lives, it is done during the festival time. The Five Precepts constitute the basic Buddhist code of ethics, undertaken by lay followers of the Buddha Gautama in the Theravada as well as in Mahayana traditions. Undertaking the five precepts is part of both lay Buddhist initiation and regular lay Buddhist devotional practices. They are not formulated as imperatives, but as training rules that laypeople undertake voluntarily to facilitate practice.

So the Sangken festival is not just a festival to mark the end of the old and the beginning of the New Year, but it is a celebration of the end of old wounds, hurt and bad feelings and the start of friendships, relationships and life anew with a pure mind, heart and soul.

Sangken festival is also seen to be celebrated abroad.

Many Buddhist exist elsewhere where this festival is celebrated with enthusiasm. Sangken is celebrated as Songkran festival in other ASEAN nations. Songkran is a new year in the countries like Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, etc., to invoke the blessings of the lord Buddha for protection of the mankind from the evils, for peace, harmony, good luck and good health.

(The author is a travel writer)

Start it early after Class X

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the common queries in our minds after board exam is what is next? Recently many students have finished their board exams and some are still appearing. Some have appeared in secondary and others in senior secondary examinations.

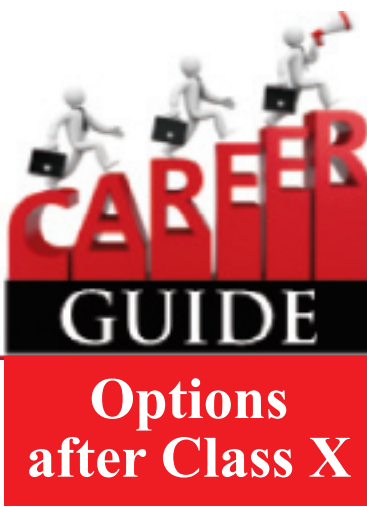
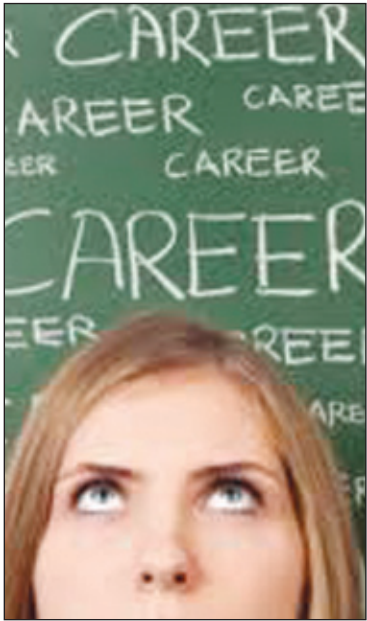
After Class X, one of the most worrying things is to choose next stream of education. Selecting a good career has been a challenge for many. But with proper planning and necessary information we could choose or select the best career options for us. It’s important to choose our career from an early age and the best to choose the professional courses or regular education comes after we pass senior secondary examination.

There are many career options after Class XII according to our interest and subject that we take in senior secondary. For getting admission into different courses we need to appear for some entrance examinations. Some colleges also take admission on the basis of the marks. In today’s edition, we are publishing some options after Class X. Some of the entrance examinations after Class XII are as follows:

Defence Entrance: Students can appear for National Defence Academy and Naval Academy Entrance Examination after passing Class XII. Students from any stream can appear for the NDA examination. For Air Force or Navy students must have physics and maths in passing examination. Students from Arts and Commerce can opt for Army only. This exam is conducted by Union Public Service Commission.

ITI/Polytechnic Courses: After Class students may choose different courses available at different Government Industrial Training Institute (ITI). Students may join these institutes through entrance and counseling process.

Nursing: In nursing one can do courses like B Sc, GNM, ANM, etc. After passing class XII students can take admission in nursing



Options after Class X

ing courses, For B Sc, students must be from science background and for GNM it is preferable to be from science stream. However students from arts stream may also take admission in GNM and ANM courses.

Law Entrance: Student can take admission in the integrated law course which are offered by reputed law schools/universities or different law colleges in the country. Students from any background passing class XII can appear in law entrance test. Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) is conducted for admission into reputed institute.

Fashion Entrance: One of the lucrative careers which are liked by youngsters of modern years is into fashion designing or related field. Fashion and Technology has a wide scope for choosing a career. Top most institutes like NIFT, NID etc conduct entrance examination for admission to their various courses.

We shall publish about options after Class XII and beyond in our coming editions. Engineering and medical entrances are well known, so, I have not written much about it in this article.

Updates:

Charpak Master’s Scholarship 2018 for Indian Students in France: Campus France announced Charpak Master's Program for the year 2018 to study courses at France for all streams and field of study. This scholarship is designed for one to two years, (September-June, 10 months per academic year) of studies in France at the Master’s degree level for all streams and fields of study. Charpak Scholarship 2018 for Master's Program is organized by the Embassy of France in India in Memory of Georges Charpak who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1992. Deadline for submission of application is April 15.

Italian Government Scholarships: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) offers grants in favour of foreign citizens not residing in Italy for the academic year 2018-19 in order to foster international cultural, scientific and technological cooperation, to promote Italian language and culture and to support Italy’s economic system in the world. Grants are offered to pursue study, training, and/or research programs at Italian Higher Education Institutes, both public and legally recognized. Aspirants may apply on or before April 30.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi

Organic farming for me is as important as animal welfare. Both save thousands of species and make the world a better place for humans. When I became minister for Women and Children, we started a new project: we hold an annual Mela in Delhi Haat, the best location, for 15 days, in which 300 women organic farmers are called from all over India to sell their produce. This year we sold Rs 2 crore worth. We also send 50 women to a huge organic mela in Ahmedabad organised by Srishthi and now we are preparing for one in Mumbai in February.

I also make sure that one or more women organic farmers, or groups, get the highest award for women in India, the Nari Shakti award. In 2016 the best exhibition I went to was one of wandering pastoral tribes in India and the NGOs that conserve their cultural forms, camels and their milk. The best exhibition I went to this year was a huge organic one in Noida which had more than 700 companies, institutions, NGOs and individuals taking part. It was organized by OFAI which is headquartered in Goa and headed by Dr Claude Alvares. I bought a beautiful pair of earrings for my sister made of red ratti (used to weigh gold at one point) and white Vijayanti seeds made by a farmer’s wife. The Sikkim pavilion was the most impressive and the Chief Minister of Sikkim should get a Bharat Ratna for the work he has done to make the whole state organic. There were hundreds of varieties of rice, including one that you don’t have to boil, just simply pour hot water on. I saw vegetables that I have never seen before – huge long, white, aubergines (baingan), every variety of kaddu , cucumber and chilli. I saw red potatoes and at least 50 varieties of rajma ranging from white to purple. When I ate the lunch thali of village vegetables, I thought I’d died and gone to Food Heaven!

I would like you to know these women, who have changed thousands of lives by simply collecting old seeds of long forgotten vegetable varieties.

The Vanastree Malnad Garden and Seed Savers Collective in Sirsi, Karnataka is run by women. They have documented 120 varieties of vegetables, from the tiny sparrow ladies fingers (bhindi) to old varieties of sugarcane. All these are heritage seeds . You can get in touch with them at sunitisirsi@gmail.com.. Annadana is a Karnataka NGO started

by Sangita Sharma. For the last few years it has been practicing and teaching sustainable farm practices and conserving over 200 old vegetable seeds. She realized that seed corporations and agricultural institutes were blasting seeds with toxins, chemicals and pesticides, contaminating all food. So she decided to start collecting, growing and distributing seeds to farmers. So far she has distributed 3 lakh free seed packets to marginal farmers and is selling them at a low cost to garden enthusiasts. She has a training programme, called Seed to Seed, on soil health management. Her core group now is 18 farmers who teach. You can contact them at info@annadana-india.org

Niranjana Maru is from Wardha and has formed an NGO called Chetana Vikas. They have a demonstration farm of trees, grasses, tubers and fodder and concentrate on wasteland regeneration

The Vanastree Malnad Garden and Seed Savers Collective in Sirsi, Karnataka is run by women

through teaching a mixed cropping system to local farmers. You can write to her at chetanavikaswda@gmail.com

Sabarmati Tiki is the daughter of Prof Radhamohan who bought degraded land in Nayagarh and, despite people calling his mission impossible, decided to regenerate it. He named the farm “Sambhav” or “Possible”. Sabarmati and her team grow 314 traditional rice varieties at the farm and distribute the seeds to farmers in Orissa. Contact her at Sabarmati@gmail.com

Pebble Garden is a land regeneration project started by Deepika Kundaji on 7 acres of laterite soil which was severely eroded with no topsoil. She and her partner set out to bring the old forest back, created water bodies, built up the soil by putting organic mulch and neighbourhood kitchen waste. Today the land grows 80 varieties of vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants, many of which are endangered and never seen in markets.

The seeds of these plants are shared with other farmers and seed savers. Contact her at pebblegardenforest@gmail.com

Mohinee Bhiste comes from Raigarh, Nainital and is part of a network of women farmers called Jan Prerna Sangathan. In 2009 she and her friends started exploring traditional seeds. They have made a bank of seeds of local wheat, millet, maize, barley and vegetables, where farmers can take freely provided they return double the quantity after the harvest. You can contact them at 09568254945.

And who can forget the contribution of Dr Vandana Shiva, who has been writing and working for non violent farming and biodiversity since 1984. She has been actively involved in conserving 5,000 crop varieties, among them 3,000 kinds of rice, 150 kinds of wheat, 150 kinds of rajma and the rest vegetables and pulses. They have their own seed bank of 45 acres in Sherpur, Uttarakhand. I buy a lot of my monthly rations from Navdanya. You can contact her at Dehradun@navdanya.net

This year for Diwali, I didn’t give useless mithai / statues / ganeshes / dates or badams as gifts. I filled baskets of organic grains, pulses, jams, pickles, brought from small organic farmers from all over India, and gave these. Needless to say each recipient was more than happy. After all, each one of us likes to eat well and the taste of organic wild rice, for instance, is incredible! We also like to feel safe – that our food is not giving us cancer. And we can only do that if we go forward to insisting on nonchemical, non-poisonous food. If you know any farmers, try to make them switch. As starter gifts, you can buy seeds from these women and give them to farmers.

Two Hindi proverbs say : *kathiya gehu kargi dhan, jo bove vah chatur kisan*. Farmers who grow Kathiya wheat and Kargi rice (both organic old varieties) are clever (because both can grow in dry, rain fed, conditions).

Kodau kare bhale mein chote, chote bade bharte pet: Kodo, a millet, may be small in size but it feeds everyone from children to the elderly under adverse conditions.

Shamika Mone has written a Source Book on India’s Organic Seeds . You should definitely buy it from OFAI, Mapusa, Goa myofai@gmail.com

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

Fill a form for reincarnation

A woman said recently that her dead husband had returned to their home reincarnated as a young cow. It behaves just like him, said Khim Hang, 74, from the Kratie province of Cambodia, without going into detail.

Sounds legit. Since cows divide their time between eating, pooping and sleeping, you can totally see they can remind people of married men.

“The young cow was born in March and has attracted a strong following on social media,” Reuters reported. How depressing it is to read that even farm animals have better web skills than this columnist and his peers.

Reincarnation was on my mind after several recent references to it in the media. For example, one news story was headlined: “Pig in Australia steals 18 beers, gets drunk and fights cow”. Reader Mark Agee wrote: “I never believed in reincarnation before but... Dad?”

Then a reader sent me a photo of a sign affixed to the tiger sanctuary in a zoo somewhere in India: “Only those who strongly believe in rebirth should risk going near.”

On the Western side of the planet, newspapers reported the sad news that the delightful Carey Williams, author of books on reincarnation, “passed away” in the first week of March. Surely “took a break” would make more sense? Indeed, I’ve heard it said that tombstones of people who believe in reincarnation should not say “RIP” (Rest In Peace) but “BRB” (Be Right Back).

One of my male friends says that the existence of feminism is proof of rebirth: “Feminists are when guys get reincarnated as women.”

I don’t know about his next life but I suspect his current one may be rather on the short side.

Now here’s the curious thing. Birth rates in the West and the Far East have plummeted while they are rising in South Asia and Africa. So if a Westerner, say Donald Trump, gets reincarnated, there’s a 75 per cent chance he’ll be Asian or African. Hope he’s cool with that. The food in Mumbai’s better than Western “food”, anyway.

In China, the law says that tulkus (Buddhist teachers who have lived at least one past life) must have filled in a Reincarnation Application Form and had it approved in their previous life. I am not making this up. Look up China’s State Religious Affairs Bureau Order No.5 if you don’t believe me.

This writer struggles to believe in reincarnation, but has lots of friends who do.

“Dying people see a light at the end of the tunnel — that’s you being born into your next life,” explained the friend mentioned above.

I told him that was even more depressing! After years of toil on

earth, surely you deserve at least a couple of weeks’ holiday somewhere (say the heavenly version of an Ibiza nightclub) before rebirth? Life is exhausting.

Unless of course you’re a pet cow, and only having to divide your time between sleeping, pooping and eating. Maybe Khim Hang’s husband has got the right idea.

If one gets to choose, I would be reborn as a potato. My wife could put me on the sofa, and voila: Everything back to just how it was.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)



Touch the sun

Astrophysicist Madhulika Guhathakurta has been fascinated by the stars from a young age. She speaks to SPAN magazine writer Natasa Milas about her passion

Last August, North America witnessed total eclipse of the sun which was dubbed “The Great American Eclipse” by the media, as the last time the country saw a total eclipse was in 1979. NASA’s lead scientist for the eclipse was astrophysicist Madhulika Guhathakurta.

Born in Kolkata, Guhathakurta holds a master’s degree in astrophysics from the University of Delhi and a Ph.D. from the University of Denver. She led the ‘Living With a Star’ programme at NASA for 15 years, which focuses on understanding and ultimately predicting solar variability and its diverse effects on earth, human technology and astronauts in space.

The programme gave rise to another initiative, known as the International “Living with a Star”, which brings together all the space agencies of the world to contribute toward the scientific goal of understanding space weather. Guhathakurta served as the chair of this group for four years and remains a member of its steering committee.

Guhathakurta is a spokesperson for NASA’s Heliophysics Division and has created graduate textbooks on this new discipline, which is a hybrid of astrophysics and meteorology. Her research has focused on the study of the sun as a star, its influence on earth, and sun’s outermost layer, the corona.

Excerpts from an interview:

Could you please tell us about your background—growing up in India, your

early interest in science?

When I was very young , I used to watch the night sky in Kolkata. I had the same question that NASA puts in big labels as one of its quintessential problems: “Where did we come from?” As an adult, I know how difficult it is to answer this question. You just can’t say “Big Bang” because the question remains, well, what was there before the Big Bang? But I never gave up the question. In the Delhi University I pursued astrophysics and general theory of relativity.

In the United States you focused your research on the study of the sun. How did you get interested in this?

The sun is the only star we can study in great detail. My personal research has been directed toward the synthesis of a number of multi-wavelength observations, ranging from radio to extreme ultraviolet and, in situ, for purposes of characterising the source regions of solar wind and coronal mass ejections and their propagation through the inter-planetary medium. Energetic particles associated with these coronal mass ejections and solar wind cause space weather on Earth and other planets. This has direct consequences here on Earth and on society at large—the very theme of NASA’s Living With a Star program.

In fact, it was during my graduate schoolwork when I was dreaming of this mission called “Solar Probe” to send a spacecraft to within few solar radii of the sun to verify some of the most hotly-debated topics in solar physics. Little did I know that someday, I would

be a champion for making this mission real.

Please tell us about some of the fascinating projects that you have been involved with at NASA.

At NASA, we are privileged to see and to know so many things that ordinary people don’t get a chance to experience; for example, some of our imagery!

I came up with a storyline to share the ‘Living with a Star’ programme and show some of these exquisite images. I helped in the creation of two major planetarium shows, “Cosmic Collisions” and “Journey to the Stars,” in partnership with the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. Children, general public, older people, are all learning something about the cosmos that they had no way of knowing otherwise.

In 2018, you will be leading a team for a historic Parker Solar Probe mission of NASA. Could you tell us more about it?

Parker Solar Probe is a historic mission to answer some of the fundamental mysteries of physics: Why is our star’s atmosphere thousands of times hotter than its surface? And what propels the solar wind that affects earth and our solar system? We have been wrestling with these questions for decades, and this mission should finally provide the answers.

Other than your work with NASA, have you been academically involved with as-



It was during my graduate schoolwork when I was dreaming of this mission to send a spacecraft to within few solar radii of the sun to verify some of the most hotly-debated topics in solar physics

trophysics?

For the past 11 years, I have worked with the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research to develop five “Heliophysics” textbooks, summer school curricula, and training for the next generation of interdisciplinary scientists.

The programme provides a special opportunity to students and undergraduate faculty to learn about heliophysics as a broad, coherent discipline that reaches, in space, from the earth’s troposphere to the depths of the sun and, in time, from the formation of the solar system to the distant future.

At the same time, a goal of the summer school is to provide a professional development opportunity to undergraduate faculty to incorporate heliophysics and

astrophysics examples into physics, astronomy and earth science courses.

What are some of your future plans at NASA and beyond?

I have drawn together the “disparate” strands of solar-terrestrial physics and enabled international cooperation with the ultimate goal of understanding the meteorology of space or space weather. A mission close to my heart, Solar Probe Plus, is planned for launch in 2018. It will even “touch the sun,” contributing to better characterising and forecasting the radiation environment in which future space explorers will work and live. As such, I hope that all these efforts will help the human species go from being earth-dwellers to space farers. (TWF)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 15, 2018

Mercury being direct on your solar return chart is well poised to give you very good results. Rival activity will be more visible and you need to be on your toes to maintain your position. Support from new comers can emerge and you are likely to be engaged in teamwork and collaborative efforts. New friendships, networking are seen in your schedule if you are able to breathe new life in established connections. Some investment deals may also be finalized. Open communications will reinforce family ties. Travel will however not bring in desired results be it professional or personal.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The planetary configuration this week indicates that your efforts, confidence and courage brings success in monetary gains and your energy increases for projects at work. Your job environment is teeming with activity. You take small yet sure steps towards your financial goals. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. Children may need more discipline than they previously did. You may find your children at an age that requires more attention and or structure. There are some contentious issues that are laid to rest as you tackle them and take a bold stand.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Some of you may have to make some critical decisions due to situations in your life that force you to make definitive choices; they could even be between career and family goals. Some of you may be promoted or your career will take a new direction. The challenge is to find a healthy balance—to improve home life, while at the same time tending to your career needs. Romantic and personal relations would be more practical than fun. For some, a romantic relationship stabilizes and becomes more serious as you look at it with a long term perspective. Some of you will meet a new romantic interest who is perhaps more younger and energetic as compared to you. Some changes in your social circle have been occurring of late, and you meet new and unusual people.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

New friendships are likely to emerge during this time: supportive and easygoing ones. Happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background than you are indicated. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around. Do not allow personal feelings to influence professional decisions. An opportunity or investment to make quick gains in the cards but analyze data at hand before you invest. Energy is high and things happen swiftly and decisively.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You would be blessed with good health, love in relationships and harmony at the work place. You give and receive affection and love from friends and relatives. You connect with old friends and business associates. Being open and receptive, you attract opportunities which hitherto seemed out of reach. You desire to learn and improve on your practical skills. Realistic levels of optimism and confidence are with you that enable you to quicken the pace at your workplace. Tension could run high and reach an emotional peak. Do not get carried away without first getting the facts. Yoga and walking would prove to be beneficial.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your social life is likely to increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful people who could prove to be helpful as they extend a helping hand. Matters related to universities, higher education, organized religion, publishing, legal affairs, and foreign interests proceed smoothly. This is an excellent time to seek advanced training or to further your education. Happiness and fulfillment through close friendships and relationships is indicated. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to aim for a sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The planetary combination this week tends to change your outlook on life, perhaps stimulated by travel. Some changes in your social circle have been occurring and this brings about a new

awareness. You are more determined to achieve your personal goals, and are more strategic in the manner you go about doing so. New responsibilities are likely to present themselves and you would take them more seriously. New projects excite you but remember that bringing them to a completion is just as important. A little attention on fitness and health related programs would be helpful.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase brings money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a realistic approach to business and finance. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement and professional activities. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is more intense. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. You look to networking to leverage your contacts. You may be quick to anger and could antagonize some whom you want to win over.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This phase is good for money, status and enhancing your standing this week. Your entire focus shifts in this direction. You take on new responsibilities, but enjoy the challenges it presents. Your belief systems and personal philosophies are especially important to you, but do not often coincide with your methods. This dichotomy will inculcate new attitudes towards finances, and social relationships before you strike a balance. It is an excellent time for travel, higher education and communications. The family is supportive and helps you look at the larger picture.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You may feel the need to be appreciated by family members and the need for togetherness with others this week. Events are such that you move towards a more objective approach towards your life and you cultivate true friendships. It is a time when you need to let go of things that no longer serve their purpose, and hold on to things that have a future. You would express your sympathetic and compassionate side. Others might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You would stand alone, take action and start afresh during this week.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would be able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility in personal and professional relations this week. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding and are also likely to form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You have to maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and profit this week.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You feel on top of things in domestic issues and spend quality time with people you care about and in activities that are rejuvenating. You tend to be traditional and restrictive in family matters and may have to face opposition from younger ones. It is time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Your unselfishness and willingness to listen will help boost your magnetic appeal. Your professional skills, wisdom and craft are appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Overseas visitors and news are positive and inspiring. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. You need to tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively this week. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well on your own rather than place trust upon others. You are generous with friends, and loving in family situations. You come across as especially smooth and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. A business venture could be gainful if you are willing to lend it some energy. You are involved in multiple tools of creativity that you possess. A gentle and softer approach can resolve an old conflict this week.

Managing it right

By Soumyadipta Basu

Recently, I came across a post titled “Don’t look for the right job but select the right manager”. I feel employees change managers and not jobs when seeking new opportunities. In my seven years of industry experience I have been fortunate or unfortunate to have 10 managers and still counting. If you add my Masters and PhD advisers then I have had 12 bosses in around 12 years of professional life. Needless to say my tenure with my MS and PhD supervisors was the longest among the 12.

The difference between academia and industry is that in the former you choose your supervisor and in the latter the manager is assigned to you unless you change jobs or switch companies. With so many bosses, over the years I have picked up some of the traits of managers who were successful and some who were not successful in their jobs. It must be mentioned that in my seven years of industry experience I have only once changed job role and once switched companies so the change in managers in my case was not job related.

The blog is obviously not a checklist of the requirements of a good manager but more like an open feedback to managers out there on what employees seek and look out for in them.

In my opinion, successful managers are born with leadership skills. Average managers tend to acquire those skills through conscious efforts and experience.

Troves of books have been written over the years trying to explain what makes good managers and the source of leadership traits. From my experience some people are good people managers while some others are great technical managers and I have had both. For any company it is a luxury to have separate folks focusing on the two different aspects and they tend to seek managers who have great people management as well as technical leadership skills.

Again, from my experience such managers are a rare breed, just like in sports where the best players rarely make good coaches.

I always connected to managers who would cater to career development of his/her employees while



keeping the company’s broader objectives in mind. Alluding to my comment about people management and technical leadership earlier, I have seen some managers who are completely turned off the moment you start discussing any technical issues with them. In such cases, I felt that I was left to hang dry and had to find my own solutions.

But on occasions where I ended up discussing technical problems with my manager in every meeting, I felt that I was becoming only a problem solver with no scope of personal development. I felt enervated in environments where 50 per cent of the projects I was working on were aligned to my career development and the rest were matched to the business requirement.

Managers also need to be transparent with their employees. While talking to my fellow colleagues, I realised that most employees seek transparency as important if not the most important quality in their managers. I always felt part of the company when my manager would relate my projects to company’s business decisions.

I have had managers who lived in a complete bubble and were totally detached from how business was shaping for the company which sort of gave me a feeling of being left out. For managers I felt transparency was intertwined with honesty and integrity.

While it is debatable whether corporate world is the right place for brutally honest people and some level of politics is an inherent part of any organisation, it is true that managers should have some level of

honesty. I had a manager who asked me not to support some of the work of his fellow manager in a different team so that he can prove in front of higher authorities that the other guy was unsuccessful in his endeavours. Clearly, I had lost respect for the guy in spite of him being a darling with his own managers.

Another important quality of managers should be finding the right balance between micromanagement and delegation. It is like two extremes and in my experience employees like managers who are neither micromanagers nor delegators. A good manager coaches/mentors his employees instead of micromanaging them. This is very important for new employees. It is the decision of when to manage and when to delegate which distinguishes good managers from the average ones.

Echoing what I said earlier, managers are really an eclectic breed and not everyone can be a great manager. It is also something which comes naturally to the select few and no amount of MBA education or schooling can create managers. They can only hone or improve their skills. Every manager should introspect whether he really likes the job and is benefiting the company. If not then he might end up as a roadblock in the career of many of his employees.

It is some of these experiences mentioned above which have led me to believe that disgruntled and disillusioned employees change managers not jobs.

(The author is an engineer at Qualcomm. He can be reached at soumya.005@gmail.com)

"A lot of people do not muster the courage to live their dreams because they are afraid to die."

--- Anaïs Nin

The Shillong Times

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The Work Permit Conundrum

THE MDA Government has in a rather impetuous manner announced that it would issue work permits to Bangladeshi nationals working in Meghalaya. First of all, no state can decide to give work permits to any foreign national. That is the remit of the Central Government. And the rules laid out for issuing work permits/employment visas to foreign nationals are very stringent. Employment Visas are granted to foreign nationals coming to India as consultants on contract for whom the Indian Company pays fixed remuneration (this may not be in the form of a monthly salary). Foreign artists engaged to conduct regular performances for the duration of the employment contract given by Hotels, Clubs or other organizations are granted employment visa. So too foreign nationals who are coming to India to take up employment as coaches of national/state level teams or reputed sports clubs and foreign sportsmen who are given a contract for a specified period by Indian Clubs/ Organizations.

Employment visas are also issued to self-employed foreign nationals coming to India for providing Engineering, Medical, Accounting, Legal or such other highly skilled services in their capacity as independent consultants provided the provision of such services is permitted under law. Also in the list of those eligible for employment visas are foreign language teachers/interpreters, foreign specialist chefs, foreign nationals deputed for providing technical support/services transfer of know-how/ services for which the Indian company pays fee/ royalty to the foreign company; senior management personnel and/or specialists employed by foreign firms who are relocated to India to work on specific project/management assignments. Applicants should be highly skilled and/or qualified professionals being engaged or appointed by a company/organization/ industry/undertaking in India on contract or an employment basis at a senior level, skilled position such as technical expert, senior executive, or in a managerial position etc. Employment visa cannot be granted for routine, ordinary or secretarial/clerical jobs. Above all the employee's salary must be in excess of U.S. \$25,000 per year. Going by the above rules one wonders how the MDA cohort expects to sell its idea to the Centre. Already this proposal has raised the hackles of most NGOs/pressure groups and even ordinary citizens who are already witnessing the evils of unabated influx from Bangladesh. This proposal seems like a foolhardy one prompted by the coal lobby that want cheap labour. It needs to be rejected at once!

TO THE EDITOR

Government apathy towards Sports in Garo Hills

Editor,

I want to bring to the notice of the State Sports Department about its apathy towards development of games and sports in Garo Hills. Tura. When I talk about development, I mean creation of sports infrastructure in Tura which has been badly missing for long. The abandoned stadium construction at Alotgre, which was started by the State Sports Council some 30 years back is living testimony of State Government's step-motherly treatment to the people of Tura Town. It is a pity that after a lapse of 40 years, the Sports Department has not been able to provide us one decent playground to train up our budding sporting talent. The only mini stadium (Dikki Bandi) at Dakopgre, which was constructed at the initiative of Late P.A. Sangma, former Lok Sabha Speaker, is mainly used for all sorts of public events rather than sports activities. Besides, the ground itself is not an ideal one to conduct any big tournament either at the district or State level, leave alone hold the National

Games. The stadium also lacks other basic facilities like drainage system, VIP enclosure, dressing room, public toilets, etc. Therefore, unless the stadium is upgraded into a full-fledged one, its mere presence as a sports centre is of no use for promotion of sports.

Much was expected during the tenure of Mr. Zenith M. Sangma, the Tura based MLA who was also the Sports Minister in the last Government. A number of representations were submitted to him by Tura Sports Association with a request to do the needful for creation of new infrastructures like - stadium construction, upgradation of D.B. Stadium, renovation of Youth Hostel, construction of Indoor Stadium, etc. But through promises galore were made nothing has happened on the ground.

Last year, there was a news report about the Sports Minister's statement in the Assembly during the budget session that an amount of Rs 40 crores had been earmarked from non-lapsable central fund to construct a new JN stadium at Tura. This statement was substantiated by the Chief-Minister Dr. Mukul M. Sangma, in his address thereafter. The sports lovers

Election is not only a grand festival and a time for joy and merry-making for those who are actively involved in the process but it also has some twists and turns which some would consider trivial but serve as lessons for many who wish to learn from what had occurred. After all, as some say, life is but a learning process from the cradle to the grave. Here is a playful reminiscence of few incidents which occurred in the last election to the Meghalaya state assembly which might be of interest.

So much has been written about the serious aspects of the election which are grim and dull and which also make people sceptical. They are beginning to ask if elections can really help voters elect the best of the candidates in the fray to become an MLA. Are we getting good and better MLAs from this 2018 election? There is a general consensus at least from all the defeated candidates across party lines that money has played a vital role in the election. Some have even said that it has corroded the moral fabric of the society. That the victorious candidates have chosen to remain silent to the charge can be taken as consent.

The election has surely not come with the best of results that we expected; however, it is also true that we will never get a perfect outcome from any election in a democracy. Also, there is no bar from looking at the lighter side of the election too. Here are some recollections of the incidents which happened during the last election to the state assembly which can also be entertaining.

A friend whose curiosity knows no bounds and who also likes to observe people's behaviour remarked that during elections the animal instincts in people becomes obvious and in fact they behave like birds. He added that during elections one would see that in every place where people congregate, be it a church or community gathering or even when they attend a funeral or visit the bereaved family, they would behave strangely. Just like birds, where sparrows will only flock with fellow sparrows and the crow with crows only, humans too do just that although

of Tura are impatient to know about utilization of that allotted amount for the new Tura Stadium. We leave it to the wisdom of our new Chief Minister Mr. Conrad K. Sangma and his Sports Minister Mr. Banteidor Lyngdoh, to examine the case and enlighten us about utilization of fund under this particular project. The stony silence of our representatives in the past and lackadaisical attitude of different sports bodies in the locality might be the main cause for stagnation of sports and games in Tura and the Garo Hills. Under the prevailing sports scenario, there is nothing for the people of Tura to cheer about in the forthcoming National Games Festival, to be hosted in the State during 2022.

Yours etc,
Rozario M. Sangma
Tura

Jewel thief or business tycoon?

Editor,

The CBI blamed the PMO for the diamond merchant Nirav Modi fleeing the country and also blamed Narendra Modi for keeping silent on the Rs 11,400 crore

Meghalaya Election Trivia

By H H Mohrmen

unconsciously. The only difference is that during elections given the opportunity people congregate according to their party affiliations or rally round the candidate they respectively support.

Sometimes election can deny an individual his or her basic right. A friend, whose wife was deputed for election duty, told me that the news caused her great anxiety. The reason is because she was then still breast feeding her baby. She had to stop the breast feeding because she had to attend to election duties. The baby was unfortunately deprived of his basic right to food because of the election.

For some of the people who play bet in archery, Rahul Gandhi's visit to Jowai was an opportune time when lady luck smiled at them while the others cursed the day they were born because they did not read the good sign that Rahul came to show them. A person who betted on a particular number said that when Rahul's cavalcade reached lawmusiang (where there are lots of archery stalls) he waved at the crowd from his car with only one hand and the guy who had the presence of mind to read the sign bought the number five and he won handsomely that evening. Another player in Shillong cursed his luck because he did not play on fifty five and therefore lost the opportunity to win money that evening. The reason was that before Rahul addressed the crowd in Shillong he waved at the crowd with both his hands, which the bettor read as forecasting that number fifty five would be the winning number that evening.

A friend who was deputed for election duty in a certain polling station shared the story of a poor, illiterate woman in a village where he was officiating, who after casting her vote came out of the booth crying saying that everything is gone and now her vote is wasted. When the official asked her why, the lady said she did not remember whether she used the thumb or the forefinger to press the button. She then asked the

official whether she should use her thumb which she used for her impression (because she cannot sign) or the forefinger which was marked (before she was allowed) to press the button. She was under the impression that she can only vote using the specific finger but she was not sure whether it should be the thumb or the forefinger.

Then there is a story of a secretary of a certain shnong who in spite of the official announcement from the concerned department that before the election guns owners should deposit their arms with the government, the man purposely kept the gun. He of course kept the gun for obvious reasons. He wanted to use it to threaten the members of his community, till this was reported and the police had to intervene and seize the gun.

But the story of the Niam Phniang is one which has a huge impact on the outcome of the election and this is one issue that the government will have to seriously consider even after the election. A certain cult-like religious group which was initially started simply as an opposition to Aadhar enrolment has spread to every nook and corner of the region. The group opposed Aadhar enrolment because they claim that the twelve digit number is the mark of the demon, it is against the scriptures and it is also against the teachings of the church.

During the election the groups which are now populating every part of the state even prohibited its followers to cast their votes. A report I received is that some candidates who lost the election by a small margin blamed the followers of Niam Phniang for their defeat because the every candidate claims to know that there are members of the cult who support him/her but because they refused to exercise their rights, the candidates lost the election.

Of course it is the right of the citizen of this country to follow and practice any religion as this is guaranteed by the Constitution, but the problem is that there are certain ways of life that the followers of Niam Phniang practice which are not safe

for the followers and even the society at large. Certain practices adopted by the practitioners of this faith group could also be a threat to others and can also be seen as being against the law of the land.

The followers of Niam Phniang not only refused to vote but it was informed they also refuse to have to do with the government. And there are reports that some who were government employees even resigned their jobs because they believe the end is near. People call them Niam Phniang (oil religion) because if members of the group fall sick they refuse to visit the doctor or get any medication to cure their ailments. They would rely only on prayer and provide water and would rub and massage oil on the patient to get him or her cured. They would flatly refuse to give the patient any medication.

There are few unsafe practices of this group which can also be considered illegal because it denies a section of its followers their basic or fundamental rights as guaranteed under the Constitution of the country. It is alleged that the followers of this group had stopped sending their kids to schools. That is not all. It was also reported that they have even refused to get their babies vaccinated or to be administered polio vaccines. This is a very serious matter which the government should take serious note of because it has to do with the rights of the infant which cannot decide for itself.

Recently there were news reports about this group in the Bhoi district and Mawkyrwat which was carried by the local media. The groups were found to congregate in certain jungles in these two districts, but the fact is the followers of this particular group can be found everywhere.

Of all the election-related stories that are mentioned in this column, others can be treated as trivial; but the story of the followers of Niam Phniang is something that the government needs to follow through. Clearly this is no longer a matter of religion but of superstition.

Are women truly liberated in India?

By Barnes Mawrie

The horrific incidents of crime against women which took place recently one at Unnao in UP and the other in JK where an eight years old girl Kathua, was raped and brutally murdered, clearly paint a dismal picture of women liberation in our country. These are not stray incidents but such violence against the fairer sex take place on a regular basis in different parts of the country.

The women in our country suffer a double discrimination. First of all, in a highly male dominated and male-centred society of India, the women are considered second class citizens with no equal rights and opportunities. In many rural areas of certain parts of India, girls are deprived of basic education and they are married off at a very young age. Female infanticide which is so rampant in some parts of the country is a barbaric practice which no civilized society should tolerate. We would be utterly shocked to know the actual statistics of female infanticide in our country.

What is more disgusting is that many of these crimes against women are committed by politicians or sons of politicians or persons in high positions. In a country like ours where the politicians and high bureaucrats rule the roost, many of these culprits go scot free and they continue to perpetrate the crime. Indian males harbour a lot of false myths about women for example like: women are meant to be housewives, women are to stay indoors, women should not converse with men in public, women should submit to men and the list goes on. Society and religions seem to conspire to confirm these myths and consequently the poor women continue to be discriminated. Using the words of Rousseau, “women in India are free but everywhere they are in

Women constitute the suffering population of our country whose voices and complaints are seldom heard and whose rights are often trampled upon. If women at the high circles are victims of male chauvinism, how much worse is the plight of the ordinary women? In the wake of the Weinstein scandal in Hollywood, many Bollywood female actors have confessed of being subjected to similar molestations. Divya Unny, a Malayalee actor confessed to being victimized by a male director way back in 2015. Harassment of women be it in film industry, in government offices or in ordinary work places, is rampant in our country. There are numerous cases of sexual harassment of tribal girls working in various metropolitan cities of India.

Yet such practices are being pursued because there is no political or legal will to put an end to them.

Secondly, the women in India suffer from a political and legal bias. This is evident that when it comes to crimes against women, there is little political reaction or swift legal actions. The above two incidents would have been conveniently forgotten and justice denied to the victims, if it were not because of the nationwide protests. All of us remember the case of Jessica Lal who would have died in vain if it were not because of similar reactions.

Women constitute the suffering population of our country whose voices and complaints are seldom heard and whose rights are often trampled upon. If women at the high circles are victims of male chauvinism, how much worse is the plight of the ordinary women? In the wake of the Weinstein scandal in Hollywood, many Bollywood female actors have confessed of being subjected to similar molestations. Divya Unny, a Malayalee actor confessed to being victimized by a male director way back in 2015. Harassment of women be it in film industry, in government offices or in ordinary work places, is rampant in our country. There are numerous cases of sexual harassment of tribal girls working in

chains.”

This causes us to pose a big question: “Are women in India truly liberated?” Legally and theoretically they are free but de facto they are still slaves of the evil system or of an imperfect and prejudiced culture that we have. If most of our women still live in fear and insecurity and continue to be under the shadow of men, can we talk of a “free India?” If women form almost half of the Indian population (48.3%), then how can India be free if they are still in chains?

Every man in India should hang his head in shame whenever a crime is committed against a woman or a girl. Every politician and every law enforcer in our country should feel ashamed whenever justice is denied or delayed for such crimes. It is time that our administrative and legal systems wake up to their God-given responsibility of meting out justice to every citizen irrespective of race, religion and sex. There would be no need for national protests or protests of any sort to deal with such crimes if our legal systems work as they should. It is only when women in our country are respected, cared for, given their due rights and privileges and share equal responsibilities in the country's affairs that we can truly speak of India as a “free country.”

CBI wants to examine these auditors. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) recommends privatization of public sector banks. Will FICCI's new solution prevent frauds? Do Indian laws protect defaulters rather than the aam aadmi? Banks officers should be transferred every three years and employees every five years. If such practices were implemented in the Punjab National Bank, such frauds could have been detected.

Yours etc.,
Micheal N Lyngdoh
Shillong -14

Street hawkers take over all footpaths

Editor,

This is to bring to the notice of the authorities concerned regarding the virtual take over of the city by street hawkers. Indeed we are being eaten up by the hawkers. I can fully understand the plight of the hawkers who sell their daily wares and come back next day with fresh vegetables etc. But I am appalled to see the streets in Police Bazar right up to the centre of the

road and the hawkers dropping their goods in their own vehicles! Another hawker's haven at Laitumkhrach, Police Point) displaying items right from shoes, dresses and even fast food items from chicken drumsticks, pakoras, chicken dry fry et al. You name it, you will get it! All of this is on the footpath! With the traffic congestion and now footpath congestion are we going to allow our Beautiful Shillong to be eaten up by hawkers?

I would suggest that every hawker should have a license with a minimum fee to display and sell their goods. I hope somebody is reading, watching and listening. Something really has to be done so that only genuine street hawkers are the ones who will sit and sell their daily wares which will benefit not only the seller but the consumer at large.

Yours etc.,
N.R.Lyngdoh
Shillong – 6

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.

“ It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership. ”

--- Nelson Mandela

The Shillong Times

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State of the nation

IT took fifty retired civil servants, many of them now civil society activists like Harsh Mandar, to converge and dash off a letter to Prime Minister Modi, on the deteriorating law and order in the country. Stating that the Modi Government failed in the ‘Darkest Hour,’ the bureaucrats criticized in strongest terms what they dubbed as the government’s failure to perform the most basic responsibilities given to it by the people in 2014. The letter expressed concern over the decline in secular, democratic and liberal values enshrined in the Constitution. This letter was in protest against the two incidents of heinous rape crimes - an eight year old girl in Kathua, Jammu in January this year and a 16-year old girl in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh in June last year. What precipitated the protests was the obstruction of justice in the Kathua rape and murder case and the death of the 16-year old’s father while in jail. The man was arrested when he went to lodge a complaint about the rape of his daughter by an MLA of the BJP.

Prime Minister Modi, remained silent all throughout and it was only three days ago at the Ambedkar Jayanti observance that he came down heavily and vowed punishment on the rapists in both cases, stating that the law should be allowed to take its course and the accused would not go unpunished.

The question that cries out for an answer is why Modi chooses to remain silent in the face of growing atrocities against women and girl-children, the latest in his home state of Gujarat in Surat. His silence is taken by his own party people as endorsement of the crimes they commit. It is difficult to understand Modi’s silence. He either does not wish to step into the jurisdiction of the respective state governments where such crimes have occurred, since law and order are state subjects. But the state governments of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir have both failed to act hastily to punish the guilty. On the contrary the incidents have been politicised and have also taken on a communal colour. Now that the Prime Minister has spoken, swift action has followed. But the question is why wait for things to reach a conflagration point before handling an imminent crisis. India today has gone down many rungs in terms of safety for women and girls. This has put paid to the slogan “beti bachao, beti parhao.” It sounds hollow and fake.

The paradox of terrorism

By Sonie Kharduit

the birth of any terror group in the world is pure reaction to discontentment, injustice, agony, collectively grouped as socio-economic and political inequalities. But when mixed with religious ingredients by some fundamentalist and other radical groups, it causes an adrenalin rush in those aggrieved souls alleviating the whole momentum. In the Muslim community we have the Wahabi group, In

tion in itself, ready to be blown off anytime to avenge the death of the loved ones. So the question is who is responsible for creating and supplying these anti-social elements, the perception that Muslim community is the bed rock of terrorism is not only an incorrect notion but it’s more of our brazenness to accept the facts what our Christians brothers from these mighty countries do to secure their interest in geo-

“ There is no problem with Christ per se but it is the quality of Christians around the world which is devoid of Christ’s philosophy .i.e., love and compassion. Gandhi himself was a big fan of Jesus but not of Christians, symbolising the fact that Jesus’ teaching has universal applications but sadly doesn’t reflect in our actions anymore.”

Hinduism (VHP); in Christianity (Ku Klux Klan of American Civil war, the Pogroms of Romania, the anti-Balaka group in central Africa). These are some of the associated radical group bringing the idea of religious terrorism. In fact our very own NSCN, the erstwhile NLFT in Tripura, the God’s army in Myanmar are all armed revolutionary Christian insurgent groups but we tend to overlook such ugly truths. Stereotyping a terror activity with any particular religion is a wrong notion when it is clearly understood that any forms of terrorism or insurgency are the result of a powerful cocktail of people’s despair and exploitation of few malicious soul by taking refuge under people’s weakness i.e., religious sentiments.

The insurgency problem in our own backyard in Garo hills is the manifestation of the same plight mentioned above. There are no born terrorists; it’s all about the life’s brutal experience which turns a person into a monster. Can we imagine the anger, the pain of a lone surviving boy from a sudden bombing, that killed all members of his family in a split second. I’m sure from every such incident, millions of militants are born from the rubble in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria etc ready to terrorise the western soil. They just need to be polished to be ready for action; their body is the ammuni-

political sphere or their quest for another form of colonialism. The idea of doing this comparative study is to highlight the fact that all is not right in Christianity as many of us perceive it to be the most superior faith. There is no problem with Christ per se but it is the quality of Christians around the world which is devoid of Christ’s philosophy .i.e., love and compassion. Gandhi himself was a big fan of Jesus but not of Christians, symbolising the fact that Jesus’ teaching has universal applications but sadly doesn’t reflect in our actions anymore. In recent times many like minded people have openly put out their views through this news paper including the editor herself, about the flaws and hypocrisy inside the church system in our state. Its inspirational to witness such courageous steps to questions the church administration. The intention is not to demean the value of the church in spiritual upheaval but it’s more of identifying the gaps needed to be bridged especially at a time when politics has extended its claws even into the pulpit. Often we witness the speech and narrations of religious leaders like some sort of collusion with political issues more so in today’s scenario due to the fear psychosis of saffronisation. Such type of speeches/sermons will only breed hatred and distrust. On leaving the

Suddenly, the PM is hard-pressed for time Narendra Modi has cut it too close to D-Day

By Aditya Aamir

Is Prime Minister Narendra Modi isolated in his own government? A prominent Dalit intellectual says PM Modi’s writ does not run and that his ministers do not listen to him; that they follow RSS diktats. According to Kancha Illiah, the Brahman-Bania-Rajput cabal call the shots in the Modi government and that ministers like Ravi Shankar Prasad answer to RSS supremo Mohan Bhagwat.

This is a new one. Going by what we saw on Friday evening, it was Modi who got Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to back-off on the Unnao gang-rape case and let the investigating agencies do their job. Again, it was Modi who is said to have forced the two BJP ministers in the Mehbooba Mufti government to put in their papers for their roles in communalising the brutal rape and killing of an eight-year-old in Kathua in Jammu.

The Prime Minister in his address on Friday, while dedicating the Ambedkar Centre in New Delhi to the nation, said that those behind the Unnao and Kathua outrages would not be spared. It was after the PM’s statement that actions followed. Kancha Illiah must surely be talking through his hat, maybe wanting to prod Modi to do more for the Dalits.

Illiah’s “reminder” to the PM that his government was voted to power not by the upper castes but by the Dalit and the OBC, and therefore the PM, who being an OBC himself, had made several promises to the oppressed classes, those promises should be honoured. And ASAP as there was very little time left for Modi before the 2019 general elections would be on his head.

Saturday (April 14) was Ambedkar Jayanti and the PM was without doubt cranking up the BJP’s election machine with the Ambedkar Centre, like Mayawati’s “elephants” and Ambedkar statues in Lucknow. Dalit voices like Kancha Illiah are not impressed by Ambedkar centres and elephants, they want policy changes that spell change in the oppressed lives of the Dalit.

Right now they are bothered about the Supreme Court ruling on the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, adamant

that no matter how many innocents get caught in the Act’s ambit, for a variety of reasons (personal to professional), the centuries of injustice done to the Dalit should be addressed and the very stringent SC/ST Protection Act, as it was fashioned by Parliament in 1989, should not be amended.

Till Unnao and Kathua suddenly became ‘breaking news’ for TV channels, after the news of the brutal crimes were in the first instance dismissed in a matter of seconds and a few words, the entire focus of the Opposition campaign centred on Modi’s “anti-Dalit” policies. The SC ruling on the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was the inflexion point.

Now, we hear that the government may go the ordinance way to correct the apex court’s “mistake”. Will that satisfy the Dalit and the political parties arrayed behind/alongside him? Hardly likely! For, if for one party/ alliance, politics is all about keeping the caste cauldron boiling, for the other, it is about keeping the communal fires flaring.

Both tactics are being honed out in states going to polls in 2018. And an India Today TV opinion poll results telecast the other day pointed to caste deciding the outcome in a majority of seats in Karnataka which goes to polls on May 12. The remaining seats will be decided by the Lingayats, who were recently categorised as a distinct religious group and accorded minority status by the state’s Congress government.

The big winner, according to the channel’s opinion polls, will be current Congress Chief Minister Siddaramiah, who will return to power with overwhelming popularity. That is not the moot point, the significant fact emerging out of the opinion polls is that the biggest beneficiaries of the cranked up caste divisions and the religious reconfiguration will be the Congress.

That is not an accolade that sits pretty on any political party but in politics niceties do not matter. What matters is victory at any and all costs. And the chaos and the blatant “games” we see being played out in the country are all to win at any cost. Suddenly, things are falling in place for the opposition parties and the government is under attack from all sides.(IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Shoot the rapist at sight!

Editor,
Why the clamour only for rigorous punishment for rape and other sadistic crimes which have their roots in mental-degeneration? Apart from the toughest punishment to the perpetrators let’s go deeper to analyze the possible causes that push men to commit rape? Why so much mental degeneration that certain individuals can stoop to the lowest depths? How to address those issues is certainly a challenge. And that “challenge” certainly calls for serious brain-storming and a self-assessment vis-a vis the environment in which we all are living.
As far as the physical environment is concerned we are convinced now that a healthy environment is imperative for healthy living. Even kids these days know that we can’t breathe well if our surroundings are filled with high levels of toxicity. We have studied through our academic textbooks that peo-

ple invite environmental disaster if they allow excessive emission of CO2, CO, methane and other dangerous gases into the atmosphere. We have fully acknowledged that each tall and black chimney of the industries and the nozzles of the vehicles are here only to mar the beauty of this planet. The damage that toxic gases are doing to our ecosystem is easily understood thanks to modern scientific appliances. Again, tomes have been written and published to create awareness and to inform us about the scientifically tested measures to address environmental concerns. But do we have the any literature to pinpoint the causes which contribute towards turning the male into “perverts”? Who else is emitting the toxic substances that overpower the inborn sensitivity of the deviant? Now we have American President Donald Trump whom many call a pervert. At this rate the number of perverts are increasing and they have become dangerously ubiq-

uitous. And, each pervert has caused nightmares to the ill-fated females. Should we still fiddle about when the pervert moves further ahead to see even “baby girls” as objects of lust!
Again, I would like to draw another similarity with what prompts big people to “rape”/violate the harmony of Mother Earth. The case is very regularly brought out by the conscious citizens in Meghalaya. Patricia Mukhim has pointedly driven home how the “greed for money” has corrupted certain leaders who are trying hard to justify the senseless exploitation of the “body” of Mother Earth --- “Why harp on mining as the only source of revenue” (ST 13 April) ? Many big shots are oscillating from Shillong to Delhi to convince their seniors to tweak the laws to grant permission to further “rape” the state which has been mutilated for past several decades.
In my mind, both are infected with common syndromes! While one type is interested in the body of the female, the other type lusts

after the rocky body of “Mother Earth”. And which type is contributing more dangerously to the society can easily be measured by our simple plus and minus equation.
Again, let’s assess the issues from another angle, given the advancement of medical science. Till some years back malaria, dengue, cholera, HIV, smallpox were life-threatening diseases. But medical science has successfully eradicated or contained them all. Scientists have correctly identified the causes of those dangerous diseases and suggested appropriate remedial measures. No doubt, that is a productive achievement. However, why have modern studies practically failed to identify the causes of the pandemic rise of horrendous instances of rapes and criminality associated with them? Is this not a slap in the face of modern civilization considering we have not yet spelled out the causes and characteristic symptoms of sexual predators who are repeatedly

raise their ugly heads to strangle the decency of society. Should we still wait to work out tough laws and remedial measures to rid the evil? I guess the time is ripe that each morally conscious individual be allowed a shotgun to shoot “perversion” of any kind at sight!
Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

Uncalled for rude behavior

Editor,
Apropos the letter "Rude Bank Staff!" by Baiahung Syngkli of Nongpoh, it is very sad that the said Bank staff did not even spare an elderly lady from his uncalled for rudeness! This is not an uncommon case as far as any public related departments/units are concerned. I have encountered many staff particularly from Govt. or Public Sector Units misbehaving with members of the public sans any sort of provocation. They take the customers as being a hurdle to their comfort, to-

tally ignorant of the fact that it is the public that is paying for the subsistence of their family including themselves. It is a part of duty of the administration of such departments/units to impart requisite training to their staff as far as their manners towards the public are concerned. This is very important. The staff must not think that the people are burden to them. And, If even after receiving requisite training, any staff still misbehaves with the public, he/she should be taken to task as deemed fit by the concerned department/unit
Yours etc.,
Partha Sarathi Gupta,
Via email

India loses its humanity

Editor,
Apropos Ananya S Guha's article, "Saving the girl child, saving a nation" (ST, April 14, 2018), Swami Vivekananda worshipped and touched the feet of a

4 - year old poor, Kashmiri Muslim girl to defy the divisions of religion, caste and class to hoist the flag of humanity in Kashmir in 1898. What a shame that after 120 years of that instructive incident, some people of our country are defending the rape and murder of an 8 - year old poor, Kashmiri Muslim girl to celebrate the divisions of religion, caste and class and to hoist the flag of criminality.
Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Work permits for Bangladeshis

Editor,
So much of hullabaloo is being heard about the government’s suggestion of issuing work permits to citizens of Bangladesh wishing to work in the State. My opinion is that Government should treaded carefully and cautiously and examine the situation. We have had a

constant flow of illegal migrants from lower Assam and neighbouring Bangladesh. The threat of demographic change complicated by burdening socio-economic stress is real. However, let us understand that most of these illegal migrants who had come here to work and gradually settle down have not been detected due to political patronage. The Congress party which has been at the forefront of appeasing the illegal migrants cannot shy away from the fact that their presence in Garo Hills and in neighbouring Assam has given leverage to them to call the shots. Whatever it is, the current dispensation should not hastily grant such work permits unless the workers come in with a valid visa.
Yours etc...
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong-3

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.

"Old age realizes the dreams of youth: look at Dean Swift; in his youth he built an asylum for the insane, in his old age he was himself an inmate."
--- A. B. Yehoshua

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Data Leaks & Cambridge Analytica

MOST users of Facebook never imagined that every detail of their lives which include even their very personal choices such as the kind of food they prefer, the friends they choose, the movies they select and above all the political parties they are inclined towards. Most Facebook users never really gave much thought to why advertisements appearing on their timelines are related to the things they mention on their posts the previous day. It all seemed odd but until a few days ago, social media users did not know that Mark Zuckerberg was selling information to different clients about his own Facebook users. Cambridge Analytica, a British Consulting firm apparently acquired data of fifty million people and used that to target voters on behalf of Donald Trump in the 2016 elections. Considering that social media has tremendous influence among its users, strategic and positive information about the candidate from sources that appear credible can easily mislead voters.

Interestingly much of the date acquired was not harvested from Facebook per se but was spontaneously given by users to the maker of a Facebook personality quiz App called thisisyourdigitallife. This App was developed by a University of Cambridge Professor Aleksandr Kogan who managed to collect the data of about 2,70,000 people. He then installed that along with data about their Facebook friends which ran to fifty million. Kogan then gave the data to Cambridge Analytica. It is curious to note that even now Facebook poses very personal questions to its users everyday and people respond to those questions and even post those responses, which, on the face of it appear harmless. The European Union and the United Kingdom have taken measures to address this threat to the privacy of their citizens by storing all data in their country. India is yet to take stringent action against the data leakage of its citizens. What is worse is that Cambridge Analytica is also working in India for certain political parties. Are we really a sovereign, democratic republic when our choices are manipulated?

It is a perfect con job. On the latest catch word: Ambedkar. So last week India stood testimony to a lot of noises being made over the father of the Constitution. Asserted Prime Minister Modi, “Everyone rushes to do politics in Ambedkar’s name but it is my Government which has honoured, given respect to him.” Retorted Dalit messiah BSP’s Mayawati, “The BJP is anti-Ambedkar and anti-Constitution.” Alongside her foe-turned-friend’ SP’s Akhilesh they grandiosely celebrated Babasaheb’s 127th birth anniversary. All staking claim to his legacy!. Reducing it to a game of one-upmanship of ‘my Ambedkar vs yours!’

Basically this bloated rhetoric about Ambedkar bandied by all Parties is essentially an intra-Party affair, all wanting to cement a winning bond with the Dalit icon and capitalize on it. Understandable, as the community accounts for 20% of the vote bank and its votes would tilt the balance on who sits on India’s Raj gaddi.

Towards that end, the BJP-led Government is constructing two memorials in Delhi and the BSP-SP combine are commemorating him in 90 UP districts and BUILDING statues. Clearly, none wants to jeopardize caste vote banks which has become the most luscious mistress to be measured through the prism of power glass politics. Hence the fight over Ambedkar has been reduced to politics of optics and perception.

Consequently, the more India changes, it remains the same as caste has cast a long shadow over Indian politics. The scepter that haunts the nation is not of class struggle but caste struggle. “Backwards” and “Forwards” are more meaningful than the Left and the Right in politics, thereby, giving further impetus and widening the caste divide. But who cares?

Raising a moot point: Does our polity divided by caste, splintered by religion, riven by political and ideological differences and bereft of statesmen with vision and concern for tomorrow, really genuinely believe in Ambedkar’s ideology? “I feel the caste system must be abolished if the Hindu society is to be reconstructed on the basis of equality. It goes without saying that Untouchability has its roots in the caste

My Ambedkar Vs Yours

A perfect rip off

By Poonam I Kaushish

system,” said Ambedkar. Alas, the caste genie unleashed three decades ago, which Ambedkar was against, is now devouring the country. Hence this issue erupted into a conflagration last week when Dalit groups across the country took to the streets in a “Bharat Bandh” in response to the alleged, “dilution” of the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. Leaving over 10 dead and many injured in Rajasthan, MP, Punjab and Delhi.

Recall, the Supreme Court banned automatic arrests and registration of criminal cases under the legislation which seeks to protect members of scheduled castes and tribes against discrimination and abuse last month.

Notably, given that the Dalits form a crucial vote bank in UP and Punjab, constituting more than 20 per cent and 32 per cent

and judicial. The cancerous C2 has already spread into its vitals. Tragically, bringing things to such a pass whereby everything today has degenerated into the caste paradigm.

Mandalisation of politics and the emergence of the Dalit-OBC-Muslim combine in electoral politics brought about a sea change in our polity. So much so it is now polarised on a caste basis with elections being fought on caste considerations.

In fact, voters are regressively but decisively voting along caste lines. This social engineering via the ballot has become its mainstay. After all, why should the Brahmins and Thakurs, a mere 15 per cent of the vote bank, rule the roost? In other words, political consciousness today terminates at the caste and community level.

Hence, this social chasm has widened with the emergence of the “Made in India” leaders like Lalu,

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Maharashtra to Manipur communal and caste explosions and exploitations rule the roost with parties defining it according to its own warped and selfish needs.

respectively of the population, as also having a large populous in the Hindu heartland including Bihar, MP and Rajasthan any wonder our Parties are desperate. All are falling over each other in positioning Ambedkarism as the ideological alternative to Gandhism. as vote-banks on caste lines are easier to build.

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Maharashtra to Manipur communal and caste explosions and exploitations rule the roost with parties defining it according to its own warped and selfish needs.

Not just that. With everyone propounding their own recipes of communal and caste harmony, the nation is getting sucked into the vortex of centrifugal bickering. So caught up are our leaders in their frenzied pursuit of political nirvana through separatism that they confuse themselves.

Touch any sphere of national life --- political, social, economic, administrative, educational

Mulayam and Mayawati. If Lalu kid gloved the forwards with his massive backward following, Mulayam played his Yadav and Muslim card to the hilt in Government and judicial appointments.

Mayawati reveled in “transfer Raj”, replacing many upper caste officers by Dalit officials thereby, giving the rootless down-trodden a new identity and attitudinal changes. Think. Today, Bihar resembles a battle ground of caste senas. If yesterday it was a tussle between the Ranveer Sena, private Army of Upper caste landlords vs the Left, Marxist Communist Centre today it is the Jai Shri Ram Sena, which has just been floated to defend farmers, against the two. All merrily turning Bihar into the killing fields!

Clearly, our leaders are either unable or unwilling to break out of the caste mould. In the long run, this is bound to increase dissatisfaction all around. By making noises and finding a scapegoat, our polity runs the risk of changing major political alignments on caste lines, forgetting that it is equally

dangerous to indulge in the ongoing political power games passed on caste rivalries. By that token, the whole social reform movement will become meaningless. It is clear that if political consciousness terminates at the caste level, divisive caste combinations will continue to dominate Indian politics. Granted it will be suicidal not to take cognizance of the new found political aspirations of the backward castes. At the same time, it is equally dangerous to indulge in the ongoing political power games based on caste and communal considerations.

Alas, with all merrily playing the caste zero sum game it is now difficult to recognize India as the same country which Emerson described as the “summit of human thought.” The time has come to undergo catharsis --- a course in emptive cleansing and in cementing a cohesive society. The moment for soul searching, not soul searing away from the electioneering fields is now!

Where do we go from here? It all depends on whether the Government is willing to get rid of its excess baggage of casteisms which is caught in the vortex of vote bankism. It remains to be seen who will come up trumps in this “battle of ideologies for a new India”

Undoubtedly, India stands testimony to the fact that power in privilege stands further transformed through electoral competition into power in numbers. Time now for our petty power-at-all cost polity to think beyond vote-bank politics and look at the long-term implications because if this is not arrested it could well boomerang on them and spell danger to our democracy.

Our leaders need to ponder over Ambedkar’s wise assertion, “An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise both will wither and die”. So instead of going through the circus of hypocritical drivels of crooning his legacy we need to see actions rather than words. India and its citizens deserve a lot better. What gives? ----- INFA

Cambridge Analytica
Compromising our democracy?

By Dr. D.K. Giri

A few weeks ago, India was stung by an ‘expose’ that a foreign company, Cambridge Analytica, was data mining and manipulating electoral strategies and outcomes. It was followed by heated media debates between political parties. After the media and party spokespersons let off steam, the controversy seemed to die down. But if the outcry in the media of compromising our India were to be heeded seriously, the issue has longer and deeper significance for our politics, and therefore, it merits our continued attention and engagement.

After the ‘expose’ political parties as usual have jumped into finger-pointing blame game. Mud was slung between the NDA in Bihar namely JD(U), and BJP, and the Congress. Both accused each other of compromising our data security, making us vulnerable to foreign manipulation, and to top it all, compromising India’s democracy. What was worse, one of the parties gave 800 crore Indian rupees to the company to do these, all in the name of helping the “parties” win elections.

Let us recall the unsavoury episode and draw our lessons from it. Cambridge Analytica is a political consultancy in the UK. It was formed in 2013, as Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), which happens to be its parent company. In India, it operated as an Indian company called, Strategic Communication Private Limited with four directors on board -- Alexander James Nix, Alexandar Waddington Oakes, Amrish Kumar Tyagi and Avneesh Kumar Rai.

The two Indians on Board provide the context for the controversy. Amrish Kumar Tyagi is the son of KC Tyagi, a JDU leader; He also runs Ovleno Business Intelligence, which works with Cambridge Analytica in India. Avneesh Rai, a freelance election consultant, got SCL to come and study a constituency he worked for. Dan Muresan, the SCL head of elections, came with three others including Alexandar Oakes from the Behavioural Dynamics Institute, UK; Oakes later became one of the founding directors of SCL, India. Rai was mighty impressed with Muresan’s strategy and findings on the constituency where Rai’s client candidate had lost Parliament elections in 2009. He kept in touch with SCL, UK.

The SCL team consisting of Alexander Nix and Dan Muresan came to India in 2010, and discussed with Rai and Amrish to begin working in India by expanding what Rai was already doing, mainly using his database for many States. Meanwhile, SCL worked for Ghana elections and Rai and Tyagi in data analysis etc. Having done Ghana, SCL - Nix, Muresan, Rai, and Tyagi went looking for clients in India. They met politicians from both BJP and Congress.

SCL had no formal client, but was keen to demonstrate what it was worth. During their preparation, it emerged they were keen to take money from the Congress but were planning to defeat it! Nix was keen on making money somehow, so did not refrain from two-timing. Meanwhile, they found a client in one Indian businessman in America who wanted Congress to be defeated in Gujarat elections.

Apparently, the contract did not materialise owing to differences in SCL, India, about the methods of interviews, and data saving in servers. Rai found out that the questions meant for Congress support were creating doubts and misgivings about the party. Apparently, he felt it unethical to take money from a client and work for its defeat, whereas Nix wanted to make money anyhow. The second point of difference was data storage. Nix

brought some smart phones which were programmed to save the data in servers kept in US, not India. That amounted to stealing data.

Due to differences within SCL, between the UK team and Indian counterparts, their work did not take off. Rai claims that SCL work in India in 2003 for candidates, and 2010 in Bihar Assembly were added to lend credentials to SCL profile in India. These were not facts. Tyagi’s Business Intelligence continued to work with Cambridge Analytica, although Rai fell out with them and dissociated.

The latest buzz is that Cambridge Analytica had roped in a large Opposition party in India, allegedly, the Congress, for the 2019 elections. The Congress may have fallen for it, as Cambridge Analytica claims to have clinched the elections for Donald Trump through a targeted communication campaign. It is learnt that it “has chalked out a comprehensive plan for the Indian political party”. This is where the theory of paying Rs 800 crore fits in.

Obviously, the fact that Indian politicians may not be averse to using an election consultancy company that claims to have had success in Kenya, Ghana, US, and in some cases in India, may not be untrue. We have heard of ‘election guru’ Prashant Kishore claiming credit for BJP victory in 2014 Parliament elections and Nitish Kumar’s win in 2015 Bihar Assembly elections. His luck ran out in 2017, UP Assembly elections, when he tried to do the impossible, to secure victory for Congress, which has been a marginal player in UP politics for over quarter century. So, companies like Cambridge Analytica could be hired by Indian politicians and parties desperate to win.

What became unacceptable in India is the dubious style of the company like two-timing, and data stealing. It is believed SCL has 5.6 lakh of Indian data in its possession. Second, Christopher Wylie who replaced Dan Muresan in SCL, and later became the whistle blower revealed to the British House of Commons Committee that Muresan was ‘murdered’ in Kenya, perhaps for double-crossing. Third, SCL makes false claims and misuses names.

Apparently, BJP logo and party profile were found in SCL website although the party vehemently denies any links with the company. Likewise, it says it has Congress as its client, denying at the same time that their client was not a national party. He says, India is a big country, and SCL has had lots of projects in India. Yet, there are counter-factual versions that SCL never worked in India. It was shown that even Rahul Gandhi could have met SCL officials although the authenticity of the clip cannot be ascertained. Yet, the new found image of Rahul and their entirely new political strategy is attributed to SCL consultancy.

All in all, the company and its dealings are shrouded in mystery, and mired in controversies. The company has unethical style and non-transparent behaviour. It is accused of data laundering as they claim “data drives all they do”. They work mainly for right-wing parties and conservative ideas etc. The UK has banned their work. Why is India courting it?

The lesson we must draw from here is that we must be wary of a foreign company which can have access to sensitive data, can manipulate voter behaviour, cause friction and regression in our society. If it is an Indian company, they will have fear of retribution, not a foreign company. So, let us embrace nationalism in saving our data, our culture and our natural behaviour. Shall we? These sustain our democracy. It is the internal values that would make any democracy vibrant not any external influence.---INFA

(The writer is Professor, International Politics, JMI)

TO THE EDITOR

Don’t delay justice for rape victims

Editor,
There has been a lot of hue and cry on the rape and murder related reports across the country. Not a single day passes when such reports are not flashed in the print and electronic media. The number of cases, it seems, have gone up especially after the “Nirbhaya episode” when the entire nation stood and protested in one voice for punishment to the perpetrators of the crime. Once a case is reported, then not a single day passes without protests but where is the justice? So far how many have been convicted? There should be special courts where quick justice is given to the victims of such heinous crimes and the culprits be given stringent punishment like death sentence or severing of their genitals. The Government & the Judiciary should be alert in dealing with such cases and allow no delay
Yours etc.,
S.L. Singhania,
Via email

Women makes us proud!

Editor,
Women have been subjugated by making them live under a manufactured halo of machismo in a misogynistic society where the word "effeminate" is used as an abuse. Moreover, they have no right to perform the last rites of their parents. All these myths have made such a dent in our mindsets that many Indian parents - rich or poor - want to have a male child. This causes girl foeticide and infanticide which make child sex ratio (0-6 years) come down from 945 girls for 1000 boys in 1991 to 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011 census.

Amid such a horrible scenario of killing of daughters in a society which fails to appreciate that women have as much potentialities as their male counterparts, Indian women weightlifters, shooters, paddlers, boxers and shuttlers have bagged gold medals for our country in the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast. Hats off to Mirabai Chanu,

Sanjita Chanu, Punam Yadav, Manika Batra, Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal, Manu Bhaker, Heena Sidhu, Apurvi Chandela, Tejaswini Satawam, Anjum Moudgil, Shreyasi Singh, Mehuli Ghosh and others for their golden performances at CWG.

Each of their medals must make those parents who have killed their daughters realize that they are not only cruel but stupid as well.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Disturbing trend of rape & sexual crimes!

Editor,
Day by day the disturbing incidents of rape and molestation are increasing. Even more disturbing is the gruesomeness in which the crimes are being committed. Rape is being used as an instrument of settling communal grudges. What is appalling is minor girls who are yet to differentiate between male and female

are being raped by people fit to be their grandparents!

As a society we need to deeply ponder what may be amiss in our social or human upbringing that has led to this abysmal moral decadence. Is it the casual attitude towards such heinous crimes or the lack of deterrent punishment that such crimes are sky-rocketting with each passing day? Our legislators also need to play a sensible role here and should know that this is not the time to play the blame game as to which community is responsible and which community is the victim. Rape is one of the gravest of human crimes and calls for the severest of action and hardest of reforms to purge such vileness from the society.

Yours etc.
Sadiq Hussain Laskar,
Guwahati

Data leaks via Facebook!

Editor
Mark Zuckerberg as the CEO of Facebook and allied

groups has made unprecedented amount of money and is known to be a dedicated and caring family man. Yet when it comes to data fraud steaming from his own organization and numerous cases of serious Facebook and other social media platforms being used in communal brain washing, criminal activities, stalking and espionage activities, character assassinations, personal humiliations, disrespectful and hateful comments directed towards specific nations, communities and individuals, very little has been done by this superbly intelligent ‘so called’ family man. Zuckerberg only cares for his business profits and has never shown or taken any responsibility towards illegal, illogical, dangerous and negative use of his social media platform. Now as the data fraud heat is burning his company he has hidden behind a veil of silence and will certainly talk about his innocence and non involvement with the process. While Face book has made this world into a

global village it has also damaged millions of people and their lives and livelihood. With the data leak from his dedicated customers, Zuckerberg needs to be brought to justice and tried for his alleged role in illegally sharing customer information with other vendors with economic and political interests with serious allegations like data theft and data manipulation. This is a crime against humanity. Facebook compromised security, dignity and personal information of millions of people who trusted Zuckerberg as an honest businessman and a dedicated and responsible family man. We are all equal in this world; but some are more equal than others!

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB
Canada

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.

“ *What’s taken God 200 years to create was wiped out in a couple of days by what was apparently an arsonist, And it just shows you what a sick world we live in nowadays. ”*

--- Bill Janklow

The Shillong Times

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Slow wheels of justice

PUBLIC memory is indeed very short. The spate of condemnations over the Kathua and Unnao rape cases have taken centre-stage even while similar cases of rape and murder in our own state of Meghalaya remain unsolved. There have been reports of sexual crimes from Garo Hills that are shocking beyond words. The latest being the rape of a 7-year old girl by no less a person than her own grandfather. There is no respite for the girl-child even in a matrilineal society! The case of former MLA, Julius Dorphang who was booked under the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for raping a minor girl is still hanging fire. It is learnt that Dorphang is regularly on parole to attend social functions in his erstwhile constituency and that there are attempts to allegedly fudge papers to prove that the rape victim is not a minor so as to get out of the POCSO net.

There is a culture of impunity and a perverse expression of masculinity across the country today which is frightening. Now even school going girl-students feel a sense of insecurity and express that to the media. What could have deterred these crimes is a justice system that treats such cases against womanhood as a priority and delivers stern and quick judgment. As of today, rape cases go on for years and the survivors and their family members are subjected to the rigmarole of several court appearances. This happens even in the cases booked under POCSO. So where is justice for children subjected to the most heinous crime of rape often followed by murder?

In a democracy the citizenry is expected to be ever vigilant and to keep the state and its institutions on their toes including the judiciary which also should be held accountable. Many rape cases are gathering dust in the District Councils courts even while rape victims give up hopes of ever getting justice. The Government has to take a considered view of this matter and the fast track courts should function at the earliest.

LOOKING BACK

May 10, 1989

Extent of donations unclear

Janata Dal president Mr V P Singh today said his party had not yet decided on the extent of donations that could be accepted from big industrial houses. Mr Singh, who came here to participate in a seminar on 'national alternative' organized as part of the national conference of the Students federa-

tion of India (SFI), students wing of the CPI (M), told news men here that 'we would, however, not accept lump sum donations. Mr Singh said his party wanted to be people oriented by accepting donations from them and was against compromising with the industrialists.

In the image of man he created Him

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The Book of Genesis in the Bible says, “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him...” In the religious practices in all times and all places, God is portrayed in the image of human beings. So in practice, man created God in his own image; in the image of man he created Him. The gods of the Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Egyptians, Babylonians and others, are in the image of human beings. This is true of all religions in the world including Christianity. The Bible says that God sent his only Son into the world; in the form of a human being He sent Him, so that human beings can worship God in Emmanuel who is God in their midst, and in their own image.

Hindus worship God in the image of humans and animals because according to Hinduism everything is a manifestation of the Supreme Being. Indeed, man is said to be none other than the Supreme Being himself if he acquires ultimate spiritual realisation. Hence, every spiritually realised person is God incarnate and worthy of worship. But the way to achieve spiritual realisation is through self denial and mortifications and ultimately attained through intimate and personal initiation at the feet of a Guru who is in the hierarchy of disciplic succession. So, without reservations, disciples should accept and worship the Guru as God himself, and the Guru worships the Gurus before him who are alive or dead, but in the line of disciplic succession. But, the presence of self-proclaimed celebrity god-men in India, who possess mysterious powers and able to garner huge number of devotees, though sometimes they are evil and criminal in nature is a riddle to the common conscience.

Besides the institutional worship of God in visible image, there is in every race and tribe a universal concept of God Almighty that transcends all cultural and religious barriers. The Khasis too, believe that there is one Almighty God who has no personal name and represented by no image, but simply addressed to as ‘u Blei Trai Kynrad’ (God, Lord and Master) who is God not only for the Khasis, but for the whole human race and all His creation. But, the Khasi word ‘blei’ is applied not only to God Almighty, but also to all good and benevolent spiritual beings who are the deities particular to clans, ‘Raid’ or

‘Hima,’ and who may be one ‘u blei’ (male) or ‘ka blei’ (female), or many ‘ki blei’ (plural). The spirit the ancestress of the clan is also addressed to as ‘ka blei-iawbai.’ But the term ‘u Trai Kynrad,’ refers only to one God Almighty, who is always addressed to in male term. In Khasi concept, there cannot be ‘ki Trai Kynrad’ (plural), or ‘ka Trai Kynrad’ (female). But to set the gender balance, ‘u Trai Kynrad’ is believed to deal with human affairs only through his attributes, ‘ka Hukum,’ ‘ka Synshar,’ and ‘ka Hok’ who are addressed to in female term but have no personal names and represented by no image. Moreover, these attributes are not seen as the wives or consorts of a supreme male God as in other religions, but always independently in mother concept, with no gender relation to ‘u Trai Kynrad. Therefore, the proper translation of the concept of ‘God Almighty’ in Khasi, is not ‘u Blei’ as commonly interpreted, but it should be ‘u Trai Kynrad’ or ‘u Tre Kirod’ (in Pnar dialect), which means ‘Lord the Master’ who is the universal God of all mankind.

History shows that there is no religion in the proper sense, in a direct relationship between human beings and God without a cult. A ‘cult’ in this context is any established relationship between this world and the world beyond whether it is a religion, a magic, or a spiritual healing, and whether it is for doing good or for doing evil, and operationalized through covenants in the personal names of certain spiritual intermediaries. Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions have different cults because the covenants and the personal names of spirits of Prophets, Gurus or Saints involved in the worship for intercession are different.

In every cult there is a community of spirits. In Hinduism it consists in the disciplic succession of Gurus, in the Catholic Church it is understood as the ‘Communion of Saints’. This is true also of the religion of the Khasis. With due respect to the opinion of other Khasi thinkers, I would like to state that there is no institutional religious rite or worship offered directly to God Almighty among the Khasis. Besides the firm belief in the existence of God Almighty which

the Khasis observe individually and personally in their hearts, religious rites are performed only in relations to benevolent spiritual beings such as the spirits of ancestors, and ‘ki blei ki dken’ (gods and goddesses) of particular clans or particular community with due sanction from God Almighty.

In the Khasi clan religion, the disciplic succession of Gurus or the Communion of Saints consists in the spirits of ‘ka Iawbei,’ ‘u Suidnia’ and spirits of other ancestors of the clan. The human body is formed in the Mother’s womb, and God poured forth His élan vital therein to create a human being. So, the Khasis believe that there is no being more worthy to intercede between man and God other than the spirit of the Mother who is related to the clan members by the covenant of birth and blood relation. That is the principle on which the Khasi clan religious cult was instituted in the personal names of ‘ka Iawbei’ along with ‘u Suidnia’ and other ancestors. Hence, though the Khasis do not worship God Almighty in the bodily image of human beings, but they maintain relationship with Him through a good moral life, and in reverential observance of rites and ceremonies in the institutionalised clan religion under the names and spiritual image of ‘ka Iawbei’ and ‘u Suidnia.’

There is much talk today about materialism, hypocrisy, corruptions and even crimes in the institutionalised religions, including Christianity. Most Church leaders, of whatever denominations, seem to have lost the treasures of heaven to feed the hungry souls and maintain only ostentatious demeanour through market-driven festivities and the treasures of the earth to feed the materialistic minds. Hence, religion is sought more for individualistic material wellbeing than for the salvation of the soul.

The Churches seem to function as the culture bearers of Western thoughts, attitudes and lifestyles, and we as Christians in poor societies ape as western celebrity evangelists and culturally reformed beings as opposed to the poor and marginalised who are seen as miserable, wicked and uncultured nonbelievers; and identified almost as outcaste and condemned sinners. This is so because Jesus words: “I have come

that you may have life; and have it abundantly” (John 10: 10), is being misinterpreted to mean material prosperity instead of spiritual fulfilment. Hence, today it seems that material prosperity and superficial display of nobility and gentleness are synonymous with a good Christian life, even in the midst of injustice, poverty and wretchedness - a new human image of God!

There is nothing spiritually or morally superior in Western culture, but it is indeed materially attractive because it is subtly interwoven with opulence and unrestraint freedom - an alluring version of ‘abundant life’! The richer and more powerful a person is, the better he/she is rated as a Christian, and the more blessings he/she receives from the Church leadership. Wealth, power, fame, and luxurious lifestyles amidst poverty, discriminations and inequality, are not characteristics of the ‘kingdom come,’ but are the selective gifts of the unjust social systems - it all belongs to Caesar. But we dare to justify these social inequalities and injustice as the selective blessings of God!

Collective and institutionalised faith and worship are indispensable for spiritual and moral guidance of the individuals. But unfortunately, when an institution is established it acquires an identity of its own apart from God and apart from man; and the image of the institution with its hierarchy stands prominently above all else. To maintain a religious institution, it requires more of the treasures of the earth than the treasures of heaven, and it is for the treasures of the earth that religious institutions need to align with business and politics even if it entails hypocrisy, injustice, corruption and fraud.

All said and done, I personally believe that God is also directly concerned with every human individual apart from the rites and ceremonies of institutionalised religions. A sparrow will not fall to the ground without God’s consent; and in the eyes of God, human beings, whether honourable or wretched, worth much more than the birds of the sky and the flowers of the fields.

Rip apart the roots of Rape

By Herocles TR Kharmujai

Year of Psychos

If like the Chinese, India was to have a calendar, I strongly believe at first thought, that it would be the year of animals, but on a second thoughts I realize animals are more controlled and sensible than the sociopaths, sexual predators and paedophiles who have a decent jobs, wear decent clothes claiming to be one in union with civilized society. But the truth is that they are just a bunch of sociopaths lurking and terrorizing inhabitants of a free society.

Vulnerable sounds like an Oppression

As an avid reader and listener of ‘social issues’, I try to keep myself as ‘calm as a woman’ and ‘ignorant as a child’, but when a social group is at stake, I can’t help but try to stand up and raise my voice to point out an opinion on a social issue. Let me affirm that at this point women and children used to be subjects associated with vulnerability, but I guess not anymore because vulnerability sounds correct when it comes out of the mouth of a protector of social rights but sounds absurd and incorrect when expressed by a society or nation that ticks on sexism, patriarchal oppression and violence against women and children.

A wake up call

As news was doing the rounds on the Kathua and Unnao rape cases (I am sure by now you are all aware of the details) the country saw a rampant rage. Social media was flooded by viral posts about the incident #JusticeForAsifa #KathuaRapeCase #UnnaoRapeCase. Non-profit organizations started petitions to gain mass support and the incident caught national and international attention too. States have also started prohibiting BJP MLA’s from entering premises where minor girls are dwelling. Some nation has started Anti-India ‘slogans’ and ‘campaigns’ simultaneously. If as a nation we don’t wake up now, then this country shall cease to exist as a nation that constituted, amended and adopted “We, the People of India having solemnly resolved to constitute, “India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic and to secure to all its citizens.....”

Facade of Rape

Rape from time to time has been associated to many casual factors by different political groups. At present they have referred the reasons for rape to – lifestyle, dressing sense and social life. Now with the 8 year old rape victim an innocent, village resident and simply dressed child what reasons do the perpetrators and supporters of the rapists (carrying the national flag) trot out? Community? Caste? Religion? I guess as Indians we just read the Pre-amble of the Indian constitution and never understood and put into practice in our civil life.

Rape records point to victim’s relatives

According to latest reports from The Quint in 2016, India recorded 106 rapes a day and four of every ten victims are minors. The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB)’s Crime in 2016 reveals that in 94.6 percent cases, the perpetrators where none other than the victim’s relatives. The report also showed that, a total of 38,947 cases of rape were registered in the country under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) as well as section 376 and other related sections of the Indian Penal Code. Of the 38,947 cases, the accused in 36,859 are related to the victims.

The NCRB figures also indicate that more and more

rapes are being reported every year.

Accountability of Rape

Charity at home: If we are to keep a reality check on violence and crime against women, the dominating side has always been men. The utmost reason being man ponders himself to be the bread earner, and because he is the bread provider he takes on the role of a decision maker and when his decisions are not conceded to then he uses his capability of imposing physical strength over a woman. Man in this process of climbing the evil ladder forgets that he is the protector and care taker too, which is the positive and brighter side of his being. If only we could try to address the issue at its nascent stage then we can we rip apart the roots of Rape from the society.

Corrupt Soul

Corrupting one’s being personally or socially is the route to all kinds of evils. Dr. Shashi Tharoor in his writing often reminds Indians that ‘the singular thing about India, is that you can only speak of it in the plural’. The plurality attributes of the country are due to its ‘unity in diversity’ existence. Corruption is an alarming issue, a corrupt soul with corrupt ideologies (material/non-material) that contemplates on social issues (race, creed, caste, community, and gender) to put forward a political or personal agenda across. So as a concerned individual, as youths and as citizens of the nation we should take it as our sole duty to challenge corruption and work on not allowing oneself or an external body to corrupt one’s soul. Only then can we rip apart the roots of Rape from the country.

Future Perspective

As a Nation: which is going to celebrate its 71st Independence Day it is high time we understood the true essence of gender equality, equity and the value of proportionate balance of power among the two gender groups. Only a mutual correlation between the two genders is what can bring equilibrium in society.

Man’s role

As men we should take it as our individual responsibility to secure the rights and protection of women and especially children. And most importantly as men we should constantly accept women- their decisions, lifestyles and most importantly respect them in every way.

As justice seekers:

Individuals, government, non-government organizations, legal, media representatives and citizens should address issues when the topic is at its peak and not let it die away until justice is achieved. One Nirbhaya and one Asifa are enough to lose. When justice cries for support; when deep within your inner self you believe you can contribute to a greater good, when you whole heartedly believe that good needs to triumph over evil, so that the latter does not take a dominant position, then take a stand. As law abiding citizens all we can do is unite in seeking justice for the social good of all.

To conclude, “There is a higher court than the courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supercedes all other courts.” As Mahatma Gandhi contemplated on conscience superceding justice, the former being the foremost ground where matters are always first addressed. So, as individual citizens we should cultivate and nurture a constructive and spirited conscience, only then can we rip apart the roots of Rape from the world.

TO THE EDITOR

A dastardly act!

Editor,
I write to strongly condemn the petrol bomb attack on Kong Patricia Mukhim’s residence on the night of 17 April, 2018. This was not just an attack on the Editor of The Shillong Times but also an attack on the free press, an attack on civil society and an attack on our God-given, Constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of expression. You have rendered tremendous service to society through your courageous writing and efficient editorship. No issue, no public figure, no institution, no organization has been beyond the reach of your comment and criticism, even during those dark days of militancy.

This does not mean that we readers agree with everything you write or accept everything you prescribe. But on the whole the public acknowledges your courage to challenge power, privilege and prejudice. And we appreciate your commitment to the preservation of that precious liberal space, which is under siege in our country right now. The perpetrators of this attack may think themselves heroes of their cause but they’re actually losers who

cannot counter word with word, writing with writing, argument with argument. I hope and pray that the perpetrators will be quickly dealt with according to law.

May you and other journalists never be intimidated but may you draw strength and courage from the outpouring of support for the free press.

Yours etc.,
Rev. Lyndan Syiem,
Shillong

An act of terrorism

Editor,
As citizens and human beings we are shocked at the attack on the home of Patricia Mukhim. While the newspapers and news channels carry news of tragic violence every day and on the hour, it strikes a different chord when it happens in our neighbourhood and to someone we know. The Northeast has grown accustomed to all sorts of violence, but attacks on journalists have been few. Humanity and civilization suffers grievous harm when messengers, artists or musicians suffer assault or assassination.

The murder of John Lennon, the vitriolic attacks

on MF Hussain, and the slaying of Gauri Lankesh are only a few examples that demonstrate the degeneration of our so-called civilized society. That Patricia Mukhim, the region’s leading journalist and the conscience keeper of our community has become a target are indicators of the poverty of public morals and the crass indecencies that creep into democracy. This deterioration all over the country stems from the willful neglect and indeed the egging on by political leadership that emboldens lumpen elements into violent acts against those who question abuse of power. Malcontent organizations whose aspirations have been thwarted by decent society also resort to violence.

Instead of the usual liturgy of condemnations, investigations and wringing of hands, we urge the government to make quick progress in identifying the perpetrators and bringing them swiftly to book. The hasty use of words like ‘miscreants’ by the media may be premature and ill-advised. They imply that the criminals acted alone. Such attacks are often carried out by hitmen who are criminal fronts for well-oiled organi-

zations.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C Kharkongor,
Via email

Petrol bomb attack!

Editor,
A heinous and cowardly act by the attackers in hurling a petrol bomb at the residence of ST Editor is highly condemnable . The culprits should be immediately apprehended by the police and severe punishment should be given to them. The reason for this attack is insignificant, but this grotesque act, specifically in the context of attack on a " JOURNALIST" is the main issue here . Moreover, that the culprits have targeted a woman is the burning issue here. I personally condemn this cowardly act from the core of my heart

Yours etc.,
Anjan Kumar Das
Shillong -6

Justice for rape victims

Editor,
Salil Gewali’s letter ‘Shoot the rapist at sight’ has shaken the modern fabric of our society. The thin

line between secularism and religion has completely vanished into thin air. The horrendous act of raping the innocent child in Kathua, and for that matter, the raping of children and women all over India should not be tolerated at any cost, though they may belong to castes and creeds different from our own. The sad part is that the rapists are tolerated and excused almost all the time in our country. Against this backdrop, the images of men wearing t-shirts about the safety of women in India, becomes a rather ironic eye-opener. Despite such symbolic gestures, the fact remains that women in India have actually become mere playthings at the hands of those brutes whose interest is only to quench their barbaric and lustful desire.

If only all Indian men understand and appreciate the role of women as mother, wife, sister and daughter! If they do, then the moral ethics of the country would not have deteriorated to this extent where the repeated gang rape and murder of a little girl cannot even move the hearts of those who can only see her as a Muslim and not as a victim of a horrible crime. As they say, ours is a

country where eating meat in front of a place of worship is an offence punishable by mob justice, but where rape inside it is not, because the victim does not belong to the same religion and does not worship the same god. This is something that all of us must be ashamed of. This is something that all of us must be angry about. We must stand up and protest against such heinous crimes with all the force in our command and we must also demand speedy justice for Asifa and all those victims who had suffered the same fate over the years. If we don’t rise up collectively; if we don’t protest with one voice, the culprits of such monstrous deeds will get away scot free again, thus encouraging them and others to repeat the crime again and again.

My heart goes out to Asifa and victims like her all over the country. I pray for their souls’ eternal repose, but I also demand that they be given the justice that they deserve without any further delay.

Yours etc.,
Christene Nongbet,
Umsning

"A dream is a scripture, and many scriptures are nothing but dreams."
--- Zadok Rabinwitz

The Shillong Times

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US -North Korea summit

US President Donald Trump who was eager to meet the North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un some weeks ago is now having mixed feelings about that summit meeting. Trump has now declared that he would pull out of the meeting if his diplomatic overture was unlikely to be successful. He seems to have realised a bit late that Kim Jong-un is a slippery customer and inscrutable to say the least. Trump has decided to depute CIA director, Mike Pompeo instead to meet Kim and lay the groundwork for the proposed summit. Pompeo was nominated Secretary of State in March this year. The US President is hamstrung by the fact that three American citizens are detained in North Korea. The US is now trying to obtain their release although Trump would not make that a pre-condition for his meeting with Kim. Trump also did not seek any new concessions from North Korea. The US President’s turn-around is interesting, considering he had threatened to go to war against North Korea some months ago.

Meanwhile Pompeo is expected to broker a deal that would be in the interest of both countries and something that Kim cannot refuse. What the US is looking at is de-nuclearisation of the world and of North Korea in particular. But whether this will really fructify is a good question considering Pompeo’s lack of diplomatic skills, having been in the CIA for the larger part of his career. Pompeo’s meeting with Kim on Sunday last did not yield the desired results. The three Korean- Americans are still under detention on charges of espionage against North Korea. The date and venue of the Trump-Kim summit has not yet been fixed. It would appear that for the first time the US is handling a tough head of state. Kim Jong-un is not an easy customer to negotiate deals with.

LOOKING BACK
May 20, 1989

Over one lakh people without shelter

The actual housing shortfall in the State as estimated by the National Building Organisation is 1-69 lakhs, Meghalaya Minister of Housing Mr Armission Marak told the Regional Conference of Housing Secretaries and Chief Executives of Housing agencies of the North East at Shillong on Friday. The State Plan budget, which is the main source of financing housing activities in the State is very inadequate, and the State Apex Cooperative Housing Society formed in 1976 with 31 primary housing cooperative societies has so far been able to give loans amounting to a mere 72.52 lakhs to about 248 tribal

families. The Meghalaya State Housing Board was set up in January 1986 to tap financial institutions like HUDCO, Mr Marak said. The Minister also submitted that housing finance should be made available at three percent interest payable over a thirty year period as in many developed countries. Chief of the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) Mr .B.K. Chakravarty said that it was with a view to assist the North Eastern states that HUDCO had upgraded its Guwahati Office into a regional office.

Why this culture of impunity

By Patricia Mukhim

Humans evolved from the primitive stage of, ‘might is right’ to the worship of nature, of gods and goddesses and then to the stage where they subjugated themselves before kings and rulers. In England kings were believed to be divinely appointed hence people subjugated themselves before these monarchs. At the time governance was thought to be a divinely ordained responsibility and people had no right to question how their kings or queens ruled. The rulers in turn provided justice and protection to the subjects in return for their obedience. It was a quid pro quo.

Then came the period of enlightenment which started from the mid seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century when there was a shift from religious based ideology to the age of reason or scientific enquiry. This age of enlightenment ushered in the social contract theory propounded by Thomas Hobbes. This theory is essentially an agreement made amongst individuals to bring about an organised society. It is also the forerunner to the idea of the ‘state’ – a system of government which had authority over a geographical area. This move from a stateless society to a more orderly one, when citizens respect and obey the rules laid down by the state, by signing a social contract, is the beginning of the rule of law. This social contract obliges the citizens to respect and obey the state in exchange for stability and security. The shift from a primitive existence of ‘might is right’ to that of an orderly society is monumental and it prefaces the political life we have today where humans are guided by natural laws ostensibly so that they proceed towards a developed social and political life.

Hobbes believed that in the absence of a state, human beings would react to each other with savagery since humans were equally able to kill each other and thereby live in a constant state of insecurity. They would therefore crave for law and order for their own protection. They would also agree to place someone in authority to tell them what to do. Hobbes suggested that a number of people would appoint a king for the sole purpose of ordering their lives and for that to happen the arbitrary power of individuals would be taken

away from them and vested in one person – the ruler. This ruler would have absolute right to make whatever laws he wants and owes no responsibility to the individuals other than to maintain law and order. Hobbes was therefore an apologist for an authoritarian form of government.

From the Hobbesian age we progressed to the age of democracy where one single ruler was replaced by a set of elected representatives of the people called “public servants.” There are many claims and counter-claims about the genesis of democracy as it is practised today but the Constitution of the United States of America, adopted in 1788, provides the world’s first formal blueprint for a modern democracy. India adopted the Westminster model of democracy, ironically borrowed from a colonial power that held sway over it for over two hundred years. India is not a natural democracy. It is a country that was ruled by rajahs and maharajahs; it practiced and continues to practise a caste system and hence was hierarchical in nature. The tribes within the country had a different social arrangement from that of the mainstream polity. This diversity of faith and societal organisation continues to be a thorn in the flesh of this country even as different groups assert their rights over others and defy the prescribed laws that come with democracy. It is my belief that India has never been a full- fledged democracy since there are still so many inequalities in society and not all citizens have equal rights.

In a country steeped in patriarchy it would be wrong to surmise that women enjoy equal rights as men. This unequal and unjust system is exposed in the way women are objectified. This objectification makes it easy for men to rape and molest women and now, increasingly young girls. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has belatedly given a call not to politicise rape cases. But the fact that politicians are perpetrators or rape and cock a snook at the rule of law, a la Kuldeep Singh Sengar a BJP MLA from Unnao, Uttar Pradesh who raped a 17-year old minor girl, cannot but take

away the stench of politics from the crime of rape. Had Sengar been arrested after the minor girl’s father lodged an FIR against him and had the rule of law taken its due course there would not have been any reason to turn the case into a political football. But the law was aborted in this case because Sengar is an MLA of the ruling party. On the contrary the father of the minor girl paid a price because the law enforcers turned on him instead. What greater injustice can there be? It took a nationwide protest before the Allahabad High Court ordered the CBI to arrest Sengar and proceed with the investigations.

In this country today we are seeing a culture of impunity which is frightening because the social contract signed by the citizen ceding her rights to the state is now broken by the state. Increasingly we see individual states failing to maintain law and order - a state subject. In militancy/ insurgency affected states there are para-military and central reserved police forces by the thousands because the state police have been compromised or have become political tools. The police too forget their training once they are deployed for law and order duty. They serve the political class and treat all others as second class citizens because that is perhaps the only way to climb the up the promotional ladder. We no longer hear of officers like the recently deceased EN Rammohan and KPS Gill who left behind a legacy. Although Mr Gill has been put through the wringer for human rights abuses and encounter killings, the fact remains that extraordinary situations require extraordinary measures. The Punjab insurgency would not have been contained without those harsh actions. That’s the price people in insurgency hit states anywhere have to pay. In insurgency affected states, the normal law and order protocols don’t work. However, using the military too is not an option. This is India’s greatest shame – to use its military to kill its own people.

It was to avoid militarisation of the civic space that in 1994-95 onwards when insurgency hit Meghalaya real hard, some of us started a people’s movement - Shillong We Care - and stood up against

the militant outfit – HNLC. It is true that the then Government too gave police a free hand to tackle militancy. Indeed, if militancy had been allowed to escalate then as it had in Manipur and Assam we would have lost many more lives to collateral damage. The military would have been called in and human rights violations could not have been averted.

Today we are witnessing a climate of impunity gaining ground in Meghalaya. There are regular reports of arson in Mawprem area (West Shillong Constituency). Shops are gutted, petrol bombs are thrown at selected houses and at vehicles but no arrests are made. At first we thought these to be election-related criminal activities but they persist even after the elections. Why? If the criminals are arrested we would be in a better position to understand why these cases of arson happen and who is orchestrating them. In this one also feels that the Dorbar Shnong ought to be more assertive and take responsibility for the crimes that happen within their jurisdictions. Isn’t that why there is supposed to be regular police-public interface to facilitate community policing? However, community policing is possible only when the community is cohesive – not fragmented. The idea of community in Mawprem is now a fiction.

If communities begin to fragment (tribal, non-tribal) in other areas of the city as well, we will only have further deterioration of law and order. The climate of impunity requires a certain climate in which to thrive. Politicians should not interfere in arrests made by police. Politicians should desist from using criminal elements during elections because these are Frankensteins that cannot be pulled back like the genie into the bottle. They will continue to be used as mercenaries. The police ought to be reminded too that their role is to secure the lives of the public and not that of politicians and the powerful only. People today feel vulnerable when criminals roam free. The MDA Government has a huge task to rebuild the image of the police in Meghalaya.

Guv Banwarilal, his cheeky pat and Mother India Purohit in the eye of a storm over Woman Journalist

By Sushil Kutty

In the movie 'Mother' India the resident 'lech' was named Sukhilal. In Tamil Nadu, Governor Banwarilal Purohit steals a cheeky pat on a woman journalist’s cheek and Mother India explodes in righteous indignation – brackets Banwarilal in the company of Sukhilal, names that have gone out of fashion.

It is being said Governor Banwarilal Purohit should have taken the permission of the journalist before extending the patting hand. Handshakes are par for the course. Even a casual pat on the back is OK. But cheeky pats on the cheek are forbidden fruit, how dare you?

It happened at a press conference in Raj Bhavan called to set the record straight after a woman professor arrested for her role in a sex scandal claimed she was “close” to Governor Banwarilal

people,” he told media before he broke through and made the ‘pat’. The moot point: the Governor can get through to the bird! Maybe governor Banwarilal was trying to make friends with women journalists, show them that he was the gentleman, the true Angrez sort. Women journalists had throughout the presser badgered him with a flurry of uncomfortably tough questions.

Not just journalists, even politicians are bashing him for the pat. Some journalists got together and drafted a missive to Governor Banwarilal, telling him in no uncertain terms that what he had done was a non-bailable offence.

“As the Constitutional head of our state of Tamil Nadu, you have crossed the lines of not just basic courtesy but also those of law,” they wrote to him.

These days any kid with the moniker Banwarilal would be the butt of a hundred and one cruel jokes and the teacher wouldn’t know how to get the poor kid out of the corner other than by ordering the bullies in class to stand in the corner till the class ends. Now, we heard that Governor Banwarilal was in a corner. Journalists in Tamil Nadu demanded from him an unconditional apology and got it too. This happened after journalist Lakshmi Subramanian tweeted a picture of the governor patting her cheek. Politicians and politicians-become-governors should know that getting cheeky with a Subramanian is fraught with risk.

Purohit. It turned out a case of ‘from the frying pan into the fire’ for Governor Purohit, every bit the priest by surname but definitely not one by his Sukhilal-type name – Banwarilal.

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Now, we heard that Governor Banwarilal was in a corner. Journalists in Tamil Nadu demanded from him an unconditional apology and got it too. This happened after journalist Lakshmi Subramanian tweeted a picture of the governor patting her cheek. Politicians and politicians-become-governors should know that getting cheeky with a Subramanian is fraught with risk.

And, by the way, did Governor Banwarilal wash his hands before he extended a hand to pat? Turns out ‘senior journalist’ Lakshmi Subramanian is like Donald Trump a Germophobic. “Washed my face several times. Still not able to rid of it. So agitated and angered Mr Governor Banwarilal Purohit. It might be an act of appreciation by you and grandfatherly attitude. But to me you are wrong,” she tweeted Tuesday.

At the press conference Governor Banwarilal Purohit dismissed the ‘lady’ professor’s claims that she was close to him. The professor was in the net for allegedly luring “girls” to do sexual favours for high varsity officials. Guv Banwarilal scoffed. “Not even a bird can get to me, I’m surrounded by my

“Even if the intention is above suspicion, a person who holds a high office has to understand that there is a decorum to it and violating a woman journalist’s personal space does not reflect the dignity or respect which should be shown to any human being.”

What to say? The journalist(s) who drafted the letter wouldn’t qualify to be a court clerk. Close, but even that will be an insult to the drafting skills of the court clerk. Such dry prose is fit to be tied and dropped in the stinking Coom. That said, even if a gesture is paternal in nature, touching a woman without her consent is a crime under the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Women Act, 1998. It is another matter that Tamil Cinema breaches the law in most every other frame.

But for politicians it was time to strike. DMK Raja Sabha MP Kanimozhi tweeted: “Even if the intention is above suspicion, a person who holds a public office” should have known he was doing wrong. But the other Subramanian, BJP politician and Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy, rose in support of Governor Banwarilal, stating that it was a “conspiracy” and that he (Swamy) knew well how Tamil politicians treated woman, “even Jayalalithaa”.

For now, the journalists have got their demand, an unconditional apology from Governor Banwarilal Purohit. But the moral of the story is to all adult men: Don’t extend a patting hand to women; pat will come response, with consequences, especially if you’ve a name that reminds people of actor Kanhaiyalal’s portrayal of Sukhilal in Mother India. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Arrest the culprits!

Editor,
The petrol bomb attack at the home of the Editor of the Shillong Times , Kong Patricia Mukhim could be a cowardly act of either some misfits in the society or perhaps an act of members of any organization who felt the pinch of the hard truth the Editor often bravely exposed through her writings and other expressions in her crusade for the benefits of the society at large. If through such intimidations the perpetrator of the crime think that they can create fear in the mind of the Editor and discourage her from taking her mission forward then they could be terribly wrong. Being public spirited as she is and a conscience keeper of the society I am sure that this will instead further embolden her and she will definitely get more and more support from the sane members of the society . The petrol bomb attack is a spineless act and is highly condemnable. It is hoped that the authorities concerned will nab the culprits quickly and follow

it up with stern punishment.

Yours etc.,
K.L. Tariang,
Via email

Freedom of the Press endangered

Editor,
I am still in a state of shock after reading the news about the petrol bomb attack at the residence of the Editor of the Shillong Times, Patricia Mukhim ("Petrol bomb attackers target ST Editor's house", ST, page - 1, April 18, 2018). Freedom of the Press is now in great danger. Journalists like Gouri Lankesh, Shantanu Bhowmik and K.J. Singh have been murdered in different parts of our country a few months ago. It tells a very sad tale of the present status of press freedom. Already, India has slipped three places in just one year from 133rd in 2016 to 136th in 2017 as per the World Press Freedom Ranking Index. It will be a bad day for democracy if the Press has to work in a reign of terror.

It is also a shame that we could not save rationalists like Narendra Davolkar, Govind Pansare, Malleshappa Kalburgi, Gouri Lankesh and others. This underscores the need for speedy criminal justice delivery system for the survival of our democracy. We must remember that democracy cannot survive without free press.

All of us must condemn dastardly petrol bomb attack on one of the leading voices of our country and demand immediate arrest of the culprits. Also, it is necessary to find out the force behind this cowardly act and to bring them to justice without delay.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

No respite for pedestrians

Editor,
Every year, come rainy seasons the roads in different areas of Shillong become waterlogged. The reason, of course, as everyone is aware is clogged drains or no drains at all. One such road which I travel on everyday is the road from

Lawmali Junction to Jaiaw Jingthang Brierw. As mentioned earlier, the areas just after crossing Lawmali Junction and the area just before reaching Jaiaw Jingthang Brierw junction accumulates water even in the slightest shower. This of course is a problem since time immemorial which successive Governments and local MLAs and MDCs who claim to represent the people have done nothing to improve, whatever it is that is needed to improve. Perhaps they represent only the people who own private vehicles.

On the right side of the road just after crossing Lawmali junction there is residue/mud/sand cleared from the drains just before the rainy seasons of 2017. Surprisingly the same has not been collected till date. Since there are no footpaths on either side of the road pedestrians are the ones mostly facing the problem. I feel sorry especially for school children who walk to school as sometimes there are motorists with an idiotic mindset who love to purposely drive fast in the waterlogged areas thereby splashing muddy water on the students. I had sometimes come across

such kids having to return home without making it to school as they are soaking wet with the filthy water. So whenever they use this stretch of road the pedestrians have to pray to God that the motorists use basic common sense or bear the brunt of getting splashed with filthy, muddy waters.

On the side of Wahumkhrach, along the entire stretch of the road, there are Guard Walls with a gap of 1(one) feet (approx) between them. So when the water gets too full on the road it can overflow into the river. Even then the water logging problem is intense when the rains are heavy. Recently, the State Government (as read vide report which appears in ST Dated 17-04-2018) had adopted various measures to save Wahumkhrach from mankind (who are not so kind) by erecting fences all along the river banks. It is observed, that to erect the fences they had to strengthen the Guard Wall by filling the 1(one) feet gap. In place of the wide gaps, 4 inch pipes were placed at strategic points all along the stretch of the road, perhaps to provide space for “free flow” of water from the road

to Wahumkhrach.

Now, common sense dictates that even with the big gap available earlier, water was not able to flow properly, thereby causing the road to be waterlogged, then it will not flow at all when the gaps are covered and replaced by these small 4 inch holes. I do not doubt the experts concerned and their expertise, but sometimes we simply just need to use common sense.

Therefore, I would request the Minister in-charge Urban Affairs and Minister in-charge PWD (Roads) to kindly take immediate necessary steps for –

(i) Easing the plight of pedestrians passing through this stretch of road – rain or no rain.

(ii) Proper mechanism for smooth/free flow of water in the said area during rainy seasons

(iii) Immediate clearance of the debris accumulated at the road side since 2017.

And I do hope that the “winds of change” come early for this purpose.

Yours Etc.,
Pyntngen Nongpluh,
Shillong -8

"If you take responsibility for yourself you will develop a hunger to accomplish your dreams."

--- John Barrymore

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.248 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2018

Attack on the Fourth Estate

MEDIA persons in Tamilnadu have risen in protest against senior BJP leader, S Ve Shekher’s abusive Facebook post and insulting remarks against women. Shekher has retracted the post saying that it was shared by mistake but the damage to the reputation of the scribes cannot be retrieved considering that screenshots of the post have gone viral. Now the BJP leader has conveniently shifted the blame to another Facebook friend. The post by Shekher was a sort of riposte to the incident in Tamilnadu where the Governor, Banwarilal Purohit had patted the cheek of a female journalist. The post that Shekher shared says, “These are the (unmentionable epithet) women who have come out to question the Governor. Media people are cheap, lowly, vulgar beings of Tamilnadu. There are only a few exceptions. I respect them only. Otherwise the whole of TN media is in a regressive path caught in the hands of criminals, rascals, blackmailers.”

The BJP’s antipathy for the media is no secret. It starts with the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi who has never given a press conference because he does not like to be questioned. If Modi gives an interview it is only to select channels of his choice who will show him a good light. That a section of the print and electronic media have become more like public relations wings of the ruling Party and Government are evident from the news slant. Media persons that critique the Government are trolled on social media by supporters of the ruling Party and Government. Media persons have also been under attack across the country and in our own state. Journalists are now easy targets and have become the most vulnerable lot with no protection whatsoever, and with their lives on the line. The Fourth Estate is integral to democracy. It is imperative that the public who is the consumer of news day after day, learns to stand up in solidarity with media professionals when they come under attack. The media, after all, informs and educates people about the performance of the executive and legislature and this allows them to make an informed choice about who they vote as their representatives. Without the media there is no democracy.

LOOKING BACK

May 20, 1989

Hedge demands setting of Lok Pal

Janata Dal vice president Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde has reiterated his demand for setting up a Lok Pal to inquire in to corruption charges against "people in high places, including the Prime Minister."

Addressing a public meeting here, he said corruption was rampant in the country and democracy "was in danger under the "misrule" of Mr Rajiv Gandhi.

Alleging that the Congress(I) had suppressed important information on the Bofors gun deal and the Thakkar Commission report, Mr Hegde appealed to the people to vote out the Congress(I) in the next parliamentary elections. He said the Congress (I) was losing ground in most of the states due to Mr Gandhi's "misrule."

TO THE EDITOR

A Sad Day!

Editor,

In today’s world, not many people have convictions and fewer still have the courage to stand up to them and proclaim to the world, where they stand. Patricia Mukhim has had the courage to stand up and boldly state her opinion on many issues of social importance. The unwritten caveat of publicly asserting one’s opinion is that people who disagree with it are free to refute and prove it wrong, with strong and factually correct counter arguments. Unfortunately, that would need courage! The photographs of the petrol bomb blackened wall of the home of Patricia Mukhim has succeeded in leaving a black scar on the collective consciousness of our society. The wall can be repainted and repaired but the damage it has done to societal ideals is probably irreparable.

Yours etc.,
Sanjeeb Kakoty
Via email

Matter of concern!

Editor,

It is indeed a matter of great concern that the miscreants are not sparing an editor of the local daily and above all a woman who commands respect from all quarters of the society. The incidents of petrol bombs are increasing day by day and the administration seems to be in a deep slumber because no one has been apprehended so far. I strongly condemn the petrol bomb attack on Kong Patricia’s residence and urge the law enforcing authorities to be more vigilant in maintaining law and order.

Yours etc.,
SL Singhania,
Via email

Assam vehicles take over our roads!

Editor,

It is so sad to see our "beloved" politicians being so short-sighted

Much has been said, continues to be said and must continue to be said for a long time about the absolutely revolting and bestial rape and murder in Kathua. No doubt every rape is condemnable more specifically when the victim is a mere child but with Kathua, as Pratap Bhanu Mehta rightly comments ‘India’s moral compass has been completely obliterated, carpet-bombed out of existence by the very custodians of law, morality and virtue who give daily sermons on national pride’. It is indeed deplorable that in the face of such despicable levels of depravity the honourable Prime Minister finally breaks his silence only with some hollow generic statement of assurance. His statement does nothing to build anybody’s confidence and has convinced nobody about his intent of ensuring justice except the usual cheerleaders. That some of the pro-rapists demonstrations were actually held under the Indian tricolour is abominable to say the least but there were no condemnations from the neo-nationalists at this defiling ! Why?

Without undermining the importance of every other instance of rape my intention here then is to reiterate the chilling lessons that Kathua has surfaced for it has indeed raised a range of deeply disturbing issues which have long term implications for us as citizens of a ‘secular democracy’. And in fact many of these are specially relevant to the context of North East India presently in its honeymoon period of a new found politics of power.

Of the statements doing the rounds is one that asserts that Kathua is not a political issue. Let us not delude ourselves - Kathua is totally political. At the core of Kathua is the politics of hate, of a deliberate targeting with the objective of unimaginable violence against one of the most vulnerable member, that of a little girl child, of a particular community based on their identity, the deliberate and strategic attempts at deepening fissures of ‘them’ and ‘us’, of the exclusionary approach based on notions of supremacy that has reached new depths of divides and violence in the country. The North East region is quite familiar with the politics of hate and of the fissures of ‘othering’. We have numerous horrific examples from Nellie to several in Meghalaya to the mob lynching in Dimapur and so

when it comes to matters of influx of tourist vehicles from Assam. We all encounter such vehicles on a daily basis. We have seen the attitude of the people driving these vehicles, yet we treat them with indifference. When these vehicles come into our state, they treat the land as if it is their own. However, when we go to their state, we are made to feel like foreigners. Here the drivers park their vehicles wherever they like; they have no regard for anyone else. When they drive, they act like they are the kings of the road; they do not have any respect for our traffic systems. Many have been spotted driving along one-way roads but they still get away with it. Our people are cowards for not standing up for what is right! I wonder why the Government and NGOs are not doing anything. It seems they are turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to all of these issues. If we do not take care of the problem immediately, it can spiral out of control really quickly. As we have seen, these vehicles are one of the main

By Dr. Roshmi Goswami

on. While not condoning any perpetrator of rape the question in the Dimapur lynching still remains whether there would have been such an outrage were the perpetrator not ‘the other’? Today this politics of hate and exclusion continues to manifest itself in different ways and in different circles including even the more progressive ones and increasingly it is along communal lines wherein one particular religious community is the primary target. It does not need an in-depth analysis to see the communal nature of the Kathua case for it is writ large in the police charge sheet. Bone chillingly, Kathua has brought back memories of Gujarat 2002 where brutal rape was used as a weapon of establishing dominance, for ethnic cleansing and unleashing unimaginable terror against a religious minority community. For me personally it has brought back images from the several relief camps that I visited during that time more prominently the dazed look of utter futility and hopelessness that I saw in the eyes of a grief stricken father whose daughter Kausar Bano was killed with ultimate bestiality. Yes the pre-meditated intentionality of the Kathua rape and torture of a little Muslim child from the marginalised Bakherwal nomadic community cannot be overstated and will not be forgotten.

The other obvious factor of why this level of depravity could even be contemplated is that India today has reached an all time low of creating and enabling a culture and environment of impunity and of normalising violence. The contempt for constitutional values and the blatant arrogance of the Kathua perpetrators openly supported by ruling politicians of Jammu, the complete disregard for law by the lawmakers is appalling. Feeble steps like getting the guilty politicians to resign instead of sacking them simply drives home the point. In numerous reports by human rights groups from North East India we have talked about the culture of impunity that AFSPA has perpetuated. But in the entire country today we have total impunity for perpetrators without even the excuse or guise, however faulty of a draconian law! Notwithstanding the heady glamour of Davos and

other innumerable high profile summits and meetings where the State is prominently visible, if the state itself is responsible for the heightened vulnerability to violence by women and girls in this widespread manner then is the country not moving slowly but surely towards being labeled a failed state?

It is well researched globally that the spread of ideologies that preach intolerance for diversity and pluralism is closely linked with increased gender based violence. Needless to say like in all contexts of wars and conflict the fallout of the politics of hate and entrenched impunity for perpetrators in the country has been greatest on women and girls and if left unquestioned and unchecked will continue to increase exponentially. The dramatic increase in rapes and violence against women in India today is not simply because of better reporting or media coverage but because misogyny has got legitimised and is out in the open. What is of great concern is that increasing gender based violence based on the ideologies of intolerance is a key precursor to violent extremism. One of the greatest challenges for the world today are new waves of violent extremism. World over extremist ideologies glorify the supremacy of a particular group, and oppose a more tolerant, open and inclusive society. Institutions and governments including the United Nations have come out with exhaustive lists of the drivers of violent extremism. So far violent extremism seemed far away from us - confined to ISIS, Syria, Iraq and compromising primarily of one religious community and the structural drivers attributed to a range of issues from horizontal inequalities to marginalisation and so on.

If one goes by the standard template many of the drivers may not be applicable to our context. But people also get pulled into radical and violent movements through well considered manipulation and socialization and proselytisation. Yet another characteristic feature of violent extremism is a violent and arrogant disregard for civic discourse, scientific or rational thought, debates and critique, human rights and due processes. These characteristics resonate well with what is happening in India presently and in this

region. Preventing the hydra-headed monster of violent extremism from overpowering us in the long run requires deeper analysis and reflection of the social and moral fabric of our country today and a willingness to be honest about where we are headed and a sincere attempt to address it without being hampered and restricted by party politics.

Today for women and organisations working for women’s rights then this is a critical moment to step back, introspect and do some soul searching. The condemnation for Kathua from different individuals and cross sections of society has been loud and clear and reaffirms belief in humanity . But there are many other probing and uncomfortable questions that we need to ask ourselves at this moment and answer with honesty. One question for an individual woman would be what kind of agency do we want for ourselves or what kind of ‘evolved woman image’ do we have for ourselves? Is it the hallowed image of political participation epitomised for instance by our Defence Minister astride fighter jets and warships ameliorating the macho image but unable to come out with a single statement condemning Kathua or is it the quiet courage, grit and humanity of the young lawyer Deepika Rajawat from Jammu who is fighting the case on behalf of the victim and who stands firm in her conviction and resolve despite threats and intimidations by patriarchal bullies. Are women’s rights organisations still being guided by the feminist politics of the ‘personal is political’ or have their activism got so blunted and their work so projectified with funding that they can only work within project boundaries and are uncomfortable to raise questions about the political underpinnings of increasing violence against women and girls or acknowledge the inextricable nexus between heightened patriarchal politics and misogyny? Are they able to push communities to go beyond the binaries of ‘them’ and ‘us’ and stand by the principle of human rights and human dignity even if the violations are not happening within their communities? We need to keep the dialogues open.

(Dr Roshmi Goswami is a feminist and human rights defender)

‘Christian institutions’ have shaped in the general conscience a totally different outlook of God apart from that which His Word represents.

It baffles me to think that these institutions and the members thereof have no understanding whatsoever that their deeds are being judged! In fact, their actions tell that they DO NOT truly believe that God really exist because if they did, would they feel they have the right and the liberty to do as they please? The corruption in churches is beyond belief and one would only get disheartened if one looks up to these as spiritual guides to salvation. I agree with Mr Lyngdoh that God takes keen interest in each one of us. I believe that we only need to look up to Christ, His true Son, who is indeed the ‘Author’ and ‘Finisher’ of our Faith.

Yours etc.,
Mebaaihun Blah
Shillong - 6.

Fiscal 2019 on chaotic start with cash squeeze

One more blow at BJP's desperate poll moves

By S. Sethuraman

Fiscal 2019 has not begun well for the terminal year of the majoritarian BJP battling desperately for a renewed mandate in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll - which may perhaps be tactically advanced, depending on mid-May outcome of Karnataka Assembly election..

Mounting opposition has been emerging for the authoritarian dispensation at the Centre on its flawed approaches and governance failures on a wide front, in first four years since 2014-15. The country has witnessed neither economic growth with jobs nor social peace and harmony.

Adding to these, highly disturbing for the immediate, and potentially damaging for the economy is the sudden outbreak of what is called "Cash Crunch" in several states, even the State Bank of India being no exception, with all their ATMs going dry. Ordinary customers going to bank counters must be having their own problems of not being able to draw relatively smaller sums they may need. If this is not already happening, it is only a matter of days to be put on rationing..

Far from meeting aspirations of downtrodden millions, as held out in 2014 vote-catching,the Modi Govenment has been unable to ameliorate the conditions

The new wave of cash squeeze, no matter seemingly it throws up high incompetence at the central bank to manage to maintain sufficient reserves of currencies to keep cash flows when shortages hit the major centres and business areas.One could even assume all this may perhaps be a cover for a deeper game being played out at a concerted level by the Finance Ministry and RBI to bring about a accelerated pace of digitalisation by calibrating cash flows.

All instantly coming to one’s mind, a re-creation of the misery for millions across the land, akin to what was inflicted by the Prime Minister’s Demonetisation of November 2016, totally unconcerned about consequences. Otherwise there would have been plenty of preparations for meeting the cash needs of hundreds of millions of customers and businesses.

As it is, the economy is yet to fully recover from the massive disruption wrought on it by illegalising high currency notes equal to 86 per cent of currency in circulation and the central bank (RBI) lost its credibility with its unpreparedness to provide moneys, even in smaller doses, on any significant scale for over two to three months.

It was not till nearing middle of 2017 that the remonetisation was said to have been completed. Economic growth got stunted for two years and a few more millions were added to the unemployed. Demonetisation was launched and completed without achieving any single objective of what was aimed including principally unearthing of black money.

The new wave of cash squeeze, no matter seemingly it throws up high incompetence at the central bank to manage to maintain sufficient reserves of currencies to keep cash flows when shortages hit the major centres and business areas.One could even assume all this may perhaps be a cover for a deeper game being played out at a concerted level by the Finance Ministry and RBI to bring about a accelerated pace of digitalisation by calibrating cash flows. For Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley, the move toward

of farmers in deep distress, beyond a promise of doubling farmers’ incomes by 2022. Jobless millions have been left high and dry - again a promise unfulfilled.

The Centre has remained largely a mute witness to the scores of atrocities on Dalits in BJP-ruled states while fatal attacks on Muslims at different centres related to use of beef by Gau-rakshaks had been taking place. The extreme Hindutva outfits are having a free reign in the country to enforce their own law. BJP may have a retribution to make for all these at the appropriate time.

Grotesome happenings of rapes as in Kathua, Unnao and Surat have not only shocked the nation but have begun to change international perceptions of India.The Prime Minister’s recent London visit had brought out the shifting moods with knots of persons, mostly of Indian origin,staging protests with placards at places on Mr Modi’s entourage.

To this was also added a voice of concern from IMF Chief M.Chistine Lagarde in a personal capacity, hoping Indian authorities, "starting with Prime Minister Modi" would pay more attention needed for the women of India..Mr Modi while in London promised "justice to India's daughters" though he also took the line that "rapes" should not be "politicised".

Though the economy is projected to grow at 7.4 per cent in 2018/19, it is all subject to revival of private investment yet to be seen, a likely firming up of RBI policy lending rate in the latter half of 2018 as inflation is said to trend up in coming months with oil and commodity prices rising. Hopefully, normal monsoon is forecast. (IPA Service)

‘Bollywood creating confusion for regional films outside India’

Jahnu Barua, the man behind the critically acclaimed movie *Maine Gandhi ko Nahin Mara*, was in the city recently for the muhurat of *Iewduh* directed by Pradip Kurbah, whom Barua calls “younger brother”. The National Award winning filmmaker from Assam has always been critical of Bollywood overshadowing regional films and had fought for an identity of movies made in languages other than Hindi. When asked to define cinema, Barua said with a smile, “It depends for whom.” During the muhurat, he told the audience he does not like to look at the region as individual states but as the northeastern region. The visionary filmmaker said, “The art of storytelling is a must for development in any society. Because of stories our society has improved.”

The Shillong Times caught up with the director after the muhurat of *Iewduh* and posed several questions. Barua, as is his wont, did not mince his words. Excerpts from the interview:

Unread Pages

We will start the shooting for *Unread Pages* from September onwards. It will have a span of six months in three schedules, so by February next year the shooting will move on. The Assam government has a tourism policy and under this they are open to all projects. And whichever project that falls under that kind of, say, scheme they provide subsidy. When asked to say something about the movie, the veteran filmmaker said waved his hand and said “Shushhhh, no” (laughs).

On Village Rockstars

I have watched it and met her also. It is a nice film. (The film, directed by Rima Das, recently won the National Award)

On films in the region

I have been closely observing in the states what it is happening. Now, Manipur has been regularly doing it and Meghalaya has started to do it. It is a welcoming beginning. Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim in which all the states are all gearing up to use the language of films to express themselves.

The most important factor that I have observed is that there are a lot of young talents. Both boys and girls and I can see in the near future, we will have great projects from the area.

The real picture of region

That depends on the filmmaker. Some filmmakers are deeply rooted and some are not. How rooted he or she is, it gets reflected in the films that way I would say that not that 100 per cent of the films will have the real flavour of the region. But most of it definitely, the talents that are coming forward to make films are in my opinion mostly rooted.

Storyline of Iewduh

I don’t know anything and as a filmmaker I don’t want to know also, because I respect that as it is something that should not be told. Now, what I could gather from I know Pradip (Kurbah, the director) and the kind of things I have heard about him, I think

Critically acclaimed filmmaker Jahnu Barua speaks to Daiaphira Kharsati during a recent visit to Shillong



he is deeply rooted and that whatever subjects/topics he would be taking up will belong to this land.

Influence on regional films

Bollywood ? First of all, I don’t like this word at all. That word is creating havoc for Indian cinema. You don’t know how I hate the word Bollywood. It is creating a lot of confusion so far as identity of Indian cinema is concerned. Outside, the moment they get to see an Indian film, the expectation becomes very limited. For example, if a Khasi film is shown and just because it is from India, people will start clubbing it with Bollywood and that is wrong. That is the confusion taking place and it is high time we get rid of this word.

Is IFFI biased?

There have been a lot of problems year after year at IFFI and those things I don’t try to look at negatively. If there is a problem it needs to be resolved. If there are corrections that need to be made, they have to be made. So this is our duty also, even if I don’t like certain things it is my job to tell them where we are going wrong, this is the kind of event that is organised purely by the government and it belongs to everyone, to the nation and if there is something wrong happens, we always try to voice, but we don’t detach ourselves from it, we try to make them correct it. (Barua had once criticised the International Film Festival of India for being biased towards Hindi films. He was among the members of the steering committee of IFFI along with Praseon Joshi and

Nagesh Kukunoor).

On Bhoga Khirkee

(Laughs) Priyanka is producing it. Their production house contacted me a couple of years back to do a film with me and after some discussion we had come to some agreement that we can do it together. So that is how it started, I told them not to announce the film before I complete shooting. In January, I completed the shoot and that is where they announced it and they are producing it. I am a very difficult person to work with. At the same time I am a very nice person. Once it is properly organised, it is fine.

On Meghalaya not having a film policy

The kind of movement that is needed in this aspect has not started yet. We need to start the movement and for that, it is not just the film fraternity even the general public and the government is concern about it. The state government should come forward to help filmmakers develop it properly because it means a lot to the state. If a Khasi film is made, at least about Khasi culture, somewhere around the world will know about Khasis because of the film.

In the same way, if you make a Khasi film and if it goes global, Meghalaya will be in the forefront. That is the gain everyone gets and that is where the government needs to realise and come forward for a proper policy.

(Photo: Sanjib Bhattacharjee)

‘KSU does not need political patronage’

The Khasi Students’ Union (KSU), the beligerent force fighting for the cause of ‘jait-bynriew’ since 1978, had always stoked controversy. Memories of the violence in the city over ILP in 2012-13 are still fresh in the minds of people.

The website of the union says, “The Union was thus founded... by a group of students who were patriotic and had a deep sense of responsibility and with a passion to unite the students belonging from u Klynriam, u Pnar, u Bhoi, u War, Maram, Lyngngam and Diko sub-groups who formed the Khasi community. The motto of the Union was adopted as ‘Mait Shaphrang Khlor Ka Ri’ meaning ‘Strive Forward Children of the Soil’.”

However, over the years, KSU has evolved, taking up several other issues, besides safeguarding the Khasi community.

But has it really evolved? The recent violence during the rally on KSU’s 40th anniversary on March 20 and the petrol bomb attack on a senior journalist’s house have once again raised doubts over the union’s agenda.

The union’s 33-year-old general secretary, Donald Thabab, speaks to Nabamita Mitra and dismisses such doubts and misconceptions. He talks about the issues that the union is focusing on and elaborates on its demand for Inner Line Permit. Excerpts:

What is KSU? Is it a students’ group or a political tool?

First I would like to say that KSU is an apolitical force. For membership, one does not necessarily require to be a student. But when we say students, we actually mean the learning process that is associated with students. The union, apart from working towards safeguarding the society, also trains its members in how to approach an issue, how to maintain prestige in the locality and how to carry on with their daily life, among others. We launched our website on March 20 and it has the history of the organisation and details of the issues that we have taken up so far.

Are you controlled by political parties in power?

Who are saying this? As I have said, we are an apolitical entity. We do not work 100 per cent with any political party. However, if certain political leaders work for the interest of the indigenous people or the betterment of the community, then surely we have to acknowledge their service. Similarly, if one is working against the interests of local people, then we have to protest against that. But at times we have to work with political parties for development of roads, welfare of people, etc... It is not that whatever they command we have to do or whatever we say they have to do... We have to work with each other... We have our own constitution and we don’t need any political patronage. (Hamarbabiang Warshong, general secretary of the KSU’s Laban unit) We are an

independent students’ organisation.

What is your agenda?

Last week, we submitted a nine-point charter of demands to the chief minister. The charter broadly included:

Uranium mining: It has been going on since 1993... We want the state government to impress upon the Centre that it cannot allow uranium mining in Meghalaya. We have seen what happened in Jadugoda (Odisha) and the exodus from the area, we have seen what happened to the aborigines of Australia... there were deformities. So we do not want that here. We might become extinct also.

Railway project in state: We are not fully against the railway or development but last year the issue came up and 33 of our members were arrested. The reason for objecting was not that we are against development. Everyone wants development. We were protesting because the state lacks effective mechanism and laws to control influx of immigrants. So we are demanding that. What we want is proper mechanisms, be it ILP (inner line permit), or any other act... the more the acts the better we can combat it.

Inclusion of Khasi Language in the Eighth Schedule

Change in MPSC system: We want changes to the process of both the MPSC (Meghalaya Public Service Commission) and DSC (District Selection Committee). For Grade D recruitment through DSC, do you think it is necessary to have interviews for the post of gardener or driver? But if interview is imperative, then we want it to be under video surveillance.

ILP (Inner Line Permit): The previous government was not willing to implement the ILP. We are not asking the Conrad Sangma-led government to implement it. What we are asking for is that the issue should be deliberated in the Assembly because it is necessary. Then we can understand whether it is necessary. Although in our opinion ILP is necessary.

Proper implementation of the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act 2016, the amended benami property transaction act and the exit-entry points: Though the former two have been enacted, they have not been properly implemented. As far as the first one is concerned, district task forces are set to be set up so we have not seen it being operational.



TALKING POINT DONALD THABAH

For entry and exit points, we want at least Phase 1 to be complete by this year. It has been going on for four years now.... After that we will see how the gates are working and then decide on discussions with the government on railways.

India-Nepal Friendship Treaty, 1950: We understand that India needs to maintain cordial relationship with its neighbours. However, we have seen influx of Nepalese in our state; we have seen what has happened in Langpih. We have seen communal violence in the past decade. Our land has been taken away. So we want Meghalaya to be exempted from the purview of the treaty.

Education: ... We have prepared a memorandum... we want engineering colleges. We want these polytechnic colleges to be upgraded to full-fledged engineering colleges. We want medical college in Shillong and one government college in every district, among other things.

These are the major points.

Talking about uranium mining, what is the status now? Do you have proof that it is uranium that is affecting environment? Last year, Mukul Sangma had said if UCIL wanted to mine uranium it would do so at its

own risk. This indicated that the state government was not willing to give NoC. So was the KHADC. However, we saw that in Ranikor, they did exploratory mining and that affected not only the rivers there but also Bangladesh. Last year, a journalist from the Bangladesh came and spoke with us.

If it’s not uranium then what is it? However, we are not sending any sample for testing as of now. We will wait till the budget session is over.

Why have you not been vocal about coal and limestone mining?

Coal and limestone are completely different things. Coal had been mined traditionally. Even the state is earning from coal mining. However, we want a scientific method. But we do need coal mining because we have seen how badly the state is affected by the ban.

But limestone mining is really harming... water has been polluted. Though the PCB (Pollution Control Board) had claimed that it is because of coal, but coal mining has been going on for decades but nothing had happened in the past. We need proper mining policy.

Does your nine-point charter have any point on women’s safety? Why haven’t we heard more from the KSU girls’ wing?

We have always condemned crime against women. We have our local units which take up issues in their respective localities. We even take up domestic violence issues... especially in rural areas.

(Warshong) The circles are taking up these issues but the media do not always come to know about these.

(Thabab) Our girls’ wing has been doing that job. After the January 1 incident of rape of a 17-year-old girl, the family was threatened... they could have killed her... Our members had worked with other organisations. However, when the victim’s family asks us not to go to the press, we respect their request.

(Warshong) Even in the Julius Dorphang case, KSU girls had been coordinating with TUR and CSWO and others under one committee. They also took out a rally.

When you talk about ILP, don’t you think that it will affect tourism?

I don’t think so. Nagaland has ILP but it has not affected its tourism. The Hornbill Festival is one of the largest in the region.

KSU has been tagged as anti-non-tribal. But how do you think you can stop the intermingling in this time and age?

People have that concept. We are not racist, we are not communal. Otherwise we would not have worked with other organizations in other states. But our objective is to safeguard our tribal populace. These are all accusations.

We have to see the magnitude of intermingling. You are saying multi-culture is necessary but you see what is happening in France, Germany or London. The Khasis from ancient times were involved in trade with other neighbours. That is intermingling... but we do not want to be overpowered.

KSU has been harping on influx of non-tribals into the state... what about the Marwari entrepreneurs buying land? So investment is important...

The state has non-tribals but they are very few and won’t affect the demography. But if a huge flow of them come then there is a concern.

No it is nothing like that. Even non-Khasis can invest in the state... That’s why the issue of trading licence is there.

(Warshong) The Sixth Schedule has empowered the district council to issue trading licence.

Besides this whole issue of tribals and non-tribals, what about corrupt tribal politicians? Have you ever spoken against land grabbing by tribals?

KSU is also against corruption but until proven corrupt, how can we know who is corrupt and who is not? That’s why we want the MPSC to change so that corruption won’t have a chance.

We have been vocal about land grabbing in the past. For instance, we had raised our voices against allotment of land to retired bureaucrats in New Shillong. We had opposed that. We had worked with Angela Rangad (of TUR) to protest against bulldozing of houses in rural areas by the government.

Why did the March 20 violence happen?

We invited people through the media. So there were many people. We had briefed our volunteers and those who participated to not indulge in such violence but we did not expect it to happen. However, we controlled it.

Have you ever thought of taking up the cause of Khasi living in Bangladesh who have been marginalised?

We are interacting with the Khasi union in Bangladesh on social media. When problems do crop up we usually contact journalists and our units in those areas.

Do you really need an awakening day?

Of course we need, every race and tribe has its own day so do the Khasis.

Living in an age of absurdity

Shopkeeper: “Will you be paying by credit card, EPS, Apple Pay, debit card, Google Pay, Bitcoin or sacrifice of your first-born?”

Me: “Uh, do you take cash? No? Okay, I guess it’s one of the kids, then.”

Life is so complicated these days! Many things which cost money can no longer be bought using money.

The world’s biggest shopkeeper, Alibaba, doesn’t have any shops.

The world’s biggest taxi company, Uber, doesn’t own any taxis.

“None of the shows I watch these days are made by moviemakers. They’re all made by delivery firms,” said a reader.

True. Netflix was set up to deliver videos and Amazon to deliver books. Now both make TV shows.

What next? A hotel chain with no hotels? Oh, wait, a friend of mine just stayed in an Airbnb room.

A young Indian reader offered her favourite modern Asian absurdity: “Today, parents tell us not to talk to strangers but still try to get us to marry one.”

Sometimes, the names and functions of organisations are mismatched deliberately. I read recently that an organisation called “Citizens for a More Affordable Cook County” was set up in the US.

It sounded reasonable but was oddly focused on fighting the sugary drinks tax. Reporters looking at the donations list discovered that the “citizens” who financed it were Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Dr. Pepper and Red Bull.

Real life is so out of control that it’s no surprise people flee to the Internet — but things are even more confusing there. It horrifies me to think that it’s statistically likely that there must exist at least one real Nigerian prince who wants to



share his mega-fortune with me and is wondering why I haven’t responded to his email.

I was moaning about the confusions of modern life when an “older gentleman” in our social group said that this was nothing new: Companies have always changed their core businesses.

“Most young people today probably have no idea that Shell, the multinational oil company, is called that because it started as a shop selling seashells,” he said. “Sharp, the Japanese electronics firm, made pencils. Nintendo, the king of video games, made playing cards.”

(This guy can probably remember when stone was the big thing and everyone poured scorn on the cheeky upstarts trying to usher in the Bronze Age.)

But I must admit I was amazed to learn from him that Nokia was set up to make rubber boots but accidentally became the global king of mobile phones.

Clues to a company’s original purpose were often hidden in the name, he explained. American Express was a delivery service, carrying stock certificates or currency by horse or train across America at “express” speed. Then someone at the company decided to give the horse a rest and just lend people the cash — which is how American Express became a financial firm.

This led me to wonder if my historian friend had the answer to a mystery. Where I live, there are five branches of a supermarket chain called Park’n’shop and not one of them has anywhere you can park.

“If Park’n’shops were places where you could park and shop, that would make logical sense,” he said. “On his planet, that’s always too much to ask for.”

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

International Mother Earth Day today

End plastic pollution

By Ranjan K Baruah

All of us are concerned about Mother Earth but only a few act to save her. We have already seen the impacts of climate change and other environmental degradation. People are living but we may not imagine what harm we are actually doing to the environment. It is not only humans but other living organisms are equally important in this planet. Mother Earth is a common expression for the planet in a number of countries and regions, which reflects the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit.

Earth and its ecosystem are our home. In order to achieve a balance among economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature.

International Mother Earth Day was started a few decades ago and now it has become one of the big environmental movements. It is celebrated to remind each of us that Earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance.

This day provides an opportunity to raise public awareness around the world to the challenges regarding the well-being of the planet and all the life it supports. The United Nations General Assembly, in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of the present and future generations, to promote harmony with nature and Earth, and noting that Earth Day is observed each year in many countries, decided to designate April 22 as International Mother Earth Day through resolution A/RES/63/278, adopted in 2009.

In 2005, the UN General Assembly declared 2008 as the International Year of Planet Earth, convinced that education in Earth sciences provide humankind with tools for the sustainable use of natural resources and for building the scientific infrastructure essential for sustainable development.

This year’s focus on the occasion is to end plastic pollution. We are aware that plastic pollution is poisoning our oceans and land, injuring marine life and affecting our health directly or indirectly.

From poisoning and injuring marine life to the ubiquitous presence of plastics in our food to disrupting human hormones and causing major life-threatening diseases and early puberty, the exponential growth of plastics is threatening our planet’s survival.

Earth Day Network (EDN), the organisation that leads Earth Day worldwide on April 22, announced that in 2018, the focus will be on mobilising the world to end plastic pollution, including creating support for a global effort to eliminate single use plastics along with uniform regulation for the disposal of plastics.

EDN will educate millions of people about the health and other risks associated with the use and disposal of plastics.

“There is a growing tidal wave of interest in ending plastic pollution and some countries and governments are already in the vanguard. Earth Day Network believes we can turn that tidal wave into a permanent solution to plastics pollution,” said Kathleen Rogers, President of EDN.

EDN’s mission is to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement worldwide. Growing out of the first Earth Day, EDN is the world’s largest recruiter to the environmental movement, working with more than 50,000 partners in nearly 195 countries to build environmental democracy.

More than 1 billion people now participate in Earth Day activities each year, making it the largest civic observance in the world. We work through a combination of education, public policy and consumer campaigns.

We have already seen the impacts of plastics pollution and it is time to bring an end to this problem else we are bringing more problems for ourselves.

Plastic pollution has been a hazard for the environment but we need to have more innovation and sustainable consumption pattern to fight this problem. We may not be too honest and say that we will end use of plastic or end plastic pollution but let us try our level best and try to take a few steps for our Mother Earth because we do not have any other home to live in.

(Feedback may be sent to bkranjan@gmail.com)



‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 22, 2018

Moon trine Jupiter on your solar return chart denotes that you can anticipate some good and happy developments both in professional and personal life. Organizational matters will be a focus. If you have any healthcare or international-related business or profession, you would develop a wonderful ability to make money from these projects now. You are favoured in all lawful matters at this time. You would express yourself more freely and can expect positivity in relationships. Don’t oversee details in financial matters. A celebration in the family will help fortify bonds. This year will see singles taking their wedding vows. Health would need some serious attention.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your self-confidence and positive attitude will reward you. Constructive connections with others can be made fairly easily. A comfortable level of personal popularity helps to keep conflict to a minimum. Your attitude towards life would be changing. You are no longer willing to make compromises in the important areas of your life, particularly with regard to career. You are more determined, and it is an excellent time to get rid of bad habits. A new project or goal begun now has a good chance of being successful and long lasting. You would be able to find a way to strike a balance between self-gratification and the obligations of daily life.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This phase brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for betterment and expansion. People are bound to recognize your leadership skills and talents. You want your life path and your objectives to reflect what you’re really about. A balanced approach to life, in terms of realistic expectations, is the best approach for maximizing success. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do in the coming weeks.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

There will be harmonious relations in professional and personal life. Positive new relationships are formed. You are instinctively starting a new phase in your life. It is time to give your life a makeover, a time of new beginnings and fresh energy. It is a friendly time, when it is easy to enjoy life and other people. Focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends and exploration. A new project begun has a good chance of being successful and long-lasting. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. You have to get yourself organized and work to build your resources.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This period brings good financial returns as you communicate well and present cordial relations with co-workers. You are inspired and could even inspire others with your words. You think more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You want your objectives to reflect what you are really about, and you are likely to rid yourself of unsatisfying goals. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do. You possess a strong artistic sensitivity, and you are able to express your feelings openly and candidly.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This is a period of work and development and a boost to your self-confidence. It is a time to deal with practical matters, and it is not a time to be lazy or especially gregarious. It can be a time that feels hard, monotonous and lonely. Try to get yourself organized, work to build your resources, keep busy. Your main focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends, and exploration. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. It is also a good time for expressing your creativity. Reach out, but avoid scattering your energies.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The planetary configuration brings unusualness and curiosity in your relationships as you feel they are more important to you. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental. This is a good time for reflection, prayer, and meditation. A higher purpose to your life is what you seek, and you rely more heavily upon your intuition in order to achieve it. Your physical activities tend to be more intense, passionate, and

focused this week. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. The way you present your ideas, certainly helping to smooth over differences in your personal relationships.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

New associations and beginnings as well as new opportunities and changes come your way. You would form new connections and relationships that enhance your spiritual and personal growth. Your popularity increases and efforts to smooth over challenges in partnerships are more likely to succeed. This is an excellent influence for negotiations, marriage, and business partnerships. You are likely to be actively involved with teamwork and collaboration with others. You are taking on new responsibilities, but generally enjoy the challenges.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You have to get yourself organized, work to build your resources and keep busy. There are better financial returns. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You might find that you are very often encouraging and supportive of others. Certainly, you are more accepting and understanding of your friends and loved ones. Emotional security and being content in love will help to attract positive circumstances into your life. You are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever. Advise - stand alone, take action, start afresh and express independence.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

New horizons in your romantic and love life open up. You might enjoy a favorable outcome when it comes to legal affairs, education, and travel. This week, you’re bound to enjoy increased social opportunities as well as a boost in your personal popularity and magnetism. You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Financial benefits may come your way. You may find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You have powerful, transformative energy at your disposal. It is likely to be a rather lighthearted time, when opportunities are greater than usual. Much will depend on how you handle it. Channeled positively, you could move mountains when it comes to pushing your projects ahead. If mishandled, however, you could be argumentative, stressed, and hell-bent on having your way. Avoid taking extreme measures to make things happen your way, and avoid people who might be doing the same. Deliberately trying to maneuver matters in order to get the upper hand will be a lesson in frustration. You need not over analyze personal relationships but rather respond with your heart and deep feelings; as a new understanding and maturity with others around you at home and work.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

There will be mixed results in domestic life and people you care for. You are practical, realistic, and your judgment is especially sound-- and you derive much satisfaction from practical accomplishment. The key to harnessing this wonderful energy is to identify and find pleasure in the simple things that make you happy. You might enjoy a favorable outcome when it comes to legal affairs and travel. Financial benefits come your way. You find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through a variety of experiences in this life.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you this time. Surprises surrounding intimate matters, shared finances and resources and financial support will be in store. You spend more time on phone calls, emails, short frequent trips and communicating with friends. You pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. Your attention turns to domestic matters for a large part of the time and building, decoration and purchase of household items for your home figures strongly now.

By Ranjan K Baruah

Most of our students from the northeastern region are confused after completing graduation. Lack of information and awareness on job options and opportunities and absence of effective campus placement make them more confused. Most of our students do not have career planning for which they are more frustrated after graduation. Few students take admission in postgraduate or post graduate diploma and go for further studies. However, many students quit after graduation as they search for jobs or employment opportunities.

In the last edition, we have published about career options after Classes X and XII. In this edition, we are publishing some options after graduation. We are aware that selecting a good career has been a challenge for many. But with proper planning and necessary information we can choose or select the best career options for us. It’s important to choose our career at an early age and the best time to choose the professional courses or regular education comes after we pass senior secondary examination.

Students who are at the graduation level or have completed graduation recently may opt for higher studies or professional courses or may appear for various entrance examinations. Some of the entrance examinations after graduation are as follows:

Defence Entrance: Students can appear for Combined Defence Service Examination after passing graduation. Students from any stream can appear for the CDS examination. For Air Force or Navy, students must have Physics and Mathematics in passing the examination. Students from Arts and Commerce can opt for Army. This exam is conducted by the Union Public Service Commission. Even doctors or engineers may also appear in CDS exam for joining in defence forces. There are special entries for women in defence forces. Apart from CDSE, there are other



exams or selection process like University Entry Schemes, AFCAT, etc.

Civil Service Examination: The Union Public Service Commission conducts civil service examination for various posts depending on vacancies. Through civil service examination, aspirants may join IAS, IFS, IPS, IRS, etc. Apart from civil service, UPSC conducts other examinations for filling vacancies in various departments of the country.

In Meghalaya, the Meghalaya Public Service Commission conducts various examinations. Apart from Civil Service there are many other exams being conducted by MPSC.

Paramilitary Forces: Paramilitary Forces (PMF) in India include Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Sashatra Seema Bal, Assam Rifles, Indo Tibetan Border Police, etc. The Paramilitary Forces of India are agencies which help the law enforcement agencies and the Indian Armed Forces in their operations. It has over a million personnel active in its service. PMF is regarded as the world’s second largest paramilitary organisation (second only to the Chinese People’s Armed Forces) and its head officers and other senior officers being members of Indian Police Service (IPS).

Public Sector Units (PSUs): PSUs are government-owned corporations, state-owned companies, state enterprises, publicly-owned corporations or government business enterprises. An aspirant is required to have good technical knowledge, general knowledge and reasoning and a pleasing personality. PSUs recruit through individual entrance Examinations having technical and non technical questions.

WSES: In 1992, an important landmark in the history of Indian Army was the induction of women into the officer cadre, and the onerous task of training them was undertaken by the Officers Training Academy. We could see woman in army as officers and also as doctors, lawyers, nurses. There are also women officers in technical side. Mostly unmarried woman are seen in technical, non technical and the time of serving is limited. The Woman Special Entry Scheme for officers offers non-technical, technical and specialist entry for females.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

“Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than the one with all the facts.”

--- W. Clement Stone

The Shillong Times

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Death penalty for child rapists

THE President of India has signed the executive order for providing stringent punishment, including death penalty, for those convicted of raping girls below the age of 12 years. This follows the nationwide protest following the rape of an eight year old girl in Kathua, Jammu. But even as India was greeted by this news which the Government believes will deter men from raping children below 12 years, activists and child rights NGOs have a different view of the latest presidential ordinance for amending the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Firstly they question why only the rape of girls below 12 should attract death penalty. What about a girl between 13- 17 years of age who are also considered minors?

The criminal law amendment ordinance seeks to amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Evidence Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act to introduce a new provision to sentence convicts of such crimes with death penalty. But activists fear that in a country where conviction not only takes a long time but there is also no certainty of conviction, merely bringing in more stringent laws will not help the cause. More so since most rapes committed on children are by family members. Hence the parents of the victims might even choose not to report the crime. A better deterrent for rape of minors is quick conviction and punishment. But according to recent studies by Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, there are so many cases or rape of minors that it would take the courts at least two decades to clear the backlog of cases. What could prevent rape of children is by following the POCSO Act to the letter and strictly adhering to timelines given which is recording of evidences within 30 days from the date of taking cognizance and completion of trial within one year from the date of taking cognizance. Government would have done better by focussing more on strengthening the existing laws, ensuring safety of victims and witnesses, speedy trials, and awareness generation.

LOOKING BACK
May 20, 1989

Finance service officers exhorted to point out blemishes without fear

The Meghalaya Special Secretary, Finance , Mr N N Mookerjee has impressed upon the finance service officers the need to point out and object to irregularities "without fear or favour". Mr Mookerjee was inaugurating the Third Annual Conference of the Meghalaya Finance Service Association in Shillong on Friday.

He urged upon the officers, whom he termed as "the eyes and ears of the finance department" to adopt a positive attitude to transactions and not to create obstacles in the way of implementation of projects. Reminding them that implementation of many time-bound projects are delayed due to unnecessary and repeated queries raised by the finance officers, Mr Mookerjee exhorted the officers to avoid making delays. The Special Secretary further urged the officers especially the Treasury Officers, who deal directly with the public to conduct their dealings in a "smooth and polite manner". Assuring the officers that the govt is trying its best to increase the number of posts at all levels, Mr Mookerjee regretted that the Meghalaya Public Services Commission takes "a long time to fill up vacancies."

In his presidential address, the Meghalaya Director of Accounts and Treasuries, Mr R K Bhattacharjee talked of the need for "artfulness while dealing with the public" and stressed the need for "mastery over the language".

Differentiating between sternness and firmness, Mr Bhattacharjee stated that "we should be firm but not stern." Others who addressed the conference were the Special Officer of Meghalaya Finance Department, Mr D B Gurung, Financial Adviser Mr B Nikhla and the retired Director of Accounts, Mr E N Syiem.

Parliamentary poll in Punjab as per schedule

Punjab Governor Mr S S Ray today said parliamentary elections would be held in the state as and when they are held in other parts of the country. Addressing press conference here, he also said that the release of detailed senior Akali leaders was not under consideration.

Referring to the situation in the state, he said the fight against terrorism had reached a decisive stage but "nobody can make a prediction about how long the fight is going to last." While admitting that terrorist killing in Punjab had increased during President's Rule, Mr Ray said a new direction had been given to the fight against terrorism. The success achieved recently by the security forces in eliminating top terrorists was "unprecedented," and was the result of a greater inflow of information about the activities of terrorists from the people, he said.

Funny and unusual names amongst the Khasi-Pnar of Meghalaya

By H. H. Mohrmen

In the last assembly election the different media platforms had a field day musing at the fancy names amongst the people of Meghalaya These names sometimes sound bizarre. It is also rather strange that the funny names of our people here only gain traction during election time, when people, particularly journalists have time to play around with the issue. The blame should be squarely put on this columnist for initiating the deliberation on this unusual subject since the last 2013 assembly election when I started writing on the issue starting with my own name. It was therefore not a surprise that when the 2018 election to the State Assembly picked up momentum, I received calls about the column which I wrote five years ago.

Again starting from my own name, I have two H's as initials of my name before my surname but for goodness sakes it does not stand for His Highness or His Holiness (not even close to that). In fact the first H of my name stands for Hamkhein which is my father's name and the other H is my own given name which is Helpme. And yes when people ask me why did your parents name you Helpme, the quick answer I give is that every time you call my name you also ask for my help. So the name in some way compels me to try to be of help to someone who calls me by my christened name.

Sometimes, having an unusual name like mine has its own advantage. First of all it is easy to remember because it is a name which once people are told about will be very hard to forget. Having strange names also helps one get a pleasant surprises too. On an evening before I left Luther King House where I stayed to study for Ministry at the Unitarian College Manchester, my colleagues and co-boarders threw a farewell party on my behalf. After the dinner, presentation of gifts and all

the formalities, my friends decided to close the merry making with a song. David took a guitar and told the audience that for the first time in his life without any problem at all he could easily find a song which is both relevant and befitting the occasion. He strums his guitar and starts singing the Beatles famous number, 'Help,' which is of course my favourite song too. Everybody who knows me by my christened name started to cheer and sing along with the singer. So, sometimes having an unusual name is also to one's own advantage.

So much has been written about the fancy names that we have and apart from having people named after important personalities like Hitler, Napoleon, Churchill, Lincoln etc., names like Let Me, Win Stone and For Me and even Kiss Me was also given to individuals. Recently a friend forwarded via WhatsApp a wedding photograph which has an inscription on the board in the wedding pandal which says, 'Special weds Speed.' Obviously Special and Speed are the names of the bride and the groom and not some fancy slogan you happen to see hanging on the wall of a wedding pandal.

Naming children after famous people continues till date. Hence we have a young man named Maradona because he was born during the 1986 World Cup. Parents also name their children after movie stars. For example during the time when Titanic was a popular movie, parents named their children after the actors in the movie. So kids were called Jack and Rose. Now since wrestling mania has become popular kids are even named after famous wrestlers too. Kids are named to commemorate certain incidents in history which have had much influence on the parents.

opposite meanings. Ironic indeed!

These above names are nothing when compared to the two following names that I came across recently. There is nothing wrong with somebody named Pelnis; it is a normal name to me until I was told that his name spelt differently until somebody suggested that he insert alphabet 'L' in middle of his name to make it sound correct. This means that before he got his name corrected it was actually the male sex organ and if not for the friendly suggestion, it would have been a most embarrassing name to have.

A friend who works as a gram sevak in a block office in Jaintia hills told me of the other strange names and though in one reading it sounds normal or does not sound awkward and has a normal meaning too, but when your mind is always looking for funny names then the other side of the name becomes obvious.

In normal reading 'Phok mi' which also means 'your kite' in Pnar is of course an unusual name for a woman. Who in the world will name a girl a kite? But we all know it is not strange at all to have odd names in the Khasi Pnar community. But if like our journalist friends who have this fascination for odd tribal names one starts reading it using the language we assume is the lingua franca of the world then you have a different meaning altogether.

The two words Phok Mi in Pnar has a similar pronunciation with the other two English words which will not be proper for us to print here, so the problem is also with the person who reads the name or as they say - it is in the eye of the beholder.

This conversation centering around awkward names will continue to fascinate us for years to come and the good thing is that we can also weave stories out of it.

TO THE EDITOR

Applause for TUR!

Editor,

As a teenage girl living at a time when the rate of violence against women and children are ridiculously high, I would like to express my concern as an aggravated citizen, wondering what went wrong in the world that God so artistically created. Instead of shaming society and attacking the atrocious minds of perpetrators however, I would like to take this opportunity to focus on the positive steps that people have been taking in order to condemn the numerous crimes against women on a daily basis and how they can be prevented.

I had the privilege of attending the programme conducted at the campus of Bethany Society on Saturday, the 21st of April 2018, by Thma U Rangli (TUR), discussing "Hate Crimes, Moral Policing and Violence against Women and Children". Listening to what different eminent personalities and speakers from different fields had to say regarding the heinous events that have taken place in the past, especially the very recent past, against the so-called 'fairer sex', left me feeling motivated and hopeful. The way society perceives rape, murder, harassment and so on, the way social media is both a platform to express views as well as a tool that prods scars till they leave fresh wounds, the way 'hatred' turns the freedom of expression into a mere abstract and the way the

Meghalaya must nurture its thinkers!

Editor,

Let me acknowledge, at the outset, that I am a die-hard fan of Patricia Mukhim because of her bold, rational and brilliant write-ups. As a matter of fact, Meghalaya is really blessed to have given birth to some brilliant thinkers/writers who are bold, unbiased and at the same time write most effortlessly. I am really constrained to say that a person of Mukhim's stature is unlucky to have been born in Meghalaya but on the other hand, Meghalaya is extremely lucky to have been receiving the astute services of a journalist/writer like Patricia Mukhim who is working so tirelessly, through her writings, with the sole aim of doing the best possible for the overall welfare of the people of the state and the country. She has been pointing out at the existing loopholes and defects in various systems and at the same time, unlike most of the main-land writers, maintaining her unbiased positions vis-a-vis innocent, helpless and tortured people of this state. One of the most distinct qualities of hers is that she does not stop after making her hard hitting remarks as she immediately goes on suggesting remedial measures for the stated ailments. Now, what could be more pathetic and shameful for the state of Meghalaya if benevolent persons like Mukhim are attacked so brazenly and mindlessly by some people with vested interests or if the perpetrators of that cowardly attack could not be apprehended by the law-

keepers and put behind bars till date!

Yours etc.,
Partha Sarathi Gupta,
Via email

Who cares about street children?

Editor,

Shillong the "Rock Capital Of India", the land which is highly influenced by western culture where everything looks attractive and perfect from the outside but as we go deep into the colourful lights and delve into the heart of the matter we find many stories of agony which go unnoticed and untold. Kids are supposed to be the future of any country but even in the 21st century some kids in our country continue to starve even while the affluent throw their food in the dustbin instead of offering it to the needy, hungry ones. Children don't even get proper education; they can't even dream of going to school; they don't have proper shelter, leave alone proper clothing. They are street children! Eventually they have to work for a living. So we have child labour which goes unchecked.

At a phase of their lives when they should have carried school bags on their back, they are carrying sack loads of sand and stones at a construction site just to support themselves and their families. Is this the life these kids dream about! Will things ever change for the better?

Yours etc.,
Tanushree Deb,
Via email

Media in the times of impeachment Opposition politicians, mutineers speak same language

By Sushil Kutty

You are entitled to your own opinion but not to your own facts. That is a truism. But facts coloured by ideology become opinions. Ideologies are basically left of centre and right of centre. Governments are ideological. The judiciary has to be above politics. And media has to walk the tightrope. So, when a left of centre political party and its ideological allies move an impeachment motion against a judge, the 'independent journalist' has to stick to straight reportage — the equator of journalism, so to speak.

But 'Independent Journalism' is a mirage. A journalist is like the atheist, neither here nor there but has to be either here or there. The best that a journalist can do is to let facts do the talking — present facts and not try to coat them with opinion.

Before lining up facts on the impeachment motion against CJI Dipak Misra, a couple of opposing viewpoints: 'Impeachment is a legitimate step', as put forward by Congress leader and its legal-eagle Kapil Sibal. Two, 'impeachment is a political tool', as articulated by Union Finance Minister and BJP legal-eagle Arun Jaitley.

For now both viewpoints prevail. The 'facts', however, are...

A motion to impeach CJI Dipak Misra has been

been involved in the conspiracy of paying illegal gratification in the case".

The second charge relates to the manner in which CJI Misra dealt with the case. The motion says "he (CJI) too was likely to fall within the scope of investigation" for violating the "first principle of the code of conduct for judges".

The third is that CJI Misra "appears to have" antedated an administrative order dated November 6, 2017, which amounted to a serious act of forgery/fabrication.

The fourth refers to Justice Misra allegedly giving a false affidavit to acquire a piece of land when he was an advocate 40 years ago. The motion says he surrendered the land six years ago after being appointed a judge of the SC.

The fifth charge echoes the allegation levelled in the January 12 presser held by Justices Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi, Madan B Lokur and Kurian Joseph — that "CJI Misra abused his administrative authority as master of roster to arbitrarily assign individual cases of particular advocates in politically sensitive cases to select benches in order to achieve pre-determined outcome."

At the end, the motion says: "These above-mentioned charges against CJI have brought the judiciary into disrepute. In view of these serious

Politics has veered in such a way after 2014 that it is hard not to choose sides for media and journalists. The journalist had to be an 'independent left journalist' or an 'independent right journalist'. There was no way to be both, neutral. So much so, media stopped short of questioning several statements/observations made by important people; most notably the one that became a refrain: "Democracy is in peril".

moved by the Congress and seven other opposition parties, including the CPI, CPM and the NCP

The motion was signed by 71 Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament, seven of who have retired, and of the 64 left, 50 are Congress RS MPs. A minimum of 50 MPs are required to move an impeachment of a judge motion

The motion is now with Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu. He has the option to reject it

Naidu may take his own sweet time to decide. But CJI Dipak Misra retires in October this year. This is the first time a CJI has been sought to be impeached

For the impeachment to succeed, it will have to be passed by two-third majority in both Houses of Parliament and then 'assent' by the President of India

Numbers do not favour the motion-movers in both houses of Parliament. Getting a two-third majority in either or both of the houses is next to impossible

There are five charges — instances of misbehaviour — in the impeachment motion against CJI Dipak Misra. However, three of the big ones hinge on "may have been", "likely to fall" and "appears to have"

The Judges Inquiry Act, 1968, mandates that charges in a motion for removal of a Supreme Court judge must to be "definite" for an investigation to be initiated. The first charge is the alleged medical admission scam in Prasad Education Trust. The motion-movers say "prima facie evidence suggests that CJI Misra may have

charges and explanatory note on each charge, it is apparent that there is sufficient prima facie evidence for initiation of impeachment (removal) proceedings against CJI Misra."

Ever since May 26, 2014 and November 2016, media worldwide have got polarized to unprecedented levels. Sections of India's television media have been cloyingly pro-government and pro-BJP with Republic TV and Times Now leading from the front. Individual journalists either fell in line or were themselves ideologically aligned. It was not for nothing that the four senior-most Supreme Court justices chose to break tradition and hold a press conference. They found many allies in the media.

Politics has veered in such a way after 2014 that it is hard not to choose sides for media and journalists. The journalist had to be an 'independent left journalist' or an 'independent right journalist'. There was no way to be both, neutral. So much so, media stopped short of questioning several statements/observations made by important people; most notably the one that became a refrain: "Democracy is in peril".

Saturday, April 21, 2018, Yashwant Sinha quit the BJP saying "Democracy is in peril". The four SC judges uttered those same four words on January 12, 2018. Political parties and politicians have off and on thrown "democracy is in peril" into the conversation and the media echoed them, never once asking: Is democracy indeed in peril? If so, why? (IPA Service)

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

--- Menachem Begin

The Shillong Times

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CPI-M Conclave

THE 22nd Congress of the CPI-M at Hyderabad ended on Sunday. The party's schism on how to get it out of a rut was evident. Sitaram Yechury continues to be general secretary for a second term. The central committee's expansion was approved. Differences remained over the political resolution on election strategy. The BJP remains the main enemy. But an understanding with the Congress seems remote. The Kerala and Tripura units wanted an alliance while the West Bengal unit was sceptical. Prakash Karat had long opposed an understanding though Yechury was for some time in favour of a tactical alliance. The Congress did not oppose the electoral understanding proposed by Brinda Karat. But she did not approve of the kind of alliance that the Left had with the Congress in the West Bengal assembly elections. Yechury finally decided on state units working out their own strategy. There was a split in the communist party in 1964 as the CPI regarded the Indian National Congress as representing the national bourgeoisie while the CPI-M disagreed.

The CPI-M seems blind to the major social and economic tremors in the country - farm distress, the exhaustion of Mandal politics and the souring of communal relations. A change is called for in the political spectrum. Communists should stop fighting over jargonistic polemics and show some pragmatism in their approach. If the debate in Hyderabad is any indicator of things to come then the CPI-M has chosen to continue as a marginal political entity.

LOOKING BACK
May 10, 1989

Chinese eye on N.E. tribal areas

The Thangs as are an Indo-Burmese tribe, living in both India and Burma. In India they live at Miao and other places along the Indo-Burmese border, in Tirap district, in south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. In Burma, they occupy the Pangchow tract, on the other side of the international border. Every other day, one may find Thangs as coming to the bazaars at Miao, from the Burmese side to buy rice, clothes and other consumer items. The Pangchow tract has unexploited gold-mines, rubies and diamonds can also be found there. This is an addition to silver, lead and zinc. But the area is utterly undeveloped. It does not

grow enough food. There are hardly any schools or hospitals. In fact, the Burmese Government, whose writ does not run west of the Chindwin river, has done nothing for the uplift of the Thangs as. It is difficult to assess the ex-act population of Thangs as living inside Burma. At least about one lakh of them maybe there. One the Indian side, the member of Thangs as maybe less. The tribal people living in India enjoy a higher economic and social status. Of-ten, Thangs as coming from the Burmese side compare their economic conditions with those of their Indian counterparts and feel dismayed.

Rape- A social crime demands social solution

By Sonie Kharduit

promise route knowing the offender is a close acquaintance or rather their own family member. Hence, shielding the family's dignity is more important than the dignity and trauma of the victim.

Marital rape is another least focused crime happening in our society, especially in a country where child marriage is rampant. An under-aged girl bestowed with the responsibility of bearing and raising babies is indeed experiencing another form of rape against her body and her childhood rights. In the name of marriage, many women are subjected to various forms of sexual exploitation. They are no different from sex slaves. The alpha male attitude besides monopolizing the political, economic and social rights don't even spare women's biological rights over their bodies.

In recent weeks, a rousing atmosphere was built based on the sentiments created by social media to protest against the gruesome acts on those two minors girls in Kathua and Unnao. Several protests were organized in different parts of the country and abroad as well. The same atmosphere was created during the Nirbhaya episode, and the government did react by amending the Criminal law, the Juvenile law, but the truth is nothing much has changed since then. Enacting a new act or merely amending the old ones has failed to deter such crimes. In fact there are innumerable women centric laws meant to protect them but none has shown any impact nor improved the status of women in India.

The knee-jerk reaction of the government or the stirred up reactions of the public are all momentary. Chances are that we will all get back to the post-Nirbhaya slumber. Public memory, after all is short. What we need to understand here is that political tools are no remedy when the disease is deeply ingrained in the social sphere. When no one values the worth of a girl or woman, then how can we value their existence? Crimes against women all intertwined with the position of women in social hierarchies. Since women possess no real identifiable assets in this hierarchy hence they become just a tool of amusement for the counterpart. Stereotyping women's capabilities only as home

maker, sexualization-commercialization of their body bespeaks their worthlessness. Aggravating the problem is the voluntary acceptance of our women of such stigmatization as if they are meant to bear the onslaught of male chauvinism.

A more sustainable effort to counter this disease is by acknowledging the facts discussed above and accordingly responding with appropriate social tools. In the societal setup, family is the first step. Our boys need to be equipped with virtues to respect women and accord the rights they own. Treatment on equal footing by the parents is another vital aspect of letting the girls know their space and worth. The same measures could be followed on a parallel plane in schools, colleges, offices etc.

From the pre-independence era multitude of laws, rules and regulations had been enacted and amended to curtail this historical injustice and to promote women's empowerment Some of these legislations are the Domestic Violence Act, Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Protection of Children against Sexual Offence act etc., but still we are far away from an egalitarian setup. The problem here is that we expect laws on paper alone to heal the social injustices. A social solution for a social problem will produce more success, because the wrong is being corrected not for the fear of law but more so because of the guilt and aspiration to undo the wrong.

Rape and other women centric crimes symbolize the overall moral degradation of our society. The prejudice against women's ability to compete, the unbearable truth to see women on the same power quotient and other biased socio-cultural influences promoting the worth of the male child only all add up to crimes against women and the girl child. Unless we change these attitudes, sad to say that our women will continue to experience the same onslaught and be subjected to objectification, sexualization and other forms of exploitation and discrimination.

The judicial system also has a big role in perpetuating the crime; offenders don't fear the law anymore because they know the delay, the poor quality of investigation, and corruption

all adds up in their favor. The cost of litigation, the complexity, the slow process further discourages many poor people from coming forward to report a crime. Justice for the poor is a tall order indeed. Hence, for reinstating the credibility of the justice system, the judiciary needs to have a focused approach; the justice system has to be time bound and affordable for women centric crimes. This in turn will inspire the victims to come forward knowing that justice will be served and the perpetrators duly punished hence adding the much needed deterrence factor.

Women too need to be pro-active in the process; it's no easy battle to correct the historical wrongs. It's your right to fight for your Rights, God did not create the value gap, and it's all a man-made rule to secure the male superiority complex. It's all about acknowledging your self-worth. Even scientifically we know that women have far superior endurance level and have higher life expectancy than men. The biological role of producing babies is the exclusive domain of women. For nine months carrying the enormous weight of a bulging body and managing household chores alongside is indeed a super human effort. Had the same role been bestowed on man, he would have died within the first-five months itself with the weight of the burden. If he survives by any chance then death is definite during the delivery stage due to lack of endurance for pains and the stamina needed din the process.

Hence, for curing this social-ill, we need to examine the problem holistically, understand the underlying causes and then adequately address it. A law becomes effective only when those who make the law or those who apply it and more importantly those on whom the law is applied have understood the essence of the law and are ready to assimilate it at the individual capacity. The victims and their families should come forward since justice will not come at their door step. They ought to fight for it, and the judiciary too should respond responsibly. Capital punishment may not be the only remedy, because death kills only the body but not the evil inside us.

‘Crorepati’ Politicians Vision blurred for needy?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Recent data of an analysis of election affidavits filed for the 64 Rajya Sabha seats is an eye opener on the country's top politicians. It revealed that 87 per cent of them are crore-patis. Their average assets are over Rs 22 crores, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), which carried out the analysis. However, not much is known whether there has been another survey or study to find out how and from where these candidates have amassed such huge wealth.

Obviously, the data suggests that the members of Parliament, whether in Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha would be worth a few hundred crores. These people's representatives ideally are supposed to plan and help the development process in a country where around 65 per cent of the population is poor or belong to the economically weaker sections.

The question that arises is whether these politicians would have the understanding as well as the foresight to look at the grass-root levels to mitigate the sufferings of the poor.

This apart, the politicians have a questionable reputation given the fact that 1765 MPs and MLAs or 36 per cent of parliamentarians and State Assembly members have been facing criminal trials in 3045 cases. The total strength of lawmakers in Parliament and Assemblies stands at 4896. According to data supplied by the Centre to the Supreme Court, the highest number of cases against politicians is in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. According to the ADR, 1581 cases were pending against politicians after the 2014 elections and subsequently the Centre decided to set up 12 fast track courts across the country.

Additionally, according to Transparency International, India ranked worse than China and Bhutan in terms of Corruption Perception Index for 2017, but fared better than neighbours, including Pakistan and Bangladesh. It was ranked 81st with a score of 40, whereas Bhutan had a score of 67 among India's neighbours and ranked 26th.

Among the political leaders, perhaps Tamil Nadu's former Chief Minister late J. Jayalalithaa happened to be the first incumbent in the country to be imprisoned on charges of unaccounted illegal wealth. Her case has been rare even if compared with other countries of the world. Other former Chief Ministers who have been jailed for corruption in various scams include Lalu Prasad, Madhu Koda, B. S. Yeddyurappa, O. P. Chautala and Jagannath Mishra. Recently, Lalu Prasad has been convicted for the fourth time in the infamous fodder case.

One may mention here that only recently, the Supreme Court directly 11 States to explain within two weeks what steps they had taken to appoint their anti-corruption ombudsmen, the Lokayukta and Upalokayukta. Under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act of 2013 (notified on January 2014), the Centre should appoint a Lokayukta each as an anti-graft ombudsman. But the States in North East as also Jammu & Kashmir, Bengal, Telengana, Tamil Nadu etc. have yet to do so.

Apart from the above, false promises made by politicians would be another reason for people to lose faith in them. There is a feeling, and not without justification, that politicians primarily look for their own interests while executing projects/programmes and have very little concern for the genuine welfare of the masses.

Moreover, politicians are gaining the reputation of rarely keeping their prom-

ises made before elections or even after that. They rarely visit their constituencies and interact with the people so as to ascertain their needs and demands. Even some don't care to interact with their party's representatives at the grass-root levels so as to touch base with ground realities. The structure of planning in the country has thus been top-down and true decentralisation is virtually absent.

Given the above factors, the character of politicians sadly doesn't command respect and a big section of the educated class may well even detest them. The young generation feels that honest and educated people shouldn't join politics where creative talents and sincerity has no value. This explains why educated youths stay far away from politics while a section does not even feel the necessity of casting their votes.

Undeniably, the political system has not developed to the extent necessary as values, morality and welfare have virtually lost their significance and meaning, specially in Third World countries like India. Democratic and welfare values, as enunciated by Constitutional experts, do not exist and today's government does not have the participation of the people at the grass-root levels.

It is feared that many of the politicians are barely concerned about the poorer sections and the EWS, as a result of which there exists a widening disparity in incomes with crony capitalism and neo-liberalism being promoted in the country by the political class to further their own interests. There is also a great disparity between the per capita incomes in urban areas compared to those in the rural areas. The neglect of the rural sector is manifest from the deepening agrarian crisis which has been continuing for quite a few years.

In such a situation, there is no plan by the leadership to force the rich to transfer an amount of their wealth purely for the poor's welfare, or say by setting up educational institutions or hospitals aimed solely for the neglected and the impoverished, who cannot afford to go to high cost educational centres or nursing homes. It really doesn't matter that the poor have to struggle to meet their health expenses. Even outsourcing work for the rural unemployed, who are educated or have skilled training, could be another area where the poorer sections could be helped. In fact, the so-called philanthropy of our businessmen really does not serve the interests of the poorer sections.

In spite of big talk and promises, it is doubtful whether the real character of the politicians would change and good governance would prevail in the country. Election after election would be held and politicians would continue to 'hoodwink' the people. The question thus arises what is the remedy in such a precarious situation?

It is indeed difficult to directly give an answer to this vital question. We may continue to talk of unearthing black money when politicians themselves along with their collaborators, a section of powerful business houses, are themselves the biggest beneficiaries. We may also talk of sustainable and inclusive development, referring to Mahatma Gandhi and his ideals of decentralisation, trusteeship and value-based politics but this may not become a reality in the coming years, judging by current trends.

We will possibly have to wait till a new leader emerges who would really be sincere to push the country in the right direction. ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Calling crime by its name!

Editor, Apropos Patricia Mukhim's article, "Why this culture of impunity" (ST, April 20, 2018), when a rape culminates in murder by a criminal, it is a common error to brand him as a rapist and this common error exposes our culture of impunity. As a matter of fact, such a criminal should be called a killer rapist and he must get double punishment for his capital offence - if it is a life imprisonment then he must be kept in an isolated cell till his death. Similar to this common error, our society had accepted rape and murder as, so to speak, an old normal. Then Nirbhaya happened. It was a public tsunami against such an offence. It could have been a watershed in the history of gender justice had we remained as vocal post - Nirbhaya.

Unfortunately, we keep on behaving like three wise monkeys ~ of speaking no evil, seeing no evil and hearing no evil when a Nirbhaya happens to be a socially and economi-

cally backward girl. As many as six Dalit Nirbhayas are raped every day in our country. Many of such rapes end in murders. But agonizing series of atrocities against downtrodden girls remain just as "o hota hai" even post - Nirbhaya. Things have come to such a pass that some people, politicians and advocates had gone to such extremes as to openly leap to the defence of the criminals who kidnapped, raped and murdered a small nomadic tribal girl. What a shame that these anti-national forces are trying to cheat their real identity by masquerading as nationalists!

A reverse - Nirbhaya movement, as it were, was staged to create Bhaya (fear) in the minds of the nomadic Bakarwal community to which the Kathua girl belonged. It tells a very sad tale of not only lust but also of greed of some people who must have had a motive for gain in terrorising and banishing the tribal people from the forest area in Jammu province.

Now, when the people

are slowly raising their voices of sanity in favour of a tribal victim, it looks like rain on burning desert sands. Let it be a downpour that can wash out our apathy towards our Dalit/ poor/ downtrodden sisters of our country.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Of religious hypocrisy

Editor, I fully endorse the view expressed by Mebaaihun Blah in his letter published on April 21 April, 2018 in your esteemed daily in connection with the article by Fabian Lyngdoh, "In the image of man He created Him". He was spot on in his assertion about 'the foul actions and attitudes of so called Christian institutions'. I would like to add here that such foul actions and attitudes are not restricted to 'Christian institutions' only. Similar attitudes are prevalent in institutions run by persons of other religions as well. Most often than not, the attitude and behav-

iour of so called religious persons towards the common man is horrendous. In the month of February this year, I was an unfortunate witness to one such abominable behaviour of the head of one well known non-Christian institution based in Sohra. On that day few teachers of a Shillong based school had gone to meet the Secretary of that institution to apprise him about their problems and difficulties. The saffron clad Secretary instead of listening to the teachers insulted them in full public view and spoke such vitriolic words, which I never imagined any head of a religious institution can utter. Out of curiosity, I followed the matter and was utterly shocked to learn that the salaries of those teachers had been held up till date as punishment for daring to express their grievances. It is well established that most of the functionaries of such institutions hardly follow what has been written in the scriptures. They think that after GOD they are the most powerful and knowl-

edgeable persons having authority to do whatever they like and their action is not subject to any question and scrutiny. So, let us pray to GOD to forgive such religious persons because they know not what they are doing.

Yours etc.,
N. K. Kehar
Shillong-6

Give the school kids a break!

Editor, As a resident of the Upper LACHUMIERE locality, I would like to take advantage of your newspaper to highlight the plight of residents in this locality. The road leading to Upper Lachumiere from Malki point has become a sort of a bye-pass for most vehicles proceeding to Don Bosco/St. Edmund's areas. It is especially an effort in the morning when we have to walk this road to drop our kids to school. It causes a severe headache for us parents to control the children while maneuvering this lane as they have to avoid vehicles coming from both directions.

The walk in this road is

made worse by the cars parked on the stretch of this lane. A few of the guest houses situated in this lane also add to the woes as the vehicles belonging to their guests are parked next to these guest houses causing a two-way parking. I have noticed that a few 'No Parking' signs have been painted on the walls on one side of this lane, but the vehicle owners care a damn about these signs. Even the Locality Rangbah has never been seen to take corrective measures to clear this mess in this locality.

We as parents of school-going kids, beg the respective Dorbar Shnong to take stern measures not to allow parking on this lane and create a healthy atmosphere in the locality.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

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.

"People ask how can a Jewish kid from the Bronx do preppy clothes? Does it have to do with class and money? It has to do with dreams."

--- Raoul Vaneigem

The Shillong Times

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Women in West Asia

EMANCIPATION of women is making strides both in Iran and Saudi Arabia. In December last year, Vida Mohaveed stood bareheaded at a traffic intersection in Tehran waving her headscarf on a stick. She symbolized freedom of the fair sex in Iran. The move has been afoot for quite some time setting back the obscurantism preached by an all-powerful Khomeini. In May last year a US-based Iranian journalist Masih Ali Najad started the White Wednesday movement on the Facebook. She called upon women to wear white on Wednesdays and to throw away headscarves in public places. It was to flout the Hijab law enforced on women in backward Islamic countries. But evidently Mohaveed's public display of defiance is an isolated piece of action and it will take time for it to turn into a widespread movement. The Hijab was enforced by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. It was intended to whittle away at women's rights in Iran while previously it had a westernized queen. President Hassan Rouhani liberalized the fatwa. It is no longer mandatory in Tehran though the rest of the country is still controlled by it. In Saudi Arabia, the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman has announced progressive reforms. In a kingdom known for subjugation of women, they have been assured greater freedom and greater participation in public life. They can drive and achieve enhanced job opportunities. The headscarf is to be optional.

All this does not apply to some other Islamic countries in West Asia. In Syria, for instance, women not only fight shoulder to shoulder with men. In one region, there is self-rule without a government and in the people's Parliament, women have as much say as their men folk.

LOOKING BACK

May 20, 1989

Assam, Nagaland agree on joint peace committee

The Assam and Nagaland Governments have agreed in principle to set up joint peace committees in the common border areas between the two states, according to official sources here. The measure was suggested by Assam Chief Minister Mr P K Mahanta in a recent letter addressed to his Nagaland counterpart Mr S C Jamiar to

maintain peace and harmony and promote mutual trust and goodwill among the people living in the border areas. Mr Jamir agreed to Mr Mahanta's proposal and invited him to visit Kohima sometime in June to further pursue the issue of setting up peace committees and other matters of mutual interest.

TO THE EDITOR

Understanding Khasi philo-theology!

Editor,
What appeared in the context of the Shad Suk Mynsiem in your paper (ST April 10, 2018) that the President of the Seng Khasi "...maintained that the festival is open to those...who converted to Christianity", is misplaced and misleading. It is therefore an imperative now in this hour of confusion to set this matter right and accord it the clarity it deserves.
At the outset it is important to affirm that in the ancient and original "Way of Life" of the Khasis, culture and worship are two sides of the same coin, inextricably interwoven, co-existent and inseparable. Flowing in the mosaic of this "Way of Life" is the river of a defined philosophy and its attendant cosmology that has been handed down to the people by the Almighty Creator from the dawn of creation or as is proclaimed "naduh ba dang lung ka sngi u bnai".
As it was handed down from generation to generation, since time immemorial from the "Dawn of Consciousness" lies the story of origin of the Human who descended onto this earthly abode from the celestial heavens via the

"Jingkieng Ksiar" or Golden Bridge straddling the heavens and the earth atop Lum Sohpetbneng. To this day the sanctum sanctorum on the summit of Lum Sohpetbneng stands witness to the origin story of the Khasi and to which they pay utmost reverence. Emanating from this fountain of thought and repository of ancient wisdom is the concept of "Tip briew, tip Blei" the presiding philo-theological precept which defines, guides and inspires the Khasi as they navigate their day to day life in prayer and praise to their Creator. At the core of "Tip briew, tip Blei" lies a deep consciousness of the "Divinity within the Human" and its link with the "Divinity without". The simple translation of this aphorism is that only in the "Knowing of the human, will the knowing of the Creator be revealed".
As a continuum to this philosophy they journey through life on earth in the pursuit of Righteousness and the Truth, "Ban kamai ia ka hok" striving earnestly sans prophetic, saintly or any other intervention. In the social context the Khasis follow a very defined system of kinship which has deep roots in the respect of matrilineal and patrilineal relationships or

"Kur and Kha" and where marriage between members of the same matrilineal group or "Kur" is strictly prohibited and taboo.
In conclusion it is clearly evident that dancers and participants in the "Shad Suk Mynsiem" are those who steadfastly adhere to the above philo-theology and the tenets therein.
Yours etc.,
Wallamphang Roy,
Via email

Stringent punishment for supporting child rapists!

Editor,
Apropos your editorial, "Death penalty for child rapists" (ST, April 23, 2018), the effectiveness of the provision for death penalty for child rapist will remain just on paper unless there also exists political will, administrative neutrality, public vigilance and moral education. However, is there any penalty for the supporters of child - killer - rapists? An inhuman show of solidarity with such heinous criminals was staged by some people with our national flag in their hands! This is an offence against our national flag, against India's image and

Modi's Europe Tour

Mixed bag of results!

By Dr D.K. Giri

Prime Minister Modi just had a weeklong tour of Europe, touching Sweden, the UK and Germany. Interestingly, he met heads of 60 countries, five from the Scandinavian countries-- Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland, 54 from Commonwealth countries, and of course, the feisty Chancellor Angela Merkel, who began last month her fourth stint as head of German Government. But the results of his visits are a mixed bag. Modi renewed, pioneered, and consolidated contacts with the Scandinavian countries, took some fresh initiatives with UK, updated bilateralism with Germany, but missed assuming the leadership of the 54-member Commonwealth.
Significantly, the Commonwealth has bounced back into reckoning in world politics after Britain decided to exit from the European Union on 23 June, 2016. Britain would want to have an alternative for its market and investment to that of the EU. However, times and conditions in many Commonwealth countries have changed. Britain is a declining power where as countries like India, Australia, Canada, and South Africa are growing economies, and are world powers in their own rights.
The Queen, the present Head of the Commonwealth has nominated her son Prince Charles to be the next Head. Britain, many observers would argue, should relinquish this post for the sake of modernising the Commonwealth structure by shunning the imperial legacy. Prominent member countries could form a 'leadership league' with some criterion of economic and political strength, and rotate the leadership amongst them. To start with, the five countries - UK, India, Australia, Canada and South Africa with their high economic strength and democratic credentials, could constitute the league.
From available reliable sources, India was offered the joint-leadership of the Commonwealth, but for reasons not known, it did not take it. Nothing could explain it except the Indian diplomatic conservatism, and lethargy. NaMo continues to fumble in stimulating India's bureaucracy including the foreign policy establishment.
Interestingly, India doubled its contribution to the Commonwealth for technical cooperation. It has offered to train 30 young men and women each every year in world class cricket infrastructure of India. Along with UK, India has launched a new tool kit for Commonwealth to replicate their bilateral Joint Trade Review (JTR). It is in fitness of things that the CHOGM this year aimed at enhancing intra-Commonwealth trade under a solidarity slogan called, "Towards a Common Future".
It is noteworthy that India receives great attention in the Commonwealth, as the 'jewel of the crown' in the past and as the largest democracy at present. India therefore, should have grasped the importance of the Commonwealth for its external engagement. Commonwealth countries account for 1/3 of world population, around 2.4 billion, 1/5 of global trade, and 1/4 of G-20. With such capacities, it would enhance India's role as a world power should it assume its leadership. But for now, India seems to have missed the bus.
Bilaterally, Modi had the usual trade and defence agreements with his counterpart Theresa May. Notable among these are India and UK Free Trade Agreement, Defence Cooperation, a Joint Green Growth equity Fund with contributions of 120 million GBP from each side and 500 million GBP of institutional investment; a 10 million GBP joint project for cancer treatment between Department of Bio-technology, India, and Cancer Research Institute, UK.
Modi's visit to Nordic countries seems to have brought rich dividends for India. An Indian Prime Minister went to Sweden, 30 years after a prime ministerial visit. Rajiv Gandhi had been done so in 1988. Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven gave a warm welcome to Modi by breaking protocols, receiving him at the airport and travelling in the same car. The five Nordic countries co-hosted the Nordic council meeting

with India. This was only second such occasion after their meeting with US President Barak Obama.
Both India and Nordic countries were revising their approach to each other. Earlier on, India was dealing with 'big powers' like UK, Germany and France, paying less attention to peaceful and prosperous Scandinavians who were high-up in various development indices in the hierarchy of nations in the world. Likewise, Nordic countries were busy determining their European identities, not looking beyond. India was, perhaps, not in their radar. With growing protectionism and a trade war between USA and China looming large, the rich Nordic countries are looking elsewhere for investment, and India appears to be an obvious attraction.
Furthermore, India-Sweden relations were overshadowed by the Bofors scandals that rocked Indian politics in 1980s. Similarly, India-Denmark bilateralism was marred by the arms-drop at Purulia, West Bengal, by a Danish national. Time as the best healer has pushed these bitterness and misgivings into the dustbin of history. Modi's visit and bilateral meetings have rebooted the relations.
With Sweden, the highlight was the Joint Innovation Partnership driven by a Joint Action Plan, with 'mutual commitment to drive prosperity and growth'. Sweden promised \$59 million to the Partnership Fund. The areas of cooperation include smart cities, renewable energy, women's development, space and science, health and life sciences, trade growth, climate change, cyber security and so on.
There are 160 Swedish companies already working in India generating direct employment for 160,000 people. About 30 CEOs attended a meeting with Modi, and committed investment of \$1.1 billion in two years. In the last three years \$1.5 billion has been invested in India. Both these figures add up to more than what has been invested in the last 20 years from the Indian side; enquiries were made on purchasing 110 combat Jets for Indian Air Force from SAAB, the

Swedish defence production company, to the tune of \$15 billion. These would replace Soviet-era MiG fighters.
Politically, Sweden supported India's membership of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and a permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council. Sweden also welcomed India's accession to other international protocols, such as International Export Control regime, Wassenaar Arrangement, Australia Group, Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, and Missile Technology Control Regime.
Modi had bilateral meetings with other four Nordic countries. Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen signed agreements on animal husbandry, dairying and urban development; PM of Finland Juha Sipila negotiated trade investment, renewable energy, space, waste management; Iceland Prime Minister Kartin Jakobs Dottir signed on blue economy, geo-thermal energy, education, tourism and culture, and finally, PM of Norway Erna Solberg signed on trade and investment, shipping and port development, IT, Green transport solution, blue economy, Renewable energy, and health.
The final stop, actually a stop-over was Germany, where Modi met Merkel, "the Iron lady of Europe". It was just to reaffirm India's close relations with Germany, the strongest economy of Europe. India has a trade deficit with Germany. Modi tweeted: "I had a wonderful meeting with a close friend and discussed multiple aspects relating to India-German co-operation as well as global issues."
All in all, Modi had a mixed bag; a good trip to Nordic Europe, but not-so-good one to UK and the Commonwealth. He was more interested in addressing the domestic audience from London before the Karnataka elections on 12 May, than to focus on 54-member strong Commonwealth. So it appeared on balance.--INFA
(The author is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

Yours etc.,
Anil Singh Roka,
via email

Respect the queue culture

Editor,
The incident that happened in a railway station on the Lucknow - Kanpur line on April 23 last where one person died and several others were injured was because of a stampede. As usual, the train came late and had not come to a complete halt when the waiting passengers rushed to board the train. In the rush one passenger slipped, got caught in the wheels and died on the spot. This incident, like many others in the past, occurred mainly because we have forgotten the queue culture. Had the passengers queued up to board the train, perhaps such accidents could have been avoided.
In my locality, at Lower Barapather, the Municipal conservancy truck comes every alternate day. People wait with their receptacles (blue and green bucket), to dump their household wastes. No sooner does the truck come when people

would rush towards it to hand over their receptacles to the two truck attendants. It used to be very difficult to manage to hand over the receptacle to the attendants because people push their dirty buckets over the heads of the people in the front, even though the truck stops for a sufficiently long time and until the attendants have picked up the last bucket. One day an illiterate truck attendant shouted at people to fall in line. Since then it has become a relief to dump our waste in the truck.
According to me, the greatest sign of civilization is not our great invention or discoveries. It is the culture of waiting for our turn or the queue culture. I have observed that only human beings queue up. This culture of forming a queue can avert a lot of anxiety, inconvenience and tragic accidents. First come first served should be our motto in everyday life.
Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong-2

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

Popular angst against BJP, Modi about to explode

Bureaucrats, scientists, academics mince no words

By Amulya Ganguli

Close on the heels of an open letter written to Narendra Modi by 49 former bureaucrats about the "terrifying state of affairs" in India, has come yet another missive by as many as 637 academics in India and abroad who have voiced a similar concern.
Not only that, they have underlined the "profoundly distasteful efforts of rationalization and the deflection and diversion that have been so much in evidence in the reactions of your party's spokespersons in the media".
The reference was apparently to a BJP spokesperson's characterization of the opposition's allegations of rape as a part of a campaign which focussed on different issues on different occasions, crying "minority, minority" at one time or "Dalit, Dalit" on another and "women, women" on a third.
The outrage of the former bureaucrats and the

away from the party to join the Muslims who are not known to be supporters of the BJP any way. Substantial sections of these groups - the middle class, the Dalits and the Muslims - stood by Modi in 2014 because of their faith in his promise of rapid and inclusive development.
While the absence of growth in a manner which was expected is believed to have led to the erosion of support for the BJP among the Dalits and Muslims apart from the atrocities which they have experienced at the hands of the saffron brigade, the middle class has largely stood by the party as can be seen from much of what is written in the social media because of, for one, the continuing belief in Modi's assurances and, two, the inability of the opposition to get its act together.
However, two aspects of the letters written to the Prime Minister, and

Evidently, the anger and anguish are deepening, which does not bode well for the government as it cannot dismiss all the angst as the feelings of the so-called Lutyens crowd which is out of touch with the people. Nor can such expressions of discontent be brushed aside as "manufactured protests", as finance minister Arun Jaitley did when a section of the intelligentsia began to return their awards in 2015 in protest against the growing intolerance in society.

scholars belonging to Ivy League universities such as Harvard, New York, Brown, Columbia and the IITs followed the rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir and the rape of a 17-year-old in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh.
However, a pro-BJP Hindi newspaper rejected the charges of rape on the grounds that they were intended to defame the Hindus in a classic example of disseminating fake news, forcing the police to reiterate that the girl was indeed sexually assaulted. A Union minister, too, has said that rapes cannot be stopped in so large a country.
The participation by two BJP ministers of Jammu and Kashmir in a rally in support of the accused was another example of the "deflection and diversion" noted by the academics, causing an uproar which persuaded the party to ask them to resign. However, there were also demonstrations by a section of lawyers in favour of the accused.
But the world sees these tragedies in a different light. Apart from the letters of the former bureaucrats and academics, shock and the revulsion about the "broken body of a little girl", as the latter have said, have been voiced by the UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres, and the IMF chief, Christine Lagarde, who has urged Modi to pay greater attention to women's safety.
What is noteworthy about these expressions of grief is that they have come from what can be regarded as the middle class and the upper echelons of society who have been vocal about their support for Modi in India and abroad and had voted for him in large numbers in 2014.
For the BJP, therefore, the possible alienation of this group is worrisome at a time when the Dalits are perceived to be drifting especially the one by the academics, need to be noted. These are, first, the larger number of signatories and, secondly, the sharpness of tone.
This wasn't so in the letter written in 2017 by 65 ex-bureaucrats who expressed a "sense of deep disquiet at what has been happening in India", unlike the latest letter from the bureaucrats which has spoken of the "terrifying state of affairs" in the country.
Evidently, the anger and anguish are deepening, which does not bode well for the government as it cannot dismiss all the angst as the feelings of the so-called Lutyens crowd which is out of touch with the people.
Nor can such expressions of discontent be brushed aside as "manufactured protests", as finance minister Arun Jaitley did when a section of the intelligentsia began to return their awards in 2015 in protest against the growing intolerance in society.
It is possible that there is now a greater realization in the BJP about the prevailing dissatisfaction than in the days of the "award wapsi gang", as the saffron camp mockingly called the returnees, when the BJP believed that the protests were being organized by those associated with the previous government who were unwilling to accept Modi's rise to power.
This realization must have been accentuated by the worldwide notice that has been taken of the rape horrors with the New York Times being particularly scathing in its criticism. With the elections due in Karnataka in less than a month, the BJP must be considerably worried about the alienation from the party of the middle class and other social groups because of its dark record in Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh where it is in power. (IPA Service)

“Some days are just bad days, that's all. You have to experience sadness to know happiness, and I remind myself that not every day is going to be a good day, that's just the way it is!”

--- Dita Von Teese

The Shillong Times

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AFSPA and Meghalaya

THE revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from Meghalaya and parts of Arunachal Pradesh has elicited several views, countrywide. In the case of Meghalaya, AFSPA was invoked only along the Assam - Meghalaya border mainly to prevent the militant outfits from that state - the ULFA and NDFB from operating freely across the two states. Although Meghalaya is buffeted by insurgency since 1994, it is the State Police that have handled the situation. Only in 1998 was there an army operation - Operation Birdie - in the areas adjoining West Khasi Hills and East Garo Hills, when the 59 Mountain Division of the army was deployed. But that Operation was short-lived as the army was out of depth in that terrain. Hence the people of Meghalaya were not impacted by the draconian clauses of AFSPA which allows the security forces to operate with impunity, including shooting to kill anyone suspected to be a militant. Meghalaya was never declared a "Disturbed Area" which is the fore-runner to the invocation of the AFSPA.

The Centre has revoked the Act following a decline in the number of violent incidents in Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. In fact the South Asia Terrorism Portal points to "relative peace" in Manipur and Assam too since 2017. AFSPA was lifted from Tripura in 2015, 18 years after its invocation, because the security situation had improved. Since AFSPA is ostensibly invoked to deal with armed insurgency it is ironic that the same Act is not invoked in the Maoist hits areas of Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, parts of Jharkhand and Maharashtra. Interestingly no one raises this issue in Parliament. The Jeevan Reddy Committee had toured the North Eastern states in 2004 and given its recommendation for revocation of the Act but the UPA Government sat on it and the NDA Government in 2015 rejected the Committee's recommendations in toto. The State Governments of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland can on their own assess the security situation in their states and revoke the Disturbed Areas Act following which the AFSPA can be withdrawn. But state governments have become dependent on the Centre for law and order. It is also a convenient excuse to blame the Centre for any act of insurgency in their states. In one sense the states are admitting that their police force is incompetent and incapable of maintaining law and order.

TO THE EDITOR

Spare a thought for the Myntdu River

Editor

The news item, "Holistic approach must to clean Wah Umkhrah etc " (ST April 19, 2018) once again brought to attention the concern for the pitiable condition of the Umkhrah river. It also mentioned the measures being taken up to clean its water and its banks and there were further suggestions by an activist for this cause. This concern and the continuing efforts to save the river are understandable as it passes through the heart of the state capital and the responsibility to reclaim it lies upon all of us now to save us from the ignominy of being considered a people that is unsympathetic towards nature and inconsiderate towards our future generation , if by our careless attitude we deprive them of nature's precious gifts in their magnificence .

The Wah Umkhrah 's predicament has been a long standing one and should have been a glaring example for us to be more caring for such resources earlier but surprisingly we have not learnt our lesson from this because on the same page of the issue of the Shillong Times of the same

date, a news item, "Activist asks government to save Myntdu," speaks volumes about the steady deterioration of the Myntdu river in Jowai Town. While a petition was filed by the activist for the Wah Umkhrah with the National Green Tribunal seeking direction to protection and rejuvenate the river, it appears from the news report that the NGT has intervened in the case of the Myntdu river with directions to the state government to ensure that the river is kept clean.To what extent the government will be able to carry out the direction of the NGT remains to be seen as most parts of the catchment of the river is now under human settlement and rapid urbanisation has brought in intricate issues which cannot be easily dealt with.Lately there are signs of human settlements approaching closer to the river upstream.

Unlike the Wah Umkrah, however, much of the banks of the Myntdu river are still unoccupied which therefore prompted the activist to suggest planting of at least one lakh saplings by the Forest Department on these banks. The Government has to take a call on this soon and if necessary may even take

over the private lands on the banks by compensating the land owners so that it can ensure sustained protection of the river through plantations or other measures. On the other hand , the suggestion of activist vis-a-vis the Wah Umkhrah that at least ten metres from the bank of the should be free from construction or human activity, perhaps came rather late as the banks of the Wah Umkhrah and its tributaries are already occupied by structures for human settlements and other purposes which therefore cannot be easily dislodged now as evident from attempts made earlier.

Let us face the fact that in spite of all the attentions and treatment it gets now Wah Umkhrah may not recover fully, although it will salvage our pride if it even recovers to some extent. Conversely, the Myntdu river is still vibrant and useful to the citizens of Jowai as a source of drinking water, irrigation and recreation and it is still considered as the lifeline of Jowai .Whether it runs smooth and deep for perpetuity or whether it will go the Wah Umkhrah way in the near future will depend on the preventive measures beginning now and the proper treatment

it presently deserves which other rivers too should get. This will all depend on our sincerity and the farsightedness , especially of those who govern us .

Yours etc.,
K.L.Tariang,
Via email

Kudos Seng Samla Umden!

Editor,

I must congratulate the Seng Samla Umden for apprehending one truck carrying coal illegally and passing via Nongpoh- Umden to Byrnihat. The road which begins from Umden to Byrnihat is a border road sanctioned by NEC and it was completed in 2012. I am not sure if the authority of the NEC has checked this road . If they have then they should be ashamed to take credit because of the condition of the road. The road is really small so that only one vehicle can pass through. Secondly, within a short period of two years the road has deteriorated to its worse condition making it not motorable for small vehicles too. It has remained unrepaired now for five to six years. I would like to ask the higher authorities of the NEC to explain the purpose of this border road. Is it

for illegally transporting coal to avoid being checked in the main road? Is the budget for making this road is so little that it is constructed so poorly? Who is to supervise the repair of this 5-6 year old road?

Going back to the Seng Samla of Umden for apprehending the illegal coal truck - I thank them for doing such a noble job. But why have the DC and the police allowed such trucks to pass via this road? Don't you see the involvement of these people in crime and corruption? I came to know that a letter of complaint was sent to the DC which was not responded to., Doesn't NEC have the right to take action against such corrupt officials or is NEC part of has corruption? There are talks that many headmen of the various villages through which this road passes are also involved as brokers or dalals in ensuring the safe passage of the trucks through this road. Will NEC take action against them? I urge the police and NEC to please follow up the FIR filed by the Seng Samla Umden and punish those involved in this corruption. I also request the state government to file an FIR against all those involved as brokers for allowing the trucks

to pass through this road. NEC please repair this road as it is the backbone of development and communication for the many villages in the border areas.

Yours etc.,
Michael Makri,
Via email

God cannot be bribed !

Editor,

This refers to the letter, "Of religious hypocrisy" by K. Kehar (ST, April 24, 2018). Sri Aurobindo had once said, ~"This is a miracle that men can love God, yet fail to love humanity. With whom are they in love then?"

It is a shame that we fail 48.2 million hungry children of our country. But we do not hesitate to share food and money with God to get something in return. We even let milk and honey go down the drain to appease the gods and goddesses ! Thus, we have created a God in our own shadows as though the Divine is as mean as a bribe taker and we are to grease His palm to fulfill our desires.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Shillong - 4

Regressive ideology puts Indian democracy in peril

By Fabian Lyngdoh

British crown, but it was only in January, 1950 that it became a 'Sovereign Democratic Republic' when the written Constitution came into force. Therefore, we celebrate our independence from the British monarchy on the 15th of August, and in commemoration of the formation of a modern republic, the 'Republic Day' is celebrated on 26th January. For over seventy years we had been a modern democratic republic, trying to implant the ideals of democracy deep into the hearts of the people and into the culture of the society. We have progressed to a great extent in the formal political sphere under the dictates of the law, but we still are a long way away from achieving the constitutional ideals in the social sphere because of the lack of the dictates of culture.

In 2013 the Bharatiya Janata Party managed to gather strength on the promise of the winds for change which hinged on the idea of removing the materially corrupt Congress Party Government which had ruled the Country for nearly seven decades. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the BJP came to power in the beginning of 2014, and the people of India had great hopes and expectations for a better political and socio-economic well-being under the new regime. Some commendable changes did take place; but overall, what has actually transpired is an unprecedented rise in social disorder, violence and crimes, especially against women and children, leading to a general feeling of lawlessness and insecurity. On the other hand, the BJP and its associates like the RSS, Bajrang Dal and others, seem to indulge in spiritual corruption and religious intolerance, acting as zealous guardians of tradition and displaying Hindu fundamentalism, machismo and chauvinism as if in deadly revenge for some imaginary oppression that they had been made to endure so far. They seem to harbour the feeling of having been oppressed not only under the British rule, but perhaps also under Ashoka who converted to Buddhism, and under Muslim rule of the Turks and Mughals.

Under the present regime, even Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru and others, began to be seen not as leaders and reformers, but as traitors because they

brought a secular democratic republic instead of the mythical 'Ramarajya.'

Now that the BJP is in power, some politicians and their radical supporters seem to be in the mood of celebration of an independence from thousands of years of imaginary bondage of history. Perhaps, a future utopian India is visualized in which the Brahmins as priests validate the authority of Kshatriyas as Kings, and receive wealth, as well as high social status in return. There seems to be a desire to re-establish the mythological kingdoms of the past such as those reflected in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, through propaganda of conservative religious sentiments and the combination of Kshatriya royalty with Brahmanical priesthood in new avatars of party politicians and self-proclaimed god-men. So, a 'computer baba' or a left wing tantric guru is considered more important to India's development than well trained scientists, professionals and seasoned academics. Even for Hindus' religious life, the Government might recommend closer association with individualistic, freelance and controversial leftwing tantric gurus than with genuine rightwing Swamis of disciplined religious orders.

A successful republic cannot be built on mythology, but it has to be firmly built on rationality and secularism. Historians tell us that the ambience of the Mahabharata is that of the clan-based societies, and its geography focused on the Ganges-Yamuna doab and adjoining areas, involving the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and also Saurashtra in Gujarat, where Krishna's clan, the Yadavas were based. The contest between the Kauravas and the Pandavas is set in the fertile region around Delhi. It was not a war in which the whole of India and the world were involved.

Likewise, the scene of the Ramayana is set in the middle Ganges Plain and the Vindhyan forests, and the whole of present India and the world were not involved at all. The conflict between Rama, the king of Kosala and Ravana, the king of Lanka reflects an exaggerated version of local conflicts, occurring between expanding kingdoms of the Ganges Plain and the less sedentary societies of the Vindhyan region. The kingdom of Kosala represents the newly emerging monarchies and is a contrast to the society of the

'rakshasas' or demons, who might be an exaggerated depiction of the forest tribes who were demonized because their pattern of life was so different from that of the monarchies.

It is nauseatingly detestable to see in the social media that some Hindu radicals mercilessly torture non-Hindus with a command that they should pronounce the slogan 'Jai Sri Ram.' These radicals would not have dared to openly commit such despicable acts if they have no assured support of the ruling dispensation. The acts of radicals seem to suggest that the Hindus, who are in overwhelming majority feel oppressed, discriminated and threatened by the miserable minorities like Muslims and Christians. But the truth is, that it is not the Hindu populace who feel oppressed, but it is the politicians who feel threatened of losing grip of their power and control. But, in a society like India it is the exploiters who rule and control, and ironically, the exploited themselves are the flag-bearers of the exploiters and the whistle blowers become the target of hate and vengeance.

History has its own authoritative story to tell. India had been a tolerant society, and Hinduism itself embraces all forms of religious faith and worship within its fold. India had been ruled by various kings, who belonged to any religion, and until the recent regressive awakening, there was a peaceful co-existence of all religions in India. All the rulers, including the British, had introduced positive contributions for the development of Indian society, and history cannot be undone. Today, India emerged as a 'Secular Democratic Republic' and it has to march forward in that direction. 'Ramarajya' as a reign of prosperity and justice can only be established through scientific, rational and secular attitude, and not by reviving a mythologized utopian state.

If mythology is the core of ideology, then Indian democracy is really in peril. The BJP leadership needs to establish the party as a democratic and secular political forum if it really wants to serve the Nation, and not to allow rogue elements to mar the Party's image by destroying the democratic path that India is traversing which is towards socio-economic development on the wings of freedom, justice and equality.

15th Finance Commission Test for federalism

By Dr S. Saraswathi

The Terms of Reference (ToR) to the 15th Finance Commission have provided another issue to different forces trying to bring together non-BJP parties against the Union Government. This time, it is in the guise of asserting State rights and fighting injustice in the exercise of federal fiscal powers. There is propaganda that the Centre is attempting to reduce the States as glorified municipalities.

The issue over the ToR contains several sub-issues -- performance of States in carrying out population control measures, North-South divide in population control, the logic of changing the base for population criteria in determining fund share of States and so on. Even BJP-friendly parties are under political compulsion to question the Union Government's proposal lest it should be understood and painted as pro-Centre and anti-State equated as anti-people stance.

A conclave of Finance Ministers of southern States of India was convened recently by Kerala Government with the idea of initiating a dialogue on the 15th Finance Commission, particularly on its ToR, which were considered as "unjust". The idea gained ground as there was a belief that these were "in contradiction of the principles of federalism enshrined in the Constitution". The aim was to stop what was perceived as the Centre's attempt "to impose stringent conditionalities on State Governments".

Some States were disappointed that the Centre did not consult them on the ToR to the Commission. The CPM stated that the terms were intended to reduce the tax share of the States in devolution, impose unacceptable conditionalities, and accord priority to Centrally Sponsored Schemes over that of the States.

It was the first such conclave and was held at Tiruvananthapuram on 10th April. Finance Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Puducherry besides the host State, Kerala attended the meeting while Tamil Nadu and Telangana stayed away. Incidentally, one must acknowledge the reality that it is not easy to bring together neighbouring States and present regional unity where it does not exist.

Efforts are on to convene a second conclave with enlarged participation of States under non-BJP governments like Delhi, Mizoram, Odisha, and Punjab. It is a political move entangled with economic interests.

Though Tamil Nadu stayed away from the conclave, it sent a communication to the Commission registering its strong disapproval of some of the clauses in the ToR. It called for granting weightage to the share of respective States in Central tax revenue. The existing arrangement has delinked the size of the State's contribution and its eligibility for funds. Tamil Nadu further resented the clause pertaining to Central Government's flagship schemes which amounted to discrediting some of the popular schemes of the State government.

The 15th Finance Commission was set up in October 2017 under Article 280 of the Constitution and deals only with the Central tax revenues. It is the body to make its recommendations to the President as to how the tax revenue collected by the Centre should be distributed among the States and the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues to the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India. These are matters of immense significance economically for equitable growth of all States, and politically for smooth Union-State fiscal relation-

ship. In either side, it is a crucial instrument to exercise financial control over the States by the Centre and a principal determinant of the efficacy of our federal system.

The conclave was particularly seized of the issue of taking 2011 census population figures as the basis for devolution of tax revenue to the States. Southern States on the whole have been keen on implementing population control measures for many decades. Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana have already reached replacement fertility rate of 2.1 and therefore, their population growth is small.

Population growth of Kerala has dropped from 19.24% in 1970s to 14.32% and 9.43% in subsequent two decades. Both Kerala and UP present contrasting pictures in population growth-- 4.86% in the former and 20.09% in the latter, since 2000. Eleven States are likely to be affected adversely by taking 2011 census figures as the base.

The Commission's proposal to provide incentives to States that are striving to achieve the fertility rate of 2.1 would not benefit the Southern States that are already below that level. Calculations on 2011 census basis show that UP will be the biggest gainer to increase its share from 15.3% to 16.5% followed by Rajasthan increasing its share from 4.7% to 5.7%. Other gainers would include Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and J&K. Tamil Nadu would lose by 1.6% and Kerala by 1.1% and Andhra Pradesh by 1%.

Though population is not the sole determinant of fiscal devolution, the affected States have reason to feel aggrieved that they are being punished for being earnest about population control and efficient in implementing family welfare programmes. It is overlooked that States that have brought down fertility rates face certain other population problems like the care of the elderly.

Indeed, the development agenda of States cannot be uniform and cannot progress at uniform pace as these depend on numerous factors. States also make different kinds of contributions to the nation's welfare and security -- all of which are essential for the nation's progress.

Contributions of tax revenue from southern and western States are more than from other States. Whether this should be taken into account in disbursement of funds is a ticklish issue in a country made up of areas at different levels of development due to historical, geographical and social factors. However, no State in the Indian federation, familiar only with water quarrels and linguistic pride, would magnanimously offer its revenue to other States for their development.

It is a test for our federalism. It is a challenge for the Union Government with national interests on top of its agenda to provide for the requirements of all States without being unjust or prejudiced. Other federal governments have different objectives and mechanisms.

In Australia, the federal government collects extensive revenues, but its power to spend directly is rather limited. Two types of payments are made to States -- Specific Purpose Grants (SPG) according to specific agreements between the federal government and the States; and General Revenue Assistance (GRA) which is mostly the share of GST. The amount each State finally gets is based on the principle of horizontal fiscal equalization (HFE). Distribution of GST is done on the recommendation of the Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC).--INFA

"Our life is composed greatly from dreams, from the unconscious, and they must be brought into connection with action. They must be woven together."
--- Ralph Lauren

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX.No.254 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 2018

Talks with China

IT is unlikely that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will soften on China in his summit with President Xi Jinping at Wuman. In order to avoid sabre-rattling, they may however avoid getting into specifics of issues and stress on the positives. India’s external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj has already paved the way for that at a meeting in Shanghai. She has brought up India’s position on terror calling for strong measures against countries which sponsor terrorism. It was an obvious reference to Pakistan and China’s protection of Masood Azhar the terrorist head of Hizbul and JuD sheltering in Pakistan. She said that the fight against terrorists should identify and penalize all states which support and finance terrorists and also provide sanctuary to them and their groups.

Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping will mostly focus on positives during the summit on the Doklan issue. Despite ongoing Chinese activity in Doklan, India feels it has fulfilled the purpose of preventing a road from being built near the chicken’s neck. China is looking to see if it is possible to propose measures to satisfy New Delhi without creating a backlash in Islamabad. Sushma Swaraj stressed that terrorism was an enemy of life, peace and prosperity. She reiterated that a comprehensive convention on international terrorism should be established and security within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) be strengthened. It seems that India’s standoff with China is mainly because of the latter’s protection of Azhar. Meanwhile, India and China are said to be planning a wide range of connectivity infrastructure projects. New Delhi however objects to the \$57 billion CPEC as it passes through Pakistan occupied Kashmir which is claimed by India. The SCO expressed faith in multi-lateral relations and called for a new type of international relations based on fairness and justice.

LOOKING BACK
May 20, 1989

State govt forms board to fight cancer

The Meghalaya Government has constituted an eight-member Cancer Control Board with Health Minister Mrs. Maysalin War as chairman to explore ways of combating the disease. According to an informed source at Shillong, the board will coordinate cancer control activities health with education, while providing for early detection-diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and research.

The Board would also work out details of strengthening the existing health infrastructure at different levels in terms of physical facilities, human resources, equipment and training facilities within the state.

Meanwhile the Rotary Club at Shillong is organizing a two-day free cancer detection camp from Thursday at Nazareth Hospital.

Power of the written word

The power of the written word came home to me when on April 17 incident a Molotov cocktail commonly called a petrol bomb, that was presumably meant to physically harm me, landed instead on a wall of my home and went up in flames. Since then there have been many who advised me to tone down my writing, be more diplomatic, ignore the event; pretend that nothing happened and move on with a business as usual attitude. I guess it’s easier to dish out advice when you are not walking in the other person’s moccasins. Since then I have asked several questions to myself and to other writers. Why do some people have the urge to write; to express; to name the lurking evil of rape, of violence, of corruption of political and bureaucratic malfeasance or against those harming the fragile environment with their relentless greed for cash? I believe all writers are provoked by a sense of outrage and because they believe what they write would make people think and act and that would eventually bring change.

Galileo Galilei, the Italian scientist who was put through the wringer for proving that the earth goes round the sun used the power of the written word to spread his scientific observations about space. His scientific theory shattered previous religious theories that the sun went round the earth. The church believed that the earth was stationary. Galileo was put under house arrest until his death. It was only in 1992 that the Vatican finally apologized to Galileo and admitted that he was right. But it took 350 years for the church to admit to its wrongdoing! Galileo died in 1642!

As someone rightly said, the written word has saved lives, circulated powerful ideas, preserved traditions and memories, and so much more. Great moments in history are recorded through the written word and the important value systems of our ancestresses by which we have set standards for today are here because of the written word. It is the written word that brings us the news on a daily basis and keeps us informed. We use the written word to communicate with each other over WhatsApp,

By Patricia Mukhim

Messages and Emails in the 21st century. And think of all the billet-doux (love letters) penned by lovers, some of which have become epics. Think of the tomes of novels and stories and narratives that move us to action! Where would we be without the written word!

Truly then the written word is the most powerful and most influential tool humans have ever created. Through our writings we share ideas, memories events and human experiences. Education rests largely on our ability to express our knowledge through the written word. Without the written word how would scientists record their scientific theories for posterity? More importantly the written word transcends time and space. We still read Plato and Socrates today, courtesy the written word. Hence anyone that tries to silence those who use the written word to express their views is an enemy of human civilisation. Since I have done nothing to harm anyone except by expressing my views in the public domain, I assume that those who seek to harm me want to send a strong message that I should abort my mission to churn out articles week after week on a range of issues; some hard hitting ones especially on delinquent behaviour by certain civil society organisations and vested interests.

“The pen is mightier than the sword,” is an idiom that will never go out of date. Most people in positions of power and authority detest anyone who questions them. They don’t like their ugly deeds to be exposed. The only tool that journalists use effectively is the pen. Today of course the keyboard has replaced the pen but the written word remains the medium for communicating our stories to the world. Journalists are killed in this country and across the world because someone somewhere does not like what they write or because of an exposé – a revelation of something that is discreditable – which someone with a vested interest wants to hide.

It is not without reason that Democracy requires the fourth estate to prevent the abuse of power by elected representatives; by those

who run the government and by other power holders in society, such as interest groups. And there are quite a number of groups that fall in the last category. While they all claim to represent public interests their actions often betray their vested interests. And although we are a democracy there are forces that constantly threaten to derail this system because of their propensity to disregard the template on which democracy functions. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. So who holds the power holders in check if not the fourth estate? The purpose of journalism is to call out any abuse of power and authority by any and every entity of a democratic society for as long as we claim to live by its ideals. Journalism cannot skirt issues in order not to offend people, institutions and organisations. The moment we do that we are no better than public relations personnel. Those who tell us to be diplomatic in the use of words should be told that we did not join the profession to become diplomats. We would have joined the foreign services if the purpose was to, “lie abroad for the nation.” How do you tame the language when someone has committed a rape? Or has stolen from the public exchequer? Or has extorted someone’s hard earned money? Calling a sin by its right name is the mandate of every journalist. If we are not doing it because of the fear of offending someone powerful or because we fear for our lives then I don’t know if we are actually discharging our duties as the fourth pillar of democracy.

I am troubled by silence in the face of so many issues that confront us on a day to day basis. Shillong city has a population that is roughly about five lakh. Even if 0.1 % of that population decide to use the written word to convey their anxieties about the manner in which government functions; about what is not working and how matters can be improved; about high-handedness in educational institutions; about public transportation, traffic mismanagement and the works, newspaper offices should be getting five hundred letters daily. But we

don’t and that is why I call this a partially functioning democracy. We are not a vibrant democracy as some like to claim Fabian Lyngdoh in his article, “Regressive ideology puts Indian democracy in peril” (ST April 26, 2018) has pointed to the ailments that plague Indian democracy because it is an alien idea implanted in a country with a past that is steeped in hierarchies, caste and religious ideologies. In fact, we are struggling to call ourselves a democracy when we clearly aren’t anywhere near that goal except for the fact that we have elections once in five years. In this mutilated form of democracy we try and claim democratic rights as per the Indian Constitution – our Magna Carta borrowed from the West. But our individual and collective actions often belie our understanding of democracy and its underpinnings.

Democracy allows a dissenting space; it promotes dialogues and discourses in order to allow for a cross section of views to intersect and finally be refined and adopted for better public governance. Democracy does not discriminate between citizens; all citizens have equal rights irrespective of their economic status, caste or creed. Every citizen has or should have a voice. But is that a reality? Is it not a fact that many refuse to speak for fear of being bludgeoned into silence? Hence until the last citizen understands and honours the principles of democracy it is futile for some to keep clamouring about democracy and its many virtues.

Having said that one is not propounding a state of life where one stops questioning the system and the power holders in this system. We must continue to question, critique, remind, nudge, shove and push with the pen for that is the only way to refine democracy and give it the status it deserves. Until then let’s work at deepening democracy and call out those that seek to d e s t a b i l i s e DEMOCRACY!

Abandonment by the Husband in Khasi Matrilineal Society

By Marbabiang Syiemlieh and Glenn C. Kharkongor

Marriage among the Khasi is monogamous and men and women marry according to their choice. In the traditional type of marriage there is no written document as proof of the marriage. A ritual of the indigenous faith is performed with the families coming together to solemnize the marriage. This practice has gradually declined. Christian marriages are now the norm, though cohabitation is common. Cohabitation may subsequently be formalized by a marriage ceremony, and the clan elders may bless and recognize the nuptials.

We report some of the findings of our recent study conducted in Meghalaya. Cohabitation seems to be increasing in the state of Meghalaya, and the main factors are perhaps as follows: Firstly, cohabitation is socially accepted. Whether the couple are Christian or non-Christian, this acceptance is solidified after the couple has a child. Secondly, in the Christian community, the wedding ceremony and reception are expensive to conduct. One of the respondents in our study, a 25 year-old woman said, “A wedding is an expensive affair and we who belong to a low-socio-economic group cannot compete with the privileged and rather than embarrassing ourselves, cohabitation is better”. Some women feel that the formality of a public ceremony helps to cement a relationship and mere cohabitation makes it easier for a man to abandon a woman. Thirdly, if a live-in couple wants to get married in a church, they have to first face various penalties from the church authorities for having ‘lived in sin’. Furthermore, if the couple are from different churches, neither church will be willing to solemnize the marriage unless one of them converts. These are further deterrents to seeking a church wedding.

According to Census 2011, there are 21.7% single mothers in the state which ranks third in the country after Kerala and Lakshadweep. But the main cause of single motherhood in Kerala and Lakshadweep is migration of the husband for employment whereas in Meghalaya the main reason is abandonment by the husband/partner. So the highest prevalence of abandonment of women by husbands/partners is in Meghalaya.

To add to their predicament, most all of these women were abandoned when their children were still at a young age. The short duration of the relationship and the lack of emotional attachment are factors that seem to lead to easy abandonment. Other contributing factors which many of the single mothers cited is that ‘the man seems to want more freedom even having after more than two children’ and that “the men cannot cope with the heavy responsibility of maintaining the family”. Another commonly cited factor is alcohol abuse which has led to the break-up of many families. Many single mothers also stated that the lack of social penalties for a man even after he leaves his wife and children contributes to the increase in abandonment. “Even if the man abandons his wife for another woman, our Khasi society accepts it” said Lita (name changed).

The rise in the number of single mothers was one of the concerns among policymakers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which led to the passing of the Meghalaya Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2012 and the campaign for its implementation. The High Court of Meghalaya Special Marriage Rules, 2013

includes provisions to help women who have been abandoned by their husband, like alimony for the wife and maintenance for minor children and the children’s education. But many single mothers felt that registration of marriage solves the problem only partially. Payment of alimony and maintenance is difficult to enforce, and abandonment of women continues.

The effects of abandonment on a single mother’s household are multiple. The struggle to make ends meet to provide for the basic needs of the children is an everyday challenge. These women and their children live in poor economic conditions. The ‘feminization of poverty’ is well seen in such households. Single mothers get entrapped in a cycle of poverty and this has severe effects on their children. A 14 year-old boy with younger siblings had to drop out of school to work and help the mother financially. He had to give up his childhood recreation and dreams of having a career. Childhood has been snatched away from him and overnight, he is supposed to think like a mature adult and take on the role of the father. Often it is the oldest child who drops out of school to help the mother.

In single mother households, there are twice as many drop outs as in two parent families. This leads to an accumulation in the number of uneducated and unqualified youth which hampers the growth of the economy and contributes to social problems like drug abuse, alcoholism. Many of these drop out children lack motivation and aspirations for a career. The struggles of single mother households have these larger societal impacts.

Fortunately we live in a society where there is no stigma or discrimination for single mothers or their children. But the daunting existence of a single mother has to be recognized and addressed. The plight of single mothers in our society is an issue that should not be looked at as a personal problem but rather as a societal problem. Although there are initiatives from the government and NGOs to help single mothers, there needs to be a more proactive involvement of all concerned stakeholders. Our traditional bodies like the dorbar, the non-governmental organizations which also includes the churches, and the government has to come together to deliberate and introduce more innovative initiatives.

Traditional bodies can involve the women’s wing or Seng Longkmie in providing crèches, and financial assistance for the education of the children at least till the age of 14. This can also be in collaboration with the church. The churches are quick to conduct marriages, but few offer counselling to a couple or emotional and social support to single mothers. Civil society organizations can initiate more livelihood training for these single mothers. In Meghalaya, the Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment (WISE), a social action wing of the Sisters of our Lady of the Mission, North East Province is doing a magnificent job in providing training that are useful for women in difficult circumstances. Finally, apart from what the government is already doing, it can play a greater role by introducing schemes and policies for single mothers and their children, such as evening schools and vocational courses for children of the single mothers to prevent children from dropping out of school.

(The authors are from Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong).

Choking the voice of reason

Editor,

Last week’s petrol bomb attack at the residence of our most fearless investigative journalist Kong Patricia Mukhim has left the citizens of the city fluttering hopelessly and desperately with uncertainty of one’s own life and safety in one’s own house. Right now we are in dire need of an assurance of security from the attacks of a pocket of our society who still exist in the preliterate era and never cease to amaze us with their distinctive behavioral characteristics. We now realize that what we perceived all along has been false and a big sham. Shillong is still the same. Nothing has changed. We mistook westernization for modernization. Funny that we thought we were fortunate enough to be living in a modern day Shillong just by seeing the big wave of westernization that has taken over but the lack of modernisation amidst such big time westernisation has its manifest in such savagery like throwing of petrol bombs at houses of law abiding citizens.

If modernization co-existed with westernization then modernisation would have brought forth the sense of right thinking and the act of doing what is right. In a modernized society everyone would have supported people fighting for truth and accountability knowing that it is an integral part of democracy and justice. Without the news information and analysis which media provides us, it will be impossible for us as citizens to know about the policies made by Government and politicians who represents us. In fact, journalists proxy for us and act as watchdogs in holding the Government accountable and checking their abuse of power.

Knowing Kong Patricia Mukhim and her style of journalism which is rather more like the voice of a matriarch in a family, hollering, asking questions, explaining to us and inspiring those in power to do the right thing, this is how we learn that it is our responsibility as citizens to keep an eye on the actions of the Government and thus for the last thirty plus years when any news make headlines, people wait eagerly to hear what Kong Pat has to say because people trust her verdict knowing she will speak the truth in a heartbeat.

If there are dedicated journalists ferreting out hidden facts and stories by digging deep into activities of Government offices, politics, businesses, education, health and welfare and every other public work and policy which people who hold the office don’t want it revealed to us the public but which we as citizens have every right to know and if there is wide spread support from the people for accountability and transparency then the society can claim its right to be a modern society.

Kong Patricia Mukhim has been recognised and felicitated in many countries by various organisations for continuously working for the upliftment of society with undeterred courage and determination. In India she is known by the title Padmashree Patricia Mukhim, an ultimate honour and title awarded by the country but here in her own land all she gets from her own people is a petrol bomb hurled into her house. Need we say more?

Yours etc.,
Asangla Syiem,
Via email

NEHU playing with students’ future

Editor,

As a concerned parent of an undergraduate student, I am constrained to observe that NEHU appears to be unable or unwilling to shed its long held callous and insensitive attitude towards the student community. To cite an example, the questions set for the subject of Environmental Studies, the examination for which was held on April 24, 2018 had put almost all students from the arts and commerce streams in a quandary for the following reasons:-

NEHU has mandated that the course of EVS should be common for all the streams with the objective of merely making the students aware and take cognizance of the environmental issues at stake. Therefore, it rationally follows that the

questions should be of “multiple choice” types rather than descriptive as they are meant to test the awareness level and not the deep knowledge of the students as mentioned earlier. However, NEHU in its wisdom did the opposite.

The above question paper has unduly put the students of arts and commerce streams at an extreme disadvantage as most of the questions are such that only honours students of science stream would be able to answer them. Such unprofessional lapses on the part of NEHU have had a negative psychological impact on the students, and this, without a doubt has also negatively affected their performance in other subjects that they appeared for subsequently.

Days and weeks of serious preparation ended up in a paper that was not expected. The students have to face the music played by the best minds of the NEHU faculty. As a parent I could understand the frustration and hopelessness of our children who prepared the course supposedly of seven to eight months in just three months and the questions put up by the NEHU experts was just too much for them.

I ask myself, what is NEHU up to? Don’t they want that our children answer the questions and at least score a pass mark to qualify? A day after it is depressing to hear the students complaining about the standards set by NEHU. Instead of making the paper interesting, the very interest or passion is diminished. Come results time, most will wonder why they could not get through just because of EVS .My earnest request to the NEHU experts who set the question paper is to kindly feel the pulse of the students and allow them to have a decent score at least.

I hope that this letter will not turn out to be a cry in the wilderness with the powers that be choosing to behave in their usual way like the three wise monkeys.

Yours etc.,
A concerned parent
(Name withheld on request)

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.

"Our dreams drench us in senses, and senses steps us again in dreams."

--- Anais Nin

The Shillong Times

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The Naga accord

THE Centre had assured the NSCN (IM) that the peace accord with the insurgent body will be signed shortly after the assembly poll in Nagaland. It looks as if that will be accomplished before the monsoon session of Parliament. The salient features of the proposed accord will be first, autonomous territorial councils set up for Arunachal and Manipur. Second, there will be a common cultural body for Nagas across the north-eastern states. Then the non-state Naga militia will be integrated and rehabilitated. AFPSA will be lifted from Nagaland and finally there will be a bicameral legislature in the state. There is one final hurdle. That is over an agreement concerning the Naga demand for a separate flag for the state. The government is also apprehensive about a violent reaction against the signing of the accord in Manipur valley.

The accord is said to keep the boundary of states in the North-east unchanged. R N Ravi, the Centre’s interlocutor who signed the framework agreement with the NSCN (IM) in August 2015 expressed satisfaction with the progress of the current talks. The Centre is dealing with seven Naga armed groups but there will be one single accord with all of them. The demand for Naga autonomy has been reconciled with India’s federal structure putting emphasis on shared sovereignty. The accord will also lead to the formation of some specific institutions for the development of the state. The Centre and the Manipur government are exploring ways to reassure residents of Manipur valley that their land will be secure. If signed, the accord will show light at the end of the tunnel.

LOOKING BACK

May 20, 1989

No Jharkhand State says Buta Singh

Union Home Minister Mr Buta Singh today ruled out any talks with Jharkhand agitationists over their demand for a separate state. Addressing a public meeting here Mr Singh said the Centre would never compromise with any demand propagating separatism. So, the question of tailoring a new state comprising parts of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh did not arise. The Home Minister said he had asked Bihar Chief Minister Mr Satyendra Narain Sinha to convene a tripartite meeting on May 22 as the All Jharkhand Students Union leaders indicated their eagerness to resume negotiations.

The Home Minister said the proposed date for negotiations could be extended. The confusion over the tripartite talks, he said, had cropped up because

of a "communication gap." Mr Singh said the AJSU leaders had expressed their willingness to settle the issue through negotiation but other Jharkhand factions could not be consulted owing to lack of time. He called upon all the factions to come to the negotiation table. Meanwhile, AJSU leaders reportedly boycotted the lunch here hosted in honour of Mr Buta Singh. Mr Singh admitted that the Central Government sponsored schemes for tribal welfare had not been fully implemented and poverty, unemployment and exploitation had persisted.

He, however, said the developmental process was being disrupted by violence which was keeping the administration engaged in tackling the law and order problem.

Management for the People

By Avner Pariat

We all know the importance of management. It is crucial in the functioning of any endeavour, commercial establishment or non-profit. It continues to be a much sought after profession. After all, that is what IAS, IPS, IES officers etc., are in reality: managers. These networks together constitute a vast managerial caste. Everyone wants to be part of the framework for different personal motivations. Managers have become so important today that we are bombarded by their words and thoughts on a daily basis, in the news, TV, social media etc. It is crucial therefore to explore some of the ideas and beliefs that these sets of people espouse.

One of the most interesting things to note about many managers is how they insist that governments must not interfere in market economics; government they say must not “do” business. This is very common and there are a thousand reasons that are given to justify this. It can sometimes be amusing but mostly vexing to hear government managers insist that the government, their government, is either powerless to support public needs or that the public should not depend on it. They are adamant that we stand on our own and make great fortunes through hard work and personal grit. Many examples are held up for us to gawk at but the true nature of those successes is never uncovered for us. For example, the Tatas becoming powerful by currying favour with the British Raj, the Ambanis and Adanis being chummy with Modi sarkar for huge financial rewards. Is it personal determination or having no ethics, is it about the triumph of competition or who you (or your father) is? These ideas smack of hypocrisy and rightly anger a large section of the population. People in a set, settled, comfortable position telling us who labour, run around and sweat how to become successful like them; sounds like fun!

Who wants higher taxation? Who wants to be controlled by someone or something else? The answer will be no one. However, many of these people use this resistance to argue for the complete obliteration of any sort of control whatsoever. By doing that, their projections guarantee

high growth rates, increased spending and an overall increase in wealth. However the prosperity that was promised to us by this and preceding Central governments continues to elude us. Why is that so? These people shove the philosophy of free and open markets down our throats at every seminar or conference but they have almost nothing to say about effective regulations. Those are the only things standing between us and absolute hell on earth. The

a large supermarket like Waitrose or Tesco. These are big corporations and people are very impressed by big anything. But what about supermarkets that follow a different model, say like the UK chain Co-Op which is as the name implies a cooperative and was started over 100 years ago? That is a friendlier option for us in the third world for a number of reasons but little mention is given to these sorts of things in the popular imagination. Large, sustained investments

The officials/managers may not always be on the pay-roll themselves but their advocacy for certain ideas is very troublesome. On many a foreign trip, our officials are taken to the various shrines of the rich and powerful of that country/state and this immediately impresses them. Many fail to look at other options that are thriving or existing in those very countries. So to use an old example, if you are in the UK as a delegate, chances are you might be shown around the floor of a large supermarket like Waitrose or Tesco. These are big corporations and people are very impressed by big anything.

world of little or weak regulations has led to the Nirav, Lalit and Mallya fiascos. This is something our managers are seldom open to discussion about. The legislation, we know, must catch up with the times but the legislators – on all sides, not just BJP - are all on the pay-roll of the various businesses so that bridge is now obstructed.

The officials/managers may not always be on the pay-roll themselves but their advocacy for certain ideas is very troublesome. On many a foreign trip, our officials are taken to the various shrines of the rich and powerful of that country/state and this immediately impresses them. Many fail to look at other options that are thriving or existing in those very countries. So to use an old example, if you are in the UK as a delegate, chances are you might be shown around the floor of

almost never make it to collectives and co-operatives; what little they do get is mere tokenism. I might be wrong but the Co-Op UK stores are actually expanding everywhere while the huge corporate supermarkets are downsizing. But more often than not these days, you will be told that co-ops are not the way forward. Of course if you raise the UK example they will say it is in a developed country and therefore not feasible for our situation. Ok, that sounds fair. So why follow the “big is better” corporate model then? That is also from a foreign country. Please be a little critical of what is touted as great, good and amazing. A lot of it is hype and it reeks.

This present state government needs to be serious about creating worthwhile gainful employment for the youth. Cooperatives need to be reconsidered and strongly

supported. It needs to step up and promote the rights of Labour so that working people can escape their soul-sucking poverty. Management is crucial in this. Bad managers are great at parroting some Central government scheme guidelines and they are brilliant at copy-paste. However they soon realise that their initiatives shoot blanks with the people. What happens then? Instead of introspection and re-working plans, they blame the people for being lazy or incompetent. This is so common and it is sad that persons who are selected to show the way forward are the ones who seem to hate those under their hand. Some government officers that I have encountered are downright psychos! Yelling at villagers, harassing people, pushing protocol and rank on their subordinates. Maybe one of the reasons for this is because our officers are constantly drawn from a particular class group which has never had any interaction with the ground realities/underbelly of their own town or city. When was the last IAS, IPS or even MCS officer we had coming from a rural community or lower income bracket? It almost never happens.

Finally, in many foreign countries, the governments actively seek out criticism and feedback from the people. It is good for any government to correct its own deficiencies, nothing is perfect after all. In some countries in fact people are actively encouraged to be almost anti-government because the managers know this is good in the long run for the continued survival and maintenance of their system. They don’t take things personally. They don’t make excuses for the failings of their departments as many do here. We are not talking about personal attacks after all. But maybe that is why so many officers here get agitated by criticism. Maybe they DO think the office/chair belongs to them, that it is THEIR private property. For many, their job is their entire life. We, the people, need to contextualise that situation for them and remind them of their place.

Racist comments deplorable!

Editor,

The CM of Tripura, Biplab Deb, is in the news again for his controversial and sarcastic remarks. His comments about the former Ms. World Diana Hayden on her skin colour portrays the sick mindset and attitude that such people like him, hold high office have. The people of Tripura are embarrassed by the kind of news their Chief Minister makes and his narcissistic remarks on nonsensical issues, instead of focussing on real issues. The BJP seems to be quite contented to have such jokers in its fold as we too have had our share with some of them coming and making baseless statements all the way from Delhi. Hope sense prevails or else the country is going to the dogs.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

Respecting the queue culture

By Pyntngen Nongpluh

This is with reference to Krishna Chettri’s letter to the editor on the above heading (ST April 25, 2018). This is the first time that I have seen someone write on the culture of queuing – a very important aspect of discipline in public life. Perhaps there have been previous letters too which I might have missed. There is that part where he writes, “I have observed that only human beings queue up”. I find this to be humorous but most agreeable too because it is a fact. And going by this concept then there are very less “human beings” in Meghalaya. Mr. Chettri also pointed out that “an illiterate truck attendant” had to shout at people to fall in line. And I am very sure those people are mostly what you would call the ‘educated’ lot.

This is not a phenomenon only at Lower Barapathar, it happens in every part of Shillong. It happens all the time, be it in schools, colleges, in bus stands, taxi stands, auto rickshaw stands, etc. It even happens in religious places of worships.

The reason as we all know is because we always want to be first; not that being first is a bad thing, but as the saying goes, there’s a time and place for everything. As stated earlier, we always want to be first when it comes to getting, taking or receiving (dumping your garbage in the garbage truck is service received) while when it comes to giving or sharing we tend to be the last.

I would like to share some of my experiences regarding this queue culture, not with the intention of demeaning anyone but with a hope that we will collectively understand and discipline ourselves into this culture as advised by Mr Chettri earlier.

I am reminded of the days when I was living in Kolkata. Compared to Shillong, the city of Kolkata is huge, massive, chaotic. Yet there is one thing which I always remember, which is in sharp contrast with ours and that is their disciplined queue culture. In Shillong we have hardly queue for anything. There is always this pushing and shoving. But there in Kolkata people queue up for auto-rickshaws, buses, and even in wine stores. The first time we wanted to use public transport for travelling locally we were surprised to see that there was a queue in front of the auto-rickshaw stand. New to the culture we moved forward and asked the auto driver for our destination but were told to stand in queue. Auto-rickshaws also maintain their own queue managed by a ‘Dada’ who sees that all drivers get their fair share of trips.

But the queue in the wine store was amazing. I mean, wouldn’t that be nice – the disciplined Q-culture? Here in Shillong when there’s a rush/during rush hour, old people, weak people, kids and pregnant women have to step aside or get stampede/crushed under stronger people’s feet. Whether it be for trying to take a bus ride, boarding a taxi, catching an auto-rickshaw – only the strong can survive. The rest can wait for their turn. There was this one time at Motphran Mawlai auto-rickshaw stand in the evening rush hour I saw a “Rangbah brieiw badonburom” side-pushing a young pregnant lady –

and as he won and successfully boarded the auto-rickshaw the young pregnant lady quietly moved to safety. So much for the ‘Rangbah-ness!’ (male chauvinism). And as we very well know, we the people of Shillong have an attitude of keeping quiet when such things happen with the thought that by keeping quiet we show that we are respectable (badonburom). So to be respectable just turn the other way. And we love to believe that this is a Christian state, Scotland of the East. I wonder how the European Scotlanders really are!. Certainly not like their Asian counterparts/ Scotlanders, I guess?

Why can’t people use common sense? Where is all the civic sense? Why can’t the people running that particular auto-stand be like the ‘illiterate truck attendant’, administer Q-culture? Someone has to start. Who will it be? The District Administration?

Vehicles ferrying passengers having to stop every 5-10 metres to drop off passengers, and if they don’t they get their fair share of ear bashing. Embarkation and disembarkation points for buses and taxis are just in name. There is no disciplined fixed stoppage area for boarding and disembarking. No passenger actually uses them. Everybody wants ease of comfort, waits for public transport right at their gate and also get dropped off in the same spot.

In Loreto Convent the school administration have been able to make parents practise the Q-culture, at least in the school premises, while picking up their junior kids. Even then there are parents who like kangaroos jump the Q – everyday and shamelessly so. Loreto Convent has a culture of distributing mid-term progress report card one-on-one with the wards’ parents. I remember a particular year an incident involving a very respectable civil servant who came for the same purpose. Immediately on arrival he stood at the doorway, by-passing everyone who was already in the queue, although the queue was not that long. That kind of attitude was not expected from a person who is from the top echelons of the civil service. Perhaps he had forgotten his civic sense in the office!

In St. Edmund’s School because the campus is big and spacious, parents feel they shouldn’t queue while picking up the junior boys. So who will teach the next generation? Although this year it is much better because the school administration has taken a tough stand and parents now have to stand five metres away from the pick-up point. Otherwise last year and the years before junior boys have to literally squeeze themselves between the parents while coming out of the gate, manoeuvring themselves from one parent to another till they reach their own parent as most parents are standing right in front of the exit point. So prior to this year I would pick up my son later than others as I didn’t want him to squeeze between parents! And Loreto Convent and St. Edmund’s, as most Shillongites would say, are schools of the elites. Imagine other schools!

So when and where should we start this Q-culture?

It’s a collective responsibility. It’s a collective effort. But first and foremost we need to change our mindsets.#SochBadlo to Desh Badlegaa#

Need to defend free speech!

Editor,

I learnt with utter dismay about the recent petrol bomb attack at the residence of Kong Patricia Mukhim, obviously meant to intimidate her, at the least, or to eliminate her if they had their way. Fortunately, the luck was on her side and she escaped unhurt.

She is the most fearless writer, columnist and journalist I have ever known anywhere, and in the context of Meghalaya, by far the most balanced, bold, wise and erudite scribe we ever had. I have always admired her for her honest, well-considered and at times brutally blunt assessment of events, situations, persons, activists, leaders, institutions, organisations, groups, associations, government programmes and policies, and indeed society at large. While one may not necessarily agree with everything she wrote, but one has always deeply respected her intellectual integrity, honesty

of purpose and earnestness of intent.

Hers is the solitary voice of sanity amidst conceit, humbug, pomp, pretense and hypocrisy. It will indeed be a great pity if Meghalaya were not to recognize the value of her contribution in creating the goodwill for the State among the intellectual circles, both within and outside the country and especially in the national capital. This may not be the first time that she has been at the receiving end of such brazen, violent attacks, and would certainly not be the last either. But she is made of sterling mettle and would take this one also in her stride and continue, undaunted, to do what she does best – write candid, fluent, forthright, unbiased pieces and show us the straightforward path of rectitude, moral virtue, decency, equity, integrity and justice.

She is a precious gem of Meghalaya and I trust that both the Government as well as the society will take steps to ensure her security

and safety. May her mighty pen continue to flourish and prosper in the meanwhile,

Yours etc.,
KS Kropha
Former civil servant

Sympathy for selected rape victims

Editor,

Probably cent percent of the Indian population and 30% of the world population learned through the news channels and newspapers that India is a country of rapists. Of course, Asifa’s case has certainly put all of us to shame. It has also opened our eyes in many respects. Nearly all Indians are united in expressing sympathy towards the victim. Not only that, but also many of our kind-hearted film stars, cricketers, celebrity-scholars top political leaders etc., have come forward to condemn the incident. The entire section of elite have left no stone unturned to pressurize

the government to bring justice to Asifa. Over hundreds of candle marches were staged across the country as a tribute to the tender girl of Jammu. Yes, one word and one chorus was that -- all rapists should be "hung". The situation prompted the cabinet of Modi Government to call for an urgent meeting. It instantly released an ordinance in favour of the death penalty for any male raping a girl below twelve years of age. This is undoubtedly a landmark development in Indian history.

But I am surprised, nay, baffled now, why the media and its associated columnists and reporters silent when 10 year girl Geeta was raped a couple of days back by a 17-year old student inside a sacred Madrasa in Ghaziabad near New Delhi? Why is there no elaborate arrangement in the newsrooms for a day-in-day-out outrage against the horrendous crime as the Kathua case? Why are our concerned and very humane film stars silent? Have they suddenly

become so insensible and so inhuman? Why is our hyper active Rahul Gandhi mum now when he lost sleep many nights earlier? Or is Janpath to Ghaziabad further than Kathua? Why is the Delhi CM not uttering a single word of sympathy towards the victim -- Geeta?

By the way, another bombshell on Facebook and WhatsApp says there is no trace of "Spermatozoa". It means the rape was reportedly not committed. Is it all "farce" orchestrated by some vested interests who successfully evoked so much outrage against one particular kind of community? Who will punish and how we will punish “those” who might have schemed this drama only to defame some and to please others? Anyway, I will not write much at this point of time, as that would reflect my immaturity. But what I can say with utmost certainty is that we have to take each word from any outside sources with a pinch of salt.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar

Crime & Punishment

Oral traditions in India are full of stories of hell & terrible punishments that await the wrong-doers after death

By Ranjita Biswas

Ravana abducted Sita, another’s wife, thus committing a crime, and so he was punished by death in the battlefield. The Kurus were unfair to the Pandavas; many a time they tried to get rid of their cousins who stuck to the right path and ultimately had to pay the price. Besides in the epics which were actually oral stories with moral message handed down from generation to generation, the folk tales also carry the message — crime does not pay. In the moral fabric that a society or community builds up, crime and punishment have been essential ingredients ‘to teach’ as how to be good, upright citizens, or else, rot in hell! To make the message clearer, even better is to graphically illustrate what can happen to the person in the nether world — what kind of punishment awaits for what kind of crime to put the fear of God — literally, in the living beings.

Lessons from Hell: Printing and Punishment in India (Marg) by Christopher Pinney is a remarkable book that amply proves that point. The author, a professor of anthropology and visual culture of London, is deeply interested in print culture and photography in South Asia and popular Hinduism in central India. This leads him to explore the world of printed images of ‘Hell’ figuring in popular imagination during the 19th and 20th century India.

What attracted him to the subject in the first place? “Seeing the prints in use in rural Madhya Pradesh, pinned to walls, sometimes framed, and seeing how often villagers referred to them. I was struck by how [they] were continually revised as part of the changing ‘history of hell’,” he says.

The images, in the fashion of calendar art, are often

lurid, over-the-board, even voyeuristic, one feels. Pinney agrees: “They are startling because of the violence and nudity. I was struck from the beginning by the ambivalence of using such lascivious images to enforce an austere morality.”

For example, women images are often in the nude (for not listening to the husband or running away with a paramour, etc) while men are shown facing blood-curdling punishment at the hand of the demons at the court of Yama, the god of death.

There are also many other illustrations of karni-bharni — ‘reap as you sow’ which show how cruelties committed in lifetime are met with the same fate after death. For instance, a man who overloads a cart drawn by bullocks himself becomes a beast of burden whipped mercilessly in hell; a man who shoots birds gets pecked by birds; a betrayer’s eyes are blinded by venom of a snake, so on and so forth.

The concept of crime and punishment to thwart moral aberration is, however, not uncommon in communities and religious discourses across the world. So these images could be a part of the ‘connected histories’, one would assume. But Pinney disagrees, “Humans seem to be able to independently arrive at pictures of hell that have a lot in common but also remain the product of distinct traditions.”

Questions still arise as to why did the 1880s see a proliferation of these graphic illustrations of an essentially oral tradition? Could it be due to the Victorian mores under the British colonial time or the availability of easy printing, or both?

Pinney feels that Victorian morals may have been a factor, but in general this is imagery that appeals to mofussil and subaltern consumers. It’s not chiefly the product of a bhadralok transculturation. The imagery (its landscapes and moral tropes) are those of the small town where the rural and the urban meet.

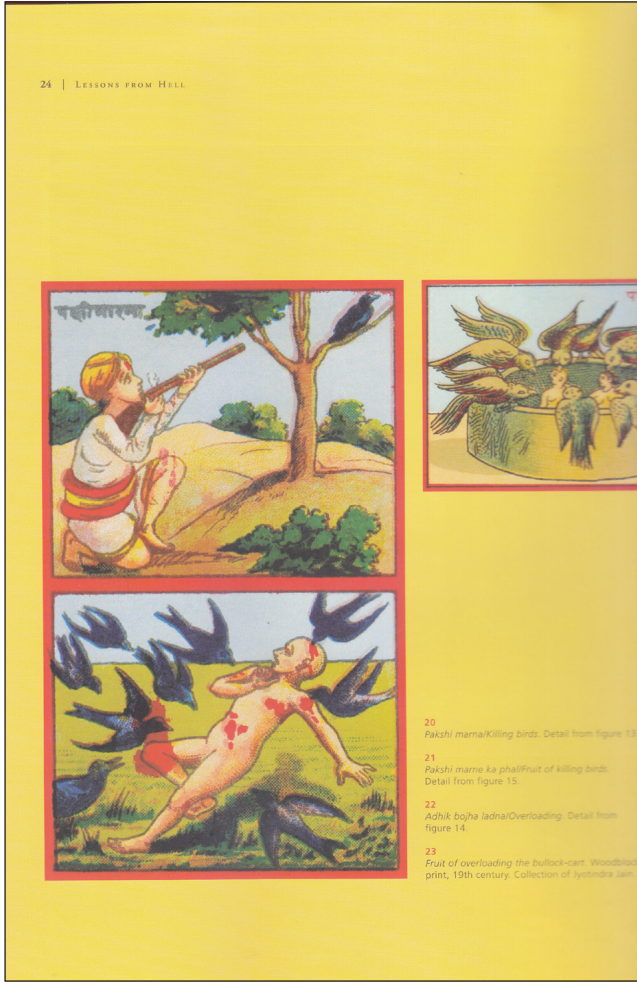
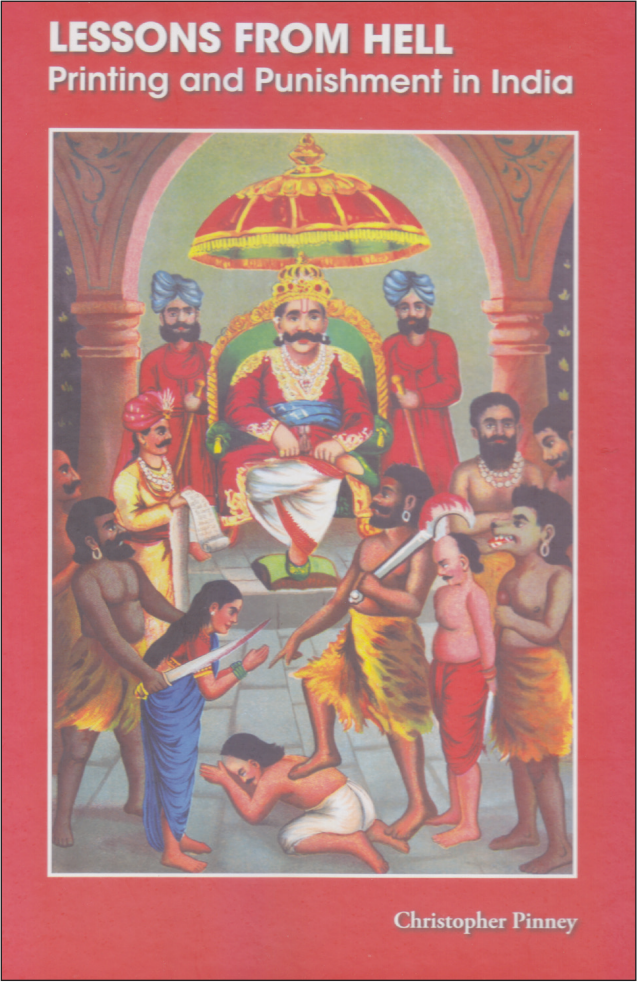
More likely is that these images are “the product of a fusion between enduring puranic classifications, the grid-like structures of moral teaching games like ‘gyan chaupar’, and an iconography of retribution that is established in Jain manuscript practices. The booming print culture of the 1880s is the key: it is this modern technology that hugely amplifies what may otherwise seem merely ‘archaic’.”

Lithography reached India in the 1820s from the West. Cheap, easily portable and relatively easy to produce, it caught the fancy of the public and printers alike. The Calcutta School of Art produced some vibrant images in the early stages bringing nearer the images people knew as moral lessons discouraged orally for generations. Then graduates from the government art college founded the Calcutta Art Studio in 1878. The Chor Bagan and Kan-sari Para presses produced prints in vibrant images that the public lapped up. This was also when Pune-based Chirashala Press also started printing somewhat similar images.

One thing, however, seems puzzling. Considering the predominance of moral lessons Hinduism invokes emphasising good deeds and the aspiration to reach ‘Heaven’ thereof, there are very few prints depicting the ideal after-death world compared to the overwhelming portraits of the evil hell with all its fearful images.

“It’s very striking,” Pinney agrees. “(Indeed) moksha is essentially a void, one that is necessarily unpicturable, an escape from the burden of representation.” But the more interesting fact is the broader issue of the human embrace of negativity.

“Why do we love disaster movies? Why is ‘bad’ news always ‘better’ news? Why are these prints so fascinating? We are Homo apocalypticus.” (TWF)



Tradition of torture: (Top) The cover of Pinney’s book Lessons from Hell: Printing and Punishment in India; Pictorial expression of various forms of punishment; and (inset) scenes from hell

Lithography reached India in the 1820s from the West. Cheap, easily portable and relatively easy to produce, it caught the fancy of the public and printers alike. The Calcutta School of Art produced some vibrant images in the early stages

How not to impress a woman

Useful tip: Guys, end every sentence you speak to a woman with, “But I could be wrong”. This saves time. Example: “Good morning! But I could be wrong!”

That thought was inspired by a news item I just read. A man robbed a bank and then threw some of the money over singer Taylor Swift’s fence “to impress her”.

More evidence that most men have NO IDEA how women think.

Bruce Rowley was arrested as he left Taylor’s home in Rhode Island a few days ago. Bruce, you do NOT impress wealthy women by throwing cash over the fences of their mansions. You throw property deeds, credit cards and in your case, I think vasectomy papers would be essential.

It reminded me of a case in India where a young man stole a train for his girlfriend. Ketan Kumar, 24, thought his beloved would be pleased to be presented with the 8.20 pm express to Amrapali. Sadly for him, both girlfriend and police were significantly unimpressed. Ketan, buddy, you need to know more about how girls think. Big, ugly steaming lump of metal? Great for guys. But for girls? No.

A colleague, hearing about this column’s topic, forwarded me a news video from Chechnya. It shows a five-year-old boy walking down the street hand-in-hand with his girlfriend. He swiftly breaks into a

car and turns on the engine to show off. The five-year-old girl, way smarter than her companion, swiftly backs away while he drives off, pursued by adults.

This all adds to the tonnes of evidence that males are born thinking women are impressed by extreme stupidity and immorality, and it

takes us years — let’s be honest, decades — to realise this is not the case.

Young males should take advice from fathers of girls, who are forced to learn something about the young female brain. For example, I now know that fathering a daughter means pretending you’re thrilled when they spend half your salary having an eighth of an inch cut off their hair. The tricky thing is that they don’t tell you whether they’ve had an invisible haircut, their eyebrows plucked or a complete head transplant, but just burst through the door saying: “Well, Dad, what do you think?” You MUST reply: “It looks great” and then leave the country before there are any follow-up questions.

In fact, when a young woman asks her father for his opinion on any matter, what she is really saying is: “I wish to hear my opinion repeated in a deeper voice.”

Stop press: A colleague forwards another example. On April 24, several media reported that a man named Zach Doell decided to pick up his girlfriend from the University of Louisiana in a different funny vehicle every day, including the Batmobile, a car that looked like a giant hot dog, and an ice cream van.

He thought this was highly impressive. His, er, thrilled girlfriend Brianna Garcia told the media it was “embarrassing”.

So there you have it. It is this columnist’s fervent hope that this information will help young men and young women understand each other and communicate better.

But I could be wrong.

(Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send comments and suggestions via his Facebook page)

Foray into creative world or start your venture

By Ranjan K Baruah

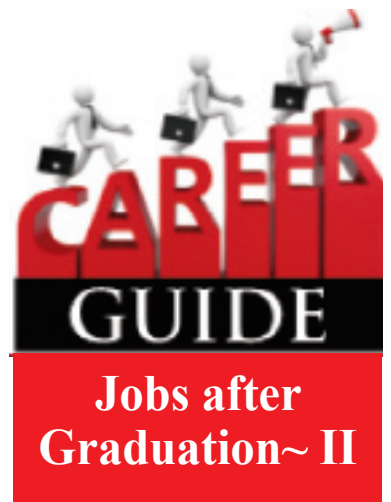
Films and drama: Students who are interested in drama and films may try for various courses available in National School of Drama (www.nsd.gov.in) in New Delhi or Film and Television Institute of India (www.ftiindia.com) in Pune.

Management: Students from any stream can opt for courses in MBA or other management courses. For admission in a reputed institute of the country aspirant must appear in Common Admission Test/Management Aptitude Test, etc. Some of the universities conducts separate entrance test for admission (www.iimcat.ac.in or www.aima.in — All India Management Association).

Hospitality courses: Interested students can opt for some courses in hospitality sector like travel and tourism and hotel management, etc. Students should be good in communication skill apart from other required soft skills. This is one of the booming areas where aspirants may get global exposure and if they have the skills then many of them may work abroad apart from different parts of the country.

CS/CA: After graduation one can enter into professional courses like CS/

CA. Such courses are offered by several institutes in India. After completion of courses one can work in public and private sector banks, industries, MNCs, corporate houses, media houses and with many more rganizations. These professional are highly required in the cut throat competitive economy thus their remuneration is very high.



Mass Communication/Journalism/Advertising: Proliferation of media houses has opened up many opportunities for graduates who opt for Mass Communications and Journalism. One



can work as correspondent, reporter, anchor, columnist and radio jockey in print/electronics/web media houses. Advertising is also a promising career option for graduates. Courses in Mass communications/Journalism/Advertising are offered by several universities and private institutes.

Fashion design: Students who are creative may join fashion design fields. There are short-term and long-term courses related to fashion and design. Fashion includes interior designing,

fashion designing, etc.

Railway service: There are different entries into railways. Those who want to make a career in Indian Railways need to pass the Civil Services Examination conducted by UPSC or an allied examination by the Railways Recruitment Boards (RRBs). These examinations are held from time to time to select a wide variety of personnel. There are gazetted post and non-gazetted post. Mostly the top posts are selected through UPSC’s examination.

The minimum eligibility required for the Group A services is graduation in any discipline or an equivalent qualification as per requirements. Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) make appointments to various services posts. RRBs also recruit teachers, physical instructors, doctors in various departments, nurses and paramedical personnel through countrywide written tests.

Banking and finance: There are different options of joining in banking service. Nationalised banks conduct

competitive examination like Bank PO for recruitment. Banking and finance offers graduates jobs in public and private sector banks, insurance companies and stock exchanges. The awaiting jobs for graduates in this sector include probationary officer, clerk, accountant, auditor, development officer, insurance agent and stock brokers. Through competitive exams one can enter into bank’s jobs. Apart from nationalised banks, there are other banks which induct aspirants into their job. (www.ibps.in or www.ibpsexam.org --Institute of Banking Personnel Selection)

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is the process of designing, launching and running a new business, which is often initially a small venture. The people who create these businesses are called entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship has been described as the “capacity and willingness to develop, organise and manage a business venture along with any of its risks in order to make a profit”. Students may become entrepreneurs after they pass graduation for which they need exposure and training.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjank@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

THE THIRD SOJOURN



By Parag Ranjan Dutta

Five years ago I had the fortune of travelling to Europe for 15 days with my wife. We were part of a group tour which was organised by a famous tour operator of India. We had many exhilarating and breathtaking moments up the London Eye, Eiffel Tower in Paris, cruise along the Rhine in Germany and the canals of Amsterdam, gondola ride in Venice, St Peters Basilica and Trevi Fountain in Rome. But this narration is based on 24 hours’ experience of my stay in Europe.

Hotel Ibis: August 8, 2012.
Au Revoir Paris

It was fifteen past eight in the morning. After breakfast and a little stroll, we pulled our travel bags and gathered near the coach. The real tour of Europe, which can be best seen over land, started that day. Coach Captain Liandro, loaded our luggage and we occupied our seats, where a daily rotation plan was followed to allow each passenger to have a maxi-

mum number of view points each day.

Would anyone believe that in a single day we were to travel through two countries of West Europe culminating in the Dutch city of Eindhoven the same day! Interestingly the twilight period in Europe starts around 9-15 to 9-30 in the evening. Soon we were on the highway. Wheels rolled on and gradually gathered momentum and beautiful French countryside passed by the window. The wheat crop was already harvested and packed to be transferred to the market. Small settlements, beautiful lush green patches of coniferous trees and streamlets appeared at intervals.

It was a long drive of about four hours from Paris to Brussels. Beautiful small cottages appeared on the scene adding beauty to the landscape and we hardly realised that we have already entered the city limits of Brussels with unusually quiet streets, with almost no pedestrians in sight.

When the tour manager announced — “Friends we are in Belgium now”, many of my fellow passengers got up from the slumber. I was struck by the sleeping beauty of a

vibrant city and I wondered how could a capital city, which is also the Headquarters of European Union, could be so quiet. Contrary to my belief I found all the cities of Europe to be very quiet and thought every time where all the people have gone! But through experience of travelling through Europe I learnt that all the European cities have same characteristics. To me, even Paris was no exception.

We were taken to a well-decorated double-storeyed restaurant, Au Paris des Indes, for lunch, adorned with a huge Ganesha idol, idols of other Indian Gods and Goddesses, and lovely Rajasthani paintings. A pleasant surprise was awaiting us when my wife told me to grab a bowl to have rice pudding. I was speechless when someone standing near the door on way to the kitchen, spoke to me in Bengali. I was overjoyed, someone speaking in Bengali, that too in Brussels. He then narrated the fascinating story of his coming to Belgium, some 30 years ago in search of fortune. The street in front of the hotel was otherwise very calm and quiet with the occasional bustling of small beautiful cars. We got

into the coach and began our orientation tour of Brussels. Brussels is a major centre of international politics and is the seat of European Union, secretariat of Benelux, and the Head-quarter of NATO.

On way to the most important landmark of Brussels, the Grand Place, we had glimpses of the Municipal museum and the Royal Palace of the King. The Royal Palace, situated in front of the Brussels Park, has a grand location in the centre of Brussels, but it is not the residence of the King and the Royal Family.

Brussels, known as the “European Village”, is famous for beautiful parks, museums, side-walks chocolate and beer. Liandro parked the coach near a beautiful park.

After the announcement by the tour manager how to go around the Grand Place; we alighted from the coach and started walking slowly for a two-hour long leisure trip.

The Grand Place, grown from a medieval market, is a huge square and is the most sought after destination of Brussels, which was declared as the UNESCO heritage site. The Grand Place has a number of important landmarks with fascinating combinations of the Gothic and Baroque style of architecture.

The Town Hall is a towering 315-foot structure with the statue of St. Michael. Close to this, in a narrow alley in the corner of Rue de L’Eturc

and Rue de Chene, the small bronze statue of a peeing boy, Mannekin Pis. According to legend, this is a symbol of protest by a small boy against a tyrant ruler. The Grand Place (in picture) has a number of souvenir shops. We visited a number of them and tasted strips of cheese and chocolate, but I bet our Indian products are at par, if not better than world famous Dutch varieties.

After a prolonged and leisurely stroll and window shopping in the beautiful Grand Place, adorned with beautiful Gothic structure buildings and quaint cafes, when we came back to the coach, it was already drizzling. We were now ready to say good bye Brussels, one of the most beautiful city I have seen during my entire tour of Europe. The wheels rolled on and are we are ready to encounter the fascinating Netherlands.

On the way, we visited Atomium, a great structure of stainless steel consisting of huge spheres representing the concept of an iron molecule enlarged 165 billion times. Originally built for Brussels Expo in 1958, this 102m high structure has nine 18m diameter spheres about the size of a large apartment.

Each of these spheres is connected by tubes. Five of these have exhibits and the topmost has a restaurant and from there one can have a panoramic view of Brussels.

With entry tickets, tourists can have access to five of these. There are a beautiful fountain and lovely flower beds up front. The surrounding is breathtaking with thickly wooded trees, many of these with lovely purple coloured leaves, though I could not identify a single species,

very natural for someone coming from a tropical country.

Our destination for the next two nights at Eindhoven was NH Koningshof, located at Veldhoven, which is a 15-minute drive from the city centre. Set in a lush green surrounding, the hotel has a sprawling property. It took some time for our tour manager to find out where we were booked for two nights. All because of the fact that the hotel premises have got a number of building blocks .The hotel was so large that it took a long walk through beautiful corridors to find our respective rooms on the second and third floor.

It was almost quarter past nine, so we refreshed ourselves with fine Brazilian coffee came down to the dining hall. A surprise was in store for us. I was amazed to see hot samosas. The tour manager introduced the man behind the scene, the Indian chef, who cooked everything for the Indian guests that evening. After dinner, we went to bed early to get refreshed for another long trip tomorrow. With 500 comfortable guest rooms, 120 rooms for different functions, many restaurants with the special cuisine, is an ideal conference hotel. At the time of our stay, there was International Conference on Environment.

The Netherlands, literally means Low Country, with half of its area barely 1m above the sea

TRAVELLER’S DIARY

level. When we think of the Netherlands two things come to our mind — windmills and tulips, which were from Asia. Eindhoven is the home of Philips Sport Vereniging (English- equivalent Philip Sports Union). The world famous brand, Philips, is a multinational electronics company, originally founded in Eindhoven in 1891 by Gerard Philips, and the headquarters of the company was shifted to Amsterdam in 1997.

Next morning we woke up around 6-30 to find a cool misty morning with a mellow sun gleaming through the canopy of conifers down to the green grass laden with dew drops. It was so calm and quiet outside. It was a serene beauty. We were very excited to venture into the typical Dutch country.

After checking out at the counter I came out of the main lobby and started taking some pictures of the beautiful surrounding.

Coach Captain was ready with his GPS setting from Eindhoven to The Hague. After passing through green belts and very quiet streets the coach finally was on the highway to The Hague. After a little while some odd structures, along both sides of the highway drew my attention. To our utter surprise, we were told by the tour manager that these are noise absorbing barriers! I never knew anything like these were to be seen on European highways. We were heading to Amsterdam, famous for windmills, tulips, and canals. The entire trip of Europe shall be remembered for all time to come.

(The author is former head of the Department of Environmental Science at St Edmund’s College)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 29, 2018

Sun trine Saturn on your solar return chart brings in a good year. You would be able to progress in your work and especially on those projects that require some out of the box thinking. Musicians, those in the media, and sportspersons may do very well in this period. Effective communications would bring about a change as interactions pick up some momentum. You are also more open to newer ways of dealing with problems, thus it's significantly easier to find solutions. Luckily, a good balance between optimism and practicality is with you. You could be more thoughtful than usual.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The planetary configuration brings love, harmony and entertainment in family and personal relations. A romantic short trip may be undertaken for pleasure. People look upon you with more respect, tolerance, and acceptance. You don't feel the need to prove yourself, and that feels good. You have the chance to shine, largely because you are projecting yourself with self-respect as well as modesty. Opportunities both personal and professional are likely to present themselves as a result. You may enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. This is a very self-expressive time when you have lots of energy, but not necessarily self-discipline to match.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature, public speaking, debates are highlighted and would figure more prominently. You feel touchy and sensitive; the attitude should be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships and you should not to take things personally. Friendships, cooperation and synergy are available to you. You would work creatively in your field of activity. This brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. You inculcate good team spirit and you are more tactful with your co-workers which bring harmony at your work place. You find yourself in a whirlwind of activities and need to slow down a bit and not neglect your health.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would have positive results from marketing, communications and public relations. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses such as beauty culture, computers, fine arts and in fields related to show business. Be sure you consider all the factors prior to putting forth your ideas. Do not go on instinct alone; take the opinion of someone close to you. You may modernize your work place and home and give it a new look. You may change your hairstyle, buy new clothes and spend on luxury items. Also spend sometime alone to recharge and revitalize yourself.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

After dealing with tough people and complicated issues you feel much stronger and clearer about your priorities. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner, and disputes with co-workers are possible. You may feel a bit defeated by situations at home and work. Allow space and time for things to change on their own. Awkward pauses and false starts do happen; the issue is how you handle them. Use information from the data at hand and your charisma to get back on track. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments. Find activities and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively. You have mental clarity and a logical approach to resolve matters. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news. Your heart and head pull you in different direction when domestic and family related decisions are to be taken. Personal relationships may be dreamy and transitory and commitments are to be made and promises are to be honored. A marriage proposal is worth considering. Health needs care and old habits of excesses need to be abandoned.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The planetary configuration brings unusualness and curiosity in your relationships as you feel they are more important to you. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental. This is a good time for reflection, prayer, and meditation. A higher purpose to your life is what you seek, and you rely more heavily upon your intuition in order to achieve it. Your physical activities tend to be more intense, passionate, and

focused this week. You are more enthusiastic and ready forAs your confidence gets a boost, you attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and handle a multitude of activity. Be careful when expressing feelings and emotions as others can misunderstand you. You handle business seminars and express yourself more specifically about the subject. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You might spend time in short frequent trips, communicating with people and visiting friends and relatives. You tend to entertain others with your sense of humor. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress. You interact with people in position of power and authority with grace and diplomacy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This period brings good-luck for love and romance. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself. As you recall nostalgic trips, you also maintain a balance of the head and heart in professional and personal matters. You turn things around in business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations but have a tendency to worry about those close to you. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. An overseas or long distance journey with includes pilgrimage is on the cards.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Mixed results are foretold this week. You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending professional, personal and material aspects. You interact with people in position of power and authority with tact and grace. You will be able to make good use of your talents, work experience for your work and projects in hand. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

New associations and beginnings in work areas will come up as new opportunities and changes may arise. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature at this time. Domestic members would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation. Some nagging issues and details will demand your attention.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This phase brings more stability in relations and professional life. You enjoy being in control but many times it is not possible. When you let go you discover that many aspects can be viewed more objectively. This objectivity lends a new edge and adds to your passion at work. This also opens new vistas in romantic relationships and helps you communicate better. Your subconscious and intuitive abilities help you forge professional associations with the larger picture in mind. Having fun that too when relaxed adds an extra element in your life.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The ability to build on financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. As you rid yourself of your inner critic you find that concepts flow and you are able to give shape to them. You or someone close to you may finalize a marriage proposal. Sharing your interests and communications with loved ones may be especially appealing to you. You might spend a lot of time in meeting friends and beloved ones. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Health food, yoga and meditation are recommended as it would help to overcome health problems.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This is a phase that brings wisdom, knowledge and creativity in your efforts. Your methods prove to be effective but you need to be circumspect as far as your interaction with colleagues is concerned. People are in awe of you for your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as are your interactions. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing a rift in relations for some time. Centering within and witnessing inner truth and reflection is the best meditation. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work.

Of never failing friends

By Deba Prasad Misra

A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to life beyond. —

John Milton, Areopagitica

April 23 is a significant and symbolic day for world literature. It is on this date in 1616 that Mighel De Cervantes and William Shakespeare passed away. It was indeed a spontaneous choice for Unesco’s general conference held in Paris in 1995 to pay a worldwide tribute to books and authors synchronising with the death anniversaries of Cervantes and Shakespeare, encouraging everybody and in particular young people, to discover the pleasures of reading and gain a renewed interest for the valuable contributions of those, who have furthered the social and cultural progress of humanity.

With this idea in mind, Unesco created the concept of World Book and Copyright Day. Every year, Unesco and the international organisations representing the three major sectors — publishers, book-sellers and libraries, select the World Book Capital for a one-year period. Thus World Book Day is organised by UNESCO every year to offer a literal feast for ardent book-lovers or bibliophiles across the world.

Alternatively referred to as Copyright Day and International Book Day, this is one of the global events which are held in high esteem all over the world. This year’s theme was ‘Share of story’ and adults, parents and other siblings were encouraged to participate by reading and sharing stories.

Now a question arises, what is the use of celebrating ‘World Book Day’ in this high-tech age as we are now equipped with modern technologies, such as internet, e-mail etc.

It is undoubtedly true that the electronic media is playing a pivotal role to provide us with different types of knowledge, but books, the oldest media to acquire knowledge, have the greatest role in this aspect. The

consolidated knowledge of different mighty minds of the world are found only in books. Now, it is high time to make and inculcate the habit of reading for each and every person of our society irrespective of age.

Books are our constant companions. The great English poet Robert Southey in one of his well-known poems *The Scholar* has called books as ‘never failing’ friends. To quote his epoch-making words, “My never failing friends they, with whom I converse day by day.”

Indeed, books are our only friends who remain with us in our weal and woe. Macaulay, the great historian

works of literary icons. John Keats as a poet became precocious after he read George Chapman’s translation of Homer’s Great classics. These examples show that books are indispensable for intellectual sustenance.

Reading is of different kinds: For example, light reading, serious reading, loud reading, silent reading etc. Francis Bacon, the father of the English Essay in one of his celebrated essays ‘Of studies’ said, “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested.” Thus we should be careful in the choice of books. Many children, including the promising

youths, have been ruined because of the taste of cheap books.

The habit of reading is a great sign of culture and civilisation. It is a great source of enjoyment and the best means of utilising leisure. Books are treasure richer than any king’s treasure. The tendency of reading habits among some of our youths is decreasing which is an unhealthy sign for the society. Apart from institutional library, a home library or a private library of a family is an important agency for inculcating the reading habit. Every family should make at least a home library cum reading room for creating a conducive atmosphere of reading and writing for our children.

The declining trend of reading habit has become a global problem in modern times. We should try our level best to encourage our children to explore book and the joy of reading. Our children have the vast store of will, capability, zeal, enthusiasm and have the power to mould the destiny of the nation. What they need today is proper channelisation of abilities, right guidance and a desired environment. Let us give our children a bright future and in turn give the world a better future with the help of reading as knowledge is synonymous with power.

(The author is the Head of the Department of English at Bajali College, Pathsala)



and thinker said, “I would rather be a poor man in a garret with plenty of books than a king who did not love reading.” Similarly, John Ruskin likened good books to “King’s Treasures” for their wisdom and knowledge.

On reading Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayam’s Rubiyat, TS Eliot, the literary giant of the 20th century, took to writing poetry and carved a niche for himself in the

“ *I don't fear death so much as I fear its prologues: loneliness, decrepitude, pain, debilitation, depression, senility. After a few years of those, I imagine death presents like a holiday at the beach.* ”

--- Mary Roach

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North-South dialogue

SO the historic moment came. The Presidents of North and South Korea met, preparatory to US President Donald Trump’s visit to Pyongyang next week. President Kim Jong- un was the first North Korean leader to come to Seoul after a decade. South Korean President Moon Jae-in agreed to visit Pyongyang later this year. The two leaders promised to work for complete demilitarisation of the Korean peninsula. They announced that they would work with the US and China to declare the official end of the 1950-53 Korean War. A peace agreement was signed in line with the non-aggression pact between the North and the South signed in 1991. The two Koreas will fully implement all existing agreements and declarations. There will be joint participation in sports events. Humanitarian issues will be swiftly resolved. All hostile acts against each other will cease. The demilitarised zone will be transformed into a peace zone. Frequent defence ministerial meetings will be held from time to time. Disarmament will start in a phased manner. Steps will be taken to make Korea nuclear-free.

The reason North Korea leaned backwards to make peace with South Korea was that not only South Korea but also China put severe sanctions on exports from North Korea which hurt the economy of the country very badly. China also firmly opposed Kim’s decision to launch nuclear weapons and missiles. His visit to Beijing must have paved the way for an understanding with the South. The US has also been pushing for North Korea’s denuclearisation. China’s role in this matter may improve relations between Washington and Beijing. Japan is awaiting developments especially following the summit with Trump. However there is scepticism in Seoul as Pyongyang is known to similar bro-

LOOKING BACK

May 15, 1989

Lady schemer of Sikkim merger

Eliza Maria Kazini, one of the leading protagonist of the drama of Sikkim’s 1975 merger with India, is critically ill in her Kalimpong home; report reaching here said. In her eighties, the enigmatic Kazini (great lady) has been suffering from protracted kidney complications but refused to stay at the Kalimpong Military Hospital, relations here said. The Belgian-born Eliza Maria, was the driving force

behind her husband KaziLhend up Dorji who started a popular movement to oust the Sikkimese Monarchy and become the first Chief Minister of the new state. After her entry into the erstwhile kingdom was banned by the Choygal, she operated from the adjoining West Bengal subdivision of Kalimpong to organize the political movement that led to the Merger.

TO THE EDITOR

What is NEHU up to?

Editor,

Days and weeks of serious preparation ended up in a paper that was not expected. The students have to face the music played by the best minds of the NEHU faculty. As a parent I could understand the frustration and hopelessness of our children who prepared the course supposedly of seven to eight months in just three months and the questions put up by the NEHU experts was just too much for them. I ask myself, what is NEHU up to, don't they want that our children answer the questions and at least score pass marks to qualify? A day after, it is so depressing to hear most students complaining of the standards set by NEHU. Instead of making the paper interesting, the very interest or passion is diminished. Come results time, most will wonder why they could not get through just because of EVS .My earnest request to the NEHU experts who set the question papers is to kindly feel the pulse of the students and allow them to have a decent score at least.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request.

Anomaly in MPSC Recruitment

Editor,

Apropos the news item, ‘MLA points out anomaly in MPSC recruitment (ST April 21, 2018), I would like to highlight certain points about the post. Firstly the post for Child Development Officer (CDPO) should have been open to all Post Graduates in Nutrition and Home Science who have specialized in Nutrition and Child Development. It should not be limited to only students sponsored by the State Government. Secondly, other states in India are recruiting post graduates in Nutrition and Home Science specialised in Nutrition and Child Development to take up the role of a CDPO. So why is our State acting differently? The role of a CDPO is to implement the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) programme and provide the link between the ICDS functionaries and the Government Administration. Two objec-

Tourism and Mining: Never the Twain Shall Meet

By HH Mohrmen

Like every new government the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) with the hope of creating new livelihood opportunities for the people of the state (particularly the youths); went gung-ho in its endeavour to promote tourism. Conrad Sangma himself had visited Delhi to urge the central government to support MDA in its endeavour to promote tourism in the state. And the Chief Minister has also visited places like Shnongpdeng and seen with his own eyes how the crystal clear water of river Umngot had attracted visitors to the site from near and far.

Ironically, the leaders of this same MDA government are equally enthusiastic about lifting the ban on coal mining and the government is leaving no stone unturned to achieve the goal. The Chief Minister is moving from pillar to post to convince the central government to come up with ways and means to lift the ban on extraction and transportation of coal from the state. The question is whether in doing so isn't the government trying to do two diametrically opposite thing at the same time?

Considering this development, the image that comes to my mind is that of a clown in a circus who tries to juggle with his two hands two or more balls at the same time. It also reminds me of a riddle I came across when I was a kid which is a challenge if I can guess the right answer. The riddle is that a trader had two bundles of consignment of five kilograms each which he intended to sell in a village across the river. The only problem is the boat can only carry one person and five Kg of goods at one go and because it was getting dark, that would be the boatman's last trip of the day. The dilemma was how to transport the consignment across the river? So the answer is that the trader would have to juggle the load throughout the journey. In doing so, technically the boat is carrying within the capacity (a boatman, one passenger and a load of five kg of goods). The argument is because five kg of the goods is always in the air so it does not add to the total weight the boat carries. Sounds like good logic, right?

SO when it comes to subject of mining and tourism development, Meghalaya under the MDA government is also in a similar situation. It is a big boat no doubt but it can carry only so much. It

“The pressure group’s strategy of insisting that the death of aquatic life is from uranium mining could also be seen from another angle.”

scribe has had open discussions with Conrad Sangma the incumbent Chief Minister of Meghalaya and highlighted the plight of the people who live in the villages downstream of the river Myntdu, Lukha and Kupli. The government also knows that the villages downstreams of these rivers would have benefited from tourism (which is a sustainable livelihood activity) if not for the fact that all the rivers in the area are all dead from mining. Villages like Botkhat, Kharkhana and other would have been able to attract tourists to the area had it not been for the kind of river that flows in the area. The previous governments which allowed random mining had betrayed them, so are we going to continue to neglect their plight?

Recently there were news reports of unnatural death of fishes in some of the major rivers of West Khasi hills district of the state, and from the press reports it is clear that the way the aquatic lives died and even the timing when the unfortunate incident occurred, is all too familiar to the people who are acquainted with the issue. In

too similar to what the people in Jaintia hills have experienced. My fear is that we might miss the wood for the trees. The pressure group’s strategy of insisting that the death of aquatic life is from uranium mining could also be seen from another angle - They don’t want to be seen as groups who are not in the same page with the mining lobby.

Of course the MDA government has guaranteed that mining will be sustainable and protection of the environment will be taken care of, but the point is that we have seen what happened even when the NGT ban is in place. Although the government would not like to admit it, there is rampant mining going on in the different mining areas of the state in spite of the ban. Not only is illegal mining happening unabatedly, but there are cases of police apprehending trucks which illegally transport coal from the state again during the same period. In their efforts to transport coal illegally, trucks took a detour and travelled on village roads which are not made to carry more than ten tons to avoid being detected. There were also cases of transporters using fake challans to trans-

port coal and where the same challan is used to transport many trucks of minerals at different points of time. These stories were reported by the media almost on a regular basis.

The claim that there are still huge amounts of extracted coal lying in the coal belt area is also pure exaggeration. The entire amount of extracted coal was transported a long time ago and the coal transported recently is freshly dug coal which was mined during the period when the NGT ban was in operation.

In such a situation where the law of the land is not respected, how can the government guarantee that the exploitation of minerals as well as protecting the environment will go hand in hand? The question of implementing or enforcing the protective mechanisms which the government hopes to introduce is an impossible task, especially when you have people who openly disregard the law of the land.

I can only write of areas which I am familiar with and if mining is allowed again and people in the areas like Jarain, Chkentalng start mining, then the livelihoods of people downstream the river Umngot will go for a toss and the story will be washed away to Bangladesh. People of Shnongpdeng, Darang, Dawki, Umsyiem who have earned their livelihood from tourism will be left high and dry because once the mining starts the first casualty will be the river. Even the famous Krangshuri waterfall which has become a major tourism attraction in the district will unfortunately lose its charm if mining upstream the river near Thanbuli village begins.

This is one area that the MDA government had failed to set it's priority right; the government has no other option but to choose one over the other because it cannot have both at the same time. It is either tourism or mining and not both at the same time because the twain shall never meet. The state government is obviously in a big dilemma on this issue and no wonder people also called MDA; Meghalaya Dilemma Alliance or an alliance in a perpetual dilemma.

What bothers the middle class?

By Samhita Barooah

According to Saul Alinsky there are three types of people haves, have-nots and have-little-want-more types. As a child one is made to believe that their family is part of the haves with everything available at hand. Once we grow up we realise our ‘have not’ status when we compare ourselves with others and then when we have nothing to begin with. Gradually we try to build our lives with the bits and pieces that we have and end up in the most absorbing and stimulating layer of social stratification which is called the, ‘have little, want more’ category. Popularly this class is known as the middle class in our social context. Within this category again there is upper, middle and lower middle class. Interestingly some people enjoy a ‘have’ status within their middle class status, while there are some ‘haves’ who define themselves as ‘have-nots’. Now it is not so important which class one belongs to or whose lineage rests where, but, it is more important to know what bothers us in each of these categories. In a casual conversation with a middle class family member some very interesting concepts emerged.

“In recent years of digital world, middle class solidarity has got strengthened through social media and the internet. Cyber space has been able to create innumerable ladders for social mobility which again bothers the middle class. Social, political, cultural and economic solidarity seems to be the most important element in the middle class digital world.”

As a middle class conservative patriarch, he said, “For us we want the good things to be conserved. Whether it is customs, traditions, culture, sanctity or values we want to conserve society. We ensure monogamy and stability of relationships. The rich and the poor do not bother about such things.” My question to him was, “Who defines good things?” He refused to answer after that and our conversation ended.

Sometimes class consciousness is about the choices we make for ourselves rather than the money, literally. People bother about costs and rising prices in the middle class. Upper middle class bothers about vehicle and flat price rise, ‘middle middle’ class gets worried about train fare, essential items and tax rates increase while the lower middle class gets angry with fuel, gas and vegetable prices increase. Ideally what really bothers the middle class are daily use commodity pricing, pay cheques and increasing bills. Investment plans of middle class people lies in health, life, accident and travel insurance plans. Very few people with middle class background would invest in the stock market, horse racing bids and auctions of any sort. But lottery, gambling, betting, housie and card games with money are common place for middle class to earn that extra little from any other source outside their salaries. State authorities are primarily catering to the middle class category in all the three layers through a socialist model of functioning. But lately privatisation of all essential services and practices has led to a changed scenario.

Salaried people plan their services from the beginning to the end in such a way that they have enough to sustain for a span of thirty years before retirement and another thirty years after retirement. They are hardly part of any social deviance

cultural norms are defined by their class boundaries. All those who have breached those boundaries turn into social deviants. Gender remains an elusive context for the middle class which is frozen in time and doesn’t give enough space for shifts. For the middle class honour and culture remain a life threatening tool of control, domination and discrimination across all genders. In the light of these realities, middle class gets trapped between living another life in reality and projecting a completely opposite life within the so-called public space.

In recent years of digital world, middle class solidarity has got strengthened through social media and the internet. Cyber space has been able to create innumerable ladders for social mobility which again bothers the middle class. Social, political, cultural and economic solidarity seems to be the most important element in the middle class digital world. But most of the youth within the middle class have moved to free chatting spaces. Mobile phones have penetrated across ever social class. Such penetration has added to the list of class conscious commodities. Owning a mobile phone is no longer a class issue but owning a particular brand has become a class issue.

Middle class does bother about sustainability, better futures for everyone, equality of opportunities, environment, peace, status quo and justice which brings them to the street and sometimes puts them behind bars as well. Their identities are entangled into the ceaseless wars of struggle and survival yet their pain never gives way to despair. Somehow they have the instinct for withstanding the unimaginable. Sometimes just a cricket score, taste of the curry and colour of the skin can keep the middle class really engaged. Wondering if anybody bothers?

(The writer is a Researcher)