

Arrogance on the part of the meritorious is even more offensive to us than the arrogance of those without merit: for merit itself is offensive.

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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Sustainable Tourism

MUCH has been spoken about sustainable tourism on World Tourism Day and many events organised across the state. But the focus has been on tourism and not on the word "sustainable." It was the Brundtland Commission Report of the United Nations in 1987 which first gave the word "sustainability" a meaning beyond the literal. Brundtland defines "sustainability" as a development process that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs." To give effect to such a process requires that nations develop a policy or policies that are holistic and are not bogged down by ambiguity. Take the case of Meghalaya where there is constant conflict between the customary practices and the modern constitutional laws. While environmental laws speak of protection of nature from 'exploitation,' here the modern state is unable to prevail against individuals and groups that bring down forests because they ostensibly own the forest land. There are others who plough through mountains and operate their quarries without any environmental regulations. This happens along the entire stretch of East and West Khasi Hills and of course the limestone mines of East Jaintia Hills. No one can question such operators even if they are operating outside the formal legal system. When there is a conflict between traditional practices and modern jurisprudence which one should prevail? This is something that the State of Meghalaya has not figured out till date. Politicians will not take hard decisions because every such decision impinges on their vote banks. It is for this reason that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had to exercise its jurisdiction on Meghalaya following the complaint from groups downstream that suffered from water pollution from coal mines.

Meghalaya's unique selling point is its natural and verdant forests, undulating hills and clear, clean rivers which are today diminishing. If this landscape gives way to messy quarries that destroy the natural beauty of the place, we can take it for granted that tourists will give Meghalaya a wide berth. What's the point of a tourist destination without its natural surroundings? Sustainability does not happen just by pronouncing the word. It is a lot of grunt work that requires the community to assert its right to conservation against the greed of a few who wish to turn this land into a hell hole, exploited to the hilt. For some in Meghalaya the future is not a word they know to spell.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Proposed Taxi Meter Tariff announced

Meghalaya govt has announced the proposed taxi meter tariff for the entire State. In an official notification issued here recently it was announced that the minimum metered charge would be Rs. 5 for the first two kms or part thereof. For the subsequent half km or part thereof the charge would be one rupee. The minimum charge for any distance travelled would be Rs. 5. The notification said that at the commencement of the journey, the taxi meter should initially read Rs. 5 and on completion of first two kms the meter will move upwards at the rate of rupee for every subsequent half km.

As for waiting charge, it has been proposed to be fixed at 25 paise for every two minutes or part thereof. Suggestion and objection, if any, from the members of the public would be received by the Secretary Meghalaya Transport Department within 30 days from the publication of gazette notification in this regard. It is expected that the Govt

would introduce the meter system in the local taxis all over the State on completion of these formalities. The Govt has already identified a local business organization which would undertake repair of the meters. It may be recalled that the meters could not be introduced in the State since there was no local arrangement for undertaking repairs of the faulty meters. In view of growing public complaints about overcharging by the taxi-drivers, the State cabinet took decision some time last year to introduce meters in the local taxis for the entire State.

Restricted imposed on National Highway 44

In order to ensure the safety and smooth flow of traffic, the Deputy Commissioner of Jaintia Hills has promulgated an order under Section 144 of CrPC banning the unloading & dumping of coal and timber within 35 feet on either side from the centre of the National Highway 44 between Jowai town and Sung Valley.

Vigilantism against women

By HH Mohrmen

Cases of vigilantism and highhandedness have happened before but they were mostly against men and of course there were also cases where the vigilantes supported by the community punished the entire family. In the past such cases were against people suspected to be the keepers of u Thlen, ka Taro or ka Bih, but this time around it was the women who had to bear the brunt and ironically the perpetrators of the crime are also of the same sex.

Like any popular issue reported by the media, the news of the assault on the three women also sparked a debate and it happened in the hearth and homes of the people and since another space also exists, the debate also happened in the different social media platforms in the cyber world. And of course opinions vary from those that justify the action taken by the women's group to those who outrightly condemned the incident as illegal. The Khasi Pnar community or the Khun u Hynniewtrep naturally have different opinions on the issue.

When I read the report that women of Pynthor have to patrol the village from midnight till the wee hour of the morning, the first question that came to my mind was, what is wrong with our community? Why is it that our villages are not safe anymore? The other pertinent question is, where are our police? Why do women have to patrol the streets? The police are supposed to protect the public and particularly (the vulnerable sections of the society) the women so that they can get a good night's sleep. Instead they are losing sleep to protect the neighbourhood. I think the first lesson from the incident is for the law and order machinery in the state, particularly in Pynthor area because the people have to take unto themselves the responsibility to protect themselves.

The police have to do some introspection and ask themselves questions like why do people have to do night patrol of the streets? Is it because the people of the area have lost faith in the law enforcing machinery that they have to do what the police are supposed to do. Surely if the case was handled by a trained law enforcement personnel, the

victims would not have had to suffer and it would have saved both the victims and the Seng Kynthei the embarrassment and the trouble of litigation. But that was not to happen.

The case can also be looked at from another angle which is conflict between the traditional institution and the prevailing laws in the country and international basic rights that each human is entitled to. We have laws in the country which deal with all kinds of crimes and we must also remember that each and every citizen of this country is entitled to free and fair trial and what happened in this case is that the victims were not even provided the basic human rights that they are entitled to. This is because the case was tackled by lay

contemporary society?

The method of punishment by shaving the head of the victim (khii-lai-nuid) is also a tribal way of punishment which is still being justified by many in the Khasi Pnar community even today. A Facebook post claimed that the only mistake the Seng Kynthei of Pynthor did was to physically assault the victims otherwise shaving their head is fine he said. Khii-lai-nuid is a penalty which is only intended to shame the supposed criminal, but it is a punishment no less. So can educated people who live in the modern world in a democratic country continue to allow people to indulge in such acts? Is it not true that only

The other lesson that we can learn from the incident is that there should be regular interface between the police and the public not only to create a good police-public relationship but more importantly to educate the community on the do's and don'ts when an incident occurs in the area or when they apprehend a suspected criminals.

people who have no training or experience and hence have no idea how to deal with such cases. Instead of a doing the right thing and handing over the suspects to the police the Seng Kynthei's decision was influenced by a mob mentality. Hence it was not handled professionally.

The Seng Kynthei and even the community justified that their action is sanctioned by tradition as the Seng Kynthei is also part of the dorbar shngong. But some even questioned legality of the very existence of organisations like Seng Kynthei. People rightly questioned the authority of the Seng Kynthei to take upon themselves the role of a court and a law enforcing agency all rolled up in one. Another important question is whether the Seng Kynthei or for that matter even the dorbar shngong has the right to try an alleged criminal? Till the Honourable High Court order on the matter related to the dorbar shngong, each and every community used to have their own cells where they imprisoned a person that the shngong found to have committed a crime. Is this even legal in the

competent institutions with authority can deliver judgement and the duty of all other institutions is to hand over such cases to the law?

Not only that the victims were tried in a Kangaroo court but even the punishment that was given to them by shaving their heads was barbaric. We have seen many cases of vigilantism in many nooks and corners of the state. This should be stopped immediately. What the community should do when they apprehend a suspected criminal is to hand him or her over to the police because no one has the right to take the law in their own hands. The other lesson that we can learn from the incident is that there should be regular interface between the police and the public not only to create a good police-public relationship but more importantly to educate the community on the do's and don'ts when an incident occurs in the area or when they apprehend a suspected criminals.

From the other point of

view, the case can be seen as a conflict between Christian values of love, forgiveness, justice and not being judgemental and the tribal way of providing instant justice and vengeance among the majority in the society. In every conflict, our tribal values prevail over cherished Christian values of love, forgiveness and empathy. In fact the gospels recorded a similar incident when Jesus challenged the crowd who was about to stone a woman to death, and called on the first man who thinks he has not sinned to cast the first stone. And we all know the rest of the parable which not only teaches us not to be judgemental but to also forgive others because we are all sinners.

Christians say the Lord's Prayer on a regular basis and part of the prayer says 'forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us,' but where is forgiveness now? Another parable which teaches us about love and the importance of forgiveness is that of the prodigal son, but we have failed in our moral duty as Christians to forgive others. We seldom practice forgiveness especially when we deal cases such as this one.

As Christians we even overlook the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount which reminds us 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied, and blessed are those who show mercy for mercy shall be shown to them.' And the most important of all is 'Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called God's children' (The Revised English Bible with Apocrypha). The questions that we need to ask ourselves are, have we ever felt the thirst to see righteousness prevails? Did we ever show mercy? And where have all the peace makers gone?

The incident not only challenges us to do some self introspection as a community but we must also try to understand ourselves and refrain from taking the law in our hands. That the incident happened in Pynthor which is part of the city also shows that we still have an awful lot to do to educate our people on this very important subject.

whatever reason, we are part of a global movement; a movement that has the power to drive inclusive development, create jobs and build sustainable societies we want for our future. Perhaps every citizen can play the role of city ambassador and play courteous hosts. Each one of us is responsible for contributing our bit to protect the natural resources of our planet.

We live in such a country that others dream of visiting and becoming wiser by the experience. Can't we help them with the right directions, authentic fares, uniform pricing and respect for the personal space of tourists while maintaining basic facilities that we ourselves are comfortable in using? We must remember that tourism is an ever-evolving and thriving industry that contributes to the economic wellbeing of every nation and generates lakhs of employment opportunities besides focusing on environment-friendly measures.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad-15

EAC Task Cut Out Focus on farm sector & tame banks

By Shivaji Sarkar

The poor and the economy have taken center stage in Indian politics. Prime Minister Modi feels concerned about the deprived and announces the formation of his Economic Advisory Council (EAC) for their welfare. His Finance Minister Jaitley looks for a package to revive the economy that has "dipped a bit" without giving up fiscal austerity.

And for a first in BJP politics, a former Finance Minister and senior BJP leader Yashwant Sinha fires salvos for a sagging economy. This comes shortly after the UN found the economy on a free fall, along-with world-wide need for austerity and "hyper-globalisation", a new coinage that marks the Trade and Development Report (TDR) of UNCTAD. This means over financialisation (bankisation) and the corresponding woes of the world economy. The TDR also wants to give up austerity at Government levels --- just contrary to what India has been doing.

Possibly all the above four --- Modi, Jaitley, Sinha and TDR --- are correct. The country needs to look for a new economic path. It needs a new package. There has to be full scrutiny and solutions found for the grave problems. Sinha and TDR look for new path so do Modi and Jaitley. There is consensus as the economic model introduced by Manmohan Singh has failed. The quandary is about how to find a new path.

Questionably, will the new EAC led by Bibek Debroy be able to find that and give the right suggestions? This question plagues everyone right from the Prime Minister downwards to the last man. Importantly, the EAC has to find new moorings and dynamics for the Indian economy. Manmohan Singh failed because as Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi said, he failed to create jobs. In fact, jobless growth, he says has worsened during the last three years.

What would be EAC's take? How would it create the jobs? Given that the industrialized-manufacturing economy has failed to do it. If it has to look for new avenues the dynamics of economy has to change. India remains moored in the farm sector but that is the most ignored. Undoubtedly, the farmer has to be the pivot of the economy. True, the importance of the farm sector has been indirectly recognized by the Government as it shelved the decision to prenone the financial year, which is linked to the agricultural production.

Besides, the Government in mid-September realized that it does not get all data before the end of kharif and rabi seasons which is the key. Over 54 per cent officially or about 75 crores are dependent on the farm sector for jobs though it contributes 14 per cent of the GDP, almost the same as the manufacturing sector, with crop growth of a little over 2 per cent normally.

This hard fact is ignored. For the last 70 years, these large numbers are targeted to be separated from the farm sector. But this has not and cannot happen. The new economy has to give these 75 crores to farm support so that it stays put and increases the GDP contribution of the sector.

Till the advent of the British and their resort to Permanent Settlement, India had a thriving farm economy with poverty virtually a rarity. Today, India needs to rediscover it and make a vibrant economy that would transform the dream of Mahatma Gandhi and

Deendayal Upadhyay for the rise of the last man --- antyodaya.

Modi's EAC has the onerous task to tailor out the new economy. However, this cannot be achieved if banks become monsters. The bankisation is the bane of world economy the TDR states. Untamed finance is continuing to be the source of instability and inequality, it adds.

Interestingly, the UN body rejected claims that the financial system is safer, simpler and fairer and condemned intensification of finance. India is facing it post note-ban.

Arguably, is Sinha then right in criticizing note-ban which in his perception has led to the slowing down of the economy to 5.7 per cent growth against the desired over 7 per cent? To some extent he is correct.

The banks are rising the world over with Government backing by creating a fear psychosis of black economy, levying heavy charges and fraudulent deductions across the world. India is no exception.

In fact, the world over despite the 2007-8 crisis, the banking sector assets have more than doubled in most countries and TDR notes, with peaks of over 300 per cent of GDP in OECD economies. Banks in developed countries have become mammoths with over \$ 100 trillion accumulation. This exceeds global income.

India needs to be wary. The EAC has to correct this and tame the power of banks along-with their demands for unnecessary details like Aadhar, mobile number, repeatedly know your customer (KYC) and unmitigated harassment. In short, India, as many Europeans, Americans and Japanese want have to be freed from the leash of the banks and their instruments.

The Council has to also address the interests on deposits, the lower interests are to depositors, higher are their profits, which are often squandered away in credit to unscrupulous businessmen and rarely repaid. Notably, Indians banks profligacy has led it to a trap over Rs 12 lakh crores NPA, all earned from poor depositors. Now the Government is recapitalising the banks with the same poor taxpayer's money.

The EAC for the sake of the poor also has to bring the banks out of the clutches of the Government. The banks need to function like commercial entities and not Government departments. They have to service and not fleece the people with the backing of the Government. That would be a pro-poor approach to bring the banks back to health.

Significantly, the UN finds austerity of Governments a major issue for aggravating the economic crisis and the growing number of poor across the world, even in the most affluent US. It also warns against mixing automation and austerity. This has led to job crisis across the world. In India, this is reflected in the sudden sacking of thousands of workers from the IT and some other sectors.

Additionally, the EAC has to ensure that robots do not replace well-paying jobs with the low-wage ones. This raises profits of big companies, pauperizes the workers and hits income distribution. The EAC has to chart out a policy on robotisation so that India's poor, Modi's prime target, are not hurt.

Clearly, this is a great opportunity to redesign the Indian economy. Its success with agri-focus can change the dynamics of the country.---INFA

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Water Crisis

RIVERS run through Indian history. On their banks cities have emerged and civilisation has flourished. However, population explosion and development needs have led to their overexploitation. Organic links between rivers, nature and people have been severed. Today, India faces a serious water crisis and remedial measures are of the utmost importance. Irrigation meets 80% of the demand. There is need to take steps to change crop patterns, curb wasteful practices and promote generation of renewable energy. The annual per capita water availability was 5,177 cubic metres in 1961 and it dropped to 1,545 cubic metres in 2011. According to the National Institute of Hydrology, India's available per capita water was 938 cubic metres in 2010 but will be only 814 cubic metres by 2025.

One way of rejuvenating dying rivers is interlinking. That will transfer the surplus of one river to another. The government has undertaken engineering projects for the purpose. The results are dubious. The Rs 18,000 crore Ken-Betwa interlinking projects can destroy 10,000 hectares of forests. Forests are very important catchment areas for rain-fed rivers. The Rally for Rivers campaign envisages that a one km wide belt along river banks can be reserved for creating tree cover. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act will ensure Rs 6,000 crore is made available annually to state governments. Rs 42,000 crore now remain unutilised with the Centre. The money can be spent to expand tree cover with environmental benefits. Pollution by industrial effluence, municipal waste and generation of thermal energy has to be mitigated. The Centre's Namu Ganga Project may go a long way in resolving the water crisis.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Dissidence in AGP ranks

Dissidence in ruling political parties is no longer the monopoly of the Congress(I) nor confined particularly to what is usually described as the Hindi belt of India. The contagion has by now spread to the north-east also, countering the off-repeated praise that this region is rather cut-off from the 'mainstream' of national life. Assam Gana Parishad, the ruling non Congress party in Assam, is out to remove this 'igno-miny' and the dissident activity inside its parliamentary wing

seems to be heading for a confrontation with the ruling coterie, the revolt no less defiant and determined than what has surfaced at the moment in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan or Gujarat. The storm in Assam was brewing for quite some time past and if it has burst only now it has only synchronised with the congenial tempo of defiance now ruling the roost in the Congress ruled States in varying degrees. The path of confrontation in Assam seems to have well been set with the AGP leadership.

TO THE EDITOR

Being religious without humanity

Editor,

The profusion of tears that certain people shed for a certain community makes us more apprehensive than appreciative. Yes, this group of people just remain silent at the suffering of certain others – even though it is against the call of humanity. And, some others just pretentiously show a token of concern just to hide from the public what they truly are.

Many intellectuals almost lost their sanity and began to beat their breasts when the BJP, only to make good their election manifesto, proposed to give shelter to the "aggrieved Hindus" of Bangladesh. It was a humane act keeping in view the fact that Hindus have for ages been inhumanely tortured and murdered by the majority in Bangladesh.

The sharp decline in the population in the past few decades reveals that there must have been hard religious persecution against the Hindu in Bangladesh. But very sadly, the cruelties faced by the

Hindus in this neighboring state usually never evoke the sympathy of our leaders, nor of so-called elites, and the media. Many instances of persecution are not even mentioned in the Indian news media. We only get to hear that sad news from the far-off BBC, 'The Guardian' or 'Huffington Post', or from our FB friends abroad. Tulsi Gibbered, the US member of the Democratic Party, raised this issue of religious prosecution in Bangladesh several times but it was not considered newsworthy or discussed at all by the mainstream media of India.

Behold, this very group with devious agenda now rather wants to welcome Rohingyas of Myanmar to India. Some are even pretentiously digging into the magnanimity of Hindu ethos and proudly quote Swami Vivekananda, "The Rohingyas conundrum" (ST, Sep 28, 2017). Some other insidiously play the part of propagandists through their regular letters and articles to drive home the point. No wonder, for some political leaders the mass exodus of Rohingyas from the Rakhine province of Myanmar has come as a windfall. So, they are rolling out the red-carpet and providing the

Within six months time the electorate of Meghalaya will once again be called to fulfil a democratic citizen's mandate of electing our very own representatives to the Meghalaya State Assembly. It however does not end there. The political party or the combo of political parties that manage to come up with the largest number of seats will form the next Government in Meghalaya. The policies and activities that the Government then follows will directly affect our collective lives. For the next five years and for many years to come. It will determine how resources, natural, human and financial will be managed and used. It will impact on the type of education our children will have and their future; the health care that will be provided to all of us; how many of us get jobs or how many of us continue to remain unemployed; how many get two square meals a day and if poverty will continue to dominate our society. Why, it might even impact on our eating habits! It will definitely determine whether a state of general contentment prevails or if overwhelming worry, anxiety and fret shall rule the day. It is therefore important whom we elect and who governs us for the next five years. This is the sole reason behind elections. Fact of the matter is we have the chance to determine our own destiny. Therefore the pertinent question before the public is - how should we vote and who do we vote for?

Every voter will be presented with two choices on how to vote. One of the negative choices which has entered the system in the last 30 years or so, especially among the youth, the poor and the illiterate, is the choice based on the belief that election time is a time for making merry, have loads of fun and make a quick buck. Time for promoters of the Jaibynriew to emerge and distribute goodies all over the place! Election time is the time for a candidate to identify himself/ herself as out of season Santa Clause in the shape of a good and generous person. It is the time when the contesting candidate is expected to provide for picnics and excursions; free drinks and mammoth car rallies; demands to feed one and all with no questions asked is now no longer an option but a prerequisite for any

citizenship underhand. Indeed, it's always one's greatness to soothe one's painful sore, India has poured out its kindness on our Tibetan refugees for which they always express their heartfelt gratitude in return. But this time with Rohingyas I am quite skeptical. Instead of gratitude, we might receive a barrage of bullets in due course of time. Many pockets of West Bengal have already witnessed such instances of ingratitude. But our fellow friends from Kolkata never discuss that. Can one guarantee that those Rohingyas, who are responsible for mass killing, abduction, and also conversion of Hindus at gun-point will not be the cause of nightmares for Indians in future? Three mass graves of Hindus in Rakhine gave a new turn to the sorrowful saga of deported refugees from Myanmar! This sacred land of India has long been battered by many subversive forces, from outside and within.

I am afraid, these large cohorts of writers or propagandists are now finding reasons and means under the sky to gloss over

By Toki Blah

serious contender. The voter is expected to vote for the candidate who squanders the most. Naturally a person with limited means, however qualified, can ill afford to contest. Its money that counts, not ability nor quality. It is only the super rich, people with unlimited funds that stand a chance to win. There are always exceptions to the rule but these are becoming rarer by the day. No wonder therefore that the number of rich but dumb, voiceless, clueless and useless MLAs are increasing by the day. If truth be told, the people of Meghalaya are increasingly voting for crass businessmen out to make a quick buck than for serious and able representatives to legislate on laws for the welfare of the state and its people. We have only ourselves to blame for this and no one else.

The second option before the electorate is to challenge the notion that election time is time for distributing and making money. In the face of increasing poverty, it sounds thoroughly naive and silly to call on the common man to ignore those who have nothing else to offer but money. The poor believe that this is the only time when they can make a few quick bucks, and who can blame them? This is because of the false belief that poverty is basically due to absence and lack of money. So when the opportunity to make some easy money comes we plunge into it without thinking. Poverty in fact is measured by the opportunity or the inability to access basic socio-economic amenities that are available to ordinary citizens. Effective and affordable healthcare, meaningful education for your children, food, housing, good roads, safe drinking water and employment are the basic amenities that the common man is expected to have quick and easy access to. It comes as a shock to many that in Meghalaya a large percentage of the population are unable to access or avail of these basic amenities that some of us take for granted. It is this inhibiting inability and lack of opportunity that makes people poor, not the absence of money. That's why in Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills, in the heart of the coal rich mining belt, the incidence of poverty is

so high and so obvious despite the existence of MLAs belonging to the super affluent class. The above basic amenities just don't exist in the midst of all that money! The irony of the situation is the electorate's continued rejection of quality leadership capable of lifting society from the crippling hold of poverty. Poverty in the state continues to increase because we continue to vote for useless people who have no clue how to remove poverty except how to make more money for themselves. Elected legislators who bought our votes have failed us and people must accept this reality.

For whom then should we vote who can bring development? It's a question that people shy away from answering. The answer however is very simple. Don't vote for money alone however tempting it might be. That's the answer to development. Please exercise your voting right only after careful application of mind. Vote for the person you believe can bring development to you, your children and the constituency in the next five years. Don't allow a few dalals, however self righteous and whoever they might be (they can be Rangbah Shnongs, religious leaders, community leaders, clan elders) with fistful of bank notes to force you into voting for the wrong person. When they approach you with money ask them the reason for this out of turn and sudden generosity. Most important, don't listen to them. Depend instead on your own conscience after in-depth discussion with your friends and family members. Vote for and choose the best person and here a question arises – best of what? The best possible way to know for whom to vote is for the electorate to ask the candidate himself his plans for the future. Start with some elementary basic simple questions. What are his plans to improve the roads? To improve health care. To address the problem of education. To provide employment and sustainable livelihoods.

a lush landscape with varied colours of peaceful peoples living in perfect harmony. But, this has never happened. What's lamentable is that in this age of advanced science each individual faith still claims its "exclusivity" to reach the doorway to heaven. The rational approaches to God are just pooh-poohed. Has this "exclusivity to meet God" through "ONLY ONE PATH" not taken a toll on the whole edifice of the humanity? Has it not literally demolished the possibility of peaceful co-existence and mutual respect? Hence now we are apprehensive even if we want to exercise our magnanimity because the religions themselves are playing a foul game. Lastly, history warns us that the genuine show of compassion and love has unmistakably met with enmity, intolerance, and bloodshed. Shall we still import trouble and bring misery to our own people here?

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

What vision does he have for you and your community. What bills will he introduce in the Assembly to improve agriculture production in the state? Ask for facts and figures. We have had enough of nonsensical emotion. These are just a few of the issues MLAs are supposed to do for the people. There are a thousand more. Actually distributing MLA funds is just a cover-up for not being able to do anything else. Incompetent MLAs have taken shelter behind this scheme. We must realise this and challenge our candidates on the issue.

Another common advice we are given is – don't waste your voting right! That is absolutely correct. The advisers however often forget to add that you should not sell your voting right to the highest bidder either. Both actions are wrong. First time voters need to be cautioned against the above. Suppose you are paid by someone Rs 10,000 for your vote. Sounds quite like a lot of money! But what does it actually mean? It simply means you are selling your democratic right for just Rs. 5.47 paise a day (10,000 divided by 365x5). Sometimes a vote is bought only for Rs 500 or less. So in the name of exercising your franchise you end up instead selling your democratic right for less than the price of two pieces of kwai! If you refuse to accept that you have been cheated then you're a bigger fool than I thought you are. You have been cheated, by no less than the very person you trust and voted for and this has been happening for the last 30 years. They buy your vote so that they can steal and rob the resources of the state for the next five years. And we allow it to happen in the name of elections and in exercising our adult franchise as free citizens of this country! Buying and selling your rights has been associated with the exercise of electing our leaders. Nothing can be more shameful. The time to stop this evil practice has come. In 2018, don't vote for the money but for the services you expect from your MLA for the next 5 years. Wise up, don't be a fool.

Tatkal railway tickets

Editor,

This is regarding the train reservation system at MSRTC building. There are three shops inside the MSRTC compound. They are doing their business well but they are also doing ticketing business to earn more money. Hence we passengers are facing problems while booking tatkal tickets because they keep many booking slips for their customers. When we go to book tickets there are already so many forms for different people so that genuine passengers never get tatkal tickets. The concerned authority should look into this matter and the shopkeepers should be removed from the MSRTC compound. Let the brokers earn their livelihood and not the shopkeepers.

Yours etc.,
S Singh,
Via email

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

A critique of religion

By Barnes Mawrie

In a dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Leonardo Boff, the great Brazilian Liberation theologian, the latter asked the Dalai Lama a mischievous question, "which is the greatest religion?" The Dalai Lama, paused a while and with a smile answered "the one that takes us closest to God and teaches us to love our neighbour." Boff was literally taken aback by such a wise and inspiring answer. He confessed that it was the truest and most authentic answer to his question. So many religions have been founded in the history of humanity. This proves that man is in constant search for the "ultimate answer" to his fundamental quests. For this reason, every religion is good because it attempts to provide man that answer. However, there is no satisfaction to man's quest

misinterpreted form, teaches that all non-Muslims are infidels and are to be excluded from its religion (the ISIS in fact portrays such a pitiable concept of Islam). Christianity at one time of history has believed in such radical exclusivism and considered others as "doomed." This is the problem found in every religion, which emerges from our human narrow mindedness. Thus it is a sad fact of history that every religion has been drifting from the essence to the accidents, from the centre to the periphery and from inclusivism to exclusivism. This in turn has been responsible for religious radicalism, interreligious bickering, religious intolerance and at times even religious wars.

How I wish that one day all institutionalized religions

The vertical points to our relationship with God and the horizontal to a relationship with our fellow beings (human and non human beings). The two poles of the cross are embedded to each other to form one reality, so too the two relationships (with God and with fellow beings) are linked to each other to constitute a "religion of love."

and he continues to be a "searcher" for a meaning in life.

Perhaps, we need to look beyond any one religion for the answer to this quest. Probably, we have to transcend the idea of an institutionalized religion or cult and may be, we only need to rediscover the basics upon which every religion is founded. In my opinion the answer of the Dalai Lama to Boff contains the clue to the answer. The basics of every religion or creed are the two relationships: a relationship with God and a relationship with the other. Tell me, which religion be it Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism or a Tribal religion, which does not essentially teach man the way to come close to God and the need to love and care for other beings (human and non human)? To have a God experience, has been the quest of every religion and to return to God has

become phased out and only a "Religion of Love" remains. A religion based on love of God and love of man, is the only religion that humanity needs in order to satisfy its existential quest. In my opinion, the image of the cross reminds us of these basics of a religion of love. The cross symbolizes the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of a true religion. The vertical points to our relationship with God and the horizontal to a relationship with our fellow beings (human and non human beings). The two poles of the cross are embedded to each other to form one reality, so too the two relationships (with God and with fellow beings) are linked to each other to constitute a "religion of love." One cannot relate with God meaningfully without relating equally with his fellow beings for we cannot love God whom we cannot see unless we love our neighbour whom we see. I

At times, each religion puts more emphasis on these secondary concepts rather than on the primary concept of God and the afterlife. In short, the "how" overshadows the "what." Consequently, radicalism sets in and an exclusive theology is formulated and taught by each of them.

been their primary goal. Unfortunately, the concept of God and the manner of reaching his abode, is distinct from one religion to the other. At times, each religion puts more emphasis on these secondary concepts rather than on the primary concept of God and the afterlife. In short, the "how" overshadows the "what." Consequently, radicalism sets in and an exclusive theology is formulated and taught by each of them.

Secondly, the teaching of the golden rule "do to others what you want others to do to you," which is the fulcrum of every religion, has been misinterpreted by radicals in every religion. Thus radical Hinduism today teaches its adherents that this fraternal love is to be extended only to fellow Hindus (this is what Hindutva means), Islam in its worst

strongly believe as Jesus had said that in the final day of judgment, God is not going to ask us, how many prayers you said? How many namaz you performed? How many pujas you made? Or how many pilgrimages to holy places you made? He is instead going to ask us one basic question: how many times did you help your brother or sister in need?

I am not mistaken to say that every true religion teaches "love and kindness towards one's neighbour," but the problem is that ritualism and legalism have got the upper hand in every religion and as a consequence the human aspect of charity has been downplayed. Orthodoxy has dominated orthodox practices. We forget that if God is "love", true religion has to be founded on love.

"The price of success is hard work, dedication to the job at hand, and the determination that whether we win or lose, we have applied the best of ourselves to the task at hand."

--- Vince Lombardi

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 53 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2017

Killing of Dalits

It is a disgrace that Dalits are segregated in society and in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, Gujarat. Last Sunday 27 year old Jayesh Solanki, a Dalit was beaten to death by a group of upper caste Patels in Gujarat's Anand district. The fight was over the right of Dalits to watch the Garba of upper caste Gujaratis. As a matter of course, the police registered an FIR against the eight assailants and a probe has been ordered. Why there should be a need for a probe in such a case is difficult to understand. Exemplary punishment must be meted out though that may not eliminate the evil. Last year, a cow vigilante group had ruthlessly beaten up a Dalit family in Una. There the Dalits have been forced to give up their occupation of skinning dead cattle. The police are often in cahoots with the offenders in these places and the rule of law is thrown to the winds. Of course, four policemen were suspended in Una for their complicity in the crime but they were later released on bail. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong invective against such brutality on Dalits has not had the desired effect.

The Constitution is often disrespected in such cases. It lays down strict action against atrocities on Dalits. But the law is hardly enforced in those cases. Cases of atrocities against Scheduled Castes in the country increased in number from 26,127 in 2005 to 45,003 in 2015. Conviction rates on the other hand fell from 30% to 28%. Gujarat has a dismal record and there were convictions only in eleven out of the 949 cases charge-sheeted in 2015. For some years now, Dalit mobilisation has been going on but the law protecting them must be more stringent. It is a pity that Solanki was killed a day before Gandhi Jayanti, the birth anniversary of the Mahatma of Gujarat who called all low caste Hindus Harijans.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Assam UMF Split, advantage Cong

The United Minorities Front (UMF), the second largest Opposition group in Assam Assembly with seventeen MLAs, has vertically split, Nine MLAs, including the party president, Mr Shanti Ranjan Das Gupta are on one side, while eight others including the party general secretary and floor leader Mr Goiam Osmani are on the other. The Das Gupta group has expelled Mr Osmani, while Mr Osmani has suspended Mr Das Gupta, deputy leader of the Legislature Party, Mr Ardhendu Dey, of the Legislature Party, Mr Jabbar, Mr Abdul Hamid, and Mr

Abdur Rouf, a member of the General Council. The UMF's political influence in Assam is much greater than is reflected in its strength in the State Legislature. It was formed in the early part of 1985 as the party of the Bengali Hindu Muslims who were the target of the anti foreigner movement. It was a significant development as Bengali Hindu Muslims had joined hands for the first time to face a common threat. That is why it was named United Minorities Front, the plural representing the linguistic minority (Hindu Bengalis) and the religious minority (Muslim Bengalis).

Mental pollution in human society

By Fabian Lyngdoh

We are living today in a chartered and branded human society where, knowledge and ability can be recognised and given importance to, only if there is a certification by some sort of authority. A person is highly appreciated if he/she uses branded products and appreciates branded things. Formerly, the beauty and value of things were defined by nature; today, beauty and value are artificially manufactured and defined by the brands. Anybody can dress like bats or be naked like frogs, then whine like dogs, scream like ghosts or curse like demons and call that beautiful music, provided it is branded. Today, we even have branded celebrities who do not possess any praise-worthy speciality in themselves, but rose to the pedestal merely because they conform to the dictate of bosses in the entertainment industry, and submit like pawns in their hands. There is now a tendency towards multinational companies(MNC's)branded tourism throughout the world. Indigenous peoples everywhere should beware that even the natural beauty of their beloved lands could be branded by mighty corporations without notice. Yes, simple, innocent and spontaneous living in the lap of nature is no longer appreciated because it is replaced by a branded lifestyle. And, it is in this brand-polluted social atmosphere that our sons and daughters are thrown into.

Why should our thoughts and behaviour be dictated by the brands of the corporate world? I'd rather buy the cheapest shoes and cheapest goggles to help the business of the poor roadside vendors than augmenting the controlling powers of the mighty corporations by contributing to their coffers. I wear low-priced goods with confidence to free myself from the pollution of the branded atmosphere. It is said that Socrates, the great philosopher, used to go to the market place from time to time not to find out what he needs to buy, but to discover what things were there which his fellow mortals were madly after, but without which he could still be living a perfectly normal life. Most of the times he discovered that he could be living comfortably and happily without any of the commodities sold in the markets, so he usually returned home with his purse and happiness intact, and his bag empty.

There are two types of pollution in the world today: material pollution and mental

pollution. At the physical level, we eat material food and the body digests and absorbs the nutrients while unwanted matters are excreted. We inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. The excretory system is within the individual organism. And, in the natural setting, before the commercialisation of every aspect of human life, pollution was dealt with by Mother Nature itself with the active participation of all creatures in a balanced ecological system. But today, human activities have overtaken the activities of all other creatures combined, so that the ecological system has become irrevocably imbalanced. Human organised efforts are required to redress the imbalance to some extent. For example, material consumers products are wrapped in beautiful packaging so that people might be lured to buy the things inside. After the purchase, the goods are put into use while the packages are discarded into the public dustbins because they are useless. The garbage of discarded packages and worn-out goods are collected by the municipal authorities and disposed somewhere to keep the people and the locality safe and sound. So with regard to material pollution there can still be ways and means to tackle it with the help of the political authority and if the people cooperate in an organised manner.

But there are also mental goods for feeding the mind through the eyes and the ears marketed by the entertainment industry and the global communication systems. We consume, or rather are fed with mental food continuously to keep our minds alive and abreast with the universal mind of the global society. These mental food items are also wrapped in beautiful and attractive mental packages which are useless, but which are entrenched in a manner that there is no way to discard them. So, the consumers can do nothing but consume the goods and the packages as well. However, the excretory system of the mind does not lie with the individuals, but with the normative values of the society, including religious morality. But in the modern society today, normative values are considered out-dated and have become informal and evoked only in lip-service rhetoric; and religious moral values become non-statutory exhortations that are being weakened by the day. All through the ages, social norms and religious

moral values have tempered human behaviour for the good of the society, but today they are seen as unnecessary hindrance to freedom. Instead of guiding human behaviour, religions are expected to modify their doctrine in accordance with the desire of the freedom-seekers however base their thoughts and behaviour might be.

When I was a boy of seventeen, I could not sleep for more than a week after watching the movie, 'Dracula'. Today, I observe that children from age four upwards sleep normally even after watching movies more horrifying than 'Dracula.' Some might not even be able to sleep unless they first watch a horror movie. When we were children, we cringed when we saw pictures of skeletons, skulls or a dagger piercing through a heart that is dripping with blood. But today, even little children would like to have these pictures on their T-shirts or as tattoos on their arms. It does not mean that children of today have become braver, but it is because their hearts have been hardened and stunted to feel and understand that these pictures refer to the deeds of men that are evil. We see everywhere weird pictures and designs that depict lust, horror, violence and death, characteristics of the occult and the demonic underworld, which today are considered as exquisite pieces of art. It seems that in the ultra-modern society today, science and demons are in collaboration. Movies which combine scientific technological gadgets with demonic characters are the most successful and sell like hot cakes and consumed with the packaging as well by individual minds as well as by the collective mind of this generation.

Science is the gift of God to humanity. But it seems that all scientific and technological discoveries and inventions are attributed to Satan and tribute is paid to him. We say that we have greatly progressed in all branches of knowledge, but it seems that the world is still under the spell of lingering inertia of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in Germany. Martin Luther rebelled against the malpractices and worldliness of the Roman Catholic Church of his time, but he did not rebel against God. Through his movement even the Catholic Church was

awakened to the need for internal reformation, and it had undergone great changes and reformation within itself since then. But the scientific, industrial and commercial communities seem to have identified the mighty Roman Catholic Church with God; hence, the rebellion is now turned against God. When the rebellion is against God, then a pact with His arch enemy, the Devil or Satan, is felt necessary. It is a simple psychology of projection but with deadly consequence. The Catholic Church was historically seen as a hindrance to human right and freedom, but today, the disgust against the Church is projected against God as the dictator of ignorance, while Satan is seen as the deliverer of enlightenment. That is why we see works of arts in tattoos, clothes, cars, murals, etc., depicting the signs and symbols of this deadly deliverer. Indeed, every description of Satan and his cohorts found in the Bible and the desecrated images and symbols of the Church become transformed into popular modern works of art which mostly reflect moral rebellion. This is how the mental atmosphere of the community becomes polluted with mental garbage, and induces mental health problems and social disorder.

No politico-legal or scientific authority has the means to collect and dispose these mental wastes because the people's minds have themselves become the dustbins. There is a rising contempt for morality and disregard for law and order in every society. Respect for the rule of law cannot exist in the society of the mass represented by the mob. Perhaps many would disagree, but I strongly believe that normative values of the society and religious morality have to be strengthened through the educational system to deal with the toxins of mental pollution prevailing in the human society today. The human race cannot survive without the assurance of absolute values. By rejecting morality as the ultimate source of law, we reject the very basis of law and order. Science and technology cannot provide these necessary values. So, if people are made to believe that there is no absolute value in God, then they would try to find them in Satan.

Carry on politics!

By Michael Makri

While attending a seminar on 'Education' last July in Guwahati, a heated debate arose on the decline of reading habits among the youth particularly of North East India. In the debate, there were many who claimed that it was not just the youth that are not reading books, but also that books for young-adults nowadays are shallow and valueless. I dare to differ and I must say this understanding about youth is dead wrong and such concepts must be put to rest once and for all because there are many young-adult books that carry valuable life lessons. There are young people who read books and I can testify to this as my book, 'Ka Social Media' was sold out in three months.

It's been for a while now that I have been reading 'Carry On', a book by Rainbow Rowell (you can

requires real sacrifices. And in a state like ours, these sacrifices involve letting go of some of our outdated and unfortunately unnecessary traditions. Traditions like voting so-and-so because of religion, place or clan. Traditions of voting for a leader who give us footballs just before elections! Tradition of voting for someone who gives you bai-sha! Tradition of voting for someone who promises you heaven when you are actually living in heaven if not for politics. Tradition of electing a leader because he laid six or seven foundation stones in a day to realize that after five years the same foundation stone is found covered with moss. Tradition of following a leader who knows your name before the election but once he/she is on the chair forget you though you are from the same constituency. These and many more

"The book is all about magicians who can't get their sh-t (sorry for the language) together to resolve their political differences."

read it online as well at <http://www.rainbowrowell.com/carry-on>). This definitely is a young-adult book and I think this book is great. To tell you honestly, initially I disliked the story in the book. It goes against my core values as a Christian and a religious - because it involves a gay vampire/magician (Baz) and his half-dragon boyfriend (Simon, the protagonist). But, truth be told, the social and political lessons that the book offers is very rich. The book is all about magicians who can't get their sh-t (sorry for the language) together to resolve their political differences. I think it is very timely for the political situation in our state, right?

Those of you who have read the book, you will surely agree with me that it is so easy to compare the politics of 'Carry On' with the kind of politics in our state. Most of us in Meghalaya thirst for change, but that thirst is the very reason the word 'change' seems to lose its meaning. Probably we in Meghalaya really want change, but most of our citizenry don't really have any idea about the kind of change that we want to achieve—because, frankly speaking, we are afraid of CHANGE. For example, we hate corruption but from the boy selling kwai in the roadside to someone up there, who occupies the most sacred seat indulges in corruption. Yes, many of us hate the present system, but we reject blatantly all efforts to alter it. We lust after transparency, but we go behind our political leaders for bai-sha. Many of us say we want change, and we want it fast. We want magic and we want magicians in government who can set up roads in a day and reduce our GST or NGT in a week. (But can they blame us for wanting it fast? Definitely NO! Because they have made us suffer enough! But can we blame ourselves for our sufferings? Hmmm! This is one of the problems in our state - that we never blame ourselves. We only point fingers at others. Many of us voted because we are paid to vote. Then why don't we blame ourselves? Anyway, we are so desperate for change that we treat unconventional leaders as political prophets - magicians who we expect to save us rather than teach us and tell us how to save ourselves. May be here both are at fault.

Dear friends, real change

traditions should be done away with if we want to achieve real change.

In this fictional book 'Carry On', Rainbow Rowell wrote about a character named Mitali who asked a man named Davy (who actually is the main character) about how a revolution can protect the pixies from the Coven, the members of which come only from powerful families with very familiar names (think of the political scenario in Meghalaya: Father + Son + Daughter + Mother + grand children etc... etc.. isn't a reality here?). Mitali gasps and then raises the following questions: "How is a revolution going to help the pixies? How is throwing aside centuries of tradition and institutional knowledge going to help any of us?" Then an amazing response came from Davy "We'll build better traditions!" he shouts. I just love this response, because if we want to see real change, we have to build better traditions. What sorts of traditions you might ask me. This is the New Election Traditions or NET as you may call it. Traditions that candidates wanting to contest election should first qualify NET which requires a PhD in Honesty, a PhD in Accountability, a PhD in Service, a PhD in Simplicity, a PhD in Performing One's Duty, a PhD in State Oriented Development. These and many more qualifications should be seen in a candidate if a revolution is to take place in our State.

I personally believe that with the above traditions, we will definitely see a more progressive and useful society and state. With the above new traditions I am sure there will be equality and fair distribution of powers. Those are what our state needs now. But those traditions are what we are lacking. Therefore, it is high time we rethink our futile pride in the cultural distinctions (which I mentioned earlier) that have been stopping us for decades now from moving forward. We should start looking at the actual use and worth of events rather than their sentimental value. Unless these happen, I don't really believe that change is coming. Although, change has always been there, waiting to be realized only if we are willing to improve our lives. But, we're just too proud to admit that, in truth, we're not ready for it. Can we admit it for once then in 2018?

TO THE EDITOR

Traffic route restored

Editor,

Further to my letters published on February 18 & May 15, 2017 in your esteemed daily and a couple of letters from other concerned citizens, I thank the concerned authorities for restoring sanity in traffic routes in and around Don Bosco Square, Upland and Red Hill Road.

Yours etc.,
Mohitosh Chakravarty,
Shillong-3

On using school buses

Editor,

It is with a great sigh of relief that the news about the restoration of the old traffic rule towards Don Bosco was received by all and sundry, particularly those who have to come up from Jacob's ladder to drop their kids to school. The Shillong Traffic

Police (STP) must be commended for having the courage of conviction to alter a rule that was not working instead of remaining adamant. For parents, having to drop and pick up their children every day is not only a pain but also a drain on their time and resources and as has been mentioned by your daily times without number, this is the only state where schools cannot be disciplined by the Government for using school buses despite the fact that private vehicles by the thousands are actually choking up the streets of Shillong during school timings. Perhaps enforcement of this rule is not within the ambit of the Police but if they are facing the brunt of the traffic jams day in and day out should they not make a case with the district administration for enforcing the use of school buses by all schools?

It is a fact that law and order are not a priority in Meghalaya and people can get away doing what they

like. And it is ironic that the elite Christian institutions like Loreto Convent, St Edmund's School, St Mary's School, St Anthony's school et al are the very ones that don't use school buses and thereby encourage a culture of arrogance and one-upmanship among the students. Nowadays, students compete with each other about the kind of vehicles their parents own. Then parents have to steal time from their respective work places to pick up their children in the afternoon. The above schools have only encouraged this ugly trend. Instead of building character and the culture of social equality, these schools are destroying the foundation of tribal values which believe in egalitarianism. By depriving school children the use of school buses the schools are also not allowing them to develop the social skills which are needed for children to build healthy relationships. Perhaps it is high time that parents unite

and demand their rights from the Government and the school authorities.

Yours etc.,
M Lyngdoh,
Viaemail

Dwindling bee population

Editor,

Native bee populations across different ecosystems are demonstrating an alarming decline with many species being threatened with extinction due to over application of toxic pesticides in agriculture, pollution, climate change and global warming, parasitic diseases, colony collapse, lack of nectar foraging plants and suitable habitats. Conservation of native bee populations is extremely important from the perspective of agriculture as they are responsible for pollinating several important food and industrial crops. This can have direct and indirect impacts on global crop production, food

security and irreparable damage to vulnerable ecosystems. Establishing suitable bee habitats or bee sanctuaries can easily provide extended bee foraging period as well as quality nesting and foraging opportunities for native bee species and other insect pollinators (honey bees, moths, butterflies and some species of beetles and flies) to thrive in these specially created natural or artificial bee habitats. Pollinator mixes comprising of annual/ biennial/perennial bee-friendly, native wildflowers and/or annual/perennial legumes along with warm/cool season forage or native grasses can have help in establishing suitable bee habitats in different agro-climatic regions. Pollinator mixes comprising of early, mid and late flowering plant species could be used for extending the bee foraging periods across the seasons to provide a

steady and continuous supply of nectar and pollens for different bee species. Diversity of the plant mixes will attract wider diversity of bees and help them to survive under the prevailing conditions. No toxic pesticides should be sprayed in these bee habitats to avoid any form of chemical contamination. Creating artificial bee sanctuaries by using suitable pollinator mixes can help native bees and other pollinator insects to survive and coexist successfully in nature and secure the future of agriculture and global food security.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Canada T1J 4B3

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.

“Experience, as a desire for experience, does not come off. We must not study ourselves while having an experience.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 54 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2017

Youth in distress

ANOTHER young man from Meghalaya died of suicide in Bengaluru on Sunday. Police have quickly attributed the reason to unrequited love, based on a suicide note they found written by him. A quick glance at the Facebook profile of the deceased informs us that he must have yearned to be liked. In bold letters he asks, “Do You Like Me?” Clearly there is much that is amiss with our young people today which we have not been able to put a finger on. Psychologists and psychiatrists are in short supply in this country. Statistics tell us that there is one psychiatrist for three lakh people in India and roughly about two crore Indians need psychiatric help. In Meghalaya, we can count less than ten psychiatrists for a population that is increasingly showing signs of severe mental health problems. There is a feeling that the breakdown of community and family support systems and excessive family pressure to excel in studies is one reason why youth easily become depressed and no longer value their lives. Young people need mentors who can listen to them and hear them out. Schools, colleges and universities are supposed to have such mentorship programmes as well as professional counsellors. The problem is that we don’t even have enough clinical psychologists around.

Normally you would believe that someone who qualifies to study engineering would be a bright young person with a driving ambition to make it in life. But whether the deceased had the aptitude for the engineering course he was sent to study or whether he had other interests is difficult to ascertain. There is obviously something deeper that is troubling the youth of today. Life has too many shades of grey that we have yet to decipher. If it’s not substance abuse then its suicide. In both cases we are losing our bright young minds too soon. Ironically even religion seems to have failed to get a grip on the youth. The young today don’t attend church because they find the atmosphere stifling. But is anyone listening to these voices that are now choking to death? Our education system too has failed to inculcate life skills which empower the young to fight their battles outside the cosy confines of the classroom. Youth need to know that failure is not the end of the road. Clearly the youth need to develop a tougher moral and psychological fibre and they can do so provided we have the a responsive educational and social support system.

Indian economy in a big mess Opportunities wasted due to wrong priorities

By K R Sudhaman

All is not well with the Indian economy, which is on a downslide, more pronounced after a grave economic blunder, demonetisation. The recently rolled out Goods and Services Tax is of course a game-changing indirect tax reforms move but the haste with which it has been implemented has pulled down the economy further, though temporarily. Multiplicity of GST rates has resulted in several teething problems and the desired increase in GDP growth by two percentage points is not going to happen in the short or medium term. Two percentage points increase in GDP would have happened rapidly if there had been a single or two-rates GST. The heavy taxes on petroleum products, which is out of GST, have added to the woes of the people as India had one of the highest petrol and diesel prices when they have been falling globally.

Demonetisation, which was intended to deal with the stock of black money, has not happened. Demonetisation is good economics in theory but in practice cannot be successful in an economy where there are so many imponderables. India is still an archaic cash economy with the informal sectors dominating small scale industries, agriculture and rural economy, accounting for 60 per cent of GDP. Also the prevailing tax system, imperfect with a plethora of exemptions including no tax on agriculture income, has resulted in generation of black money and cash, which at times is legitimate. The government talks of eliminating shell companies and black money stashed abroad, but what about the black money being generated within the system, which according to one global estimate, is around \$650 billion? This black money is generated due to corruption right from a peon and police constable in Kanyakumari to the topmost functionary in the government. This can be eliminated only through political, electoral, administrative, bureaucratic and judicial reforms and that is not going to happen. Demonetisation can never eliminate this flow of black money because of vested interests for which the entire political class and bureaucracy are

responsible. Prime Minister Narendra Modi might talk of stringent action to root out corruption like his predecessors but in reality no one is interested in ending this rent seeking. This has been the bane of Indian economy and is one of the reasons for the country having missed the bus several times to become a high growth economy on a sustained basis like China.

The government led by the Hindutva party, through its actions, has ensured India moved back to the Hindu rate of growth. The latest quarterly growth figures clearly indicate this trend. The old estimate of 4.7 per cent growth in 2013-14 was revised to 6.7 per cent GDP growth as per the new estimate. Going by that 5.7 per cent growth in the first quarter of 2017-18 as against 7.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2016-17 is certainly below 4 per cent GDP growth as per the old estimate and that means the economy has returned to the low growth rate cycle of the pre-economic reforms era. So the Modi government, despite tall claims to curbing black money, has neither been able to tackle stock nor flow. Of course, he has taken some feeble actions against some adversaries.

So the moot question is how does India move forward to put the economy back on rails and get back to high growth trajectory. Also high growth has to be inclusive, giving thrust to job creation to take advantage of the demographic dividend, which otherwise could become a ticking bomb.

There are 3-4 issues in which the government will have to concentrate to ensure that this declining trend is arrested. India is now a \$2.2 trillion economy. It has to become at least \$ 7-8 trillion economy overtaking Japan and Germany to become the third largest economy after United States and China. This means the economy has to grow on a sustained basis at around 9 per cent GDP annually for the next two decades like China. Also it has to be inclusive so that jobs are created at a rapid pace considering 65 per cent of the 1.3 billion people are below the age of 35. Money is not the issue for investment. It is now available in plenty globally but the question is how to

kick-start the economy, which at the moment is not firing. Many foreign investors are waiting to invest as India, now at a bright spot, is the only country that offered investment opportunity.

A bullet train project costing Rs 1.08 lakh crore between Mumbai and Ahmedabad is not the answer. India should have high-speed trains but that should not be the priority at the moment. Instead the money should be spent first in creating rail freight corridors connecting four metros and two diagonals of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai so that industrial clusters along the corridors can be developed. Small and medium industries with an investment of Rs one lakh each create at least one job each whereas it requires Rs 6 lakhs in capital intensive industries to create one job. This will also prevent migration to urban areas. Six freight corridors alone would have created many times more jobs all over the country than Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train with the same amount of investment on one bullet train. Also the industrial clusters around the freight corridors would spur construction activities all over the country, reviving the steel and cement industries that are in doldrums now. This would have incentivised more private investment, which is not forthcoming due to excess capacity. Bullet train might help Modi in the Gujarat elections next year, but is certainly not good economics at the present juncture. Bullet train will only help Japan revive its economy and certainly not India.

Opening up of multi-brand retail would have helped the economy much more and that is not happening because of the traders constituency in BJP. Despite a bumper harvest, farmers are in distress, who account for 60 per cent of the population. In a year when the country has had good monsoon after two successive droughts, agriculture has grown by just 2 per cent. This explains the plight of farmers. Potato is sold at Rs 2 a kg by farmers, less

than the cost, whereas it sells at over Rs 20 a kg in retail. Where does this Rs 18 go? Clearly into the pockets of middlemen. If multi-brand retail is opened, surely farmers would get Rs 4-5 a kg of potato and for consumers at Rs 12-14 a kg. So it’s a win-win for all. Also farmers do not have to take their produce to mandis as cold storage vans will go to their field and collect. Studies show nearly 70 per cent of sales in multi-brand chains are food products. So opening it up would create cold storage and hi-tech food processing clusters country-wide. This means more jobs. The fear of kirana shops is unfounded. At present retail is around a \$500-billion industry, which will double to \$1 trillion in the next 7-10 years if India grows at 8-9 per cent. So multi-brand retail will only take away the new opportunity and not the existing ones. The only thing that will happen is kirana shops will have to become more competitive and the scope for generating black money will get minimized. This perhaps is the reason that BJP, a party of traders, does not want multi-brand retail as it does not serve vested interests.

The third area where government has to act is direct tax reforms. All income including farm income beyond a threshold has to be brought into the tax net. All exemptions should go and rates needed to be lowered so that everybody earning beyond certain income pay the same tax so that there is no rent-seeking and corruption.

The government will have to immediately address the woes of power and banking sectors to incentivise infrastructure and industrial development. Banks have so much liquidity but lending can start only after cleaning up the balance sheet, which is in a mess due to the huge NPAs. The bankruptcy code will certainly help in putting the banking system back on rails. Good economics is bad politics. Prime Minister Modi seems to be good at politics and hence perhaps the corollary applies to the Indian economy. (IPA Service)

The BHU Travails

By Ananya S Guha

The BHU Vice Chancellor’s flippant comment that the molestation of a girl student, was simply a case of eve teasing, reeks of total bias in a situation where he should have probed deeply into the matter. This statement has many implications and he is taking cognizance of students’ protests in the campus. Thirdly despite all the noise about educating the girl child, the Vice Chancellor’s statement goes into a total reversal of it. Fourthly he highlights eve teasing which can be a culpable crime as, something acceptable. This acceptability is totally unacceptable. Fifthly the male-centered pose is too apparent and smacks of rabid male chauvinism. How a Vice Chancellor of a reputed institution can make such a callous statement and get away with it, is of course the question and. Campus safety was not his concern. Words of commiseration to the student and her family was also not his concern. The only other concern apart from that fatuous, insensitive remark was having a probe, a routine institutional affair in India.

Also his statement that the perpetrators were outsiders is beside the point. The issue is safety inside the campus. And if outsiders violate such safety, they must be brought to book. An administration which cannot manage student matters as important as this is inept. An administration which cannot honour equal status for its women students is an atrocious and dismal failure.

universities. Selection of Vice Chancellors should be strictly apolitical and based on academic merit. Consequently there will be more transparency in the selection of academics and teachers. Otherwise these sad, goof up stories will continue. Some responses to a post of mine on this episode, on a social networking site say, ‘why blame the poor Vice Chancellor? These things happen and will continue happening.’ Another one says that this is embedded in the ‘culture’ of a people of that part of the country. One of our characteristics is stereotyping: a major Indian fault line. Everyone is bad, funny, arrogant, exploitative, excepting of course our very own community. We are the simpletons, those who are naively exploited. Self examination or criticism certainly does not seem to be our forte. So blame the entire state of Uttar Pradesh, and let those two or three sneaking, prying culprits get away with what they have done. And of course a Vice Chancellor, remember a VICE CHANCELLOR has the prerogative to say that and promptly call the police into his campus, after hell is let loose, students protesting and shouting.

What are the specific roles of a Vice Chancellor? Is it not protection of teachers, students and staff? Is there no welfare measure in his or her vocabulary? Or is it only information gleaning of laws, acts and statutes? When the entire university campus is enraged, does

The great academic is the one who has mollycoddled himself successfully into the favours of the boss, via a political bigwig whom he or she knows. And believe me this is how a teacher’s credential works, at least to a great extent. Not by the work he does, not by how student friendly he or she is. That again affects selection processes. The whole thing is a vicious cycle of a politics which demeans and makes the entire system unstable and vulnerable.

It is high time Vice Chancellors of our universities understand that there is more to heaven and earth than those that are dreamed of in their philosophy, which is basically making foreign trips, ingratiating political powers and working at their behest.

Further the appointments are purely political, and this is how politics has been saddled into our educational system, vitiating the very atmosphere of academia. Teachers are huddled into groups, officers find themselves on one side in one tenure, and at the receiving end in another. This is how politics manifests in our universities. The great academic is the one who has mollycoddled himself successfully into the favours of the boss, via a political bigwig whom he or she knows. And believe me this is how a teacher’s credential works, at least to a great extent. Not by the work he does, not by how student friendly he or she is. That again affects selection processes. The whole thing is a vicious cycle of a politics which demeans and makes the entire system unstable and vulnerable.

Thus the BHU Vice Chancellor perhaps makes this statement because he can get away with it. What is the HRD Ministry doing? They are the ones who have been ranking this university, as one of the best in the country! Are they not rankled by the state of affairs?

It is high time we strip off politics from our

not this kind of a statement upbraided students unnecessarily? No, our Vice Chancellors behave like untainted heroes, but talk like sophomores, some of them at least. If the CBSE indicted a school for the murder of a child, why can’t a Vice Chancellor act with more promptitude in assuaging student feelings, in the midst of unrest? In this case after the death of a child, in a washroom in a Gurgaon school, the CBSE Board took prompt action against Ryan’s International asking authorities to reply to their pointed questions within a stipulated time frame. Kudos to them! I don’t think that this has happened ever before in our country. A Board which only conducts examinations and declares results is adopting welfare measures, or trying to, by some kind of pre-emptive acts. This should be a model of trustworthiness in educational administration. But no one talks about this. The media only reports. But thanks, it has brought this to our notice at least.

The theory of outsiders intruding into the campus is worse. What are the safety measures then, or what action can be taken to prevent criminals from entering campuses? So, ‘outsiders’ can enter and do whatever they want? The truth is these things are happening, because some people having the blessings of others, know that they can get away with these actions. Powers of Vice Chancellors must be tempered with love for students. Otherwise what is education, learning, student welfare all about.?

TO THE EDITOR

Discrimination in conduct of Rangbah Shnong election

Editor,
Through this letter I would like to draw the attention of the readers in regards to the ongoing traditional institutions of the Khasis or as we call it, the Dorbar Shnong. The Dorbar Shnong has played a very important role in the well being and development of the community for ages. But with time, the Dorbar Shnong has not changed but remained stagnant with its old system of conducting elections. This old system seems to not work in the present society and therefore the community faces many challenges even though many people don’t realise this or are oblivious of this. The process of choosing a Rangbah Shnong is not a proper one and there are many flaws in the election process. There is favouritism and nepotism within the Executive Committee. Many qualified and responsible individuals who wish to contest in the elections may not even get a chance just because they are not part of Executive

Committee. The Executive Committee comprises only a few members of the community and in their meeting they elect a candidate as the Rangbah Shnong and later on the people are only made aware of this new Rangbah Shnong in the Dorbar Shnong meeting, after which people have to endorse what the Executive Committee has done. Hence, there is an urgent need to remove this old system and replace it with a better one which is to use secret ballots conducted by an Independent Election Committee etc. for people to exercise their Right to Vote and participate in equal and fair elections.

Another major setback of the Dorbar Shnong is that the tenants who have been residing in that particular locality for many years do not get equal rights to participate in the Dorbar Shnong as permanent residents do. In fact, a Rangbah Shnong is never elected from among the tenants just because they do not have a permanent house in that area. The tenants have to fulfil all procedures of registration, payment of various community welfare fees, take part in community activities like the cleanliness drive and many more. But

while they are active members of the community they are denied the right of being equal members of the community in decision making and also they are never consulted about any issues/affairs of the Shnong. This clearly shows the discrimination faced by the tenants, which is unacceptable in today’s modern society.

I am a resident born and brought up in Jaiaw Laitdom and on the July 29, 2017 the Dorbar Shnong of Jaiaw Laitdom was conducted the election for Rangbah Shnong or so they say. The election process was not different from the one mentioned above. The Executive Committee brought forward their elected Rangbah Shnong from among the executive committee members for the people to agree and conform to their decision but this time around it did not happen. In fact the people, especially the youth were outraged and revolted against this old process of conducting elections which has been going on for so many years. The Dorbar Shnong meeting was eventually halted. Till date, the Executive Committee has not come up with any decisions on how to move forward with the election. The people have

decided that they want a complete participation in the election with regards to voting and choosing the candidate of their choice irrespective of whether a person belongs to the executive committee or not.

It is ironic that in a democratic country like India where people are given full rights to choose the leaders/representatives of their choice they are being denied this right in the Dorbar Shnong. An intervention should be made from the Hima Mylliem or the KHADC so that such misunderstandings between the people and the Dorbar Shnong can be avoided in the future. In order to curb internal conflicts between the Dorbar Shnong and the people there are two things which should be put into immediate action by the concerned authorities. Firstly, an Independent Election Committee whose members must be from outside the Executive Committee should be set up in the Dorbar Shnong in order for people to participate in free and fair elections in a democratic manner. Secondly, guidelines should be provided about the roles and powers of the Rangbah Shnong because at present people have very

little knowledge or no knowledge at all.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request for obvious reasons

Judicial intervention against animal sacrifice

Editor,
The historic Kamakhya temple attracted the wrath of patronizing animal sacrifice in the name of culture, religion and traditions. Animal sacrifice is a part of ‘Durga Puja’ and ‘Navratri’ celebrations in Assam, West Bengal, Odisha and Nepal where slaying of buffalo is carried out for the victory of Durga. The crowds witness animal sacrifices with a lot of excitement. Almost 1000 animals are butchered across Assam during this festival. Jnanpith winner Mamonni Raisom Goswami was deeply religious but never supported any animal sacrifice rituals. No God demands bloodshed. It is illegal and unconstitutional. We need a sustained campaign to educate devotees to have compassion for animals.

As per Indian slaughterhouse rules and FSSAI regulations, no animals can be butchered outside a licensed slaughter house. Also there is Section 428 (killing or maiming animal) in the IPC. The southern and western states of India implement Animals and Birds Sacrifices (Prohibition) Act since the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 does not prohibit animal sacrifice at religious places. It has been completely banned in Uttarakhand since 2011 after strong criticism by Maneka Gandhi for infamous ‘Bhukhal Mela’ in Garhwal. Even Bollywood star Salman Khan is charged with killing endangered species in 1988. Neighbouring Nepal put a ban at ‘Gadhimal festival’ in 2015 where lakhs of animals are sacrificed after international campaign led by British actress Joanna Lumley. Can Assam live up to that expectation? But the irony is that the Supreme Court refused to interfere and stop the century-old traditions of different communities.

Yours etc.
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

“Real estate investing, even on a very small scale, remains a tried and true means of building an individual's cash flow and wealth.”

--- Robert Kiyosaki

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2017

Political Violence

POLITICAL violence has to be denounced, regardless of country and who are involved. The CPI (M) has a blood-stained record when it was in power in West Bengal. It has taken to violence now in Kerala where it is the ruling party but of course it takes two to tango. The BJP in Kerala is not preaching the cult of non-violence. Kannur was the hotbed of CPI (M)-RSS/ BJP violence. BJP President, Amit Shah has started a 14 day Jan Raksha Yatra and pilloried Kerala chief minister Pinaray Vijayan, a Kannur native taking a holier than thou attitude. Statistics tell a different story. In the orgy of violence in Kannur, the numbers of dead on both sides are evenly matched. True, being the party in power, the CPI (M) has a greater responsibility for keeping the peace and enforcing law and order. Political opponents have to be fought at the hustings, not in gun fights. And that goes for the Opposition as well.

Amit Shah has shown a singular partisanship in drawing a parallel between Kerala and Karnataka. In Kerala, what is happening is deplorable but it is between political cadres. The cases Shah has cited are of a different nature. M M Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh did not die in a battle of cadres. There were writers and journalists who died for their ideology and their weapon was not the gun but the pen. The killers of Kalburgi and Lankesh have not been arrested as yet hence it would be premature to make allegations but the goons who killed them were downright murderers. However, Shah and the national BJP leadership heading for Kerala to declare a moratorium on political violence are on the right track. But between practice and profession of faith falls a shadow. The ruling party in any state in India balks at meting out condign punishment to those who engage in murder and mayhem. The power struggle in India relies on a policy of smash and grab. The rule of law takes a backseat.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

A hole in the sky

December last, Indian scientists working in Antarctica discovered a disturbing hole in earth's Ozone belt. It is a thick layer of Ozone gas enveloping the entire earth. This ozone shield goes not allow harmful rays from the Sun to strike the earth's surface. Three years ago West-ern Scientists found a hole bigger than the

surface area of USA over Antarc-tica. Therefore, Indians sci-entist's findings only con-firms the presence of the above fact. What is Ozone belt or shield? It is a thick layer of Ozone gas enveloping the earth. Ozone is a form of Oxygen gas produced be-tween nitrogen oxide, the burning or combustion of fossil fuels and chemicals.

Slacktivism versus grassroots activism

By Patricia Mukhim

We have entered the age of virtual activism. Every other day there's an email from Change.org asking us to sign a petition seeking redressal of a grievance. We are also asked to share what we signed with other friends and better still to put up the same on our Facebook page or tweet it. The more the signatures, the better the impact! These signatures are intended to impress the powers that be because, after all, in a democracy numbers matter. It is also easier to start an online campaign than to come out to the streets every other day to protest against too many things that are not working. For a person from Meghalaya there are just too many issues to protest; too many aspects of governance which have all but collapsed. If the Public Works Department (PWD) were to be assessed on a scale on 1-10, it would probably score a poor 1 or 2 marks only. Ditto the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). Till date there are many areas even within Shillong city that get water only on alternate days. And no one sees anything wrong with that. The other alternative, you are told quite bluntly, is to get no water at all so you would have to buy water @ Rs 300 for 2000 litres. So do we start an online campaign to address these issues? Will it work? I have my doubts because that is Slacktivism!

Malcolm Gladwell the renowned author of, 'The Tipping Point,' among others was the first to coin the term Slacktivism. Writing in The New Yorker in 2010, Gladwell defined Slacktivism as a new style activism where people just sign online petitions and shares on Facebook, instead of the processions and banner waving, old fashioned street style activism. Slacktivism therefore is an action performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but which requires little time or involvement. Online petitions have become the in thing now in India. Slacktivism is therefore much easier than grass roots activism. Having been an activist for many a cause but mainly while leading Shillong We Care (1995-2005) during those militancy afflicted days, I know how much hard work it is to be going around holding meetings in public spaces every evening after my teaching work is done.

There was no time to look after the family. It was a full time commitment. Shillong We Care members would patrol the streets of Laitumkhrh in the evening and request shop owners to keep their shutters up until at least till 7 pm because everyone downed their shutters at dusk and people hurried home to safety. Shillong had become a ghost town then, thanks to the HNLC. I recall we had street plays organised by Ampareen Lyngdoh and her students from the Department of Mass Communication, St Anthony's College. Street plays were held in Police Bazaar and Laitumkhrh as these were the busiest areas, to sensitize people on the diminishing returns of militancy. Shillong We Care members also violated the bandh calls by the HNLC on January 26 and August 15. Ampareen then was a member of Shillong We Care. It was only when RG Lyngdoh became Home Minister (2000-03) and took the bull by the horns that militancy went on the wane. Later, I was also part of the Peoples' Rally Against Corruption (PRAC) along with other pressure groups such as the KSU, FKJGP, and SSSS etc. We were able to bring down a government on corruption charges. Activism takes a toll because the street is where you spend the bulk of your time. But in terms of dividends it's where you make real impact.

So as far as I am concerned Slacktivism has a limited impact because the target of your campaign has to be on social media otherwise it makes no sense. In a state like Meghalaya where MLAs/ MDCs don't even have a Twitter handle or a Facebook page it cuts no ice to rave and rant on Facebook or Twitter. So far only Mr Vincent Pala, the Shillong MP responds to Facebook rants. He manages his own FB page, unlike others who outsource it to agents who respond on their behalf. Even internationally there are organisations like UNICEF which have come out to say that people who actually want hungry, sick children saved need to donate money and supplies - not just virtual support. The UNICEF Director of Communications Petra Hallebrant says, "We like 'Likes,' and social media could be a good first step to get involved, but it cannot

stop there. "Likes" don't save children's lives. We need money to buy vaccines." The UNICEF poster says, "Like us on Facebook and we will vaccinate zero children against polio. We have nothing against Likes but vaccines cost money." Slacktivism is therefore a derogatory term that the Oxford dictionary describes as, "the practice of supporting a political or social cause by means such as social media or online petitions, characterized as involving very little effort or commitment". It basically means insincere activism where the person concerned isn't really doing something for the cause they claim to be pursuing. However, proponents of the Slacktivism narrative argue that by participating in politics in easy ways on social media, young people are initiated into voluntarism in later life.

This is not to discount the power of social media. In fact, I often wonder why this platform is called social media when most of us actually engage in political activism via that route. If one does a study of what post gets the maximum likes and reactions then it has to be a political rant on something that is not working or exotic pictures. Anything that's more philosophical and requires a deeper engagement gets few likes. So even social media has a peak and a plateau!

Now, as elections get closer there will be multifarious groups on Facebook and countless Facebook warriors who will take on even formidable opponents in the same manner that the BJP uses its army of trolls to trounce the voices of opponents to their ideology and the present Government's style of functioning. But will Facebook posts alone change the contours of elections in Meghalaya? No they won't. The reasons are many. Firstly the hoi-polloi in the rural outback, many of who actually elect candidates who pay them money, are their relatives or clansmen and are from the same religion, are not on Facebook, leave alone Twitter. To change the

electoral behaviour of such voters requires more physical effort. Multiple methods need to be used to communicate to voters the importance of not pawning/selling their votes. Street plays, theatre, small group meetings and a consistent personal interface with voters might bring in some change. Television is also a powerful medium as it includes more sensory organs.

Those of us in the city may want change but try asking anyone to define that change and what you get is an amorphous wishy-washy reply. It means that we as voters too are unclear as to who to vote for and what to vote for. There is no consensus as yet in Meghalaya as to what our priorities are since no one has come out with a Peoples' Manifesto. As a result political parties will come out with their neat little write-ups that are neither here nor there. Neither political parties themselves not the electorate takes those manifestos seriously. Has any group come back after five years and done an audit of the manifestos placed before us in 2013? Does anyone remember the Congress manifesto or the UDP one? I guess not. Political parties take their cues from the voter. A confused electorate is a boon for political parties and candidates. And pray who amongst the present set of candidates or political parties actually want change? No one! Everyone loves the status quo because that is a comfort zone. No one wants to move out of the comfort zone into the learning zone.

So if you ask me whether 2018 will bring change my question will be - does the electorate really want change? Hence Slacktivism is not going to change anything. People are talking to themselves about their own problems and angst and none of the candidates actually care about what is posted on social media, except for Zenith Sangma and his cohort of about 2000 followers.

If people really want change there is no alternative to grassroots activism. Period. Slacktivism? Thumbs down!

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Looting the nation

Editor,
While global crude prices have receded the cost of importing crude oil is high considering the import duty taxes, state taxes and a plethora of dues before it reaches the end user that is the consumer. The average middle class is gradually feeling the brunt under this current government which came to power promising the people of this country a 'true change' under its slogan, "Saab Ka Saath, Saab Ka Vikas" which is now losing its sheen. Inflation has risen again with the steep increase in food prices, the GDP is on the low side at less than the proposed target. Added to this is the rising fuel prices. Perhaps the Modi magic is waning away and his bubble might soon burst. Ironically, the BJP state party seems contented with the sufferings of the masses and seems to be laboring under, "Saab Ka Saath, Apna Vikas"

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar
Vieemail

Financial Tools

The poor need savings, not credit

By Moin Qazi

More than four decades ago, the idea of microcredit was born out of a radical concept -- poor people, when lent small amounts of money, pay back in a timely manner. In the meantime, that money can be put to use in ways that help boost income, such as rearing goats or weaving carpets. These occupations can help a family improve its standard of living. But as impoverished borrowers defaulted on debts at alarming rates and often with fatal consequences, many practitioners started questioning the efficacy and power of credit.

This led to soul-searching by the industry and the rediscovery of a new radical idea, specifically the realisation that what the people really need -- more urgently than business loans -- is a safe place to save their money. This is what the development expert, Robert Vogel, once famously called the "forgotten half of rural finance". It is now universally acknowledged that the most fundamental instrument of personal finance is the piggy-bank.

Access to the right financial tools at critical moments can determine whether a poor household is able to utilise an opportunity to move out of poverty or absorb a shock without being pushed deeper into debt. The poor don't need simple banking tools; they need tools that can help them navigate their complex financial condition that is marked by needs and inconsistent income.

Given the variability of their income, the poor are vulnerable to sickness or death in the family or weather-shocks which can be a drain on family finances and may even prevent families from hanging on to accumulated assets, including productive ones.

These shocks can quickly sink families into spells of extreme duress. As a result, the poor lead precarious, anxiety-ridden lives with the risks looming much larger than opportunities. The benefits of microcredit are often extolled, but debt remains debt; it always increases the risk and borrowers are sometimes overstretched. Savings can help people manage such risks and conveniently, with less monetary burden. And savings do matter, especially to women.

Even in traditional societies, no matter how oppressed women are or the degree of literacy, they are often the stewards of family savings. The key to effective financial inclusion is a safe and confidential savings account for every woman.

The older ones advise the young to keep a store of value that other family members don't know about. In the event of an emergency, they will appreciate your initiative. Savings have been the mainstay of the impoverished and villagers cope with a veritably biblical range of hazards. Nature delivers snakes, scorpions, malaria, drought, floods, hurricanes, tuberculosis and pests that ravage crops and animals.

And then there are the environmental and vocational risks arising out of changes in market climates. Families are normally financially prepared for education and marriages, but health tragedies are usually wild surprises.

Credit can be both an opportunity and a risk for low-income families. It is necessary to open the doors, but this can also be a barrier. You can dig yourself into a fair amount of debt, and that prevents you from moving up financially. It may become a deepening hole. Loans can be

malignant. Some people just cannot handle debts. Certain business enterprises are too risky. And there is always the temptation to take these costly loans and scrimp on groceries.

When they miss loan payments because a lingering illness keeps them away from their business, they get into a regular default cycle. This soon leads to acute indebtedness and makes life stressful for the entire family. Savings increase their capability to manage cash-flow, address the problems of uneven income, reduce the impact of the lean season, become more resilient in the face of shocks, build assets or invest in a family business and, most importantly, become empowered to improve one's status within the households and communities.

A safe and smart savings account can transform the lives of villagers. Savings also serve as a form of self-insurance and enhance the sense of well-being. They are a gateway to self-employment and job creation. Lower-income families can convert savings into home purchases, education and microenterprise.

Despite conventional wisdom, poor people actually do save, even if the amount is meagre. They use a variety of informal mechanisms -- hiding cash at home, lending money to relatives, participating in rotational savings groups with their neighbours, engaging deposit collectors, buying livestock or other commodities such as jewellery or construction materials. None of these measures can be reliable or safe.

One major problem that the poor often face in accumulating savings is lack of easy access to savings' accounts where they can deposit money. The money is kept in a tin at home, and is easily spent when a neighbour, who is in difficulty, approaches the person next door for help. By taking a loan from a micro-financier to buy a needed asset, and then making regular mandatory weekly payments out of her income, the housewife borrows to save. She no longer has spare cash lying around for others to fritter away.

The institutions that promote credit, to the exclusion of savings, place poor clients in bondage. To finance a child's primary school education, clients must take on debt because they are not in a position to save. To deal with a health emergency or family food shortage, to finance weddings, funerals or social ceremonies, they must keep borrowing again and again.

To acquire essential gadgets, they will need to borrow at prohibitive rates of interest that keep them on the debt treadmill since there is no other option. Financial institutions ought to realise that they owe poor people a safe, flexible entity to save. With credit alone, they cannot free them from the tangled web of poverty. Savings is a vital prerequisite for the emancipation from poverty. We must think beyond the standard microcredit model.

Modern microfinance -- savings and insurance, and more flexible credit products -- has often had a more important impact than simple credit, according to microfinance researcher Dean Karlan, who is also the founder of Innovations for Poverty Action.

As the former RBI Governor, Raghuram Rajan, had emphasised, credit should follow and not lead. "Savings habit, once inculcated, not only allows the customer to handle the burden of repayment better, it may also lead to better credit allocation."---INFA

Transcending religious dogma

Editor,
Your editorial, "Killing of Dalits" (ST, Oct 4, 2017) zeroed in on the murder of a Dalit, Jayesh Solanki, by a group of upper caste men in Gujarat's Anand district, to condemn never ending atrocities against Dalits. Now, what's the religion of the victim? A Hindu. And the killers? Also Hindu! Recently, some women fought and won the battle against the regressive practice of triple talaq in the Supreme Court of India. What's their religion? Muslim of course. And whom did they fight against? Muslim indeed! Anyway, what's the religion of Martin Luther who fought against Christian dogmas? What's the religion of Raja Ram Mohan Roy who fought against Hindu prejudices like Sati? What's the religion of Kemal Atatürk who fought against the burqa and other regressive practices of Muslims? All of them belonged to the very religion they dedicated their lives to reform. We can also say that those great men as well as the anti - talaq - Muslim - women brigade indeed belong to the same religion of humanity which

is progressive and liberal that can adapt itself with the evolution of humankind.

We spoke loud and clear against ISIS design to poison the world with hatred, terrorism and religious fanaticism. We condemned in unequivocal terms when Islamic fundamentalists had been taking the lives not only of Hindus but also of liberals like Niloy Chatterjee, Washiqur Rahman Babu, Avijit Roy, Ananta Bijoy Das, Nazimuddin Samad and Rezaul Karim Siddiquee one after another in Bangladesh. And we know that Niloy Chatterjee and Rezaul Karim Siddiquee belonged to the same religion of humanity as that of Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, Malleshappa Kalburgi and Gouri Lankesh.

Indeed, to make us realise this truth of one religion of humanity of Maha Upanishad, Swami Vivekananda touched the feet of a four-year-old, poor, Kashmiri, Muslim girl to worship her as Goddess Uma when he was in Kashmir in the autumn of 1898. With this singular act he defied divisions of religion, region, race, caste, class, creed, gender and generation to hoist the flag of humanity. Actually, Swami Vivekananda did a Sri

Ramkrishna who himself practiced Islam, Christianity and other religions to live his words, ~ "many opinions, many paths". They tried to make us realize that divisions between religions could kill humanity. Oceans of human blood could have been saved had we realized their teachings.

Now, if we focus our attention to Rohingya refugees the first question we need to answer is ~ can it be practical for a country to compromise its national security? No, it can never be. It has got to be alert not only in the matter of dealing with refugees but in other areas as well. However, we must keep it in mind that India cannot abandon her age - old reputation of living up to the ideals of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" meaning "the whole world is one family" which is a Sanskrit phrase found in the Maha Upanishad. Never has India deviated from this great tradition and has been giving refuge to different races and religions across the world from Aryans to Tibetan Buddhists to Afghan Muslims to Hindus from Bangladesh. This is what India has always stood for. Indeed, Swami Vivekananda spoke highly of this great tradition of

India in his memorable Chicago speech 125 years ago and Rabindranath Tagore in his famous poem, "Bharat-tirtha".

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

How to camouflage a stink

Editor,
The front page headlines "Clean course likely for city streams project"(ST, Oct 5, 2017) sounded like a very promising read-up to begin the day with. Everyone is deeply interested in any endeavour to clean up our two city rivers. However as one read the news report, anticipation rapidly gave way to unease, apprehension then to outright alarm. Let me state with all the authority at my command that the proposal has nothing to do with cleaning up the Wahumkhrh nor the Umshyri. This is a flood control mechanism designed by the Department of Water Resources and Flood Control. That's all. As a matter of fact the whole project aims at turning the two streams into concretised nallas, period.

The project seeks to raise the banks of the Wahumkhrh with concrete walls to prevent flooding of

the Pynthorumkhrh areas. The next logical step afterwards will be to lay slabs across the walls and turn the whole length of the Umkhrh into a concrete parking lot or to invite encroachments on the covered area. The report itself is very clear that it was conceptualised to control frequent flooding of the Pynthorumkhrh area, protection of agricultural land and control overflowing of the Wah Umkhrh and Umshyri. That is the technical jargon used to source the 46.45 crores earmarked for the project. It has nothing to do with cleaning up the river. In simple layman's language it means let's just cover up all the dirt, garbage and sewage that will continue to flow into the two rivers. Out of sight will be out of mind and never mind the stink and the foul smell. My advice is please call a spade a spade. Call flood control measures as flood control measures. If the project has merit the 46.45 crores will come in. In the meanwhile let's not attempt to camouflage flood control measures as noble river cleaning or river beautification efforts. That would be cheating.

“Believe me! The secret of reaping the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from life is to live dangerously!”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

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Economic adventurism!

THERE are daily, nay minute by minute updates on the state of the Indian economy and there are as many views as there are economists and financial experts, many of whom have crawled out of the woodwork in recent times, on the state of the Indian economy today. Many have attributed the economic downturn to the Modi-Jaitley combine calling it an 'experiment in adventurism.' In this turmoil there are two school of thought that are emerging. Those in support of the Government see the current turndown as a temporary setback that is exacerbated by the untimely introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), before a fool-proof system was in place and that a little judicious delay would have made the GST implementation smoother. Others see demonetisation as a poor attempt at curbing black money and GST which followed it as the shock that will take India a long time to recover from. Small and medium businesses suffered the most from demonetisation and the agricultural sector too was disrupted. Economists have their own ideas of how to revive the economy. They believe there is need to stabilize the fiscal and monetary policy to prevent the economy from going into a shock. They of course blame the Government for its adventurism based on a shallow understanding of how the economy works.

But while the narrative of gloom and doom persists, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim avers that the recent slowdown in India's economic growth is an "aberration" mainly due to the temporary disruptions in preparation for the GST. Kim believes that this will get corrected in the coming months and also asserted that GST will have a hugely positive impact on the Indian economy. Kim also stated that Prime Minister Modi has really worked on improving the business environment in India. However, the World Bank President has also taken a view that others before him have not. For the first time, the World Bank has added human capital to its wealth analysis, in addition to produced capital and things like machinery and buildings, natural capital, energy, forests, agricultural lands, and net foreign assets. He says that human capital alone is the key to reducing poverty and growth inequality. Kim feels that India and other developing countries need to enhance investment in education and health as both are integral to building human capital and in turn the economy.

Election 2018 and the business of 'giving fish'

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

There is a very common and popular Chinese proverb (although its Chinese origins is still highly contested) which says, 'give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime'. Well, going by this proverb our state politics and elections over time have been nothing but 'fishy' with a stench of a stale and rotten fish. As simple as it is to understand, the proverb plainly means that instead of giving niceties, cosmetic symbolism, tokenism and brittle gifts at the eleventh hour it is far better to pave a platform, provide a means, coach and mentor, empower the people and create an environment for holistic development overtime. This proverb is significant for us, as over the years our politics, elections and governance generally manifests in the limits of 'giving fish'. Sadly, we have failed to see the light. Our legislative and executive democracy is more of a play in darkness where no one knows where we stand; forget about where we will go. As such, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, what is politics? To start with, people are starting to abhor politics. It is being seen as a phenomenon with promises that generates over a few months and dies even quicker. In general, the masses do not see the point of politics and political deliberations. As such, which party is planning on doing what, which party is disintegrating, which one is integrating and so forth is of no interest. The reason for these is half truths and full lies that politics has sowed throughout across parties and ideology. However, is this what politics really is? A brief view into the Greek philosophy on politics will provide a contrary answer. Accordingly, Aristotle famously said that 'man is by nature a political animal'. The premise here is basically based upon virtue and well-being. Although this statement is widely debated, yet it forms the hallmark of what politics is (in its true sense) and what it purports to achieve. Well, basically it thrives to formulate a city-state for achieving outcomes of, virtue and well-being and on these features we can include economic growth, development, social peace and security, equal

opportunities and so forth. So inherently, politics and political activity is not bad/dirty; rather, it is a means to a good end. On the other hand, if at all it has gone bad; it is because of the actions of people and definitely not due to its inherent nature. In our local context, we have lost this very noble essence of politics and hence as an outcome we are lost in the myriad of 'giving fish' as the core of our political deliberations and executions.

Secondly, who is a politician? Fact is, if you ask this question in the streets of Shillong we will get pretty funny answers; and at times angry and disillusioned ones. Sometimes the terms can be as ghastly and nasty like 'ki thlen' 'ki nongshohnoh' 'ki nongbakhsuid' and so forth. I agree, these are very notorious terms to be associated with a politician, but what to do, as these are the outcomes of years and decades of crassness. Who is to be blamed for this? Is it not the political direction our state has been taking over time? We have vision documents and policies galore but are we really working on them or even planning by keeping them in perspective? Here lies the crux of the matter. In general, we have failed in dissecting who a politician really is and as a consequence we tend to lack political direction. In the real sense of the term, a politician is an 'entrepreneur'. Let us not be alarmed at this. This is because the term 'entrepreneur' is not only trade and commerce specific. Rather it encompasses a thought, cognition, behaviour and practice. Overall, it is an idea. As a practice, an entrepreneur is a person who innovates and takes calculated risks. They introduce new options, products, services and means. They are involved in making the livelihoods of people better through their new processes and interventions. They think long-term and all their plans and intents are at creating a 'tangible-viable-sustainable' human and non-human investment and not at simply handing out petty gifts and ineffective niceties. Fact is, until and unless our politicians see and practice themselves as entrepreneurs the conditions of our state will never tangibly improve

and we shall continue to view our politician roles in the 'giving fish' manner.

Thirdly, sadly the majority of the masses do view our politicians as being useless. There is a glaring disconnect between where they are and where the aspirations and needs of the people stand. There is a growing disillusionment towards getting any tangible and meaningful benefits from politicians. However, in the recently held concert of St Anthony's Higher Secondary School, Shillong on 'Joseph and the amazing technicolour dreamcoat' which was fantastically performed and marvellously dramatised by the boys, Ampareen Lyngdoh while speaking as the Chief Guest on 22nd September said something significant. She said, 'Contrary to general thinking, not all of us are blind and deaf'. I take it that by 'all of us' she meant the sixty in our legislative assembly. As such, even if only ten are not blind and deaf then it is indeed a good start. Hence, can we really expect these 'ten few good people' to change the political direction of the state from 'giving fish' to creating platforms for 'enabling our masses to fish'? Point is, Meghalaya is one of the smaller states in the country endowed with a plethora of rich resources and that too while housing a pretty small population. Hence, at times it is difficult to comprehend as to how and why we have failed to synergize all our strengths and opportunities into creating viable, meaningful and progressive livelihoods for the populace.

Fourthly, we will be turning fifty in 2022. On such an occasion, do we really have things to be proud of? Of course, for arguments sake we can point to this development and that progress. However and as responsible citizens, are we really proud of these? Of the many other issues plaguing the state, our boundaries are still not formalised, the real poverty levels of Meghalaya are one of the highest in the country; there is lack of clarity on coal mining and

its future, thousands of graduates pass out of our universities every year and have nowhere to go. What about the promotion of sports, arts and music for the youth? Our natural environment is degrading fast. What about the militant outfits like HNLC and GNLA? How do we position ourselves as one of the major economic players in the country and so forth? As such, Dr. Mukul Sangma it is time to realize that bringing in the National Games in 2022 is not going to make up and cover up for all our problems. If anything, it is just another 'giving fish' business. In addition, making claims of 'turning polo market into times square (or like times square)' has got to be one of the biggest and craziest jokes in the history of our state. There can be nothing fishier than that. Well Sir, instead of doing that there is a far more viable and tangible option. As a state we can invest on a state-of-the-art business/entrepreneurship incubator. Yes do dignify polo market and make it presentable, but that should be it. As such, the crores to be used on Times Square can be put to a far more noble and effective initiative. This is significant as studies worldwide have shown that in the absence of incubators the success rate of businesses is just a meagre 10%, while in their presence, the rate goes up to an impressive 35%. This jump of 25% is definitely an investment worth going for as it will undoubtedly change livelihoods.

Lastly, this is for the masses. If you are disgruntled and disillusioned with our politics and politicians, do not stay back at home next year during polling. Rather move out in numbers and go for the NOTA (none of the above) option. If there was ever any reason to vote, election 2018 is the one. Make your voice heard. Send a strong message once and for all against this business of 'giving fish'. More so because we the people deserve a lot more than this!

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

Buddhism and Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar

By Amiya Dey

Myanmar is undergoing a state of upheaval and transformation. As of now, the country is experiencing changes on the political, economic and social frontiers. Amidst such transitions, Myanmar is also witnessing increased cases of religious intolerance. In spite of its rich cultural heritage and legacy of socio-religious harmony, present-day Myanmar is surely not the best place for its religious minorities.

Recently, the government of Myanmar proposed a law that seeks to impose a virtual ban on religious conversions (any case of religious conversion will need prior approval of the state). This proposed law is just one of the many recent ones that are being put into effect to target the country's religious minorities: there are plans to outlaw interfaith marriages, and also to limit the birth rate among non-Buddhist families residing in Myanmar. But that's not all. The worst part is the fact that these discriminatory laws are being backed by radical Buddhist monks (collectively known as the Mabatha), and there have been petitions signed by as many as 1.3 million people calling for elimination of Muslims from the country.

Just like any other religion, Buddhism too has seen its principles being put at stake by its own clerics and clergymen. For centuries, Buddhist sects and monasteries have failed to arrive at a common consensus on various issues, both big and small. Should a monk's robe cover both shoulders or just one? Answer awaited.

Also, in spite of Buddha's non-violent teachings and principles, Buddhist monks are no strangers when it comes to violence and conflict. During the colonial era, several Buddhist monastic orders made it mandatory for their members to engage in armed violence against the Europeans.

As such, politics is not unknown territory for Buddhist monks who claim to have denounced the world. In the period ranging from 1980s to 2000s, many Burmese monks participated in the pro-democracy struggles.

However, after the political transition of 2011, two extremist Buddhist outfits the Mabatha and the 969 Movement have dominated Burmese political thought and ideology. Firebrand radical Ashin Wirathu has emerged as the de facto proponent of communal discord. Both the 969 Movement and the Mabatha seem to have one common goal: creation of an exclusively Buddhist state in Myanmar.

Back in mid-2012, communal violence took a turn for the worse, when riots broke out in the western state of Rakhine, killing hundreds and displacing over 140,000 Rohingya Muslims. The government simply refused to step in, and even when it did, the authorities blatantly sided with the extremists and essentially rendered the Rohingya people helpless. This showed that anti-Rohingya activities in Myanmar were nothing more than a planned religious pogrom being conducted by the Buddhist terror outfits in assonance with the government of Myanmar. Apart from planned genocide, Buddhist extremist groups also indulge in anti-minority propaganda in the form of economic boycotts against Muslim businesses and false criticism of religions they do not like which include, apart from other faiths, forms of Buddhism that do not agree with their extremist actions. Of course, Islam is the centre of their hatred: when delegates of

the Organization of Islamic Cooperation visited Myanmar in 2013, banners reading "Islam is a faith of animals with uncontrollable birth-rates" were flashed.

The question is, if certain sects of Buddhism are engaging in violence, why are they getting away with it? Fundamentalism can be found in any religion: Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam... you name it! But in every religion, the majority of the followers are always against fundamentalism. But in case of Buddhism, the anti-extremist or moderate voices are too feeble.

The problem is that the average Buddhist is taught, time and again, to think of monks as ascetics who have renounced worldly comforts and are thus immune to human flaws. Even if a monk errs, he is not called 'corrupt', but is instead termed as 'deviant'. The robe of the present-day monk is still equated with the Wisdom of Buddha, even if the said monk is miles apart from the teachings of the Enlightened One. As a result, each Buddhist monk considers himself to be a Pope in his own right.

More importantly, on the practical front, the radical monks serve as handy allies for the pseudo-civilian government of Myanmar. Therefore, even Aung San Suu Kyi, so well known for her pro-liberty credentials, has chosen to be a mute spectator while innocent Rohingya children are being massacred.

Yet, all hope is not lost. In Myanmar, even though the extremists seem to have the upper edge, there are voices who are trying to protect the country's secular fabric. Led by monks such as Metta Shin U Zawana, some intellectuals and students are coming forward to question the policies and propaganda of the radical outfits. Bloggers such as Nay Phone Latt have written extensively on this subject.

However, the Mabatha and the 969 Movement are quick to discard the peaceful voices as "echoes of treachery". When the government's discriminatory policies against the Rohingya were criticized by women activists, the Mabatha terrorists termed the activists as "traitors".

Buddha preached that salvation could be attained only if one were to free himself or herself from worldly desires. Universal brotherhood of humankind was the underlying principle of Buddhism in its pristine form. Unfortunately, modern-day extremist monks of Myanmar are more concerned with ethnic cleansing. Their critics are summarily silenced by the government of Myanmar, and this has left the Rohingya people at the mercy of the terrorist-members of the Mabatha and the 969 Movement.

This is where the international community needs to step in. The Dalai Lama, for instance, should be requested to help spread the true message of Buddhism among the Burmese masses and specifically criticize the extremists for defaming Buddhism.

The actions of the fundamentalists are causing great tension and turmoil in Myanmar not to mention the fact that they are putting the lives and property of the Rohingya people at stake. If Myanmar actually intends to progress towards true democracy and prosperity, it will have to eliminate the terror groups like the Mabatha and the 969 Movement, and attempt to safeguard the interests of its religious minorities. True development seems impossible as long as terrorists are dominating the Burmese politics and society.

TO THE EDITOR

Tears of a matriarch

Editor,
It pains my heart to see and read in the media about the series of rapes and murders of young girls committed in several places of the state. In the past, sexual harassment and rape followed by murder, were topics attributed to hoodlums. At that time, the concept of beauty and fashion inspired ladies to wear several layers of clothes which were later reduced for comfort's sake. Thus in a lonely spot, it would take quite a long time for a rapist to commit the criminal act. Often than not, he was caught for sure by the mob; dragged into a public place and beaten black and blue. It did not matter whether the perpetrator is tribal or non-tribal. He was shaved on three sides of his already swollen head; thrown into prison by police authorities; judged, convicted and either died by hanging or sent to "Kala pani" which was then the isolated and much feared Andaman island; and forgotten by both the rulers and the ruled. What a quick, good riddance of an old rubbish!

Those were happy days in old Shillong town, where Money and Politics could not and dared not play the

role of Religiosity and Justice. In our youth and when in danger, we always ran up to our own men folk for protection. Many of these brave-hearts had passed away but no one can deny the fact that they were true gentlemen to the core. They were Heroes in our minds and in our hearts. Today, that social harmony and security has receded into the shadows. Going by the actual events, I am so afraid that in ten or twenty years time, perhaps the female population in the state will come down to almost nil. Perhaps it is good to remember that the extinction of any human race from the face of the earth is also due to the extinction of its own womenfolk - a food for thought and action if any...

Yours etc.,
Cassandra Symbieth,
Via email

Manner and etiquette expected

Editor,
Any person paying a visit to the SP's Office to meet the officers for important matters would not visit without a reason. Those who have visited would expect manners and decency from those manning it outside in the public corridor but that is lacking. The officers may

not be aware of what happens outside their office but experience tells us that those who are on duty attending on the officers should learn how to behave, speak and address the public in the right manner. It is observed that manners and etiquette are totally absent even amongst the lower grade which portrays the poor quality of human resource in the state police. We hope the authorities in the SP's office take heed of the matter lest it becomes an embarrassment to them.

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

Judicial intervention against animal sacrifice

Editor,
The historic Kamakhya temple attracted the wrath of animal rights activists due to animal sacrifice in the name of culture, religion and tradition. Animal sacrifice is a part of 'Durga Puja' and 'Navratri' celebrations in Assam, West Bengal, Odisha and Nepal where buffaloes are slain for the victory of Durga. The crowds witness animal sacrifices with a lot of excitement. Almost 1000 animals are butchered

across Assam during this festival. Jnanpith winner Mamoni Raisom Goswami was deeply religious but never supported any animal sacrifice rituals. No God demands bloodshed. It is illegal and unconstitutional. We need a sustained campaign to educate devotees to have compassion for animals.

As per Indian slaughterhouse rules and FSSAI regulations, no animals can be butchered outside a licensed slaughter house. Also there is Section 428 (killing or maiming animal) in the IPC. The southern and western states of India implement Animals and Birds Sacrifices (Prohibition) Act since the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 does not prohibit animal sacrifice at religious places. It has been completely banned in Uttarakhand since 2011 after strong criticism by Maneka Gandhi for the infamous 'Bhukhal Mela' in Garhwal. Even Bollywood star Salman Khan was charged with killing endangered species of black buck in 1988. Neighbouring Nepal put a ban on animal slaughter in 'Gadhimai festival' in 2015 where lakhs of animals are sacrificed after an international campaign led by British actress Joanna Lumley. Can Assam live up to that expectation? Sadly the irony is that the Supreme Court refuses to interfere and

stop the century-old traditions of different communities.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

Rebuilding Kashmir

Editor,
This refers to the thought-provoking article "Rebuilding Kashmir: Is it possible?" by Ananya S Guha (ST- Sept 27). The issue of Kashmir is a chronic one, and has festered for nearly three quarters of a century. Those familiar with Kashmir's history would be aware that violence in Jammu and Kashmir generally tends to come in "waves". The centre and state governments have been deliberately silent till the situation exploded. Problems are due to the insincere and inept polity. Unrest in Kashmir reveals the failures of the ruling People's Democratic Party. To be fair to the security forces, they have faced exceptional ferocity from groups of young people. Slogans are becoming the main instigators of violence even though sloganeering has been a part of long cherished history of the world. The security forces do not

appear to be following standard operating procedure. Whenever there is a riot, there are plenty of ways in which the situation can be dealt with. The country needs a tough law to curb the misuse of information technology. India always thought that Peace can be made by sincerely addressing grievances. India must take its cue from those instances and solve the Kashmiri conundrum once and for all. Tourism is the main business of Jammu & Kashmir, which gives employment & business to lakhs and crores of local people. This business can only flourish if there is peace and tranquility.

Countries across the world must unite to fight terror so that the innocent people of Kashmir can live in peace and not in pieces. It should also be the responsibility of every citizen to cooperate with government as well as our armed force in the way of making terror free and peaceful Jammu & Kashmir. Good governance and good policy will address the problem to a very large extent.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 15

Bollywood's small town winners



A scene from *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan* and below *Bareilly ki Barfi*

Of late, it's the simple stories set in small towns that are making waves on silver screen

By Shoma A Chatterji

Bollywood cinema has forever been linked to the glitz and glamour that metros and big cities exude with extravagant sets, designer clothes and of course, hit music adding to the narrative and the characters. If it were outdoor shootings earlier they were in the beautiful Kashmir valley or at the most, Goa.

Now the trend is, the more exotic the better, with plots stretching to some foreign locale in Europe or America. However, despite all this chutzpah, recently some of the big budget films have flopped while quietly, films set in some small Indian town with 'regular' people that are making it big at the box office. It is also a reflection of a changing taste and a more discerning audience.

Two recent films come to mind in this context. *Bareilly Ki Barfi* and *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan*. While the former is set in Bareilly near Lucknow, the latter has been shot in Haridwar on the banks of the Ganga.

Bareilly Ki Barfi has protagonists who speak in a language any common man or

woman would recognise in the Indian milieu while the romantic story builds up.

Shubh Mangal Saavdhan is set mainly in Haridwar, one of the holiest cities in the country, with all its colours, hustle-bustle and temples. But the subject is far from the usual romantic 'boy gets girl' set in a pious ambience. Rather, it deals with the delicate subject of erectile dysfunction many men suffer from, a subject that has never been dealt with in Bollywood before.

The common thread that binds these two films, apart from the small-town ambience, is Ayushmann Khurrana who projects the image of a small-town boy convincingly. His charm was equally evident in an earlier ground breaking film *Vicky Donor* where he was a sperm donor for couples unable to conceive.

Earlier Khurrana impressed with his boy-next-door look and acting (once ably portrayed by Amol Palekar), in Sharat Katariya's *Dum Lagake Haisha*. A sleeper hit, it was shot in Haridwar too. The endearing story has school drop-out Prem and his educated 'fat', mismatched wife Sandhya (Bhumi Pednekar) who struggles to find love and acceptance but staunchly refuses to go on a diet to please



him.

Finally, good sense prevails to make for a happy ending. It touched a chord with the so-called 'common' people for whom all those ritzy locales are as if from some dream sequence. For a change these films seemed 'real' and that's how they became hits.

Small town and bold subjects dealt with sensitivity but entertaining nonetheless, are the USPs of these films thereby

beating some big Bollywood films hollow because of weak storyline. Even if some big budget films from the factory do moderately well, the returns are not up to it. The lure of reaching the 100 crore club could be their aim but often, they leave the audience cold.

The other noticeable aspect of these so-called small town oriented stories is

that the women in suburbia and villages are also different from the image of ghunghatwali beings overshadowed by men.

Here the leading ladies are smart, intelligent and — and not necessarily in the mould of 'moral' guards of the society. They are bold enough to try and lead life on their own terms, belying the 'cute and shy' myth of the small town girl once and for all. After all, small towns are not excluded from the influence of globalisation on the one hand and the information highway on the other.

Arrah is a little known district of Bihar. *Anarkali* of Arrah pushes the borders of performance and genre to tell the story of a gutsy woman called *Anarkali* who is a stage dancer. She tries her best to live life on her own terms and is not ready to sleep for money if she does not want to. The film did not do too well commercially but will be remembered for its wonderful performances and the aggressive storytelling.

In his well-researched paper, *Provincialising Bollywood? Cultural economy of north-Indian small-town nostalgia in the Indian multiplex*, Akshaya Kumar states: "The small-town may have grad-

ually become more form than content, it might have also become the anchor of a cinema located elsewhere — which would mean a body of films that shun the label 'Bombay Cinema'."

He adds that *Dabangg* re-establishes the tricky but magnetic relationship between Bollywood and the small-towns of north India, yet not without a critical take on them. It illustrates an enthralling performance that borrows from the tradition of spoof as much as it does from impersonation. All the women in *Dabangg* from the mother of *Chulbul Pandey* through his wife and the other item girl are any day, bolder and brasher than their big city counterparts.

Even *Bareilly Ki Barfi*, heroine *Biti Mishra* (*Kriti Sanon*) would rather run away from home to find her dream writer than marry according to her mother's choice and in *Dum Lagake Haisha* *Sandhya* would rather leave her in-laws' house to take up a job as a teacher than give in to unrealistic demands.

These characters are etched from real life dramas and are not like distant dream girls. Definitely, the small town has made its statement in big, big, Bollywood. And people are taking notice. (*TWF*)

Just two movies old, director **Rima Das** is one for the future, reckon veteran film critics. Her movie *Village Rockstars* garnered lavish praise at the recently concluded *Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF)*. *IBNS Canada's Suman Das and Sudipto Maity* find out what makes the filmmaker from Assam, whose first film was *Antardrishti (Man with the Binoculars, 2016)*, tick. Excerpts:

Rima, you wanted to be an actor. How did you end up as a director?

I started as an actor and have been acting since my childhood. I was born and brought up in a very different kind of environment but grew up watching Bollywood films. Till the time I came to Mumbai (in 2007) I knew nothing about world cinema. It was in Mumbai where I got exposed to the larger film universe. Watching the international films, I somehow thought I could make a movie and tell my own story. I started with a short film, *Pratha* (2009). The film went to a couple of festivals and that gave me a lot of confidence to continue what I am doing presently.

Antardrishti (Man with the Binoculars) was your first feature film. What inspired you to make it?

When I decided on making movies, I tried a couple of short films, but the dream was always to make a feature film. I am someone who loves to express and I thought a feature was the best option for me to do so. It began somewhat like this...I was in my friend's place and noticed a pair of binoculars. I was in the middle of finishing my short film and this friend was doing the background score. So as we spoke, he said that he had bought this binoculars for his retired father, who lives in a village. That was it...That was the starting point. Later on I worked on the story and developed the plot, which eventually took two years to finish.

You grew up in the same village in Assam where your film Village Rockstars was shot. Did you use the movie as a time machine to travel back to your past and relive your childhood?

After staying in Mumbai for nearly eight years,

'I want to tell positive stories'



when I went back to my village to shoot my first feature film, *Antardrishti (Man with the Binoculars)*, I realised what I was missing in life. In the city, we lead a materialistic life. Everything that we need is available there. Back in the village, after spending time there I realised what living in deprivation is. But these people were actually enjoying life. Yes, they endure hostility; they endure the natural calamities, but always move on. That inspired me.

Without naming anyone...I have seen many Indian films showing village life and mostly it's about poverty. I don't want that. I want to tell a positive story. I am from the same village and look I've made it to Mumbai and my films have been to various international festivals, so why just uplift the poverty. We need hope, we need positivity. Films that showcase urban lifestyle shows children playing video games...I wanted to offer something new and that is how *Village*



Rockstars came by.

You shot for a period of three years to complete this movie. Keeping that in mind, the girl (actor) in the film must have gone through physical changes. Was it some sort of a challenge for you to keep the two, her growth physically and the story-line, intact?

Yes. It was very difficult to manage. For the first 18 months, everything went well, but later on I had to use some techniques (laughs)...I had to restrict myself from using too many long shots. Fortunately, her face didn't change much!

So why did you drag it for three years?

Firstly, I was still in the post-production stage of my first film when I started shooting for the second one. Secondly, I had to travel to attend film festivals. Also because of the way I worked with the children...I worked with them in the morning

before they departed for regular school and sometimes in the afternoon. With the shortage of a crew, I had to shoot the film in natural light, so that took a lot of time. Lastly, it was a learning process for me... Sometimes to get the perfect shot, I had to wait for ten-fifteen days. Another reason for the delay was that I wanted to show the whole season. A lot of sequence, the rains and floods are real. I wanted to make it perfect...At least to me. What the world thinks of my film is different, but I wanted to get the creative satisfaction.

When did you decide that film-making was your true calling?

As I said, I grew up watching Bollywood movies and after a period of time I realised that it was going to be hard for me to do a film...It needed a lot of funding and didn't have much. Bollywood also uses a lot of songs and dance, which I couldn't relate to. It was only after getting exposed to world cinema

and watching certain international films, did I realise that I too could make a film...Like it could be done without dancing and singing. So I returned to my village, the place where I was born and shot my first film feature film there.

Rima, in your film Village Rockstars, you used a lot of non-actors, people who have never faced a camera before. Was it very difficult? How was the experience of working with so many children and 'first timers'?

It was very challenging to be honest. But I love working with children...I feel I connect with them better. I feel like a child when I'm with my parents. For my first film, *Pratha*, I worked with children and somehow I retained that confidence. But I wasn't that confident while casting the other characters (seniors), so I did a couple of workshops with them. Being an actor myself, helped me in that regard

Your film shows gender bias in society. Was it something that came on its own or was it a very conscious effort from your side?

Well, the story is about how the lead character, *Dhunu*, dreams of owning a guitar growing up in poverty and confronting natural calamities. It is all there...I could not have avoided it even if I wanted to. Gender bias exists in Indian society, in villages. But that was not by main theme. The movie is about hope and desire and how one dream even when faced with difficulties.

While discussing Indian films, especially by foreigners, Bollywood movies crop up. As a regional and independent filmmaker, are you happy with that or do you want that attitude to change? Do you think regional movies are underrepresented?

Probably yes, but again, it differs from one individual to another. At the moment, I am more into creating something. I still have a long way to go.

What are your future plans? Making more and more movies (laughs). (IBNS-TWF)

Image: Radha Bose/IBNS

Secrets of gender pay gap

This columnist, who is also a writer of books, was at a school as a Visiting Author when one of the children asked a question: "How much does Thor get paid?"

"Good question," I said. "Superhero salaries are never revealed. However, they seem to do just fine. Definitely they get paid more than authors or teachers!" (Always good to get the academic staff on side)

Then a teenage girl's hand shot up. "I bet Thor and Iron Man get paid more than Wonder Woman," she snarled.

"Yeah," the other girls growled — and so did the teachers. The atmosphere turned to ice. Teaching staff (all female except two) nodded sternly at this timely reminder of evil gender inequality.

"In superhero land, boys and girls get paid exactly the same," I said, trying to dodge the bullet.

What I was thinking (but didn't say) was this. Many male superheroes clearly have massive incomes (think Iron Man, Batman, Black Panther, Mr Fantastic, Nighthawk, Professor X, Green Arrow, etc). But Wonder Woman, if memory serves me, was a nurse!

Why was everyone in a bad mood about this?

The previous month, a news report said that in the creative industries generally, male stars get paid more than female stars. Earlier that week, a study of the BBC showed that women presenters earned significantly less than men.

The Internet was filled with outrage at what they saw as horrendous sex discrimination, as were the three women in this columnist's family.

Here's something else I didn't say. This writer has spent years in the creative industries (including working for the BBC), and knows full well that financial chiefs of these organisations are heartless automatons

who see nothing but bottom lines. They honestly don't care if you are male, female, transgender, hermaphrodite or a googly-eyed alien from the planet Zorg.

So while it's true that discrimination exists, that's not the whole story. Academic studies repeatedly show that women at certain stages earn less money by choice because they have a superior attitude to work-life balance.

Guys sign up for every promotion and burn out into early graves, while women make smart compromises and live happier, longer, healthier lives.

Researchers call this the "self-selected pay gap". Journalists never write about this because outrage sells more newspapers and gets more clicks.

The gap between male and female pay at the BBC is much smaller than the UK average, indicating the organisation is unusually successful at finding ways to steer money into the hands of female staff.

After my school talk, I was signing books when I was approached by a nerdy boy who was a fount of knowledge about superheroes.

"Wonder Woman is a

nurse," he said.

I was about to tell him to SHUT UP for his personal safety (female teachers were hovering nearby), when he added something that got me thinking: "She's an army nurse with the rank of Major."

Interesting. There is no gender pay gap in the military, and US army Majors earn a fortune, more than \$100,000 a year.

Thor, being a minor Norse god, probably doesn't get paid anything at all. Oh well, Wonder Woman seems like a nice person — she can buy Thor a drink.

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

THE FUNNY SIDE
Nury Vittachi

Is digital world safe enough?



By Shatavisha Chakravorty

In today's era of technological advancement, almost all our needs (financial or otherwise) are dealt with digitally. In such a scenario, our greatest threat is not from thieves and robbers. It is cyber intruders who must be feared. The gravity of this statement was reiterated to us following the recent cyber-attack on Deloitte, one of the largest global accounting firms.

One of the 'Big Four' companies in the corporate world, Deloitte provides auditing services, tax consultancy and financial risk advice to some of the world's biggest companies. Registered in London, the company has its headquarters in New York.

With a global presence in hundreds of countries, its client base includes both MNCs as well as government agencies. One of the largest private firms in the US, last year Deloitte reported record revenue of \$37 billion. It is ironical to note that a firm which has made a mark for itself in the world of cyber security consulting is today struggling with cyber security.

In the month of March, the accounting giant discovered that confidential data per-

taining to six of its major US clients was being accessed by some unauthorised personnel. On further inspection it was found that the hackers had access to the data since last fall (October-November 2016). The lost data included passwords, e-mails and other confidential data. The fact that all the security breaches were US specific raises many questions.

Hackers managed to gain access to the company's email server through an administrator account that was not secured using two factor authentications. This granted him or her unrestricted access to Deloitte's Microsoft hosted mailboxes. Once that was achieved, the hackers had complete access to usernames, passwords and IP addresses. They also had potential access to architectural diagrams for business and health information.

The official figures for how much of these data have been used (or rather misused) have not yet been declared. The company

has not released the hard numbers or indicated whether the attack affected individuals. However the manner in which the entire process was executed shows that there was a lot of meticulous planning involved. Speculation within the cyber world has theorised that the attacks were focused on corporate clients and not on individual clients. However, this is just a speculation and its reliability has not been confirmed by official sources.

Till date, no individual or company has taken up responsibility for the attack. Thus it is yet to be established if it was a lone wolf, business rivals or state sponsored hackers who were responsible for this massive attack. However the fact that the attack appeared to target email systems to gain access to client information (possibly corporate client information) suggests that the hackers were cyber criminals looking to steal data that could be sold.

It is interesting to note that Deloitte is not the first high profile company to be tar-

getted by cyber criminals. A couple of weeks ago, Equifax revealed that confidential data belonging to 140 million customers have been compromised in a security breach. For those of you unaware of the firm, it is one of the world's largest credit checking companies. Hence this breach is one of the largest data breaches in history, with up to 400,000 bitcoins stolen in the hack. Each of the bitcoins is believed to have stored personal information of the clients.

The lesson that the Equifax attack was supposed to teach the corporate world was finally learnt following the Deloitte attack. The firm set up a team of dedicated and highly qualified cyber experts who were responsible for everything concerning this matter. Once this team was mobilised, an intensive and thorough review was initiated. With Deloitte coming up with new comprehensive security protocols, other corporates are also taking a note of it to ensure such a thing does not happen to their firms. If such stringent measures are adopted on a large scale, very soon cyber-crime will become a thing of the past.

(The author is a Bengaluru-based technical content writer)

It is ironical to note that Deloitte, which has made a mark for itself in cyber security consulting, is today struggling with cyber security

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 8, 2017

Moon trine Pluto on your solar return chart denotes a good year. You are more capable of helping friends and loved ones who are dealing with a crisis - you can be leaned upon. Your ability to understand and accept anything that is deep in meaning or significant is enhanced in the coming year, and you instinctively realize that the path to healing is to face your fears. Any type of in-depth study or research is likely to go well. In some cases, a significant tax refund, inheritance, or other such benefit might arrive during this year. Financial gains may come through a partnership or there may be an increase in a spouse's income.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

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

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You would realize that unsolved issues and puzzling situations are now becoming clear. All that is really needed is action, and you have plenty of energy to utilize. Your social life is likely to increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful and helpful people. This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. Your emotional brilliance will shine through as long as you do not react too quickly. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and your well being. A sense of humor allows free expression without anger or wounded egos.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

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

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

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

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

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

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

This phase sees your energy and confidence increase dramatically. Things will not go in your favor if you resort to tactics to get what you want. At times, you could have problems staying calm, cool, and collected. Buried resentments come to the fore and demand to be dealt with. It would be favorable to have good team

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

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

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

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

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

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

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

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

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

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

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

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

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

Media mode for engineers

By Ranjan K Baruah

Broadcast engineering is the field of electrical engineering, and now to some extent computer engineering and information technology, which deals with radio and television broadcasting.

Audio engineering and RF engineering are also essential parts of broadcast engineering, being their own subsets of electrical engineering.

Broadcast engineering involves both the studio end and the transmitter end (the entire air chain), as well as remote broadcasts. Every station has a broadcast engineer, though one may now serve an entire station group in a city, or be a contract engineer who essentially freelances his or her services to several stations (often in small media markets) as needed.

There is no direct degree course but it is part of other engineering and IT courses. Some degrees under broadcast engineering: Degree in Electronic Engineering, Degree in Telecommunications Engineering, Degree in Computer Engineering, Degree in Information Technology, Degree in Broadcast Technology, etc.

It is not offered as a main discipline in undergraduate engineering courses. Candidates with four-year bachelors' course in electrical engineering, electronics and communication engineering, computer engineering, information technology and audio engineering can pursue a career in broadcast engineering.

Aspirants may go for some special course after their basic degree or diploma in engineering. Diploma, post graduate and certificate level courses in broadcast technology are offered by several Institutes in India.

Students must be from science stream to study courses related to broadcast engineering. Due to the growth in the entertainment industry, broadcast engineering is becoming a lucrative career field across the world. India is the third largest television market in the world with many



television channels and FM stations.

Broadcast engineers may have varying titles depending on their level of expertise and field specialty. Some widely used titles include Broadcast design engineer, Broadcast Integration Engineer, Broadcast systems engineer, Broadcast IT engineer, Broadcast IT systems engineer, Broadcast network engineer, Broadcast maintenance engineer, Video broadcast engineer, TV studio broadcast engineer, Outside broadcast engineer, Remote broadcast engineer, etc.

One must prepare an attractive CV and post it on job sites to get shortlisted for interviews. There are advertisements related to broadcast engineers. Knowledge of different Indian language is another added skill as one might get opportunity in different parts of the country. Like private channels or media houses, government also engages broadcast engineers in Prasar Bharati as it is one of the largest networks in India managed by the government.

enced without much formal engineering degree but as the field is challenging it is preferable to have formal engineering degree to become a broadcast engineer.

One must prepare an attractive CV and post it on job sites to get shortlisted for interviews.

There are advertisements related to broadcast engineers.

Knowledge of different Indian language is another added skill as one might get opportunity in different parts of the country. Like private channels or media houses, government also engages broadcast engineers in Prasar Bharati as it is one of the largest networks in India managed by the government.

Update

Bharti Infratel, one of the largest telecom tower infrastructure providers in India announced its scholarship programme for Persons with Disabilities. This programme is designed to benefit students across all eight Northern Eastern States of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya. Interested may contact Shishu Sarothi in Guwahati. Last date for sending application is September 20.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 9864055558 for any career related queries)



Electronic Broadcasting

"A sedentary life is the real sin against the Holy Spirit. Only those thoughts that come by walking have any value."

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

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Sex sans consent

EVER since the Delhi High Court acquitted Mahmood Farooqi the co-director of the film Peepli Iive, much has been written about the legal import of the word consent. Can sex without affirmative consent on both sides be taken as rape? What is hard to understand is whether in any particular case, consensual sex has been performed. If one party has not agreed, the act can be considered rape, even marital rape. The Delhi High Court had stated that the woman in this case did not firmly express her dissent. The definition of consent according to the 2013 amendments to the rape law makes it the job of the victim to prove that she had said "no" to sex. It has to be clear that the man gets the woman's refusal clearly expressed and understood. The ruling of the High Court case sets a bad example for rape cases. There seems to be a great deal of confusion about the content of willingness and misunderstanding. Sex has got to be an affirmative, conscious and voluntary participation by both parties to be a legitimate act. It is a firm contractual relationship. The other person's reaction in the act has to be equally important.

It may be a fact that the woman complainant has an advantage in all these cases. Her statement is enough to prove that a man has committed sexual violence. On the other hand, women have great difficulty in establishing their credibility through the investigative and legal process. That is why women are often reluctant to register cases and proceed with them. In the Farooqi case, by ruling that the woman's "no" was not clear the High Court has perhaps obscured the meaning of consent. It may put women up against it in future cases to prove their lack of consent in a sexual act.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Coal smuggling to Bangladesh unabated

About 240 tonnes of coal are smuggled into Bangladesh illegally from the coal rich Ranikor and Borsora areas in the West Khasi Hills every day by about 80000 Bangladeshis operating on 40 jungle routes. This was disclosed to the Meghalaya Minister for Mining & Geology, Mr J D Pehrmen, by the local

people of the areas while he was on a visit there last week. However, the local Police and Customs officials claimed that such smuggling had stopped in the recent months.

The Minister, while taking a serious view of the matter, said that Meghalaya was losing revenue due to such smuggling.

Where have all the 'Doomsayers' gone?

By H H Mohrmen

When the National Green Tribunal (NGT) first ordered the ban on mining and transportation of coal from Meghalaya in April 2014 all hell broke loose and the doomsayers had a field day. They have predicted loss of jobs, social unrest and even starvation in the area if the NGT continues with the ban. But three years down the line with the benefit of the hindsight, we can only thank goodness that the doomsayers were wrong.

Of course it is not that the people did not have to undergo hardships because of the instantaneous ban which did not give them the chance to explore alternative livelihood opportunities, but thanks to the common human virtue called resilience the poor people in the area are beginning to write new chapters of their stories.

This column had earlier written about the farmers of Samasi village and its adjoining areas who had started farming once again and some of the youths who were trained in apiculture have succeeded in producing and marketing honey. Areas like Jalaphet and those adjoining to it have started farming once again.

In places where (during the heydays of mining) people would not have time to do anything at all, now they have started kitchen garden and have started appreciating the chirping of the birds and caw of the crows. Elsewhere in the newly created district people have started robust agriculture farming and there are those who are now engaged in livestock rearing too in a big way.

The newly appointed DC of East Jaintia Hills district who himself is the founding member and is still in the forefront of Jaintia Tourism and Environment Society (JTES) an organisation which works for promoting tourism in both districts of Jaintia hills district has done a commendable job since he assumed office about a year or so ago. Through the convergence mode between District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), District Basin Development Agency (DBDU), MLA schemes and other

departments and agencies MS Lhuid first started promoting Chamcham village as a potential spot to attract tourists. The village which is situated on the banks of the river Myntdu is blessed with the majestic Rynji falls which about 70 feet high and Sahksaw which has a beauty of its own.

Recently other spots like Moopoon water fall and the Moopoon stone bridge was introduced to the tourist map of Meghalaya and both the spots have huge potential to attract tourist. It was the former Deputy Commissioner of Jaintia hills F R Kharkongor who while addressing a gathering once said, not only 'mooning' (coal) can give you income 'moo-tourism' (tourism) can also provide you income which is also sustainable.

There is also information that people from Shnongrim village where there is a huge potential for cave tourism have approached the DBDU to explore the possibility of projecting the area for developing it as a tourist spot. Despite criticism that the water in the area is still polluted, there is no denying the truth that in some areas the quality of the water in the rivers has started to improve and it has only been three years since the ban. The improved water quality coupled with the beauty of the place will be able to attract tourists to the areas.

Yet there are people who still think that coal mining is the only solution and the only livelihood activities for those in the coal mine areas. Coal barons especially those who are from outside the district are of the opinion that only coal mining can save the people in the area and they also foresee no future for the district except through coal mining. They cannot accept the truth that coal is a finite resource which will one day exhaust and therefore there is the need to look for other sustainable livelihoods.

It is the youth which are more open and are ready to accept the changes. On September 25 last while observing the anniversary of the unfortunate firing on the crowd that protested against the NGT ban at Mukhep, East

Jaintia hills, the pressure group Hynniewtrep Achik National Movement (HANM) East Jaintia Hills unit organised a special program to mark the occasion. Because September 24, the anniversary of the firing falls on Sunday, HANM instead organised a one day awareness program on job opportunities in the area post NGT ban on the September 25. The meeting in which officials from the district administration East Jaintia hills and the police department also addressed the gathering dealt at length on the issue and the speakers encouraged the youths in the meeting to explore other alternative livelihood opportunities. The speakers also made the youths realise the truth that even if coal mining in the area is permitted again, the fact remains that it is a finite resource and it will one day exhaust.

If the people had learned any lesson at all from the coal mining ban, it is that they are prepared now. They are not depending on one activity alone and this will continue because the truth is in a state like Meghalaya where more than seventy percent of the population still lives in the rural areas and depend on agriculture, farming is the only potential job provider in the state. The way forward for the state is to focus on improving agriculture and create avenues for job creation in the sector.

But instead of looking forward, the coal mine owners in collaboration with the politicians are hell-bent in their efforts to pressure the Government to find ways to allow mining to continue as usual in the area. The coal lobbyist are even switching sides from left to right hoping that these parties will be able to pressure the NGT to allow mining as usual without any regulation whatsoever. With the election to the State Assembly approaching closer every day, the parties too are in

competition to woo the mining lobby to their side. But the reality is that it is the farmers who are going to decide the winners of the election.

The question is why none of the parties realize what happened at the grassroots level? Why is nobody caring to even look at the efforts that the people who had once lost their jobs have put in to support themselves? They have survived the ordeal by going back to farming once again and they are not complaining about it anymore. If one visits the village and talks to the people who are in the lower strata of society, the narrative has changed and they are back to being farmers once again. These are the stories that we need to pay heed to too because they are genuine and depict the real picture of what is really happening at the lower strata of the society.

The political parties and the Government should look at these stories of resilience in almost every nook and corner of the district and encourage and support them in their endeavour because it not only provides them livelihoods but the activities are also sustainable. The political parties should not only listen to the lobbyists who are of course rich and can easily explore other job opportunities anywhere, but instead listen to the poor who have given their sweat and tears to eke out a living after the ban.

The political parties should also remember that the lobbyists have predicted chaos and starvation in the area post NGT ban and they were wrong. What instead we see is the quality of water in some streams and rivers getting back to normal again and anglers starting to fish once again in these rivers, even without any Government intervention, to reclaim the rivers. And the most important lesson is that the people have succeeded in their efforts and have risen once again from the depths of their crisis.

Limits to the right to self-determination: Catalonia and Kurdistan

By: T.P Sreenivasan

India's early experience of dealing with Pakistani aggression in Kashmir and the subsequent developments shaped India's approach to the concept of self-determination, which is cautious, restricted and clearly defined. While we have subscribed to one of the purposes of the UN Charter as developing friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples", India placed reservations on Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which reads: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." Initially, the Indian position was challenged by many legal experts, but over the years, the Indian position that self-determination applies only to territories under alien or colonial domination came to be accepted as fundamental to its interests.

The question of definition of self-determination is an annual ritual at the Third Committee of the UN when a Pakistani resolution comes up for consideration with India and Pakistan setting forth their positions. Pakistan usually makes the point that it thinks that Jammu and Kashmir is indeed under alien or colonial domination and, therefore, it is entitled to self-determination through a plebiscite and the matter ends. But the world is deeply divided on this issue, as large countries are attached to the view that self-determination will not apply to integral parts of states and smaller countries insist that all people are entitled to such a right. Countries like Liechtenstein have taken initiatives to press the point with the support of small states and the larger nations have resisted any further strengthening of the right to self-determination. I recall how my repeated demarches to the Foreign Minister of Slovenia to vote against self-determination in a resolution in the UN resulted in the Slovenian delegate being absent at the time of the vote. That was a friendly gesture, as it was explained to me that if he was present, he would have had to vote for it! Slovenia, with a population of two million, had no fear of a move for self-determination in the country.

India generally reacts negatively to moves for secession on the ground of self-determination, but has accepted division of countries as a solution to ethnic conflicts. India faces the same dilemma in the most recent cases of Catalonia, which seeks to break away from Spain and Kurdistan, which wants to become independent of Iraq. Spain without Barcelona is unthinkable to most people and Kurds are believed to have sufficient autonomy to safeguard their interests. People are deeply dismayed by the scenes of chaos and violence in Barcelona, a beautiful and prosperous city with international fame.

The Catalan government's decision to hold an independence referendum and Spain's ruthless action to prevent it are ominous for the region and Europe at large. The tragedy is that Spain's actions, witnessed by the world on television have helped the Catalan case, though nobody believes that secession will be permitted. If it was a referendum accepted by Spain and Catalonia, the situation would have been different. In the present case, a right derived as a reaction to imperialism will not receive much support. A solution will be for Catalonia to get a higher level of autonomy than the one it

already enjoys. Catalans are not colonised, oppressed or discriminated against and the argument that a distinct cultural identity or having to bear a disproportionate part of the national budget are not strong reasons for secession. By this token, many prosperous regions with distinct cultures, which are now supporting poorer regions in the same country will seek secession, resulting in chaos.

If the Catalans indeed declare independence as they threaten to do immediately, Spain's reaction will be to come down on them like a ton of bricks and withdraw the autonomy of the province. Catalans believe that Spain is already guilty of not allowing the region the extent of autonomy promised in the Spanish constitution and their aim might be to secure more autonomy by demanding independence.

By a sheer coincidence, another referendum took place in Kurdistan in September. But the process was smooth as Iraq did not seek to interfere, perhaps because it was felt that the Kurds have been suffering from the turbulence in the region, and that they have a case for seeking some stability and development. Iraq itself has not been in a position to help the autonomous region in any manner and the Kurds have been fending for themselves. But secession is unlikely to be permitted as Baghdad wishes to retain control and Turkey and Iran are opposed to an independent Kurdistan, with immense implications for their own Kurd populations. The likelihood of a civil war between the Arabs and the Kurds should be a strong deterrent to moves for an independent Kurdistan. The Kurds in Iraq already enjoy near-independence with their own parliament, army and security forces and they will be pushing the region into an ethnic war, without securing any particular benefit for themselves.

Both Turkey and Iran have made it clear that they will oppose Kurdish independence by taking military measures such as exercises and threatening to suffocate an independent Kurdistan by cutting off Kurdish oil pipelines. Countries like the USA and Russia, engaged in fighting the Islamic State do not seem to be interested in a Kurdish distraction, though some believe that the referendum took place with US support. Israel is the only country to support the Kurds, not because they love the Kurds more, but because they love Iraq and Iran less.

The champions of secession, whether in Spain or in Iraq merely have to look at the present plight of the 193rd member of the United Nations. More than the right to self-determination, it was the persistent conflict that prompted the international community to carve out South Sudan. But within three years, the newest state in the world became its newest failed state. The merit of remaining united within established states, in spite of differences, is evident, whatever may be the reasons for Catalonia and Kurdistan to seek solutions to their problems through secession.

Indian reservations on the right of all peoples to the right to self-determination have become universal except for a few regions of the world. With the happy culmination of the decolonisation process, the championship of self-determination in independent states will lead only to chaos and strife. The Catalan and Kurdish cases may eventually reinforce the Indian stand.

The writer is Former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA, Chairman, Academic Council and Director, NSS Academy of Civil Services & Director General, Kerala International Centre.

TO THE EDITOR

Las Vegas hits the explosive jackpot

Editor,

Money is the root of all evils. It can be used to buy lethal weapons as easily we buy bread and butter from a store. Countless such violent incidents have happened in a couple of years and they have instantly extinguished the lives of numerous innocent people. From Mississippi, Newtown, Texas, Las Vegas, and then France, Kuwait, Manchester, Landon Bridge, Lahore...! In each case, if we go deeper, the big boss America is directly or indirectly responsible.

Well, as to the rise of gun culture in the USA, I totally blame its Government. The recent mass shooting tragedy in Las Vegas shocked the entire world. How can the US Government allow Tom, Dick, and Harry to purchase weapons? The police have found a stockpile of arsenal from the possession of perpetrator Stephen Paddock who killed 59 people, leaving 527 wounded. How did he procure all these deadly weapons? And what had stopped the government from totally banning sale of guns in the wake of the cruel instances of shootings at various spots? Small kids are shooting themselves, schoolboys shoot their classmates for fun, sons gun

down fathers and mothers in a rage and wives shoot their husbands over petty issues.

This is how the most advanced country in the world is now virtually reeling from a stream of horrific tragedies. Are not the leaders and business houses insanely stupid to resist the gun control legislation? They have not yet realized that "evil" also roars from gun barrels. Bluntly speaking, can these leaders give sharp daggers to their own kids? It is exactly like that. People may have grown but their minds are cluttered with gory thoughts and sadism. And, the results are now here to make the world shudder with fear and anguish.

One wonders, how many more such dangerous tragedies should strike the mankind before the leaders come to their senses and act sensibly? No one should gamble with the lives of the innocent. Explosive America can no longer hit the jackpot for humanity.

Yours etc.,
Sahil Gecwali,
Shillong-2

Absurd and baseless allegations

Editor,

Aprpos the news item captioned "Hospitalized due to food poisoning,"19th (ST September 2017), on the unfortunate experience of some people at Nongjngi village, it is disturbing to

note that the report made baseless allegations at Dr. Norman Tunnel Hospital, Jowai. As stated in the news item, an unfortunate incident of food poisoning happened at Moolephaw, Nongjngi West Jaintia Hills, leading to 15 people being taken ill. Surprisingly, instead of reporting facts there seems to be an attempt at defamation. As narrated by the headman and others in the paper, the next day, after the naming ceremony in the family, fourteen people were taken to the hospital. It is understood that they initially sought admission at Jowai District Civil Hospital, Ialong. However, they were told to go to Dr. Norman Tunnel Hospital in Jowai. This is the crux of the problem.

Dr Norman Tunnel Hospital throughout its existence ensures that it is accessible to all health problems of the people. Never has it rejected any patient on grounds of gender, religion, class, or background. In the long journey of its service there are countless stories of people recovering due to timely help from this hospital. The hospital authority has clarified on the baseless allegations of the headman and others. Regarding the inclusion of qualified physicians in the fraternity, there is no reason for not welcoming a trained individual to be part of the team. The management has carefully scrutinized the qualification of any person before appointing them in the

hospital. The procedure is strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Medical Council of India (MCI). Therefore, the charge that unqualified doctors are employed by the Hospital is unwarranted and highly condemnable.

Coming to the problem in the story, there are a few things that need to be taken care. Firstly, the narrator has no authority to generalize his statement by stating, "The people of Jaintia Hills do not trust Dr. Norman Tunnel Hospital." All the patients who were admitted in the hospital are people from both the districts, i.e. West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills. If they no longer have faith in the hospital they would have not occupied those wards.

Secondly, the cases of food poisoning was not brought directly to this hospital but referred by some other hospital. Therefore, the question should not be directed at doctors of this hospital. Perhaps the headman and others on reaching the hospital find themselves treated at par with all others. To the best of any knowledge, the hospital empathized and tried its level best to save the lives of those affected people.

Thirdly, these people were not abandoned at Dr. Norman Tunnel Hospital. They were not admitted in the Jowai District Civil Hospital, Ialong which raises question, "Why" The concern authorities must have their grounds for doing so. The common view is that there are

some loopholes in the hospital. The headman should take up the matter with the higher authorities. Is the problem that of insufficient beds, less doctors, less nurses or non availability of medicines etc. These should be logically brought forward. Instead of doing that, the headman points his fingers elsewhere.

Let us forget, at times when people arrive in the hospital they always expect the doctors and nurses to rush and perform miracles in the twinkling of an eye. Languages exchanged, attitude of the relatives, behaviour and even the support of the family is very important. It can be rightly understood that under some circumstances the family will be helpless and frustrated. But that doesn't mean that the practitioners don't really care and are incapable. As much as the patients, family and others feel the pain so do the doctors and those people who help. For that reason they are there!

Hence, the statements and allegations from the headman seems to be influenced by some vested interest. This should not be allowed in a community life. Such an attempts should not be encouraged. A proper investigation and evaluation to prevent further hurdles and unwanted happenings in the future is required.

There is always a

tendency to rail against any hospital with a hyper-critical eye. As responsible citizens of the society, let us learn the basic manners of being grateful to those who have sacrificed and toiled to help, serve and assure us a healthy life. It is never an easy task to be in the medical field. Certainly, some may not consider it a responsibility to be accountable. For someone, it may be a mere employment opportunity. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that there still exists a pure heart of care. Any criticism should be constructive to benefit the social web of the community.

Removing the spirit of differences on caste, creed and class will help build a better space to survive. With the plurality of faith tradition and practices, we need to keep the spirit of love, care and togetherness higher than ever. It is not for political, economic, cultural, social, historical reasons that we start raising irrelevant and untimely questions. This letter is not to counter the issue being raised. It should not be treated as an official response to the news report above. The writer is not siding with or against any individual, group or institution. Everything in this letter is purely a personal observation and opinion.

Yours etc.,
Spysker Dkhar
Jowai

“Against boredom the gods themselves fight in vain.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 59

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2017

Paying lip service to the disabled

ON his recent visit to the state, Minister of State for Social Justice, Ramdas Bandhu Athawale asked the State Government to set up schools for the disabled and come up with a robust law for the protecting the elderly. There are only 12 private schools for over 44 thousand disabled children in Meghalaya. The ratio of such special schools to students is 1:3666. This shows that a huge section of the disabled are out of school and left to fend for themselves. A reasonable teacher - student ratio is 1: 13-17 for the teacher to be able to make an impact and for the student to benefit from the special education provided. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Secondary and Higher Education) has been implementing a scheme of 'Integrated Education for the Disabled Children' (IEDC) in formal schools since 1982. The objective of the scheme is to provide educational opportunities for the disabled children in normal schools so as to facilitate their retention in the school system. Disabled children who are placed in special schools should be considered for integration into common schools once they acquire the communication and daily living skills at a functional level.

Children with various disabilities should be integrated in formal and non-formal school systems. A three-member assessment team comprising of a doctor, a psychologist and a special educator is formed to assess whether a child can be enrolled directly into a normal school or should receive preparation in a special school/ or a special preparatory class in Early Childhood Education Centre (ECCE) specially equipped for this purpose. Under the IEDC scheme, resources and itinerant teachers are provided. Children are also given certain incentives like book allowance, equipment allowance, transport-allowance etc. But all of the above are neatly written policies that are implemented in the breach. The Central and State Government has paid scant attention to the educational needs of the disabled in Meghalaya, thereby causing frustration and a sense of hopelessness in those who have strived to set up those special schools because of a sense of personal commitment. There is also a social apathy hence the societal push to empower those who run such schools are negligible. How can society ignore its own? It's time for governments and civil society to pay attention to this crucial issue. It should be part of the election agenda for 2018.

TO THE EDITOR

When facts tell a different story!

Editor,
This is in response to your news concerning the visit of the Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment on the October 9, 2017. The Minister spoke about the Government establishing Schools for the Disabled. The Govt of Meghalaya, way back in 2000 had proposed to establish a School for the Disabled but held back the proposal after realising the obstacles of a School for Children with Special Needs (CWSN). It is extremely expensive, costing nearly Rs. 35000 per student per year. The Minister had the audacity to talk about grants.

The Special Schools come under the Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme which allows for 90% of the finance to be provided as Grant. This was brought down to 75% in the last ten years. The Grant

used to arrive in two instalments - the first by the month of July and the final one within November of the current year. We received our grant for 2014-15 only in January 2017 and not a pie for the subsequent years since then. From the year 2010-2011 the grant covers around 26% of our expenditure. The Minister also spoke about 4% reservation of jobs. Well, Mr. Minister if you do not provide the finances to run the schools which make a humble endeavour to educate the disabled in order to bring them to a certain standard, how do you expect them to compete for the jobs? A regional paper reported that the State Government could not provide the details of the number of students in the Special Schools of Meghalaya. These details are submitted by the respective schools year after year, every year within the month of July. As a matter of fact these were submitted to the Directorate of Social Welfare, again, as late as the first week of October 2017 in

respond to a query from NEC.

I had proposed to the State Government to take over our School, Dwar Jingkyrmen in 2012 and again in 2015 as with my present age of 76 years I am finding it extremely difficult to go about with the begging bowl which I have done in the last thirty years. This School runs absolutely on charity. The building came out of donation - the Central Government never gave a rupee in spite of our appeal for ten years since 1994. Assurance of money was given by Maneka Gandhi when she was the Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment. But nothing happened. At my meeting with the Prime Minister at the Raj Bhawan in May 2016 I had offered the School to the Central Government and reiterated this offer in August this year. The PMO's Office only forwarded my request to the Ministry. That is where it ended. It is unfortunate that the State Government does not invite the Schools to the

Meetings with the Central Government. Perhaps because I am no, "Yes Sir, No Sir, Three bags full Sir," person.

Yours etc.,
Sajjad M Ali
Via email

Whither smart classrooms?

Editor,
I am a student of BK Bajoria Higher Secondary School and I wish to bring to the notice of everyone, a very valid point. The school has installed digital software in the classes to make them Smart Classes. The annual fee for the smart classroom is Rs. 1500. I have been studying in this school for the past two years. Not once, in two years has a teacher used the smart class for teaching. Rs 1500 is no small sum and this done by a prestigious institution is unacceptable. Through the columns of The Shillong Times, I wish to draw the attention of the school authorities towards this matter. Paying Rs. 1500 for

nothing is not fair. I request for action on this matter at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
Debashish Halder
Shillong-4

Will the Inspectorate of Schools respond?

Editor,
I would like to highlight the functioning of Government Girls Higher Secondary School in Jail Road Shillong. It has been noted that the school despite opening in the month of February did not start regular classes until April end. The students were seen making noise in their classrooms as there were no teachers available in any class room. The classes were halted for the SSLC examinations, but concurrent classes could have carried on if the teachers were interested in taking classes. I wonder

doubled to Rs 54 crores and 1989 to Rs 154 crores. Just two years later, the expenses shot up to Rs 359 crore and by 1999 it was Rs 880 crores. By 2004, it had shot up to Rs 1300 crores and 2014 Lok Sabha elections entailed an expenditure of Rs 4500 crores.

Today, confusion has got more confounded with various States completing their five-year terms at different times. The result? Election costs have sky rocketed. The Bihar Government spent over Rs 400 crores for Assembly polls and UP more than double, the less said the better about expenses incurred by the Election Commission and Central Government. Just see the amount of the taxpayer's hard earned money being spent over and over again mindlessly.

Think. In 2011 Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Puducherry and Bengal, 2012 UP, Goa, Punjab, Manipur and Uttarakhand, the following year Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Mizoram followed by the Lok Sabha polls in 2014 and four States Maharashtra, Haryana, Telengana and Andhra, in 2015 Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, J&K and last year Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Bengal and Assam.

Where do we go from here? The US model should be considered. The President and State Governors are elected directly for a fixed four-year term and they choose their own teams. Certainly, the President is answerable to the House of Representatives and Senate but he is not required to seek their confidence vote. This ensures good governance, stability and continuity enabling him to take hard decisions without fear of losing power.

In sum, elections are the bedrock of our democracy but we should avoid duplication of polls. With States going for elections every year, running the Government is challenging as the country is in perpetual election mode. India's democracy should not be reduced to a Great Indian Political Circus tu tu mein-mein between Parties all the time. Enough of the destructive PES! ---- INFA

why they are only interested in a government salary with 'zero' dedication to their work. Further, the school gives holidays for no reason on any day of the month. To our utter surprise, for the Puja celebrations, the school was closed from September 23 up to October 8. It's like having a pre-winter vacation. All other schools celebrate Teacher's day; here they have Teacher's week. If the school staff are not interested in doing their job then they should resign from their posts and make way for people who are passionate about teaching and know the principles of school administration.

Yours etc.,
Concerned parents
(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.

One India, One Poll Halt perpetual election circus

By Poonam I Kaushish

amendment is required for simultaneous elections as Article 172 makes clear provisions for a fixed term of an Assembly."

In fact, a Law Commission report in 1999 had said, "This cycle of elections every year, and in the out of season, should be put an end to and recommended a gradual move towards simultaneous elections once in five years." Adding, when a no-confidence motion is moved against a Government, a confidence motion should also be moved for an alternative Government in the Assembly or the Lok Sabha as the case may be to ensure a five-year term for a majority or minority Government.

This was dittoed by a Parliamentary committee in December 2015. It held this would result in better

deserving of support at the Centre for its policies and performance at the national level. Yet, the same Party could be deserving of popular punishment and defeat for its policies and performance at the State level.

Though simultaneous elections could be held for State Assemblies and they be given a fixed term. If an elected State Government was to fall, the Centre could impose President's rule till the time for a fresh poll. But the Lok Sabha cannot have a fixed term as there is no provision for President's rule at the Centre. This could create more problems than solving them.

Further, a fixed term for the Lok Sabha and State Legislatures goes against the basic tenets of

The Bihar Government spent over Rs 400 crores for Assembly polls and UP more than double, the less said the better about expenses incurred by the Election Commission and Central Government.

deliverables of essential services and superior policies which come to a halt due to imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time along-with lessen the burden on crucial manpower deployed during election time.

Recall, the first four elections in 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 were a joint affair whereby simultaneous elections were held for the Centre and State legislatures. It was only in 1971 when Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and advanced elections by a year that the synchronization fell apart. This saw the onset of many unstable Governments at the Centre and States resulting in early dissolution of the Lok Sabha or Assemblies.

However, Constitutional experts believe it is not advisable to mix them. The proposal could be motivated by political considerations, as when simultaneous elections are held voters tend to vote for the same Party. Also, poll issues at the Centre and States are quite different and it would, therefore be better to hold separate polls.

Two, holding simultaneous elections could create confusion for the voters. A Party could be

The "Saubhagya" scheme

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The central government has recently launched the Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana or Saubhagya Scheme. The scheme seeks to ensure universal household electrification (in both rural and urban areas) by providing last mile connectivity. The scheme is expected to cover three crore households. As per reports currently about four crore households are un-electrified. Various rural electrification schemes have also been under implementation since 2005 and the recently announced scheme only seeks to augment the existing schemes and give a further impetus to the rural electrification scenario in the country.

The first rural electrification scheme was launched as the Rajiv Gandhi Grameeen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGVY), in 2005 and is the first scheme on rural electrification. Subsequently with the coming of the new government in power rural electrification received a renewed focus.

With this in mind the Ministry of Power launched the Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) in 2014. Once it was launched it subsumed the RGVY. The major components of DDUGJY included separation of agricultural and non-agricultural electricity feeders to improve supply for consumers in rural areas, improving sub-transmission and distribution infrastructure in rural areas, and thirdly rural electrification by carrying forward targets specified under the RGVY.

The total financial outlay for DDUGJY over the implementation period is Rs 82,300 crore which includes budgetary support of Rs 68,900 crore. In it the central government provides 60% of the project cost as grant, the state power distribution companies raise 10% of the funds, and 30% is borrowed from financial institutions and banks. The Saubhagya scheme seeks to further these goals.

An electrified village is defined as one that has the following: provision of basic infrastructure such as distribution transformers and lines in the inhabited locality, provision of electricity in public places like schools, panchayat office, health centers, dispensaries, and community centers, and at least 10% of the total number of households in the village are electrified. Therefore, a village is considered to be electrified if 10% of the total number of households in the village have been electrified. This is apart from the basic infrastructure and electrification of certain public centers in the village.

The newly announced scheme, Saubhagya, seeks to ensure universal household electrification, that is, in both rural and urban areas. Under this scheme, beneficiaries will be identified using the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data. The identified poor households will get free electricity connections. Other households not covered under the SECC, will be provided electricity connections at a cost of Rs 500. This amount will be collected by the electricity distribution companies in 10 instalments.

The total outlay of the scheme will be Rs 16,320 crore, of which the central government will provide Rs

12,320 crore. The outlay for the rural households will be Rs 14,025 crore, of which the centre will provide Rs 10,588 crore. For urban households the outlay will be Rs 2,295 crore of which the centre will provide Rs. 1,733 crore.

The state discoms will execute the electrification works through contractors or other suitable agencies. Information technology (mobile apps, web portals) will be used to organise camps in villages to identify beneficiaries. In order to accelerate the process, applications for electricity connections will be completed on the spot.

So far the focus of electrification schemes has been on rural areas, where typically last mile connectivity has been difficult to provide. Saubhagya extends the ambit of electrification projects to urban areas as well. While DDUGJY has focused on the village as the principal unit to measure electrification, the new scheme shifts the targets to household electrification. While the target for ensuring electricity connection in each household will be a significant step towards ensuring 24x7 power, the question of continuous and quality supply to these households will still rest on the ability of the discoms to provide electricity. Further, while the scheme provides for free connections, the ability of these households to pay for the electricity they consume may be a concern.

The States and Union Territories are required to complete the works of household electrification by the 31st of December 2018. The solar power packs which will be used for this programme where 200 to 300 Wp with battery bank for un-electrified households located in remote and inaccessible areas, comprises of Five LED lights, One DC fan, One DC power plug. It also includes the Repair and Maintenance (R&M) for 5 years.

The expected outcome of the Scheme is as follows in the scheme are as follows: environmental upgradation by substitution of Kerosene for lighting purposes, improvement education services, better health services, enhanced connectivity through radio, television, mobiles, increased economic activities and jobs and improved quality of life especially for women

For easy & accelerated implementation of the Scheme, modern technology shall be used for household survey by using Mobile App. Beneficiaries shall be identified and their application for electricity connection along with applicant photograph and identity proof shall be registered on spot. The Gram Panchayat/Public institutions in the rural areas may be authorised to collect application forms along with complete documentation, distribute bills and collect revenue in consultation with the Panchayat Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. The Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) will remain the nodal agency for the operationalisation of the scheme throughout the country. This scheme will undoubtedly give a new impetus to rural electrification of the region.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

"It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light."

--- Aristotle

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 60 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2017

Simultaneous elections

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has expressed the desire that elections to the Lok Sabha and to the State Assemblies should be held simultaneously. That will save money. Besides, the delay in holding elections in accordance to the model code conduct in different states at different times hampers governance. The Election Commission has supported the Prime Minister. But simultaneous elections depend on two conditions. All political parties have to agree. Moreover, the Constitution and the Representative of the People Act have to be amended to give constitutional approval to the decision. Simultaneous elections can be held six months after the amendments. But a large number of EVMs and voter verifiable paper audit trail machines will be ready by 2019. Separate machines will be required for the Lok Sabha and assembly elections. How much money will be saved?

The decision cannot be implemented all at once. Some political parties have nixed the idea. But it will of course remedy the evil of arbitrary President's rule. The West Bengal government has no reason to go to the polls before 2021. What happens when a government has not been able to complete its term? Those assemblies completing their term in 2019 are also exceptions. Lack of trust is most important. The BJP forcibly grabbed power in Manipur and Goa. Security is another concern. Security personnel according to the Prime Minister should not be distracted more than once. But are there enough personnel for simultaneous elections? To decide on an issue of such great import requires that the matter be carefully thought through. A sudden decision could be cataclysmic.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

PM: Fresh package for jobless, poor

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today promised to announce soon a fresh package of schemes to solve the twin problem of poverty and unemployment. Speaking at the plenary session of the Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) committee here, Mr Gandhi said the Centre planned to strengthen

panchayati raj institutions and a bill in this regard would be introduced in the next few months. The day-long session was attended by about 20,000 Congressmen from various parts of the state besides members of Parliament and Central Ministers.

Games Political Parties play: Meghalaya's election

By Phrangsngi Pyrtuh

Meghalaya is gearing up for the 2018 assembly elections. This election is like no other elections in the past. One among many reasons is the absence of a Congress led government in Delhi that is already affecting the Congress party with disgruntled members looking for greener pastures. With the Congress being a poor image of itself there are many claimants to the throne in 2018. Political parties are pulling out all stops to ensure their victory. This election will see a pre-poll alliance of two formidable regional parties (UDP and HSPDP) that is bound to have an impact on certain constituencies, a newbie party (PDF) that would bank heavily on the image of the present KHADC CEM and his troubled relationship with his parent party (the Congress); an aggressive BJP that is banking on the ruling leadership from Delhi and the Independents that do not care who wins.

Meghalaya politics has always been between the Congress Party versus the different regional parties. Going by the by-elections to the KHADC-JHADC held last year, it could well be the same story. New entrant PDF was not in the picture then so we have to wait and see how much impact the new regional party has on the upcoming election. The BJP suffered miserably during the by-elections with many candidates losing their deposits. So we have a prelude of what is in store for the upcoming election. The Congress is facing anti-incumbency but it faced the same during the 2013 elections when a few months earlier the state was caught up with the ILP issue. Many have written off the Congress at that point but the grand old party sprung a surprise. Credit should be given to the present Chief Minister who managed to steer the party through tough times and is on his way to become the third Chief Minister who completed his full term in politically unstable Meghalaya.

The formation of the UDP-HSPDP alliance

sounded the election bugle in Meghalaya. The combined vote share of these parties in certain constituencies should easily see them through and it is possible that the alliance takes the lead in government formation should there be a hung assembly. Had all regional parties come together and formed a grand alliance, the Congress and the BJP would be nowhere in the equation.

The PDF is harping on the anti-Congress rants of PN

bane of the BJP in the state. They have to contend with development agenda that brought Modi to power. However, the BJP in the state is facing problems of a different kind, a making of its own that has sabotaged its development agenda.

Demonetisation and GST is weakening the BJP's much hyped development agenda with indicators showing that Demonetisation brought

resigning from the party and more others threatening to resign if the ban continues. Thankfully the cattle slaughter ban was stayed by the Supreme Court. But even though the ban has been stopped by the court, the controversy is alive and kicking. And this has taken away the steam from the BJP in Meghalaya. Nagaland and Mizoram where beef is a staple food.

The BJP is facing an uphill task to ameliorate the situation. Recently it raked the coal mining issue, promising to lift the ban by the National Green Tribunal if elected to power. It is a politically motivated move with a view on the seats in Jaintia hills. But lifting the ban is not only feasible it is not possible, something that the gullible voters do not realize. The NGT will not budge unless a strong mining policy is in place. With the ban becoming a legal problem it is only the court that can settle the issue once and for all.

The BJP has also utilized the services of its MPs, Union Ministers et al to mobilize support. Another is to solicit the support of church elders/representatives with regular meetings and parleys. Is this not appeasement politics that the Supreme Court has clearly declared to be illegal in its January ruling? Personally I have problems with religious leaders meeting political parties for whatever reason. More importantly why are civil society and NGOs not asking questions on what transpires in these meetings? We also need to ask question to the church and religious leaders who partake in these meetings. Surely there is more to it than meets the eye.

The present situation in Meghalaya is not ripe for a single party to form a government on its own. We will likely see a coalition that may involve the Congress or the regional parties. Only time will tell who the electorate finally votes for.

"Political parties are pulling out all stops to ensure their victory. This election will see a pre-poll alliance of two formidable regional parties (UDP and HSPDP) that is bound to have an impact on certain constituencies, a newbie party (PDF) that would bank heavily on the image of the present KHADC CEM and his troubled relationship with his parent party (the Congress); an aggressive BJP that is banking on the ruling leadership from Delhi and the Independents that do not care who wins."

Syiem who is widely expected to assume leadership of the party. Syiem has a turbulent relationship not only with Dr Mukul Sangma but his parent party. It is difficult to see the PDF winning majority seats precisely because it is new and does not have a movement or a cadre based organization to create an impact like AAP does in Delhi.

The BJP is hoping to ride on the now waning Modi wave which performed decently during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in the state. But the party got a reality check during the by-elections to the district councils. Communal politics in Meghalaya will not work, as it did in other states with a substantial Hindu population, and that is the

down India's growth and will do so for some more time. The impact of GST is also likely to be unfavourable when new data comes up. The government's failure to tackle unemployment, job generation, black money, inflation etc has taken the sheen off its spectacular victory. Prime Minister Modi had to defend the economic slowdown just last week but the general reaction in the country is pointing to a change in the mood that may turn against the BJP if things are not fixed soon. A decline in the fortunes of the BJP in the country will impact the state unit.

The cattle slaughter ban in May had its repercussion with some prominent BJP members

Survival of the better

By Ananya S Guha

Coming to power by the ballot is one thing. The people of India always respects the verdict. But throwing yourself to destabilize state governments ruled by another party, central or regional is the height of intolerance. And that is what is happening in Kerala in the name of yatra. That this is of malicious intent is not far to see. We are now living in conditions, where might is right and anarchy is let loose anywhere in the name of religion, caste, politics or community. So Dalits cannot sport a

attempt to brow beat crystallize into more concerted protests? Or will all these be subsumed into a thunderous roar of history? Of course time will tell, as it always does but worrying are the actions which will continue to take place in its assault against secularism and egalitarian thought processes. Worrying also is what course education will take, as history is being slighted and feverishly rewritten.

So we have portents at many multi-layered levels: politics, history, society,

"The readings are clear. Mix religion with politics in such a manner that the fetish created affects the ordinary citizen. One group is empowered, if that is the word; the others feel ridiculously low and insecure. The clever ploy is to enter a political scene at any cost, debasing it in the process and muddle religion with politics. Forster was right: India is a muddle, but viciously so."

moustache and cows cannot be used for economic benefit or as cattle.

The readings are clear. Mix religion with politics in such a manner that the fetish created affects the ordinary citizen. One group is empowered, if that is the word; the others feel ridiculously low and insecure. The clever ploy is to enter a political scene at any cost, debasing it in the process and muddle religion with politics. Forster was right: India is a muddle, but viciously so. The targets? Minorities of any hue or shade, the open minded intellectuals, writers and of course the caste less. Hence muscle politics takes the shape of mauling the weak, the poor, the non-caste Hindu and of course the Muslims, the Christians etc. But assailing the state of Kerala has added a new dimension to the murky politics. Kerala is known as a Leftist bastion, where three religions live peacefully and co exist in destiny making and economic development of the state. Throwing the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh into the gauntlet has also nefarious designs. Isn't he the saffron clad politician symbolizing the self righteousness of the times, and its macabre ideology? The symbols of the cow, the mother and the saffron infused into politics, is a desperate attempt not only to silence secular forces, but also divide the country on clear religious lines. And Kerala is the first laboratory experiment. The excuse that the Chief Minister of the largest state has been chosen as impresario is a warning of brute and muscle power. This is the heart land of the country. The mainland marginal dichotomy is given absolute legitimacy in the politics of the times.

India now resembles a truncated country pleading for re unification. It's fragments have shored winds, and it's historical validity and moorings ruthlessly assailed. Then attack the liberated classes, social thinkers and writers, so that history of the country is rebuilt into new and golden eras.

Economic prosperity is kowtowed as reality. Many argue it is a myth, with the present growth rate, farmer suicides, inflation, GST and demonetization, a sudden impetuous decision. But these cannot be questioned. Loan waivers have turned out to be specious gimmicks according to an NDTV report.

The worry is what the future will tell us. Will the

religion and a loosely held culture. Perhaps the people of India who have in past absorbed so many historical tremors, will absorb these as well, but certainly not without resultant movements. The electorate in the next hustings can surely reveal a mass intelligence. But that will happen if political greed and money power are pushed out of the repertoire of unethical politics. It is not only power politics, which is the issue, but that of survival of not the fitter, but the better. The better has to be viewed rationally. If once again corrupt forces come to power with dynastic ambitions things might again flounder. The point is the present change also came about because of disgust with preceding powers. Just mouthing the splendid diversity of the country and then having corrupt people ruling will once again spell utter doom.

The spaces of liberty and free thinking must be complemented with clean administration. Can this happen? Right now if many feel this is an assault on democracy then we certainly have to look at democracy in its totality. Just free speech is not enough; this must be backed by objectivity in all spheres and support for the poor and the economically distressed. If there is a review of the GST we welcome it. The marginalized small businesses must suffer. The total lack of dispassion in the body politic is a point of serious worry with mud-slinging aided by twitter handles ruling the roost. Education is not given the attention it deserves. Substituting skills development for education disparately will not be a solution. Skills development should be geared towards the employable, unorganized sector and certification. If certification and prior knowledge are matched, linked with vocational institutes then there will be a semblance of learning and education. This will link education with training. Simply rewriting text books is not an educational policy. It must be matched with skills learning and vocational training from schools onward to higher levels of such training.

Survival of the 'better' will be in sum the quality of life, more employment and a little respite for the poor. This, backed by urgent call of democracy! Political killings, political desperation, mud-slinging are the hallmarks of retrogression.

TO THE EDITOR

Attempt to defame

Editor, Apropos the letter, "Whither smart classrooms?" (ST Oct 10, 2017), written by one Debashish Halder, we would like to bring to your notice that there is no student by the above name in our School, from classes Pre-nursery to Class XII. We would also like to inform you that the School does not take any fees for either Smart Classes or Computers. So we feel that the name of our prestigious institution has been unnecessarily tarnished.

Yous etc.,
Principal, Vice Principal,
& Staff,
B K Bajoria School,
Shillong.

Exodus of Congress heavyweights

Editor, As widely reported by your paper and other vernacular newspapers, I wish to express here that the exodus of politicians, especially the MLAs from one party to another is not new and in fact, it is a regular feature in Meghalaya and in the whole country. In fact, this is in tune with the most familiar political sayings, "Aya Ram, Gaya Ram" or "One going, ten coming." Just like natural fields even in politics there are greener and withered pastures.

But this time, the exodus

of many Congress leaders and MLA heavyweights from the Indian National Congress (I) to other parties, especially to the NPP is unprecedented. The public of Meghalaya already know who these individuals are. Now, this is compounded further by the announcements of some other sitting Congress heavyweights that they would not contest the forthcoming general elections to the State Assembly. All these do not go down very well with the electorate of Meghalaya. In fact, they are wondering what is going on in the Congress party. Is it not because this grand old party has lost the grip in the seat of power in New Delhi and in other states and also because of acts of omission and commission of Dr. Mukul Sangma and Mr D.D Lapang in Meghalaya? The fact of the matter is that there is nothing wrong with the Congress Party. In fact this party is widely accepted in Meghalaya. In fact, this is the only party that has got organisational sub-units in almost all villages, units in all polling booths, Block Committees in all Constituencies, District Committees in all Districts and the State Committee at the state level. In organisational matters, no party in Meghalaya can beat the Congress and it has a committed vote bank. But this time around the vote bank in several constituencies is broken with the exodus of many Congress leaders, especially the MLAs and their supporters. This will

definitely adversely affect its prospects in the up-coming L.A elections in the state. However, nobody should underestimate this party here.

Now the fact of the matter is that those parties which have admitted the Congress leaders and Congress MLA heavyweights are the beneficiaries, and in this, the NPP is the greatest beneficiary. This might lead to the NPP becoming the alternative to the Congress in 2018. That too depends very much on the quality and capacity of the NPP candidates both in Garo Hills and Khasi-Jaintia Hills.

However, we should not discount the UDP-HSPDP combination, the PDF and the Independents. Even BJP may re-open its account in the state. These are also the forces to be reckoned with. But the so called friendly match between the UDP and HSPDP may prove counter-productive, because, in many constituencies, instead of combining forces, they are moving in opposite directions because they have already developed bad blood in the past elections. In an election there is no friendly match. A match is a match. Though the experiment may work in few constituencies, yet it should have been better for them to go to the elections separately and combine together post elections. Definitely, the top leaders of both parties will regret the outcome of the 2018 elections.

In such a scenario, people of Meghalaya ought to be satisfied with yet another coalition

government and who knows, we might see a series of coalition governments in the next five years beginning from February-March, 2018, since none of the existing single parties are in a position to even get a simple majority, not to speak of an absolute majority.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2.

The Aviation Blues

Editor, The National Civil Aviation Policy is good for the country. Also the time has come for the government to give serious-thought to the country's aviation industry. Right now, the industry is in the grip of many big challenges that must be handled carefully. To start with, the performance of Air Traffic Control [ATC] in airports is not up to the mark. India should learn techniques from Dubai and Singapore whose ATC performance levels are over 55 flights per hour.

Second, the ever-increasing costs of airport infrastructure have led to increased cost of air travel. While privatisation is needed, the airports and air travel should be cost-effective and passenger-friendly. Third, it is shocking to note that India does not have even a single MRO [Maintenance, Repair And Overhaul] centre. Till date, our aircrafts go to Dubai for regular maintenance - which is unnecessarily costing the aviation industry dearly. With

the backing of its strong IT knowledge and industrial penetration, India has the potential to become a major hub for aircraft maintenance for airlines across the world.

The home truth is that many airports in smaller Indian cities and even metropolis are crying for attention. In the background of dismal state of airports, airlines will really find it difficult to attract passengers. So, the bail-out measures for aviation sector should start from the aspect of renovating and remodelling the airports in the country. In this regard, the government should have a clear blueprint of the existing airports. On the whole, new business models are the need of the hour in the aviation industry.

Yours etc.,
P. Senthil S Durai,
Mumbai

Hanging, sagging wires an eyesore

Editor, Electrical wires and cables, sagging, swaying and hanging from the poles, are a familiar sight in the city and a serious cause of concern for pedestrians. Recently, as a result of the gusty winds and heavy rains, trees were uprooted in many parts of the city especially the one in the premises of Raj Bhavan. It is observed that the cables around All

India Radio, MBOSE building, the site where the tree fell was strewn with broken cables which are an eyesore and may pose a danger to pedestrians. The BSNL main office is close by and I fail to understand as to why they are blind to such a mess. Who is to blame? I want to convey through this letter that the District Administration or Municipal Board should come forward and do something to regulate the hanging of cables by any party whether they be mobile phone companies or Cable TV providers across the city. There should be strict guidelines against hanging of cables or wires so that the city will be safer and also cleaner.

Further, strict guidelines should be given to hanging of banners or hoardings before and after use. It is seen that when these banners of different sizes are torn and lay hanging and swaying the parties involved do not bother to either remove or repair the same. I hope the administration will kindly look into this matter seriously and urgently to keep our beautiful city ever beautiful.

Yours etc.,
RN Rymbai,
Shillong -8

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.

A strong and secure man digests his experiences (deeds and misdeeds alike) just as he digests his meat, even when he has some bits to swallow.

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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Political churning and electoral messaging

PREPARATIONS for the state assembly polls scheduled for February-March 2018 have begun in right earnest in Meghalaya. There is a virtual exodus of political actors from their parent party the Indian National Congress to the National Peoples' Party (NPP) and other political groups. Only two regional parties, the UDP and the HSPDP have formed an alliance leaving out others like KHNAM and the newly formed PDF. It would have been in the larger interest of the electorate had the regional parties put their egos aside and aligned to serve the people. But as usual that is not to be. In fact this election presents a major opportunity for the regional parties to take the reins of governance from the Congress which is suffering a major anti-incumbency factor, after having been in the seat of power for seven years (2010-2017). But the very fact that the UDP and HSPDP will be having friendly fights in some constituencies exposes the fragile nature of the alliance. Both parties don't want to give up their political turfs and also the claim to chief ministership should they manage the magic figure of 31 seats. That of course is a dim possibility since the NPP is proving to be a major contender this time around with several Congress stalwarts joining its bandwagon. But if people are looking for change they are already disappointed. The NPP cannot bring change in governance with the same set of people that had dragged down the MUA-2 Government.

Congressmen who have deserted the evidently sinking ship have blamed the chief minister Mukul Sangma of leading a one-man army. But the question is why did they allow that? A cabinet is where crucial decisions are taken, questions are raised on the performance of the government and accountability is sought. There is space for that. If Mukul Sangma does not take kindly to criticism the ministers should have put in their dissenting notes instead of cribbing privately. That they did not do so exposes their own incompetence. It's pointless blaming the CM for all the wrongdoings from 2013-17, since he was not holding all portfolios such as PWD, PHE, Education, Health, Forest, C&RD etc., which are major departments. Those who held these departments for five years must answer to the public irrespective of whether they have joined the NPP, NCP or any other party. A new uniform does not necessarily absolve them of past sins.

Rejuvenation of Rivers Challenge to politics, faith

By Dr S Saraswathi

The Union Government has plans to clean all rivers in the country -- a task urgently required, but most difficult to accomplish. Expectations are high from new Minister for Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation Nitin Gadkari, who seems to be keen on taking up a challenging task. Adopting the Ganga Law and starting five river-linking projects that are in the pipeline are among his priorities.

Cleaning rivers is part of rejuvenation of rivers which has been going on all over the world in very small to long and deep rivers in all continents. Water scarcity and environmental degradation have drawn the attention of governments, NGOs, and general public to the urgency of restoring and cleaning water resources that nature has bestowed.

There are some popular leaders and voluntary organisations engaged in creating awareness and initiating popular schemes for restoring dwindling water resources in our country which are indeed our lifeline. One such group, The Art of Living, is reported to have taken up over 30 projects in which hundreds of volunteers are participating.

Launching a nationwide campaign for "Rally for Rivers", a social leader remarked that we have today 75 per cent less water per person than in 1947 and almost 25 per cent of India is turning into a desert. The common man facing acute water problem in all States is inclined to believe these figures and does not look for verification. It is feared that very soon, perennial waters will become seasonal.

Remember, a recent verdict pronounced by the Nainital Court in Uttarakhand granted to the Ganges and Yamuna the same legal rights as enjoyed by human beings with all corresponding rights, duties, and liabilities. How they can be enforced and who is the custodian of the right to protect them are, however, still vague.

This verdict is doubtless one of far-reaching significance in many respects in the context of the pathetic condition of many rivers including the holiest of the holy. It follows the example of Whanganui River in New Zealand, a river revered by indigenous Maori people as sacred, which has been declared as a living entity with full legal rights by the Government of New Zealand by a law passed in Parliament. The law blocks hydro-electric projects. Ecuador in South

America is the first country in the world to secure the rights of nature in 2008 in its Constitution called "Panchamama". In 2011, Bolivia enacted the Law of Mother Earth.

The situation in India definitely cannot correct itself by natural cycles since human activities are day by day adding to global warming and climate change which will only worsen conditions. Faith-related polluting activities and political rivalry in sharing water add ammunition to people's ignorance and pose a combined challenge to the very future of rivers.

Relevant in this

the US alone would have crossed 50 years and would require reconditioning.

On the contrary, Asian countries are busy constructing dams as the best solution to their water scarcity problem. India is no exception having built nearly 3200 major/medium dams and barrages since 2012. There are over 100 dams of various sizes in the Cauvery basin. It requires a combined analysis by experts from all disciplines to examine the safe limits of human intervention in nature's course.

Israel has earned unique reputation for

Rejuvenation of rivers in the country is understood by the common men as restoring the original vigour of rivers, that is, making them younger and removing or at least lessening impurities and their sources. In technical language of geomorphology, a river is said to be rejuvenated when it is eroding the landscape and lowering its base level. Base level of river water flow can change in two ways - uplift of land or lowering of the sea. Tectonic activities also result in land uplift.

connection is a silent movement against dam construction in some places. "It is time to give permanent protection to free flowing rivers", is the idea of activists leading a movement to decommission dams in the US. Dam removal in Elwha River in Washington, claimed as a big success, is the world's largest dam removal project. In 1992, dam removal was approved by a legislation and two dams on the river were dismantled by 2012 restoring the eco system.

Between 1990 and 2015, over 900 dams are reported to have been removed in the US. Every year 50 to 60 dam dismantling operations are being taken up primarily for restoring the natural eco system. This is indeed unbelievable in India where dam wars are common between States fighting for share of water.

France and Canada have also removed dams. Japan embarked on a similar project in the Arase Dam on the Kuma River in 2012. Over 5,000 large dams around the world were counted as over 50 years of age in 1996. By 2020, 85 per cent of dams in

innovative water management in which government, industry, and academia work closely together. It has a highly centralised system of water governance to manage the needs of different fields of activity. Under Israel's Water Law, "nature" is in the list of "legitimate recipients of fresh water allocation" along with agriculture, industry, and households. Standards are continuously improved in the quantum and quality of water.

India is several times bigger than Israel and has a federal system with strong State units keen on serving State interests. Its water problems are too big to make any meaningful comparison with Israel or transplanting its model of operation. Still, strategies to ensure coherence and coordination between varied interests may be learnt. Shifting the item "water" concerning aspects of storage and water power from the State to the Central List in the Constitution is no solution

given the way party politics and water politics are played in the country. Rejuvenation of rivers in the country is understood by the common men as restoring the original vigour of rivers, that is, making them younger and removing or at least lessening impurities and their sources. In technical language of geomorphology, a river is said to be rejuvenated when it is eroding the landscape and lowering its base level. Base level of river water flow can change in two ways - uplift of land or lowering of the sea. Tectonic activities also result in land uplift.

Deterioration in rivers is caused over several years by steady increase of human intervention in the name of custom, religion, and development, but rejuvenation is being planned as direct operation at the site of rivers.

Germany has played an enormous role in rejuvenating the Rhine River which passes through many countries and was once declared the dirtiest river. It provides the incentive for Clean Ganga project which seems to require the blessings of some divine power.

Dravyavati River Rejuvenation Project in Jaipur, is a pioneering attempt to restore a river from dry and arid landscape. It aims at cleaning the water, augmenting ground water as well as preventing flooding. It will improve aqua life and create better aesthetic surrounding. The project will also widen the channel.

Karnataka has adopted a water conservation plan tried in north-east Maharashtra known as "Shirpur Plan" which is hailed as a miracle cure for drought. It involves recharging wells using water from canals, building check dams on streams, and dredging rivers to increase their capacity to store water. But, its suitability for Karnataka cannot be taken for granted.

Uncoordinated local schemes for "protection" of rivers going on in the country can also yield good results provided political rivalry and bureaucratic pressure respond to the gravity of the situation and people's sentiments and greed are not allowed to destroy natural wealth.--INFA

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

World War III as Armageddon to satisfy national jingoism

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

Armageddon is the War to end all wars. In the post Second World War period we heard a lot about the preparation for such a war to end all wars. "If you want to end wars, then prepare for a War to end all wars," was the shout from both the Soviet Union and the United States. Suddenly a new balancing started in the global order. It is unexpectedly South Korea instead of North Korea that threatens the US with dire consequences if their sovereignty is further threatened. It may contain some truth as the US Senator Bob Corker has recently blasted a bomb by accusing American President Trump of pushing to the path of World War III. His support is now crucial for passing the Tax Reform bill and deciding the Iran Nuclear deal. In the present context of Korean threat to blast a nuclear bomb to punish America for its neo-imperialism, this rebuke from Corker is quite significant. Corker is very assertive in his choice of words "Trump's recklessness threatens World War III." This 'recklessness' he explains is a threat to other countries. It is an open secret that America is a bullying nation always on the alert to establish its own hegemony as a global don. Once Einstein was asked what he thought of the consequences of the World War III. The great scientist replied, "I don't know what will happen after the Third World War but certainly after the World War IV will be fought with bows and arrows."

Hence whatever threat America can pose for beginning World War III with nuclear weapons it will commit an unpardonable crime to unleash nuclear terror on mankind. After World War II there was a big slogan in favour of Armageddon, to begin the war to end all wars. But with so many nuclear powers all over the globe, the consequences can easily be conjectured. Some political observers feel that the next World War will likely happen in Asia and the two super powers America and China will be the principal contender for establishing their hegemony although China's military still lags far behind the US. China is still dependent on the US and its allies the EU and Japan. China is still vulnerable to naval blockade. Great dependence on foreign markets is a weakness for which US and its allies can threaten other countries which including China have not yet been able to shift from 'export-oriented model' to 'domestic sources of growth'. China will need open support from countries like Russia and India as a geopolitical block which may be including even Australia. India's rise as a new global power is still a headache for Beijing leaders and the recent Doklam stand-off has shown the bitterness in place of a cordial give and take situation. China repeatedly refers to Indian intervention in Tibet for justifying its offensive in the border and no man's land area. It still daydreams of Sikkim annexation. In spite of a collective defense pact among China Russia Pakistan the war to end all wars cannot be fought against America.

According to the Book of Revelation in the New Testament of the Bible Armageddon is the prophesied location of a gathering of armies for a battle during the end times and symbolically the end of the world. A threat to unleash 'fire and fury' in retaliation to threats by Pyongyang can have snowball effects leading to

an Armageddon. The Trump administration has already been seized with anxiety and terror following North Korea's successful testing of a long-range missile. US military warmongers are trembling in fear and running amok. Reckless and hysteric behaviours may reduce the US mainland to ashes at any moment and 60 Congress Members warned American President to stop giving bombastic threats. North Korea's aggressive rhetoric already sparked off much conjectures for a global apocalypse after Trump threatens the state with annihilation. Whatever may happen it will not be the war to end all wars, rather this US-Korean stand-off will spread like bonfire with new strategic blocks and allies. Not only Trump's America, the world itself will see 'a miserable end' a phrase Kim Jong-Un used after Trump's suggested war against North Korea.

Trump earlier threatened to launch rockets at US Pacific island Guam and moved fighter jets to the coast to counter the US bombers. Third World War is now a real and frightening possibility and one can only surmise at the ultimate consequences as this time it will be a global nuclear war.

The Cold War scenario is now out of our heads and with that the prospect of a Third World War until this US - North Korean conflict assumed a serious turn. In the Cold War era everyone imagined that the next world war would be fought between two superpowers - the Soviet Union and the United States-a war between the Capitalists and the Communists and many even hoping for a new millennium after the end of the Armageddon. Now the total scenario has changed with the Soviet Union disappearing and the bipolar realities having receded. The Cross-Crescent fight after the Al-Qaeda rise and operations is no longer a reality. After the Al Qaeda and Islamic States have spread their operations round the world, everyone thought of the Cross-Crescent War - the jihadis versus crusaders. It was not a fear of nuclear war that chased us that time. But now the situation is different. Threat of terrorism is now changed to bullying and hegemonic rhetoric between two unexpected adversaries. One hope is still there for Kim Jong said "Our Republic is a responsible nuclear state that will not use nuclear weapon first unless aggressive hostile forces use nuclear weapons to invade our sovereignty." National jingoism is no longer in its heyday. Neither North Korea nor America can take the world as their pawn for displaying their national jingoism and to satisfy the thirst of a modern Tamburlaine no one can use nuclear weapons as the first striker. No nation has the right to annihilate mankind from earth in the name of national sovereignty. Now many are thinking that nuclear weapons and long range missiles can be the only deterrent to US hegemony and intimidation, but at the same time it cannot be forgotten that such thoughts will only impoverish the nations and each dollar spent on the destructive nuclear weapons can be used more effectively for the welfare of mankind. It is better to make the world beautiful and vibrant than to make it a heap of dirty devastation.

(Ratan Bhattacharjee is Associate Professor & Head PG Eng of Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata a columnist and poet. He can be reached at profrajbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

TO THE EDITOR

More government colleges needed

Editor,
The Meghalaya government should start more colleges in order to make higher education easily accessible to the poor, in the light of the high cost of education in the self-financing colleges especially in rural areas of the state. Education in the private sector has become a business proposition, and therefore self-financing colleges charge high fees, which the students from poor families cannot afford. Private educational institutions will definitely charge higher fees. The government institutions alone can provide education to the poor at affordable cost. Therefore, Government should start a scheme of free higher education for the poor. Moreover it would be of

great advantage if it Government opens up colleges in every district of the state in order to provide easy access to higher education to the poor. Only then can we speak on inclusive education.

Yours etc.,
Phrangshai Hynniewta
Shillong-2

Positive response

Editor,
Your paper recently published a letter from this writer highlighting the lack of public courtesy by those attending visitors to the office of the Superintendent of Police. It is a welcome step that the police department through the SP Vivek Syiem acknowledged the weaknesses and asked for public feedback. This speaks well of the police department and the officer concerned for taking criticism in the right spirit and trying his best to improve the image of the

force. We look forward to see that more such officers are posted to carry out their duties to society.

Yours etc.
Dominic S Wankhar,
Via email

Dealing with difficult people

Editor,
The best possible strategy to avoid difficult people with complex personalities and mercurial temperament and negative attitudes is to humbly avoid or politely neglect them. A vast majority of such complex personalities are actually suffering from serious personal attention deficiency issues. They will always try to be aggressive, quarrelsome, rude and disrespectful towards others; and mostly misbehave with their unfortunate victims to establish their authority or just to drag their much

cherished mass attention. It is indeed extremely difficult and challenging to handle such individuals if they are in managerial or supervisory positions. It is this authoritarian socio-economic status that they mostly take advantage of to demonstrate their suppressed anger, frustrations, irritability to humiliate or insult their subordinates. Actually they are mentally ill and are in serious need of psychotherapy and proper medical attention. Based on my experiences I have found that if one bravely confronts such an individual directly and give him/her back in polite and courteous manner what they need to hear back from abused individuals, they backtrack and withdraw into their inner self and do not bother others. Of course one has to be careful that the situation does not go out of hand and turn more serious or complicated.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu,
Lethbridge, AB Canada

Guwahati the sports hub of NE India

Editor,
When little known Jalandhar turns hub for sports good, can the North East aspire to be the sports hub of India? It has started since the SAF games took place in Guwahati / Shillong in 2016. Guwahati has hosted various events from ISL to Elite Senior Boxing, FIFA U-17 and T20. The infrastructure has been built up and it achieved excellence by conducting global events. There are modern stadia for football, cricket, hockey and indoor games to claim its strong presence. Guwahati has hosted the IPL? India has formally put its bid for FIFA U-20. The World Youth Women's Boxing Championship in Guwahati in November is the qualifier for Youth

Olympics at Buenos Aires and Tokyo Olympics. The love for football in the North East is enormous where eight players represent India from Manipur in the Under-17. And the entire Jawaharlal Nehru stadium was occupied by one fourth of enthusiastic NE fans recently. The region lacks infrastructure not sports talent. Aizawl FC and Lajong FC have brought laurels to our region. Mizoram started promoting its center of excellence in sports curriculum. Now the International Olympics Committee has voted to add Karate in the 2020 Olympic. There is great potential in martial arts from the North Eastern region. Now Assam should take this opportunity to move forward to put Guwahati on the international sports map.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

“Learning is the beginning of wealth.
Learning is the beginning of health.
Learning is the beginning of spirituality.
Searching and learning is where the
miracle process all begins.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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SC on marital sex

FOLLOWING the Nirbhaya outrage in December 2012, a new look is being given to laws on sexual assault. Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code lays down that intercourse or sexual act by a man with his wife who is not below 15 years is not rape. The Supreme Court has now struck down a part of this clause of the Section. Sex with a minor wife now, according to it, is rape. A case can be filed against the husband in such a case. In 2013, the Criminal Law Amendment Act raised the age of consent from 16 to 18 years. But married girls between 15 and 18 have no legal protection against sex without their consent. The SC has now decided that there is an unnecessary distinction between a married and an unmarried girl in this context. The Court's recent decision is welcome. In August, the government held that such a ruling violated the concept of the institution of marriage in India and it impacted on children of such marriages. This was conceived in view of the country's socio-economic ambience. The right of the girl child to bodily integrity was ignored.

The Court has however made it clear that its ruling about sex with minor wives without their consent was confined to only those under 18 and did not apply to marital rape of women above 18 years of age. The Court focused only on girls of 15 to 18 years. The Delhi High Court has been hearing an appeal for 2 months for a ruling to criminalise marital rape. The government however stresses the sanctity of the institution of marriage. The SC ruling a few days ago upholds the idea of consent to some extent and stresses the wife's active role in the sexual act.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Arjun Singh's ouster

The resignation of the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mr. Arjun Singh at the Congress (I) high command's behest following the verdict of the state High Court on affairs of the Churhat lottery has not come too soon. The Churhat Children Welfare Society lottery scandal involving Mr. Arjun Singh's family is not a recent development; it has been going on for the last seven years and has been focused off and on in the print media. Had not leader ordered an inquiry by an independent high powered agency into the allegation, the scandal would not have taken the political turn it has done now and would have perhaps remained as dormant as it had in the last seven years. Although the High Court judgment reportedly

did not personally indict Mr. Singh on grounds of corruption, yet the way timing of his ouster did spring a surprise. The AICC(I) high command did not think it wise to wait till the outcome of a probe into the Churhat lottery affairs and thought it expedient to sacrifice Mr. Arjun Singh rather in an undue haste if only to brighten the image of the party which it thought necessary immediately after the party's poll debacle in Tamil Nadu. Mr. Arjun Singh was not new to the office. Last time he was the Chief Minister, the Bhopal gas leak tragedy struck the city. A court case then accused him with failure to deliver the goods in areas where there was need for prompt succor, especially the drought stricken district of Drug.

Election 2018: Fever or Fervour

By Patricia Mukhim

Each time we head for the state assembly elections there is a certain expectation that the next government will bring change. But what change? In which direction? And how will this change be wrought, is of course left to the imagination. Every person has his/her aspiration and idea of what that change should be. This is where a peoples' manifesto produced by scholars with a research background, essentially from academia, after consulting a cross section of the electorate should ideally be brought out for public discussion. That's the least that a university like NEHU should be doing. But NEHU is as detached as if it is located in Delhi or some outer space. In its 43 years of existence NEHU has not helped to advance our political and economic and social consciousness.

Granted that some seminal work on our traditional institutions was done by the Political Science Department but those are now dated the data needs refreshing. People, institutions and circumstances have changed, so the study is now passé.

What bothers me as an avid social media user who tracks conversations on different social media handles about the coming elections is that they lack depth and are at best raucous and at worse border on cretinism (full of pointless information that is senseless and appeal only to other cretins). This is troubling. You can count on your fingertips the number of sensible comments that aim at educating us because on social media you learn through engagement. In this scenario to expect a change in 2018 is to be a blind optimist. Social media is a sounding board where young people spill out their anger and frustration but it ends there. They don't look beyond the verbiage and don't know what to say next. The posts regurgitate around corruption and how everything has failed.

It was Theodore Roosevelt who said, "A vote is like a rifle: its usefulness depends upon the character of the user." So what is what is the character of the voters in Meghalaya? Are they really committed to voting candidates who can serve without turning politics into a lucrative business? I am reminded of Larken Rose who said, "Politics is the art of using euphemisms, lies,

emotionalism and fear-mongering to dupe average people into accepting--or even demanding--their own enslavement." I believe this is where we are at. There was a time we voted for those who injected fear through communal riots and said they would save us from exploitation by non-tribals. That was the late 70's and early 80's. After that we got wise and realised that the non-tribal was not the enemy. But some continued to sound that same bugle so the regressive Inner Line Permit (ILP) was trumped up as an instrument to save us from ourselves. Again elections were won based on that slogan. Now we are wiser still but we still aren't sure what issues to vote for.

The challenges before us today are legion and these have been repeatedly listed by this writer. But on Thursday when I walked down the MES Road (Umkaliar) down to Messrs Kohli and Alphons on a one on one debate. But look at his cabinet. Is it inspiring? Are his ministers as well-informed or well read about issues? Well, we know better. There are coal dealers and contractors and businessmen all engaged in creating wealth for their families. None of them are interested in governance. I wonder if they even understand the nuts and bolts of governance. They are elected because they paid the voters. That's it.

Dr Mukul Sangma is accused of driving the government lorry alone. Whose fault is this? Why are the ministers unable to challenge him on governance issues? Why do they crib outside the cabinet? And now when the Congress Party is down and out they are abandoning the sinking ship and need only an excuse to do so.

Dr Sangma's flagship programme - the Meghalaya Integrated Basin Development Programme will be dropped like a hot potato the moment another political dispensation comes. There have been problems in the execution of this programme. It is meant to bring convergence between departments because at the grass-roots that is what how things actually work. People need water, health, roads, livelihood all in a package. They find it difficult to deal

with too many departments. They need a single window agency but departments want to operate in silos and they are the biggest enemies of this Programme. It's true that the Basin Programme also spent a tidy sum in importing all manner of consultants whose credibility is questionable and whose contributions have not been evaluated. What are the outcomes of those numerous visits of experts in entrepreneurship? How many entrepreneurs has the Basin project created? Is there a figure we can go by and confirm?

The CM is too busy to drive the Basin Project. In fact, he has been lagging behind in the Medical College projects too. And the biggest grouse against him today is (a) that he allowed the roads of Meghalaya to deteriorate to the point of no-return (b) that he has no plan to restructure the MeECL which is likely to sink under its own weight (c) that he has not been able to come up with a coherent policy for Education and Health. Now it's high time to capitalise the MeECL and privatise it. This capitalisation will also inform the people of Meghalaya the net worth of the assets that MeECL holds in today's market price.

To those who believe that the Congress is still strong because it has units down to the lowest denominator, I wish to remind that people of Meghalaya don't vote for a party; they vote individuals. And there are people who don't vote for money. In the last election people voted Jemino Mawthoh who actually had no money to buy votes, which his rival had. The Congress is as strong or as weak as the candidates it chooses.

Elections mean more than just voting 60 people, some of whom will form the government. There are deliverables that need to be met by all 60 MLAs. How was the MLA scheme of Rs 10 crore spent? Can any MLA give a report card? Why are MLAs spending over 70% of the Rs 10 crore in buying CGI sheets? Is there another CGI sheet scam in the offing? We need to dig deeper into this!

behind. Only the three passengers in the back seat can understand the inconvenience when every taxi driver tries to push four people instead. Sometimes the driver pushes two passengers in the front seat.

People have to bear the inconvenience and embarrassment while travelling by Shillong city taxis to reach their work places etc. It is time to provide minimum dignity to taxi commuters.

Yours etc.,
P.K. Lakiang
Shillong-3

Pedestrians at receiving end

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily I wish to draw the attention of the S.P (Traffic) East Khasi Hills to a grievous problem that is faced by the pedestrians who are using the road that leads from the BSNL Quarters (Oakland) to the Polo market. One has to come to this road at

Law makers & the demands of society

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Sociologists like Auguste Comte believed that human societies evolve in a unilinear way- that is in one line of development. According to them social change meant progress towards something better. They saw change as positive and beneficial and to them the evolutionary process implied that societies would necessarily reach new and higher levels of civilization. L.H Morgan believed that there are three basic stages in the process such as savagery, barbarism and civilization. This process of evolution further created an organized structure in the form of a nation state which is governed by the rule of law and not by the command of a ruler or monarch. And the meaningful 'rule of law' implied that the level of accountability rises in the society. This means that the sense of ownership to the principles agreed and enacted are expedited consciously in letter and spirit without being forcefully enforced or demanded. But for the purpose of maintaining and sustaining this smooth flow, a systematic mechanism of administration evolved to further delegate responsibilities for tangibility. But such a situation has not yet developed in our Indian society and for this reasons offences of various types and degrees continue to flourish despite the active involvement of enforcement agencies.

Societies are also established through dialectical process whereby people or groups of people after a set of discourses and dialogues after careful examination of every angle enter into an agreement to reorganize themselves for a better future. A unified Germany is a perfect example in this case and we hope that North and South Korea will one day follow suit. Revolution or uprisings are other means that some societies have adopted in order to achieve their goal and determination. In all these cases there is without doubt a clear blueprint in the mind of the people that serves as a roadmap for their journey to the future. Based on this clear roadmap, lawmakers emerged and are elected from among the people especially those with the capabilities to steer the mechanism that translate these strategies into physical reality. In this manner societies are then managed by people who can maintain the momentum and level of progress in the path of civilization without disruptions. And for this reason perhaps the wealthy province of Spain, Catalonia, with per capita income of more than \$30,000 feels that they are better off alone than with the rest of Spain. But in our Indian societies the situation is just the opposite. Lawmakers are those people from influential backgrounds either financially or from established families who are excellent in making promises sans a clear roadmap.

Various states in our country are created out of numerous agenda and issues. Some are carved out just by political decision from the top to fit the number game of politics. But when there is a genuine demand from the people such as Gorkhaland, the same people in authority are silent. The demand for a separate Khasi-Jaintia & Garo land orchestrated by few people drew insignificant support in both the communities. Going back to the days where Meghalaya was created, the process seems to be simple and bloodless but those who engineered the movement perhaps were purely guided by the idea

that self-determination and governance is mere detachment from legislative system of the plain regions. But as for the process of governance, most of the laws and procedures are inherited from the erstwhile state of Assam. The idea of self determination towards a better future was overshadowed by the frequent conflict of governance coupled with the fractured public opinion whose mentality is strictly confined to certain sectional areas of their perception. A mass movement in a professional manner to drive the state forward is absent. As a result of which, self-made saviours of the society or 'jaidbynriew' emerged here and there that further created confusion and complication. A society needs to be intellectually guided and not on the assumption that traditions is preminent.

A clear roadmap for the future is the need of the hour but the level of our lawmakers is so pathetic that this idea is dwindling away from both political and public domain. Societies in general are not stagnant but are transformed under various types of influence. Therefore, lawmakers are also watchmen who can identify areas that may have severe impact on the dynamics of the commonwealth of a society. In a country like India, the presence of illiterate lawmakers in the democratic process has only benefited those in power in order to consolidate their numerical strength to fulfill their whimsical objectives. A self-reliant society on the contrary is characterized by multitudes of opportunities where people can generate income and create wealth that will further enrich the nation's revenue. But as of now most of the income generating sources are being dried up or stopped. So how we tackle this problem requires a strong political will and determination.

The attributes of post-civilization are marked by rapid and robust technological invention and development to the extent that it has triggered many social changes and adaptation to the society at large. The dynamics of law making process should also conform to this fast changing scenario. Lest we forget, this robust technological advancement is also a threat to society and civilization and this threat is both normative and conspiratorial in nature. Here also lies the doctrine of sagacity and discernment. In the normative dimension, societies are deeply under constant affliction due to territorial or ideological conflicts which prompt many nations to aspire and pursue nuclear warheads. The effrontery industrial expansion has further created ecological imbalances and environmental changes detrimental to the society. On the conspiratorial aspect, terrorism, cybercrimes and encroachment on individual privacy constitutes to be the major challenges and danger to the society and civilization. Understanding these challenges we should also weight the caliber of lawmakers we intend to elect by keeping in mind the betterment of the whole society and not only a part of it.

In a small state like Meghalaya the reason for having an elected government with sixty lawmakers or legislators is meaningless if the situation of the state remains the same as it was twenty years ago and the condition of the people does not improve.

TO THE EDITOR

Where drivers break all the rules!

Editor,

It is a matter of great sadness and humiliation that a respectable headman should be manhandled by a driver and conductor of a government bus. Mr Bruce Sawkmie is a senior citizen who retired as an officer of the MIDC office. Many city drivers of Shillong are rash and haughty. They seem to own the road and vehicle. The money they collect is more theirs rather than that of the government's or private employers'. Months ago I commuted in a shared taxi to Nongrim Hills (shared taxis in Shillong are not according to definition of the Motor Vehicle Act). A lady with two girls disembarked at Bethany hospital leaving me the sole commuter. The driver politely asked me to get down, for to most taxi drivers of Shillong the taxi is not a public service vehicle except at the time of availing a P.S.V

D/L. Since I was in a hurry I offered to pay him Rs 20 instead of the usual Rs 10 but to no avail. I got off with the intention of filling a complaint to DTO Shillong, simultaneously marking the registration no of the taxi. To the driver money is more important than public service.

Over a year ago, as advertised by MUDA I bought a tiny booklet of tickets of Rs 100. I could use about three-fourths of the tickets, much to the chagrin of the conductors. It was obvious that I was the only passenger to offer a pre-paid ticket depriving them of hot cash. I could not continue for long. Next time, before getting down at Fire Brigade Point, my ticket was refused by both the conductor and the driver. I destroyed the ticket, did not pay money and stepped out wisely, for I could face a similar situation like Mr. Bruce.

Now, the real and legal operators are the motor owners and permit holders. The drivers and conductors are paid workers. The

government can talk about their decent wages but they are not supposed to withhold even a rupee from their masters. On the other hand the vehicle owner cannot wash his hands off by saying that the vehicle was driven by the driver and therefore he is not responsible for anything that happens, for without his permission or knowledge the driver cannot touch the vehicle. While government authority may punish drivers and conductors, the owner is responsible for what the driver does according to law. Sometimes this is difficult but it cannot be avoided. The government authority had earlier outsourced the management of government buses to MTC. But experience alone may not suffice. Honesty and sincerity of conductors etc at the ground level is even more important.

Recently, I noticed a very young man on the driver's seat of a government bus. By his looks he is about 20 years old. According to the rules the boy is not entitled

to drive a heavy vehicle, more so a public service vehicle. There are some formalities such as age, steps to go through like First Aid knowledge etc., but sad to say that the State has not been able to produce its own rules even after 28 years since the MV Act, 1988 was passed. Uniforms are generally not welcome by the lower class office workers or drivers who sometimes manipulate to extract monetary benefits even from uniforms. There was a short lived tradition in which drivers and conductors were taught by the DTO once in a while on how to behave with ladies, seniors citizens and tourists. Many conductors don't come ready with change but try to pocket a Rs 10 coin on the plea that he has no change.

The DTO Shillong had since 2014 told the media that a Maruti 800 taxi can carry only five persons in all including the driver; i.e. according to the registration and manufacture of the vehicle; i. e. two persons in the front seat including the driver and three passengers

Yours etc.,
Shyamali Deb,
Shillong-1

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.

“Against boredom the gods themselves fight in vain.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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Pak softens

IT has long been suspected that Pakistan uses terror groups as proxies to further state objectives. Islamabad helped secure the release of an American-Canadian couple from terrorist custody in order to please Washington. That proves Pakistan's tie-up with terrorists. It also shows how Pakistan is bending under President Donald Trump's pressure. The couple had been held hostage by the Haqani Network since 2012. The US has described the Haqqanis as the fighting arm of the Pakistani ISI. The couple had given birth to three children during their captivity. It is generally felt that the couple has been released days after Washington turned the heat on Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khwaja Asif during his US visit. The Trump Administration had warned that it would take punitive action against Pakistan for its continued sponsorship of terror. The steps under consideration included cutting of aid and resumption of Drone strikes if it came to the crunch. Pakistan's softening began when Asif returned to Islamabad and was ready for a joint creation with the US to destroy the Haqqani network. US General Mike Mullen had once described the network as a fighting front of the ISI. Pakistan's capitulation has come when its economy is on the verge of collapse. A devaluation is imminent. Exports have declined and trade deficit is on the rise. Bringing in foreign money and institutional support are urgently required. The US seems happy with Pakistan's response. The time is opportune for India to use greater diplomacy with Islamabad and get closer to Washington.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Why TISCO busy limestone from Japan and not Meghalaya

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr P.A. Sangma has disclosed that the Tata Iron Steel Company (TISCO) prefers to import limestone from Japan rather than Meghalaya because the cost of transporting from Meghalaya is prohibitive. Addressing a public meeting in Myllem on Wednesday, he said the cost of transporting limestone from Japan is less than that prevalent in these Hills, and that is why both Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) and TISCO shy away from buying from Meghalaya.

Meghalaya could easily meet the demand of 60,000 tonnes per month, if cheap transport was available to enable Meghalayan Limestone to have a competitive overall price he said.

Warning that opportunities for government jobs were dwindling rapidly as "saturation point" has been reached, he said that the only way to ensure that the younger people in Meghalaya lead a life of dignity and self respect is to develop other avenues for employment.

EAC Vision Blurred, Dampens Diwali

By Shivaji Sarkar

Notwithstanding Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (EAC) making moves to revive the economy, there are other departments that possibly are working at cross purposes.

The focus of the new policy has to be the rural self-reliant economy. It would create jobs, reduce dependence on government, doles, reactivate the economy, and generate demand. It also needs to emphasise that ban on selling of fire crackers at the nick of time, Diwali, hurts the economy of millions. This imprudent decision should be reversed. It leads to back-door sales and makes the policemen and inspectorate happy. Such utopian ideas can never be implemented to dampen the festive spirit.

Not much should be read into the higher tax collections. It is largely the impact of the implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations and some stray pay hikes in the corporate. Overall direct tax gains now at Rs 3.86 lakh crore, said to be 16 per cent higher, is not that a large amount. It was Rs 4.06 lakh crore last year but also had Rs 79, 600 crore refunds between April and September 2016.

The annual refunds are over Rs 1 lakh crore. The EAC has not included direct tax abolition in its ten-point action plan. It includes economic growth, employment and job creations, informal sector and integration, fiscal policy, public expenditure, institutions of economic governance, agriculture and animal husbandry, patterns of consumption and social sector.

During his monthly pragati meeting in September 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the CBDT that taxpayer complaints (tax terror) had gone up. Income tax hardly raises kitty for the government. It increases tax administration cost and rent seeking. To reduce corruption, its abolition should be a priority. The biggest bane of income tax is sharp reduction in purchasing capacity. It suppresses demand all over. Somehow despite rise in prices, there is a tendency to

ignore it as statistics show otherwise and the EAC must take serious note of it. Some of the inflation is fueled by decisions of different government departments. These include rail fares, fuel charges, metro fares, highway and other tolls, parking charges, surreptitious raise in phone tariffs, continuous rise in bank and compliance charges. These all are inflationary.

The aadhar link has an additional cost on compliance costs at all levels, including expanding the aadhar backbone and access costs. Linking aadhar to office attendance serves little purpose but adding to the government expenditure and burdening the aadhar network. The EAC has to advise the government to

The annual refunds are over Rs 1 lakh crore. The EAC has not included direct tax abolition in its ten-point action plan. It includes economic growth, employment and job creations, informal sector and integration, fiscal policy, public expenditure, institutions of economic governance, agriculture and animal husbandry, patterns of consumption and social sector.

trust people and futility of surveillance of every individual. It is against the concept of security.

It has missed an important aspect. It has decided to look at government expenditure but it has not taken any view on public transport policy and needs to keep its fares low. In Delhi, number of buses, as per government report, is coming down every two months though riders are increasing. Sharp metro fare hikes have reduced one lakh metro riders, soon after the June hike and more after the October 10 hike. They are shifting to rickety DTC bus services and those who can afford are commuting by private cars choking vehicles. The solution is not in sharp parking charge hikes. That helps the mafia and adds to inflation.

It was expected that the EAC would try to remap the economy and change its

framework. Rural industries, khadi and the farm sector have to re-integrate to create self-sufficient villages.

The EAC has to chalk out how MNREGA and direct benefit transfer funds could be utilised to have self-sufficient villages that would not be dependent on the government or the corporate sector. Pricing of farm products is another key issue. The revival of the rural economy is a must. Not so long ago, urban workers were looking to the village homes for their financial support. It has changed of late. The trend has to be reversed. The villages must not be begging.

Unless the focus changes to farm and rural sector, the policy planners always would be in dilemma. It needs a detailed discussion and new

focus. Agriculture and animal husbandry remains its third last priority. It has to change. Further, EAC chief Bibek Debroy was candid on many issues including whether jobs can rise or not during his press briefing. This only hints at the critical situation. Job creations take time and linked to gradual improvements. The EAC has not yet considered how to make the farm sector the base of the economy. Jobs cannot be created by reducing most of the 75 crore farm jobs. Of course, changing tack needs time.

Debroy distrusts job figures and is right to an extent. It is found that from July 2014 to December 2016, in the eight major sectors - manufacturing, trade, construction, education, health, information technology, transport, and accommodation and restaurant - only 6.41 lakh jobs were created against 12.8 lakh jobs from July to December 2013. The Prime Minister's Employment Generation programme (PMEGP) created 24.4 per cent less jobs in new micro enterprises and small projects, from 428,000 in 2012-13 to 323,362 in 2015-16.

The Economic Survey (2016-17) indicates that casualisation of jobs has adversely affected wages, employment stability and social security of the workers. The new schemes have not added to entrepreneurship much. The task is onerous. The EAC has to focus on a new economic vision and set fresh standards. --- INFA

not easy. Various lobbies that have enormously grown at the exploitation and ignorance of the rural sector would not like this. These lobbies are demanding stimulus once again, even as the post-2008 stimulus has ruined the banking sector. Now that is being sought to be compensated with farm-loan waivers. None of these is practical. On the one hand, industry stimulus robs the banks and on the other farm-loan waivers rob the exchequer. There are benefits for political parties but real farmers get little.

The EAC has been wise enough in rejecting stimulus. It, however, has yet to come out with a detailed roadmap. One problem is that it wants to do too much to keep too many happy. Attending to ten different aspects would never be possible. It should seriously consider not keeping its hands full. In fact, it need not ignore industry as also the informal sector - closely linked to the rural and semi-urban economy - but all the same has to find out the moorings of Indian economy in villages.

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Can health care be made affordable?

Vested interests keep reforms at bay

By Dr Arun Mitra & Dr G S Grewal

The shocking stories of infants dying in hospitals in our country even after 70 years of Independence should ideally have shaken the 'collective conscience' of the society. These deaths are reflective of the pathetic state of affairs of healthcare in the country. The tragedy is that we have been quite tolerant and have accepted it to be a fate accomplished. Worse is that, instead of debating the ways to improve the state of affairs, those responsible for such state of affairs are busy in a blame game.

According to the

any reform in the healthcare system. Unfortunately those who are supposed to bring in reforms to make health care accessible to all do not feel the pinch of the problem that exists today. The polity and the bureaucracy get all the benefits from the government but in practice support private investment in health care instead.

It is a double whammy for the poor and the common man. While on the one hand the hospital charges are unaffordable, the expenses on drugs are equally cruel. In the absence of a proper

Good health is directly related to the right to life. When the state fails to provide good healthcare to its people, it indirectly violates their right to life. And it is not something very difficult to provide to the people. There is a huge physical infrastructure available across the country from the primary to tertiary level. Every year tens of thousands of crores are allocated and spent on healthcare by the government. But it does not reach the right people. If the money is properly and judiciously spent and if responsibility is fixed, it will not be difficult to provide affordable healthcare to people.

National Health Policy 2017 of the government, as many as 6 crore people in India slip down 'below the poverty line' after spending and exhausting all their resources on treatment. Nearly 40 percent of hospitalised patients borrow money for treatment and get entangled in that for very long periods. About 25 percent of them have to sell their property to meet the expenses on treatment. It may not be an exaggeration to say that quality healthcare and treatment are a luxury in India today.

Barring a few reputed institutions, like the AIIMS or PGI Chandigarh, the healthcare system has virtually collapsed. Even primary healthcare has gone beyond the reach of the common man. Not that there are not any hospitals and primary health centres available at the accessible distances: this is only because these are not run and managed properly. Most of these health centres remain without doctors. The doctors are either not posted or they prefer private practice to their official duties.

With the emergence of the (in)famous corporate hospitals across the country, a wrong perception about the availability of better healthcare has been built up. It is anybody's guess as to how many people can afford treatment in such hospitals. In fact, it is the crass commercialisation resorted to by such hospitals that have led to the decline in healthcare across the country. The culture of cuts and commissions has percolated right to the bottom that even the basic healthcare comes at an exorbitant price.

The problem lies at the decision-making level and policy level. It is basically the vested interests and the conflict of interest of those who matter that do not allow

drug pricing policy, the prices of drugs are inhumanly exorbitant. For example, a medicine that one should be able to get for Rs 10 is available in the market for not less than Rs 100; in certain cases many times more. Disease is a compulsion. Nobody falls ill of one's own volition. Even when the person knows that he is being cheated, he has no option to but to pay through the nose. But not everybody is lucky to be able to pay.

Good health is directly related to the right to life. When the state fails to provide good healthcare to its people, it indirectly violates their right to life. And it is not something very difficult to provide to the people. There is a huge physical infrastructure available across the country from the primary to tertiary level. Every year tens of thousands of crores are allocated and spent on healthcare by the government. But it does not reach the right people. If the money is properly and judiciously spent and if responsibility is fixed, it will not be difficult to provide affordable healthcare to people. How is it that a government-run civil hospital in a district headquarters with massive infrastructure and adequate funds stands no comparison to a privately-run hospital with far less infrastructure? We need to learn the lessons. (IPA Service)

Dr Arun Mitra - Senior vice President Indian Doctors for Peace and Development, Former Chairman Ethical Committee Punjab Medical Council & Member core committee ADEH (Alliance of Doctors on Ethical Healthcare)

Dr G S Grewal - Former President of Punjab Medical Council & Member core committee ADEH (Alliance of Doctors on Ethical Healthcare)

TO THE EDITOR

Will the Church leaders of Tura clarify?

Editor,

Apropos the news report in The Shillong Times (ST Oct 12, 2017) about church leaders of Tura meeting the BJP leaders and gladly posing for photographs which was published in the front page, first of all, let me make it clear that I do not care which political party comes to power. I am not a supporter of any political party. Any government that delivers is fine. The church leaders of Tura (not all) meeting the political leaders and that too, when elections are round the corner, does not appear to be a good idea. The church is an NGO and the leaders are supposed to be apolitical. Religion should not be mixed with politics. There is no harm, rather it would be very good if church leaders meet the political parties/leaders for discussion on issues affecting the community/people and try to find solutions to problems for the good of the public. But the timing of the meeting is questionable. Why now? Why not later or even earlier? As is the normal practice, when elections are round the corner each political party will try to woo the public, including the church leaders. Can the

church leaders disclose what is the agenda discussed in the said meeting?

Any member of the church or its leaders, are free to meet any political party or parties or political leader/s in his or her personal capacity any time he or she desires. However, meeting the political leaders at this juncture, when elections are near at hand, definitely raises eyebrows. To clear the air will the church leaders of Tura please make the deliberations of the meeting public? It would have been a good idea if the church leaders invite, like they do in Mizoram and elsewhere, all political parties to a common platform for a debate on issues affecting the people and to explain their election manifesto, etc. for resolving those issues and to put forward their action plans for the development of the state.

Yours etc.,
FR Marak,
Shillong- 14

Why contest from two constituencies?

Editor,

Rumours are doing the rounds in some vernacular media and on social media that our Chief Minister will contest from two constituencies in the upcoming assembly elections. If this is true, Dr Sangma will not be the first

politician to do so and I'm pretty sure he will not be the last. Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Narendra Modi and the list goes on have done so in the past. The Representation of Peoples' Act 1951 allows a candidate to contest from two constituencies simultaneously but the person has to vacate one seat should he win from both the seats, thereby triggering an unnecessary by-election. Hence this provision is illogical in the first place. Interestingly in most elections a prime ministerial or chief ministerial candidate would often this tactic for two reasons. First, as a safety measure. Second, as a political game plan. I reckon our Chief Minister will do it for the first reason if he really contests from two seats. In fact politicians and political parties simply misuse this provision though it serves no useful purpose. They thereby abuse the electoral system of this country. At the end of the day it benefits only politicians and political parties and not the general public but the whole exercise is at the expense of the public exchequer.

A friend jokingly remarked that Mukul Sangma should cough up from his pocket to conduct the by-election if the need arises. I jokingly replied that

monetary penalty would not be a problem for the larger than life politicians of ours. After all, politicians are the blessed and the pampered lot of this country. Apart from monetary expenses, it is a total waste of time for the voters and the Election Commission, though for some voters it might be a bonus, a tamasha and parties and extra paid holiday. Though the Election Commission in 2004 proposed to amend this provision but the then UPA Government declined the proposal which is not surprising. Any reforms will have to be executed by the elected representatives but it is highly unlikely that they will act against their own interests. It is disheartening to see political heavyweights misusing this provision instead of being a statesman and following the principle of, "One man, One post, One constituency".

Yours etc
Manuel Carey Lymba
Shillong -8

Bandhs, hartals & public inconvenience

Editor,

Finally Gauhati High Court has barred any kind of activity at the southern bank of Dighalipukhuri. The Court made it clear that a peaceful rally is different from a law

and order situation. Are those protesters unmindful of public woes? The directive came on a PIL that complained of blocking of traffic and paralysing normal life. Also various students' organisations, general public and trade unions are continuously holding strikes and dharnas during peak hours of the day. The bench issued notices to the Government to find an alternate place within a period of three months. As an interim measure, District Administration is asked to ensure ease of traffic in the wake of the present situation.

In a democracy citizens enjoy the right to protest or go on strike without disrupting public order. Workers' Unions go on strike to negotiate better working conditions but they don't bring life to a halt. Bandhs and hartals were powerful instruments of expressing popular discontent when Gandhi fought against colonial rule. Those protests were non-violent in nature. Nowadays bandhs lead to the shutting down of social and economic activities. It succeeds because people fear for their safety. Even essential services are not spared during bandhs. The methods used by protesters such as chakka-bandhs, gheraos and road/

train blockades are destructive.

A bench comprising Chief Justice JS Khehar rejected the plea to declare 'hartals' unconstitutional in April 2017 whereas the High Court of Kerala in 1987 declared bandhs organized by political parties as unconstitutional. Ironically we have political parties calling hartals instead of bandhs while holding office. Be it a bandh or hartal, it means total paralysis of normal life and industrial activities. The state loses several unscheduled man days and there is loss to the public exchequer. A penalty was imposed on Shiv Sena and BJP for holding a bandh in Mumbai in 2004 to show dissent after a series of bomb blasts rocked the city. Should Election Commission derecognise political parties which indulge in unconstitutional forms of protest? It is time for the Supreme Court to take a hard look at such disruptive tactics in the name of democracy.

Yours etc
Kamal Baruah,
Guwahati

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.

Think green this festival of lights

People are moving away from usual Diwali gifts repeated year after year and taking to new ideas, like organic products, finds Maiyankini Bose

Diwali, the season of lights, sweets and of course, gifts for the loved ones. Why not be innovative this year? Shunning the usual suspects, you can choose from an emerging field of 'green' products. For their utility value as well as their eco-friendliness, these products are a hit with conservationists and the socially conscious.

Gift a plant: Reduce your carbon footprint and help someone breathe easy by gifting planters or organic plant pots to decorate their homes and terrace gardens. This gift idea is both creative and environment friendly. Noida based Nurturing Green, an online plant seller, offers a plethora of options to choose from. Foliage plants, braided money plants, stress-buster plants, zodiac plants, bonsai, cut-leaf bamboo and many more are available for sale in textured ceramic pots, jute or glass. Check out <http://www.nurturinggreen.in/>

Go organic: Breaking the norm from conventional gift items, biodegradable organic products are creating a buzz amongst millennials. The organic items help keep the environment clean and have zero toxicity.

Bangalore-based brand, 'Bare Necessities' by Sahar Mansoor, a Zero Waste Living enthusiast, has innovative gifting ideas in the form of personal and home care items packaged in recyclable or biodegradable products with labels designed by botanical illustrator, Nirupa Rao. Deliberately keeping it bare, they make earth friendly handcrafted soaps, makeup remover, spa bars, bath salts, lip balm, face wash etc with 100% organic and natural raw materials minus any filters. These are even available in the form of goodie gift baskets.

Bare Necessities has collaborated with 'Style Salad' to launch Housewarming or Welcome Home Gift Box consisting of Citronella surface cleaners, kokum and honey hand and foot cream, table runners, luxury tropical Green Tea and Dot metal bowls lending that personal touch to turn a house into a cosy home. There is also a Mom and Baby Gift Box consisting baby safe laundry detergent, crochet baby booties, organic cotton bib, soft toy and much more. You can also say 'No to plastic' by gifting your loved ones their Bare stainless steel re-usable straw to sip your favourite drink.

Another organic label offering perfect



gift options for Diwali is from Gurgaon based retailer 'Soul Tree'. Made from forest grown natural ingredients and colours from plant extracts, they offer ethically produced bath and beauty products available in individual packs or gift combos.

Organic gluten-free bakery gift hampers: Like any other festival, Diwali celebration is incomplete without sweets and desserts. This Diwali you can satiate all your sweet cravings, that too guilt-free. 'Taantraa', an organic hand bakery in Indiranagar, Bangalore uses almond flour, multigrain and jaggery to concoct a tempting range of cakes that are vegan and gluten-free.

A royal three-tiered Sugar-free Symphony cake with innovative layers of lemon-ginger cake, moong dal cake and raw cashew lemon cake is a perfect Diwali gift hamper for your friends and family. Their 'no maida' multi-grain sugar-free cakes come in a range of natural toppings like organic sauce with almonds, Rum dipped Fruit & Nut topping, edible Rose topping, fresh fruit toppings and many others.

The special additions for this year Diwali are their vegan baked Cheese cake, Almond Blondies, Lite Granola cake, Orange Almond cake, Almond flour Choco Walnut cake, Hazelnut butter cake, Choco Peanut butter cake. Special Diwali Goodie baskets with mix and match nuts, cookies, truffles and cakes are also on offer. Taantraa also offers

special deliveries for parties or festive celebrations during Diwali at your home or office with its personal touch of cupcake décor.

If you are not in Bangalore place your orders online on www.taantraa.in or mail at Taantraa.cakes@gmail.com

Dress earthy: Stylish yet eco-friendly



clothing is a responsible gift idea this Diwali. There are brands like Ethic Attic of Bengaluru, Vadodara's Bhusattva, Jodhpur's Medhya, Kolkata's Promostyl Fashion, Mumbai's Women Weave making stunning designs using organic cotton, linen, hemp, flax, silk, banana fibre or organic fibre blends and using organic natural colour extracts of turmeric, pomegranate, beet root instead of artificial dyes. The earthy tones of the comfortable cool natural fabrics make them all the more attractive.

Novelty items: With the organic trend catching up fast, novelty gifts items have got a new look and feel. Be it diyas, candles, oil diffusers or home décor this category is still extremely popular. This Diwali, gift your loved ones an eco-friendly alternative to electric lights in form of traditional clay lamps readily available on amazon.in. These lamps come in a lot of colourful shapes, sizes and are stylish. Other innovative environment friendly options are floral diya, flour diya, floating candles, paper lanterns, paper cup lamps, egg carton lamps, sea shell lights, recycled lanterns

and candle holders, fruity candles and many more. Ahmedabad-based, CraftsShopsIndia offers Indian handicrafts and home décor items on its online marketplace. The variety is huge and supplies pan-India.

Traditional gifts: Nagpur-based Fashion & Lifestyle store, Bird Cage, offers chic and quirky products that are niche and fashionable. Founded by duo Aditi Rai and Vidhi Wadhvani, this boutique store promotes upcoming talents showcasing interesting gift items and fashion goods.

You can also buy from exclusive retail chain of Delhi based, 'Happily Unmarried' offering quirky novelty products. They have store presence in all the major cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Pune, Mumbai and Raipur, Ahmedabad, Surat, Chennai, Lucknow, Pondicherry and Guwahati. You can also place your orders on their website from anywhere in India.

For men's tee shirt with fun quotes explore the online store SheepStop supplying through pan-India. Not just tees they also have a huge range of merchandise ranging from mugs, fun bumper stickers, badges, clocks, frames to shot glasses, wall décor. Kiosks at Seasons mall, Pune, also display their product line.

Happy shopping, Happy Diwali! (TWF)



Bangalore-based brand, 'Bare Necessities' by Sahar Mansoor, a Zero Waste Living enthusiast, has innovative gifting ideas in the form of personal and home care items

'We should celebrate variability in classroom'

Every year Meghalaya celebrates World Disabilities Day on December 3 along with the rest of the country and the world. Promises are made and pledges are taken and forgotten at the same pace. The society too remains reluctant to change its mindset about physical disabilities. It is a vicious cycle that persons with disabilities are caught in and many, especially those coming from the economically weaker stratum, have little hope for dignity.

Carmo Noronha, Executive Director at Bethany Society, is opposed to the government tagging Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as 'divyang' and 'special'. He says it is time that "our society celebrates variability". In an interview with The Shillong Times, Noronha, who is in the government panel that was recently reconstituted to implement 4 percent job reservation, says there should be a focus on inclusive education that can empower PWDs. Excerpts:

Recently, the govt has reconstituted the panel for jobs to provide 4 percent reservation to PWD. But the PWD Act was formulated long back. How far has the jobs quota been implemented? Are they considered for groups A and B jobs?

Jobs is a sensitive issue. When we talk about quota then we should remember that there are other forms of reservations in government jobs and it becomes difficult for the government to accommodate all the 15-16 categories (for quota) and maintain a balance.

However, another issue is that though there is reservation for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), there are only a few who have the required qualification to get the jobs. This is because these people are often neglected and those in villages do not get enough education.

Nonetheless, it is a fact that disability is not a priority here and the government lacks the will to improve the existing situation. The PWD Act was formed in 1995 and only now they are taking up the issue because there is a proactive commissioner at the helm.

For Group A and Group B jobs, the posts are so less that people often get to the level through promotion.



TALKING POINT

How sensitive do you think the state government is, compared to the rest of the country, towards the needs of persons with disabilities?

In terms of sensitivity, the government has become quite open about the issue in the last 8 to 10 years. For instance, if a family in a village has a person with disability, then he or she is eligible for a job card under MGNREGA and can get employment in any project under the national scheme. Also, SSA schools take in children with disabilities.

How far Government implemented ramps in offices and facilities for crossing the roads to ease the difficulties of the disabled in the context of world white cane day on October 14?

Last year we did access audit in 26 buildings in the city and the report is with the Government of India.

With time, how inclusive has the society become? How is the awareness level?

The awareness level has definitely increased. But if the government, both in the state and at the Centre, continues to segregate them by calling them special ordivyang (divine) then how can we expect inclusiveness. I always urge people to use the term Persons with Disabilities as per the international convention.

There have been cases of sexual assault of physically & mentally challenged women and children in the city and in rural areas. How can this problem be tackled?

This only mirrors the degradation in our society.

There are several such cases, some are reported and many, especially cases in rural areas, go unreported. There are laws but their implementation is sluggish. Cases of sexual harassment of PWDs should be expedited through fast track courts.

Do you think the government should set up more institutes/schools for the disabled as suggested by Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Bandu Athawale during his recent visit?

I am aware that the minister suggested more special schools. I am sorry, but I beg to differ. Please be sensitive about variability in classroom. I do not believe in the concept of special school. Why do you need one? Why can't the government open up mainstream schools to the persons with disabilities? Now the schools might say they do not have the proper infrastructure and equipment to take care of special children. I would say why not train a few teachers and include these students in the classroom.

Special schools are under the Social Welfare Department but shouldn't they be under the Education Department? The government has to strengthen the existing education system so much so that there remains no segregation.

What is your idea about inclusive education? Whether there should be separate schools for the students with various disabilities or they should study in normal schools?

As I said, we have to start accepting variability. I call any disability impairment. Add to that barriers and it becomes disability. To lesser the extent of disability we should try to remove the barriers as much as possible. Only then inclusiveness will be a successful.

Do you feel that the parents or the relatives of the children with disabilities should be caring and compassionate in dealing with them? Have you come across any instances of ill treatment of the disabled by the parents, guardians and colleagues?

The level of awareness among urban families has increased but as a community the mindset needs to change. In families where there are children with disabilities, they are neglected more than physically tortured. Their education also takes a backseat. That is the reason why the focus should be on inclusiveness.

Alternate option

By Bertina Lyngdoh



Passing or failing the examinations while applying for job opportunities is not a question that I am raising here. But what I am mentioning here is that if Persons with Disabilities have put so

much efforts in completing their studies, why is that we are finding it difficult to apply for the different posts that are available for us, especially when we have to apply online.

Yes, everybody may agree to the point that applying for jobs and scholarships online is the easiest way, but I and on behalf of Persons with Disabilities, especially the visually impaired, do not agree to this.

The reason is that we always have to depend on others for there is no screen reader software accessible in the cyber cafes. I am telling this for I and many of my friends had experienced and missed out most of these opportunities that came our way. I missed my chance to apply for PhD in universities outside the state and this is a great loss for me. It only adds to the struggle that my friends and I have to go through.

We are not blaming the persons who are in charge of cyber cafes. They do help us on several occasions. But when there are many customers, they tend to forget us.

So if the government thinks that applications for jobs and scholarships still need to be online then it should strongly take the initiatives to make cyber cafes accessible, and if not then think of some other possible ways which will be accessible to Persons with Disabilities.

(The author teaches English at Jyoti Sroat, Bethany Society, and is visually impaired)

Salvaging past to know the present

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the common subjects for students of Arts is History. Humanity's progress is also based on the past. When we want to progress and move ahead, it is also important for us to know about our past like civilisations and about people and their activities in the past.

History is the study of the past as it is described in written documents. Events occurring before written records are considered prehistory. It is an umbrella term that relates to past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organisation, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events.

Scholars who write about history are called historians. History can also refer to the academic discipline which uses a narrative to examine and analyse a sequence of past events, and objectively determine the patterns of cause and effect that determine them.

Students learn about history from schools. In higher studies it is part of Arts or Humanities and there are different levels like graduation and post graduation. Specialisation after history might be archaeology, conservationists, museologist, archivist, etc.

Archaeology is the study of human activity in the past, primarily through the recovery and analysis of the material culture and environmental data that has been left behind by past human population, which includes artifacts, architecture, biofacts, cultural landscapes, etc.

The word archaeology is derived from two Greek words — 'archaios' which means ancient things and 'logos' which means theory of science.

Archaeology was first put to use by the Romans in the 18th century but it was given more accuracy by Heinrich Schliemann who brought to light the origins of Greek civilisation.

Archaeology can be one of the rewarding and challenging career opportunities for those who are keen to know about the past. It can give awareness about the heritage and tradition of a country or a culture.

It is the scientific and systematic study of past and human cultures through the recovery, analysis and documentation of material remains and environmental data, like archi-

ture, artifacts, features, landscapes and biofacts.

Archaeology is a multidisciplinary science which draws help from geography, history, anthropology, chemistry, geology, art and literature. Those who are involved in the studies of archaeological discoveries are called archaeologists. There are courses related to same and aspirant may opt for it.

Numismatics, epigraphy, archives and museology are the important branches of Archaeology. One needs to spend time to become successful as it needs patience, training and time for research and learning.

Courses related to the subjects include Advance Diploma in Archaeology and Museology, B.A Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, M.A. Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, MA Archaeology, etc. Aspirants may join government services or join teaching. There are different opportunities to be in research and other fields.

ASI: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organisation for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation. Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime concern of the ASI.

Besides it regulate all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. It also regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972. For the maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance the entire country is divided into 24 Circles.

The organisation has a large work force of trained archaeologists, conservators, epigraphist, architects and scientists for conducting archaeological research projects through its Circles, Museums, Excavation Branches, Prehistory Branch, Epigraphy Branches, Science Branch, Horticulture Branch, Building Survey Project, Temple Survey Projects and Underwater Archaeology Wing.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 98640 55558 for any career related queries)



Saif connects with Roshan

Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan's new film *Chef*, an adaptation of an American film with the same title, released last Friday. The actor (Roshan Kalra) spoke about the film, his acting career and other issues during the promotional activities. TWF-IBNS correspondent Souvik Ghosh tracks him.

What was the most challenging thing in this film as an actor or a person?

Honestly, there are some roles that are challenging because one has to become somebody which he is not. Likewise, the character in *Omkara* was challenging for me because I couldn't have improvised one word and had to learn a language. I do not think *Chef* was challenging to me. It was challenging to be disciplined in the kitchen and learn how to chop and not cut fingers off. But the basic language that the character speaks is a very urban space that I am familiar with it so a kind of I played myself in that space so actually didn't find it particularly much challenging, apart from the basic works of learning lines and turning up.

How much did you learn to cook food in the film?

Yes, quite a lot. I had to go through a preparation for a month. Raja (Raja Krishna Menon, director of *Chef*) wanted me to be comfortable in the kitchen with all aspects. The main thing I learnt was the chopping and cooking spaghetti and pasta. I really enjoyed cooking and now I cook at home. It was very therapeutic and relaxing thing to do. So I am looking forward to cooking even more.

You had the release of *Rangoon* and now *Chef* in 2017. Which one is closer to you?

It is hard to say. *Rangoon* was very dramatic film when I read the script. *Chef*'s character is obviously similar to what I am. I think its like my show really in that sense. They (filmmakers) are counting on me to perform whereas in *Rangoon* I played a part for Vishal (director Vishal Bhardwaj) and I really enjoyed it and had a great fun....I always thought *Rangoon* and *Chef* are the kinds of new beginning of an era in movies also.

As an actor, you have been calling yourself a 'late bloomer' these days. Tell more about it.

I think in every department. I am just an actor. Generally some people have been quite sorted from very young age



Saif Ali Khan after the interview and (below) a scene from the film *Chef*



like my father (Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi), for example. I think for me, I understand the things a little slowly but 40 is a magical kind of an age or 40s is the time when everything comes to my head together. I have been thinking about acting more and also the style of film making and performing has changed and it has become much more international. Now direc-

tors are asking the actor to go subtle in the film. So when we watch international staff, we can try and learn from them. May be it is not about late bloomer but the right time to think about things like craft.

Are you anxious about daughter Sara who has already started to shoot her first film?

I am very happy for Sara. She has done really well so far and also finished her college and now living her dream and got a lovely job. She is being clear headed, knows with whom to work and loves to read scripts. So, she knows what she is doing. I wish her all the best and support. I am anxious for her because the world is sometimes tough. (IBNS-TWF)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 15, 2017

Moan sextile Mercury on your solar return chart denotes a good year. The coming year can be a successful year full of major achievements, crucial decisions and changes for you. Great things are possible with so much transformative energy aimed your way. Your home life, domestic environment, your home town, your country, and your home planet Earth rarely get this much celestial attention. Make great progress on any or all of these home fronts as soon as you can. It's also a great year to successfully conclude a long, difficult project or to make that big change that takes you to a better place... geographically, mentally, and/or emotionally.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your efforts and confidence and courage bring success in the form of monetary gains and your energy increases for work projects and your job environment is lively. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful through devotion and considerable efforts on your part. You may find your children at an age that requires more attention and discipline. You have more energy at your disposal to express yourself creatively, through activities with children, romantic hobbies, or sports. Short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly now.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This phase brings love and harmony in professional and personal relations. You have the chance to shine, largely because you project yourself with self-respect and modesty. You are especially appealing and charming in personal and family relations. Your children may need more discipline than they previously did. You may enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress. You might invest time in traveling and visiting friends and relatives. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved. Health will take a turn for the better.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This period offers a natural curiosity, facility with words, and the ability to multi-task successfully. You are especially good at mediating conflicts. Smoothing over differences and using your diplomacy skills figures now. Your mind is always active with new ideas for an increase of income. This is a very self-assertive time when you have lots of energy, but not necessarily self-discipline to match. You are inspired creatively and emotionally. You want others to take notice, and you are more sensitive to the appreciation of people. Personal projects are on the rise. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This is favorable period for hobbies, sports and competitive exams. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships. You are bold in your love, yet not aggressive either. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, fashion and writing. Your communication style tends to be sharper, more direct and to the point. You may work hard at making yourself feel more secure, and you may be called upon to take charge on the home and family front. You may have more energy to invest in homemaking, house repairs, re-decorating, or family activities. In fact, if you are feeling very restless, moody, or defensive, it would be a good idea to do any of these things.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The present planetary configuration increases confidence in personal relations; courage and efforts at work place. It is a great time to do something entirely new and pioneering. Discussions and ideas about finances and material security figure strongly. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs. Although you like the good things in life and may spend quite a bit on clothes, furniture, and entertainment, your innate sense of security will not permit you to go overboard to the point of extravagance. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

This is a period that brings love and understanding in personal and professional relations. Friends and loved ones take priority. People at work might be surprised by your ability to assert your-

self and your needs. You do not find yourself lacking in opportunities to socialize. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness and solidarity in friendship, or with groups of like-minded individuals. You are more peace loving than usual and slightly detached on a personal level and feelings towards religion are enhanced this week. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't waste your energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Success, responsibility and maturity are the keywords. You have a great deal of energy for new money making projects, or for stepping up existing ones. Matters of the heart touch you deeply. You may willingly play a supportive role to the family and offer compassion and selfless love. This is a rather happy, goal-oriented time on the professional front. This is a time to follow your dreams and ideas, and to plant a seed in the form of a wish for the future. You possess extra charm in your professional life. Strong opportunities for love and fun occur. More opportunities to socialize and network could present themselves now.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This phase is good for money, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. Your love life is more attractive and charming. Public relations work, promotion, and other such endeavors are favored now. You give attention on fitness and health related programs.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Diplomacy, correctness in manner, finesse, and charm will be a big plus in aiding financial gains, especially in areas requiring public interaction. You feel attracted to intelligent people with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others and you do so in a natural and warm manner. More contact with authority figures is likely. Recognition is likely to come your way whether you ask for it or not, and the responsibility that comes right along with it. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are at your most visible during this time. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This is an excellent time to create a budget or financial plan, or to rid yourself of old habits that undermine your sense of personal power and self-mastery. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or brand new subjects. Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy. If single, you are more willing than normal to enter into a committed relationship. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You receive pleasure from anything that expands your horizons, both physically and mentally.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

All that is deeply personal comes into focus now. Conflicts with a partner over values or personal possessions are more likely to occur. Circumstances are such that your diplomacy skills are required. Your self-mastery skills matter more than usual. This is the time when you are most desirous of change on a deep level. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. On a more practical level, you may be dealing with joint finances and shared resources now more than usual. Social life takes priority in your life. Social interactions of a personal, one-on-one kind are emphasized.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You would be generous, emotional, and sympathetic with people around you. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, with a loved one. You have good team spirit right now, and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. It's important to include others rather than to go solo for the time being. However, bending too much to the will of another is not advised either. You take more pride in the work you do and in your health routines.

How to avoid bad dates

Author: "You missed my book launch." Me: "Yeah, I know, sorry, I died, wasn't resuscitated until afterwards."

This columnist has never been good at excuses. So I was interested to hear from a reader named Gayatri that sensible people review their calendars regularly and prepare escape plans.

Her top tips for slipping away: Do not pretend to get a phone call — it's much harder to carry off than you think. Also, do not try to escape from an unwanted date by pretending you are "just going to the toilet". Your date may watch the toilet door, and rest rooms rarely have windows big enough to climb out of.

Instead, text a pre-arranged key word to a friend who will ring you with a fake emergency such as: "Come home quickly, your brother cut his head off and you have to hold it while surgeons sew it back on."

There are even apps (such as 'Bad Date Rescue') that you discreetly click to receive a pre-recorded "you are needed" message.

An alternative escape strategy is to say something that makes your date nervous enough to want to end the evening. 1) I'm not contagious any more, hopefully. 2) The voices in my head told me you are the Chosen One. 3) My 30 cats are going to love you. 4) "So. What shall we call our kids?"

Escape plans were on my mind after readers sent me a huge flood of recent news items (two) involving people making ill-planned attempts at disappearing.

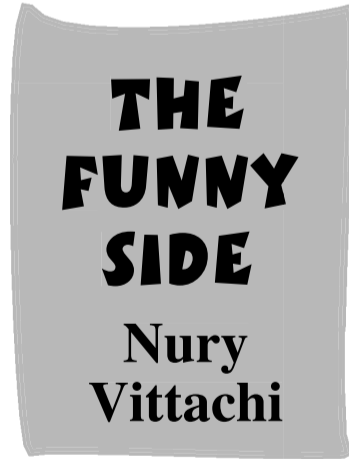
The first was about a suspected car thief on the run from police in Saskatchewan on September 27. He tried to escape by climbing a tall tree. Trees are never good escape

The second report was from China Daily in the first week of October. A man tried to escape his hotel bill by slipping out of his guestroom window. The hotel was a skyscraper, so he ended up dangling from telephone wires over the centre of the road, 19 stories in the air, bringing that part of the Chinese city of Guizhou to a standstill. Thanks to the wonders of the Internet, it is possible that a significant part of the world's population watched his "discreet" escape.

These are worthy additions to this columnist's "most ill-considered escapes" file, although they don't replace the current top story in that cabinet, which is a 1990s report about a thief in Japan who tried to escape from pursuers by sprinting into the main hall of a police training school. "Nice of him to give the trainees some hands-on practice," the chief instructor said.

Gayatri also had a failed escape story of her own. "I abandoned a nerdy group of friends to go to a party which turned out to be even duller. Worst of all, the first group ended up launching a really cool start-up." Then she had to go. Her phone rang. Or was it an app?

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



routes, as the likelihood of finding alternative exit routes up there are pretty low. He stayed there for several hours, news services reported, but came down when a neighbour offered him a taco.



TALES OF A JOURNEY: Participants of a floral expedition to the Tale Valley pose for a photograph. The expedition ended on October 8. There were 16 members in the team. Tale Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. DFO Koj Rinya said the main objective of the expedition was not only to update the floral inventory of the Sanctuary but also to facilitate information exchange between various stakeholders for promotion of ecotourism.

"Reason" is the cause of our falsification of the evidence of the senses. In so far as the senses show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie."

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2017

Not simultaneous polls

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi had said that calls for the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies should be held simultaneously. The Election Commission (EC) backed the suggestion. But EC has promptly deviated from it. It has announced poll dates for Himachal Pradesh but not for Gujarat. Elections in the two states are usually held simultaneously. EC has stated that it does not want Gujarat to have a long period under the model code of conduct because the state government needs more time for flood relief. The opposition parties however argue that EC has given the ruling BJP in Gujarat more time to offer sops to the electorate. It is hoped that the EC did not do it for that reason. Voting in Himachal will be on November 9. The Congress is in the saddle in that state. But Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh is not in a comfortable position. He is under a cloud about a disproportionate assets case. Besides, the law and order situation in the state has gone downhill. In fighting between Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh and Himachal Congress President Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu has affected the party's electoral prospects adversely. There is also the past experience of the state alternating between the Congress and the BJP in successive terms.

The BJP in Gujarat is not going smoothly either. There is factional fight weakening the party's prospects at the hustings. The party may not declare a candidate for chief ministership and leave it to Modi to be the decisive factor. This strategy paid rich dividends in Uttar Pradesh. However, outside the Hindi belt, Modi's charisma appears to be dimming.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Prime Minister says Integration council to be convened to tackle communalism

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today announced in the Lok Sabha that the national integration council would be convened shortly to discuss ways of tackling the menace of communalism. Intervening in a special debate on the communal situation in the country, Mr Gandhi said he had asked Home Minister Mr Buta Singh to call a meeting of leaders of the various political parties on the subject. A suggestion in this regard had been made earlier during the debate by CPI member Mr Indrajit Gupta, which the Prime Minister

accepted. Mr Gandhi said the meeting of opposition parties and Government leaders would precede the National Integration Council meeting. Declaring that as government our first duty is to protect secularism, Mr Gandhi appealed to all secular-minded people to join hands with the Government in this national endeavour. Mr Gandhi hit out at certain political parties which became tools of fundamentalism masquerading as religion. They were also those who incited passions posing as protectors of faith.

TO THE EDITOR

Whither professionalism

Editor,
Jawed Habib is one of the leading Hair Salon chains in the world and in Shillong too, people go to the Jawed Habib salon with a belief that they will be provided good service. I had gone to the Jawed Habib salon in Anderson Arcade (Laitumkhrah) on Saturday with my wife because she wanted to get her hair dyed. We had to wait for a while and when her turn came, I did not expect that I would return shell-shocked. We had told the person there that my wife wanted to dye her hair to 'golden' and that a short trim has to be done. The barber did things in a hurry and messed up my wife's hair such that she had to accept a boy-cut. And instead of the golden dye, the person applied the Burgundy colour. It was a bitter experience. When questioned, the barber said that the makeover was looking good on my wife. I had to pay Rs 850 for something which was not wanted. This was not expected of a respectable

brand. I request the franchisees to groom their staff well to suit the customer's needs. I hope that this letter will prevent another such incident. I hope that what has happened with my wife does not happen with anyone else. I also request for some level of action on this matter.

Yours etc.,
Gerry Shira,
Via email

PHE supplying muddy water!

Editor,
In a modern state, the supply of clean and potable drinking water is a basic necessity. In Meghalaya, the government has spent tons of taxpayers' money to put in place a Greater Shillong Water Supply scheme. But the quality of water being supplied to consumers is unfit for consumption. In the last few days, the locality of Lumdiengsoh, Motinagar has been receiving absolutely filthy and muddy water. I am sure the other areas would fare no better. The question which arises is whether there is some kind of filtration system before the water is pumped to

consumers and secondly, what kind of mechanism exists to monitor the water being supplied? Do we have any accountability in our state?

Yours etc.,
Sanjeeb Kakoty,
Shillong -14

A disgraceful incident

Editor,
The newly built cricket stadium at Barsapara, Guwahati? hosted its first ever international match recently. It was a highly successful match from administrative standpoint, not to mention the world class facilities in the stadium that were appreciated by players, media alike and had given enormous hopes to the people here? of more such matches in the future. But everything that starts well doesn't always end well. A freak incident of some fan pelting stone at Australia's team bus not only took all the sheen out of the well organised match but also catapulted Assam in general and Guwahati in particular to the Hall of Shame. It's really sad that the entire city's

image went for a toss due to the action of one unsporting fan. The failure of the authorities to nab the real culprit exposes the connivance of the general public, when they should have rather handed over the offender to the police themselves for bringing the city's name into disrepute. Unlike what most of the people in this country think, patriotism is not just about cheering for India when they play a cricket match with Pakistan or chest-thumping when the army undertakes a surgical strike or troll a certain Maria Sharapova when she says she doesn't know who Sachin is. It also includes true love and honest feelings for fellow country men and work passionately for the country's progress, development and well being. A conscious effort to not let any action of yours bring ignominy to your motherland forms the basis of this quality. But sadly, many of us do not possess these qualities and through our actions bring about infamy, either knowingly or unknowingly. The prospect for this magnificent stadium being awarded a few IPL matches in the next season which

looked pretty bright, has suddenly taken a nose-dive all because of the misdeed of one individual, not to mention the International matches that BCCI will definitely think twice before allotting one in the future. We stay in a part of the country which many of the Indians living in other parts are still ignorant about. And such unforgivable behaviour will only abet our journey back to oblivion. Hopefully, the authorities will apprehend the perpetrator soon and inflict exemplary punishment that dissuades people from indulging in such misadventures in the future. Sincere and deepest apologies to Team Australia for this ugly episode; they played supremely well that day to outclass India in all departments. Hopefully, they'll understand that one unruly fan doesn't represent the cricketing fraternity of North-East India and come back to play here again.

Yours etc.,
Subhasish Das,
Via email

On Child Marriage

Editor,
Apropos your editorial, "SC on marital sex" (ST, Oct 13, 2017), the Supreme Court of India's landmark verdict to stop the practice of child marriage is welcome. According to the recent report by Save the Children, 23.3 girls per 1000 in India have to give birth between the age of 15 and 19 years. These child brides are always at a greater risk of experiencing dangerous complications in pregnancy and child birth. So, to complement the SC order, substantial educational scholarships must be provided for unmarried and poor girl children up to the age of 21 years to make child marriage totally a less attractive option in both of its negative (punishment) and positive (rewards) outcomes.

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.

The Battle for Lucky Seven is over

By HH Mohrmen

two Justine Dkhar and Robinus Syngkon the last time we heard was that they plan to join the BJP.

There is no denying the fact that Meghalaya remains the Congress' last bastion and a preliminary survey of the strength of the parties at least in Jaintia hills only indicates that 3-Raliang is still a comfortable seat for the Congress. Dr Roytre Laloo will face a challenge of retaining 2-Jowai because Madonbai Rymbai one of the MDCs is shifting allegiance and will not support him anymore which means that he will now lose Khliechrychi which used to be his strong hold.

It is also a fact that for more than three decades Jowai was represented by the two parties only and the Congress and the UDP can prevent the NPP from winning this prestigious seat only if the two brothers in-

when his candidate lost to Lamdibok Sumer of the Congress in the by-election to the War East MDC constituency which he himself had vacated. The Congress already has another MDC in the area Honlando Lamin who represents War Central and the very recent development is that even Het Pohthmi, Stephen's strongman and War West MDC who is also from the same Padu village with Stephenson has recently joined the Congress. The recent development indicates that in the battle for 7-Amlare constituency it is advantage Lakhmen Rymbui but only if he contests on a Congress ticket.

Considering the developments in the two districts it is safe to say that the Congress is a

The news which did not receive the publicity it deserves is the decision of Roshan Wajri not to contest the coming elections and give up her political career. The news should have been in the limelight for the very reason that politicians never retire but they just fade away. Very few politicians will decide to call it a day because they stop only when they lose the elections or die in harness like P.A. Sangma and Hoping Stone Lyngdoh.

law can get off their ego ride, forget the past and let bygones be bygones and come up with an arrangement to win Jowai. The truth is no power can defeat them in Jowai if only they can come into an understanding.

Another constituency which can be a comfortable seat for the Congress is 5-Sutnga-Saipung which is currently represented by Hopeful Bamon but the party can win the seat only on one condition and that is if Vincent Pala gives his all out support to Shitlang Pale the Congress candidate. Congress candidate Jopthiaw Lyngdoh is also lottishly giving the sitting Congress MLA defector and NPP candidate Sniawbhalang Dhar a run for his money.

The recent development in 7-Amlare constituency is also interesting and the first vote of no confidence against the incumbent MLA, Stephenson Mukhim was

strong contender in at least five constituencies in both the districts in Jaintia hills. The Congress is here to stay at least till 2018 and only the uninitiated writer will try to write-off the Congress at least in the ensuing election.

The news which did not receive the publicity it deserves is the decision of Roshan Wajri not to contest the coming elections and give up her political career. The news should have been in the limelight for the very reason that politicians never retire but they just fade away. Very few politicians will decide to call it a day because they stop only when they lose the elections or die in harness like P.A. Sangma and Hoping Stone Lyngdoh. It is for the first time in the history of the state that an incumbent legislator who still has a strong chance to win the

next election has decided to retire. The lady deserves to be honoured because she is the only politician in recent times who decided to retire gracefully.

Hopefully other senior legislators like D.D. Lapang, Dr R.C. Laloo and Rowell Lyngdoh will also follow her example and retire while they are still making good tidings and while the people still have fond memories of their contribution to the community. Like clever sportspersons the politicians should stop behaving like drowning people clinging to straws, but should instead hang their boots at the right time. Politicians should stop making it a tradition to continue doing politics as long as they live and make dying with their boots on an honour.

The other development which could be detrimental to the NPP is the fact that it will be the party which has the maximum numbers of millionaires in their list of candidates in the ensuing election. And NPP will be perceived by the voters as the party of the contractors, the businessmen and the big fish.

In conclusion all along the NPP and the BJP tried to outdo each other in their effort to attract the seven MLAs as they had claimed, but it was the NPP which won the game albeit it is one short of the lucky number seven. Of course having four Congress defectors and two independent MLAs on its side is good enough but the truth is that lucky seven still evades the party. The battle for lucky seven is over but the war has just begun. The NDA allies have already made claims and counter claims for what little achievement that the alliance had been able to introduce in the state.

The truth is that this is all drama where the partners are engaging to woo voters. The BJP will be the NPP's natural ally and the Deputy Chief Minister from Manipur has already stated that in Manipur the BJP was leading the government. Their hope is that the NPP will lead the alliance in Meghalaya supported by the BJP. The only catch here is that parties can make tall claims, but it is the voters who will decide.

India seeks closer ties with Bangladesh

By Barun Das Gupta

Last week, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was in Dhaka on a three-day visit to sign a \$4.5 billion letter of credit to Bangladesh. The decision in this regard was announced last April during Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Delhi visit. India's aid package to Bangladesh has increased steadily. This is the third LoC India has signed with Bangladesh. The first one was for \$862 million, while the second one was for \$2 billion. The latest deal is more than double the size of the second. Indian assistance has been primarily for the development of Bangladesh's infrastructure sector.

India's increasing economic and military cooperation with Bangladesh has to be seen in the larger context of India's determined bid to counter China's growing influence in the countries of South Asia and increase its own footprint. The shadow of Beijing looms large over every neighbour of India, whether it is Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal or Bangladesh.

For decades, Chinese aid has gone heavily into developing infrastructural projects in Bangladesh. Six bridges have been built with Chinese help. The rail-cum-road bridge over Padma is

the weaponry manufactured by India. This lobby pushes the line that deepening defence ties with India will not only alienate and antagonize China but may end up Bangladesh becoming solely dependent on India. Apparently, this lobby has no problem if Bangladesh becomes dependent on China.

So, India has to be wary in making every step in Bangladesh, carrying not only the Government of Sheikh Hasina but also the people of Bangladesh with it. Any faux pas, diplomatic or otherwise, on India's part will not only play into the hands of the anti-India lobby but also go against the Government of Sheikh Hasina. Politics in Bangladesh is very fluid. Both Pakistan and China will try to put obstacles in developing closer India-Bangladesh ties.

China is one of the biggest trading partners of Bangladesh. And the trade is almost entirely one-sided. In 2014, Bangladeshi exports to China were valued at \$74.6 million while its imports from China were to the tune of \$7.75 billion. By now, China's economic diplomacy is quite clear: to give loans liberally to neighbours who eventually find it hard to repay the loan with interest. They are caught in a debt-trap.

China was also interested in helping Bangladesh with technology to develop nuclear power but ultimately lost out to Russia. So was South Korea. India, with its long experience in nuclear power generation, can help Bangladesh in this respect. Other fields can also be explored.

being built with Chinese assistance. And so is the Barakpuria coal mine and power generation unit based on that coal. China is also currently engaged in improving the mobile network facilities in Bangladesh.

India, therefore, has to make special efforts to cooperate more energetically in developing Bangladesh's economy, which is now going through a critical period of transition from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial economy. Some private companies of India have shown interest in building the deep-sea port at Sonadia (which the Chinese wanted to do). India is also taking part in increasing coal-based power generation in Bangladesh, where natural gas and diesel oil now account for the largest percentage of power generation. Long distance transmission lines are also being set up with Indian assistance.

India is now giving priority to deepening defence cooperation with Bangladesh in view of the security environment in the region, with the Chinese resorting to open muscle-flexing as was seen in Doklam. At present China supplies almost 90 per cent Bangladesh defence forces' requirement of military hardware. It is Bangladesh's single biggest source for small arms and heavy weapons. Last year, Bangladesh acquired two submarines from China, setting alarm bells ringing all over the North and South Blocks.

The pro-Chinese lobby is quite strong in Bangladesh. Many military officials, both serving and retired, are known to be opposed to Bangladesh entering into a defence pact with India. They claim that India being the world's biggest arms importer, there is no reason why Bangladesh should buy arms from India. They also question the quality of

To give one example, a Chinese company provided loans to Sri Lanka to build the Hambantota port. Unable to repay the loan, Sri Lanka had to sell 80 per cent equity of the project to the Chinese company which became the owners. Even in Pakistan, there is considerable opposition from the people to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). They fear that eventually Pakistan will become a colony of China.

India can help Bangladesh in many fields, of which power generation is one. As stated, the Bangladesh economy is in a transitional phase from agricultural to industrial. The demand for power is rising rapidly and the supply is inadequate. About one-fifth of the population of Bangladesh has no access to power. The forecast for power demand is estimated to rise to 19 GWe by 2021, to 34 GWe by 2020 and to 39 GWe in 2030. Bangladesh now wants to switch over to nuclear power generation. It plans to have two large Russian nuclear power reactors, the first one by 2023.

China was also interested in helping Bangladesh with technology to develop nuclear power but ultimately lost out to Russia. So was South Korea. India, with its long experience in nuclear power generation, can help Bangladesh in this respect. Other fields can also be explored.

From the point of view of history, culture and language India and Bangladesh have more in common than any of their neighbours. Cementing their fraternal relationship will be mutually beneficial. It is for the statesmen of the two countries to evolve imaginative policies, sensitive to each other's needs, interests and sentiments, to take that relationship to newer heights. (IPA Service)

“After coming into contact with a religious man I always feel I must wash my hands.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 66

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2017

High time to construct flyovers

A city is as smart as its planners are. Sometimes you wonder what ideas the city planners are selling the government. After all they are experts in town and country planning and have a degree in the subject. So far we see no long term plan to change the contours of this city despite the traffic nightmare which is our daily fare. Visitors coming in by air up to Guwahati airport and taking a taxi to come to Shillong are known to be stuck for hours together at the Mawlai petrol pump- NEHU junction. That junction is crammed but it is mind boggling as to why taxis are allowed to halt and lift or drop passengers right near that point. The need for a flyover at this point cannot be understated. Even a simpleton will know that the Mawlai-NEHU junction can no longer take the kind of traffic that converges there unless there is a diversion. And a diversion is possible only if there is a flyover.

In Meghalaya there is a long hiatus between conceptualizing an idea and its operation. Flyovers were spoken of at least ten years ago and they were proposed to be constructed through Keating Road but some problems arose and the project was shelved and never considered thereafter. This is not how things work. If there are problems to any proposal those have to be surmounted by engineering skills. Granted that such skills many not be available in-house, given the poor quality of all construction work in Meghalaya. Hence the project should be conceptualized and executed by experts, including international experts. There is no dearth of funds for such projects if the state has vision and foresight but what we have seen over the decades is the complete absence of a think-tank in the Government. All Governments that have come to power in Meghalaya have been reactive. We see no pro-activity because that involves thinking. It is bad enough that after 45 years of statehood Meghalaya does not have a fully functioning airport which means that visitors to Meghalaya have to take the three hour long road journey to Shillong and then get caught for another two hours or more at the Mawlai-NEHU junction. This onerous journey has actually deterred many guest lecturers from coming to the IIM Shillong, NEIGRIHMS and other institutions of higher learning. Will the next government have the political teeth to take swift decisions on smarting up the city with or without the central government granting Meghalaya the Smart City funds?

This time 'Meghalaya First'

By Dr. Lakhan Kma

announced before the last elections with zero progress on both the projects except the cosmetic actions. These are some examples of the election gimmicks of the Congress party before the last election which BJP can cash in on. Anyway, people cannot be fooled for long and perhaps Congress party's days to govern the State are limited now.

Coming back to the prospect of other parties, the regional parties too, have seriously lost their credibility to forge a reasonable path of development for the State. In their quest to outsmart each other, most of their energy has been wasted over the past five or ten years. Take the examples of KHADC, JHADC or GHADC. These councils have become the political theatres almost on a day-to-day basis to the extent that one is thoroughly confused as to who belongs

to which party on any given day. Being outside the purview of Anti-Defection Law, these councils have created the most unstable institutions in the State where MDCs are found busy planning their political ambitions by hopping from one group to another rather than legislating and leading the State to meaningful development. Indeed, their action completely defeats the very purpose of the existence of the District Councils. I hope that these Councils are not waiting for the next jolt from the judiciary to legislate on keys social and environmental issues haunting us. Similarly, regional parties in the Assembly have also failed to expose the government on every front. Perhaps, the fear of 'having been there' or 'will be there' on the other side of the aisle restricts their action against the incumbent government. They have failed to protect the interests of Meghalayans. Coming to another national party-the

BJP, appears promising but it should not get crushed under its own weight. The cascading effect of demonetization on economy resulting into fall in the projected GDP for the current fiscal year without any significant impact on curtailing black money, is a cause of concern for the BJP. Similarly, some of its policies have not brought noticeable changes in our well-being. Policies, particularly economic ones that create inconvenience to public require revisit even if they were formulated with the best of intentions. Additionally, some of the petty leaders/followers of BJP across the nation are only compounding its problems in poll-bound states like Meghalaya.

While BJP's core sense of nationalism, which for

The cascading effect of demonetization on economy resulting into fall in the projected GDP for the current fiscal year without any significant impact on curtailing black money, is a cause of concern for the BJP. Similarly, some of its policies have not brought noticeable changes in our well-being.

me, gets translated to a strong sense of attachment and commitment to my motherland-India in general and Meghalaya in particular, is to be fully embraced, the unnecessary vigilantism on food habits or religious beliefs and rechristening the ancient or medieval mindsets is not in good taste. Personal choice of food habits or religious practices and historical facts should not be a point of contention or a matter of public discourse. What happened during the Chalukya, Gupta, Maurya, Khilji, Tuglaq, or Mughal dynasties, etc. and British rule are inseparable parts of our history which cannot be changed no matter how good or bad they were. We can only learn from history and put those lessons to good use.

Therefore, mature and genuine BJP followers of this great nation hailed the wisdom of the drafters of our Constitution led by Dr.

request the person to walk up to the salon and give us your constructive feedback so that we can serve you better rather than complaining to a newspaper. This makes us suspect the authenticity of such complaints. It is against our professional ethics to make such gross errors as to apply any color not remotely close to a customers' choice. In fact we have a palate sample where customers choose from and only after consent of the customer, do we use the color as agreed upon. In fact we even go the extra mile to inform all customers of the ill effects of using colors during pregnancy and we strictly say "No" to colouring the hair of a pregnant women.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Via email

few months hence. There is a sense of foreboding among the Christians in Meghalaya and mind you, this is not merely crying wolf. I hope some prospective Catholic candidates like J A Lyngdoh from 17-North Shillong (ST), 16-East Shillong (ST) likely of this Christian denomination and elsewhere in Meghalaya who are craving for BJP tickets are listening!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Via email

Customer satisfaction our motto

Editor,
It is with sincere regret that we read about the customer angst from a letter in your newspaper captioned, "Whither Professionalism?" (ST Oct 16, 2017). We at Jawed Habib (Laitumkhrab) at Anderson Arcade had investigated if there was any wrongdoing that happened on Saturday Oct 14 last as reported but we are unable to figure out what we did wrong. There was not a single customer who left the Salon dissatisfied on that day as had been mentioned. If at all a customer feels she has been short changed then we

country one after another within a span of just 20 days, tells a very sad tale of the present status of press freedom. Already, India has slipped 3 places from 133rd in 2016 to 136th in this year in World Press Freedom Ranking Index which is released by the International Free Speech Advocate Reporters Without Borders. It will be a bad day for democracy if the press has to work under a reign of terror. Unfortunately, Gouri Lankesh's killers who dared to kill her in front of her home, are still at large. We already have a long list of such murders - Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, Mallehappa Kalburgi, Jyotirmoy Dey 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 a free press.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Press freedom!

Editor,
Press freedom is now in great danger. The murder of three journalists namely Gouri Lankesh, Shantanu Bhowmik and KJ Singh (along with his mother) in different cities of our

The Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill -2017

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The Financial and Deposit Insurance Bill was introduced in 2017 during the Monsoon session of Parliament. The Bill is a remarkable departure from all other bills introduced and in structure and spirit is similar to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code which was introduced in 2016. The bill seeks to lay down a comprehensive framework to deal with financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies should they face financial closure. In spirit the bill seeks to protect the rights of its citizens should the organisation that they have invested in, fails to take off. In an increasingly volatile global financial environment this is an important step towards protecting the rights of the citizens.

The Bill seeks to provide for the resolution of certain categories of financial service providers in distress; the deposit insurance to consumers of certain categories of financial services; designation of systemically important financial institutions; and establishment of a Resolution Corporation for protection of consumers of specified service providers and of public funds for ensuring the stability and resilience of the financial system and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

The financial firms that have been described in the Bill include banks, insurance companies, and stock exchanges, among others. These financial firms accept deposits from consumers, channel these deposits into investments, provide loans, and manage payment systems that facilitate transactions in the country. These entities interact with each other and propel the financial and the economic ecosystem of the country. Yet at this juncture the regulation for closing down these entities should they fail are scattered across a broad spectrum. While in the case of banks the power lies with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) looks at the insurance companies while the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is responsible for stock exchanges. The present bill seeks to change the same.

Since 2008 the economic structure of the world's major superpowers has seen much shift. The failure of Lehmann Brothers and other big financial entities have brought to focus the protection of the rights of the customers should such organisations fail. This bill seeks to change that by protecting the rights of the individual customer to these financial institutions. A major step towards this is the creation of a Resolution Corporation. The Bill seeks to create a consolidated framework for the resolution of financial firms by creating a Resolution Corporation. The Resolution Corporation will include representatives from all financial sector regulators and the ministry of finance, among others. The Corporation will monitor these firms to prevent failure, and resolve or liquidate them in case of such failure.

The Resolution Corporation or the regulators (such as the RBI for insurance companies or SEBI for the stock exchanges) will classify financial firms under five

categories, based on their risk of failure. This classification will be based on adequacy of capital, assets and liabilities, and capability of management, among other criteria. The Bill proposes to allow both, the regulator and the Corporation, to monitor and classify firms based on their risk to failure.

Based on the risk to failure, the Resolution Corporation or regulators may direct the firms to take certain corrective action. For example, if the firm is at a higher risk to failure (under 'material' or 'imminent' categories), the Resolution Corporation or the regulator may: prevent it from accepting deposits from consumers or prohibit the firm from acquiring other businesses, or may require it to increase its capital. Further, these firms will formulate resolution and restoration plans to prepare a strategy for improving their financial position and resolving the firm in case it fails. The Resolution Corporation will take over the administration of a financial firm from the date the firm is classified as 'critical' which means it is on the verge of its failure. The Resolution Corporation will resolve the firm using any of the methods specified in the Bill, within one year. This time limit may be extended by another year. During this period, the firm will be immune against all legal actions. The maximum time limit that will be available for these actions will be to the extent of two years.

The Resolution Corporation can resolve a financial firm using any of the following methods: transferring the assets and liabilities of the firm to another firm, merger or acquisition of the firm, creating a bridge financial firm (where a new company is created to take over the assets, liabilities and management of the failing firm), bail-in (internally transferring or converting the debt of the firm), or liquidate the firm to repay its creditors.

If the Resolution Corporation fails to resolve the firm within a maximum period of two years, the firm will automatically go in for liquidation. The Bill specifies the order of priority in which creditors will be repaid in case of liquidation, with the amount paid to depositors as deposit insurance getting preference over other creditors. While the Bill specifies that resolution will commence upon classification as 'critical', the point at which this process will end may not be evident in certain cases. For example, in case of transfer, merger or liquidation, the end of the process may be inferred from when the operations are transferred or liquidation is completed, but for some other methods such as bail-in, the point at which the resolution process will be completed may be unclear.

This Bill will indeed strengthen the hand of the consumer or the customer during these uncertain financial times. It will also increase global investors confidence in the Indian economic system. In the present time when the Indian economy is facing certain challenges this Bill is undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

TO THE EDITOR

Can Mr. Alphons respond?

Editor,

The appointment of Mr Alphons Kannanthanam, the Union Minister of State for Tourism, as the saffron face, besides Mr Nalin Kohli, to ensure the success of BJP in the forthcoming elections to the Meghalaya State assembly is very flattering given that Alphons besides being an upright bureaucrat was also a philosophy alumnus at Christ King College at Laitumkhrab, Shillong in the early 1970s. In response to his party's high command authorization, the Central Minister in question had recently landed in Shillong to get himself acclimatized to the latest political milieu of Meghalaya. Further, it was no less heart-warming to note that he met the religious communities in the City, especially those Christian leaders like Arch Bishop, Dominic Jala at Shillong Cathedral. What transpired in the meeting is not known. Incidentally, while being interviewed by the media, Mr. Alphons had heaped winsome accolades on PM Modi and the BJP led Govt

at the Centre for its avowed aim of all round development and tolerance underlining Modi's slogan: "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas". Hence, the Minister reiterated that the Christians of Meghalaya need have no fear on account of their religion, culture and dietary habits under the saffron regime.

Against the fore-going engaging assurances, I would put on record a pertinent question before the said minister as to what reply has our Hon'ble PM conveyed to the Christians of Jharkhand, a BJP ruled state, when their dreadful fears were communicated to the PM via a letter written by the Secretary general, Theodore Mascarenhas, of the Catholic Bishops Council of India (CBCI), the apex body of Roman Catholics in India. The content of this appeal letter to the PM were to curb the spread of pathological hatred orchestrated by Chief Minister Raghubar Das of Jharkhand following Ranchi Cardinal Telesphore Toppo's effigy being burnt by the Hindutva fanatics known as Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM) early last month. The letter averred that there is an imminent and deepening fear among the Christians in the

backdrop of religious-hate campaigns launched by HJM which could unleash physical violence and persecution of Christians. The letter to Modi has decidedly brought to the fore the Jharkhand Govt's full front page advertisements that spewed full-throated barbs against the Christian minorities, reminiscent of Hitler's Nazi propaganda against the Jews preceding World War II, which thundered slogans like : "Hate the Jews," thereby marking a new low in a BJP ruled state against the Christian minority. And this Jharkhand syndrome may only be the tip of an iceberg in India.

In this context, I would like to remind Mr. Alphons what he has done as Roman Catholic after occupying a coveted chair of a Union Minister, to ameliorate the persistent harassment of his Catholic brethren in Jharkhand and elsewhere in India where his saffron party wields the undisputed state powers? And it is nonsense paranoia to assert that Meghalaya too would have to undergo such unsavoury experience if BJP can manage to access power, directly or indirectly, by way of the outcome of the next assembly polls a

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.

“And if your friend does evil to you, say to him, ‘I forgive you for what you did to me, but how can I forgive you for what you did to yourself?’”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 67 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017

Trump vs Iran

PRESIDENT Donald Trump has decided to decertify the Iran nuclear deal signed by his predecessor Barack Obama. Trump says that Tehran has not fulfilled its commitment and wants US Congress to slap more restrictions on Iran. He is not in agreement with European signatories to the deal who think Iran has significantly reduced its nuclear stockpile. Trump is on a unilateral pitch. He seems motivated by a policy directive to wipe out his predecessor's legacy even in foreign policy. And he prefers to isolate the US from its western allies and does not care if he loses credibility. It will be difficult for him now to advocate non-proliferation of peace on the global scene. Tensions have already mounted between the US and North Korea over Pyongyang's nuclear designs. Trump suggests that he is willing to talk to Kim Jong-Un but North Korea is no longer willing to trust Washington. Sinking the Iran deal will make it more sceptical about Trump's statement.

Trump's hostile attitude may drive Iran to Islamic Fundamentalism of the Ayatollah brand. Moderate President Hassan Rouhani who has been re-elected is for reform and invites Western investment. By scrapping the nuclear deal, Trump will strengthen the hands of hardliners in Iran. Besides, Trump's crusade against the ISIS and other Islamic terror groups will take a hit. Saudi Arabia is not a great ally. Finally Trump has already taken firm steps with Pakistan which Islamabad has reciprocated to stabilise Kabul against the Taliban. Cancelling the nuclear deal with Iran will interfere with US initiatives.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Purno rules out immediate cabinet expansion

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr Purno A Sangma has ruled out any move for immediate expansion of his ministry. Talking to this reporter on Wednesday, he said that he was not thinking in terms of reconstruction of the ministry shortly. Brushing aside speculations that in view of the inclusion of HPU (BC) and the HSPDP (DL) in the coalition, he was going to include some new faces and drop some from the council of ministers, Mr Sangma said "they are not supporting us with the expectation of any thing in return".

Informed sources said that although Mr Sangma had made it amply clear to the MLAs that their support to the UMPF would be

without any strings attached, there was no escaping for him from giving balanced representation to all the coalition constituents. It is, however, unlikely that the induction of new ministers will take place before July.

It is for sure that both HPU (BC) and the HSPDP (DL) would find representation in the cabinet as a true reflection of the coalition composition. In that event it is possible that a few Ministers may be dropped. Sources said that some partymen recently pleaded with the Chief Minister to drop certain Ministers who had not totally identified with the coalition's interests. The Chief Minister remained noncommittal.

I am not being defensive; rather, an attempt is being made to place an appropriate platform for fruitful deliberations by representing issues as they are and without holding a brief for any side. However, if the arguments being placed still produce a sense of disgust and irritation on the part of the NEHU students' union then there is nothing that can be done. On the contrary, the 'disgust and irritation' can further be deliberated in-house or in public, in writing or in person. Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, do we need a students' union? If the answer is 'yes' then what exactly is its role? Is it 'organization building' or 'organization destruction'? Contemporarily, the students' union is increasingly seen to be synonymous with the phrase 'from order to chaos and to more chaos'. There is no doubt that the students' union is an important stakeholder in the university but that calls for a certain perspective towards dealing with issues and problem solving. In most cases it seems as though it is more bent upon creating problems. The concept of 'collective bargaining' when it comes to demanding and fighting for the students' cause seems to be an alien one. Oh yes, there is bargaining of course, but it is more of 'coerced bargaining'. However, let us give our students' union a fair chance. As such, we must not forget that the threshold of any organization building process is actually and in the true sense of the term 'organizational destruction'. After we destroy, we build or we can build only after destruction. Nonetheless, how this destruction is managed and controlled determines the direction and outcome of progress. This is true not only for NEHU but for all organizations. As such, the authority of the university must reconcile to the fact that the students these days are far more alert, smart and aware of rights and regulations (and this is a good thing). Hence, the failure to act on responsibilities and duties will only lead to more forms of unionism across all stakeholders (be it teachers, non-teaching and/or students). After all, the best way to curb militant unionism is to ensure proper and timely execution of responsibilities thereby contributing towards a congenial and cordial path of organization building.

Secondly, what about aggressive student unionism? NEHU has seen a

NEHU and its Students' Union

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

number of student agitations in recent years. Most of these are predominantly related to hostel issues and research scholar fellowships. Whatever may be the case, the fact of the matter is that there is a degree of mistrust between the university and the students' union. Well, the university is tied by its own constraints and the students are tired of their own hardships. Either way, none is having a rosy time. In the end, the primary target is The Dean, Students' Welfare (DSW).. In my time at the university, I have never seen such aggressiveness and abuse. The series of locking of the DSW's office along with the kind of foul language being used is just regrettable. In addition, the abuse and humiliation on social media platforms is abhorrent and unprintable. Is this what our students have become? If this is it then it is a shameful fall! Like I said at the very outset, I am not holding a brief for anyone but at NEHU, we have come to a stage where students' union can and do openly threaten teachers point blank. In such a case, how is a person (DSW) supposed to react? Obviously he will react in the way in which he has reacted. Accordingly, just factor in one reality! If you think that you are thick skinned, always remember that there will undoubtedly be others who have a thicker hide than you. It is the law of natural justice. The world is round and it goes in circles. Further, the Vice Chancellor's office is not spared. The discourse of the students' union with the VC is at best appalling. True, there is freedom of expression; however it must not cross the limits of decency and propriety. The point is that in a situation where the bull is not grabbed by the horns, all levels of aggressiveness snowball into a snowstorm. As a result, we will get to hear terms such as 'NEHU VC baahar aao' and references of 'tum' instead of 'aap'. Clearly, it defies all forms of decency and has degenerated into abusive language!

Thirdly, the subject matter of admissions and the interference surrounding it is absolutely puzzling. I somehow fail to understand as to why the admission processes and procedures have to be vetted and certified by the students' union. In the entire scheme of things, it makes the role of the department and the efforts and activities of the faculties redundant. Overall, the students' union supersedes the faculties in as much as their 'yes/no' is the

good. On the other hand, I am looking forward to the day when students' union elections in the university are contested on mainstream party lines like the Congress, BJP, UDP, NPP, HSPDP, KHNAM and so forth. I am sure these parties realize that the best place to look for talented student leaders is in the university, so why not take the leap? To my knowledge, the only time that something close to this almost materialised was in the year 2001-03. That was the time when the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) of the Congress tried to set up units. However, the plan and efforts then just fizzled out and died a premature death. Nonetheless, the time is ripe for the political parties to try again and with the BJP coming in aggressively and more visibly into state politics, it will not be surprising to see Akhili Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and/or Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) taking the first leap.

Lastly, the students' union representation contemporarily is a huge concern. Over the years of my close association with the students' union election, the exercise does feel like a bastion of 'Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep'. The candidates are all from the Khasi community and even on the day of polling and counting, the interest is shown by this community only. But this is not what NEHU represents. NEHU represents a mix of cultures and practices and people, so why is there no diversity amongst the contesting candidates? As such, the voter turnout at the very recent students' union election was only 47%. This is a result of a lack of cohesiveness amongst the student community. As such, one can be blunt and say that the current students' union does not represent the entire student community.

In conclusion, I can foresee a degree of bitterness and resentment towards this article. But that is the least of my concerns. What is most important is that we learn from this across all stakeholders. We learn and correct, reengineer and reposition; chart out a new plan and strategies; all with the good intent of progress and organization building. (The Author teaches at NEHU)

gospel truth. In addition, just look at the irony. In admission matters they are called as 'observers'. Just figure this out, they observe over teachers. In the hierarchy of things they are above teachers. I mean things like these can happen only in NEHU and it is crazy! However, the crux of the matter is that when it comes to admissions there is a trust deficit on the part of the students' union. Hence, as teachers are we to introspect on our admission practices? It is indeed a Pandora's Box and reeks of skeletons in the closet. On hindsight there is an inside story and it goes like this, 'Instead of having outside interference from pressure groups like KSU and others (where the problems would be far bigger), it is better to have an in-house mechanism'. As such, we have the current system of students' union observers. Fact is guys, if you want publicity and attention, there are far better ways of doing it. Our online system for admissions can be confusing to some of the applicants. In such a case, why not set up admission assistance outlets at various strategic points in the campus for direction and counselling to the newbies? Moreover, the professional courses at the university like MBA, tourism, engineering etc., require entry through national level admission tests. There is still a lack of awareness about this amongst the school/college students at large. Hence, this is one loophole that the students' union can strive to address.

Fourthly, it is an open secret that some of the students' union leaders have mainstream political aspirations. This is good and for the few who have such an aspiration, the university is indeed the best place to initiate such dreams. So do it and see it through. Now, for this to be effective and have any tangible outcomes, visibility of the person is important. As such, if visibility is the only parameter then it can be achieved by doing good or bad or both. Hence, do as you wish and people will pay attention and the objective is achieved. Consequently, manage the show and play to the gallery. But what sort of leaders will this breed? Surely, the long-term consequences will not be

protesters, protested the coal ban, why? Common people like me are confused. We don't need coal anyway. What do we need coal for? Technology has come of age where humans can harness the power of the sun and the wind and use it in place of fossil fuels.

Anyway, let us hope that coal mining ban is lifted and it will be business as usual. But the railway if it ever sees the light of day, shall pass through Shillong, go through Jaintia Hills down to Assam via Silchar. Then most of the coal ferrying trucks would be useless/redundant. Wouldn't that be bad for some people's business? What about influx? We would still need these 'illegal immigrants' and 'non-indigenous people' to do the hard labour (coal digging) for us. Well I end here. What transpires remains to be seen!

Yours Etc.,
Pyntngen Nongpluh,
Shillong-8

To Laban With Love

By Janet Moore Hujon

To honour Laban's first MDC the late Ragland Singh Lyngdoh Mawlong, the *Shillong Times* reported the unveiling of a bust in his memory. (September 23, 2017) The photograph taken on the occasion says the bust is at 'Laban *Batting* Bazar parking lot'. This area now demoted to a mere parking lot was never ever a *batting* bazar. It was Laban's '*batti bazar*' - open for business after office hours and therefore a lifeline for local residents who could not always make their daytime way to Iewduh (Bara Bazar).

We know that the Hindi word *batti* has nothing whatsoever to do with *batting* but is associated with light - this busy little market place was a perfect oval of light created by the flames of *dongmusa* (flambeaus), their fierce roar guarding each stall owner's territory. Visits to the market were rewarded by the sight of fresh produce - from colourful fruit and vegetables to the glint of silver-scaled fish - all neatly laid out on green banana leaves. While there was the expected cacophony of haggling, both good-natured and not, the market was also a place where greetings were exchanged, old connections renewed and new ones made. I have no doubt that trade flourished because places like this sustain connections and underscore the meaning of the expression - 'word of mouth'. The word was spread with a lively immediacy totally absent from today's vast borderless universe of online shopping. It is only the word *batti* that can bring back to

became 'synonymous with *dkhar*, the outsider', when Indian government servants from East Bengal arrived and bought land from local Khasis who, wary of the outsiders, left the locality. So although her name may not have graced any written documents of sale, this explains why Ka Tik lives on in the collective memories of those who lived before and during the glorious days of *batti*-bazar Laban. Since Laban began life as a Khasi locality, then surely Lum Ka Tik must predate Lum Kartik. If this were not the case then why as children were we not taught to say Lum Kartik instead of Ka Tik? That would not have been any more difficult than saying *batti* bazar.

Bah River then goes on to say that when the initial 'irrational fear of outsiders subsided', Khasis returned to live alongside the newcomers. So I grew up hearing the rhythms of different tongues and appreciating the descriptive accuracy of a non-native phrase. Of course we do have the name *Iewdak* (Iew-market, dak-mail?) which is still used to refer to the former *batti* bazar. Dak implies that perhaps there once was a Post Office in the area so in a way *Iewdak* can be seen as a composite of the local and the 'foreign'. But for vivid impact it can in no way compete with *batti* bazar.

While I would not change *batti* bazar to anything that might sound more Khasi, I do however experience a thrill when I say 'Lum Ka Tik', and positively burst with cultural pride to know that *Sohra* has been rescued from Cherrapunjee and restored to its rightful place in our hearts and our

Bah River then goes on to say that when the initial 'irrational fear of outsiders subsided', Khasis returned to live alongside the newcomers. So I grew up hearing the rhythms of different tongues and appreciating the descriptive accuracy of a non-native phrase. Of course we do have the name *Iewdak* (Iew-market, dak-mail?) which is still used to refer to the former *batti* bazar. Dak implies that perhaps there once was a Post Office in the area so in a way *Iewdak* can be seen as a composite of the local and the 'foreign'.

life these vibrant memories of a Laban that once was. So let it not be forgotten.

As I continue on the subject of naming I am aware that I will be sailing into controversial waters as I question the origins of the locality - 'Lum Ka Tik' or 'LumKartik'. In his article 'Sorry plight of the Oldest Town in Shillong', (*Shillong Times*, September 12, 2013) Bah River Wahlang tells us that Ka Tik was a Khasi lady - who sold a sizeable area of land for "the princely sum of Rs. 20". Now isn't that a perfectly told story! I will readily admit that as a woman and a Khasi I delight and mourn in equal measure to discover that once upon a time a Khasi woman could and did sell almost an entire hill for that sum.

However an article 'Shillong: What's in a Name?' by Rajib Roy published in the *Meghalaya Times* throws up a different explanation. This article states that Lum Kartik (Road) was named after a wealthy Bengalee landowner named Kartik Bose who owned properties in the Laban Hills. Perhaps both Ka Tik and Kartik have equal validity- I leave it to the local historian to verify the truth. But as far as I am concerned, Bah River's account is the more plausible one. He informs us that Laban was originally a small farming village that for a time

imaginations. While the answers as to why that reclamation took so long are culturally painful, it is important to recognise undoubted linguistic resilience for despite the imposed name, the word *Sohra* never ever dropped out of use. To the Khasi ear *Sohra* has the authenticity missing in Cherrapunjee. *Sohra* belongs in a way Cherrapunjee does not, and that is why it will always be voiced with love.

In the course of writing this article I have realised how much growing up in multi-cultural and multi-faith Laban shaped my worldview. On the one hand I distinctly recall the pangs of sadness I felt at not possessing that cohesive Khasi identity which seemed to belong to Khasis living in the Khasi neighbourhoods of say Jaiaiw, Mawkhar and Mawlai - I wanted to have a less fluid identity, to be 'whole' like them. Yet, I was also quietly protective of my own fractured sense of self because that was who I was and of course still am. And today I am grateful for this dual perspective because while it provides the rooted sanctuary of the old, it also allows me to look out through windows opening into new worlds. It is my Laban experience that allows me to step outside rigid dividing lines and to challenge or accept both the old and the new. I remain grateful.

TO THE EDITOR

Battle for Meghalaya in the upcoming election

Editor,
In a political equivalent of spread betting, campaigning from two constituencies is a legitimate game plan in India and even in state politics where politicians often contest elections from two seats. As the state is preparing for the assembly elections, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya also took a major decision in the direction of the Assembly elections to be held next year. According to sources, although not announced publicly, the CM expressed his desire to contest from two constituencies for the upcoming elections in the state. Many have criticized this move taken by the CM and claim that his confidence has dipped. In fact the CM is full of confidence and he wants to show his dominance and

totally eradicate the National People's Party (NPP) from both the constituencies. It will be interesting to see how things turn out after the elections for both the CM and the Congress Party.

Yours etc.,
Phrangshai Marbanianag,
Via email

On railways, coal mining ban and influx

Editor,
The experts have spoken. The people in the know have shared their views and opinions. Perhaps it is also time for a common person like myself with less knowledge to try and share my views and opinions on the railways vis-a-vis coal mining ban. Is it good? Is it bad? Well the truth of the matter is everyone is entitled to their own opinion. And there are also some who don't give a damn. Some say when the railroad reaches Shillong essential commodities will be cheaper. Really? Will they? Well that remains to

be seen as there are many learned, knowledgeable people who argue for and against this particular view. Then there is also a very popular view that when rail tracks reach Shillong there will be influx of the outsiders meaning non-indigenous people. I am left to wonder if these non-indigenous people travel only by rail? Maybe they would skip the railroad and come by air. Perhaps they would come via the usual route, by road or perhaps they would just choose to come via the unguarded borders or unchartered territories. Anyway it is assumed that if we can freeze the railways only up till Assam then there'll be no influx. Right? Isn't that the argument?

A few years ago when I was living in Khlhiehrat because of my job we had to take a vehicle from Lad Rymbai to travel to Khlhiehrat. Lad Rymbai was overflowing with non-indigenous people. The vehicle fare was then ₹20 from Lad Rymbai to Khlhiehrat and vice-versa.

There were these Maruti

800s used as public transport but with no registration at all. I asked around and people said that they just bought and use them straight away. Registration has never been a necessity. One can make out that the portion of the bumper for sticking/screwing the number plates were never disturbed. But that's not the point here. The first time I used these public transports I was a bit confused. The drivers and helpers (who were all non-indigenous by the way) were calling passengers and shouting "Khliladi, Khliladi, Khliladi". Then I asked which ones goes to "Khlhiehrat". Surprisingly, they answered "Yes, this one goes to Khliladi". Then I understood "Khliladi" is "Khlhiehrat". Lad Rymbai was like the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, as some religious people would often put it. One can see posters of movies that are screened or will be screened in the cinemas openly on display with nude figures right there in the main Lad Rymbai market.

Now everybody knows that there is a huge influx of

non-indigenous people in the coal belt areas and it is mostly these immigrants that feed the coal trucks and their masters. There were no railways. How did these people reach the coal belt areas? It is also common knowledge that most of these NGO-wallahs are into coal business. Period. There was no question of influx then. So why now? Why not then?

And then the good old NGT came along and hurt feelings by banning rat hole coal mining. Coal mining work suddenly stopped as everyone was unsure of what the NGT ban actually meant. There was chaos. A large number of people were affected by the ban - both local and non-local, indigenous and non-indigenous. There were also reports in various news - print and digital about large scale out-flux of illegal immigrants and non-indigenous people. Influx problem was solved. The influx protesters should have been happy, yet they weren't, why? Influx

“A woman may very well form a friendship with a man, but for this to endure, it must be assisted by a little physical antipathy.”

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

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Poll Issues

GUJARAT had witnessed great agricultural growth followed by agrarian distress with the approach of elections. The Congress has promised farm loan waivers but the ruling BJP has pledged to make agricultural loans interest free and that only for financial years 2015 and 2016. The gross value added by the agricultural sector contracted indicating that the states phenomenal agricultural growth had been belated. Deficient rainfall has been a factor. Cotton has suffered a setback especially in the last decade. Small and medium manufacturing enterprises in Gujarat have taken a hit owing to demonetisation and the introduction of GST. Gujarat faces the same economic challenges as other states consequently. The poll issues in Modi's home state are a national challenge.

India has experimented repeatedly with farm loan waivers with Sonia Gandhi spearheading the initiative. But it has in the long run proved counter-productive. Both farmers and the macro-economy have been adversely affected. Fall in the growth of cotton cannot be counteracted by eliminating interest on loans. More effective and permanent solutions are necessary. The state should come to the rescue of farmers by providing them access to new varieties of seeds. SMEs provide the majority of jobs and should be freed as much as possible from the stranglehold of regulation. Gujarat in the last decade provided an exemplary economic model. The Congress promise of farm loan waivers may not cut any ice with PM Narendra Modi on the campaign trail attacking the Congress for not highlighting a development agenda.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Plight of a Medical College

Silchar has a medical college in which at the moment 30 posts of doctors and 122 posts of nurses are reported to be lying vacant. The Superintending doctor, if his post also is not going begging, must be having a trying time managing the show with even the minimum of efficiency and the modicum of medicare expected of the institution serving the entire Barak Valley. It cannot be that

doctors or nurses are in short supply in the country or even in this region itself. It is, of course, known that our young doctors are normally allergic to rural posting, but Silchar in any case is not that much rural, much less rustic. It is the hub of the entire Barak Valley, and there's the rub for most of the doctors chosen from the Brahmaputra Valley may be reluctant to join posts in the other valley.

NEHU and its Students' Union - An Alternative Perspective

By Mantre Passah

First of all, this is written with no degree of bitterness nor resentment, but it is meant as a point by point counter-narrative of the issues pointed out by the author of "NEHU and its Students' Union" (ST Oct 18, 2017). The NEHU Students' Union (NEHUSU) has been very active in these past few years and many of the issues that it has taken up and its methods has naturally ruffled a few feathers within the university. This is not meant as a defence of the students' union but to analyse as to why NEHU is in this situation.

As to the first point, where the author asks the question of whether there is a need for a students' union, and if 'yes', is it for 'organization building' or 'organization destruction'? - any form of unionism has been due to a natural reaction to a sense of dissatisfaction and alienation, and if we look at history, unionism of any form - be it labourers, students or workers of any kind, has been for the positive development of its constituents as well as the organisation or institution involved. It can indeed be for 'organization building', but in the case of NEHU, the problem is more deeply rooted, that for any issue, mere representation or negotiation does not work. A portion of the blame here can be laid on the administration and the officials of the university. Obviously, some are competent and some are constrained by certain factors, but any administration which does not seek opinions and which is undemocratic in its decision making is bound to fail.

On this point, issues that have been taken up by the NEHUSU like the continued opposition to certain clauses of the hostel rules (RU-3, OD-4), which have been implemented and imposed on students without proper consultation with them merit attention. This can be done only through proper representation of student representatives in the decision-making bodies of the University, particularly in the Academic Council. The current system is basically flawed (selection through academic performance) and as I have

stressed earlier - undemocratic, and does not allow for representatives who are aware of the issues at hand. To speak of the institutional flaws of NEHU would require another article altogether. The author is right to point out that timely execution of duties by the authorities concerned would help in the organisation building of NEHU, but as long as that is not the case in NEHU, the students' union will naturally use pressure tactics which might not be palatable to all. This 'chaos' is necessary because it is natural progression for a brick wall to be smashed if it refuses to allow a window, let alone a door.

To the second point that the author pointed out, while I do not deny that there have been instances of verbal 'abuse', it has to be taken into context. The blame cannot be leveled on the students alone. Certain officials, and their style of functioning (and speaking) are unbecoming to say the least. There is nothing else to comment on this other than that some individuals demand respect when it is undeserved. Regarding the usage of what the author termed as 'abusive language' towards the Vice Chancellor, the language used can hardly be termed as 'abusive'. Moreover, the less said about the VC the better, since it is public knowledge that the current VC's functioning has led to confrontations with even the teachers' body of NEHU. Lack of competence and dynamism in leadership cannot be hidden through bourgeois veils such as 'decency' and 'propriety'.

Regarding the third point where the author questions the role of the students' union in the admission process of the departments. It is to be noted that it is purely as observers and it is a harmless exercise. If the students' union helps in making the admission process of the various departments transparent, where is the problem in that? At the end of the day, no individual, be it a teacher or a student, can go against the regulations governing the admission process. The argument is moot since this observer status is granted as

per the Constitution of NEHUSU, as approved by the University, and it is one of the institutional mechanisms that actually makes NEHU relatively transparent. The author does give an important point where the union can actually improve on, regarding providing more awareness and assistance to prospective students regarding national level admission tests as well as the online system of admission. NEHUSU should indeed explore ways and means in making this possible.

Regarding the fourth point, where the author points out an obvious fact that the students' union is a platform for those with higher political ambitions, it is a myopic view to hold that it is used only to gain visibility. The majority who are active in the union over the years have no inclination for mainstream politics at all. Student politics in NEHU has grown over the years and is helping students in becoming 'more alert, smart and aware of rights and regulations' and hopefully will continue in the years to come. Regarding the entry of political parties in the student politics of NEHU - that would destroy the student politics of the university, for that would only breed factionalism and divide the student community. The idea that a far-right body like Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), should take the leap in NEHU student politics is a nightmare scenario, and should be opposed tooth and nail by all stakeholders involved.

On the last point that the author notes, that in recent times the students' union representation feels like 'a bastion of Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep', it is true that candidates have been only from the Khasi community, which is a testament to the political and social environment of the region more than anything else. But who would take the 'leap', and if yes, that is question that is uncomfortable for many to comprehend. Regarding

the voter turnout in the recent election as well as in the recent past, though it may seem low, student interest and participation has been growing gradually and is bound to increase. But political apathy here is hardly surprising and it only mirrors the lack of interest found among many educated youths of the state. Though there may be other factors as well for this, I will have to disagree with the statement that the 'current students' union does not represent the entire student community' of NEHU. Through the years, the students' union has been able to bring together the various communities closer and has played a unifying role. The leaders of the current students' union, and those of the past few years, will no doubt give a fitting reply to this, through their agenda and work.

NEHU is plagued by many issues that would require more experienced and knowledgeable people to open a debate on - be it the harassment and sexual harassment problem (which many people are scared to talk about and many deny), past corruption cases, and the most pertinent problem of the hundreds of vacancies (academic and administrative) that need to be filled up as soon as possible, that have hindered the functioning of the university for the past few years.

The problems facing NEHU are complex, and the students' union is only one stakeholder that is engaged in pushing for student development and the progress of the university as a whole. Some may dislike its aggressive style of functioning in recent years, but that is because there is a section in NEHU who do not share the same vision as most do for the betterment of the university, or are too meek to break from the mould created by mistakes of the past. Whatever its deficiencies, at least NEHUSU dares to question and seek answers, however difficult they may seem.

(The writer is Editor, NEHUSU 2014-15)

Not a brave new world this!

By Ananya S Guha

21st century expansionism is perhaps like never before. The polarization of the world, the US Korea conflict, flexing of muscles by China and the constant skirmishes between India and Pakistan, the rise of new race ideologies, religious and Islamic fundamentalism have severed the world into tight holes of petty power and volatility. What does all this lead to? The missile and nuclear threats and 'tests' by North Korea have posed a threat to world security, coupled with American retaliation in South China seas. Technology is supposed to unify world vision, thinking and even relationship, but that it is a double edged sword is proved beyond doubt.

Why do countries want to cross borders, and flout expansionist policies? China's constant incursions into Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh and now Bhutan, shows how territorial sovereignty and a ruthlessness at all cost expansionism is the hallmark of 21st century geopolitics. In a way it is akin to British imperialism in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. But of course in present day contexts, testing of the missile, hydrogen bombs, purchase

In between such frenetic dialogue or even monologue, countries are sanctioning deals, exports and imports to other countries. The nuclear deals are examples of the worst kind of abetting in corporate deals, fueling the world into dangerous divides. This is a new world, with mobile phones and computers carrying out day to day human transactions, with societies like in India striving for a cashless economy, but it is hardly brave. It is only the stamp of muscle power, bullying, threatening which are some of the worst signs of human effiteness.

In the midst of it we are looking towards a new India, a brave one, with new technology, new economy, standardization of taxes, flushing out black money, mitigating terrorist forces. But India too looks at the West for imitative possibilities, a corporate culture and to flash newest technologies, the smart city etc. How brave is she? Can she look at the disparities in the health sector and in education? What are the solutions to unemployment? True the new initiative to train skilled workers in Japan, is a bold initiative but the

The exodus of refugees, first from Syria and then from Myanmar, both because of religious fundamentalism and warring with US backed regimes, is another dimension to a world crisis. So refugee problems become secondary, and get lost in the fight with nations. But how has world surveillance got infected with religious fundamentalism, taking the shape of a terror war? Countries like the US must give this answer with bloody histories in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

of the nuclear arsenals for 'peaceful' purposes is a feverish rat race. How can purchase of arsenals be for peace? Armament strengthening is a sign of preparedness for war. The more there is talk of disarmament, the more the world is gearing for armament purchase, which is corporate market on the one hand, and flexing muscles on the other. Where can there be the clap trap of peace then? The more money is diverted for purchase of weapons, the more development of a country takes a bashing, especially in underdeveloped economies. Today a country like India has one of the highest percentages of malnourished children, comparable to Saharan Africa, in addition to the ubiquitous poverty.

The exodus of refugees, first from Syria and then from Myanmar, both because of religious fundamentalism and warring with US backed regimes, is another dimension to a world crisis. So refugee problems become secondary, and get lost in the fight with nations. But how has world surveillance got infected with religious fundamentalism, taking the shape of a terror war? Countries like the US must give this answer with bloody histories in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

Then came the Middle East, to nibble at wealth and oil resources. American imperialism, does not believe in setbacks, even if it means death of civilians, men women and children. The photo of the Syrian boy, washed ashore by the raging sea has not yet probed our conscience; world conscience.

unorganized sector needs attention and priority in terms of formal skills and perhaps certification. Skills are in terms of many components, including both aspects of technical and non technical. Touches of a new India are coming, but not without rumblings of discontent among tax payers, businesses and the common man who had to bear the brunt of the note ban.

As for a brave India, we are pretty brave in respect of mauling and attacking people who dissent, don't accept a monolithic faith as a way of life. We are brave too in mauling history but perhaps we have to be more so in facing some consequences of present actions. Our world is now looking towards the world's greatest super power with unmitigated deference. Fine, but that same country has made or, is at least trying to make more stringent immigration laws, based on what it calls merit, and India will surely be one of the most affected as America attracts some of our best and most hard working people. The best days for us will come when we face the economic situation of the country with guts and find out pragmatic means to solve the crises of poverty and unemployment and their vicious extrapolated cycles.

Emphasis on cleanliness is a must, but what is the reason for the squalor? Rehabilitation for the poor in terms of affordable housing is priority to be done on a war footing and state or zone wise. Bringing some respite to the poor is the bounden duty of the State. No amount of American kowtowing will help in this.

TO THE EDITOR

Are pedestrians third class citizens?

Editor,
Shillong now is a place where the traffic crawls in most places at most times, when it does move at all. This might have been an excuse for at least some of the city's residents to try a healthier - and quicker - alternative, namely walking, but the roads are so full of vehicles that one would have to walk on the rooftops of cars to be able to walk at all. There is hardly space left anywhere to put one foot down on solid earth, let alone two feet. In those parts of the city where there is some sort of footpath - narrow though it may be - one can at least try walking, even if it is in single file. However, a lot of places don't make even that minimal concession to pedestrians. In the road near the Hon'ble Chief Minister's residence that goes down to Polo Bazar for instance, there is no footpath. There is however a school in the vicinity. As a result, every day, the rare few parents who do not send cars to pick up their children are forced to negotiate some very heavy traffic along with their children.

The lack of concern for pedestrians disproportionately affects children and the elderly, who find it difficult to cross roads safely. The city's lack of facilities for pedestrians is a completely non-partisan issue of civic governance that all residents of Shillong

who have young children or elderly parents would benefit from solving.

In more developed parts of the world, they now make cycling tracks a part of urban planning. Here, where everyone used to walk, with good consequences for their own health and the environment, progress has taken us from clean roads with moving traffic and sufficient walking space to gridlocked roads with no walking or cycling space. By the time the city's bosses progress to building appropriate infrastructure to solve the current traffic woes that trouble both drivers and pedestrians, the rest of the world may well have moved on to flying cars.

Yours etc.,
Samrat X,
Via email

Commitment to smooth city traffic

Editor,
The health of a person depends upon how smooth and free his blood vessels are. In the case of continuous cholesterol build-up in the blood vessels, the person becomes susceptible to various kinds of illnesses that consequently lead to his death. Blood vessels are like roads through which the oxygen, carbon dioxide and digested nutrients are transported by the blood. The same holds true with the city we live. If the roads in the city are jammed and

choked with a random fleet of vehicles then know for sure that the city is unhealthy and needs surgery. It's also going to reduce the life-span of its denizens. This is exactly what is happening now in Shillong.

Our town is terribly unhealthy. The traffic here is virtually immobile and sloppy. The public can't reach their destination within the normal time. All our expensive vehicles are like showpieces, and for many others, they have become a huge liability. Perhaps about 40-60 % of vehicles are parked at home. What is bizarre is that our jealous friends still eye us and dream of buying new vehicles and rush to the motor showrooms. But in reality, buying vehicles in Shillong is like inviting a whole lot of miseries.

It might be worthwhile to make traffic movement in Shillong an election issue this time around. Why don't we drive a hard bargain with our aspirant MLA candidates, especially of Shillong town? This is the only time we can make our leaders intently listen to our genuine grievances as they walk up or down to our drawing rooms with folded hands. Come on, let's hit the iron while it's hot. It will make sense if we residents of Shillong unitedly put pressure on our respective leaders to include traffic streamlining in their election manifesto so that they will leave no stone unturned to solve the traffic issues that have been the bane of

Shillong. A complete prohibition on granting of fresh permits for new vehicles, for at least ten years, widening of roads, and constructions of over bridges -- wherever viable, compulsory using of school buses are a few must-do pleas to our leaders. It would be prudent for them to make this promise before they fuel themselves for the victory. Indeed, smooth road communication makes way for swift economic growth, and overall development and that finally brings prosperity to the state. I am very sure our honorable leaders will give a serious thought to this suggestion. So, no more dilly-dally, let's all unite to keep the show on the road right away.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Via email

Modi Govt's anti-pensioners' policy

Editor,
The 7th Central Pay Commission (CPC) had recommended two formula on how to fix the revised pension of pre-2016 pensioners, option-1 and option-2. Option-2 is the easiest to implement. It involves multiplying the pension fixed under the 6th CPC by a fitmen factor of 2.57. Option-1 is also easy to implement. It involves only finding out the pay scale at which a person had retired and the last pay drawn by him to determine the number of increments

earned by him in that pay scale. His notional pay is then fixed at the minimum of the corresponding pay matrix of the 7th CPC and raised by the number of those increments earned by him in his old pay scale at 3% per increment. The amount so obtained is his notional pay. 50% of this amount is his pension and 30%, family pension

Option-1 is the most beneficial to the pre-2016 pensioners. Its aim is to bring parity in pension between the old and the new pensioners. It is the most scientific, rational and implementable formula. It involves minimum calculation. Once the notional pay is fixed at the minimum of the pay matrix of the 7th CPC and the number of the increment earned in the pay scale from which a person had retired. One need not do any multiplication or addition in the process of raising the notional pay by the number of increments earned in the old pay scale. Only counting the rows/cells of the corresponding pay matrix by the number of increments is sufficient. For instance, a retiree who had earned 20 increments in his old pay scale draws the amount against row/cell no. 21 as his notional pay for pension.

But, alas! this formula has been rejected by the High Powered Committee (HPC) on the grounds that it is not feasible to implement due to lack of records and recommended option-3 instead, which

had been accepted by the government. In both option-1 and option-3 records needed are service books and PPOs. Records which are not available for option-1 will not be available for option-3. Therefore, the ground put forward by the HPC for rejecting option-1 is flimsy and untenable. Moreover, the method of fixation of notional pay under option-3 is cumbersome. Notional pay has to be fixed at every intervening pay commissions, on 1.1.'86; 1.1.'96; 1.1.'06; 1.1.'16. To fix notional pay of a retiree on 1.1.'86 and 1.1.'96, one has to hunt for records, whereas, in option-1, once the pay scale from which a person had retired and the number of increments earned in that pay scale is known, which is very easy to find out, one need not go through the intervening pay commissions, 1.1.'86; 1.1.'96; 1.1.'06, but go straight to the 7th CPC's corresponding pay matrix.

By rejecting option-1, the government had done great injustice to its pensioners. The biggest losers are the old ones who retired in the 4th, 5th CPCs. The loss in monthly pension can go up to more than Rs 10,000 per month depending on individual cases. Drastic reduction in the interest rate of the senior citizen saving scheme from 9% to 8.3% on 1.7.'17 is another display of an anti-senior citizens' attitude.

Yours etc
A.Pyrtuh
Shillong-14

*"All truly great thoughts are
conceived by walking."*

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 69

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2017

NE India: Emerging from the shadows

RECENTLY the Himalaya University, Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini organised a two day conclave titled, "Transforming North East India," in Delhi. There were speakers from each of the eight states. A legislator from Nagaland, M Kikon, held forth on the Act East Policy and pointed out the loopholes that hinder this policy from being fully operationalized. He pointed to the unfriendly borders which are viewed by Delhi from a very security-centric perspective. Kikon pointed to Tripura which has a robust trade with Bangladesh because the borders between the two are soft and friendly borders as opposed to the Nagaland-Myanmar and Mizoram-Myanmar border which is not open to trade and commerce. Clearly the policy of Delhi vis-à-vis the international borders on the north eastern frontiers calls for a shift.

The North Eastern region could become an educational hub since the climate in many of the states is congenial for such ventures. Tourism as an industry is now picking up in all the eight states and is a huge revenue earner despite infrastructure constraints. The region would benefit from clean industries such as the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. It is also time to rethink and redesign our power generation technologies. Hydel power is not sustainable for the long term especially as India is a lower riparian country and is impacted by what China does with the rivers in that country. Much has been debated about attempts by China to dam the Yarlung Zangbo (Brahmaputra) at different stages of the river. Without water treaties with that country India would be at the receiving end. In recent times the North Eastern region has produced some outstanding sportspersons who have made a mark for themselves. In the performing arts and cinema, the region is now well known. These are positives that should be given a bigger push through creation of better communication links within the region and with the rest of the country. This will also reduce the feeling of isolation that has led to the coining of the word "mainland India" to denote that the Northeast is not part of that mainland.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Information service probationers visit Meghalaya

Eleven Indian Information Service probationers under the leadership of a senior research officer of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in Delhi, Prof Nawal Singh, visited Shillong recently as part of their all Indian study tour to expose them to the country's history, culture and developmental

activities.

The Meghalaya DIPR Mr H G Lyngdoh, met the probationers and discussed with them the functioning of the various information media. The group also visited some places of tourist attraction in and around Shillong, including Cherapunjee.

TO THE EDITOR

FIFA U-17 : A Milestone for NE Football

Editor,

On October 6 last, India U-17 rubbed shoulders with their contemporaries on the world stage. It is the first time that India is hosting FIFA event. Guwahati is one of the six venues where 24 teams from six confederations participated. The finals will be played on Oct 28 at Kolkata while Sarusajai is allotted nine matches including a semi final. India returns to FIFA competition after 57 years. It played four consecutive Olympics between 1948 and 1960. India named a 21-member squad with eight players from Manipur and one each from Mizoram and Sikkim. This selection gives us a reason to smile. NE players have shown that their physique is not a hindrance; they are very skilful footballers. It is an unprecedented achievement where success has not always

followed the passion despite them coming from a humble background.

This year has been incredible for NE football. Aizawl FC scripted history to win the I-League besides Shillong-Lajong FC reached the 5th place. 49 NE players have been selected for the cash-rich ISL. The love for football is present in abundance. Chandan Boro is a playing Captain for a junior club in Germany. With no big sponsors, the federation has to create infrastructure for this region. NE is not just about tribal rock n roll and wild scenic beauty. Football is emerging as a big opportunity. A number of talented players will be in action for this mega event. Striker Aniket Jadhav and Manipuri Captain Amarjit Singh Kiyam carry the hopes and dreams of 1.3 billion people. The rise of FIFA U-17 will mark a milestone for NE football.

Yours etc.

Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

Dilemma of the Conscience

By Fabian Lyngdoh

There seems to be something incongruous in the type of social system we are living in today. Human beings live in the midst of paradoxes and contradictions; amidst opulence and poverty, knowledge and ignorance and amidst high hopes and despair. Yet the ideas of success and happiness prescribed and recommended are to propagate this unjust system forever. It seems that it has become a fashionable luxury for many of us to express concern for the poor and the marginalised people, for the disabled, gender justice, and for nature and the environment, while at the same time fervently maintaining, and deadly protecting our own lifestyle in glass houses and high towers, and inspire our offsprings to achieve, not realising that it is that kind of lifestyle which is the real cause of all the injustices in the society. Indeed, for some, it seems that working for the cause of the poor and the downtrodden is itself the means to maintain their higher position in the social scale. Working for the poor while at the same time enjoying the difference between one's social standard and the miserable life of the marginalised would amount to insult, not charity. It is the mind-set of the colonist charity. It is not empathy which identifies itself with its object, but it is a dressed-up sympathy which distinguishes itself from its object.

We consider it a success when we can create a wide gap between ourselves and our fellow men in the constructed social scale. We even justify such achievement in the stratified order, as the blessing of God. "I am rich because God blessed me; they are poor because God does not love them!" Can there be a rationalisation more absurd than that? Wealth, fame, honour and power are not the gifts of God, but they are the gifts of the unjust social system. Every extra crore of rupees that a man earns, and every extra hectare of land that he acquires, reduces the per capita share of the poor in the common wealth of the economy.

When Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly" (John, 10: 10), He did not mean that his followers should live a good life as a means to achieve success in the social scale above the fools, the sinners and the ignorant, and to wear the robe of celebrity with a branded lifestyle, so that

one may have life not only abundantly, but luxuriously as in the Garden of Eden. Is such a garden of abundance available for all in this unjust social system? Everyone shall have life, and have it abundantly, only when there would be equal distribution of wealth and power in the society; it implies a life free from the oppression of the caste system and free from a society that is based on economic stratification. But we have a society which promises justice and equality on the basis of competitions in which the clever ones would always be the winners and the simple and innocent ones would always be the losers.

With the elections-2018 drawing nearer, there is a wide spread concern for the lack of proper administration and development in the State of Meghalaya, and it seems that everyone would like to vote for a change. But Meghalaya politics is only a part and parcel of Indian politics. Hence, the change that we want can never come in isolation, apart from the National politics. And, change cannot take place merely by the process of elections in the political front, without change in the socio-economic background. Hot debates in the Parliament and in the States' Assemblies have so far not been concerned with establishing a just Indian society, but years have passed by, only with deadly fights for who shall hold the reins of power regardless of injustice and poverty.

What kind of change then do we really want? Is it the welfare of the minority urbanites and the rural elites, or the augmentation of the living standard of the majority rural folks? Shillong is the hub of policy concern, but the type of government to be formed shall be decided by the electorate from the rural constituencies. The change that we want would commensurate with the kind of success in life that we define. Regardless of conscience, the situation we are in is always in favour of the interests of the clever minority groups of various hues. In its naked truth, the coming election shall be the election of Kings by the King-makers, not by the people at large. The votes of the people would only validate or justify the will of the King-makers. It is not the election of a legislator for the good of the whole State; it does not matter whether good laws are made or not, provided that the King is able to bring wealth and fortune to the King-makers, respectfully

known as 'party leaders' of various grades. The more corrupt the King is, the better their fortune would be.

All the political parties, old and new, are the same in structure and objectives, only the people are different. The goal is to capture power in five years. Stake holders in the forms of party leaders and party sponsors are already in place to reap the fruit of success. The actual manifesto is not how to make the State more productive, but how the distribution of wealth from the Central funding is to be decided. The common expectation is that the party Kings should hold lucrative departments, which are described shamelessly as "dohkshong" (fat part of the pork) even by the media and well-meaning persons. Corruption of the King is the way to success of the King-makers in every field. Even new legislators with academic credentials and good intention would be entrapped and digested by the existing system overnight. In our private world we have defined corruption as a side-income which is an accepted means to success. So, where are we?

If that is the social situation we are in, then what is wrong for an aspiring youth to support a corrupt candidate or an illiterate crore-pati if that is the way to his success in life? What is wrong for the simple rural folks to bargain money and vote for non-representatives, when their performance or non-performance is all the same, and has no direct impact on their day today living? Moreover, there is no trustworthy agency to clearly identify which is the genuine party, and who is the right person that the people in a constituency should vote for. All parties have interesting manifestoes, and all the candidates have good promises up their sleeves; an illiterate candidate would even speak better about his concept of development in the language more understandable to the rural electorate. Whom shall the people vote for? We are in a dilemma of conscience. This is because we have defined well-being in term of individual's success in the capitalistic framework. By what means that success is achieved doesn't matter at all in this

scheme of things. Success is that a beautiful temple or church is built to worship God; it doesn't matter whether the funds are diverted from a road or a bridge that should have been constructed, or from the medicines that should have been procured for the poor and the needy; success is that a corrupt bureaucrat is able to send his/her children to study abroad so that they would rise up in the social scale far above their neighbours; success is that a person is able to manipulate political decisions to further his/her business interests. Ultimately, success is that a person would be able to join with the circle of the elite, when he doesn't have to work at all and spends his days in leisure and luxuries, as the blessing of God flows automatically into his bank account. That kind of success is possible for a clever person who knows how to position himself in this corrupt system, free of all conscience. "Shall I disregard conscience and become rich in the mainstream, or shall I follow the truth and remain poor in this incongruous system?" That is the dilemma of the conscience that thoughtful people are facing.

What is needed is to redefine the present concepts of human well-being and success that we have idealised, and formulated in our educational system and operationalized by our academic and vocational institutions. We need a drastic social transformation as conceived by Paulo Freire in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; a transformation initiated by the underprivileged people who constitute a majority in any society. A social transformation initiated by those who are well placed in the existing social system can never be true to the core because their own lifestyles and their own placements in the system contribute in one way or the other, subtly or conspicuously, towards the propagation of the existing system. A just system and real democracy would be established only when the underprivileged and marginalised people realise that their miserable positions in the society is not their fate determined by God which cannot be changed, but it is an oppression of the social system which can be eradicated by human efforts.

Interrogating the Role of a Students' Union

By D V Kumar

An interesting debate has begun in the Shillong Times to which Benjamin Lyngdoh (NEHU and its Students' Union, 18th October) and Mantra Passah (NEHU and its Students' Union- An Alternative Perspective, 19th October) have made their own valuable contributions. This debate has to do with a critical interrogation of the role of the North-Eastern Hill University Students' Union (NEHUSU) in the University. In this context, I wish to focus on four points (not necessarily in the same order in which they have raised). First, the much denigrated issue of student politics. It has been said time and again that students should not involve themselves in politics and their concern should be just to come to the University, get their degrees and disappear. There appears to be a complete misunderstanding about what politics should actually mean. Politics does not necessarily refer only to electoral politics. It should be understood from a much larger perspective. It is about looking at possibilities and empowering oneself. It is about critically examining issues and taking a position on them. When one goes to JNU, one finds a slogan written on the walls there. It says, 'if politics decides your future, decide what your politics should be'. Politics decides everything about us. It decides from simple things like what we should be watching, eating, wearing to more serious things like how the minorities, dalits and women are treated in the country, what kind of education is imparted and so on. If politics is such an all-pervading narrative, why should students who are some of the most educated people with critical and creative minds of their own be discouraged from expressing their position on important issues concerning the society. I would, in fact, go further and argue, on the basis of my experience of working at NEHU, that it is depoliticisation and deradicalisation of the students of NEHU that is a matter of serious concern. One hardly finds them engaging in heated debates about issues that concern all of us. Whether it is a matter of unbridled liberalisation and its implications for the weakening of working class consciousness, or the threats posed by the right-wing forces in the country which are trying to impose a hegemonic and one-dimensional understanding of nationalism, or attempts to throttle the liberal voices and delegitimise secular and democratic forces, students in NEHU seem hardly bothered about. They would be able to reflect on these issue only when their consciousness is politicised.

Secondly, the very legitimacy of having a students' union at NEHU has been sought to be questioned for the alleged indulgence in frequent 'disruptions'. Any students' union, it needs to be recognised, definitionally takes a stance on issues which may not always be palatable to the administration. Dissent should not be misconstrued as disruption. We need to create that dialogical space where all the stakeholders of the university-teachers, students and administration- try and resolve issues that agitate them. It needs to be understood that like any students' union, NEHUSU is no exception, is a duly

elected body of the students of a university. It represents the collective spirit and aspirations of students. It is a platform through which students articulate their grievances and concerns and draw the attention of the authorities. It therefore enjoys considerable legitimacy among students. It would be doing great disservice if one were to question the very legitimacy of a students' union on the grounds that it is taking recourse to disruptions. In fact if any students' union indulges in disruptive activities, it should be largely viewed as a failure of the administration as it has failed to empathise with students and resolve their issues. We have seen what happened on the University campuses in the last one year or so, the latest being the Banaras Hindu University where an utterly incompetent Vice-Chancellor made a mockery of himself by not paying attention to the legitimate concerns of the female students of the University.

Thirdly, the involvement of the NEHUSU in the admission process of the University has been critiqued. As I mentioned above, any students' union, again NEHUSU is no exception, commands certain amount of legitimacy among the students. If such a body is involved in an important activity such as the admission process it is only going to enhance transparency and make the whole process more credible. I wish to refer to the practice which was followed at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. There used to be Student Faculty Committees (SFC) which consisted of a few elected student members of the department (or centres as they are called at JNU). They were given the responsibility of scrutinising applications for admission to the concerned department and passing them on to the teachers of the department who would then conduct interviews etc. The system worked very successfully. Later on it was shelved as the process of admission had been centralised with the opening of a number of centres both within and outside country for the conduct of the admission test. At NEHU the practice of involving the students' union has been working very well and it is pointless to question the legitimacy of the system.

Lastly, the point being made about NEHUSU being not sufficiently representative is well-taken. NEHU being a premier University in the north-eastern region attracts students from all the states in the region and it is only logical that sufficient representation needs to be consciously made for all the stake-holders of the region. Deepening of the democratic process is critically dependent upon the wider participation of people, students in the context of NEHUSU.

(The writer teaches Sociology in NEHU)

Effective students' unions and teachers' associations are an essential component of any dynamic and vibrant University. They represent the collective spirit and should always try to live up to the expectations of their members. Any University administration should learn to live with them and engage with them in a creative and dialogical manner.

(The writer teaches at NEHU. Views expressed in the article are personal. He is the Vice-President of the North-Eastern Hill University Teachers' Association)

FIFA U-17 : A Milestone for NE Football

Editor,

On October 6 last, India U-17 rubbed shoulders with their contemporaries on the world stage. It is the first time that India is hosting FIFA event. Guwahati is one of the six venues where 24 teams from six confederations participated. The finals will be played on Oct 28 at Kolkata while Sarusajai is allotted nine matches including a semi final. India returns to FIFA competition after 57 years. It played four consecutive Olympics between 1948 and 1960. India named a 21-member squad with eight players from Manipur and one each from Mizoram and Sikkim. This selection gives us a reason to smile. NE players have shown that their physique is not a hindrance; they are very skilful footballers. It is an unprecedented achievement where success has not always

followed the passion despite them coming from a humble background.

This year has been incredible for NE football. Aizawl FC scripted history to win the I-League besides Shillong-Lajong FC reached the 5th place. 49 NE players have been selected for the cash-rich ISL. The love for football is present in abundance. Chandan Boro is a playing Captain for a junior club in Germany. With no big sponsors, the federation has to create infrastructure for this region. NE is not just about tribal rock n roll and wild scenic beauty. Football is emerging as a big opportunity. A number of talented players will be in action for this mega event. Striker Aniket Jadhav and Manipuri Captain Amarjit Singh Kiyam carry the hopes and dreams of 1.3 billion people. The rise of FIFA U-17 will mark a milestone for NE football.

Yours etc.

Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

Congress supporter or independent columnist?

Editor,

I have been following the articles by HH Mohrmen regularly. While some of them which deal with the environment and culture are enlightening it is when he steps into the domain of politics that he can hardly camouflage his pro-Congress preference. In at least two articles he has given a certificate of good conduct to the MUA-2 government headed by Dr Mukul Sangma. In his latest article he has reviled all those who left the Congress to join the NPP or other political parties. Mohrmen has given a thumbs up to Jophthaw Lyngdoh a former bureaucrat who will be contesting from the Congress Party against one of the Dhar brothers who Mohrmen evidently has no love lost for. I have strong

reservations about bureaucrats joining political parties soon after their retirement or even before they have hung up their boots properly. The reason is because these babus use their official positions to create a constituency for themselves the way HM Shangliang is doing. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has to come up with strictures where officers of the government must go through a cooling off period before they jump into politics.

As far as columnists are concerned, we expect them to have independent views and to remain non-partisan because they too influence the readers. If columnists use the power of their words to speak for or against a political party then they should make full disclosure and not hide behind the respectability of being independent writers. Mohrmen's support for the Congress Party is all but visible. He seems to know the minds of the electorate and which way they will vote.

If I recall correctly, Mohrmen was leading the campaign against coal mining, by citing the example of acid mine drainage which poisons the rivers of Jaintia Hills. He has at times spoken against cement companies for causing pollution and being located along the virgin forests of Jaintia Hills. Mohrmen was very jubilant when the NGT put a stop to coal mining. But coal is still extracted and exported clandestinely. Mohrmen has however not pursued with similar passion the limestone mining activities which also have similar destructive impacts on the environment in East Jaintia Hills. Why?

As a regular reader of The Shillong Times I am educated by the issues raised in the paper especially by their regular columnists. I read Fabian Lyngdoh's articles with keen interest because from there I glean a lot about Khasi culture and tradition. Toki Blah's articles are eminently readable

because of the easy flow of language. I wish Janet Moore Hujon would write in more regularly. She has the perspective of an insider-outsider which also marks the contours of the changing times. That Batti Bazar of Laban has changed to Batting Bazar was news to me too. For many of us who live outside Meghalaya the columns by local writers keep us in touch with not just the politics but also the social and cultural transformation of the people of Meghalaya.

I am also greatly delighted by the articles questioning the utility of the NEHU students' union and a plucky rejoinder from a member of the NEHUSU. These are signs of a dynamic society which has also created a healthy climate for dialogue and dissent. This is how we should be engaging on issues; with reason, not fisticuffs.

Yours etc.,
AS Syngkri,
Via email

“Art raises its head where creeds relax.”
--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No. 70 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2017

Crisis Continues

PEACE that dawned in Darjeeling on Mahasaptami Day following a 104 day bandh may not last with the West Bengal government feuding with the Centre. The Centre wanted to withdraw central paramilitary forces from the region. Mamata Banerjee sniffed conspiracy in it and opposed the decision on the ground that it would disturb the law and order situation. The Calcutta High Court has resolved the dispute staying the withdrawal of troops. This round has gone to the West Bengal government though the judiciary and not the executive sorted out the mess. Of course, it has to be admitted that Mamata Banerjee was largely responsible for bringing on the crisis and may not have been entirely justified in saying that the BJP encouraged the Gorkhas to mount the agitation demanding a separate state. Her government antagonised the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) by making Bengali compulsory in state-run schools. Then she had Bimal Gurung replaced by GJM revel Binoy Tamang as Chairman of the Gorkha Territorial administration (GTA). That did not go down well with the last section of the Gorkha leadership.

Admittedly, the Trinamul government never looked favourably at the close ties between the GJM and the BJP. First, Jaswant Singh and then S.S Ahluwalia of the BJP have been representatives of Darjeeling in Parliament. It is not clear whether the BJP supports Gorkhaland though it is in principle in favour of creation of small states. But Gorkhaland is unviable for two reasons. First, it is too small with only three parliamentary constituencies. The reported support of Sikkim puts a new complexion of the scene provided it means merger of Gorkhaland with Sikkim. But that will invalidate the raison d'etre for Gorkhaland. Secondly, Gorkhaland is strategically situated providing a corridor between the North East and China, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The Centre and the West Bengal government should go all out to work out a sensible settlement without crushing Gorkha aspirations.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Ben's Doctor bought animal steroids

Sprinter Ben Johnson's doctor purchased large quantities of steroids intended for cats, dogs and horses beginning in 1985, a Canadian Federal inquiry into drug use in amateur sports was told yesterday. Joseph Kiefer, Director of Corporate Relations with Sterling Drug Ltd. The only maker of Stanozolol products in North America testified that Dr Jimmie Astaphan began purchasing tablets of the muscle-building drug in June 1985.

Stanozolol, manufactured by Sterling under the trade names Winstrol and Winstrol V, was found in Johnson's urine at last fall's Seoul Olympics. Johnson was stripped of a gold medal and world record in the 100 meters, triggering the inquiry. Astaphan and others in the Johnson Camp have said the sprinter was not on Stanozolol and the test result must have been due to sabotage.

No more dilly-dallying on NPAs of banking sector Time has come to tread the path of Sanity

By G. Srinivasan

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley during his Washington sojourn to attend the Fund-Bank annual jamboree maintained in his interactive session with business leaders that addressing the problem of non-performing assets (NPAs) or what is in plain parlance the unrecoverable debts the public sector banks (PSBs) had been saddled with for far too long remains “a very high priority”. Jaitley said this has two aspects. One is to recover what is recoverable. For this the government has created new laws, amended existing laws and have created a new machinery, which will probably take care of it, he said, obviously alluding to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) with its far-reaching beneficial implications to the stakeholders.

Jaitley also said there was need to strengthen the public-sector banks so that their ability to lend is maintained. This issue is a high priority area for the government, he noted.

It is germane to note that Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former Deputy Chairman of the erstwhile Planning Commission, remarked recently that the IBC process alters the incentive structure facing bank managements by according them a legally sanctified route to determine what a reasonable haircut is. He said since the alternative is liquidation, they should be willing to accept any haircut that gives them more than they would get from liquidation. He is also sanguine enough to presume that the process would free bank managements from having to bother about the CBI/CVC/ the Comptroller and Auditor General post-mortem which otherwise deters decision-making.

Rightly Ahluwalia is worried that the acceptance of large losses and a commensurate depletion of capital of banks need to be reckoned, even as the process would certainly go a long way in cleaning up the banks' red-lined balance sheets. As he cites market expectations of haircuts of 60 per cent or more might be de rigeur to attract new investors, this would entail considerable erosion of

capital. That is the reason why there is an urgent need for beefing up the capital adequacy of the PSBs to a reasonable level.

While this has been the thinking and doing of the government ever since former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan flagged off the asset quality review (AQR) of the country's banking system in 2015, the concerns of ever-escalating NPAs, inclusive of stressed assets in the banking system, have not been lessened by any mitigating action on the ground so that the confidence in the financial system of the country and its stability are not left to wild conjecture of panicky people that constitute the larger universe of the banks' clientele. It is no secret that the PSBs, albeit being flush with deposits, partly owing to

they caused to the banking system because of the extant light touch regulations, the political masters still do not refrain from announcing another round of farm loan waivers under the benign illusion that nothing damaging could happen to the system when the freebie culture is socialized!

Even as the ratio of NPAs has been sedulously surging for five years, the options are getting limited. Either you must perforce write off the loans and book losses or urge shareholders to chip in more equity capital. For the latter option, with government as a majority shareholder, its capacity to bring in additional capital to bolster the capital base in the form of recapitalization is nowhere

The Department of Company Affairs no doubt needs to be lauded for exposing the egregious shell companies across the country but it should also take concrete steps to ensure that existing blue chip companies or companies with realistic expansion plans do not get let down for want of meaningful policy support including credit at affordable cost through formal banking channels.

demonetization or what is dubbed by the former Chief Economic Advisor Dr.Shankar N Acharya in one of his widely read column in a pink daily as the Demon with no unintended pun, are pernickety in extending credit to the productive segments of the economy. Their shyness or risk-aversion is understandable, having been bitten twice by loan waivers to farmers and directional lending to crony capitalists under duress from the political dispensation of the past. The resulting panic attack plaguing the PSBs from discharging their Dharmic duty is mostly owing to the overwhelming burden of bad loans that had got many a bank bruised and burnt its arms appallingly. The irony is that even as the corporate tycoons are let off despite the immeasurable damage that

near the required sums, leaving the beleaguered banking industry to remain unfocused on beefing up its profitability through evenly spread credit disbursal to the various real sectors of the economy to ensure higher economic growth the country is badly in need to re-start its growth engine. It is an open secret that corporate debt piling up hugely is a massive drag on the economy and unless the balance sheets of companies get cleaned up their ability to borrow and re-invest to keep their machinery moving would turn out to be a Sisyphean task.

There is no point in deprecating against the woeful lack of private investment to ramp up the overall growth of the

economy in the face of little action to clean up the corporate mess through purposive action by the authorities concerned. The Department of Company Affairs no doubt needs to be lauded for exposing the egregious shell companies across the country but it should also take concrete steps to ensure that existing blue chip companies or companies with realistic expansion plans do not get let down for want of meaningful policy support including credit at affordable cost through formal banking channels.

Be that as it may, the predicament of PSBs at this juncture is unenviable as recounted by a recent analytical news story by a western news agency, which documented that Indian banks' bad loans hit a peak of 9.5 trillion rupees or \$145.56 billion dollars at the end of June, citing RBI data obtained through right-to-information request. This revealed that the banks' total stressed loans—including non-performing and restructured or rolled over loans—rose to 4.5 per cent in the six months to end-June, 2017. Even as the bulk of the bad loans remains with the PSBs and flow from lending to large conglomerates in steel and infrastructure sectors, the spurt in bad loans among small firms and even retail borrowing is deleterious enough to preclude the banks from encouraging new loans to help fuel growth.

In the eventual analysis even as the government had done recognition of the big problem and is moving towards a resolution, the other options of recapitalization and reform of the banking industry brook no delay for which sensible proposals like specious dilution of the government stake in the existing systems and merger and consolidations on a realistic scale need to be initiated before long. The road ahead is not easy or paved with bed of roses but nevertheless the time has come to traverse on the path to sanity in the larger interests of the economy. (IPA Service)

Public Investment In N-E Aiming to be National Hub?

By Shivaji Sarkar

The North-East is said to be transforming and wants to catch the nation's attention. At the same time, the country needs a stronger NE region for faster development and making addition to the GDP. But why is it flailing? Or is it making an impact, which the nation fails to see?

Yes, the N-E is changing. It held a meet in Delhi on its transformation and awareness, as it wants to be national and just not a regional hub. It is coming up with infrastructure such as the longest Dhola-Sadia, Bhupen Hazarika Bridge. Still it looks for sharp focus and its people though spread across the country find their acceptance not that easy even today.

The North East's contribution to the nation's GDP today at 2.5 per cent is almost half of what it was in 1947. The partition had its impact in accessibility through a 27 km wide Chicken's neck, causing detour in terms of distance and time.

It has yet to become an investment destination despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's repeated visits, stress to ameliorate the conditions and proposed Rs 45,000 crore government investments. One aspect that planners need to understand is that over 70 per cent of the people in the N-E are dependent on agriculture. The perspective has to veer around farming to give the region a boost.

The SAMPADA -- Scheme for Agro Marine Produce Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters -- will be Rs 6,000-crore umbrella project for seamless transfer of food products to consuming areas. Additionally, the Guwahati traders are becoming less dependent on Delhi. They have started their own manufacturing in many areas including garments and now import less from central India. The traders find that this has helped give their buyers better quality and at less cost.

However, the region looks for connectivity proposals floated by sub-regional or regional groupings, such as BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal), BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation). A recent study mapped a total of 476 freight-carrying routes in the region.

The development agenda is being noticed in the better connected parts of Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. Tripura, which will go to the polls, is developing in a different way. It is becoming the rubber hub with high rubber cultivation in one lakh hectare area. It is adding to the State GDP but jobs are not growing in proportion.

Undeniably, the N-E is an emerging market and has the potential to becoming a hub of neighbouring nations such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar. Unofficially it is happening as there are many supposedly illicit channels that open up in all these countries. Officially, it is dubbed as smuggling.

There are also some ingenious Indian traders too. They export their goods say from Punjab to Bangladesh and then re-export these to the N-E. These channels are legal and the traders save in terms of export duty drawback, transportation cost as also time.

Tripura is becoming a gateway and is building a rail head to Chittagong port in Bangladesh. Assam has set up 'Act East' department and an international firm is drawing up the policy. Dhaka has opened a consulate in Guwahati and is planning to open one at Thimphu in Bhutan. However, the N-E has a nagging concern as to why it remains cut off from

the rest of the country. Would this agony end with the proposed rail and road linkages through Bangladesh? Will it come closer to Kolkata?

There are still some reservations in Bangladesh and the Indian economic corridor is becoming a political issue. India, instead of investing in a bullet train, may think of an elevated road-cum-rail corridor to link it with West Bengal and Bihar. While an estimate is yet to be made, it may be around Rs 40,000 crore.

This would boost the economy of North-East and eastern India. The plan is to take N-E out of its closet as it cannot grow with this plan alone. It has to develop an inner strength. Till 1960s, persons from Assam, then undivided, used to go to Allahabad University and other institutions in northern India for education. Today, this has changed. However, the region has not become a magnet to invite people from rest of the country.

Thus, the new N-E has yet to emerge as it is still in a receiving mode. The NHA is building roads in Mynamar to create the South East Asian highway. The Ministry of External Affairs has funded the first installment of Rs 1177 crore as a private sector Indian joint venture with Punj Lloyd and Varaha Infrastructure. India is investing another over Rs 4,000 crore on Myanmar roads. The plan to connect the region with Myanmarese seaport at Sittwe is also on. In the long run this would give a further boost to north-eastern exports.

The inner power of the region has to be built on industry, manufacturing and agriculture. Somehow investments are mostly from the public sector and along with the government is said to invest Rs 45,000 crore in all the eight States. About Rs 300 crore private sector investment is coming into education. New universities like Himlayan University in far off Itanagar in Aruanachal or Don Bosco in Guwahati have come up. Dimapur is also developing as education hub. This is somewhat akin to Bengaluru developing such a hub in the mid-80s.

Importantly, over five lakh students from the region go to south and northern India for education. Bengaluru and adjacent region draws about a lakh young men from Bangladesh for higher education and higher IT-based training. This emigration has to stop.

Further, the region cannot long sustain on government investments alone. This despite the best efforts has a large fund leakage and under-utilisation owing to red tape. The region has developed some medium level corporate. It has to do more to increase the non-government investments and make the region lucrative not only for its own people but also for others. Why should a Bangaladeshi go so far as Bengaluru if he could get a better facility near his home in Assam, Meghalaya or Nagaland?

With relations improving with Myanmar and also better economic standards there, the region should design itself to draw its talent including from many parts of South-East Asia. Today it looks difficult, but with perspective planning this may be possible, feel experts. Optimism is being gradually noticed in the north east. The youth are more open and focused. Those who have some pessimism also feel that in the next 10 years the region would be different, prospering and pave the way for a new India that is oft talked about. --INFA

TO THE EDITOR

On NEHU Students' Union

Editor,
People have been questioning the role of the Students' Union of the North Eastern Hill University. Many of them have also voiced out their opinions in newspapers and other forms of media. And yes, it is a fact that in the recent years the Union has taken bold measures in the hope that their actions will trigger an effect on the university authorities. But the question that begs an answer here is “why do they have to take such extreme measures?”

As a student and a former member of the North Eastern Hill University Students' Union, I have witnessed firsthand the hardships that the students are facing on a daily basis. Issues such as poor hostel management, inadequate library resources, pathetic health and transport services and inhumane treatment of students by teachers and staff of the University are among the prevalent ones often voiced out by the students' union in the recent years. As a matter of fact, even issues like the miserable condition of roads within the campus, university buildings, street lights, toilets and other infrastructure which can be rarely seen or

heard in other Central Universities also have to be taken up by the students. Yet questions have always been raised against the Union especially by the university authorities, without trying to reason out the distressing situation of the students.

Also in lieu of trying to build a bridge with the students, it is seen that the authorities are busy in softening and infiltrating the students' union by trying to interfere and influence the outcome of the student union elections which is a shame not only to the university but the state and the country. Although false promises and crocodile tears have been the strongest strategies of the authorities in the past, but as we all know, none of those will work with the students any longer.

To conclude, the authorities need to address students' issues as soon as possible to ensure peace and harmony in the university. This is because in my opinion the students' union of the university is just reacting to the stimuli caused by the many issues that surround the student community as a whole.

Yours etc.,
Johnson Langdon
Research Scholar,
NEHU

“Teachers' woes.”

Editor,
Recently the Union Cabinet announced revised pay scales for nearly eight lakh teachers of higher educational institutions funded by the UGC and also 329 universities which are funded by state governments and 12,912 government and private adding colleges affiliated to state public universities. But what about the un-aided self-financing colleges across the country? Teachers in self-financing institutions are being paid the least. Their salaries also need augmentation. The problem starts at the grassroots with very low pay scale for teachers in self-financing colleges. They are being paid a pittance, so invariably teachers who are working in such colleges are typically those who haven't got a job elsewhere or who find teaching convenient. So, instead of having teachers who are motivated to enrich the learning experience of students, we have teachers who barely know the basics of the common core subjects.

The government needs to take steps to extend financial assistance to self-financing colleges so that teaching as a profession attracts best minds which

will improve the quality of education.

Yours etc.,
Phrangshai Hynniewta
Shillong-2

Of columnists and their politics

Editor,
I am a young student who is currently doing my masters in political science in the national capital Delhi. I am an avid reader of your newspaper through the online e-paper. Your newspapers employs other writers to offer their individual opinions in the newspaper but do these columnists do thorough research? Do they write factual news stories or rather their own personal views on events? Some columnists focus on particular issues such as national and state politics, local current events, food, parenting, sports or environment etc. Others write on a variety of topics. By reading several columns by the same writer, a researcher can begin to determine the writer's attitudes and politics more broadly. We are aware that our state will go to the polls next year and hence writers will write a lot about this great event which will happen in February-March 2018. One noted columnist of your newspaper seems to be

slanted towards a particular political party. He even went to the extent of acting as adviser of this party and tendering his advice to them through your newspaper. Columnists are human beings and human beings will support a particular party, a particular club or particular individual. They have every right to do so on their individual capacity but using a space in the leading newspaper of this state as a platform form to indirectly or directly canvass for a party, group or individual is disrespectful for the readers of The Shillong Times. Therefore as young citizens of this country I request the noted columnists of our state not to be biased in their writings. The Shillong Times is not meant to be used by few people but is meant to serve the larger public.

Yours etc
Manny Lyngwa
New Delhi,

Editor replies: A column is not a news report. Columns are usually commentaries of the news that have appeared in this or other media. The editorial page is a space provided for people of different persuasions and politics to express their views. The reader may or may not

agree with those views. Those with strong disagreements on what a columnist has written can write a rejoinder to counter the points put forth by the writer. Democracy is about expressing multiple views and about encouraging the climate of debate and dissent.

Humanity or hatred?

Editor,
There are only two religions ~ Humanity and Hatred! Fundamentalists had killed many rationalists in Bangladesh notably Niloy Chatterjee, Washiqur Rahman Babu, Avijit Roy, Nazimuddin Samad and Rezaul Karim Siddiquee. These rationalists belonged to the same religion of humanity as that of Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, Malleshappa Kalburgi and Gouri Lankesh. All these killers belonged to the same religion of hatred as did Stephen Paddock, the sadist gunman of Las Vegas.

Yours etc.,
Suji 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.

History of illumination

Ancient texts show use of fireworks

By BK Mishra

Fireworks are at least 2000 years old and have indeed been an integral part of Indian culture cutting across religions, caste, creed and gender for several hundreds of years.

Paintings from the 16th and the 17th centuries suggest that fireworks were part of celebrations by the masses (royalty as well as non-royalty) and not limited to any particular religion or gender.

Apart from the ancient Sanskrit texts which referred to saltpetre (Potassium Nitrate) as 'Agnichurna', its usage for producing smoke (to fight the enemy during war) was documented 2300 years ago in Kautilya Arthashastra.

Also, Chinese texts dating back to the 7th century had acknowledged that Indians were aware of saltpetre and its usage for producing purple flames implying that it might be used for aesthetic purposes apart from military.

Over the next few centuries, alchemists experimented with saltpetre and there are Chinese texts dating back to the 9th century which mention the usage of saltpetre enclosed in bamboo tube to create loud explosions. The Chinese believed that such explosions could keep evil spirits at bay.

As the Chinese continued to innovate further with different form factors like sparklers, light fountains, rockets etc, they quickly sensed the business opportunity and began to export them to Europe and India.

By the 16th century, fireworks had become one of the major sources of entertainment for Indian royalty. Grand fireworks during functions (especially weddings) costing a fortune had become a norm. In 1609, Adil Shah spent a whopping Rs 80,000 on fireworks alone.

(Just to give an idea of the magnitude of the money, consider the case of Bangalore around that timeframe. In 1687, Bangalore was a 150-year-old business hub with trade links to Rome and a thriving city. The city was purchased for Rs 3 lakh by Chikkadevaraya Wodeyar. It means the amount of money spent by Adil Shah on fireworks could have fetched him almost 1/4th of Bangalore).

The use of fireworks in the celebration of Diwali, which is common in India now, must have come into existence after about 1400 AD, when gunpowder came to be used



in Indian warfare.

The major constituent of firework is gunpowder which in turn comprises saltpetre, sulfur and charcoal. While sulfur and charcoal act as fuel to prolong the combustion, it is actually the saltpetre which gives the characteristic purple flame due to which fireworks are used not only for military but aesthetic (celebratory) purposes as well.

Historians around the world have confirmed that the knowledge of gunpowder existed in ancient India. Dr Gustav Oppert (a German Indologist) has done extensive research on this and has been an authority on the subject, with his works being accepted and quoted by several books by authors and historians around the world.

Elaborate description of fireworks in mythological works from this period also brings in imaginations of pyrotechnic exuberance, familiar to the writers of this period, around these epic events. For example, a popular 16th century Marathi poem by Saint Eknath called "Rukmini Swayamvara," describing Rukmini's wedding with Krishna, mentions a range of fireworks, from rockets to the equivalent of the modern *phooljhadi*.

Telling tales

Various schools of paintings: Mughal, Pahari and Rajasthani from the 18th century depict people enjoying firecrackers. (Courtesy British Museum and San Diego Mu-

seum of Art).

By the eighteenth century, fireworks began to become de rigueur in grand scale Diwali entertainments organised by rulers. Peshwayanchi Bakhar, a Maratha chronicle text, mentions a recounted account of Diwali celebration in the Kotah (modern Kota, Rajasthan).

Mahadji Scindia in it describes to Peshwa Savai Madhavarao: "The Diwali festival is celebrated for 4 days at Kota, when lacs of lamps are lighted. The Raja of Kota during these four days gives a display of fire-works outside the premises of his capital. It is called... "Lanka of fire-works". Mahadji then went on to describe an image of Ravana at the center, surrounded by rakshasas, moneys and a big image of Hanuman prepared in gunpowder, which upon being lit actually illustrated the scene of Lanka dahan via Hanuman's tail via pyrotechnics. After hearing this, the Peshwa gave orders for a similar display of fireworks for his entertainment. The resultant grand performance, as per the chronicle, was "witnessed by the people of Poona in large numbers".

A historical account in Marathi by Rai Bahadur DB Parasnis translating to English fireworks in India mentions the arrival of a skilled English pyrotechnician in India in 1790 AD, who first impressed the British in Calcutta with his performance and was then sent by them to Asafadnula, the Nawab of Lucknow, whom he impressed with a spectacular, continuous display in the sky of

colourful fireflowers, fishes, serpents and stars. In one display, a mosque arose in the sky.

A firework display for Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah 'Rangeela' (1702-1748), portrayed seated and leaning against a bolster. The indolent emperor was known for his various indulgences.

Thus, by the late Peshwa period, when the Mughal empire was breathing its last and the British East India Company was afoot realising its designs in India, not only was the knowledge of different fireworks common, but also many references to Diwali along with accompanying description of fireworks or *atishbazi* began surfacing in various publications.

Often these makers of fireworks were also the manufacturers of gunpowder, the raw materials for which were always readily available in India and which was used in bulk in warfare.

By the end of the 18th century, however, its military use was phased out in favour of newer explosives like dynamite. Since then, the medieval technology's principal use remained in the fabrication of fireworks.

Fireworks in modern India

What generally seems apparent from the sparing descriptions of crackers and fireworks in medieval India is not only their grand nature but also that they were probably quite expensive and hence commissioned mainly by the rulers for personal and citizen entertainment or by the economically well-to-do of the community.

In the colonial era, it is likely that like most indigenous industries, India's fireworks production and development also took a setback, with imports from Europe and China appearing in the Indian market.

The first fireworks factory in India was set up in Kolkata in the 19th century. After Independence, Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu emerged as India's firecracker hub, benefiting from the restrictions of imports of firecrackers. It is plausible to theorise that, unlike in the colonial and medieval eras, with increase in the population and economic prosperity of the Indian middle class — especially in the last three decades — and with ready supply coming in from the flourishing domestic industry, bursting of firecrackers only grew and never looked back. And the rest as they say is history.

(mishrabasant24@yahoo.in)

Imminent danger

By Parag Ranjan Dutta

It took millions of years for the first sign of life to be formed in the form of a droplet of protoplasm. It is believed that life evolved in water. The irony today is that millions of lives might end up in water, either with less, excess or qualitative changes in water bodies.

The availability of fresh water resource is extremely limited and it is threatening the very existence of life. A study by the World Bank revealed that 97 per cent of the earth's water is saline. Approximately about 2 per cent of the fresh water is trapped in the form of glaciers and polar ice. Only a meager 1 per cent is available for drinking and other domestic purposes.

It is believed that a gaseous envelope of ammonia, methane, water vapour and hydrogen surrounded the primeval earth. Atmosphere had undergone changes gradually and came to stay with nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide as major constituents. It is a known fact that carbon dioxide regulates and maintains the global temperature balance between the solar energy received by the earth and the outgoing terrestrial radiation (known as Heat Budget).

Carbon dioxide is the best known Green House gas, but other Green House gases like methane, nitrous oxide, CFC's, ozone and water vapour are all heat trappers and have given rise to the phenomenon of Green House Effect and consequent global warming.

Recent studies of air trapped in bubbles inside ice cores in Greenland and Russian station Vostok in Antarctica have revealed a distinct relationship between these variations and air temperature.

From prior to the days of Industrial Revolution till the present, there was a substantial rise in the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. According to one estimate more than 18 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide is injected into to the troposphere (layer of the atmosphere closest to the earth) annually.

There are enough geological evidences to prove that the climate of the world changed several times during the past 350 million years.

The presence of coal in the mid-latitude countries, are a testimony to the fact that these regions were hot and humid in the coniferous period (350 million years ago) and were endowed with wealth of vegetation.

On the other hand tropical regions of the continents of the Southern Hemisphere (Gondwanaland) witnessed large scale glaciations in the past. This suggests that continents have undertaken long journeys from their actual positions.

This theory was propounded by the German climatologist and botanist Alfred Wegener. According to him the Gondwanaland started breaking away from Antarctica in the Mesozoic era. This north bound journey of the southern continents was poetically described by Wegener as 'Polflucht', or flight from the poles. In the evening of April 21, 2008, a disturbing news was aired by CNN, which said that Greenland had started melting. The Arctic was already bustling with activity never seen before. Melting of icebergs in the Arctic had probably opened up a new route for ocean transport. A NASA report of 2002 showed an alarming report that the North Pole would be free of ice by the turn of the century.

Oil boom in Alaska had opened up a new horizon of economic activity in the region. But unfortunately very few of us could realise the long-term implications of these misadventures. Marine pollution by oil slicks is a major international concern because of its devastating effect on marine ecosystem. Oil slicks could inhibit the growth of planktons and photosynthetic activities of other plants. The infamous oil slick from the super tanker Exxon Valdez near Alaska in March 24, 1989, leaked about 20 lakh tonnes of oil into the sea.

If the global warming continues at the pace of today, the day is not far off, when the Tundra Biome (large terrestrial communities of plants and animals) would be lost from the surface of the earth. This will lead to the disappearance of an already fragile food chain in the arctic.

The wonderful world of seals, walrus, polar bears, and a number of flowering plants and Reindeer moss shall not adorn the Tundra anymore. Northbound flights of thousands of birds of different species that hatch and breed in the very brief Arctic summer camps would come to a halt.

(The author is former Head of the Department of Environmental Science, St. Edmund's College)

(To be continued)



App-t solution to school attendance trouble

Anirudh Goyal needed a solution to a problem that every school-going student faces at some point of time. Last year, when he faced a tirade of questions in school after he took sick leave followed by preparatory leave before examinations, Anirudh decided to come up with some device to tackle confusion over attendance.

The Class XII student of DPS RK Puram in New Delhi thought of developing a mobile application that would help students calculate their attendance for a longer period of time.

Attendx is a virtual assistant that monitors the school attendance of the user on a real time basis besides providing projections to balance the number of leave and attendance figures for ensuring mandatory compliance.

The application is dedicated to school goers and is a simple and friendly user interface keeping the requirements of students in the forefront. It is available on Google Play Store.

"The app will constantly give you re-

mindings to update your attendance so you don't have to take the trouble of keeping a track," the teenager told *The Shillong Times* on phone from Delhi.

Attendx requires the user to feed in the threshold percentage attendance that he/she wishes to maintain or achieve on culmination of the session and thereafter punch in daily attendance. The app provides pre-programmed alert reminders for punching the latter. It also provides real time monitoring of leave and attendance; for users who join late during the session/academic year, there is the facility of "retro punching" for the attendance for the period or months transpired till the date of joining.

The user can calibrate the Attendx calendar in advance for any school off's or known holidays in sync with the school almanac, so that the percentage results are reflective of the true position at any point of time.

It took Anirudh around three months to develop the application that was launched recently. He started work dur-



ing summer vacation this year. The student said it was difficult because he had to prepare for board examinations and he had to juggle time between studies and work.

The young Founder Director of Attendx is happy with his first entrepreneurial venture. "There have been 900

downloads till October 1 and the feedback from those among my friends who are using the app is positive," says a soft-spoken Anirudh.

A member of the computer club of his school for last three years, Anirudh says he has always been interested in technology and was trying his best to get into the club since Class VII.

Asked how he managed to develop the app without any prior experience, Anirudh said he worked alone and used his knowledge about technology. "But in the later stage I took help from my tutor," he added.

As member of the computer club, Anirudh has won trophies and awards in 21 of the 22 inter-school competitions that he represented his school at.

On financing his mobile app project, Anirudh said he got the seed capital for his venture via bootstrapping — he had his earnings from YouTube for a video he posted on photoshop designing tutorial, besides relying for balance from his pocket savings and parents.

The teenager did a lot of research before giving shape to his ideas. He said there may be other apps available for attendance on the Google Play Store but none catered to school students. "I am not sure whether students of other boards can use it but those studying under CBSE can definitely use. I am from this board of education and I designed the app keeping in mind the needs of a student from this board," he added.

Anirudh has also authored a book on Logo Design which is under publication presently.

The Class XII student, who loves cricket and watching Hollywood movies, wants to pursue computer science in a university outside the state. Right now, he is taking a break from his experiments and focusing on studies.

(Attendx is an Android mobile application available for free download on Google Play Store (attendx.in/download))

What shall we be angry about?

When you see the shocking, outrageous things people do just to get attention on the internet, it's impossible not to shake your head and think: Why didn't I think of that? So this columnist bought a KitKat, a snack consisting of four thin sticks of chocolate. Instead of snapping the individual sticks apart, I left it as a single unit and took a big bite out of the top. As soon as pictures were posted, outraged reactions poured in. "That's not how you eat a KitKat!!!" said the first. "Man, that is just so wrong," said the next. "U R one sick dude," said the third. "What is wrong with u," said another.

This experiment, which I did some time ago, confirmed that a) people love being outraged, and b) the most trivial things create a much bigger reaction than serious but uninteresting things such as the imminent end of the world, the coming nuclear disaster, global Armageddon, etc. Case in

THE FUNNY SIDE
Nury Vittachi

point: In August, police officers reported that a man wearing jean shorts robbed several shops in St Louis County in the US state of Missouri. The public reaction? I found precisely zero comments about the wrongness of robbing stores but vast numbers of angry posts about the wrongness of a male wearing jean shorts.

Police investigators joined in. "His disregard for the law is as offensive as his disregard for fashion trends," said officer Ben Granda. His team circulated a photo of the man and asked the public (I am not making this up) to report him to law enforcement officers and "the fashion police".

Last month, the internet glowed red hot with a report entitled "That's not how you eat chicken

nuggets". Clicking on the headline led you to a secretly filmed video of someone eating the McDonald's, er, "foodstuff" with a knife and fork instead of fingers. "It's so weird," said one comment. "People who do things like that might be serial killers."

Reddit and Twitter, meanwhile, were outraged over people who buy hot pizzas and then carry them vertically. "Who carries pizza like that?" said one Tweeter. "I think I am witnessing a drug deal."

Modern, liberal Internet society HATES non-conformity and loves exposing misfits. Why?

"Historically, humans have always gathered to discuss behavioral morality in religious and cultural gatherings," a psychologist who did not want her name printed told this columnist via email. "Now many are missing such forums."

Professor Ryan Martin, who studies anger, told The New York Times that people are angry on the internet because they are hungry for group validation. When others share their shock, "they feel they're vindicated and a little less lonely and isolated in their belief".

The bad thing is that evil, unscrupulous media people can exploit this to get clicks on their own posts.

Mwa ha ha ha ha. Speaking of which, more responses had arrived under my image of eating a KitKat the wrong way. "That's chocolate abuse!!!" said one. "You need help," said another.

I need to stop here. I feel the need to go buy jean shorts. Pix coming.

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

'We're not us in Jia and Jia'

Bollywood film *Jia and Jia* promises a rare story line, centred on a road trip by two young girls. Lead actors of the film, Kalki Koechlin and Richa Chadda, speak exclusively to IBNS-TWF correspondent Souvik Ghosh.

Is there any similarity between the characters you two have played in the film and your real life personalities?

Kalki: I don't have the kind of energy in real life what Jia (Kalki's character) has. She is really excited all the time. In every other minute, something new would excite her. I wish I had that kind of energy for life but definitely do like her philosophy that one has to live life in a moment. One has to keep finding happiness. I do not believe to have the kind of madness in me that Jiya has. My character is much more daring than me. Unlike Jia, I do not steal things from shops, cafes and run away without paying bills (smiles). I haven't done that. But sometimes, I like to tease people. When I am really bored in a situation, I do certain things like pulling someone's hair and all such stuffs. I have goofy elements.

Richa: None of our characters are relatable. Neither she is the girl from *Margarita with a Straw* (Kalki's film) nor I am the bossy girl from *Fukrey* or the angry old house wife of *Gangs of Wasseypur* (Richa's films), which we have played on-screen so far. We just play roles and have to keep playing different parts to explore our own range of acting. Sometimes, I become surprised to see how the roles have turned out so well. It is important to keep experimenting.

Both of you have so far played some unique roles in the films. In that sense, what drifts you to a film, your own character or the script?

Kalki: We are eager to make good films that everybody wants to watch. As a member of the audience, I want to watch every kind of films, but that doesn't mean those will be bad. I want to see all kinds of films but not the mediocre ones with mediocre acting. The beginning of a film is the script. A quality film requires good directors,



We just play roles and have to keep playing different parts to explore our own range of acting
~ Richa Chadda

We are eager to make good films that everybody wants to watch. I want to watch every kind of films, but that doesn't mean those will be bad
~ Kalki Koechlin

actors, cameramen and musicians but the beginning is always a good script. If there is no script (good script), one (the film) has nothing.

Richa: I wish films should not be called as content-oriented, rather just good or bad or mediocre ones.

Hopefully we will start investing more in writers and directors who actually make the film on paper. I feel now all are so much caught up in numbers, weekend businesses and the box office collections, that they are trying to make just projects, turning the films into products.

This is may be for the first time, a film is centred on two women undertaking road trips. Do you think it is path breaking in Bollywood?

Kalki: In India, for sure. At least in Hindi cinema, we can't think of a film that is centred on road trip undertaken by a girl. We (Kalki, Richa) couldn't find one. So, I think it has been a USP for the film which haven't been done before. What is the biggest take away from the film?

Kalki: I have begun traveling a lot more after this film because in the beginning of my career, I was very focused on my works. This film has opened me up to writing, travelling, learning new skills like surfing. After *Jia aur Jia*, I have started doing lot of things instead of just one.



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 22, 2017

Venus conjunct Mars on your solar return chart denotes a good year. It's a potentially excellent year for making positive lifestyle changes and for dedication to your work or special projects. You are willing to put in the effort for a mental interest or project, and you can feel pleasantly dedicated to your work or ideas. You are more able to focus on what you're doing and communicating, and you are more inclined to notice and consider details. For some, there can be the beginning of a significant new relationship or the intensification of an existing romance or an important passion project that reaches a turning point. When you are motivated, you can accomplish great things, bringing new life to old goals. However, you may struggle at times with increased responsibilities.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
This week brings good results through your efforts and continuous hard work. You are committed, bold and adventurous right now and avoid delays by proceeding exactly the way that you want to. Your popularity is increasing, and is reinforced by your own ability to cooperate and harmonize. Taking care of business is a focus. You may find your children need more love affection and attention. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to new situations. You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved. A health routine started now is likely to be successful.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
Fine arts, drama, fun, glamour and creativity come into focus. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel a part of the whole. This could also be the harbinger of new professional opportunities. It's a great time to make improvements. Your vision is practical right now, and you want to see tangible results for your efforts. Relationships take on a fun aspect and activities with children increase. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive now. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Health will take a turn for the better.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
This is the time of year when personal finances and possessions receive maximum attention as your focus is on material affairs and comfort issues. Pour your energy into your work and your finances, and you might just be able to take your ideas to the bank. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused. You might consider furthering your education and hobbies. It is a fabulous time to do so or simply broadening your knowledge in a more informal manner. Some form of pleasant result in your professional life brings rewards and recognition. You feel on top of things with good health and energy at your disposal.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
This phase brings fabulous results in domestic matters. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work. You are more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. Media and the arts involve you in creative pastimes while professional ventures and assignments bring financial stability. You are fond of love and admiration. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, arts and writing. You would be infused with positive energy and gain recognition for your talents and hard work.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
You can look forward to increased funds and monetary gains as you may earn from investments and insurance done earlier. Your most natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. Work done behind the scenes may be incorporated into your career or public life. Some of you may find that your career is moving towards a more service-oriented direction. There will be times when you feel stressed over details or the job you do and the recognition you get for it. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are headed. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. A sense of humor allows free expression and does wonders for your love life too.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
The planetary configuration indicates, an excellent phase for money, career, and romance. Children, romantic trips, hobbies and other forms of communication and making connections appeal strongly. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happi-

ness and solidarity in family and friendship. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't get caught up in the past. You feel a great need to push your personal interests and projects forward, and this is a strong time to do so. You are bound to receive gifts and happy financial news.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)
Sincerity, cooperation and harmony in relationships are highlighted. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. Financial security and enjoyment of the good things in life are important to you, although you also value simple pleasures. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of financial matters with social or public affairs. This is a stable period for love matters and close relationships. You value those who make you feel comfortable, and familiarity is more important to you. You give attention to fitness and health related programs.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
This period brings responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations. This is a strong period for analyzing your cash flow, income, and earning power. You are more practical and rational in your approach. With your conscious mind focused on money and possessions, as well as personal values, this can be a strong period for gathering new profitable ideas. Alternatively, it could be a time when you tend to fret over your finances. Conversations tend to be practical rather than frivolous now. Don't isolate yourself when you are feeling down. People will support you, or at least listen, when you share your feelings.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)
This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. There would be financial gains and profits from business. Circumstances in life are likely to create a situation where you may have to take the lead in handling complicated situations. You may be placed in a position where you have to make important monetary decisions yourself. If you have a business, it will be difficult to avoid spending lavishly on equipment and office supplies. Work-related travel or reaching out to people is possible now. There could be up-gradation, new responsibilities or transfer. You would have more contacts with authority figures. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are at your most visible during this phase.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
This is a time of profitable productivity. There would excellent opportunities for media studies and other related fields. You tend to be expansive and generous with people around. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now. You are inclined to exert energy and initiative into making money and business dealings. You can be more resourceful than usual at this time, but you could also be inclined to rash decisions or risk-taking with money.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
Your popularity increases as you cooperate and harmonize at the workplace and at home. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. This is a time of profitable productivity. A matured or an assertive type of individual may come up with challenging offers and new suggestions. You are more motivated to make money now.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
You are patient, humble and secured with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. Showing your authority and a "take charge" attitude is important now, but gentleness is important as well. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another service-oriented capacity where you volunteer your services. You are likely to have many ideas and plans going and you might be inclined to scatter your energies as a result. Channelled well, this is a good time to sell your ideas to others, or to present your case. You may be especially busy running errands and communicating with others. More articulate than usual, you may also have a more assertive, self-centered, or provocative communication style.

Make the most of the booming sector

By Ranjan K Baruah

Tourism is a common word when it comes to Meghalaya or the North East. The tourism and hospitality sector has emerged as one of the key drivers of growth among the services sector in the country. Tourism in Meghalaya and the North East has significant potential considering the rich cultural and historical heritage, variety in ecology, terrains and places of natural beauty spread across the region.

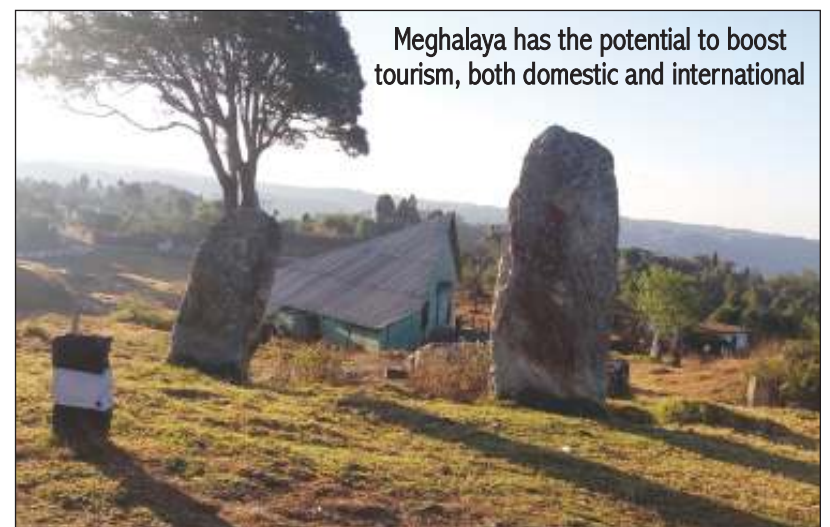
India's rising middle class and increasing disposable incomes have continued to support the growth of domestic and outbound tourism. According to the Ministry of Tourism, foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India increased 19.5 per cent year-on-year to 630,000 in May 2017.

FTAs on e-tourist visa increased 55.3 per cent year-on-year to 68,000 in May 2017. India's foreign exchange earnings (FEES) through tourism increased by 32 per cent year-on-year to reach \$2.278 billion in April 2017, the Ministry of Tourism data shows.

The tourism and hospitality is among the top 10 sectors in India to attract the highest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). During the period April 2000-March 2017, the hotel and tourism sector attracted around \$10.14 billion of FDI, according to the data released by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion.

In the Union Budget 2017-18, the Government of India announced some initiatives to give a fillip to the tourism and hospitality sector such as setting up of five special tourism zones, special pilgrimage or tourism trains and worldwide launch of Incredible India campaign, among others.

India's travel and tourism industry has huge growth potential. The tourism industry is also looking forward to the expansion of e-visa scheme which is



Meghalaya has the potential to boost tourism, both domestic and international

expected to double the tourist inflow to India.

The launch of several central branding and marketing initiatives, such as Incredible India and Athiti Devo Bhava, has provided a focused impetus to growth. India has also released a fresh category of visa — the medical visa or M-visa, to encourage medical tourism in the country.



Tourism products include cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, historical, rural, religious tourism, etc. There are many career avenues related to tourism industry. One may be associated with tour and travel agency, hotels and resorts, managing the sights, etc.

A very wide industry, it includes government tourism departments, immigration and customs services, travel agencies, airlines, tour operators, hotels etc and many associated services like airline catering or laundry services, guides, interpreters, tourism promotion and sales etc.

Some of the courses related to tourism are : Advance Diploma in Travel and Tourism Management, Diploma in Travel and Tourism Management, M.B.A.

Travel and Tourism, Master of Travel and Tourism Management, Post Graduate Diploma in Travel and Tourism Management, Masters and Bachelor of Tourism Studies/Management, etc. These courses are available in many colleges and institutes across the country.

Updates
Chulabhorn Graduate Institute's Scholarships: Chulabhorn Graduate Institute, Bangkok is offering scholarships to Indian applicants for the academic year 2018 under 'Chulabhorn Graduate Institute Post -graduate Scholarships Program' for the programme leading to the master's degree in applied Biological Sciences: Environmental Health, Environmental Toxicology and Chemical Biology. Interested may apply before 31st October.

Netherlands Fellowship Programme: Working professionals may apply for the Netherlands Fellowship Programme for Short Courses 2017 to enhance their capacity through education and training in different universities in Netherlands. This fellowship is fully funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Last date varies from university to university.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 98640 55558 for any career related queries)

"A matter that becomes clear ceases to concern us."

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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Corporate Governance Reforms

CORPORATE governance in India has been reviewed by four committees in the last decade. The objective has been to improve performance on the board of over 5000 listed firms. The latest committee was mandated by SEBI and set up in June under Uday Kotak. There has been squabbling in public in some famous houses in India which has led to the formation of this committee. Recently promoters, founders and professional managers were seen fighting with each other to grab power. Transparency, accountability and independence of directors came under a shadow. The Uday Kotak committee has recommended an egalitarian board environment. The roles of the Chairperson and the CEO should be separated. Board evaluation should be transparent and open to public scrutiny. Half the members of the board should be independent directors. Greater responsibility of audit and remuneration should be thrust upon the board. Some recommendations of the committee have proved a failure. Educational qualifications and expertise in an industry for board members may be off the mark. Investors should of course be made more informed about investment choices.

If corporate governance reforms have to succeed, both institutional and other investors should abandon their present passive approach. Japan has made great strides under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in this direction. Asset managers in India should be more forceful and should ensure greater public disclosure. The burden for good corporate governance now rests on regulators which are a sad commentary on prevailing standards. Reform is necessary to attract capital flow and sustain the momentum investment.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Election Commission ready for polls after July

The Election Commission will be in a position to hold a general election to the Lok Sabha any time after July. According to Commission sources, it requires about forty-five days after the publication of revised electoral rolls for holding the election.

Revised rolls in all the states and union territories except Assam will be published

by June. Draft rolls of most of the states excluding Assam have been prepared and the voters have been given time to file claims and objections, the source said.

The draft rolls contain the names of eighteen-year-olds who have been given the right to franchise for the first time under a recent Constitution amendment.

TO THE EDITOR

Stop the blame game

Editor,

People go to the market like lewdah with a purpose. The purpose is to get their requirements, come out of the market and go home. Inside the crowded market, a lot of jostling and pushing is inevitable. Despite all the commotion people take it in their stride. No anger is shown; no nuisance is created, no serious offense is taken against anyone. There are no hard feelings if one is pushed or pushes someone else because we all know it is not intentional. The shopkeepers raise their prices and buyers bargain to their best efforts. In the process lots of words are exchanged but both parties know this is part of business. And at the end of the day, buyers and sellers return home. The next day it's business as usual.

Considering the things happening in our beloved NEHU and the recent jabber on the NEHU Students' Union (NEHUSU), if everyone working and studying in the University have the same mindset as the shopkeepers and customers in lewdah, the University would be ranked among the top 10 universities in the country by now. If the stakeholders in the university perform their duty selflessly to complete their respective task, no article is needed in the newspaper. If the

administration runs the university without any bias towards anyone, the stakeholders would not disrupt their activities. And the students! They are students for God's sake! They would not be interested or involved in activities other than their own. But time and again their rights are snatched away; they are mistreated, and neglected by mediocre faculty and staff who are at the helm of affairs and their faithful coteries. Sadly, when students protest against such injustice they are tagged as the enemy since the mediocres don't know how to correct errors in the system. They don't want anybody to expose their mediocrity. What have they achieved besides bringing down the university to a new low in the process of promoting themselves? Why blame the students for their own shortcomings? How long can they hide behind the politics of blame game? Why don't the administrative authority and the teachers follow the example of the daily business in lewdah? Taking a jibe at the student community will not bring NEHU to its former glory, one of the best in the country. Instead one should be reminded that the welfare of the students is a top priority and the rest follows.

With only less than a

Reclaiming Community Ownership of Rivers

By HH Mohrmen

The growing numbers of community-led River Protection and Conservation movements in Meghalaya are good omens and a ray of hope for the state in general and the people in the area in particular, mainly because water is the basis of life on earth. A program entitled Rally for Umngi: A River Conservation Movement organised by Friends of the Umngi River on October 21 at the Synod College, Shillong is perhaps the first meeting of its kind where community leaders had the opportunity to learn from experts on the need and benefit of protecting our river system.

The movement for conservation of Umngi is unique because it is not only community-based but it is also community-led where more than 20 villages form the integral part of the project and the government through the office of the SDO Ranikor C&RD Civil Sub Division under the leadership of FB Basan and the DC South West Khasi hills are supporting the campaign. It is a movement in which the villages, the Raji and the hima in the area have taken upon themselves the responsibility to protect and conserve the approximately 50 km long stretch of the downstream segment of the Umngi River.

The Friends of the Umngi River (FoTUR) with the help of the District Administration of South West Khasi hills were able to stop poachers who use dynamite and illegal substances to indiscriminately kill fishes in the river. It was heartening to know that FoTUR not only works to protect and conserve the river Umngi, but it also conducts studies to understand the entire river system. Studies have been done on the aquatic life in the area by Robert Basan who is one of the leaders of the FoTUR. Perhaps it is also not out of place to mention that in the community's effort to protect the river, Robert was even attacked by unscrupulous elements in the community who were against this noble endeavour.

It was also inspiring to know that colleges like the Synod College and St. Anthony's College under the leadership of their

respective teachers have also done a lot of studies on the river system and the aquatic lives in some areas of the state. Dr Bashida Massar, Assistant Professor, St. Anthony's college who is from Lapalang a border village in the East Khasi hills District had done a commendable job of documenting the fishes in the two rivers in the area namely Rymben and Borhul and Dr Richard Lyngdoh Assistant Professor, Synod college, Shillong informed that currently students from Synod college are engaged in a similar project at Darang village of West Jaintia hills district.

Part of Dr Massar's project which was supported by UGC was also to make students aware of the river system and the variety of fishes that are available in the area. Dr Massar also engaged students from the local schools in the project. She was surprised to learn that the local students have more knowledge about the river and the fishes in the area. Her plan was to get her work which includes the fishes she had studied and the indigenous knowledge related to rivers and the aquatic life in the area published in the near future.

Dr Massar's other objectives include the starting of a conservation project in the area in-situ to protect the diverse aquatic lives in the different rivers of the area. Some of the fishes that we have in the area like the chocolate mahseer are in the list of endangered species as per the IUCN red list and she hopes that with the support of the community they will be able to protect the various fish species in the area without disturbing their habitat.

I picked this phrase, 'Love Story of the Earth,' from the Shillong Terra Madre Festival organised by NESFAS last time and I am beginning to see many love stories between people and mother earth budding and blooming in different nooks and corners of the state.

Another example of such love story is the conservation and protection efforts by the Jaintia Fishing and Environment Society. The

organisation has successfully conserved the stretch of river Myntdu which goes around Jowai town. The organisation's recent project was improvement of one portion of the river while giving more focus on the historic Syntu Ksiar. JFES has been able to create a recreation space on this portion of the river which also adds to the beauty of the area which is already a prominent tourist spot in the state.

The area already has a tomb in memory of u Kiang Nangbah, the Madiah Kmai Blai which is a portion of Myntdu where the legendary freedom fighter proved his mettle to lead the fight against the British and the archery competition which happens in the afternoon. The organisation made a blanket ban on fishing on the Syntu Ksiar part of Myntdu and now the fish population has increased to such an extent that it has become a selling point for tourism.

But Myntdu is also a story of a river which has to bear the brunt of abuse and fed with pollution from Acid Mine Drainage, therefore downstream of the river is where the no life forms can survive. Its water is not fit for human consumption anymore. The rivers in Jaintia hills are a classic case of how the upper riparian population can jeopardize all the efforts made by the lower riparian residents. The lesson we learn from Jaintia hills is that if any river is to be protected it has to start from the source and continue till its last point. Therefore Robert Basan the leader of FoTUR is right to be concerned about the way people who live upstream of the river Umngi treat the River.

As per the Sixth Schedule rivers are subject of the District Councils and protection conservation of the rivers is the Councils' mandate, but till now none of the ADCs have legislated any law to this effect. In Jaintia hills the JHADDC use to annually award the river on lease to

the highest bidder. The businessman meanwhile will always try to extract maximum profit from the deal including using dynamite and chemicals. Now is this (mass killing of fishes in the river) in the interest of the tribals? The ADCs should come up with policies and formulate rules to protect and preserve the rivers in their respective jurisdiction keeping the interest of the tribal people in mind.

If the councils or the state government fail in their duty to protect the rivers then the judiciary will have no other option but to step in as the NGT has done so in the case of upstream of Myntdu River which flows around Jowai. Thanks to the NGT order, now construction in a distance of 500 meters from the body of the Myntdu River is strictly prohibited. And if this order is implemented in letter and spirit then Myntdu will at least be saved from going the Wah Umkhrah way as no construction can be made in within the prescribed limit.

FoTUR is one story that needs to be told and replicated. We therefore need to include more friends of the Umngi River throughout its length and breadth if we are to really protect the river. In fact why should it only be Umngi River? We need to start more friends of the river organisations all across the state which will work to protect all the rivers.

Hopefully government will also render its support to such efforts to protect and conserve rivers all in the state and it should also insist that the project should always be community-led because once it is led by the community then that itself will ensure community ownership. FoTUR has done a commendable job and it ought to be recommended for the award for protection and conservation from the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India, to serve as a role model for all.

accident prone places. Only when action is taken will become more responsible while driving. I request for action in these matters and some level of enhanced investigation in the 'Rose Lyngdoh' case.

Yours etc.,
Pratham Kumar Sharma
Shillong-3

Accidents on the rise

Editor,
Recently, many accidents have taken place along the highways. In the most recent incident, one Rose Lyngdoh from Laitkseh Village in West Khasi Hills was killed and 4 others injured. I had seen a picture of Rose Lyngdoh through an Internet forward and I could not believe my eyes. The face was completely destroyed and I like any other person who looked at the picture was stunned. I did not have the courage to look at it again. But, I am of the opinion that this may be a case of robbery and murder too. Some other pictures I had seen depicted that the hair of the lady was covered with stones. It might be possible that that the murder was planned well before the incident. Accidents have been occurring almost regularly and I feel that the authorities should take the initiative and investigate whether these are really accidents or something else. Also, strict action must be taken against those who are found breaking driving rules, especially in such

Ethical sharing

Editor,
I want to impress on all who irresponsibly share content on WhatsApp messenger or any social media that there is such a thing called 'Ethical sharing.' In case of accidents or any horrific incident, please have the humanity to NOT expose or carelessly share graphic photos or videos of the victim no matter how tempting it maybe. Think about the victim's family, the ones that are grieving and are still lying in shock. I'm pretty sure you are all aware of the horrific accident that had tragically ended the life of a respected 50 plus year old lady involving a red Suzuki Alto with a truck. I am aghast by that photos of such sensitive content can be mishandled by smart phone users who are anything but smart. THIS HAS TO END. This isn't

the first time such a case has occurred. Administrator of all groups should take this seriously and the members/ users should all take note. You are not leaving an inch of salvation or any shred left attached to the bone when you do this. I know it may be the hottest or the most trending news at the moment which will die out by the next evening but the scars of the victim's family will remain long after we have jumped to another topic. It leaves them exposed and naked before the public. It is pathetic and unethical. It is a vile indecent act that demands our common emotional intelligence if we so possess it. Let's ask ourselves if by some misfortune, photos of our suffering/dying loved ones were to spread like wild fire in the public domain would we not feel rage, anger and helplessness? So please smart citizens lets have some decency and empathy with those who suffer and with their family members. It starts with each one of us!

Yours etc.,
Banjop K Nongbri,
Via email

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

Modi development agenda remains on the periphery

Core issues remain untouched as economy fails to catch steam

By K Raveendran

The data-driven slugfest over the performance of the Modi government in the first three years between its loyalists, led by Narendra Modi himself, and detractors, both in the ruling party and Opposition, saw an important piece of statistics that should have pricked India's collective conscience pass off as a non-event, except for some noise created in the social media. The data related to the ranking of India in the latest Global Hunger Index, released by the Washington-based International Nutrition Research Institute, which said that the country's position slipped some 45 points in the space of three years to an embarrassing 100th place, behind Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. To rub salt to the wound, the review period corresponded to the first three years of the Modi government.

Explanations have come, particularly in the online media, about the fall of a

instance, for the Jharkhand girl who ended her life after she failed to get food grain ration, a decent life was a far cry when her right to life itself was challenged. A large section of people are now tending to believe that this is the crux of the dilemma of the Modi government's development philosophy.

Modi has a penchant for acronyms, many of which became popular, although some like Make In India were poorly coined and had equally non-descript results. Some of his expansions such as good and simple tax for GST, First Develop India for FDI, Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile for JAM have stuck, but many other schemes with fanciful names have been forgotten as soon as they were announced.

All this brings up the issue of the sustainability of people's patience, which is already appearing to wear thin. The rising clamour about the failure of the government to bring about any substantial improvement on the ground, including from within the

Modi came to power selling a dream to Indians. And he sounded true in that promise as well, which made people conjure up an imagery of everyone enjoying a better living standard, less corruption, more equality and opportunity to earn a lot more money to pursue one's life's ambitions.

steep 45 points from the level of 2014 as a matter of methodology change, but the fact still remains that there has been a fall. Considering that the index is constituted by such important parameters as undernourishment, infant mortality and child stunting, the 'honour' is not at all flattering. One wonders whether in reeling out data in support and against the Modi government's performance, the real story is lost in transit.

Modi came to power selling a dream to Indians. And he sounded true in that promise as well, which made people conjure up an imagery of everyone enjoying a better living standard, less corruption,

more equality and opportunity to earn a lot more money to pursue one's life's ambitions. Fortunately or unfortunately, or because of both, the Indian public believed him totally and voted for him overwhelmingly. It was essentially a vote for Modi. They voted for BJP because the party represented him rather than the other way around. If the Indian system of democracy permitted Modi to contest all the seats by himself, he might still have won a majority. Such was the appeal of his promise.

But like most dreams, the one sold by Modi also turned sour within no time. The hope of bringing back all the money stashed by Indians in secret foreign accounts and redistributing it among all Indians proved to be a mirage. Within days of taking office the Modi dispensation realized that it was not as simple as it sounded and there were innumerable hurdles even to access information about black money.

That certainly was a big disappointment. Still people were ready to persist with Modi apparently because they were convinced about his intentions. He launched a number of good initiatives for cleanliness, sanitation, education of girl children etc, but all these touched only the periphery while the core issues remained outside their realm. For

ruling party, is symptomatic of the deepening trouble. Of the two major reform moves of Modi, demonetisation has completely gone away while on the second -GST- the jury is still out, but the initial results are not at all encouraging.

Since the context of this discussion is India's standing on a global list, a look at how some of the world's poorest countries have fared in the last quarter century would be a rewarding exercise. Our social studies textbooks in the 1960s had a lesson about Korea, which were described as a peninsula inhabited by poor farmers. In three decades, however, Korea has developed into a global leader in certain sectors, particularly technology and engineering.

This writer had the opportunity to visit the Samsung headquarters in Seoul in 2000, when the company had mileage only in the semiconductor industry and the prototypes of some of the products in which the company currently enjoys near total dominance were on show there. Koreans have a typical love-hate relationship with big brother Japan and naturally Samsung's ambition was to be in the top-five band with Sony, easily the world leader in the product range that the Korean company was planning to enter, within the next five years. But incredible as it may seem, Samsung not only caught up with Sony, but overtook the Japanese company in its own product group, including television and display technologies, within the timeframe it set and became a runaway leader in the newly-emerged mobile phone business.

Now India is a major market for Korean companies, including their auto manufacturing major Hyundai, but no company from India, whose text books had portrayed the Koreans in a condescending tone, is known to have established a foothold in that country. It's time we did some deep introspection into our development philosophy. (IPA Service)

Art is not merely an imitation of the reality of nature, but in truth a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, placed alongside thereof for its conquest.

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2017

Politicians have shelf life too

IF there is a retirement age there must be a reason for it. Otherwise it should be abolished by law. And if there's a retirement age for every job holder then why not for politicians especially of they reached the age of senility? The human mind has a capacity beyond which it cannot function with the same agility it did at age 40 or 50. The politics of the 21st century requires not just physical strength but cerebral health above all. People in politics serve a larger idea than just a constituency. They are to engage on a range of issues affecting the state, the nation and the world. They have to keep abreast of the latest developments in the digital age. A person who is not computer literate cannot cope with the constant flow of information. The reason why many politicians in Meghalaya have neither a Facebook Account or a Twitter handle is because they are technologically disabled. Having someone else to manage a Facebook account or Twitter handle is fraught with danger because the person behind the handle does not understand the nuances of local politics. At times such responses could even lead to unanticipated trouble. The minister/MLA might, be following some undesirable character on Twitter as has happened with Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently.

In this respect we ought to doff our hats to Ms Roshan Warjri, MLA and Minister who has chosen her own time to retire 'gracefully,' while she is still much sought after. But she is a rare breed among politicians. This is a tribe that is afraid of hanging their boots because they fear the loss of power. Retirement also creates space for younger people who are in sync with the times, to bring in fresh, innovative ideas. India is a young country and needs young, progressive minds to lead it.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

The second split

The Hill People Union, Meghalaya's major opposition party, has split for the second time in the course of last fifteen months. The first time the party split was in February 1988 when a small chunk of seven legislators led by Mr B B Lyngdoh decided to be partners of a coalition with the Congress(I). On Tuesday, the party suffered the second split when seven legislators announced formation of separate parliamentary group in the Assembly. The HPU (BC), as the new splinter group has decided to call itself, has announced that it would support, cooperate with an participate in the ruling UMPF coalition. With this the ruling conglomerate has acquired a massive strength

of 47 in the House having effective strength of 57. The significance of the second split obviously lies not so much in the gain for the ruling side but in the reduction of the Opposition to insignificant handful.

The Hill People, it is to be noted, was formed in the early 80's to fulfill an aspiration of the people to have a common regional party. Right from birth the HPU had rough weather to face. While the erstwhile APHLC totally embraced the idea, a section of the HSPDP led by its President Mr H S Lyngdoh backed out midway. The fact that the HPU experimentation was not going to be an easy proposition was not difficult to see.

Of rivers and pipes

By Paramjit Bakshi

A few mornings ago I had an unusual awakening! I woke up with two words and two corresponding images, clear in my head. The first word was "drive", and it came, with an image of a sparkling stream, gurgling down a gentle hill; a rarity in our immediate surroundings. The second word was "driven", and came with the picture of a galvanised water pipe; the kind we see so much of, around town.

When a stream moves downstream, it does so, dancing gently to the internal bidding of gravity without any business like seriousness to drown itself in the sea in a short straight line. Instead it meanders lazily around the land, in an almost whimsical manner. It seems to enjoy its quirkiness and sings lyrically, hypnotising us by its music and its motion. It is not constant either, but changes its speed to suit the terrain, and the volume of water in it. If the slope is steep it speeds up, and on a gentler incline, it slows down. When the monsoon comes and fills its belly, it hastens along its course, and even inundates new areas. It is calm when it encounters an obstacle, never clenching its teeth or flexing its muscles to overcome it. If the obstacle yields easily, it flows over it; otherwise, it finds an easier way around it. At no time does the stream go against its nature, and fight gravity by attempting to climb to a higher ground. When the monsoon gets over and winter comes, the river does not mourn its loss of power and abundance, but runs silently, even when reduced to a thin trickle during years of drought. Patiently it awaits the return of happier times, and when they come, it rises once again like the phoenix.

The story of the water pipe and the water in it is different. By its very design the pipe confines the water to a narrow bore, so that it can be made to go against its own nature and defy gravity, when a pump is introduced into the system. At the flick of a switch, the water rushes furiously through the pipe. It does not sing, but seems too growl, as it runs business like towards its destination. By being made obligingly obedient, it becomes miserable and loses its zest. Without oxygenation it becomes stale, in contrast to the water from the river, which gets a flavour by interacting freely with air and varied minerals. The piped system turns the water safe but insipid, and though it can longer harm us like the flood waters of the river, it loses romance for us. Thus though we may go and

sit idly on the riverbank and enjoy a picnic there, none of us, educated or otherwise, ever show such fascination for a water pipe. Instead we use its water only for utilitarian purposes like drinking, bathing and washing.

Something similar has happened to people. Rarely does one encounter an individual with a diverse drive, or an authentic impulse. There are very few mavericks in our midst, no larger than life rebels, and few bards soulfully playing their own tunes. There is hardly anybody who can steer our common Titanic with foresight, or even somebody who can roar with genuine conviction. Rather like mass produced clones, most of us strive to be socially correct, and move like piped water, pushed along the tube of capitalistic modernity. Forever in a hurry to reach some misplaced goal, we learn to hide our angst and our real feelings, behind fake smiles. Somewhere deep inside us we know, that the prevalent economic structure has disfigured our freewheeling spirit, and turned us into one-dimensional productive economic robots. But being driven we are powerless on our own, ill at ease and prone to a life of dis-ease. As somebody once said, from human beings we have become human doings. With no occasions to pause, to just stand and stare, to dream our individual dreams, to know ourselves or to be deeply inspired by beauty, song, dance, art, literature or poetry. Out of a mistaken belief that life offers us so many paths we confuse making a living with our life. We lack the leisure to look at things closely, and hardly ever realise, that though the paths might be different, the end goal is always productivity. In every walk of life we are rewarded for the volume of our output and punished for the lack of it. And the reward of being productive is merely being thrust into a bazaar of tinsel plated goodies which bring mere momentary gratification. We get to choose the meats we eat, nay even the cut we want, we can wear suits of Armani or Levis jeans, drive a Ferrari or an Audi but the "just do it" must remain confined to what the capitalistic juggernaut dictates. Just as juggernaut is a much mutilated version of Jaganath, the Hindu God, so are our lives today about nurturing the body and maiming our spirit. Without consciousness most of us end up driven into the arms of colourless and soulless universalism. The trap is set wide and well camouflaged. If consumerism does not

drive us in, then some moral or political ideology definitely does. We believe without much insight, in the virtues of globalisation and democracy even though, the former leads to conflict by widening the income divide and the latter: a willing concubine to well heeled lobbies. Somehow if we avoid such thinking, then we still end up kneeling at the altar of some pervasive religion which breeds in us a disdain, over other forms of spiritual thought. Or we get carried away by ideas of racial superiority, fancy ourselves in plumes of other civilisations, or pay token tributes to tribalism. Just as we elect our popular representatives by maximum vote, we accept ideas by the yardstick of their popular acceptance, rather than their inherent virtue. Both often fail us in the end.

It takes both insight and strength of character to live free - to remain a peaceful singing river rather than become an anonymous angry jet of pumped water. Rudyard Kipling put it aptly when he said, "To be your own man is hard business, if you try it you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high for the privilege of owning yourself." It is hard business because, it involves believing in yourself, your vision and your own creativity, often against common sense and well meaning advice. This the young find more difficult today, because it is often their own parents, who against the natural inclinations of the child, push them to become joyless 'brick(s) in the wall'. All convenience is costly and compromise fatal for the spirit, yet this is what every generation unknowingly teaches and does.

However it is not the young alone, who are driven down mindless channels. Old societies with hundreds of years of culture deviate from their course, when they start being driven by a civilisation, seemingly more successful than their own. As Pavan Verma, a distinguished diplomat, in his book, "Being Indian", points out such amalgamation breeds a "duality which requires people to become practiced schizophrenics."

People get torn between their inherited way of life and what seems fashionable now, between the old religion and the new, and as he correctly points out "between the

two is an entire world of aspiration, shame, denial, camouflage, resentment and emulation". If the generation previous to ours produced the "brown sahibs", it should not surprise us to see our children, becoming partial clones of American teenagers, with their lives swaying between the extremes of foreign influence and isolationism, between ethnicity and desire to ape, between wanting ILP and migration to foreign shores, between 18 degrees and NH7. To quote Pavan Verma once again, "There is no contradiction between being culturally rooted and being a global citizen. On the contrary, only those who are culturally rooted win genuine respect. Photocopies are a not respected, they are merely a convenience."

Water in a pipe or a photocopy, is there any difference? On the contrary a stream and a genuine human being are so refreshingly different. While running a home stay in Barapani I had come up with a concept of giving what I termed an "interesting discount". Dependent on our guests for social interaction, we gave good discounts to people whom we found interesting, and none to exacting and boring guests. That morning's epiphany reinforced my belief that the Innkeeper of the Universe too, looks favourably on exuberant originality rather than on cultivated correctness. It is why the Prophets are worshipped and the priests often derided, why Bob Dylan with an unmelodious voice wins accolades and the Nobel Prize, and highly trained singers make a meagre living singing covers. Why less educated people like Steve Jobs become successful entrepreneurs and people with prestigious MBA's their employees, and folks without Ph D's become bestselling authors while those seeking such degrees while away their lives researching them.

Everything worthy including instinct, intellect, intuition or inspiration has the prefix "in" and driven, mind you, a totally different end.

PS: In Meghalaya sadly, literally and metaphorically, we have been for decades, disregarding and polluting our rivers and trying to fix our pipes.

(The writer is a life skills trainer and can be contacted at bakshi03@rediffmail.com)

National Nutrition Strategy

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The NITI Aayog has recently drafted the National Nutrition Strategy. The strategy was formulated through an extensive consultative process. The Strategy lays down a roadmap for effective action, among both implementers and practitioners, in achieving our nutrition objectives. This roadmap has come at a crucial time for the country. As India steps into the new era of multipolar world and an increasing acceptance of its role in global order, the question of basic necessities for the citizens is a puzzle which continues to keep the policymakers in tenuous. Hunger and nutrition form important part of the basket of basic necessities. Periodic reports released by various agencies have not painted a pretty picture of either the state of hunger or nutrition and the recently released Hunger Index is no different. Despite making considerable strides India's performances in food and nutrition continues to be challenged and a lot of ground remains to be covered.

The National Nutrition Strategy will primarily seek to address the problem of malnutrition in the country. Malnutrition in essence is an indicator or a state where children are either too short for their age or too thin for their age group. These children whose height is below the average for their age are considered to be stunted. Similarly, children whose weight is below the average for their age are considered undernourished or malnourished. Together, the stunted and wasted children are considered to be underweight - indicating a lack of proper nutritional intake and inadequate care post childbirth. And these children form the core group of kids who suffer from malnutrition.

India's performance on key malnutrition indicators is poor according to most national and international studies despite making rapid progress in the past few years. According to UNICEF, India was at the 10th spot among countries with the highest number of underweight children, and at the 17th spot for the highest number of stunted children in the world. Malnutrition affects children in many ways. It decreases the chances of survival for children, increases their susceptibility to illness, reduces their ability to learn, and makes them less productive in later life. It is estimated that malnutrition is a contributing factor in about one-third of all deaths of children under the age of 5. And thus it was imperative that a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem of malnutrition was brought on board and the National Nutritional Strategy could not have come at a better time.

The key features of the strategy would look at addressing these issues in a comprehensive manner. One of the first goals of the strategy is to reduce all forms of malnutrition by 2030. It seeks to specially focus on the most vulnerable and

critical age groups. The Strategy also aims to assist in achieving the targets identified as part of the Sustainable Development Goals related to nutrition and health. The Strategy aims to launch a National Nutrition Mission, similar to the National Health Mission. This is to enable integration of nutrition-related interventions cutting across sectors like women and child development, health, food and public distribution, sanitation, drinking water, and rural development. The strategy aims to replu on decentralised approach. This will be promoted with greater flexibility and decision making at the state, district and local levels. Further, the Strategy aims to strengthen the ownership of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies over nutrition initiatives.

This is to enable decentralised planning and local innovation along with accountability for nutrition outcomes. Local partnership is an important component should a comprehensive strategy towards defeating malnutrition be put in place.

Targeted interventions are an important tool that this strategy will seek to deploy. The Strategy proposes to launch interventions with a focus on improving healthcare and nutrition among children. These interventions will include: promotion of breastfeeding for the first six months after birth, universal access to infant and young child care (including ICDS and crèches), enhanced care, referrals and management of severely undernourished and sick children, bi-annual Vitamin A supplements for children in the age group of 9 months to 5 years, and micro-nutrient supplements and bi-annual deworming for children. These interventions will go a long way in stemming those causes which contribute to the infant mortality rate and higher mortality rate among children when they are in a vulnerable age.

Special focus has been given to improve maternal care and nutrition and measures to improve both have been put in place. These measures include supplementary nutritional support during pregnancy and lactation, health and nutrition counselling, adequate consumption of iodised salt and screening of severe anaemia, and institutional childbirth, lactation management and improved post-natal care.

As part of the governance induced reforms the strategy lays down the following governance reforms envisaged in the Strategy including convergence of state and district implementation plans for ICDS, NHM and Swachh Bharat, focus on the most vulnerable communities in districts with the highest levels of child malnutrition, and service delivery models based on evidence of impact. In totality the National Nutrition Strategy will go a long way towards curbing malnutrition in the country.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

TO THE EDITOR

A harrowing ride

Editor,
On Oct 20 last I boarded a red mini bus (ML/01/7385) from IGP point going to Motphran. Since it was already 8 pm, a crowd of passengers had congregated at Police Bazar, waiting for cabs going to Jhalupara. The bus that I boarded took in all those passengers. When the bus reached Butcher's Lane (Thembijoy point), it took an unusual left turn, and not the usual route towards Motphran. This shocked the passengers that were planning to get down at Motphran. One elderly passenger asked for his Rs10 back as he had to catch a bus/cab from that point to Motphran, as he was carrying a heavy load. The conductor blamed the driver for the unusual turn (just to avoid further questioning) and the driver directed the conductor to return the person only Rs.5 and advised the person to take the next bus.

So I patiently waited till we reached Jhalupara as I usually get down at Garikhana (via Motphran) but after all the

passengers got down, the driver turned the bus to go to Police Bazar as there were many passengers bound for that destination. This provoked me to film the scene and I also started questioning the driver and conductor whether an old lady or a sick mother with her children, will have to walk in the rain on empty streets (being a holiday) if it suits them (conductor and driver). Knowing that I am comparatively younger, the conductor thought that he could just give me my Rs.10 for a cab fare from Jhalupara, which I refused, as the elderly passenger who got down at Butcher's Lane at least deserved the same treatment. Is all this justified? Just because I had a camera capturing the entire scene, the conductor was scared.

Now my question to the concerned authorities is, are all the citizens of Shillong who board these "Government" bus potential hostages? Can the drivers do as they like and drop us whenever it's convenient for them?

If it was a private bus,

actions could have been easily taken by the District Transport Office on submission of the video clipping and their License/Permit could have been taken away, but the sad and bitter fact is, do these "ML01" buses have a Commercial License or Permit? Do they pay the passenger taxes like any other commercial vehicles? So can we conclude that, these vehicles provided by the Government tend to the need of the people, have the right to harass passengers and get away with it? Can one still step on a Government bus at odd hours and be certain of getting to the desired destination? Can the authorities assure us of our security and redeem our faith?

Yours etc.,
Teilang Rymbai
Shillong-2

Vincent Pala versus Mukul Sangma

Editor,
Apropos the news item, "No inclination to return to

state politics" (ST Oct 23,2017), I want to tell the readers that our MP, Vincent Pala, has never contested any of the L.A Elections in the past but he has contested two Parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2014 and won both. So where is the question of his returning to state politics? If today he is interested to contest the ensuing L.A elections slated for February 2018, then that is his wish but we do not know his mind on this. If he so desires, let him contest. What is wrong in that?

However, he is more interested to contest the Parliamentary elections scheduled for 2019 from the BJP or from other parties and he has been toying with the idea for the last few years now by putting his hands here and there. We should not forget that he was accused of playing games within the Congress during the last L.A elections by propping up his own candidates in a number of constituencies for which many State Congress leaders were very angry. However, Pala is still a force to be reckoned with, because he is quite shrewd and the only

stumbling block for him in the Congress is Dr Mukul Sangma who has the wherewithal. He is not only shrewd but has vast knowledge on almost all subjects and the money power, which are the most important factors to succeed in politics. The only factor that Dr Mukul Sangma lacks is credibility, integrity and the love of the people of the state, including Garo Hills. However as the famous English saying goes, "Every dog has his day".

About Pala's comment on the roads of West Khasi Hills in the media, I beg to differ widely on many counts. Our M.P should have been very cautious in making such comment because there are very few buyers of such comments in the media.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein
Via email

Responsible citizenship

Editor,
Through your esteemed

daily, I would like to draw the attention of the Hon'ble Minister in-charge Urban Affairs Department to the water logging problem in and around Laitumkhrah area particularly the areas where schools are located. It is understood that the main cause are clogged drains and the main culprits are the parents and school children. Why parents? Because parents need to teach their children not to throw any form of waste on the road but in the plastic/wooden/bamboo bins kept especially for such waste. But first and foremost parents should stop the bad habits themselves so their kids will do the same because kids don't follow what you say, they follow what you do. Nevertheless, since we can't expect much from 'highly literate' but 'uneducated' people of the Scotland of the East, I would like to draw the attention of the said Minister to the problem

especially during rainy seasons when water starts accumulating on the streets and school kids are unable to walk through without filling their shoes with water. This also creates vehicular traffic jam as seen especially at Loreto Convent and St. Mary's where vehicles cannot be stopped at different spots for dropping off school children because of water accumulation but have to be dropped off at particular spots where there is less accumulation of water. Hence, the Minister in-charge is requested to kindly do the needful to clear the clogged drains for smooth flow of water and thereby help the school children. At the same time we also sincerely pray and hope that the citizens of this city learn some basic common sense and not to litter the streets. This will ensure that no drains are clogged and no waterlogging happens.

I'm sure people have heard of an ongoing campaign started a few months ago called SCC, - 'Silent Cleaning Campaign'

(not Shillong Chamber Choir, mind you although both are amazingly incredible). This campaign was started by a young revolutionary, Nangjop Thabah who started cleaning his own locality at Jaiaw, simply because this guy believes that cleanliness is next to Godliness. He moved on to Police Bazaar along with his practical supporters (sadly these people have more virtual supporters than real life one with me being one of the keyboard supporters). The point is even though there are good Samaritans who willingly clean our streets for free, please let us not wait for them to come to our localities and pick up our garbage. Let us help them by not littering at all. Just because we don't live in a particular locality doesn't mean we can litter that locality. We pass through different localities daily because the only way from Point 'A' to point 'B' of our workplaces is through some locality.

Yours Etc.,
Pyntngen Nonplugh,
Shillong - 8

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."

--- Albert Schweitzer

The Shillong Times

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Abe's ride to victory

THE coalition led by the Liberal Democratic Party under Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan has romped in after a snap poll securing two thirds majority in the lower house of Parliament. Abe has been in the saddle for two consecutive terms but in the recent past his and his party's position had been under Opposition attack. The massive victory has now consolidated his position and given a firm hold to his mandate. He is further more in a stronger position now to revise Japan's pacifist Constitution which is a result of its defeat in World War II. What is more significant is that the victory has given a boost to his economic policy and rescued it from a phase of economic stagnation. It is projected that Japan's growth rate will pick up significantly in the near future. More importantly, Abe has made Japan more dynamic in its foreign policy and elevated Japan's presence to a more assertive status. The US pulled out some time ago from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Free Trade Agreement. As a result, Japan has moved in to lead the implementation of the pact. Abe has put up a brave front for some time against China's territorial aggrandisement policy, especially in the East China Sea. His thumping victory is a vote for his assertive policy in this regard. With his proactive contribution to peace, Japan aims at developing a global security framework which will be in conformity with international rules. Japan's Constitution has accordingly to be revised to legalise its self defence forces.

If Japan can strengthen its military capability, China's militarisation will be effectively counteracted. As a result, stability in Asia will be shored up. Tokyo under the new government should have greater strategic depth enabling it to influence important geopolitical issues. Japan's partnership with major countries in Asia and Africa will receive a powerful impetus. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has a personal bond with Shinzo Abe which was strengthened during his recent visit to Japan. India-Japan strategic ties can be further firmed up. Japan's economic assistance to India should go up. The proposed Asia-Africa Growth Corridor will hopefully be facilitated.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Death rate of babies falls

The infant mortality rate has been showing a declining trend as a result of the immunization prog-rammes. The Health Minister Ram Niwas Mirdha told Lok Sabha today. Replying to Syed Shabuddin, the minister said the infant (0-1 year) mortality rate, which was 110 per thousand in 1981, had been progressively coming down.

After the launching of the Universal Immunisation Programme in 30 districts in 1985, it was expanded to cover 304 districts in the intensive phase of implementation. The programme sought to give immunization cover to at least 85 per cent of infants in the districts covered under the programme.

TO THE EDITOR

Women's representation in State Assembly

Editor,

The election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is due to be held early next year. Every political party is gearing up for the forthcoming election to ensure they win the maximum number of seats and each of the political party would have a list of promises to attract the voters to its own side. The women voters can bring a change by ensuring increase in the number of women's representation in the State Assembly. This is precisely for the practical reason that more than 50% of the voters in our state are women and they cannot be ignored and under represented. During the campaign for the upcoming election, the political parties would definitely like to attract the women voters by highlighting the issues of gender equality, women empowerment and their safety and these issues

would also find a prominent place in the election manifesto of the political parties.

The two prominent national political parties the BJP and the Congress have women's wings in the state. The Congress party which is in power in the state could well boast that it does offer party tickets to women candidates. In 2013 Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Election, the state witnessed four women candidates registering a remarkable win and making their entry in the 60 member house and notably all of them are from the Congress party. With the win of Chokpot Assembly seat by a woman candidate in 2015 bye-poll, the total number of women MLAs in the Assembly has risen to 5, whereby the percentage of women representation in the Assembly has gone up to 8.33%, which I believe is the highest so far and for securing this high percentage the Congress deserves to be applauded.

The BJP which is in power in the centre are looking forward to win

The Chinese President Xi Jinping, expectedly, emerged stronger after the quinquennial Communist Party Congress last week. The 19th Congress since the Party was founded in 1921 Xi has the prerogative of nominating 70% of the Party's Central Committee, its e most powerful apex organ, and would stay in office for a third or even fourth term beyond 2022. This is contrary to Party tradition whereby a successor to the incumbent President is chosen five years before he or she takes office. At this Congress, no such thing happened.

Obviously, India and the world would have to deal with Xi for another decade as he is popular and occupies the exalted position by successfully fighting corruption and consolidating the development plank. In his marathon speech lasting over three and a half hours he adumbrated Chinese agenda in all its dimensions. He talked of the 'Chinese dream' which is interpreted as an ambition of being a world power and building Chinese military as the world's largest one.

Should India be wary of the Chinese 'dream'? True, New Delhi is in an adversarial position with its neighbour as it shares 4000 kms of borders. Further, China's geo-political approach in the region coupled with its expansionist tendency should bother India.

But let us understand Chinese ideology shaped afresh by Xi who is now mentioned in the Chinese Constitution amended by Congress. This rare honour was given only to two other leaders: Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Xi's ideology consists of two major objectives: nationalism and capitalism.

How do both affect India? As China's current standing in the world rests on its economic might, capitalism carefully crafted and built by the Communist Party, in its quest for continued growth based on exports, Beijing would look for markets. As European markets are saturated and experiencing slump, India becomes the ultimate market for it.

Having realized this, Xi while visiting India in 2014, had suggested closer relationship with New Delhi. Asserting, "we should aim for expansion of strategic communication among leaders, maintaining border

majority of seats in the 2018 assembly election and thereafter to form the government in the state. It would be quite interesting to see how many party tickets the BJP gives to the women candidates in the upcoming assembly election.

My concern is that there is a need for increase of women representation in the Assembly and their percentage is required to be raised by encouraging women candidates to come forward to contest elections so that we get more and more women MLAs. All political parties including the regional parties must ponder on this issue and do the needful to ensure maximum women representation.

Yours etc
Aneeta Synrem
Shillong-1

Can we expect change?

Editor,
In a few months from now we would be again lining up just like patients in an OPD clinic waiting our turn to select a candidate of our

The Dragon Blinks Pragmatic engagement

By Dr. D.K. Giri

stability, enhancing economic cooperation and people-to-people contact".

No wonder, China has decided to invest US \$85 billion in India and despite popular angst against Beijing's aggressive posturing against its neighbour Chinese goods continue to flood Indian markets. Will China stake its huge economic benefit from India by engaging in a military confrontation?

The other pillar of ideology is 'nationalism' or 'Chinese Core'. A nationalistic agenda generates anti-India rhetoric in the Chinese

Importantly, 'string of pearls' in geo-strategic terms refers to the Malacca Strait, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Strait of Hormuz and Somalia. It also includes Bangladesh and Myanmar. Pertinently, the Malacca Strait, not far from Nicobar Islands, connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean, Malaysia, and Singapore on one side and Indonesia on the other.

Besides, about 80% of Chinese fuel from the Middle East passes through this. From Myanmar, 2,400 kms of gas

"China has made several incursions on the Indo-China borders, Depsang plains in April-May 2013, Chumar in the Western sector in 2014-15, Barahoti area of the middle sector in mid-2016, Doklam face-off in 2017 that lasted for 73 days."

Establishment whereby its nationalism has led Chinese forces and border guards to nibble away undefined borders, claiming vast swathes of territory in South China Sea and Japan-claimed Senkaku islands.

In the same vein, Beijing rivals New Delhi's status on Asia's stage. China has made several incursions on the Indo-China borders, Depsang plains in April-May 2013, Chumar in the Western sector in 2014-15, Barahoti area of the middle sector in mid-2016, Doklam face-off in 2017 that lasted for 73 days.

In addition, China has consistently blocked India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) which controls global atomic commerce, vetoed the UN declaring Jaishe-e-Mohammad Chief Masood Azar a terrorist and runs its China-Pakistan economic corridor projects through Gilgit-Baltistan which affects India's sovereignty.

More serious, China has encircled India with its 'string of pearls' whereby Beijing will endeavour to expand its naval presence by building civilian maritime infrastructure along the Indian Ocean periphery. Simplistically, it implies access to ports and air-fields, expansion and modernization of military forces and fostering diplomatic relations with trading partners.

choice. A lot of political noises have been made by parties of all hues but the unfortunately the road ahead is bumpy and not a cakewalk either. When the number of MLAs who are in the present Congress Party have either booked or pre-booked their seats for their New Year Assembly flight, and would be soon switching to another party, do we expect any positive results when their previous tenures was marked by incompetence and inefficiency? Most of their MLA schemes have not even gone through public scrutiny leave alone their report card. We do not expect any magic from them even after the polls. Certain parties are hyping upon so-called new faces when it's just old wine in new bottles and nothing more.

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

Starvation death!

Editor,
The starvation death of 11 - year - old Santoshi Kumari in a remote village of Jharkhand, after being denied

pipeline has been built by China which also has a military base in Myanmar's Coco Island. Beijing has invested US \$46 billion in Pakistan's Gwadar port as a part of their joint economic corridor. The Gwadar port is 240 miles away from the Strait of Hormuz which gives an opening to Central Asia.

This port also connects to the Karakoram highway linking it with the Arabian Sea, which is of concern to India. Moreover, China has invested in building Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on its South-East part. Similarly, it has built a container shipping facility in Chittagong, Bangladesh. It has a military base in Maldives's Masao Atoll.

Undeniably, China's capitalist economy depends on foreign sources for its energy security. It is the largest importer of oil. The sea lines of communication that link the Chinese mainland with ports throughout the Middle East and Africa coasts have become a major source of conflict for China with other countries. True, the 'string of pearls' might be economic in nature but, admittedly, it creates a security dilemma for China and India in the

ration for not having her family ration card Aadhaar linked, has raised a question. Must a driver be allowed to run over poor pedestrians in order to rush to his destination? Must the end ~ be it Aadhaar, GST or demonetisation ~ justify the means? Many lives also could have been saved during the time of demonetisation if the supply of the new currency was adequate. A driver needs to take all precautions while driving in a crowded road. The bureaucracy and administration must deal with us sensitively as we, the people of India, have sent our representatives to the Parliament who have then formed the government.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Clogged roads and VIP movement!

Editor,
I fully agree with the

Indian Ocean.

How should India respond to this? Going by historical experience, New Delhi cannot be complacent and ignore Beijing's moves. In fact, it should play the Chinese game: Deepen trade and economic links which will deter Beijing from any military adventurism.

Two, India should encircle China with allies that are affected by Beijing and are opposed to its aggressive actions. New Delhi has already invested heavily in diplomacy with countries around China, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. It should consolidate its relations with traditional friends like Japan, South Korea and Russia. In South-East Asia new potential allies are Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam who are wary of China.

Undoubtedly, Chinese nationalism and capitalism would lead to neo-imperialism through domination in trade, military bullying and wherever it can territorial expansion. Beijing would not want to jeopardize its economic interest, but the military angle might be used precisely for protecting its economic gains.

Notably, India has moved closer to China's arch rival Japan and US. Beijing will be wary of New Delhi's increasing nearness to these countries. It might seek to disengage India from Japan and US and allies of America. India, on its part, is unlikely to do so, given Chinese proximity with Pakistan which aids and abets terrorism against India.

Will China follow the proverbial strategy, "if you cannot beat them, join them"? That is a probable, given Chinese proclivity for guarding its self-interest in lieu of principles and trust. But New Delhi cannot count on this. It has to engage with China pragmatically. We should learn from past mistakes vis-à-vis China. Hence, New Delhi should deeply study Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' to deal with China. This calls for a combination of economic might, diplomatic skill and military strategy. Is New Delhi up to it? It better be.

---- INFA

(The author is Prof, International Politics, JMI)

letter of Salil Gewali relating to the traffic congestion of Shillong city (ST Oct 19,2017) Nowadays the traffic has arrived at a point where the roads are fully occupied by vehicles of all sizes; the two wheelers ply wherever space is there and the pedestrians are trying to find space crossing from one end to another. To add to this chaotic problem of driving in Shillong roads, you also have to give way to those swanky VIP cars with the siren blowing as if they own the roads. Let us as voters make this as one of the most important election issue as the previous writer rightly pointed out. This is our chance and we have every right to ask the candidates to give up the VIP culture in exchange for our votes.

Yours etc.,
Arwaka Laloo,
Via email

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

Tillerson's speech and his vision for India-US ties in the decades ahead

By Kanwal Sibal

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's speech on October 18 at a Washington DC-based think tank is important as it tells us how the US views India as a partner in the years ahead. It is not the first enunciation of the Trump administration's approach towards India. The joint statement issued on the occasion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US in June this year offered a fairly comprehensive view of bilateral relations as seen by both sides. It is the first time, however, that in this administration the State Department chief has pronounced at length on ties with India.

If the State Department is seen in New Delhi as inclined negatively towards India traditionally, Tillerson's speech would come as a surprise. It

warning to China about its conduct and US readiness to contain its maritime ambitions in partnership with others in the Indo-Pacific.

His adverse comments on China in a speech focused on India is unusual and cannot but heighten China's concerns about deepening India-US strategic ties which it views as an American ploy to contain its rise. In Tillerson's view, China, unlike India, is undermining the international, rules-based order and sovereignty of neighbouring countries. He also cited China's provocative actions in the South China Sea, all of which he warned the US will resist.

In language hitherto not used so openly by US leaders, Tillerson stated that in this period of uncertainty

"The thrust of the speech is on the partnership between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific region to maintain peace and security there, with the China factor in view. So far the US has bottled up China in the western Pacific because of the strength of US naval presence in the region and its alliances there."

outlines a vision of India-US ties in the decades ahead that is so positive that many in India would view it with scepticism, keeping in mind the difficulties of the past and the uncertainties of the future.

The thrust of the speech is on the partnership between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific region to maintain peace and security there, with the China factor in view. So far the US has bottled up China in the western Pacific because of the strength of US naval presence in the region and its alliances there.

China can loosen this grip by developing a powerful navy of its own and consequently acquire the capacity to independently protect its trade and energy flows through the Indian Ocean which are at present vulnerable to disruption in a conflict situation.

The only country that has the potential to seriously disturb the existing maritime order in the Indo-Pacific is China, which announced in May 2015 its new maritime strategy that would see the PLA Navy developing a blue water navy capable of protecting the security of its sea lanes of communications and overseas interests. This means a stronger presence of the Chinese navy in the Indian Ocean which, in turn, implies a successful challenge to US naval power in the western Pacific.

In January 2015, Modi and Barack Obama had signed the US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and India Ocean Regions. In the joint statement issued on the occasion of Modi's June visit, this document was not referred to by name, though the shared interest of the two countries in ensuring freedom of navigation and overflights in the Indo-Pacific region and resolution of territorial and maritime disputes there in accordance with international law was mentioned.

Beijing would have taken such a formulation in its stride, considering it standard and defensive in nature, unaccompanied as it has been by any push back. Tillerson's speech on October 18, however, constitutes a sharper

India needs a reliable partner on the world stage and that partner is the United States. The world - and the Indo-Pacific in particular - needs the United States and India to have a strong partnership, he affirmed.

America's concerns about China's increasing challenge to US power in the Asia-Pacific region are obviously growing, though it is not yet clear how far Donald Trump is willing to go to counter Xi Jinping's declared ambition to take centre-stage in international affairs, an objective that requires that the US cede sufficient geo-strategic and geo-economic space to it.

After Xi has ascended to power, it is clear that China is building itself not only as a counter to US global power but also as a competing model with 'values' that differ from those of the West. Also the timing of Tillerson's speech is significant. It has been made on the same day as the opening of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Beijing, with Trump's slated visit to China in November this year too in mind.

The Doklam episode, which saw China's efforts to bully India in unbridled language and India's determination to stand up to Beijing in a new show of confidence, could also have been a factor in the timing, besides adding pressure on China to cooperate more on the North Korean issue.

True to American diplomatic style, Tillerson's speech contains much rhetoric. He believes that the US and India are increasingly global partners with growing strategic convergence, which is a profound transformation with far-reaching implications for the next 100 years.

It is very difficult to accept such overblown assertions at face value or dismiss them as verbiage when our interest lies in improving and consolidating bilateral ties. Our challenge is to accept the US embrace but not be smothered by it and ensure that our other partners do not conclude that we have changed the orbit of our foreign policy.

(The writer is former foreign secretary)

“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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Ghani, Tillerson

AFGHAN President Ashraf Ghani was in New Delhi to strengthen economic and security ties with India. The visit of Rex Tillerson, US Secretary of State followed. The simultaneous visits indicate a line-up between the US, India and Afghanistan. Tillerson had previously described the US as India's reliable partner. He said that unlike China, India has always followed the rules of international order. He called for greater cooperation between the US and Asian democracies and also a check on the Chinese aggressive stance on the South-China Sea. President Donald Trump has also alluded to a tilt towards India and slammed Pakistan for extending support to terror groups in the country. Tillerson is likely to stick to the same standpoint in India which will be in this country's interest. The US advocates isolationism in its foreign policy but is very much engaged in the West Asian theatre of operations.

It appears that a new chapter of Great Game is unfolding in Asia. Chinese President Xi Jinping has made it clear that his country will not compromise on its core strategic interests. US policy as it emerges now is in conflict with China's militaristic ambitions. However, India should not be lulled into complacency to become a US vassal state in the present political situation. The US has never been a reliable partner especially in relation to Pakistan and China. It relies on Pakistan and China for economic and strategic reasons. The US needs Pakistan's help to eliminate jihadis in Afghanistan. India should not in any event allow the US to make it commit troops in Afghanistan.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Ozone depleting

December last, Indian scientists working in Antarctica discovered a disturbing hole in earth's Ozone belt. It is a thick layer of Ozone gas enveloping the entire earth. This ozone shield goes not allow harmful rays from the Sun to strike the earth's surface. Three years ago West-ern Scientists found a hole bigger than the surface area of USA over Antarctica. Therefore, Indians scientist's findings only confirm the presence of the above fact. What is Ozone belt or shield? It is a thick layer of Ozone gas enveloping the earth. Ozone

is a form of Oxygen gas produced between nitrogen oxide, the burning or combustion of fossil fuels and chemicals such as unburned gasoline and certain solvents. Ozone plays an important role in maintaining a radiation balance in earth. For instance, the Ozone shield absorbs or effectively blocks such solar radiations like harmful ultraviolet rays from reaching earth's surface. These UVR's are capable of injuring or killing most living things.

Party politics in Meghalaya is secondary and consequential

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Party refers to an organisation of people whose association and dynamics is bound by the consensus on certain ideology or philosophy of governance. Politics on the other hand refers to the art and science of governance. In countries where democracy has become mature like in the west, party politics is more associated with the dynamics of party management and convergence in order to deliver a desired objective. This is very important in the context of governance because in a democratic set up governance issues come from collective decision and not from an individual. With regards to this young and small state of Meghalaya, peculiar in culture and traditions, heredity, land management and different layers of governance, the idea and concept of party politics is parochial and provincial where party affiliation is secondary and consequential and subjected to suitable conditions. Therefore, party members switching membership like players in the IPL and Ivy League Football teams, to the highest bidder is common phenomena. This shows that their affiliation at the first instance is not to benefit the whole society but themselves and a section of the society.

Interestingly, being a small state with a small population, yet the number of political parties is more in comparison to other states. This reflects a state of absolute freedom of individuals that may also lead to anarchy if no ideal political system emerges in the near future. This also indicates that most of the electorate are still ignorant and confused about what should constitute an ideal political system as well as the power of collective decision. The concept of liberty and freedom in a democracy does not entail the idea to be let alone like a wild animal. A progressive society or state is driven by certain philosophical and ideological principles of development based on which a collective decision is also arrived at. Therefore, when we vote, it implies that we are making a decision along with other fellow citizens of the society. But as of now representatives are elected not on the basis of a party philosophy or

agenda but primarily because of personal relationships and other hidden connections or deals.

The other reason that has created this fractured opinion in decision making is the level of thinking of the people and the divisive approach by political leaders. When I say

victory in a collective pattern was the first general election to the state legislature in 1972 where the Association turned political outfit APHLC secured the mandate to govern the newly formed state. The reason for this was

“Interestingly, being a small state with a small population, yet the number of political parties is more in comparison to other states. This reflects a state of absolute freedom of individuals that may also lead to anarchy if no ideal political system emerges in the near future.”

the level of thinking of the people it means that the choice of the people is different from one place to another and where personal and local issues are considered a priority by most of the leaders rather than the progress of the whole society. Another factor that makes political affiliation secondary is the fact that none of the political parties so far have been able to prove themselves on the principles they stood for. And therefore political affiliation is just like

perhaps people at that time people had a hope on the philosophy and ideology of the movement of self-determination thinking that their leaders will further pave the way for a better future for the state and society. If those leaders at that time had stuck to their principles, APHLC could have been another Congress of this hill state. By dissolving APHLC and abandoning the core identity, a great blunder has been committed by our leaders

“For a state and society to progress, there is a set pattern that should be followed in an organised manner under the superintendence of a sound law making system. And the result of this is reflected in the increase of per capita income of the state.”

a rented house where students share the apartment for convenience sake. There is absolutely no sense of ownership and scope to promote such attributes within the party. This is the grey area that makes political activists and supporters to switch allegiance frequently. While some political leaders feel gratified because they believe they have engineered the concept of coalition politics, in reality this has not yielded optimum satisfaction to the citizens and the state in general.

The only situation where people gave a thumping

just for the sake of power in the context of uniting people or regional factions. Therefore, the same culture and nature is perpetrated till date. The desire for power is strong but the direction to steer public opinion for a better future is absent.

For a state and society to progress, there is a set pattern that should be followed in an organised manner under the superintendence of a sound law making system.

And the result of this is reflected in the increase of per capita income of the

state. This can only come from regular employment in the organised sector. This means that irrespective of any job that a person embarks on, it should yield not only a sustainable income but surplus income and vice-versa. But as of now our government is always busy in promoting schemes and programmes that benefit only a section of the society in a particular period of time and in the long run does not have meaningful result. The best example of this is MRDS which has disappeared with no trace of its footprints. The organisation (MRDS) with a sizeable corpus fund could have turned itself into an institution like Grameen Bank of Bangladesh which is now a global institution but can anyone claim its credit or commemorate its service? Where have all the self help groups disappeared? The same thing might also happen with other schemes. Schemes and programmes are like critical care units for sick persons. The sad thing is that those in the political arena are following this pattern expecting an opportunity to grasp power in order to create another CCU or ICU for their own voters somewhere. The need of the hour is to inculcate and indoctrinate entrepreneurial concepts and skills in the minds of the people so that a giant leap forward can take place.

Party affiliation on the basis of societal perception of growth and development is a non-existent concept and no political party ever promotes such ideas. But satisfying and meeting voters demand and expectation in a particular area that constitutes a major chunk of vote bank has so far been the top priority of each and every representative. It is a common fact that most of the candidates get re-elected again and again mainly because people think that he or she has done something to their constituency. But in reality their contribution to the progress of the whole society is zero.

Whether voting trend continues in the next elections is a matter of conjecture.

Rahul facing his first real test

Can Congress ace Gujarat polls?

By Amulya Ganguli

The timing of Rahul Gandhi's ascent is propitious. It can even be said that it is just as well that the Congress waited till now for the coronation of the crown prince because for the first time since the party's humiliating defeat three years ago, its supporters can afford to wear a faint smile.

The reason is that there are signs that the dark clouds which hung over the party are slowly lifting. One silver lining was its massive victory in the Gurdaspur by-election in Punjab and another was the success of the party's student wing in the Delhi University Student Union elections and the ABVP's defeat, albeit at the hands of the Congress's ally, the Samajwadi Party's student wing, in Allahabad

gone. Instead, an element of sobriety and maturity is discernible as when he welcomed Yogi Adityanath's loan waivers for farmers and condemned the murder of an RSS worker in UP.

His comment that even if the BJP speaks of a Congress-mukt Bharat, he will not want an India where the BJP has no place has been approvingly noted. As has been his earlier admission that Modi is a better communicator than him.

The stage is set, therefore, for the Congress vice-president to pose a serious challenge to the BJP's vikas purush. To do so, however, he will have to highlight the Congress' fundamental differences from the saffron camp by

“The time he spent, therefore, in Dalit huts with a bottle of mineral water at hand was mocked as a case of slumming. His strident declarations of intent to fight for the rights of the Niyamgiri tribals in Odisha, or distressed farmers in Bhatta Parsaul in UP, or in favour of Kalavati, the farmer's wife in Vidarbha, were seen as flashes in the pan and not to be taken seriously. Now, however, it is a somewhat different. The shrillness which marked his speeches in Parliament is gone.”

University.

Since the ABVP is associated with the BJP, its setback is of considerable significance, especially when there are reports that the BJP is not too comfortably placed in the forthcoming local body elections in UP.

But these are not the only reasons why Rahul's appointment as the Congress president is taking place at the right time. A greater cause for satisfaction in the Congress is the widespread belief that the BJP has started feeling the heat of public dissatisfaction.

As a result, the ruling party at the centre has been showing signs of nervousness. These are evident from Narendra Modi's frequent visits to Gujarat to shower sops by taking advantage of the delay in the announcement of the poll dates by the Election Commission, the prime minister's castigation of the Congress for all of the state's ills despite the BJP's long stint in power there, the party's tantrums over unflattering references to demonetisation and GST in a Tamil film called Mersal and the attempt to prevent any discussion on the business deals of BJP chief Amit Shah's son.

Rahul, therefore, is facing the first real test of his short career because of the opportunity which the Congress has got at long last to trip up the BJP. Up until now, the Congress vice-president had given the impression of being a dilettante – a part-timer in politics as he has been called, who doesn't have his heart in the profession.

The time he spent, therefore, in Dalit huts with a bottle of mineral water at hand was mocked as a case of slumming. His strident declarations of intent to fight for the rights of the Niyamgiri tribals in Odisha, or distressed farmers in Bhatta Parsaul in UP, or in favour of Kalavati, the farmer's wife in Vidarbha, were seen as flashes in the pan and not to be taken seriously.

Now, however, it is a somewhat different. The shrillness which marked his speeches in Parliament is

emphasizing the 132-year-old party's inclusiveness, which shuns polarization, projects a scientific outlook, which does not believe in the imagined therapeutic value of cow's urine, and has respect for institutional autonomy, which rules out planting party apparatchiki on august organizations.

More than in Himachal Pradesh, it is Gujarat where a battle royale is due. On the face of it, the BJP has the upper hand because of the 10 per cent difference between it and the Congress in the state where the assembly elections are concerned.

However, there is a significant reduction in the difference in the parliamentary polls although the BJP still remains ahead of the Congress. For instance, in 2004, the BJP's percentage was 47.3 compared to the Congress's 43.8.

Moreover, the Congress won 12 Lok Sabha seats, which is equivalent to 90 assembly constituencies, while the BJP won 14. Two years earlier in the assembly elections in 2002, the BJP won 127 seats (49.8 per cent) and the Congress 51 (39.2 per cent).

In 2009, the BJP's vote share was 46.5 per cent while the Congress's was 43.4. Again, two years earlier in 2007, the BJP's percentage was 49.1 and the Congress's 38. The figures were nearly identical in 2012 with the BJP securing 47.8 per cent and the Congress 38.9.

As is known, 2014 was the year of Modi's triumph. So, it is not surprising that the BJP won all the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat with a percentage of 59.1 while the Congress brought up the rear with zero seats and 32.9 per cent.

If the 2014 results are kept aside, it can be said that the Congress's best performances in recent years were in 2004 and 2009 when it won 43 per cent of the votes. That was when the BJP was riding high in the now with a Modi at the helm. Now, it is a different story. Can the Congress cash in on the difference? (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Apocalypse now?

Editor,

Now that election time is nearing there will be many who will want to make themselves heard and even followed. The shenanigans by a religious man who wants to defy the Aadhar enrolment makes me laugh. This same man has indulged in similar shenanigans in the troubled years of Shillong. As usual people here have short memories and some voted for him in the last Lok Sabha election. Now he is asking people to defy the Aadhar enrolment as if he has the last word on it. People now get their subsidies on LPG cylinders directly in their bank accounts. What happens if the Government decides to stop paying those subsidies to those without Aadhar Cards? And by the way what is that privacy claims that so many are making a big deal of? Those who need to fear what is alleged to be intrusion into individual privacy are people who have something to hide. And most people don't want anyone to know how much they have in their bank accounts. More so, those having to pay income tax and others whose sources of income are questionable. Other ordinary citizens who don't have much money in

their accounts and about 98% of this country's population fall in that group, have no fear if anyone takes a look at their accounts anyway for there is not much to steal.

These church types are the very same people who travel in and out of the country and will not mind living in a foreign country if they are accepted there. And then they will not mind complying with all the laws including giving out the complete biometrics of themselves and their family members. So why the double standards when it comes to giving the same information to their own government? And to drag the Bible in on the Aadhar enrolment is a bogus move. Its time people learnt to question these seasonal leaders who emerge out of the woodwork on the eve of elections.

Yours etc.,
Banisha Lyngdoh,
Shillong- 2

Nuclear war in the offing?

Editor,

Are we on the brink of destruction? Are our precious lives worthless in the hands of a few eccentrics? Can Mother Earth withstand another holocaust --- this time a full-scale destruction? Will sanity prevail in some crazy

world leaders?

Answers to these dreadful questions lie in Washington and Pyongyang. We, like the rest of the inhabitants of planet earth can only be the dumb spectators. If the dreaded catastrophe befalls, it will be beyond our means to prevent, and beyond our means to survive. Yes, a series of the dreadful missile is being blasted off from the soil of North Korea too frequently. And it is duly matched with the more alarming thunders by the US President Donald Trump. It is frightful to imagine when these two capricious men will be losing their sensible judgment and start acting against the norms of humanity.

The US President Donald Trump and North Korea Dictator Kim Jong-un must introspect with all seriousness. They must exercise strategic restraint. They must avoid a potential flashpoint. They must think of a world outside their egomania. They must introspect on the devastating consequences of their protracted antagonism. They must understand military provocations, militant statements, and crossing swords will not solve problems of this magnitude. So, they must listen to reason and

display the right statesmanship which the world's citizens expect. They must display their compassion and exercise their prudence. They have never been mandated to hurt humankind and to injure the earth's crust.

Yours truly,
Salil Gewali
Via email

Showcasing Assam to the world

Editor,

The promotion campaign of Awesome Assam Tourism is surely a laudable step. The land of one-horned rhino, world-famous tea and the mighty Brahmaputra has enormous potential to make it a must visit location. The department claims its tall presence by releasing an advertisement on social media but the need of the hour is to connect the road towards its industry. "Aththi devo bhava" is truly reflected in every Sikkimese and we need to learn from them. The roadmap of Assam tourism is to be designed with technology so that outsiders can easily Google us from a distance. Wi-Fi, high speed internet and internal security will boost it to make it happen

for safari visitors. The infrastructure needs to be developed to capture the traveller's imaginations. The potential sites are to be interlinked for hassle free moving.

Beyond Assam, North East always finds a mention on a tourism bucket list. Neighbouring Meghalaya attracts huge tourist inflow due to publicity on social networks. Nagaland and Manipur could project themselves despite insurgencies and ethnic conflicts. Frontier Arunachal has now followed them. Tripura and Mizoram have a unique identity. Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh have done huge campaigns and mega publicity to attract domestic tourists. Assam too offers a wonderful panorama of wild destinations to project its three sixty degree happiness. What we need is to explore those destinations that are famous for their rich culture of indigenous tribes, age old Sattriya, lush greenery, breathtaking hills and fascinating spice. The ongoing efforts are an excellent start for adding momentum to showcase Assam around the world. Would the 'Act East Policy' give that much needed push to increase tourist footfalls from South

Asian countries? Aggressive publicity is a must to focus Assam as a favourite tourist destination.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

Global Hunger Index

Editor,

According to Global Hunger Index - 2017, among Asian countries, India's position is only better than Afghanistan and Pakistan. While India ranks 100th among 119 countries, China in spite of its vast population is at the 29th position. Even Bangladesh has fared much better than us and ranks 88th. It is a matter of concern that only 9.6 per cent of our children between 6 and 23 months of age, receive adequate diet and as many as 97 million children in India are underweight! How can India be strong if our children are weak?

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.

“Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.”

--- Pele

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2017

Boost to the economy

THE Indian Government has planned a slew of measures which include greater spending on the building of roads and expressways, recapitalization of banks and financial support for medium and small scale enterprises in 50 clusters. These measures should stimulate growth. The greatest challenge the BJP government faced in May 2014 was the balance sheet of banks, especially of nationalized banks. The government has now decided to pump Rs. 2.11 lakh crore into the state-run banks in the next couple of years. The details have not been worked out but the two year prospect is greatly reassuring to banks. Small and medium enterprises and smaller firms will also benefit as result of the capitalization since they cannot raise funds from the bond or debt markets should large banks refuse to lend. However, the capital infusion by the government should be accompanied by changes in the governance of these banks.

In 2016-17, total capital expenditure from the Indian budget was Rs. 290,299 crore, which was higher than the capital expenditure budgeted which was Rs. 247,023 crore. The budgeted capital expenditure for the current fiscal year is 309,801 crore. Rs. 146,300 crore has already been spent which is a welcome development. Capital spending by PSU's and Railways is lagging. But road and transport tell a different story. 8230 kilometers of National Highways have been built in 2016-17 which was significantly higher than in preceding years. Rural road construction has made headway. The Prime Minister Gram Sarak Yojna has registered good growth. There seems to be no need for a fiscal stimulus. However, private sector investment which plays a significant role in growth has unfortunately shrunk.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

The end of a controversy

The centre has decided to set up a Central University in Cachar district of Assam, Mr L P Shahi, Minister of State for Education and Culture told the Rajya Sabha last week in reply to a question by Mrs. Bijoya Chakraverty. That a Central University for Assam, which had none so far, was well on the card was known for several years now and if it did not see the light of day yet it was because of the fierce controversy raging from the very start over its location, the rival valleys claiming it with equal gusto. The Rajya Sabha announcement settles the

issue at last by allotting the University to Cachar in the Barak valley, a clear victory for Mr Santosh Mohan Deb, the Union Minister from this valley, who has been promising this institution for Cachar through successive Lok Sabha elections he has successfully fought on this issue among others the last serious statement he made was that he would not stand for election once again if he failed to redeem his promise during his present term in the Lok Sabha and impliedly his current tenure.

as well as Urban Affairs Department under the present Minister are raising eyebrows in the city.

Yours etc.,
B.K. Singh
Shillong-1

BJP a ticket to ride?

Editor,
Mr. Narendra Modi's tryst with destiny has catapulted India into a world player. The Indian populace has given Mr Modi a thumbs up to the social, financial, and economic changes in spite of facing many problems as they feel that the ongoing changes can make India great. Such feeling of hope has touched the north eastern part of India too. State after state has rejected previous governments that have ruled for ages without any vision towards development and only with the intention of filling their personal coffers. People had no choice but to elect the same corrupt who projected themselves as leaders and saviours. Mr

Youth as a critical constituency of Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

Youth they say is the golden period of life. However, there have to be sufficient reasons why that period of life is termed as golden. Youth spells opportunities; it's the ability to shift gears quickly without much creaking; to experiment with life (not with drugs and alcohol) and new ventures; to forge ahead and plunge into the icy waters without cringing. That's youth...full of promise and dreams and more. But youth are also part of a society and what society thinks, says and does is absorbed by the youth. If as a family and society we shy away from risk taking and keep drumming into the ears of our young ones that their only goal in life should be to look for a secure government job then we will have a long queue of job seekers wasting their time waiting indefinitely. Alternatively, some parents will even buy a job for their son/daughter and thereby teach them early in life that corruption pays. A person who gets a job by bribing invariably ends up becoming a corrupt individual because that person has no value system to adhere to. And more often than not that same person will jump into the political bandwagon once he/she retires because that is another opportunity for making the fast buck.

I spend much time with young people and find many of them fascinating. Recently a young lady, Teiskhem Lynrah who lives between Mumbai and Shillong and her friends organised a pop-up dinner at Heritage Hotel. Teiskhem later told me that she and a friend from Uttarakhand have launched a start-up called Meraki Bombay (www.facebook.com/merakibombay and www.instagram.com/meraki_bombay). They were both bankers in Mumbai but quit what was a cushy job to take up what they evidently liked better which is starting a pop-up culture. To the uninitiated a pop-up restaurants are temporary restaurants. That often operate from a private home, former factory or similar space, and during festivals. It's an exciting experiment with food. For those who enjoy cooking, pop-ups are a good way of earning money. This culture is catching up in Shillong. We have a pop-up restaurant called La Bohemienne run by Tara Goswami at the Malki-Lachumiere junction. Leaving a steady job also

means giving up a comfort zone. Only the brave dare to take that fling. Obviously this requires a supportive family.

Indeed we have now come to a point when young people shift from job to job which also means they are multi-talented and have equipped themselves with more than one skill set. These are the kind of young people from whom we can expect change; not the stereotypical, predictable types with bored looks. There are people who have worked for years in some government department without any

creative thinking and who cannot envision a new Meghalaya except their own personal welfare will continue to rule the state. Is this what we want in 2018 too? Yet that is the trend we see unless some spirited young people have the courage to form a youth only party and launch into the political jungle of elections. Otherwise it is pointless losing sleep over the government's acts of omission and commission. Youth engagement in politics leads to civic

“This happens in a number of professions, including the teaching profession. Teachers spend at least 30-35 of years of their lives without communicating anything of substance.”

output. They have drawn salaries but if one were to measure the outcomes from their respective jobs one would not be able to quantify that. This happens in a number of professions, including the teaching profession. Teachers spend at least 30-35 of years of their lives without communicating anything of substance.

Now let me not digress further but come to the point about youth participation in politics which to me is the key driver for change. Youth must be constructively engaged in politics because politics is what drives our lives. Hence I was very fascinated by the recent repartee from members of the NEHU Students' Union on an article written by a teacher of that University who interrogated the role of the NEHUSU which included their being part of the Selection Committee for admitting students to NEHU. The teacher wondered whether their inclusion undermined the role of the expert members of the Committee. Interestingly, what was also raised by the teacher is whether the members of the NEHUSU are also using their time in the Union to launch themselves into mainstream politics. The repartees were more interesting than the original article. Personally, I feel that educated youth with questioning minds should engage with politics, raise questions and disrupt the status quo. Unless the youth do that we will not have change. The same old faces without the capacity for

engagement which is broader than political engagement because it can include service to the community through involvement in many areas of development such as health, education the quality of water supplied to us, the kind of roads that we are walking or driving on now and the reasons for frequent power cuts, amongst others. It's time the youth get out of the old and clichéd students' bodies that have ruled the roost for a long time and have more non-students than regular students in their fold. Political engagement is a more targeted aspect of civic engagement and can be expressed through voting, participating in political demonstrations and signing petitions for specific issues. It would be wonderful for instance if our youth start filing PILs in the courts on issues that affect the larger public. Or they can petition the Government after having researched through an issue so that in case they are called for a dialogue they are well armed with facts, figures and solid evidence with which to advance their arguments.

At Silchar I met young medical students from Meghalaya and they wonder why Meghalaya has not been able to come up with a single state university or a medical college when Assam already has six medical colleges with 726 seats.

You can sense the frustration in them when you begin discussing the developments in Assam and the status quo in Meghalaya. We cannot afford to let young people slip into cynicism so early in their lives. We have to give them hope but how do we do that in a system that fails to respond adequately to their needs. And what examples do we have to give them that things are indeed moving in Meghalaya. Look at the State Assembly building gutted in 2001. This is 2017. Sixteen years have passed and we are yet to see a new building. Is this development? Is this what the MUA -I and MUA -2 Government is proud of showcasing?

And now, when the state assembly elections are just a few months away we have inaugurations galore of projects that might never see the light of day until several years have passed because in Meghalaya there is no concept of a time line and no contractor is ever penalised for not completing projects on time. Rather contractors are awarded with escalations over their old budgets. This sort of attitude is what has held the state back. If today we have young people who have broken out of the circle of gloom and are doing well for themselves, they have done it despite the government.

And before I end this piece, I must admit that Mr Vincent Pala's statement recently that he is not interested in state politics because his children are still young and studying in Delhi, is a graphic demonstration that the MP does not have faith in the education system of Meghalaya. He prefers that his children get their education in Delhi and from there perhaps he will pack them off abroad. That's what all our, "Who's Who" are doing. Only underprivileged souls continue to educate their children here. But even they would rather see their children in Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore than waste themselves here. What does this say about our education system in Meghalaya? Don't we deserve better?

Hence I would enjoin our young professionals and college and university students to join active politics and "Be the change they want to see."

Caught in the world wide net

By Ananya S Guha

Whoever said politics is the last resort of scoundrels may, or may not be right. It depends on how we tackle the scoundrels. Mahatma Gandhi was no scoundrel, nor were Patel, Ambedkar and Nehru. Among many other names I have not mentioned I will leave it to your fecund imagination. Someone said Nehru should have been a writer and Dr S. Radhakrishnan fitted perfectly into Plato's philosopher king. However politics is construed by many to be a dirty game. But the ones who don't want to meddle into it let others wallow in this filthy game. Watch the fun! No matter how we try we are not able to cleanse politics out of the

is no longer as major issues seem to have taken a back seat. The opposition party should rather concentrate on looking at the wreckage it has created and do some rebuilding. No it harps on individual lashing and our government matches this with as much fatuity as it can. So there is excellent nonsensical repartee.

That is the internal scenario now. In the midst of this a twelve year old girl dies almost unnoticed of starvation in Jharkhand. This too in the much touted 21st century when fake Babas get so much media attention. But no a poor girl from a poverty ridden family gets little words of sympathy. Anyway she is

That is the internal scenario now. In the midst of this a twelve year old girl dies almost unnoticed of starvation in Jharkhand. This too in the much touted 21st century when fake Babas get so much media attention. But no a poor girl from a poverty ridden family gets little words of sympathy. Anyway she is dead.

rubble. Even awarding the Nobel Prize to world leaders is not free from doubts.

Why is it that politics is such a dirty word, and why is it also, people run for the rat race to be legislators, or head a nation? Why is it also that men and women heading a state, build power blocs and bring divisiveness into the world? Nuclear energy has become the source of flexing muscles, hidden as it is under euphemistic expressions like non proliferation deal and so on. That is the macro situation of the world or countries.

Let us look at the micro. A political situation can exist anywhere: in houses, in offices, in institutions and educational institutions. It is common to hear of sentences like "There is too much politics in this university". Then, why blame it on the poor politician? At least he professes to be one. The human mind is endowed intrinsically with guile and machinations. This he can use to divide people in his work ethos or the institution in which he works. That is the insecurity syndrome,

death. Death in India manifests in slow but subtle ways. Death of people who are cow dealers for business, death, nay suicides of farmers, death of opinion makers who would deign to say no, death of a monument of history, the Taj Mahal, death of someone for alleged food habits, death of history; you name it. So one death of a poor girl does it matter? An emphatic no!

What we need to do is to show our murky faces on television and shout at each other. This is the best match practice we can get before a veritable war takes place? Don't you know Pakistan and China are already into a war mode? And our biggest supporter is saying: "Come on, chum don't worry, And their wings (pun intended!) the IMF and the WHO are equally consolable. This economic phase is a passing one because of some measures taken. Don't worry you'll bounce back.

So let there be starvation. It helps after all. Some food is saved. And we sure will bounce back. Death is ubiquitous. We still have

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jealousy or a feeling of threat posed by someone else, real or imagined.

Now let us look at the larger picture. A political power in the country which has come to absolute power by people's verdict is now jittery when a truncated, wishy-washy opposition is making allegations. The wraith of that opposition party is doing it, because it has lost all blood and bones. But it has been taken seriously, so much so that today, politics in our country has just become a war of words, everyone from the two groups is chipping in to make rhetoric sound like language. The actual issue is lost in the midst of such obstreperous rambling. It was fun, but it

not been able to save the marginalized farmer. The richer ones prosper and apart from having monetary opulence, they have perhaps political opulence, read clout. Politics is the measure of success, whether coming to power, getting a job, pleasing the ingratiated bosses, selecting people who your know will kowtow to your whims. This happens in colleges and universities too by the way, on the basis of inbreeding, caste, religion, ethnicity. That is why diversity is so willingly and craftily exploited.

So why blame poor politicians? They are only caught in this world wide net (wwn)!

TO THE EDITOR

MUDA back to its old tricks!

Editor,
As one walks behind the Governor's House looking down at the valley below the Commerce College, it is astonishing to see a building over five floors under construction. One recalls that a couple of years back a lot of heat was generated by the Meghalaya High Court on high rise buildings in Shillong and consequently many private buildings were sealed and remain so till date. One tends to wonder after seeing this building under construction if perhaps the rules have been relaxed or alternatively MUDA has gone back to its old ways of giving permission for any number of floors with a slight payment on the side. No wonder the tainted officers have found their way back to MUDA under the dispensation of the present Chairman MUDA who also happens to be the Minister, Urban Affairs. Otherwise why are retired and serving MCS officers flooding the MUDA which is supposed to be a technical agency. Many things happening in MUDA

as well as Urban Affairs Department under the present Minister are raising eyebrows in the city.

Yours etc.,
B.K. Singh
Shillong-1

BJP a ticket to ride?

Editor,
Mr. Narendra Modi's tryst with destiny has catapulted India into a world player. The Indian populace has given Mr Modi a thumbs up to the social, financial, and economic changes in spite of facing many problems as they feel that the ongoing changes can make India great. Such feeling of hope has touched the north eastern part of India too. State after state has rejected previous governments that have ruled for ages without any vision towards development and only with the intention of filling their personal coffers. People had no choice but to elect the same corrupt who projected themselves as leaders and saviours. Mr

Modi's party, the BJP, is trying to make inroads into the Christian tribal population of Meghalaya. As the hustings get closer many, leaders and rejects alike, have joined the party and more will enroll wanting to bask in the glory of Modi's BJP. Having choices is good for the electorate but the BJP must ensure that the choices they offer are not rotten apples. It is unfortunate that the central BJP leaders in charge of this State, lap up the adulation and turn a blind eye to the nefarious games of some of the existing state BJP honchos. The clout is being held by a few businessmen, contractors and builders, for whom BJP is nothing but another vehicle to make money. These people are ruining the credentials of the party in the eyes of the tribal people who are watching every twist and turn of BJP's moves. The social and print media is loaded with information regarding the dubious and nefarious activities of some prominent members of the state BJP. Such members can never bring laurels to the party. I request Mr Modi is issue strict instructions to his office and ensure that

membership to the party is not entwined with gifting of the party ticket for elections. It is a shame that party tickets have been already gifted in exchange of considerations much before invitation of application for the same. I request the BJP Central leaders to please give us clean candidates and not the corrupt and the rejects. Then the youth will then look up to your party with admission and hope.

Yours etc.,
Jenny Lyngdoh
Mawlong
Shillong-14

Priority to Primary Education

Editor,
In the midst of global recession, India continues long-term growth for the last couple of years but the state of our education is a concern for us. The nation must build skilled workforce to improve their livelihoods. We have premier institutes of higher learning and research including IITs, IIMs, IISc, AIIMS etc but the primary education was never accorded the priority it

deserved post independence. Now India emphasized the NPE for child-centric primary education focusing on universal access and enrolment. The 86th amendment to the Constitution advocates free and compulsory education to the children of 6-14 years of age as a Fundamental Right through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan. The initiative, like the Midday Meal Scheme, brings many more children into schools. But the question on whether the children are really learning, goes unanswered.

Teaching has always been the last career option in India. The vernacular school carries on with outdated teaching methods and lacks a competitive environment. According to ASER effort and DISE on elementary education, learning outcomes do not improve. On the other hand, private schools give children quality education. The government has now taken action to revamp schools under RTE Act 2009. Course curriculums have been re-designed for co-scholastic achievement

concerning school and education. But poor students continue to struggle in higher classes owing to shaky training. Their education does not offer enough to get a white-collared job. Finally they fall a prey to subsidised jobs like MNREGA or temporary hazardous occupation. They have been denied opportunities. Their skills, talents and intelligence go un-nurtured and ignored. Finally they experience an identity crisis. We cannot let down the hundreds of millions of students in our classrooms. All children, irrespective of birth or background must be given equal learning opportunities to hone themselves. We need to overcome structural barriers to education and ensure opportunities for children to realise their full potential.

Yours etc.
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

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.

“Alienation as our present destiny is achieved only by outrageous violence perpetrated by human beings on human beings.”

--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

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Help to Rohingyas

INDIA is carrying on a high level dialogue with Myanmar and Bangladesh so that Rohingya refugees can return to Myanmar, said India's Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar. Talking about India's policy in the Bay of Bengal, he said that the exodus of people was a matter of serious concern. India wishes that the refugees should be rehabilitated in the countries they come from. It is of course a far from easy job. Practical measures and constructive talks are necessary for a settlement of the issues. Mere heated condemnation of any country is of no use. The stress should be on a sensitive approach. The Rohingya crisis should be a test of India's regional diplomacy especially because it involves two strategic and important neighbours, Bangladesh and Myanmar. India's External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj has exchanged views with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in this regard.

Bangladesh has received almost a million refugees from Myanmar. That is adversely affecting that country's economy and security. India has launched a massive relief assistance programme to help Bangladesh on the Rohingya crisis. There is constant intelligence exchange on Rohingyas who have entered Bangladesh. Myanmar is also getting increased support from India on the rebuilding of the Rakhine state where almost all Rohingyas live. But the government of Myanmar has turned the heat on Rohingya radicals. India has supported the Kofi Annan report recommendations about a change in Myanmar's citizenship laws. Jaishankar has said that India's policy on this issue is part of this country's Act East pursuit.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Greater autonomy for AIR & Doordarshan demanded

Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha today made a strong demand for greater autonomy for All India Radio and Doordarshan and for allotment of the second channel of TV for the states. Participating in the discussion on the working of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, the alleged tht the electronic media was being used by the ruling party for its own ends. Initiating the discussion, Congress(I) member Mr Vishwa Bandhu Gupta said that even the Janata Governemnt between 1977 and 1980 had failed in giving autonomy to All India Radio and Doordarshan. Mr Gupta

wanted more programme on family welfare and aero sports. Mr S P Malaviya (JD) said the government had ignored various reports relating to the functioning of AIR and Doordarshan. He also referred to the strong criticism of AIR and Doordarshan in the estimates committee report of the Lok Sabha last week and alleged bias in coverage.

He wanted a proper media policy for the Ministry. Mr P N Sukul (Cong-I) urged the government to withdraw additional excise duty on glazed printing paper.

Former President Pranab Mukherjee told a national newspaper that in coalition Governments' the Prime Minister's writ often does not run fully. This is true even vis-a-vis choosing Ministers and allotting portfolios, notwithstanding this being the prerogatives of a Prime Minister in a Parliamentary democracy.

Adding, that the problem of managing regional interests faced by the UPA still persist in the NDA Government despite the BJP enjoying a clear majority in the Lok Sabha. Mukherjee underscored the need for a national debate on regional Parties agenda affecting national interests.

As a national consensus on major national issues is necessary in view of the country's multi-faceted diversity which is itself a coalition. More so, as the stronghold of regional Parties in some States with their own agenda, a salient feature of our federalism, results in them pushing their Party stand in foreign relations.

Undeniably, many of these Parties are so well established in their regions that national Parties are dependent on their support for winning elections and forming Governments. Consequently, leading to an era of coalition Governments at the Centre with new laws, conventions and inter-Party understanding.

Debut coalition dharma, a term quintessential in India's political vocabulary and a concept contributed by democratic politics. This dharma puts certain constraints on the leader of multi-Party coalition Government in forming and running the Administration.

Notably, for the leader the political and moral responsibility of fulfilling his Party's ideology without damaging the interests of his partners and allowing them space to honour their commitments is a fine art of balancing different interests in common policy and action programme.

Indeed, it is internal politics within coalition Governments that mostly ends peacetime alliance Governments. Pertinently, no coalition Government at the Centre except Vajpayee's in 1999 served its full term. Leadership struggle and internal contradictions weakened the Janata, National Front and United Front. The phenomenon of undependable and

Uneasy Throne Coalition Govt's “yes” PM

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

irresponsible outside support brought down the NF and UF Governments.

Remember, the difficulty of keeping together birds of different feathers saw the fall of Vajpayee Government in 1999 when the AIADMK withdrew support and reduced Manmohan Singh's UPA II to a minority Government when the TMC quit the alliance in 2012.

More. Junior partners even with a single MP in Parliament are encouraged to harass the Prime Minister with constant demands thanks to the coalition's numerical weakness in the Lok Sabha. In such situations, governance becomes secondary to political power and status and politics of Parties gets reduced to a game of enthroning and dethroning Governments.

The TMC's withdrawal from the UPA Government over economic reforms illustrates the futility of forming a coalition Government without an agreement on basic and crucial policy issues. Politics of friction and blackmail instead of broad-based national consensus emerges when the poll verdict is hopelessly divided.

The struggle of the coalition Prime Minister to carry out a national agenda faces severe blockages whenever partners push their regional demands overlooking national interests. Wherein the national Government gets reduced to a collection of regional Governments.

Further, when matters reach a climax, some partners at times do not even hesitate to call one another “anti-people”, “corrupt” etc. Clearly, artificially created majorities cannot for long conceal the vacuum of political power prevailing in a country.

True, coalition Governments are common in west European countries. Many of them were “over-sized” especially in Belgium and Netherlands which helped to safeguard Governments against indiscipline and revolt by partners.

Recall, UK's first coalition Government after Churchill's war time Cabinet was formed in 2010 by the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Parties. The former was 20 seats short of majority in the House of Commons leading to the two Parties agreeing

that each Cabinet Committee in the Government would have a Chairperson from one Party and a Deputy from the other.

Additionally, there was a Cabinet Committee specifically to oversee the operation of the Cabinet. Ministers of both Parties shared responsibility for Government decisions. The arrangement provided for internal political review which was helpful to the Government.

Importantly, every Party in the coalition had its own whip. The two even contested each other in by-elections yet maintained their separate identities.

Coalition Governments are common in Australia and are even preferred to single party rule. Ministers are chosen at the sole discretion of the Prime Minister --- a right missing in coalition Governments in India.

Detailed agreements among partners framed post elections form the basis of coalition management in New Zealand where a majority Government is an exception and coalitions the rule, ever since the adoption of proportional system of representation in the 1990s.

Significantly, New Zealand presents a paradox of Parties simultaneously joining the Government and sitting with the Opposition. The spectacle was witnessed in the outgoing two-Party coalition Government in the behaviour of both Parties --- the New Zealand First and United Future. The present coalition Government of NZF and the Labour Party have signed an agreement pledging to ensure that all New Zealanders share the country's economic wealth.

Finland stands as a model for most stable coalition Governments of multi-Parties. In Germany and Sweden detailed discussions among coalition partners take place before a matter is taken to the Cabinet. In Ireland, a team of “programme managers” is attached to the Prime Minister's office.

Furthermore, the term Rainbow Government is adopted from Rainbow

Coalition of two organizations in the USA formed in 1971 to promote social justice, civil rights and political activism.

This term has been commonly used to denote coalition of contrasting Parties in many countries. Ireland, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands, Kenya and India are some countries where Rainbow Coalitions were in power. When ideologically unrelated Parties opposed to one or more dominant Parties come together, a Rainbow Coalition is formed.

Certainly, India is not the lone instance of unprincipled alliance, disunited or makeshift unity. Handling a Rainbow Coalition is a challenging task for any leader who puts a priority on governance but faces severe handicap in choosing his Ministerial colleagues.

Undoubtedly, several advantages might accrue from coalition Governments like amalgamation of varied views and interests, churning of a national agenda with regional inputs, prospects of achieving inclusiveness in a plural society and opportunities for regional leaders to come out of their shell and learn to enlarge their vision. These sights must not be allowed to vanish in the naked fight for Ministerial berths and portfolios.

In sum, India's experience in running coalition Governments at the Centre in recent decades is not without its contributions to strengthening democracy in a multi-Party system. It also presents lessons in survival tactics. Very often, the leader has to try hard to get the support of his partners as much as he has to convince his opponents.

In this situation, it will be politically wise for national parties with a national agenda to cultivate understanding and rapport with regional forces to enlarge their support base. Pre-election alliances might add strength to the ruling as well as opposition coalition more than a post-election get together for sharing loaves and fishes of offices! -----

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

Recapitalisation of PSBs: A reality check Bailouts often come without due commitments from banks

By G. Srinivasan

Periodic bailing out of the public sector banks (PSBs), the commanding height of the country's financial system, in the post-reform phase has become passé. But what strikes dispassionate observers is the fulsome praise and hosanna that hail such a course of action for, the management folly has a cost which is socialized even as the means to this end are cloaked in subterfuges and technicalities. To boot, no less a person than the country's banking industry regulator, the RBI Governor, characterized it as ‘cash neutral’. It is an open secret that most PSBs require infusion of capital not only to meet the regulatory minimum capital requirements that are called in technical parlance capital adequacy norms but also for cleaning up the Augean stables of their balance sheets bruised by non-performing assets (NPAs) that are the byproduct of their imprudent lending to risky ventures or friendly corporate honchos of dubious hue with obvious political links!

Be that as it may, the mammoth 2.11 lakh crore (2.1 trillion) rupees recapitalisation package announced on October 24 by Union Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs Arun Jaitley is broadly welcomed by investment rating agency Moody's as “a significant credit positive for Indian PSBs” with some economists and policy wonks praising it as the much-needed booster dose to free the credit sluice that had been blocked by the burden of NPAs for far too long. Of the aggregate 2.1 trillion rupees additional infusion of capital, 1.35 trillion rupees would be in the form of recapitalisation bonds, while the balance would entail a medley of already declared budgetary prop and capital raisings by the banks themselves from the capital markets with their marked warts and all.

Despite their proclivity to “extend and pretend” credit disbursal culture, it is not for the first time that PSBs have been so massively and comprehensively bailed out as in the latest instance as they had been mollycoddled in this manner since the advent of economic liberalisation way back in the 1990s. Both the incumbent and the erstwhile UPA governments had resorted to safeguarding the wobbly pillar of the financial system manifest in the PSBs without demanding any clear commitment by way of quid pro quo to subject them to rigorous cost control and other prudential lending behaviour so that the eruption of egregious errors post-advances does not haunt them. But then the inter-linked nexus between the political classes and the banking biggies is adamant.

It is only in July this year a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) on recapitalisation of PSBs, laid in Parliament but skimpily covered by the mainstream media, laid bare the shortcomings and glaring gaps in this exercise spread over a nine-year span from 2008-09 to 2016-17. It is revealing to get a grasp of the granular details of the audit's gruelling exercise in freeing fact from fiction or fictitious promises such a move generates. Thus, a cursory perusal of this report shows that over 2008-2016, the advances of PSBs had more than doubled from Rs 22,59,212 crore to Rs 55,93,577 crore, though the rate of increase in advances had plummeted from 19.56 per cent in 2009-10 to a nadir of 2.14 per cent in 2015-16. The return on assets (RoA) of PSBs, a barometer of their profitability, has been consistently lower than that

of scheduled commercial banks (2011-2016). PSBs account for well-nigh 88 per cent of gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) of the banking industry in 2015-16, it said adding that there is “a significant gap between book value and market value of PSB shares, with most PSBs having a lower market value, which may come in the way of PSBs approaching the market for additional capital funds”. This is a salient point of the audit as in the latest bailout package the PSBs are supposed to raise as much as Rs 58,000 crore from the market, probably by availing of the leg room to dilute government's equity that hovers well over 51 per cent. But this is easier said than done, given the glitz and glamour the PSBs need to put on before they parade in the capital markets' beauty contest to lure potential subscribers to grab their equity!

The CAG audit pointed out that the Government of India infused Rs 1,18,724 crore in PSBs during 2008-09 to 2016-17 but for the second phase of fund infusion in fiscal 2010-11, Rs 6,423 crore was infused in PSBs, mainly on the basis of information obtained from the PSBs sans any independent verification by the Department of Financial Services (DFS). The audit further admitted that it could not verify the assessments about capital requirements in PSBs made by DFS as they were in line with INAAP and AFI reports of the banks. The audit also detected that the basis for working out parameters for capital infusion altered between actual and estimated values from year to year and often within different tranches in the same year!

Even in last fiscal 2016-17, DFS resolved that 25 per cent of the capital to be infused in 2016-17 would be disbursed upfront and the remainder latched on to achievement of quantitative targets by PSBs. But this decision was revoked in July 2016 and eventually with most of the PSBs falling woefully short of the set target, performance was not deemed the basis for capital infusion in 2016-17. This dilution in norms is alarming as it let the bank management off the hook to carry on with their chores as if no harm would come as the long arm of the law is not all that looks minatory in practice!

Yet another glaring incapacity revealed in the CAG report is that against a target under Indradhanush for raising capital from the market by PSBs of the order of Rs 1,10,000 crore between 2015-16 and 2018-19, in the span of January 2015 to end-March 2017, they were able to raise only Rs 7,726 crore.

Pointing out that high levels of NPAs in banks impair the economy as bank credit is a catalysts for economic growth, the CAG stated that GNPAs of PSBs zoomed from Rs 2.77 lakh crore (March 31, 2014) to Rs 6.83 lakh crore (provisional) as on March 31, 2017. What is bothersome is that for the PSBs the recovery rate has in general been at a snail's pace than the write-off between 2010-11 and 2014-15, showing that the system is unable to deploy carrot and sticks even in uneven proportion to wrest what it could from the wreckage!

The only salutary feature in the latest package, given the backdrop of the stark reality portrayed by no less a body than the CAG, is the assurance by Jaitley that reforms would be rolled out to ensure that the whole plan of recapitalisation is reinforced at every stage so that the shareholders and the stakeholders in the system could breathe easy! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

India's poor human development indices

Editor,
India is set to become the world's youngest country by 2020 when 64 per cent of our population will be in the working age group. Given that the West would start aging, this will offer India the most effective resources. However, according to Global Hunger Index - 2017, only 9.6 per cent of our children, between 6 and 23 months of age, receive adequate diet and 97 million children in India are underweight! Thus Indian economy is going to face a gigantic problem of unhealthy and unskilled work-force in the future, which will further degrade our resources into liabilities. Ironically, according to a study, two-thirds of food to feed 600 million poor Indians is lost as hungry millions do not have enough purchasing power to buy the same. Now, government itself can buy it

from farmers with minimum support price (MSP). It will certainly stop the incidence of farmers' suicides. The excess food can then be distributed to students in addition to the midday meal. This will attract more students to school and address the issues like illiteracy, school dropout, child labour, hunger and malnutrition.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

India's impact on Western intellectuals

Editor,
Sitting on the beach, staring at the pale blue sea I am wondering if the world is really spherical. I can clearly see the flat, never-ending sea of water and thought to myself, how did we find out the world was actually a spherical shape? Thanks to my Yoga teacher and my association with this ancient discipline that brought me in touch with

the amazing book called ‘Great Minds on India’ by Salil Gewali, which answered my question and took my knowledge of the ancient Indians much further than I could have imagined. Indian sages asserted that the earth was spherical many centuries before the Greek's speculation over this idea. I quickly realised that the science and the literature of modern times is far behind compared to the ideas expounded by ancient Indians. This book truly demonstrates that India affected the cutting edge world; these are cases of extraordinary individuals that helped society in different ways, who gave credit to India's disclosures and discoveries.

Salil Gewali's book demonstrates to us how ancient Indians impacted present-day science, mathematics, philosophy, linguistics and others. The book initially alludes to one of the most eminent individuals ever – Albert Einstein. It tells us that Einstein said, ‘Without Indians no advantageous

logical revelation would have been made,’ meaning that without the “numeric framework”, that Indians discovered it would not have been conceivable.

Dick Teresi recognized that Indians discovered that the earth circles the sun and realized that a planet's path is elliptical a great many centuries before the thought was acknowledged inside Europe and the rest of the western world. Dick Teresi is an exceptionally famous author and columnist, who was best known for authoring ‘Lost Discoveries.’ Archibald Wheeler trusts that the Indians knew “everything” and in the event that it was conceivable to decipher their old dialect, we would have every one of the responses to every one of our inquiries. He was the co-creator of ‘The component of atomic splitting’ by Niels Bohr. Wheeler is the researcher and coined Black Hole, who is also instrumental in the development of the Hydrogen Bomb.

Erwin Schrodinger, a splendid physicist, trusted that blood transmutation from India is an unquestionable requirement as it spared other-

worldly pallor. Schrodinger was the designer of Wave Mechanics, which is one of the best logical creations of the twenty-first century.

One of the best hypotheses, the ‘Hypothesis of relativity’ is a hypothesis made by the ancient Indian sages and is “light year”. Light years are utilized as a part of room terms right up to the present and is educated in science ponders within school foundations. This was said by Alan Watts, who was a logician and a standout amongst the most productive scholars of 20th century.

Indians also investigated the importance of natural laws, (many yet to be discovered by the modern scientists) the nature of the soul, the birth of the universe, and what is past the cycle of life, birth, and demise, the connection between body, mind, knowledge, and soul. Their vision addressed the idea of holiness, the pre-eminent planning power that may underlie normal laws. To put it plainly, they

tried to know everything that the psyche can appreciate—from the particle to unendingness, the making of the universe, and its significance. The source of different branches of science, craftsmanship, and theory ascribed to this human advancement are genuinely exceptional results of India's “Jijnyasa”, or urge to want to know with clear vision. Finally, I choose to close this letters with the opinion of a pioneering philosopher of German romanticism August Schlegel – ‘Even the loftiest philosophy of the Europeans appears like a feeble spark before the Vedanta’.

Yours etc.,
Bernie David Holt,
36A, Slade Gardens,
Erith,
England

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.

Treasure trove of Indian paintings

One of the world's best collections of South Asian art can be found in the San Diego Museum of Art, California, reports Candice Yacono

The San Diego Museum of Art boasts of a collection of over 1,400 Indian artworks created for the Mughal, Deccani, Rajasthani and Pahari courts from the 12th to the 19th centuries.

An ornate building resembling a Spanish palace lies nestled in Balboa Park, an oasis in the southern California city of San Diego. Inside this European architectural marvel lies one of the world's best collections of South Asian art.

The San Diego Museum of Art opened in 1926, and is the oldest, largest and most visited art museum in the region, serving about 250,000 visitors each year.

As San Diego is located adjacent to Mexico, the museum's exhibition text is in both English and Spanish. The museum is most famous for its selection of artworks by European masters like El Greco and Henri Matisse. But its Edwin Binney 3rd Collection is one of the most comprehensive and high-quality collections of South Asian art outside of India. The collection's 1,453 works include paintings from the 12th through the 19th centuries, including those created for the Mughal, Deccani, Rajasthani and Pahari courts.

The works were created for Indian rulers as well as merchants from Persia, Central Asia and Europe, who travelled to India, set down roots and commissioned art to local Indian artists. The artists were expected to adapt to the whims and aesthetics of their foreign patrons, while maintaining a quintessential Indian quality.

The museum has South Asian, Southeast Asian and Persian art galleries, where selections from the Binney collection are always on display. The artworks are organised chronologically as well as by form, like paintings or sculptures, and by theme. The museum strives to showcase the beauty and craftsmanship of the art within the collection, while also informing its viewers about what makes it unique and important.

The collection was put together per-



(Left) A 16th century Indian painting from Rajasthan depicts Krishna's attack of Naraka capital; and Raja Sangram Pal in a 17th century painting from Himachal Pradesh

sonally by Edwin Binney 3rd (1925-86), an heir to the Crayola fortune. Crayola is known worldwide for its art products like crayons. Rather than acquiring examples of just one era or type of art, Binney sought to collect an encyclopaedic range of art from different epochs and schools of painting.

Binney also collected objets d'art like Persian miniatures, ballet prints, art from the Ottoman Empire and theater books. He began by focusing on Persian and

Turkish art, but as interest in this type of art was widespread at the time, Binney focused on collecting less faddish and, therefore, less expensive South Asian art.

The Binney collection ranges from narrative illustrations of Indian epics to portraits of important personages like emperors, as well as folk art from various regions of South Asia. Not all of the art was intended to be hung on walls. In addition to the massive assemblage of paintings, sculptures play an important part in

the collection. However, paintings originally housed together in a single manuscript were removed and sold individually; the text in these large manuscripts was probably destroyed. So, the museum is now trying to preserve the art for future generations to appreciate.

Marika Sardar, the museum's associate curator of Southern Asian and Islamic Arts since 2013, has written extensively about the art of India and South Asia, including the section on South Asian art for the text-

book "Asian Art."

Some of the paintings from the Binney collection have appeared in major exhibitions across the United States and in Europe. In addition, selected works have travelled to cities like Québec in Canada, Mexico City in Mexico and Madrid in Spain. In 2012, the museum exhibited 106 works from the Binney collection at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum of Art in Madrid. This marked the first time an exhibition of Indian art was organised in

Spain.

More than 90 narrative paintings appeared at the Princeton University Art Museum in 2016, in an exhibition titled, "Epic Tales from Ancient India: Paintings from The San Diego Museum of Art". It included paintings from the Bhagavata Purana, the Ramayana, the Ragamala and the Shahnama. (TWF & SPAN)

Images: San Diego Museum of Art and FB page of museum

Imminent danger

(Continued from last week)

The Arctic Tern, a unique long distance traveler, undertakes a Trans-world journey from Antarctica to the Arctic to breed in summer.

A much warmer Arctic can pose an ecological threat to this pattern of unnatural journey of long distance travelers.

The cold Labrador Current flowing south from the Arctic bringing lot of planktons, embedded in the floating ice may not be available for the shoals of fish, simply because of the fact that the Labrador Current might cease to flow in near future.

The consequent result may be the loss of a very productive fishing ground, the Grand Banks, of the coast of Newfoundland in North America.

The glaciers retain record of the past climate may serve as a record keeper for glacial activity and climatic changes. Geomorphological studies conducted in the inner Himalayas revealed that the snout of the Gongotri glacier was 50 kilometer downstream from where it is located today at Goumukh.

Without any doubt one of the causes of degeneration of the Himalayan glaciers, except for the winter of 2000-01, were due to phenomenal reduction of winter precipitation, which could be attributed to global warming along with a combination of various meteorological events.

With an abrupt change in the mean global temperature of the earth, the dynamics of the ocean water shall undergo a sea - change. Temperature and salinity status of the ocean shall be altered. All these shall profoundly influence the maritime and coastal weather conditions of many countries. Abrupt warming of the earth's atmosphere mean a gradual shift of the sub-tropical pressure belts further north, which might disrupt the entire rhythm of winter precipitation pattern of the western margin of the continents.

In the early 1990's Africa witnessed the worst drought of the century. Nearly one hundred million people suffered from an

acute food shortage. This was brought about by extreme weather changes associated with a rise of sea-surface temperature off the coast of north western part of South America.

The phenomenon that had such drastic consequences in Africa is called El Nino, otherwise known as EL Nino Southern Oscillation or ENSO. A recent ENSO event was blamed for an unusual warm weather condition in Alaska, causing an unusual warm winter in western USA, a phenomenal rise in the level of the sea along the coast of California and the death of coral reefs in the Pacific Ocean. Though not new, ENSO events have become more frequent now.

A human induced climate change might throw a number of natural phenomena out of gear, resulting in the disappearance of a number of plant and animal species. A number of gene centers might shift their positions that can have a profound influence in the pattern of production of food grains all over the world. As a result of climates change the tropical forests might be located anywhere between 20-200 kilometers far north. And in the process of spreading over the settlements, mountains, waterbodies etc. the species that will not be able to adjust themselves to the changed environment, shall disappear. Species once become extinct cannot be evolved like a mythical Phoenix. Loss of biotic resources could lead us to a Midsummer nightmare instead of a 'Midsummer Night's Dream'.

Remember the Biblical story of Noah's Ark in the Old Testament, where Noah escaped the flood with his family and animals? If there is any moral to be learnt from that story, it is about conservation against torrid times. (Few years back a group of people claimed to have found the wreckage of Noah's Ark near Mount Ararat, Turkey.)

(Concluded)

(Parag Dutta is former Head of the Department of Environmental Science, St Edmund's College)

Marathon Man deserves recognition

The Marathon Man of India, Wing Commander (physician cardiologist) Ashis Roy was born in Laban in 1932.

The moniker of 'Marathon Man' is apt for Roy, an octogenarian, who has participated in more than 100 marathons. His 100th marathon was in 2010 in Mumbai. Roy was then a lively young man of 78.

As he was the first Indian over 70 years to run a marathon, there were lot of media publications. The race organisers allotted him with chest number 100 and gave him start with young elite runners from abroad Hundreds cheered him en route. A group of Mumbai policemen honoured him with a guard of honour under a fly-over near Marine Drive.

We feel happy to know that he had run a very difficult half marathon in the US on October 5, 2014, known as Woodrow Wilson Bridge Half Marathon. It was cool weather at 7-9 degree centigrade for 3,500 runners, him being the oldest at 82. This was his fourth half marathon in the US that year. He received his winner's medal of 80+ age group along with his finisher's medal. The crowd cheered him as the oldest runner and running many marathons in life. Many runners took picture with him for their record.

He ran along with his daughter Amrita as father daughter team on October 2, 2016, Woodrow Wilson Bridge Half Marathon. Probably they were the only team comprising of father daughter and a world record till date.

Roy holds the Indian records of running 115 full marathons and 13 full marathons in one year in 2009 at the age of 76-77 years

There were 1,500 runners and he was the oldest at 84 years. The route was along the bank of Potomac River till 10 miles which he completed in 3hours. After that 1 mile through city center where he was cheered by large crowd, the 12th mile was steep climb of the longest bridge and last mile was return down the bridge and 200 meters to finish. This last part gave him trouble as his right osteo arthritic knee gave way and he had to struggle to finish in 4hours 10 min. They received double medals for completing two half marathons in Alexandria, the first one was in May 2016.

He is holding the Indian records of running 115 full marathons but also holds records of running 13 full marathons in one year in 2009 at the age of 76-77 years.

Roy always nurtured the dream to go to the Olympics. But after joining the

IAF, he could hardly make time for sports. Though he stopped running during his service period, Roy, an alumnus of St Edmund's College, started his regime after retirement to lose weight.

In November 2011, he suddenly developed complete paralysis of his right lower limb and MRI showed serious injuries to his vertebrae. He was immediately operated by a Great Neuro-Surgeon at Max Hospital Delhi which took four hours. From the next day, he started improving gradually and after two months he was walking freely.

In February 2012, he returned to the US and continued his walking and changed to slow running. After three months in May 2012, he ran a half marathon in Alexandria and felt happy. After three months he returned to Delhi and again ran Delhi Half marathon on September 30, 2012. Since then he is running regularly half marathons but he ran two more full marathons in India in 2012-13 to complete his full marathon numbers to 115.

Till date, very few people know about him or his contribution to sports.

We feel ashamed being an Indian, especially Shillongites, to never know his name or his achievements and contribution. He is a man of spirit and fully dedicated to sports.

Does not he deserve a state honour or Kheiratna from the Government of India?

(Contributed by Sutapa Choudhury)



Transgender fish may have a message for us

A reader notified me of a mass sex-change taking place in his country. Half the male fish in some British lowland rivers have female characteristics, and many can now lay eggs, research indicates.

This must be causing extremely awkward underwater conversations. Female Fish: "I have news, Stanley: I'm pregnant!" Male Fish: "Wonderful, darling, me too!"

Grandparent fish are surely delighted at the double portions of grandchildren, although the market for underwater league football TV specials must have collapsed.

The reader, who wanted only to be known as Concerned Teacher, said he only bought it up because many young males in his class seem to be taking the same journey. I told him it was probably just a sign of the times, but he should call me if any of his boys actually lay eggs so I can make a viral video, I mean, express my heartfelt concern.

The news clipping said scientists blame the problem on contamination by

estrogen, a chemical known for causing mammals to purchase shoes and care what colour curtains are. But why is there no corresponding contamination from testosterone, a chemical that causes massive growth in the human male's most prominent organ, the ego?

"It's apparently estrogen from contraceptive pills which leaks into nature and creates feminisation," Concerned Teacher said. Feminisation was originally detected in fish, whales and dolphins but has been found in land animals, including seals, otters, polar bears, frogs, alligators and, yes, humans.

The good news is that contraceptive-swamped Western civilisation is by far the most likely to be wiped out, which may actually be worth it when you consider that the world would be rid of the Kardashians, British "food", reality TV shows, etc., and even my Western friends agreed with that.

But further reflection suggests that a world in which the only music, movies and culture were Eastern would be pretty sad. There's only so much Gangnam Style

a person can take.

On the plus side, females are less affected by estrogen; so we may end up with a female-dominated world, which might be a good thing. There'd be fewer wars, since geopolitical summits would end up with one leader saying "Fine" and the others trying to work out whether this was good or bad.

My colleagues were less inclined to panic over the gender-blender trend. One told me about a kindergarten parent he encountered who initially refused to identify the sex of her child, but its two initial acts — the gleeful emission of astonishing amounts of sound from the end of its colon, and the use of toys to commit mindless acts of violence on other toys — were big clues that it may not be female. But these days you never know, do you?

While writing this column, a newspaper arrived reporting that train announcers in London have been told to stop opening their statements with "Ladies and gentlemen". Presumably this is to show respect for the many lowland river fish who travel by train these days.

Not sure what a politically correct columnist should say about that. Maybe: "Fine."

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

THE FUNNY SIDE
Nury Vittachi

No dearth of jobs in tourism sector

By Ranjan K Baruah

In the last edition, we have published about tourism as a career option. In this edition we are providing more information related to different career prospects in this sector.

There is no doubt that travel and tourism sector is one of the world's largest foreign exchange earner, provides employment directly to millions of people worldwide and indirectly through many associated service industries.

It includes government tourism departments, immigration and customs services, travel agencies, airlines, tour operators and hotels and many associated service industries such as airline catering or laundry services, guides, interpreters, tourism promotion and sales.

Travel and Tourism enterprises include major international with a workforce of thousands, to the small private travel agent with a handful of employees.

Some of the career options related to tourism include:

Tourist Guides: One of the best professions in this regard is being tourist guides. A tour guide or a tourist guide is a person who provides assistance, information on cultural, historical and contemporary heritage to people on organised tours and individual clients at educational establishments, religious and historical sites, museums, and at venues of other significant interest. We shall write more about tour guides in our next issue.

Tourism Departments: Officers and other staff are recruited in the tourism departments. All states have their own departments apart from central departments. There are corporation to deal with tourism. Officials are appointed through civil service and other selection process. A degree in travel and tourism is preferred for operational jobs in government organisations. One of the popular designations is Tourist Information Officers and Assistant Tourist Information officer and they are also called as Tourism Officers.

Airlines: In the airlines, one can work as traffic assistance, reservation and counter staff, airhostess, sales and marketing staff and customer services, among others. A

course in travel and tourism or a qualification in hotel management helps to get in.

Tour Operators: They operate travel plans for tourists and organise conducted tours to various spots and manage the travel and stay of tourists. There are many companies operating tours for the domestic as well as the international tourist.

Travel/Transport Agencies: These agencies guides and manages best travel and stay options for the tourist. They deal with bookings or travel tickets, itineraries for the comfort of the tourist. Travel agencies could be found everywhere.

IITM: Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITM) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism and is one of the premier institutes in the country offering education, training, research and consultancy in sustainable management of tourism, travel and other allied sectors. IITM is committed to developing quality human resources for tourism and allied services.

Updates

AICTE Scholarship: AICTE has announced two scholarship namely Pragati Scholarship Scheme for Girl Students and Saksham Scholarship for differently abled Students.

For Pragati Scheme: Family with two girl children are eligible provided its income is not more than Rs 8 lakh per annum during the preceding financial year (in case of married girl, the income of parents/in-laws, whichever is higher will be considered).

For Saksham Scheme: Specially abled students having disability of not less than 40 per cent and family income not more than Rs 8 lakh per annum during the preceding financial year (in case of married girl, the income of parents/in-laws, whichever is higher will be considered). Details of the schemes are available on AICTE website www.aicte-india.org and last date for Submission of Application November 30.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 98640 55558 for any career related queries)



Celebrating Life & Vision of Bahá'u'lláh

The year 2017 marks the 200th birth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder prophet of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'í communities across the globe are celebrating this momentous occasion with zeal and ardour.

The Bahá'í Faith originated in the mid-19th century, making it the newest independent religion in the world. The central teaching of the Faith is based on the oneness of God, unity of humanity and the essential harmony of all religions for peaceful co-existence.

Born on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, Bahá'u'lláh showed forth extraordinary qualities that indicated he was destined for a life of greatness. From an early age, Bahá'u'lláh chose to walk a path of service to humanity, instead of one of comfort and ease, and became known as a champion of the cause of justice.

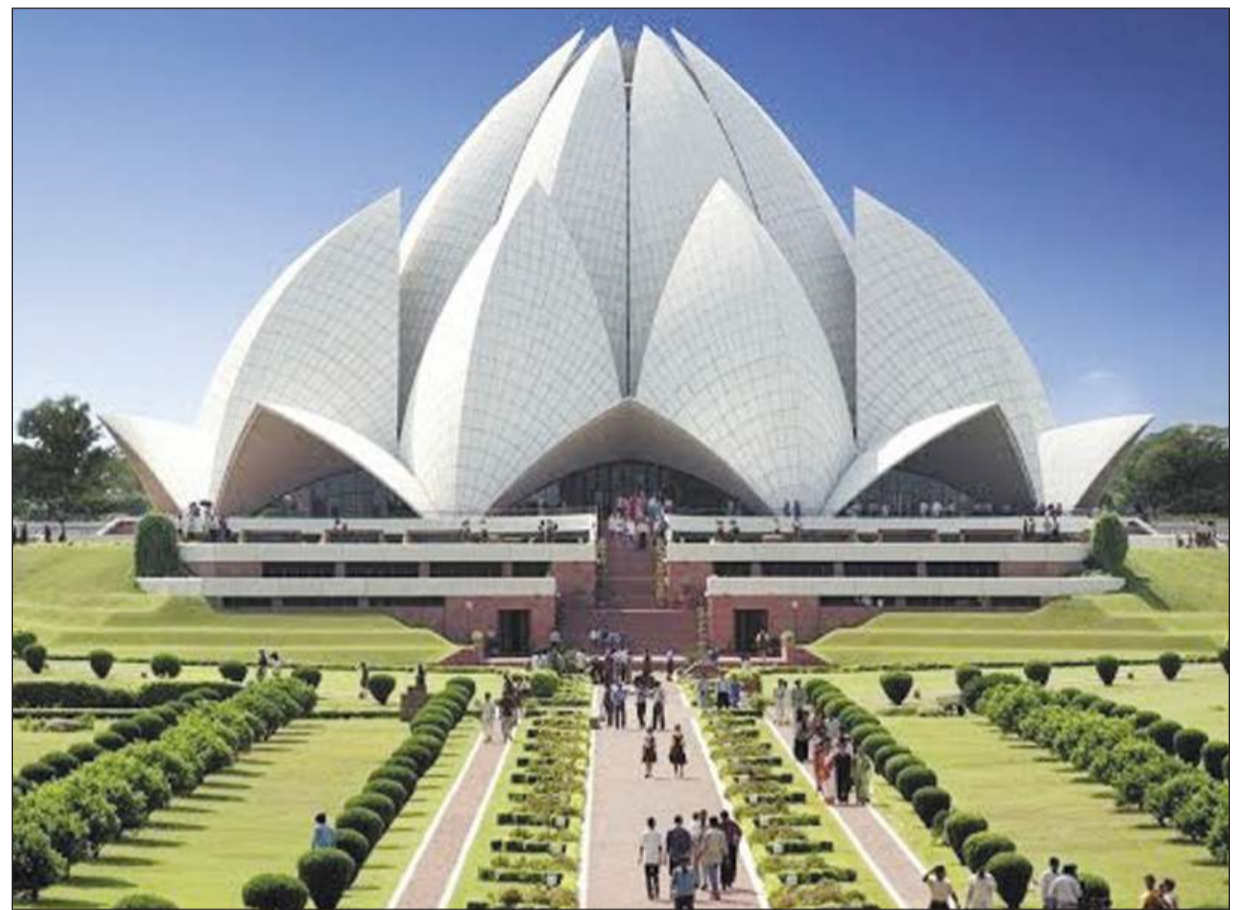
Bahá'u'lláh's father, a distinguished minister in the court of the king, had a dream about his son swimming in a limitless ocean; his body shining with a multitude of fish gathered around him, each holding onto one strand of his hair. Yet, unrestrained he moved above the waters as the fish followed. His father would later come to know that this dream symbolised the multitude of challenges that his son would face in his mission of ushering in humanity's spiritual revival.

Bahá'u'lláh would single-handedly achieve sovereignty over all opposing forces despite the turmoil which His message would arouse among the people of the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, like all previous manifestations of God, endured a life of hardship for the greater Cause of humanity and spent 40 years in exile and imprisonment. It was at the outset of these trying years of tribulations and imprisonment that the Holy Spirit filled Bahá'u'lláh's soul and revealed to Him that He was the Promised One for today.

Worldwide, Bahá'í communities are increasing their efforts to contribute towards building unity in diverse societies, in order to spread the guiding light of Bahá'u'lláh's message and to bring an awareness that the most urgent and necessary requirement, in this day and age, is that of the recognition of the oneness of humanity and the unification of its diverse groupings.

Unlike previous ages, human unifica-



tion is made possible with the help of modern communication which has virtually merged the five continents of earth.

The unification of mankind is inevitable yet dependent on the

conscious and consistent efforts made to achieve it on an individual and collective level. In this age of increasing interdependence, self-sufficiency is no longer possible and Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to "Regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch. So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."

In line with Bahá'u'lláh's divine teachings, the worldwide Bahá'í com-

munity in virtually every country and in thousands of localities, exert efforts to demonstrate that human diversity should be not only tolerated, but rather celebrated.

In nature, a garden full of diverse colours, shapes, and fragrances has an uplifting spirit, where diversity enhances the attraction of each component. Much in the same vein, the garden of human community can, and should, see diversity as a source of enhancement of the strength, beauty and attraction of individual members, cultures, and talents.

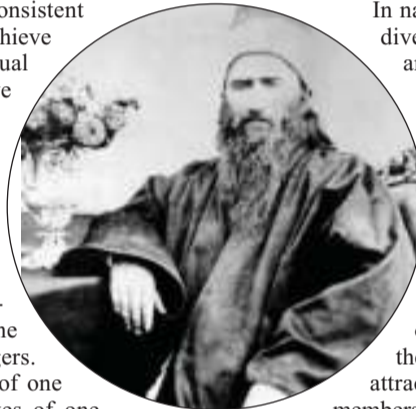
Such is the reality of our spiritual essence, and so should we endeavour to unlock our individual and collective potential.

Today the members of this community

together with those of the wider society are engaged in building unity in diversity in different parts of India. Hon'ble President and Prime Minister of India have extended their felicitation messages to the Indian Bahá'í community.

President Ram Nath Kovind, in his greeting to the Indian Bahá'í community on this significant occasion of the Bicentenary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh, says: "The bicentenary of His Birth provides an opportune time for all to meditate and draw inspiration from His message of equality and of the inherent nobility of all, regard-less of community, colour, or creed." Addressing the Indian Bahá'í community in his message, the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sri. Narendra Modi, says: "Its institutions and missions are much revered in our nation and its followers have contributed significantly in all walks of life. Its institutions like the Lotus Temple epitomize this spirit of fellowship and universal brother-hood."

(Contributed by Shayaba Ngangom)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 29, 2017

Moon trine Venus on your solar return chart denotes a good year. You're in a great position to get your life sorted out in key ways this year. Better routines and more consistent attention to health and wellness figure strongly. You can come to a better work-life balance by automating some of your work or coming up with new ways and methods to do the things you've previously toiled over. A partner or even a potential partnership could play a vital role in helping or motivating you to bring more order into your life. This can be a time for finding more joy in life from simplifying. Some of your wilder ideas can be brought down to reality this year. You are able to free yourself from limiting situations and attitudes. Do be careful, however, that you don't alienate others with a self-centered, defensive attitude.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced by the planetary combination. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. Reliability and creativity will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever. You will brilliantly and effectively handle difficult projects at work. Business associates bring good news and lucrative terms and opportunities.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Friendship, love, romance and children are highlighted. You would have new attitudes towards family, finance, and social relationships. Home and family matters capture your attention and are a strong source of pride. It is a time when worldly matters are not as important to you. Use this energy to find ways to improve your interpersonal relations and your home and work environment. You might be a bit of a showman at this time. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and for joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your family would be more supportive. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

With communication, creativity and judgment you gain money and influence in business ventures. Success brings status and respect as you dominate the professional scene. This is the right time to participate in community events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This phase brings rewards and recognition in your professional life. You would also work hard with an inclination towards more detailed work, and it can get to you at times. Personal projects are on an upswing. You are in a position to inspire others through what you create. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time. You feel on top of things and replete with good health and energy.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

A period of hard work and effort is in your forecast. You would be taking on new responsibilities and will enjoy the challenges. A new set-up in an existing home or a new home altogether may be part of the picture in the coming weeks. There will also be a sense of renewal and reinvigoration with regard to your domestic routines, comfort, and feeling of security. Do not isolate yourself when you are feeling down. Friends and loved ones will support you and listen to you when you air your feelings.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Practical matters come into strong focus and demand attention. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routine tend to speed up now. You are required to do a balancing act, and something big is in the pipeline. There may be some confusion about your dreams and ideas regarding your career. Give yourself time to digest everything before you make a move. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Increased energy for health routines and work is with you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 24)

There may be debates and discussions in family and you may face some opposition. You are likely to exert your energy and

ment, and pleasure in general. You have a likeable and competitive temperament. There is a stronger desire for creative endeavors, athletics and risk-taking pursuits. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner and a few conflicts are possible. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You have a stronger need than usual for intellectual stimulation.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase brings good-luck for love and romance. Ego confrontations with family members are possible now, but the best way to handle this is to do your best to strengthen your relationship with your family and your home base. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself, so that regardless of what you meet in the outside world over the next weeks, you have a secure place to return to. Besides spending more time tending to domestic affairs, the focus can be on cultivating and nourishing your inner foundation that support you and your growth.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Associates at work might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you status. You can improve your love life by bringing more understanding and sharing views with each other. You are more inclined to seek a broad understanding of people and of your immediate environment. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating, and learning is your best bet now. If health is affected, fevers or infections are more likely.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This period brings new horizons in your romantic and love life. You explore and search, make new connections, and pay attention to your immediate environment. Give other people a little extra time and attention, notice their efforts on your behalf, and strengthen your connections. You are more curious and alert than usual, and you could be quite busy with work. Much energy is expended in understanding and adapting to your immediate environment. Siblings, neighbours, close relatives, friends, and co-workers may play a more important role than usual in your life. You are eager to investigate new things, whether scientific or technical.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration promotes your luck in work related areas. You would be especially fond of home and family life. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental now. Loyalty and sensitivity in your relationships are more important to you. There would be a bright opportunity to travel, learning or the publishing of a project. Getting your finances on track will be necessary at this time. Do your best to avoid letting emotions rule over good judgment when it comes to expenses and other financial matters. Share your thoughts and feelings with others and you may be surprised at the support you receive from close friends and loved ones.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Pay close attention to performance, it will be rewarded and continuity to perform work would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits. You can expect good returns from overseas business. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. There may be a development of romance at your work place. You turn your attention on fitness and diet programs.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

There would be happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening of your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background. Your dreams and ideas about intimacy come into focus, but could also bring the flaws in this area of your life to light. An income boost is likely in this period. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the physical world of the senses, and this is a time to start fresh in terms of how you arrange your life in order to feel a sense of value and worthiness. It is also a wonderful time for taking moments to please yourself through

Chhath: An eco-friendly festival

By BK Mishra

Chhath is a Hindu festival celebrated each year. People pray to the God of energy, also known as Dala Chhat or Surya Shashti. According to the Hinduism, Sun worship is related to the cure of a range of diseases such as leprosy.

Devotees wake up early in the morning, take bath in the Ganges and keep fast for the whole day without even drinking water. At some places, Chaiti Chhath is also celebrated in the month of Chaitra (March or April) few days after Holi. It is named as chhat because it is celebrated on the sixth day of the month of Kartika.

Chhath puja has a great significance in the Hindu religion and it is assumed that the oldest purohiths were requested by the kings to come and perform the traditional puja of the Sun God. They chant the ancient Rigveda texts and a variety of hymns.

It is assumed that Chhath puja was started by Surya Putra Karna. He was a great warrior and had ruled over the Anga Desh (Munger district of Bihar) during the Mahabharata period. Chhath was celebrated by Draupadi and Pandavas of Hastinapur (New Delhi) for solving their instant problem and regaining their lost kingdom.

Worship of Chhati Maiya (consort of the Lord Surya) is held at Chhath puja, Chhati Maiya is also known as Usha in the Vedas. Usha means dawn (the first light of the day). People pray to Chhati Maiya to overcome their problems as well as to get the Moksha or liberation.

It is believed that the celebration of Chhath puja may predate to the ancient Vedas, as the rituals performed during the puja are similar to the ones mentioned in the Rig Veda, in which the Sun God is worshipped. At the time, the rishis (sages) were also known to worship the Sun and remain without intake of food as they would obtain their energy directly from the sun.

Another history behind celebrating Chhath is the story of Ram. It is believed that Ram and Sita had kept fast and offered puja to the Sun in the month of Kartik in Shukla Paksh during their coronation after returning to the Ayodhya after 14 years in exile. From that time, Chhath became a significant festival.

Many years ago, there was a king named Priyavrat and his wife Malini. They were living very happily but there was a big unhappiness in their life as they had no children. They decided to make a big Yagna with the help of Maharishi Kashyap in



order to be blessed with a child. His wife became pregnant because of the effect of Yagna. But she gave birth to a dead child after nine months. The king was crestfallen and decided to commit suicide. Suddenly, a goddess appeared and said, "I am Goddess Shashti, if someone would offer puja to me with pure mind and soul, he would definitely get a child." The king, Priyavrat did the same and blessed with a very beautiful child. Since then, people started celebrating Chhath puja.

The festival is observed most elaborately in Madhesh (southern) region of Nepal and Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. It is also prevalent in areas where migrants from those areas have a presence. It is celebrated in all northern and north-eastern states. In Shillong too, Chhath is celebrated elaborately.

There are six great stages of the Chhath puja which are:

The belief of fast and cleanliness of body on the festival identify detoxification of the body and mind to set them up for accepting the cosmic solar energy.

Standing in water with half of the body submerged diminishes the escape of energy as well as facilitates the prana to elevate to the sushumna.

Then the entrance of cosmic solar energy takes place in the pineal, pituitary and hypothalamus glands (known as the Triveni complex) by the retina and optic nerves.

In the fourth stage Triveni complex gets activated.

After activation of the Triveni complex, spine gets polarised and the body gets transformed into a cosmic powerhouse and gets the Kundalini Shakti.

At this stage the devotee is fully able to conduct, recycle and pass on the energy to the entire universe.

Scientific significance
Chhath puja has a special significance during sunrise and sunset. Sunrise and sunset are the most important periods of the day during which a human body can safely get the solar energy without any harm. That's why there is a myth of offering the Sanjhuya Arghya and Bihaniya Arghya to the sun at the Chhath festival.

During this period, the solar energy has low level of ultraviolet radiations. People perform Chhath puja to thank the Lord for continuing the life on the earth as well as to get blessings. The rituals of the puja provide mental calmness by detoxifying the body and mind, enhances the energy level and immunity, and reduces the frequency of anger, jealous as well as lot of negative emotions. It is also believed that following the Chhath processes helps in slowing down ageing. Environmentalists claim that Chhath is the most eco-friendly Hindu festival.

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“More than anything else, I believe it's our decisions, not the conditions of our lives, that determine our destiny.”

--- James Allen

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2017

Xi is King

THE Communist Party of China has enshrined Xi Jinping's political doctrine and his name in China's Constitution. President Donald Trump has called it an extraordinary elevation. Xi's thoughts will now be bracketed with those of Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China. School children will be indoctrinated with Xi's thoughts which are known as “Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new Era”. It may sound like socialism with Chinese characteristics as propagated by Deng Xiaoping, arbiter of China's destiny from 1975-1989. Deng blended capitalist economics with a socialist political system. Xi says that Deng's thesis was not socialism though it brought a huge number of people in China out of poverty. In fact, according to neo-Maoists it engendered a climate of decadence. Inequality rose, workers were exploited and corruption flourished. Xi promises to create a society where collective interests will be secured. This outlook had for years enabled communism to prevail over capitalist systems in some countries.

Following Deng's retirement, the Communist Party of China had been trying to address the problems of the legitimacy of his policies. Xi has rejected it and has presented his brand of socialism through what he calls the “China dream”. He wishes to pursue spiritual revival in China to realise the rejuvenation of the Chinese people. The anti-corruption campaign has been his major contribution to the great country. Nationalism has been intensified through military adventure and the expansion of the Chinese army. Xi stands for prosperity and stability. It has been said that he has replaced the cult of the personality by the cult of the Party. All this may be regarded with consternation by the rest of the peace loving world.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Lok Sabha

Members demand ban on communal organizations

Members participating in the resumed debate in the Lok Sabha on the communal situation in the country today vied with one another in demanding a ban on all communal organizations. Regretting that the country had recently witnessed a spurt in communal riots, they said the need of the hour was to promote communal harmony and true practice of secularism.

Ms. Mamata Banerjee (Cong-I) said political parties should be prohibited from using religion in

electioneering. Mr. Umakant Mishra (Cong-I) demanded a curb on religion fundamentalism. Mr. Saifuddin Souz (NC) wanted proper representation for minorities in police and other security agencies. Mr. Sriballab Panigrahi (Cong-I) suggested holding of an international conference of all religion. Mr. Arif Mohammad Khan (JD) said communal thinking was the most dangerous. The debate was inconclusive.

Influence of money power in elections

By H H Mohrmen

In many of the deliberations about the election to the State Legislative Assembly in 2018, especially post the NGT ban on rat-hole mining in the state, the general consensus is that it is going to be a dull election because the flow of money from the coal barons will be in short supply if not totally shut. In this context, political observers also see the NGT ban as a blessing in disguise because the coal lobby will be compelled to think twice before they squander the meagre resources which are becoming scarcer by the day.

Prior to the NGT ban, coal barons were major players during the election by way of sponsoring candidates of their choice. In fact if one looks at the 2013 list of MLAs from Jaintia hills, except for Jowai constituency, all the MLAs elected were either themselves involved in coal business or supported by some coal barons.

But the jubilation about the dwindling influence of coal money and the expectation that money will now have a lesser role to play in the election is short-lived because we now see money flowing from those who are engaged in construction and other businesses.

This year although the list of candidates that are supported or sponsored by people with deep pockets has dwindled and the influence of coal barons is diminishing, but there are other major players. In Jaintia hills the glaring example is the case of a construction contractor setting up a candidate who is also his own relative to contest from the Jowai constituency. This is a classic case of a candidate being sponsored by somebody else and there are abundant media reports about this.

One may ask how or where does money change hands during the elections which is also a good question. I did my own research and found that the major expenditure that a candidate incurs is during the series of rallies and the cost involved is not only for arranging the site and other logistics but the candidates also have to spend on transport to ferry the voters from their villages to the venue of the rally. In some cases I learned that candidates have to even pay the voters for the loss

of their man-days to attend such rally. The rallies are important because through them people can gauge the ‘winnability’ or the potential of the candidate to win the election.

The major chunk of the expenditure is incurred during the twenty odd days from the day the election is declared till the date when the counting is done. Wasteful expenditure during election can be curbed if the Election Commission puts a cap on the number of rallies that the candidates are allowed to organise.

In the context of Jaintia hills, candidates also incur huge expenditure on the daily evening canvassing at the time of electioneering when they visit different villages for campaigning. The maximum numbers of vehicles used for canvassing

control the number of speakers that the candidates use during such meetings.

There are some examples where the community provides a common platform for all the candidates to address the crowd or debate among themselves. If a platform like this can be arranged it will not the candidates can save money because they will not need to spend on hiring vehicles for canvassing. Also the villagers will save time by listening to all candidate at the same platform instead of having to spare their time again and again.

Come elections and everyone wants to be appointed the campaign manager or leader in every village. The reason is because these leaders are

The influence of money is also glaring if one only reads reports in the vernacular papers about candidates distributing knick-knacks and construct football playgrounds and footpaths to entice people. Election is the time when people literarily make hay while the sun shines and try to reap as much benefit from the candidates they support as they can for their own personal benefits or for the welfare of their organisation, shnong or even the church they belong to.

are being hired by the candidate. They have to pay for the fuel of other non commercial vehicles used in every campaign. The candidates consider this very important because it is also like a show of strength since the bigger the cavalcade the greater the influence on the fence sitters. They think that the more the people from different parts of the constituencies gather for the meeting, the better are the chances for the candidates to win the swing votes. Each candidate believes that the crowd and convoy of vehicles can also improve his/her chances of winning and that is the main reason why they spend so much money on canvassing.

This particular expenditure which is unnecessary can be easily curtailed if the Dorbar Shnong really wants to do so. The Dorbar Shnong can control the number of vehicles the candidates bring for canvassing when they visit their respective villages and better still it can also

paid handsomely to canvass for the candidate. The money is used ostensibly to provide tea and snacks and to fund the potential voters for their emergent needs which could include payment of hospital bills or school fees for kids etc. Such expenditures actually cut a hole in the pocket of the aspiring MLA but he/she has to do it because that is what voters expect. There are some people who expect liquor and a good time during elections. But all of them have to be tolerated.

The influence of money is also glaring if one only reads reports in the vernacular papers about candidates distributing knick-knacks and construct football playgrounds and footpaths to entice people. Election is the time when people literarily make hay while the sun shines and try to reap as much benefit from the candidates they

support as they can for their own personal benefits or for the welfare of their organisation, shnong or even the church they belong to. Such reports are published almost on a daily basis and the stories come from every nook and corner of the state narrating how candidates help in constructing a wall of a church, a stadium for the village or providing an ambulance for different organisations and so on and so forth.

There were reports of Dorbar Shnong and Churches receiving largesse from candidates despite claiming to be non-political and religious organisations. Now if the organisations are indulging in such activities during election time can they still call themselves non-political organisations?

There are also reports of certain Dorbar Shnongs endorsing a candidate of their choice. This also raises a question if it is possible that the entire village to support the same candidate. If not, then how can we ensure that the rights of those who are against the will of the majority are protected? If we go by press reports there are already a few villages like Khanduli, Kyndong, Khliehriat West and others which claim to support only one candidate as a collective choice. In such cases the Election Commission should see that the rights of the minority are protected.

The good news is that there are also reports of churches which rejected donations by potential candidates and questioned the source of the money no matter how big the amount is. Although such cases are rare but it is heartening to know that there are people who still question and do not accept blindly what is being offered to them in a platter.

At the end of the day is there any chance of bringing to an end the influence of money power during elections? Is there any end to this madness in the foreseeable future? This is a million dollar question and the answer is not blowing in the wind but it lies with the people. Only the people can bring an end the influence of money power during election.

An Elephant called GST and the blind men Bureaucracy suffers from genetic disorder that afflicts foresight

By K. Raveendran

India's IT power has evolved into its current pre-eminence because the government, meaning bureaucracy, could not do anything to stop it despite their best efforts. The government and the bureaucracy had virtually no clue as to what was happening. Otherwise they would have stalled it through various means, including labour-related and administrative issues. By the time they realised the reality, technology had grown beyond them, although they have not given up the bid to overwhelm it through regulations. Essentially, government, or more realistically the bureaucracy, and technology are the perfect antithesis of each other. There is so much of difference in their respective approaches.

Software engineers by nature are ‘boring people’ who live in a world of their own, where there are only events, conditions and their results. They eat, drink and breathe software. At the same time, they are most creative when it comes to their profession. Commonsense and logic are their domains and they hack their own work to eliminate unintended results. Contrast this with the approach of the bureaucrats, who simply love whatever they do and hate to see their work criticised. They would rather have the world revolve around them and

go to Facebook and other social media platforms to share our thoughts, moods and what not, but little do we realise the gigantic operation that makes all this possible. Facebook, with a membership exceeding a billion, handling around 2.4 billion pieces of content and 750TB of data every day, has spent over \$3 billion to power its network infrastructure, according to available information. Amazon has over 450,000 servers in its seven data centres located across the world, storing about 40 billion objects, with around 17 million monthly visitors accessing 410TB of data from its platform on its cloud servers alone. Such infrastructure does not get built overnight and is the result of years of painstaking planning, investment and hard work.

Leaving the technical issues apart, the bureaucracy has failed to think through even the most basic issues of GST before embarking on this misadventure. Quite unlike the software people, our bureaucracy seems to have developed a genetic disorder that prevents them from seeing the obvious. The much-hackneyed saying commonsense is not so common is not more true for anything as it is for our bureaucracy.

It is such predicament that forced Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assure the people that the

Take for instance the case of demonetisation and GST. Had they been truthful to their responsibility, and the privileges that their job accorded them, both would have taken different courses altogether. Demonetisation may be a slightly different proposition as the bureaucracy was mostly sidestepped in the whole process; to the extent to which it was involved, we have instances of people like former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan opposing it as impractical.

their airs. Bureaucracy cannot be more adamant when they realise that events are overtaking them and these are not to their liking. As a result of this mindset, its members often fail to see beyond their nose.

Take for instance the case of demonetisation and GST. Had they been truthful to their responsibility, and the privileges that their job accorded them, both would have taken different courses altogether. Demonetisation may be a slightly different proposition as the bureaucracy was mostly sidestepped in the whole process; to the extent to which it was involved, we have instances of people like former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan opposing it as impractical. For argument sake one can say that the bureaucracy was involved only at the implementation stage, which was anyway bungled and was probably destined to be so in view of the basic fallacy of the idea.

But the haphazard manner in which the GST rollout has taken place smacks of foolhardiness, and outright arrogance, the midnight ‘riff-raff’ launch included. It was clearly a miss-step taken before its time. Who couldn't have imagined, except an inept and time-serving bureaucracy that the small window of time allowed for the registration for GST, especially the huge number of small and medium businesses, would challenge the capacity of the infrastructure available for such a massive operation?

At the drop of a hat we

government will not hesitate to take corrective measures after watching the results of GST implementation for three months. Is this the only way we can ascertain the practicality of a measure?

Revenue Secretary Hasmukh Adhia, who has been the defender-in-chief of the government's GST plan, has now no qualms in saying that that some rejig in the rate structure may be required to reduce the burden on small and medium businesses.

“There is need for some rejig in rates ... it is possible that some items in the same chapter are divided. There is a need for harmonisation of items chapter wise, and wherever we find there is a big burden on small and medium businesses and on the common man, if we bring them down, there will be a better compliance,” Adhia told different media outfits in separate interviews.

But compared to the dead hurry in which the GST regime was rolled out, he is more liberal with the time frame for the review. If everything goes well, it will take only one year, he avers. “Because it is a new system for everybody... There has been a complete overhauling of tax system in GST so one year is needed.”

It is indeed sad that in the era of big data and new analytical tools and models, which are redefining the operations of the world's leading companies and creating new opportunities, we are still groping in the dark like the proverbial elephant and the blind men. (IPA Service)

All about the “Red Bus”

Editor,

The recent downpour in the state showed the havoc that nature can wreak on commuters especially those who travel by public transport. The recent traffic accident at Mawblei brought to light the inexperienced driving skills of the driver of the Red bus when he ploughed through the cars parked by the side of the road and careened headlong into oncoming traffic injuring many. The state of the smashed up cars was a terrifying sight. Being a daily commuter on this route, I was just thanking my stars that I was half an hour late that day to work. For many of us who use public transport, we literally put our lives in the drivers' hands every time we step into a bus or a cab. The report which came out in the media revealed the inexperience of the young driver who didn't have the skills to check his bus properly before plying it out for the day's business. I often

take the bus when I commute and when boarding do so with a prayer as these buses always speed through trying to overtake other buses. The driving is so erratic with a lot of sudden braking and jerking that one would literally fall off their seats if not holding onto some support. I understand that they have to make a certain number of trips but isn't safety their first priority when ferrying commuters? I wonder if their licences have been obtained through proper checking and whether proper training and workshops are given before giving them the responsibility to drive these big public vehicles...

Private buses also ply in the city but I am sure that they have their owners to account to. However most red buses on the other hand look all banged up and dented. Is it that the drivers are not accountable to anyone? The mishap that occurred at Mawblei thankfully did not result in any casualty, maybe it's because God was kind to the young driver that day

but what if it had resulted in fatalities? We would all have to pray to our Gods before we embark on journeys in these red buses. Is anyone from the DTO paying attention?

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh
Shillong-14

Of MPSC and DSC

Editor,

The news report in anomalies in appointment to different vacancies in government employment in West Khasi Hills with quotes from several young people who have become victims of the system is an eye opener. This story was followed by another one which says that Government is not honouring the bond signed with the Agricultural graduates and that many are not finding employment even though there are several vacancies in the Agriculture and Horticulture Department. In Meghalaya the sad story is that merit has no value. If you don't

know a minister or high ranking officer or a members of the MPSC or DSC then you are not likely to get a job no matter how well you have appeared in the written exam. Many of us who have now joined the private sector have seen injustice from close quarters. Many who appear for exams conducted by the MPSC or DCSs scare poorly in the written tests but fail in their viva voce test. How can someone who fares badly in the written exam which is very comprehensive suddenly do well in the personal interview?

If the Government wants to cleanse up the system it should not delay the announcement of results of the written test and the personal interview should, as suggested by some be recorded so that there is scope for checking how each candidate fares. The propensity to appoint people who are not fit for their posts has resulted in poor governance and corruption as well. No wonder those who are appointed are the ones who come late to office and

cannot be held accountable. The Education scam in Meghalaya is a classic case of people being appointed teachers of primary schools when they have not qualified for the post. This is the reason why primary education is in a shambles. Will the Government clean up its act and stop nepotism in appointments? Will it clean up the MPSC and DSC and appoint people of character and experts only. Political appointees should not be allowed to destroy the backbone of the selection Commission/Committee.

Yours etc.,
RS Kharpran,
Via email

Using mobile phones while driving

Editor,
In Meghalaya rules are made to be broken. Drivers

continue to use mobile phones while driving and slow down traffic. But more than that, speaking on mobile phones while driving could result in serious accidents. How do we know that the driver of the red bus at Mawblei was not speaking on his mobile phone, as a result of which an accident happened? Why are the police so lax when it comes to implementing rules? Even people on two wheelers speak on mobile phones while driving. I think it is high time that police takes cognisance of complaints from lay people against those who speak on mobile phones while driving. Police might not see every violator but we as fellow travellers can see who violates the law.

Yours etc.,
Nandini Choudhury,
Via email

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

"A modern, harmonic and lively architecture is the visible sign of an authentic democracy."

--- Henry Louis Mencken

The Shillong Times

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Drugs and cricket

ONE may be distressed by the thought that the shadow of drugs even overhangs the gentleman's game of cricket. But the drug menace has hit different kinds of sport. And now the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has taken a firm stand even on cricketers. India's National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) has been warned that it will lose its accreditation if Indian cricketers refuse to undergo the international dope testing regulations. The International Cricket Council (ICC) has been asked to direct the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) to enforce drug testing on Indian cricketers. The Indian sports minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore has been requested to take a hand in the matter. Should NADA lose its accreditation, the entire sporting life in India will be under attack. The government has given full authority to WADA to enforce drug testing on Indian cricketers. Indian cricketers apparently object to the 'whereabouts' clause whereby they are required to give details about where they can be contacted for a one hour window every day for drug testing. They think that the clause threatens their privacy and security. They should realise that what cricketers in other countries accept, they also should.

The BCCI and Indian cricketers have of course been out of line in opposing WADA's directives. The Supreme Court of India has however ruled that the BCCI is the public body discharging public functions and cricketers cannot be exempted from NADA testing as its disaffiliation will adversely affect other fields of sport. What can be said however is that while there have been cases of drug abuse among internationally famous footballers, cricketers have been untainted except some rumours about English cricketer Ian Botham. But rules are rules.

LOOKING BACK

May 3, 1989

Congress(I) "defence" camp concludes

About eighty delegates, including 20 girls from all over Meghalaya attended the first ever Congress(I) Volunteer Force Camp in Shillong at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium this week. The Volunteer Force (known as the Seva Dal in other States) is the "Defence" wing of the Congress(I) open for men and women from the ages of 18 to 40. Volunteers are given training to assist in various programmes of the party, and provide "security cordons" for visiting Congress dignitaries.

The seven day camp, in which physical training and

lecturers formed a major part, was attended by volunteers, a majority of whom were PU and Matric students. A rigorous and Spartan routine was adhered to with volunteers cooking, cleaning and reporting for sentry duty around the clock. Congress MLAs took it upon themselves to deliver lectures while Chief Minister Mr Purno Sangma set time aside for visiting the camp for a "question hour". Mr D D Lapang, the Deputy Chief Minister also took a special interest in the camp.

Joyful Inclusive Education for Free

By Iwamon Laloo and Glenn Kharkongor

A visit to this unique school tugs at your heart strings. For hardened academicians, who may claim to have seen it all, spending an hour at Sein Jaintia Morning School is an emotional experience. Situated in Qualapatty, the busy commercial heart of Shillong, street children, domestic help, teenage dropouts, adolescents labeled as ne'er do wells, all have been given a second chance to gain an education. The students come to school at 7:00am, before the bustle of Bara Bazaar begins, and attend class for two hours before they have to get back to work.

Any child who longs for an education can study free at this school. There are 230 students from Class 1 to Class 10. Class 1 has 19 students, ranging in age from 6-15 years. The three 15 year-olds, two girls and a boy, are attending school for the first time. Many of the children have come from the village, placed with relatives or other families in Shillong, mainly to work, but also to try and find their way in the world. The children represent the many communities of Shillong: Nepali, Assamese, Bihari, Khasi, Jaintia and others.

The marks of poverty are writ large in the classrooms. Many are poorly clothed, struggling with unkemptness, the winter will bring more harshness to their lives. Tragically, many carry signs of chronic malnutrition, thin physique, short stature from stunting, discolored straggly hair, dry eye. A few seem to carry psychological stigmata, downcast eyes, flat expressions, delayed responsiveness. But somehow, in the braveness honed by constant obstacles, these deprived children have roused themselves to move ahead. Even though the school is free, it is a daily struggle to get here. Some have walked long distances to school, others have taken the bus, coming from as far away as Nongmynsong. But these are street smart children, toughened by the hard vicissitudes of life, and they know the value of things that other children take for granted.

The school was started by Billion Lamare, who started her career as a school teacher, then joined the Education Department. When she retired she

broached the idea of a free school for poor children and dropouts to the Sein Jaintia. They provided a room at the back of their building and the school started with students of several classes all at once. There was no budget for salaries, and Ms Lamare wondered how to get teachers. Somehow in the course of one miraculous day, five teachers walked in offering their services free. These first teachers reflected the communities of the inner city, a Marwari, a Bihari, a Nepali, a Bengali and a Khasi. There were no textbooks or stationery, writing on the wall served as a blackboard. From the scrap shops in the area, loose bits paper were purchased, cut to notebook size and stapled. Over the years, several benefactors have stepped in. The Rotary

immediately shot up. But the school does not have a computer. All of them have seen a computer, but none has touched one.

We talked to the teachers, all of them young adults. Most of them wanted to help a good cause, some wanted teaching or work experience. Interrupting his maths class, I asked a Nepali man, "Why do you teach here?" Softly spoken, he said, "These children are from my area". He is a shopkeeper, and with his BCom degree, suited well to teach maths. After teaching for two hours, he goes to the market and opens his shop.

In the last batch of Class 10 students, 22 students appeared for the matric exam as private candidates,

The marks of poverty are writ large in the classrooms. Many are poorly clothed, struggling with unkemptness, the winter will bring more harshness to their lives. Tragically, many carry signs of chronic malnutrition, thin physique, short stature from stunting, discolored straggly hair, dry eye. A few seem to carry psychological stigmata, downcast eyes, flat expressions, delayed responsiveness. But somehow, in the braveness honed by constant obstacles, these deprived children have roused themselves to move ahead.

Club gave some charts, the Shillong Club donated Rs 25,000, an MLA contributed books to start a library. Some of the cash donations are used for the teaching staff, an occasional sum of Rs 500 is sometimes distributed.

Recently the SSA has started providing some help. They pay the salaries of three teachers, which is divided among the 16 teaching staff. SSA has also provided some textbooks and exercise books. Each textbook is shared by several students. Among the students, attendance is regular, motivation is high. When we asked the 9th standard students, "How many of you want to be good in English?", many hands went up. "How many want to learn science?", again many hands were raised. For the question, "How many want to learn computers?", every hand

12 passed. We met four of the students preparing for this year's exam, all of them want to continue their studies. We asked each of the Class 9 students what they wanted to do in life. The spread of answers showed a clear sense of ambition, several wanted to start their own business, some wanted to join the police or army, a few planned to become nurses or teachers. One wanted to be a journalist, another a beautician and one girl shyly said, "air hostess".

Over a cup of tea we had a long conversation with the lady who started it all. Talking as teacher to teacher, we were inspired by the earnestness and clearness of her thoughts on education. Ms Lamare reminded us that the lofty goal of education is to produce good human

beings, good citizens, and impart lessons of life. Children must learn to stand on their feet. We have to go far beyond the syllabus. The syllabus by itself sometimes becomes an instrument of suppression. The educational system is so superficial, we measure only what the children are told to reproduce. Mere regurgitation is not intelligence, so-called brilliant students don't certify the school. We don't give importance to children's thoughts, don't encourage them to differ. If they deviate from the norm, they are penalised or face rejection. Real intelligence is often hidden, as teachers we have to probe a student's potential and develop it.

Experienced teachers we think we may be, but her motherly, benevolent manner reminded us of the need for a parental, mentoring and caring attitude to school children. We observed the easy, friendly exchanges between the principal, teachers and students. This is a happy school.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) annually publishes comparative data on the learning skills of students across countries. The PISA annual league tables are scrutinized each year by teachers and education policy makers in every country, looking for best practices that may improve performances of their students. In the last few years, PISA experts have realized that more than teacher qualifications or hours spent in homework, the most important factor for effective learning is the happiness and sense of well-being of the student.

On our way out we walk past the classrooms one last time. The rooms are dim and dingy, the walls unpainted and unplastered in places. But the sounds coming through the open doors are bright and vigorous, the enthusiasm of the teachers and students are highly evident. This is a true temple of learning and the principal and her teachers are true heroes of education.

(The authors are from Martin Luther Christian University)

Neolithic and other prehistoric sites in Meghalaya

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The history of the Northeast since the colonial and post colonial times have focussed predominantly on its relations with the rest of India and how it has shaped the communities over the years. While there has been some research on the Ahom kingdom of Assam, histories of the rest of the kingdoms and chiefs are completely missing. The case of prehistory is even worse. Despite Northeast India boasting of substantial prehistoric archaeological evidences, there has been little effort to understand the same hence they languish as mere watermarks in historical records and often the people themselves fail to understand and appreciate their own heritage. While the Stonehenge of England or Bhimbhetka closer home in Bhopal makes for interesting historical trips such examples are unheard of in the case of Northeast India.

Among the many examples of such historical significances, the neolithic sites of Meghalaya stand out as shining beacons. Neolithic period refers to the last part of the Stone Age. The neolithic period is marked by development of human technology and acts as a precursor to the Iron Age technology when humans began to technologically evolve. Neolithic period is also marked by farming and

Phulbari (Garden of flowers) on the way to Tura. This site has revealed a number of interesting discoveries which make the history of Meghalaya uniquely interesting. One of the first discoveries that was made was of fortifications signalling settlements which were of permanent nature of some kind. A second kind of discovery that was made was of debris of a burnt brick temple that was discovered. Interestingly, this temple had a number of terocotta figurines resembling Hindu gods like Parvati, Kubera etc. where figures of Ganesha seemed to dominate. The third and impressive discovery during the excavation was the discovery and exposure of the site of an octagonal Shiva temple with eight miniature octagons, each having a Shiva Linga. The structure is of a more magnificent architecture, having eight square subsidiary shrines radiating from the eight arms of the main octagon. Burnt bricks were used to make this temple. However the most important and unique discovery from this site was the discovery of a Stupa dedicated to Lord Buddha. While there is no evidence of Buddhism being practised in Meghalaya today, the discovery of Buddha indeed points out to the confluence and change that history undergoes.

The third important and perhaps the most intriguing site in Meghalaya is the site that is located in the point of the Purana/Old Bhaitbari, a small village in the West Garo Hills district on the southern bank of the River Jingjiram, in a distance of about three miles from Phulbari (Garden of flowers) on the way to Tura. This site has revealed a number of interesting discoveries which make the history of Meghalaya uniquely interesting.

domesticating wild cereals. It started in the Levant, West Asian region and by 8800 BC farming communities arose in Levant, West Asia, Africa and Asia Minor regions. One such Neolithic site is the Lumsophtbng region of Ribhoi district in Meghalaya.

Since 2013-14 regular excavations have unearthed a number of neolithic pottery and agricultural tools in the Lumsophtbng region of Meghalaya. The site is a place of pilgrimage for those who profess the indigenous Khasi religion. Legend has it that it was in Lumsophtbng that a golden ladder connected Heaven and Earth, God and Man. Researchers have concluded that the evacuated remains go back to as early as 1220 BC. Evidences also suggest that later on these communities moved to other parts so the Khasi and Jaintia hills and settled there.

Another important Neolithic site of Meghalaya is the Ganol Rongram river valley in West Garo Hills. The site is triangular in shape and is spread over an area of over 16 square kilometers. A number of tools both from the Neolithic and Paleolithic age were discovered in these sites.

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A look at the pre historical Neolithic and other prehistoric sites of Meghalaya throw up interesting questions of history and the history of NorthEast more specifically. Today Meghalaya is a predominantly Christian state and yet it had a Hindu and more interestingly a Buddhist history to itself as well. Also, scholars often mistake the kind of Hinduism that must have been professed. Hinduism is often a way of life. The history of Hinduism in NorthEast India would necessarily not align itself with that of the more dominant themes. For example Hinduism in Assam in Pre Ahom era found its heroes among those who sided with the Kauravas during the Mahabharata. At the same time the story of the golden ladder in the Lumsophtbng region of Ri bhoi district is quite close to the Ahom story of the King and his descendants climbing down from a golden ladder from Heaven. Do they signal a common history or common origin? Do the Khasis and the Ahoms share a common ancestral link then since their stories suggest striking similarities? The history of Buddhism is something that remains even more unexplored. In summation, there is no doubt that the NorthEast has much diversity and interesting history to offer and efforts must be made to study and popularise the same.

(Views expressed by the author are personal)

TO THE EDITOR

A genuine reply

Editor,
This is in response to the letter, "Will the Inspectorate of Schools respond?" (ST Oct 10, 2017) where some of the parents have expressed their grievances with regard to the functioning of Govt. Girls' Higher Secondary School at Jail Road, Shillong. The allegations made by the parents against the school have no basis at all. I am therefore countering the allegations point by point.

The school is a centre as well as sub-centre of SSLC and HSSLC examinations conducted by MBOSE which is held most often in the month of March every year. Hence it is difficult to conduct the normal classes during the period of the examinations. This is something which the teachers and the staff of the school cannot avoid. The teachers of the same school are also invigilators of the above mentioned examinations.

The school observes holidays as per the holiday list approved by the authority. It may not be out of place to mention that for the Durga Puja celebration,

the school was closed from September 25- October -6, 2017 The discipline and all round development of the students are of utmost importance and is being maintained by the teachers with their full efforts. I am surprised that the concerned parent has made a sweeping statement about the lack of dedication of all the teachers and further alleged that they are interested only in a Government salary. I earnestly request the concerned parent to reveal the grievances to the concerned authority instead of bringing those grievances to the media. I wonder whether the concerned parent is really worried about the smooth functioning of the school and the development of the students or otherwise.

Every teacher of this esteemed institution is duty bound to dedicate themselves to the overall growth and development of the school in general and the students in particular. Is there a yardstick for measuring the scale of dedication? I would like to be enlightened by the

concerned parent about the method of measurement in order to judge the dedication of teachers who are the nation builders through these young students.

The concerned parents may kindly disclose their names instead of making frivolous, vexatious and manufactured allegations so that their wards may be benefitted. Despite individual differences, the problems of the students can be dealt with by the teachers once they know the extent and nature of the problem.

Yours etc.,
Principal In-Charge,
Govt. Girls' Higher
Secondary School

Remembering the October Revolution

Editor,
Interestingly, this year marks not only the centenary of the October Socialist Revolution but also the bicentennial birthday of Karl Marx. The major contribution of the October Revolution in the evolution of humankind is to establish

that liberty cannot exist without equality and to bring forward a better order than archaic capitalism. How poor children were made to work as chimney sweeps in the UK after the industrial revolution (Who can forget Oliver Twist?) is a testimony of the fate of the poor when a state is limited to taking care of only law and order and leave the general people in the lurch.

That was the reason why socialist states came out to take care of the huge potentialities in every human being. However, human evolution again discarded socialist states as it had earlier thrown out police states where market players had the last word. It is human greed that spoiled both market raj as well as dictatorship of the proletariat. Now, modern welfare states have come to balance between liberty and equality as well as between state power and the power of private players.

A modern welfare state with mixed economy is now trying to amalgamate capitalist laissez-faire liberty into socialist endeavour to ensure equality. Such

amalgamation is necessary to create a level playing field with the help of subsidies and positive discrimination in order to climb up the ladder of human development index. Archaic capitalism has indeed been discarded by the countries in North America, Europe and Australia. These countries have graduated from police states to welfare states and are according top priority to human development.

So, a welfare state ~ even the United States of America cannot deny the contributions of socialism in its policy of social security like health care and handsome allowance for the unemployed. A welfare state which ensures freedom of an individual and at the same time guarantees his or her social security is a synthesis of the thesis of capitalism and antithesis of socialism.

As a matter of fact, a truly welfare state is more inclined to socialist states than caged police states. This is the reason why Indian Constitution has absorbed the spirit of

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.